Unpacking Coaching Skill in School Leadership: A Structured Review

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Abstract
Coaching skills are essential for developing effective school leaders and enhancing their leadership capacities. This review explores how structured coaching contributes to leadership development and its impact on educational outcomes. This structured review examines coaching skills among school leaders, using a PRISMA approach to analyze existing literature. The review focuses on the importance of effective coaching for school leaders, especially in adapting to rapid changes in educational contexts. A systematic search of academic databases, including Scopus and Web of Science, with keywords such as "coaching skills," "school," "lead," and "leaders," identified a comprehensive selection of relevant studies. The analysis revealed that effective coaching skills have been crucial in enhancing leadership in recent years, offering essential support and guidance for school leaders navigating evolving challenges. The final finding data is (n=12) which review identified key themes such as the challenges of applying coaching skills, the need for adapting coaching methods, and the importance of ongoing development for coaches. Expert validation decided to divide into three themes which is (1) Development and Implementation of Leadership Coaching, (2) Impact of Coaching on Professional and Personal Development and (3) Research Approaches and Insights in Coaching Studies. The review highlights the crucial role of coaching in enhancing leadership capabilities, improving professional skills, and addressing the needs of both educators and students. It underscores the need for further research to refine coaching practices and maximize their impact on school leadership and student outcomes.
Keywords: Coaching Skills, Education, School Leaders

Introduction
The development of coaching skills among school leaders is essential for advancing educational leadership, particularly in Malaysia, where the education system is continually evolving to address the needs of a diverse student population. Effective school leadership has

a significant impact on teacher performance, student outcomes, and overall school improvement (Leithwood et al., 2020). Recently, there has been an increased emphasis on the professional development of school leaders, with coaching emerging as a vital approach to enhancing leadership abilities. Coaching involves a collaborative partnership focused on promoting reflective practice, goal-setting, and performance improvement through personalized feedback and support (Knight, 2011). In Malaysia, the distinct challenges and opportunities within the education system underscore the importance of school leaders being skilled not only in administrative duties but also in coaching and mentoring their staff (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

A systematic literature review on coaching skills among Malaysian school leaders aims to consolidate existing research, identify gaps, and offer insights into effective practices and frameworks for strengthening leadership development in this context. This review will examine various facets of coaching, including its theoretical foundations, practical applications, and its influence on leadership effectiveness. It will emphasize critical coaching skills for school leaders, such as active listening, questioning techniques, goal-setting, and delivering feedback (Grant, 2017). Moreover, the review will evaluate how these skills are being nurtured and supported within Malaysia's educational setting, considering training programs, policy initiatives, and the role of professional learning communities (PLCs) in fostering continuous improvement (DuFour et al. 2016)). By analyzing the existing literature, this review seeks to contribute to the discussion on educational leadership development in Malaysia, providing an overview of current coaching practices, successful strategies, and recommendations for future research and practice. The ultimate aim is to support the growth of school leaders who are equipped with the essential coaching skills needed to lead their schools effectively, inspire their teachers, and sustainably improve student outcomes (Bush, 2020).

Literature Review

This five-year initiative trained 27 elementary teachers to become Mathematics Specialists in high-need schools. The research focused on their experiences and outcomes, revealing that teachers who embraced cognitively-oriented beliefs showed significant improvements in learner-centered teaching. The study also found variability in coaching practices and identified key themes such as increased confidence, initiative, and advocacy for effective pedagogy (Swars Auslander et al., 2024). Additionally, first-year literacy coaches face challenges when transitioning from classroom teachers, emphasizing the necessity for targeted training in adult learning and communication strategies (Ruesink & Teichert, 2024). This paper explores how continuous professional development enhances teachers' skills in inclusive education. Interviews with school leaders and teachers from four Australian schools indicated that informal leadership practices are prevalent. The study, guided by Transformative Leadership Theory and the concept of Relatedness, evaluated various learning models, concluding that Relatedness is crucial for effective inclusive education (Carrington et al., 2024). A two-year action research study examined a collaborative professional learning and coaching program for school leaders, developed in partnership with a school division. Data from surveys, interviews, and focus groups revealed that sustained, collaborative, and reflective approaches are effective in supporting leadership development, providing valuable insights for continuous professional growth (Thomas et al., 2024).

In Malaysian schools, middle leaders often lack a tailored professional development framework for instructional coaching. This study employed the Nominal Group Technique to develop a framework with input from School Improvement Specialist Coaches Plus (SISC+) and experienced middle leaders. The framework includes key elements such as coaching strategies, content, feedback, and continuous support, which were validated for effective instructional improvement (Rahman et al., 2024). Another study highlighted the critical role of school leaders in implementing evidence-based practices (EBPs) in special education. This study examined their perspectives on facilitators and barriers and evaluated 15 strategies, finding that ongoing consultation or coaching was both important and feasible, while other strategies varied. Enhancing leaders' knowledge in implementation science is essential for the effective application of EBPs (Moore et al., 2024). Coaching capacity is recognized as a crucial component in educational leadership standards, significantly influencing practice and student learning. An urban district in Southern California integrates coaching into its leadership programs, where candidates in a one-year, tuition-free program achieve a 100% pass rate and surpass state averages (Nava et al., 2024).

Material and Methods
Identification
The systematic review involved three phases: identifying relevant keywords and terms using various resources, developing search strings, and retrieving papers. The process included creating search strings for Scopus and Web of Science, which successfully yielded 160 relevant papers in the first stage of the review.

Table 1
Search String

Scopus	(coaching AND skills AND school AND lead) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE, "final")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE, "j")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English"))
WoS	coaching AND skills AND school AND lead (Topic) and 2020 or 2021 or 2022 or 2023 or 2024 (Publication Years) and Article (Document Types) and English (Languages)

The table above shows the use of keywords to find relevant papers in the initial stage of the review.

Screening
During the initial screening stage, duplicate papers were removed, resulting in the exclusion of 6 articles. In the next phase, 73 articles were reviewed based on inclusion and exclusion criteria determined by the researchers. The primary requirement for inclusion was research articles, as they offered the most applicable insights. Other types of publications, such as systematic reviews, meta-analyses, meta-syntheses, books, book series, and chapters, were excluded. The review was limited to papers written in English and covered a five-year period from 2020 to 2024. In total, 87 publications were excluded based on these criteria.

Eligibility
In the third phase, referred to as the eligibility stage, 67 articles were examined. At this point, the titles and key content of all articles were carefully reviewed to ensure they met the inclusion criteria and aligned with the study's research objectives. As a result, 55 reports were excluded for being outside the relevant field, having titles that were not significant, or containing abstracts unrelated to the study's aims. Ultimately, 12 articles were deemed suitable for review (see Table 2).

Table 2
The Inclusion and Exclusion Criterion

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Time line	2020 – 2024	< 2020
Literature type	Journal (Article)	Conference, Book, Review
Publication Stage	Final	In Press

Data Abstraction and Analysis
An integrative analysis was utilized as one of the assessment strategies in this study to examine and synthesize various research designs, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. The objective of the study was to identify relevant topics and subtopics. Data collection served as the initial step in developing these themes. As illustrated in Figure 2, the authors meticulously analyzed a compilation of 12 publications for assertions or material pertinent to the study's topics. Subsequently, the authors evaluated significant current studies related to coaching skills and school leaders, investigating both the methodologies employed and the research findings. The lead author then collaborated with co-authors to develop themes based on the evidence within the context of this study. Throughout the data analysis process, a log was maintained to record analyses, viewpoints, puzzles, or any other thoughts relevant to interpreting the data. Finally, the authors compared the results to identify any inconsistencies in the theme development process. Any disagreements between concepts were discussed among the authors, and the resulting themes were adjusted to ensure consistency. The selection of analyses was conducted by two experts to determine the validity of the issues: one specializing in leadership (Halimah Mohd Yusof—an expert in leadership and training) and the other in coaching (Mohd Fazeli bin Bakar—a School Specialist Coach). The expert review phase established the domain to ensure the clarity, importance, and suitability of each subtheme.
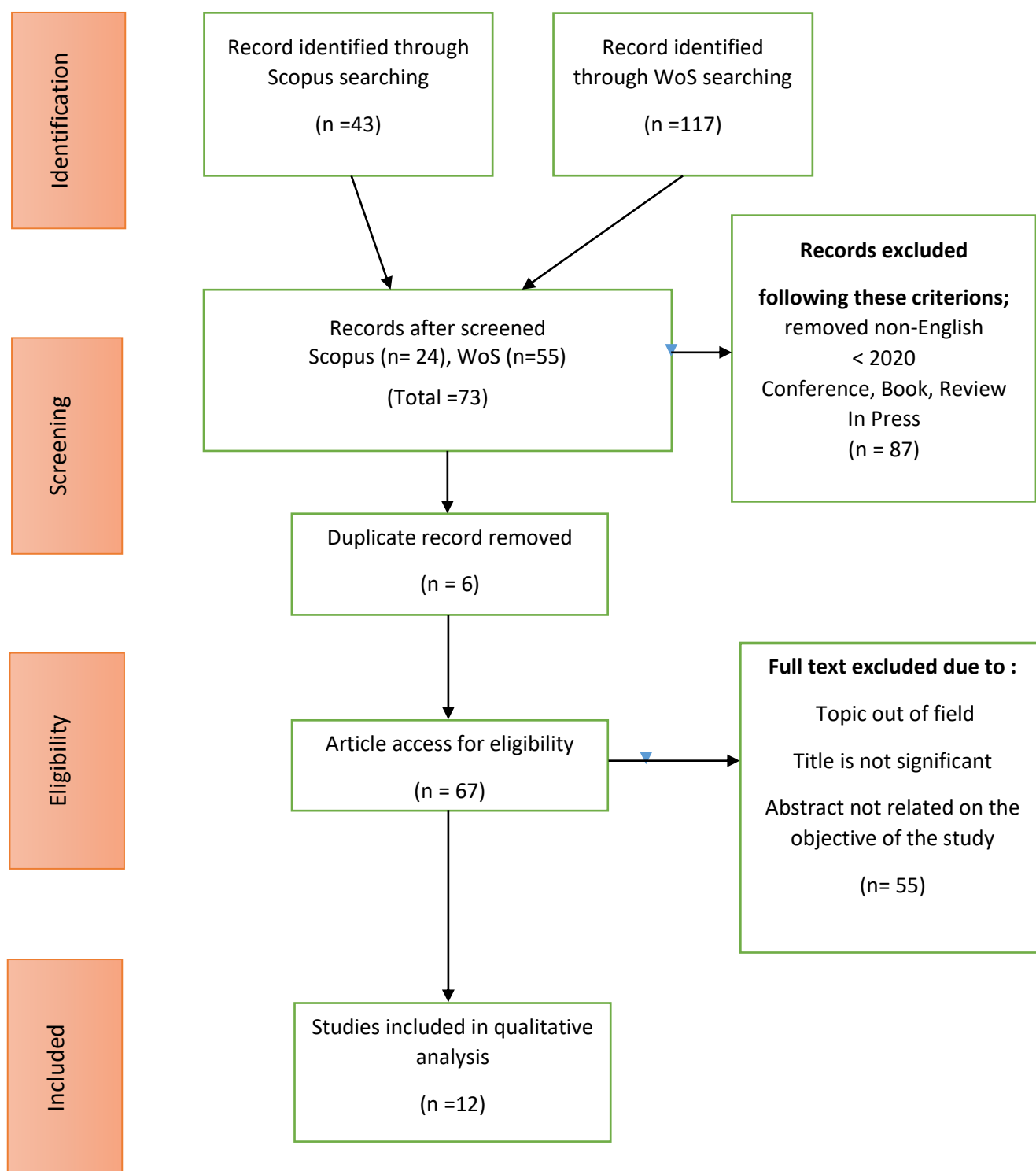
Fig. 1 Flow diagram of the proposed searching study (Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, 2009)

Result and Findings

The findings are presented according to the themes that have been garnered based on the proposed criterion from the articles review.

Table 3

Theme 1 - Development and Implementation of Leadership Coaching

Authors	Title	Journal	Methodology	Advantages and Findings
Butler (2024)	Building a Coaching Culture in Irish Schools; Challenges and Opportunities: A Mixed-Methods Study	Societies	Since 2015, Irish schools have embraced coaching as a leadership style. This study used surveys and interviews to explore the challenges and opportunities in developing a coaching culture in schools.	Results show leadership coaching boosts reflective practice, distributed leadership, and well-being among educators. Challenges include time constraints. Building a coaching culture in Irish schools requires support and continuous professional development.
Huggins et al. (2021)	Facilitating Leadership Coach Capacity for School Leadership Development: The Intersection of Structured Community and Experiential Learning	Educational Administration Quarterly	This article explores how experienced school leaders can develop coaching skills to aid less-experienced leaders, using two years of data from observations, interviews, and coaching sessions.	Combining structured learning with experiential opportunities boosts leadership coaching capacity. This study aids in supporting school leaders' development and highlights the need for further research on coaching for leadership supervisors.
Rodríguez et al. (2023)	Coach as youth development specialist: developing a TPSR-based coach training program and examining participants' experiences	Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy	Effective youth sport coaching develops personal, social, and athletic skills. This study tested the Coach as a Youth Development Specialist (CAYDS) program, expanding from five to seven modules, and found	Findings show andragogical approaches helped coaches develop interpersonal, intrapersonal, and professional skills. Positive community interactions and role-play increased self-awareness and motivation, aligning with TPSR values, and

|			it enhanced coaches' skills.	improved fundamental movement instruction.
Thompson, (2023)	Teachers' perceptions of the influence of leaders' behaviours on school culture: Exploring paradigm RePaDO	Power and Education	This study examines Jamaican primary teachers' views on principals' leadership, including recognition and decision-making. Teachers value these aspects but feel their contributions are often overlooked, despite principals' crucial role.	The study recommends adding executive coaching and periodic discussions for principals, along with confidential 360-degree reviews, to enhance their role in shaping school culture and leadership growth.
Blazar (2020)	Teacher Coaching to Improve Instruction at Scale: Opportunities and Challenges in Policy Contexts	Teachers College Record	Teacher coaching, effective in enhancing instruction and outcomes, faces challenges from policy and organizational issues. This study explores these roles and suggests areas for further research.	More research on effective teacher coaching is needed, focusing on coaches' skills and dispositions to enhance instruction while navigating school and district policies.
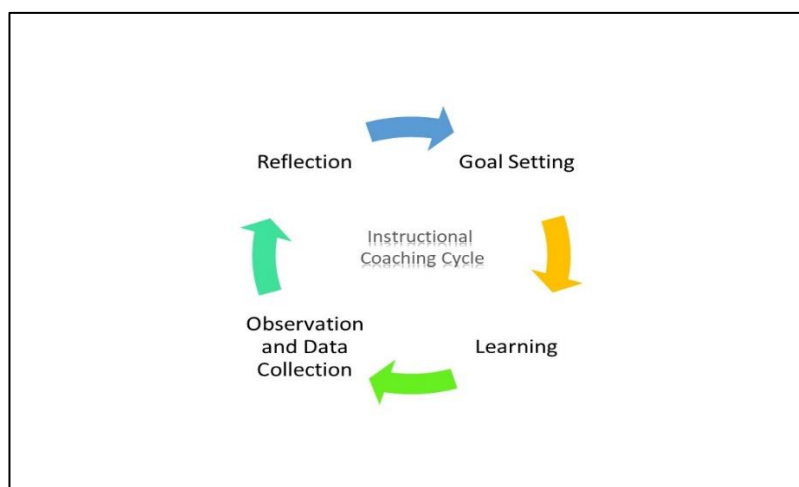
Fig 2. Instructional Coaching Cycle (Knight, 2017).

Table 4
Theme 2 - Impact of Coaching on Professional and Personal Development

Authors	Title	Journal	Methodology	Advantages and Findings
Fitzgerald et al. (2021)	The ACLGIM LEAD Program: a Leadership Program for Junior-Mid-Career Faculty	Journal of General Internal Medicine	Junior and mid-career medical faculty often assume leadership roles without formal training. A program with annual meetings, online learning, and leadership coaching was created for them, involving 79 participants from 2014 to 2018.	Post-program evaluations showed that the LEAD program effectively improved participants' understanding of leadership (93%), reflection (90%), and application of leadership principles (88%), while also helping build a network.
Doyle et al. (2023)	Testing the integration of a teacher coaching model and a social-emotional learning and literacy intervention in urban elementary schools	Teaching and Teacher Education	Teachers often struggle with SEL training, affecting implementation. This study tested if combining the 4Rs curriculum with the MyTeachingPartner (MTP) coaching model improves SEL and academic outcomes in 91 classrooms.	In summary, classrooms using both 4Rs and MTP exhibited notably reduced hostile attribution bias and less aggressive negotiation strategies, along with improved attendance rates and enhanced academic skills as reported by teachers.
Rodríguez et al. (2023)	Coach as youth development specialist: developing a TPSR-based coach training program and examining participants' experiences	Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy	Effective youth sports coaching requires balancing personal, social, and athletic skill development. This study evaluated the Coach as a Youth Development Specialist (CAYDS) program, finding it improved coaches' skills and youth development.	This study supports andragogical methods that improve coaches' skills and self-awareness. Activities like outreach and role-play were impactful. The CAYDS framework effectively aids coaches and shows promise for high-performance youth sports.

Fig 3. The Five Level of the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) Model (Hellison, D.,2011).

Table 5
Theme 3 - Research Approaches and Insights in Coaching Studies

| Authors	Title	Journal	Methodology	Advantages and Findings
Cohen et al., (2024)	Experimental Evidence on the Robustness of Coaching Supports in Teacher Education	Educational Researcher	New teachers often learn on the job, causing burnout and poor outcomes. This paper evaluates a mixed-reality coaching model to improve teacher readiness and preparation through individualized coaching.	Brief, focused coaching improves instructional performance in simulations but is less effective for those not in formal programs. Supplementary coursework may be needed, emphasizing the value of targeted teacher preparation.
Reddy (2023)	Advancing the science of coaching in education: An introduction to the special issue	Journal of School Psychology	This article reviews four key studies on school-based coaching, highlighting its impact on staff, student outcomes, and practices. Studies cover coaching components, motivational interviewing, and behavior support coaching.	The article summarizes common themes, suggests future research directions, and includes a commentary on how school consultation research has shaped coaching research, offering recommendations for applying findings in practice.
Molaei (2022)	Toward Semiotic Coaching (Paris School): Change and Transformation	Language Related Research	This research examines how the Semiotics of Discourse can frame coaching as an academic discipline. Using Fontanille's methods and "Khodnavardi," it integrates coaching into transdisciplinary studies.	This study aims to localize coaching in Iran by linking it with Semiotics of Discourse and introducing "Khodnavardi." The "Semiotic Coaching" model connects with diverse fields and coaching types, fostering growth.
Huggins et al., (2021)	Facilitating Leadership Coach Capacity for School Leadership Development: The Intersection of Structured Community and Experiential Learning	Educational Administration Quarterly	This article examines how experienced school leaders can improve their coaching skills to support less-experienced colleagues. Using a two-year study with observations and interviews, it evaluates the effectiveness of leadership coaching.	The study finds that structured community learning and hands-on experience boost leadership coaching capacity, adding to research on school leadership. Results guide educational organizations and suggest further research for improving coaching.
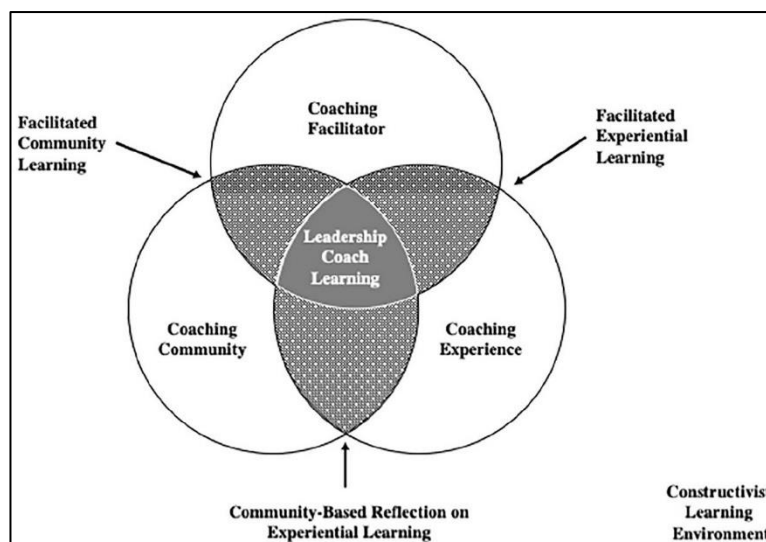
Fig 4. Leadership Coach Learning in the Leadership Learning Community (Huggins et al., 2021).

Discussion and Conclusion

Findings reveal several key challenges in developing coaching skills among school leaders, including the difficulty of facilitating hands-on and interactive coaching sessions, varied interpretations based on different leadership experiences, challenges in applying practical coaching techniques, and technical issues during virtual coaching sessions. These issues highlight the need for tailored approaches to coaching that address diverse backgrounds and learning styles while ensuring effective delivery of practical skills and overcoming technical obstacles. The following conclusions were obtained;

Theme 1: Development and Implementation of Leadership Coaching

Leadership coaching in educational settings faces several challenges, one of the most significant being the lack of understanding and familiarity with coaching as a leadership style. School leaders, often trained in traditional management approaches, may struggle to see the value of coaching in their daily responsibilities (Grant, 2017). This lack of awareness can hinder the adoption of coaching practices, limiting their potential to improve leadership effectiveness. Another issue is the difficulty of integrating coaching into the demanding schedules of school leaders. Time constraints and heavy workloads make it challenging for leaders to engage in regular coaching sessions (Knight, 2019). Research highlights the need for flexible coaching models that can accommodate these practical limitations while still fostering leadership development (Ianiro & Kauffeld, 2014). Furthermore, building a coaching culture within schools is essential but difficult. It requires ongoing professional development, support from organizational leadership, and alignment with school goals (Pennell, 2023). Without this foundation, coaching efforts may remain isolated rather than integrated into the broader leadership framework. Organizational factors, such as rigid policy environments, can further impede coaching success, emphasizing the need for structural support to ensure its effectiveness (Bob et al., 2017).

Theme 2: Impact of Coaching on Professional and Personal Development

Leadership coaching in educational settings faces the challenge of balancing personal development with professional growth. Coaches often need to develop both social and leadership skills, which can be complex to manage (Knight, 2019). Ensuring that leadership

development programs are accessible and relevant to participants is critical for achieving meaningful outcomes. Integrating coaching with other educational interventions is another challenge that maximizes impact but can be difficult to coordinate effectively. Research highlights the importance of aligning coaching with broader educational goals to foster comprehensive growth (Ianiro & Kauffeld, 2015). Additionally, motivating leaders to continuously engage in personal and professional growth requires consistent effort, with effective strategies needed to keep participants committed over time (Grant, 2017). Addressing these challenges is essential for creating impactful coaching programs that support both the personal and professional development of school leaders, ultimately contributing to a more effective and well-rounded leadership approach in education (Bob et al., 2017)

Theme 3: Research Approaches and Insights in Coaching Studies
Leadership coaching in educational settings faces the challenge of combining coaching with formal education to maximize its effectiveness. Developing innovative frameworks to conceptualize the impact of coaching is essential for advancing the field, as these frameworks can help clarify how coaching supports leadership growth (Grant, 2017). Research suggests that understanding the specific components that make coaching effective will lead to improved practices and outcomes. Designing scalable coaching programs that can be applied across diverse educational contexts is another significant focus. Scalable models ensure that coaching programs can be adapted to different schools and leadership settings, making them broadly applicable (Ianiro & Kauffeld, 2015). Interdisciplinary approaches, drawing from fields such as education, psychology, and organizational leadership, can further enhance both the theoretical and practical dimensions of coaching research (Garvey, Stokes, & Megginson, 2018). Addressing these research challenges is critical for successfully integrating coaching into educational environments and ensuring its long-term impact on leadership development.

In conclusion, Effective educational leadership coaching must address key challenges like understanding coaching practices, managing time constraints, fostering a coaching culture, and integrating with other interventions, while combining coaching with formal education and scalable frameworks.

Suggestion for Future Research
Several themes for future research have emerged from the systematic assessment of literature on coaching skills among school leaders. These include creating novel frameworks for coaching leaders, investigating scalable coaching models, examining the role that policies and organizational structures play in the implementation of coaching, conducting longitudinal studies to determine the long-term effects of coaching, and utilizing interdisciplinary approaches to enhance the theoretical understanding of coaching. The field will advance and coaching programs in educational settings will be more effective if these research gaps are filled.

Co-Author Contribution
The authors affirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article.

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