

Research Article

Perceptions of Selected Heterogeneous Primary School Heads toward Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) in the School Strategic Planning (SSP)

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Abstract: In education today, school heads rely on strategic planning to prepare and manage the school’s academic excellence goals. The study employed a, qualitative longitudinal trend approach investigating the perceptions of the selected heterogeneous primary school Heads in Malaysia toward continuous quality improvement (CQI) in the school strategic planning (SSP) in sustaining quality education. The study involved a one-to-one interview with the selected heterogeneous primary school Headmaster and Head- mistresses in thirteen schools, i.e., four from the northern region of Peninsular Malaysia and nine in the Klang Valley area. The analysis of documents and on-site participant observation accompanied the unstructured face-to-face interview with the respondents. A conceptual framework was designed and applied to the interview responses. The finding of the study indicated that CQI is not a new concept but was already in the school management systems structure known as added-value. As such CQI can be put into practice in the school immediately since the similarities with SSP carried out in the school is very apparent. As a result, six themes emerge from the SSP, namely, 1) Effective Planning Methodology, 2) School Vision and Mission, 3) Culture, Climate and Change, 4) Strategic Outcomes (specifically the school programs), 5) Supportive Leadership, and 6) Broad Stakeholder Buy-in or the involvement of not only the parents, the community but also the students and the school. And the four themes emerge from CQI, namely: 1) Planning and Process, 2) Staffing, 3) Data Management, and 4) Leading. The SSP will act as a compass to direct CQI in the school improvement plan that will bring in students’ academic excellence, high performance school status (HPS) and internationalization contact.

Keywords: Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), High Performance School (HPS), Heterogeneous Primary School Heads, Added-Value.

INTRODUCTION

Bearing in mind, as emphasized by the former President of South Africa, the late Nelson Mandela, education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. Currently, there is a paradigm shift in Malaysia education ever since it became a bigger and more complex (educational) ‘business’ venture in order to compete in the GLOCAL or the merging of the global plus the local (educational) market in the quest to be an established education hub this side of the global village.

Research Paradigm

The government of Malaysia in its myriad transformation programs had introduced a new national Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for education known as the School Key Result Areas (or identified as SKRA) for the School Improvement Plan (SIP) that will result in (selected) High Performing Schools (HPS) which is famously referred to in our Malay language as *Sekolah Berprestasi Tinggi* or by its acronym SBT. This SBT school (as is commonly called among Malaysian educators and academicians), not only has an autonomous school management school system and team, directly under the authority of the Ministry of Education

(MoE), but will also have a world class education standards or

what is known as internationalization. Based on this understanding, the researcher comes up with the graphical illustration in Fig 1 below to augment the research paradigm of this study

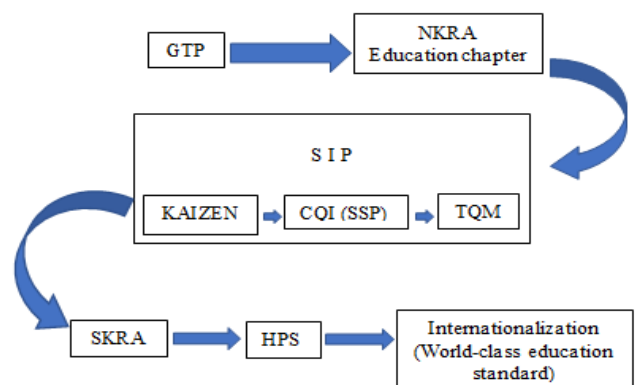


Fig 1. Research Paradigm Graphical Illustration

1.2. Statement of the Problem

All schools need to have the School Strategic Plan (and for ease of remembering, from now on it will be noted by its

acronym, SSP), in order to prepare and manage academic excellence goals programs. Malaysia's education today showed an apparent reliance on the School Strategic Plan (SSP) as it acts as a 'road map' or as part of the Global Positioning System (GPS) in guiding how to get **where** its **desired destination** is in its quest to debut as the center of education.

Nowadays, schools need **business-styled operations** or KPIs to outperform other schools as the **vital** part of the **school operating process**. The pursuit of being the dynamic focus of education and educational excellence give rise to the schools' need to be proactive rather than reactive. As such, school of the 21st Century must adopt and adapt numerous and variations of operational methods to realize the two prong journeys' end of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and the School Strategic Plan (SSP).

1.3. Objective of the Study

Numerous rhetoric questions arises from myriad educational perspectives as to what works best for and to the school? the students? the teachers? the staff? and the community as the stakeholders? in order to attain academic excellence which lead to customers' satisfaction of and with the educational institution of and in Malaysia. Thus, the school work process must be at par and/or upgraded to the internationalization standards by identifying, quantifying and eliminating all forms of waste and/or redundancy to produce quality. Today, in the fast changing global village, just yielding excellence would not do it as an assurance. A systematic and systemic method for quality practices in the form Continuous Quality Improvement or better known in the business world as CQI must be employed and engaged by the school of today in their School Strategic Plan (SSP). As a consequence, a two-prong perceptions by the selected heterogeneous primary school heads of Malaysia is significantly highlighted in order to identify what are the elements or components of CQI and how these (CQI) initiatives are utilized in the sample schools as well as ascertained the types of the most basic SSP Models of operation and execution accomplished ends up to be the objective of this paper.

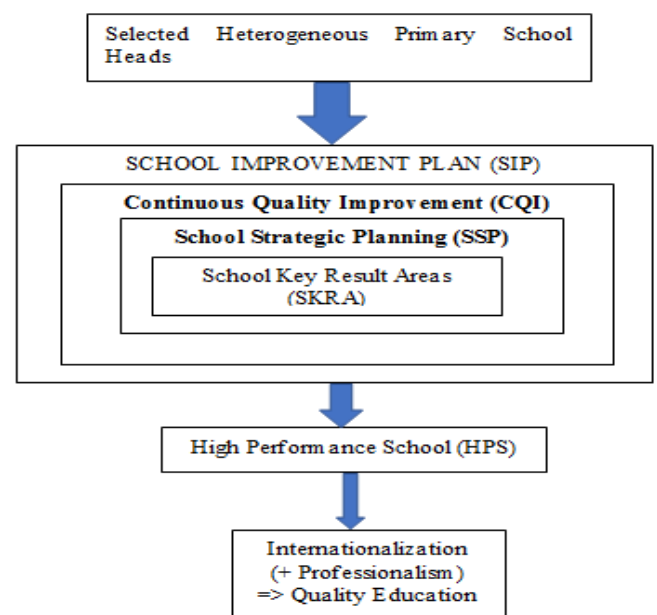
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

An anonymous maxim: when you think you have done something right, there is still something to do, improve it!...is the lift-off point of this study undertaken by the researcher to support and assist these selected heterogeneous primary school heads in their pursuit of continuous quality of excellence for and in their respective schools. The review of the literature on the theories and models of the school strategic planning shows the progression towards total quality improvement as a sustainability factor for continuous quality improvement. The Government Transformation Programme (GTP) which promises to improve student outcomes across the school system and to enable access to quality education for all students will revolutionize the school further with the introduction of the corporate culture into the school system.

The existence of a comprehensive roadmap for the education chapter, also known as the Education National Key Result Areas (NKRA) is to raise their quality, creates places for all the students with a system that ensures that every child succeeds and develop a model for other schools to follow. The change to create a new generation of knowledge workers through the school students beginning as young as 4-years old preschoolers is another aspect of the Education GTP. The colossal road map aim of GTP is to raise Malaysia's education standards to world-level as well as to being the educational hub this side of the world. The deciding future structure in achieving world class quality education in this education chapter roadmap (as stated by the government) emphasizes on pre-schools, literacy and numeracy, high performance schools, and a new deal for school heads (headmasters for primary schools and principals for secondary schools). As pointed out in the roadmap, there is need to invest heavily in these school heads because they are the primary drivers of change to upgrade the school system significantly. With the assistance of a capable, committed, and dedicated team of staff, who are ever-willing to the extra mile, the whole school (inclusive of all) will be able to reap the promised rewards and awards through improving student outcomes. Thus, a more competitive and skilful workforce will be developed as Malaysia pushes towards becoming a developed nation in the year 2020. This fact was uphold by Allan Bloom in his book entitled *The Closing of the American Mind* (1985) that "education is the movement from darkness to light, and knowledge allows you to survive but wisdom permits you to live." Further to that, the school leadership (aka, the school heads) must in turn be willing to work with the private sector partner and adopt certain corporate practices in exchange for the extra funding and greater autonomy.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Theoretical Framework

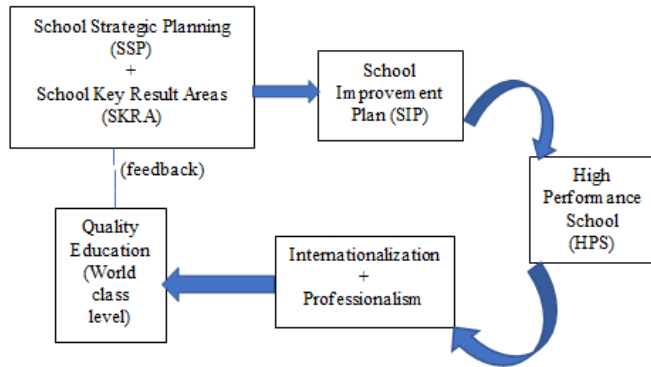


Proposed Schematic Diagram of the Study
(Modification based on Performance Management Delivery)

Unit Guidebook, 2009)

This proposed schematic diagram of the study showed the overall subset structure and position of each element involved. The proposed schematic diagram above was drawn in order to ease the understanding of the connection and the coordination between the School Improvement Plan (SIP), as the big overall picture, with the School Strategic Plan (SSP) through Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI).

3.2. Conceptual Framework



Graphical Translation Diagram

(Source: The Selected Heterogeneous Primary Schools Malaysia Management Document, 2006-2010)

The graphical translation diagram of the Conceptual Framework further illustrated the crucial linkages of those components in the proposed schematic diagram above in the Theoretical Framework. This speaks volume as the management iterative cycle in assisting the school and its staff to achieve the School Key Result Areas (SKRA) which in turns will result in the National Key Result Areas (NKRA).

Research Method

This study employs the qualitative trend study approach by looking at the depth that is analytical in nature due to its unstructured information required from participative observation, interviews, and document analysis. A series of longitudinal trend studies across a period of time was created and conducted in the selected heterogeneous primary schools in Malaysia which resulted in a chain reaction that affected the school key result areas with eventual identification of a high performing school status. The researcher employed purposive sampling method for this qualitative longitudinal trend study with a convenient sample size that is the selected heterogeneous primary schools heads. This trend study utilizes the sample of different groups of respondents from among the selected heterogeneous primary schools heads at different point in time and/or from the same sample in order to see the net changes at an aggregate level. The researcher utilizes the ‘on-site’ participation observation with the respondents consisting of the selected heterogeneous primary schools heads in its one-to-one, face-to-face formal and informal semi-structured interviews. This was further substantiated through the document analysis from these selected heterogeneous primary schools heads management

documents known as PIPP, 2006-2010. All these instrumentations is directed toward understanding the respondents’ perspectives of their experiences and/or situations expressed in their own words as an additional enrichment to the limited information available in a holistically professional and educational form.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1. Analysis of Data

This study will specifically observe and differentiate the selected heterogeneous primary schools’ present strategic planning application and implementation in order to be up to mark with the basics so as to

distinguish the point of reaping the high performance school status and professionalism in Malaysia. This first concern will expand the knowledge and understanding of the processes and the cycle of these selected heterogeneous primary schools’ strategic planning in utilizing the standard strategic planning model as shown in the table below, is that, utilizing **all** five (5) models types depicted in the diagram below according to types of situation warranted since there is no one perfect model for the respective schools in this study.

The Strategic Planning Model Types

Model Types	Name of Strategic Planning Model	Characteristics/Features
ONE	BASIC	Very basic process Not much planning done Small organizations Usually carried out by top-level management
TWO	ISSUE-BASED/ GOAL-BASED	Evolve from the Basic Model More comprehensive More effective type of planning Depicts straightforward view
THREE	ALIGNMENT	Overall purpose to ensure strong alignment Among organization’s missions and resources For effective operation of the organization and planning
FOUR	SCENARIO	In conjunction with other Models To ensure planners truly undertake strategic thinking Useful in identifying strategic issues and goals
FIVE	ORGANIC/ SELF- ORGANIZING	Another view of planning Similar to the development of an

organism
 An “organic” self-organizing process requires continual reference to common values, dialoguing around these values
 Continued shared reflection around the systems current processes

These respondents of the study who are the selected heterogeneous primary school heads of Malaysia have all agreed that they have been using and applying the four (4) identified Continuous Quality Improvement or CQI initiatives of (1) planning and process, (2) Staffing,(3) Data Management, and (4) Leading into the school without realizing and aware of its significance to them and the school.

Significant of the Study.

The overall purpose of a small sample is credibility not representativeness, thus Creswell (1994) concluded that, the idea of qualitative research is to purposely select the informant that will best answer the research question.

The presentation of this study to the right authority of the Ministry of Education for application and implementation to all the primary schools in Malaysia would definitely add-value towards internationalization in the country’s pursuit of becoming a hub for education this side of the world.

This study is valuable in describing long-term changes in a population as a pattern to establish over time in order to detect shifts and changes in the school strategic plan through continuous quality improvement from the school key result areas in order to affect school improvement. At the same time, this study will ascertain that the continuous quality tools/instruments usage in sustaining the school strategic plan to reap professionalism and high performance school status is effectively very much in its rightful place.

5. CONCLUSION

This research is not a mere academic exercise but a necessity to continue and progress proactively in today’s modern and dynamic world of education. Continuous Quality Improvement or CQI is not a new concept in school but was given a new name known as added-value that was not highlighted to all before but must now be made known to all school staff and stakeholders as an immediate crucial requisite to be put into practice in the school. Concurrently, it will elicit and bring forth perceptions or bring to fore the conceptions of CQI in SSP or the School Strategic Planning by accentuating and describing not only the differences but also the similarities, if any.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Without the great presence of both my late parents, who have been my backbone forever, this study would not come into fruition, especially my late mother, a college graduate educationist and academician. The journey was long and tedious but in the end it was most satisfying and so worthwhile.

A simple thank you would not ever be suffice to both.

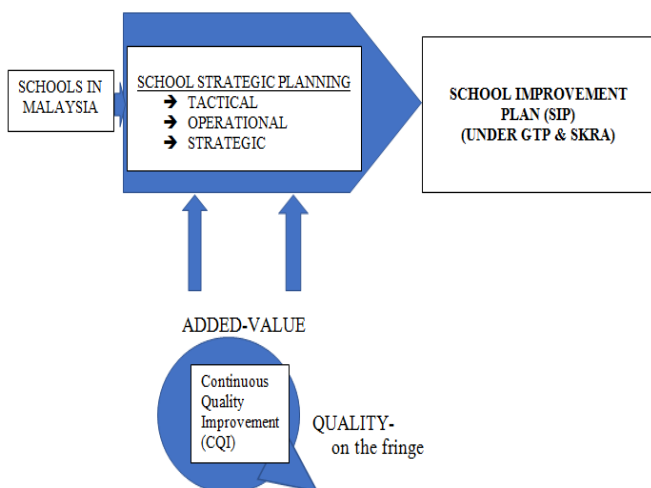
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[Adaptation and modification based on source: McNamara (1999)]

As part of the discovery by the researcher no one particular model is the best for application into the school strategic plan since all of these models are employed by the management of the school at different time, place and depending on the situation, phenomenon and nature of the planning, the types and involvement levels of the staff and many more factors. Hence, the best fit of this strategic planning will be one that will suit the situation at the particular time. The organic nature of these models will be decided upon by the management of the school especially the school heads. All these selected heterogeneous primary school heads of Malaysia, who are the respondents of this study, all agreed that each individual school are responsible to come up with a doable execution model that is flexible, feasible and easily understood by staff , especially but must be within the guidelines of the Ministry of Education.

The second concern is to identify and clarify the presence as well the extent of continuous quality improvement initiatives usage in these selected heterogeneous primary schools in Malaysia. Thus, the added-value factor should be in sync with this second concern. As part of the school improvement plan, these selected heterogeneous primary schools in Malaysia must synthesize and enlarge on the school strategic planning in line with the continuous quality initiatives introduced by the researcher. The graphical illustration of this findings can be seen in the adapted and modified version of the Ishikawa “Fishbone” diagram as depicted below:



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