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School Effectiveness And Improvement Practices In Excellent Schools In Malaysia And Brunei

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the school effectiveness and improvement practices in excellent schools in Malaysia and Brunei. Questionnaires based on the content of effective school model were distributed to the sample of 271 teachers from excellent schools in both countries in order to study on the practices of school effectiveness and improvement in their schools. This study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on school effectiveness and improvement practices particularly experienced by Malaysia and Brunei. It also will benefit the school effectiveness practitioners in developing countries through academically systematic research findings.

Keywords: School effectiveness, school improvement, practices, Malaysia, Brunei;

1. Introduction

The term 'school effectiveness' has been widely used since 1960s. It was frequently related with the school effort to make changes toward improving the students' level of achievement. Nevertheless, research findings in the early reformation of school effectiveness (during years of 70's) were less convincing the stakeholders in education. They believed that the school factors were less influencing the students' achievement at school. After that, research findings by further movements (early 80's till now) find that school and its activities were able to improve the school effectiveness. In support of this fact, Cohn and Rossmil (2001) have suggested reasons on why the school success need to be evaluated based on the whole organizations itself. Firstly, there was theory that proved on the influence of school contexts towards individual and teaching and learning methods. Secondly, school is believed as a unit of social which every decision really influenced by schools' internal and external variables. Even though the recent researches in school effectiveness (for example, Cohn & Rossmil, 2001) have focused on school as a research sample, every school has its own apparent differences in terms of surroundings, process and structure. All these factors really influenced the contribution factors towards the school's achievement. Harris (2003) and Stoll and Fink (1992, 1996) supported that fact and agreed that every school will produce different outcome as they have different needs, problems and ability. Therefore, this research is carried out for the purpose of examining the practices of effective school based on the approach of school effectiveness and improvement categorized by different location.

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This then will become a good guidance for the people of interest in education especially the school members themselves.

1.1 Problem Statement

The report of Equality of Educational Opportunity which also known as Coleman report (1966) has assumed that the role of school is dominant in improving the student's achievement. This report find other factors such as parent's background, peers and society really have an effect on students' achievement as compared the school itself. However, most researchers on school effectiveness (such as Edmonds, 1982; Purkey & Smith, 1982; Mortimore, 1991) have disagreed with that through their effort to identify other factors that could contribute towards school effectiveness. Hence, in early 80's, a body which was responsible to gather the related literature review has been formed (Benhow, 1980). Similar with other developing countries, research on the school effectiveness has been done by cooperation of World Bank (Psacharopoulos & Woodhall, 2000). They also identified the factor of school's and teacher's ability in making changes for improving the student's achievement. Even, all the research conducted, based on various methodologies has succeeded in finding the guidance in improving the quality in education in their country. (Psacharopoulos, 2001). However, every research finding is different based on its local context. Harris (2002) and Stoll and Fink (1996) agreed and did find that a good research will not neglect the contiguous ability, needs and problem. Furthermore, Sharifah Maimunah Syed Zin and Lewin (1993) both agreed that the primary factor of effective school depends on the effectiveness of variable input such as school leadership, teacher and students. This finding was similar with Edmonds (1979a, 1979b), Harris (2002), Marzano (2003), Purkey and Smith (1983) and Teddlie and Reynolds (1999). It were reported that the success factor of a school depends on the professionalism of principal's leadership. Even, David and Thomas (1989, p. 12) reflected that situation as follows:

“ I haven't seen a good school being led by a poor principal or a poor school being led by a good principal..... I have seen less successful school was changed to become excellent and effective, and famous schools decline abruptly. For every case, the rise or fall can easily associated with the leadership quality”.

In responses to the above problem, there is need in having research related to the practices of effective school especially in terms of comparison between the same category of effective school with greater sample size and location. This will assist the society to have better understanding on school best practices through trusted and reliable research findings. Furthermore, it also will become a good guidance in improving the quality of education especially in managing the school development.

1.2 Research Objectives

This research is carried out with the objectives

1. To compare the practices of school effectiveness in excellent schools in Malaysia and Brunei.
2. To find out if any significant relationship between the principal's leadership with the practices of school effectiveness in excellent schools.

1.3 Research Questions

This study has been carried out to answer the questions as follows.

1. Is there any significant difference in the practices of school effectiveness in excellent schools in Malaysia and Brunei?
2. Is there any significant relation between the principal's leadership and the practices of school effectiveness in excellent schools?

2. Review of literature

2.1 The concept of School Effectiveness and Improvement

The concept of school effectiveness and school improvement was introduced in many schools in the United States in the early 1990s. It has applied the concept of school effectiveness into school improvement concept to obtain solid outcome out of that. General Accounting Office (1989), Gray, Reynolds, Fitz-Gibbon and Jesson (1996) and Taylor (1990) were mutually agreed with the above view and believed that tremendous effort done by researchers in this movement are through combination of findings from the Movement School Effectiveness and the Movement of School Improvement. As an implication, the best output will be generated through the integration of process variables that forming the school structure and culture. In addition, Mortimore (1991, pages. 223) had explained the concept of school effectiveness and improvement as follows:

"The concept of school effectiveness and improvement is an effort to transfer strength, knowledge and research skills regarding the study of school effectiveness into the study of school improvement to create a new culture." Meanwhile, Fullan (1991, 2001) and Holly (1990) have added to the above concept of school effectiveness and improvement by setting conditions that the concept could be applied successfully if its applications was taking into account the local context. However, the concept is still new in developing countries especially in Malaysia. Rahimah Ahmad, Zulkifli A. Manaf and Shahril Marzuki (1999) supported this statement with the view that the efforts to develop Malaysian schools with the process of school improvement and effectiveness is a concept that is still young in the field of Malaysian education. In conclusion, the concept of school effectiveness and improvement emphasizes a combination of all process variables to recreate the school culture and organization before obtaining the best outcome.

2.2 Research Theoretical Framework

The research theoretical framework is based on School Effectiveness Model in Malaysia by Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani (2008). The model have shows a few main variables that are input variables, process, context, temporary findings and outcome. The input variable is the best selected variable. It will be processed through activity that will be implemented simultaneously in the process variable. Whereas, the intermediate finding variable is only temporary and acts as a control process. This mean that if the process variable is not implemented simultaneously, the school will fail to redevelop the school organization structure and culture. In addition, the school will have to re-implement the practices of an effective school to reach at the consensus level among the process variable. This analysis is similar with the view given by Stoll and Fink (1996) about the effective school movement based on the approach of school effectiveness and improvement. It was stated that the movement particularly stressed on the cooperation of all input variable which will be processed to re-establish the school structure and culture before improving the school achievement. In short, the research theoretical framework is shown in Figure 1.

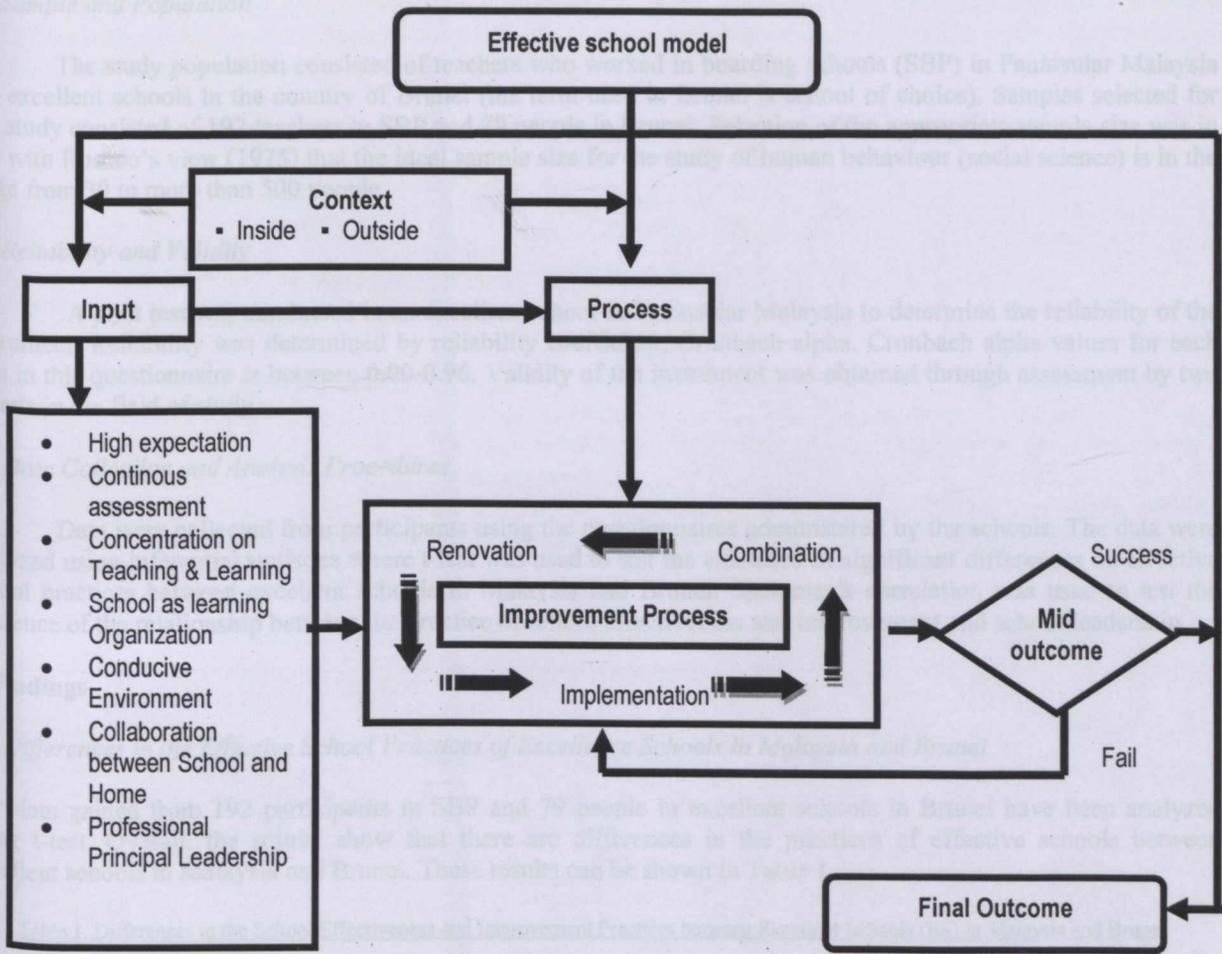


Figure 1: Effective school model based on school effectiveness and improvement approach

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Instrument

This study used survey method to answer the research questions as the study aimed to explore the information about the practices of school effectiveness and improvement in excellent school. Questionnaire was used to collect data and for each item, participants should state their feedback in the form of five-point Likert scale that reflects their perceptions of effective school practices in their own schools either none, seldom, sometimes, often and very often. In terms of location, the study was conducted in six boarding schools (SBP) in Peninsular Malaysia and two secondary schools in Brunei. For the research location in Malaysia, excellent schools were

selected based on the school rating by School Inspectorate at the Excellent Level. Meanwhile, Brunei has only two excellent schools and both have become sample in this study.

3.2 Sample and Population

The study population consisted of teachers who worked in boarding schools (SBP) in Peninsular Malaysia and excellent schools in the country of Brunei (the term used in Brunei is school of choice). Samples selected for this study consisted of 192 teachers in SBP and 79 people in Brunei. Selection of the appropriate sample size was in line with Roscoe's view (1975) that the ideal sample size for the study of human behaviour (social science) is in the range from 30 to more than 500 people.

3.3 Reliability and Validity

A pilot test was conducted in an excellent school in Peninsular Malaysia to determine the reliability of the instrument. Reliability was determined by reliability coefficient, Cronbach alpha. Cronbach alpha values for each item in this questionnaire is between 0.90-0.96. Validity of the instrument was obtained through assessment by two experts in the field of study.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data were collected from participants using the questionnaires administered by the schools. The data were analyzed using inferential statistics where t-test was used to test the existence of significant differences on effective school practices between excellent schools in Malaysia and Brunei. Spearman's correlation was used to test the existence of the relationship between the practice of school effectiveness and improvement and school leadership.

4. Findings

4.1 Differences in the Effective School Practices of Excellence Schools in Malaysia and Brunei

The data gained from 192 participants in SBP and 79 people in excellent schools in Brunei have been analyzed using t-test. Overall, the results show that there are differences in the practices of effective schools between excellent schools in Malaysia and Brunei. These results can be shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Differences in the School Effectiveness and Improvement Practices between Excellent Schools (ES) in Malaysia and Brunei

Malaysia (N=192)		Brunei (N=79)		df	t-value	Sig.
Mean	Std. D	Mean	Std. D			
614.79	72.79	486.08	101.44	269	10.81	*p=0.000

Note. * = significant at 0.05 confident level (2 tail)

Table 1 shows that there were significant differences in implementing effective school practices in the excellent school in the Malaysia and the excellent school in Brunei with $t(269) = 10.81$ and $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). These results can also be illustrated more clearly by comparing the mean and standard deviation of these types of schools in both countries. For the excellent school in Malaysia, the mean score is 4.42 ($614.79 \div 139$) and the standard deviation is 0.524 ($72.79 \div 139$). Meanwhile, the mean score for excellent school in Brunei is 3.50 ($486 \div 139$) and the standard deviation is 0.730 ($101.44 \div 139$). This gap indicates greater effective school practices by the excellent schools in Malaysia as compared to excellent school in Brunei. The difference can be measured at the level of very often for excellent schools in Malaysia as compared to excellent schools in Brunei which is at the level of often in implementing the school effectiveness and improvement practices.

4.2 The relation between Principal Leadership and Effective School Practices in Excellence School

To obtain the results, data obtained from 192 participants in the study of SBP and 79 people in excellent schools in Brunei have been analyzed using Spearman's correlation. Overall, there is strong correlation between principal leadership with the successful practices of school effectiveness and improvement in excellent schools in Malaysia and in Brunei. These results can be shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Relationship Between Principal Leadership and School Effectiveness Practices in Excellent Schools

Correlation Definition	N	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig.	Correlation Strength
Principal Leadership And School Effectiveness Practices	271	0.724	*p=0.000	Strong

Note *=Significant at 0.05 confident level (2-tail)

Table 2 shows a strong correlation exists between the leadership of principal and successful practices of school effectiveness and improvement in excellent schools in Malaysia and Brunei. The results are based on $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). Furthermore, the value of $r = 0.724$ also reflects the result with the assumption that if there is exist a relationship between the two variables, it is at strong level.

After that, detailed analysis of the findings to see whether there is a significant correlation between principal leadership with the successful practice of school effectiveness and improvement of excellent schools in Malaysia and Brunei was addressed in Table 3.

Table 3. Details on a relation between Leadership of Principals with Effective School Practices in Excellent Schools

Effective School Practices	N	Principal Leadership		
		Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig.	Correlation Strength
Principal Leadership	271	0.910	*p=0.000	Very Strong
Conducive School Environment	271	0.821	*p=0.000	Strong
Concentration on Teaching & Learning	271	0.695	*p=0.000	Medium
High Expectation	271	0.644	*p=0.000	Medium
Continuous Assessment	271	0.782	*p=0.000	Strong
Collaboration Between Home and School	271	0.686	*p=0.000	Medium
School as Learning Organization	271	0.724	*p=0.000	Strong

Note *=Significant at 0.05 confident level (2-tail)

Table 3 shows the results of Spearman's correlation test on each dimension of school effectiveness and improvement practices. For the relationship between leadership of school principals by creating a conducive school environment, there is strong correlation exists between these two variables when $r = 0.821$ and $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). Similarly, the dimensions of High Expectation was found to create a moderate relationship between the principals leadership with schools effort to put high expectations when $r = 0.644$ and $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). Meanwhile, the dimensions of Continuous Assessment was found to establish a strong relationship between the leadership of school principals and school effort to have continuous assessment, when $r = 0.782$ and $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). Furthermore, for the dimensions of collaboration between home and school, a moderate correlation exists between the leadership of principals and their efforts to create collaboration between school and home when $r = 0.686$ and $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). For the dimensions of school as learning organization, a strong correlation exists between the leadership of principals and their efforts to create schools as learning organizations where $r = 0.724$ and $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$).

In conclusion, there is a significant correlation between principal leadership with successful practices of school effectiveness and improvement in excellent schools in Malaysia and Brunei. The results are based on r scores > 0.600 and $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). This means that principals in both countries have roles to create effective schools through the school effectiveness and improvement approach.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The study found that excellent schools in Malaysia and Brunei have practiced the effective school practices based on school effectiveness and improvement approach at very often and often level respectively. This means that excellent schools are able to adopt the approach of an effective school practices because of the existence of cooperation in the process variables that form the structure and culture of the school. These findings conform to the views of Stoll and Fink (1991) which describes that the school effectiveness and improvement approach is suitable to be practiced if the school input variables are at excellent level. The cooperation that exists from each process variable will change the school culture, particularly with the positive culture. The statement can be illustrated through a rigorous screening of input variables of excellent school such as pupils, teachers and the total financial allocation in excess of other types of school in order to create a conducive school environment. Hence, the final goal of excellent schools would be achieved that is generating professional human resources in science and technology.

Furthermore, this study found that school leaders particularly principals significantly related to the effectiveness of an effective school practices. This means that the principals in the two countries play an important role to improve their school performance. The findings match the findings by Green, Dundas and Clarke (2002) and Levin and Lezzote (1998) who reported that the behaviour of the principals are the most important factor to determine the effectiveness of a school. Similarly, the local effective school researchers such as Abdul Karim Md. Nor (1989), Maimunah Muda (2004) and Shahril Marzuki (1997) also found the existence of the relationship between the roles of a school principal and school effectiveness. In fact, their study put the factor of the principals in the first order of priority in terms of the factors contributing to the effective schools. Coinciding with these findings, the government in both countries should review the basis of the selection of principals. In rationale, if the principal was appointed based on seniority without taking into account the skills, knowledge and experience, then there will be deficiencies in leadership. In other words, principals who are appointed should have been tested in terms of specific skills such as problem solving, interpersonal relationships, concepts, leadership, self-image management, communication and ability to work in a team.

However, this study found other factor than principals as the main contributing factor in creating an effective school. This means, the existence of co-operation of all process variables (such factors, teachers and pupils) are less dependent on the principal leadership factor to become excellent. These findings match the findings of Stoll and Fink (1996) that study the school effectiveness projects in Denmark. Studies have found that outstanding schools are able to produce principal with transformational leadership in which the principals will transfer integral part of their powers to enable teachers to enhance the role of school achievement. As an implication, school culture will be formed as a result of the existence of a conducive school environment. Similarly, the study Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani (2007) who found that the excellent school have less expectation on school principals to improve school performance. This is due to excellent schools are able to incorporate all the process variables in implementing the daily activities of school. Thus, culture and school structure will be re-established. Therefore, schools should ensure that the input variables obtained are to be processed in excellent and further exist the cooperation among the process variables in implementing the daily activities of school. For example, school staff must be trained to create a conducive school environment through the provision of knowledge and skills that are in line with current needs. Therefore, the role of school development program need to be upgraded actively in enhancing the knowledge and skills of school staff.

As a conclusion, this study has found that excellent schools in Malaysia and Brunei have adopted the effective school practices based on school effectiveness and improvement approaches. However, excellent schools in Malaysia have better implementation of these practices at very often level compared to the excellent schools in Brunei. Furthermore, the effectiveness of such practices in the two countries not only due to the factor of the principals, but other contributing factors such as the conducive school environment, focused on teaching and learning, continues assessment, high expectation, collaboration between home and school and the school as learning

organizational. However, the role of principal as a factor contributing to the effectiveness of an effective school practices are not to be denied with their emphasis on transformational leadership.

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