

Evolution-Transformation Programme under COVID-19 Pandemic: A Framework for Private School Principal Professional Development

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to prepare school principals during the Coronavirus disease or COVID-19. As the result of being ill-prepared for facing the difficulties, they are finding ways and means to deal with the issue. The objectives of the studies will be discussed in this article, along with the enhancement of the safety of the teachers, staff, and students and prevention and control measures to be prepared and put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, a training programme will be developed for aspiring principals in Chinese Independent High Schools in Malaysia based on the national education system, general schools' culture, and the leadership training. Professionalism is the characteristics, behaviours, responsibilities, values, and goals that characterise a profession. A designated school will assign the participants to learn and follow some characteristics of development. The COVID-19 pandemic has become one of the disasters in the world. Most people will be affected regardless of their nationality, gender, or academic achievements. Total lockdowns during the pandemic had caused all the schools not to function properly since March 2020. As a result, all the schools need collaborative efforts to sustain the continuity of teaching and learning during this period. Hence, the widely distributed Internet and the information and communication technology infrastructure that enabled students to learn effectively. Instructors need to adopt and adapt the latest pedagogical concepts and modes of delivery of teaching. Unfortunately, most of the existing principals, teachers and staff were not well trained in this field. Similarly, learners do not have sufficient experience in accessing digital learning resources or lack the necessary skills to learn independently. As a result, there is a risk of neglect. Hence Principal Professional Development is required for the transformation of novice principals in Malaysian private institutions into professional principals and a three-measure vocation-relevant set of knowledge update, upskill competency and ethical responsibility is required to further value-add and value-create in the public interest of private schooling involvement towards building the Malaysian nation.

Keywords: COVID-19, evolution, knowledge, Pedagogical concepts, Principal Professional Development, transformation

Introduction

The current COVID-19 crisis has compelled most education systems to implement alternatives to face-to-face teaching and learning. Many education systems shifted activities online to allow teaching to continue despite school closings. As the principals are not well prepared for the pandemic, they must face the impact on their job. In addition, there are

certain relevant constraints such as lack of funds, lack of experienced managerial staff and the high number of novice or untrained principals, particularly within the Chinese Independent High Schools. Online schooling has been an important tool to maintain skills development during school closings. Online learning may have been a sub-optimal substitute for face-to-face instruction, especially in the absence of universal access to infrastructure (hardware and software) and inadequate preparation among teachers and students for the unique demands that online teaching and learning pose.

Thus, the internet has come to be one of the necessary platforms to facilitate students' learning. Modern instructional concepts and teaching approaches need to be implemented by the instructors. Regrettably, many principals have not been well-trained in these areas. Likewise, learners do not have the necessary skills to access digital learning resources or learn independently. As a result, there is a risk that some students are neglected during this period. Hence, Principal Professional Development (PPD) is essential to support the evolution of novice principals in Malaysian private institutions into professional principals. There is a pressing need for competent principals who can deliver quality management in schools, both in the public and private sectors. However, without formal digital training, school principals cannot deliver what the schools need in terms of educating their teachers and administering their functional roles to fulfil mandatory requirements and obligations to students, parents, communities, and the nation. Additionally, trained teachers on the job and during their career progression in the school systems, in whatever capacity and job titles, must update and upskill their pedagogical knowledge. This is needed for teachers to realign themselves with the changing demands of school education delivery in concert with changes in governmental policy, schooling curricula and syllabi requirements.

With the help of the principal, quality trained teachers retain the credibility and currency of their profession. Moreover, teachers can help develop strong attitudes towards learning among students to help them overcome the challenges of online learning, for instance, remaining focused during online classes or maintaining sufficient motivation. They are also crucial in helping their students use information and communications technology (ICT) effectively and make the most of new technologies for learning. Education systems should aim to strengthen engagement between schools and parents to improve information and guidance to parents on effective practices for supporting their children's learning. At the same time, teachers need support to incorporate technology effectively into their teaching practices and methods. Supporting teachers' training about the use of digital resources for pedagogical practices and promoting teaching practices adapted to this context is key to effective leveraging of ICT.

Literature Review

Educational management, educational administration and educational leadership are three models which are closely associated but have different designations depending on how the models are applied. The reality in Malaysian schools and management support, however, is quite far from the current practice. Undoubtedly, trained principals are already doing their jobs commendably in both the public and private school systems. Educational leaders must ensure the delivery of 21st-century teaching and learning (Baker et al., 2011).

According to Dimmock (1999, p.442), leaders experience strains from challenging essential management and administration work. Regardless of how these relations are demarcated, leaders have trouble in determining the equilibrium between higher order tasks designed to improve staff, student, and performance (management), routine upkeep of existing processes (management) and lower order duties (administration). To ensure educational management is effective and efficient, it is very important to produce and uphold

situations within educational institutions that encourage, support, and withstand efficient teaching and learning under the pressure of pandemics. However, how those key objectives are set and attained may differ significantly depending upon the education system or level and across educational cultures.

The following are the definition of a few terminologies relevant to this study.

- i. Principals' Professional Development (PPD): This consists of planning derived from perspectives from their long-term entrenched experience in their professions.
- ii. Management Professionalism: This implies the engagement and manipulation of those approaches that a person commences to enhance his career prestige and improve his social and economic situation. It refers to the degree of behaviour and mindset that an individual shows at the workplace.
- iii. Professional Knowledge: This refers to knowledge acquired by specialists that enables them to execute professional chores, roles, and duties with excellence (Eraut, 1996).
- iv. Professional Competence: This is about the ability to perform whatever assigned or contractual tasks and roles under current and anticipated standard operating procedures and administrative standards of quality and excellence (Eraut, in Day, 1999).
- v. Professional Accountability: Professional accountability is related to the framework of qualified responsibility in promoting a universal belief of teachers including their moral responsibility, values, and code of ethics, and involves those who see professionalism development as being embedded within a context of moral principles (Dimmock, 1999).

There is a prospect in learning opportunities to carry out incubation concepts of improvement schemes in protective good times to come under the new normal, post-COVID-19. This study provides an opportunity for stakeholders to promote a viable PPD framework that will create a community of novice-cum-professional principals who serve the often-inadequate managerial staff of independent Chinese schools in Malaysia. The outcome is promoting, nurturing, and maturing the rich cultural plurality of "One for All and All for One" Malaysia through transforming a novice generation of principals to manage their schools within the challenging Malaysian schooling system.

The basic assumption in this study is the work-experience premised conviction that the proposed PPD framework for novice principal professionalisation will add and create value towards promoting, nurturing, and maturing a young generation of novice principals, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, and creed. This will help sustain public interest in enhancing and enriching the teaching profession in Malaysian schools, particularly in reforming principals' delivery in private independent secondary schools to redress principal shortages more efficiently and effectively in the national interest. This study is confined to the proposed five-principal pathway PPD Framework to further encourage discourse and exchange-feedback on its feasibility and effectiveness to convert private independent (vernacular) secondary school novice principals into professional principals in Malaysia. The measurement criteria-set of professionalism is limited to only three (3) vocation-relevant values, that is, knowledge update, competency upskilling and ethics accountability.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- i. To establish the attributes of a principal based on PPD;
- ii. To determine resemblances and discrepancies in PPD across private and public secondary schools in Malaysia in terms of specialised knowledge, proficiency, and responsibility.
- iii. To analyse the discrepancies in standards and developments between Malaysia and intranational prototypes or structures that affect regional and global PPD.

- iv. To recommend a structure for PPD of secondary school principals to facilitate their development from novice principals into proficient principals.

Research Method

For this study, a qualitative research method in PPD was conducted. The qualitative research method is used for collecting data by conducting observation and interview of three school principals from three different Chinese Independent High Schools in Malaysia. Data collection will be as follows:

- i. Observation protocols
- ii. Observation fieldnotes
- iii. Verbatim transcripts
- iv. Self-evaluative reports

A training programme was developed for aspiring principals in Chinese Independent High Schools in Malaysia based on our education system, general school culture, and leadership training for educational leaders. Professionalism is made up of the characteristics, behaviours, responsibilities, values, and goals that characterise a profession. For education professionals, this also encompasses the strong societal roles and emotional elements. On the other hand, ethics is the study of morality – careful and systematic analysis of moral decisions and behaviours and practising those decisions. School ethics focuses primarily on issues evolving out of the practice of education. It is generally believed that professionalism and ethics are taught by watching our novice principals and seniors and not taught formally. However, over time, it has been suggested that novice principals need to be formally trained in the concepts of professionalism and ethics. In this paper, a formal curriculum on professionalism and ethics, tailor-made for novice principals in Chinese Independent High Schools will be proposed. The theory of professionalisation in the context of novice principal recruitment and training about the philosophy, practice, models, ethics, and morality of principal education highlighted confined to the three key-value components of professional knowledge, competency and accountability in the research framework named as the PPD.

The research survey on administrators were limited to the following schools: (a) Penang Jit Sin Independent High School, (b) Alor Star Keat Hua Independent High School, and (c) Sungai Petani Sin Min Independent High School. The qualitative method adopted involved a semi-structured Interview Guide that seek responses on the research-focus topic from school principals, Dong Zong Officers and Educationist from different divisions and departments.

A suitable training programme for aspiring principals in Chinese Independent High School in Malaysia based on our education system, general school culture, and the leadership training for educational leaders was developed based on the following arguments through five pathways.

A more discerning, investigating practice for selecting applicants for training.

It is necessary to create a more efficient and diverse organisation of potential principals. It is important to note that planning, in selecting not only aspiring principals, but also the right ones, must begin with the first judgments to decide who should be selected for management training. The quality of aspiring principals will be raised as well as removing candidates who lack genuineness and motivation to run the schools. A general excuse for districts to be immediately engaged in selection is to develop the ethnic and gender variety of their principal groups.

Ambitious principals require pre-service training that makes them to improve the teaching and learning and school adjustment.

To achieve the above:

- i. The improvement of teaching and learning as well as changing school culture should be focused on the curricula, so instruction at high standards is everyone's top priority. This will enable the curricula to go well beyond a conception of good classroom instruction. The aspiring leader to coach teachers, and plan appropriate professional development by focusing on students' requirements. New leaders must communicate effectively within and beyond the school by building high expectations and adopting systems thinking to identify obstacles and come up with effective resolutions.
- ii. Assignment at exemplary programmes requires participants to apply theory to practice and to explore real-life leadership challenges and react to them. Participants must be encouraged to use latest techniques such as case approach, action research, problem-based instruction and academic journal writing.
- iii. The offering of well-designed, supervised internships to promote genuine leadership understanding is important. The aspiring principals will be equipped with "hands-on" knowledge to run the crucial work of school development and higher student accomplishment before being positioned at the wheel of a school.

Districts should do additional effort to execute their ability to improve the excellence of principal training, so that freshly employed leaders better meet their requirements.

The demands of ambitious principals are genuinely a key element in determining the national curriculum and education in training programmes. However, if there is an intention to upgrade schools in the selected districts, the requirements of schools and students must be dominant; and the content of leadership training should signify this. This recognition transforms districts into the leading "consumers" of principal training. Training programmes have a tremendous enticement to modify when a district proclaims it will appoint only those who have met its requirements. To achieve this, the following procedures are required.

- i. To be "discerning customers" by implementing or establishing management standards to operate the major alternatives in choosing, coaching, and employing new principals.
- ii. To be "collaborators" by merging associations and different enticements to manipulate area universities to associate their content or practices with district requirements.
- iii. To be "competitors" by carrying out the duty of principal training themselves.

Through standard-setting, programme recognition, principal accreditation and monetary assistance for qualified and experienced applicants, states could utilise their capacity to impact the excellence of leadership training.

Undoubtedly, states can exert substantial power over how well principals are trained. However, districts are the front-line players for refining school leadership. Stanford research claimed that some of the most strategic state efforts use, among other things: standards and culpability to enhance the programmes through licensure and program certification; fiscal support for principal recruitment and quality internships and mentoring..

Excellent-quality mentoring and professional development tailored to individual and district requirements are needed by the principals particularly in their initial years of employment.

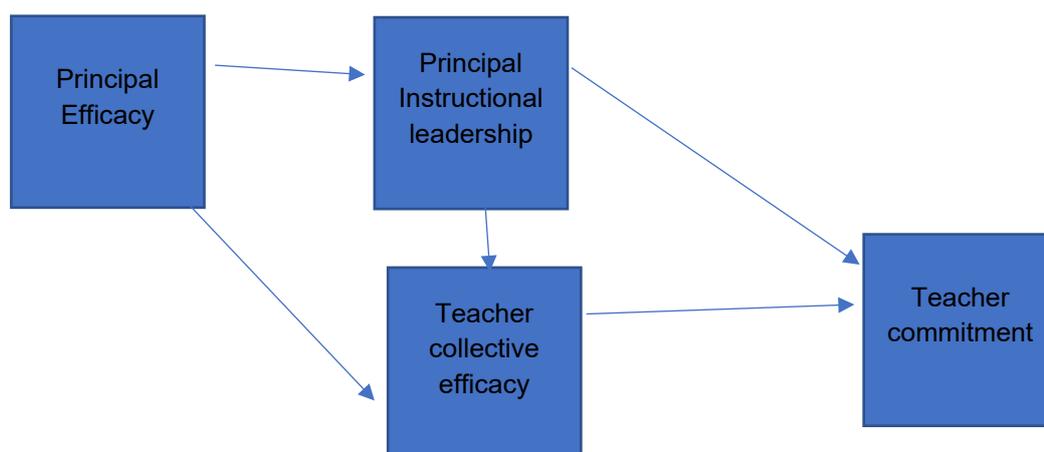
It is necessary to provide pre-service principal training. However, training and support school principals receive after they are employed are equally important. The certainties of their duties hit full-force the day they start work at their schools, alongside with strain to focus on challenges and build up strategies for fast outcomes.

Findings

Figure 1 depict the Principal Education Conceptual Model that emphasises the significance of four fundamental characteristics of knowledge, competencies, and beliefs, which are incorporated within the entire programs planned and subject disciplines. These fundamental characteristics are (1) The principal’s efficacy, (2) the principal’s instructional leadership, (3) the teachers’ collective efficacy and (4) the teachers’ commitment (Hallinger et al. (2018).

Figure 1

Conceptual model of leadership effects



Source. Hallinger et al. (2018)

Curriculum required by the school principals

To fulfil the above criteria, a special curriculum is required by all the school principals in the school management and leadership programme.

Table 1

Curriculum for School Management and Leadership Programs

| Levels | Duration | Curriculum Content |
|--------|----------|--|
| 1 | 4 weeks | i. School management ii. Curriculum management iii. Student affairs management iv. Financial and administrative management |
| 2 | 4 weeks | i. Principle and community management ii. ICT management iii. Co-curriculum management iv. Special culture management |
| 3 | 4 weeks | i. Assessment administration ii. Educational research and measurement iii. Quality of instruction iv. Constant growth of human resources and implementation |
| 4 | 4 weeks | i. Self-enhancement management ii. School counselling and supporting management iii. Effective school strategic development iv. Etiquette and social protocol |

Level 1:

- i. **School Organisation:**
Efficient school principals stimulate cooperative culture. Committed, value-led, proficient, and extremely ambitious school principals are indispensable and required by schools as they can inspire contemplative practice and nurture discourse and collaboration among all the staff in school and with other participants.
- ii. **Curriculum Management:**
Curriculum Management Process: The Curriculum Management Process is profoundly concerned with efficient instruction. The development comprises the supervision of what students are supposed to discover, assessing whether it was learned, and looking for methods to enhance student understanding.
- iii. **Student Affairs Administration:**
With the goal of improving the student experience, student affairs administrators are tasked with overseeing the development and implementation of programmes, policies, and services related to everything from academics to enrolment.
- iv. **Financial Administrative Management:**
This relates to the development of the general corporate financial objectives and goals. This also includes supervision and planning of financial records associated with the general ledger, payroll, budget, expense, etc.

Level 2:

- i. **Principle and Community Management:**
These are: (i) democratic system and social well-being (ii) community backgrounds for community curricula (iii) citizen understanding, backing, and involvement and proficient service (iv) collaboration (v) Social well-being programs (vi) Competence, distribution, and establishment of social well-being services and (vii) Anticipation.
- ii. **ICT Management:**
Management and supervision applications of ICT are presently prevalent in schools because of their competencies in expediting management activities from data storage to knowledge management and decision making. The participants are required to have the capability to manipulate computer operational systems, to gain access to computer software programmes, to handle the fundamental tasks of a computer, and to create materials using word documents and presentations confidently.
- iii. **Co-curriculum Management:**
This study focuses on the principal's role which must utilise the aspects of organising, coordinating, managing and influence in handling school programmes. This is to improve and develop a student holistically, including mental, physical, and emotional development as well as boost values
- iv. **Special Culture Management:**
School culture management in terms of the scientific community, which seeks to examine the factors that contribute to its existence.

Level 3:

- i. **Evaluation Management:**
Participants should contemplate the relationship between school culture and the Simulation Process and Data Management to make sure positive outcomes from professional development initiatives will be achieved. This will promote school efficacy based on improved student accomplishment and teachers' contentment (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). The intended assessment prototype offers a new outlook for education administration for the efficient as well as the effective execution of the quality systems and programme development.
- ii. **Educational Research and Statistics:**
Statistical information can help in the adoption of the appropriate techniques to gather information, analyses can be employed correctly, and the results can be presented effectively. Statistics is a fundamental means behind how we make detections in

science, make judgments based on data, and make projections. Research is crucial for the students as it enables them to perform a comprehensive analysis of everything. If a proper in-depth analysis of any topic is available, the outcome will be effective, and the knowledge is augmented.

- iii. Value of Instruction:
Value in Instruction can be realized in the way the knowledge, skills and ability of the teacher are engaged to improve meaningful pedagogic practices for students. Such practices are apparent when teaching impacts learning or vice versa.
- iv. Continuous Development of Human Resource and Performance:
Human Resource Management is the procedure of supervising people in an establishment in an efficient and structured approach. It is a process that includes four essential functions: achievement, advancement, incentive, and upkeep of human resources.

Level 4:

- i. Self-development Leadership:
Realising that self-development and leadership advancement are the same provides us with the opportunity to adopt such learning opportunity and not just approach it as something we “should” or “need to” be taught for work. When we realise the individual value, we tend to be more eager and more enthusiastic about prospects to learn.
- ii. School Guidance and Counselling Management:
Guidance and counselling are defined by Akinade (2012) as a procedure of assisting a person turn out to be fully concerned of his/herself and the approaches in which he is reacting to the impacts of his/her environment. According to Onyango et al. (2018), there is a statistically substantial correlation between guidance and counselling and student behaviour management.
- iii. Effective School Strategic Planning:
To motivate an entire group to battle and create change, a strategy is necessary. Group members must be encouraged to be responsible for achieving the school objectives and vision with an actionable strategy.
- iv. Protocol and Social Etiquette:
Etiquette is a set of models and principles regulating social performance. In contrast, Protocol implies the system of conduct or behaviour stipulated for leadership and global officials. “Social protocol” is a term used to review their application that allows individuals and societies to convey social competencies.

Upon completion of the above curriculum, the participants will be assigned to a designated school to learn and follow some characteristics of development that has been conducted by the corresponding schools as a benchmarking programme. In addition, a value-added programme will be carried out in school administration and leadership. Towards the end of this curriculum, the participants are required to produce three accomplishment portfolios and an advancement portfolio. A supervisor will be appointed by the institute to facilitate the process.

Discussion

In a time of crisis, principals must act swiftly and with foresight but also with careful consideration of alternatives, consequences, and side effects. School principals will increasingly need to be technologically savvy and well informed. COVID-19 has generated huge commercial opportunism with pressure to buy technological solutions to contemporary problems. School principals will need to be perceptive about the digital products they choose and to be careful about striking a *balance* between technology and pedagogy in their school (Hargreaves et al., 2020). Ultimately, pedagogy is the key to effective learning and while technology has a part to play, it is the human dimension of

effective teaching that makes the difference. It is crucial to further examine this principal preparation training to get over the “*Tsunami*” of challenges that confront them in this era as it is the only training that can make a difference in the leadership of the principals in schools. In short, research has revealed that school principals can perform better if they are given the autonomy make crucial decisions. Nevertheless, autonomy alone does not instinctively lead to developments, it must be well practised. Furthermore, it is vital that the core accountabilities of school principals be characterised and defined. School leadership obligations ought to be identified through an appreciation of the practices most expected to improve teaching and learning. Disseminated leadership has become the default leadership response in this current crisis involving more school leaders, at all levels, to connect, share, learn and network their way through issues (Azorín et al., 2020).

Policy makers ought to:

- i. offer higher degrees of autonomy with applicable support;
- ii. redefine school leadership duties for improved student learning;
- iii. improve school leadership structures for improved policy and practice;
- iv. promote dissemination of leadership;
- v. support dissemination of leadership; and
- vi. support school boards in their missions.

In addition, communities are a key resource for school leaders, as they host a wealth of additional expertise, knowledge, and local capacity. Forging stronger links with parents/community groups to support families, young people and children is now a prerequisite to deal with the many issues that COVID-19 has generated, particularly for vulnerable, marginalised, or isolated young people. Furthermore, new programmes will be required that fully and adequately encompass the leadership skills, practices and actions suited to the current, and potentially ongoing, COVID-19 situation.

Conclusion

All in all, management advancement as a continuum should be considered to improve competencies for efficient school management. Upon completion of the designed curriculum, the novice principals concerned could better deal with the problems of facing the current pandemic. Besides, a certain uniformity of provision by different institutions and the guaranteeing of applicable diversity for efficient training needs to be made. In addition, communities are a key resource for school leaders, as they host a wealth of additional expertise, knowledge, and local capacity. By way of fundamental requirement, rather than by strategy, effective school leadership is now connected, collaborative, innovative and receptive. Most school leaders will face difficulties given the countless challenges that COVID-19 has created for them, so distributed leadership is a must to stay alive. In such distracting times, school leaders cannot compete with the leadership practices they witnessed or enjoyed in a period of stability, continuity, and relative calm. Leading in disruptive times means being able to travel through a different course, to establish new routes through the disruption. School leaders on this journey are characterised by their determination, their hope, and the strong belief that whatever happens, whatever the cost, whatever the scale of the challenge, they will do everything in their power to defend the learning of all young people

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