

Leadership as a Factor of School Quality in International Schools



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ABSTRACT: The success of an international school is affected by a multiple of factors, most of which contribute to the quality of learning. One of these factors is related to the role of a principal whose leadership quality impacts learning processes. School principals are in charge of developing staff, setting directions, and redesigning the institution. The current paper aims at revealing these qualities and responsibilities that may contribute directly to enhance learning processes. It also attempts to evaluate principals' roles in allowing teaching staff and admins to share responsibility and be engaged in building trust and strengthening relationships and roles. The results of the paper indicate that the roles of effective principals rely on positive impact on the school staff.

KEY WORDS: school quality; school principals; leadership qualities; school staff

1. INTRODUCTION

School is a place where students learn how to read and write and acquire life skills. However, learning goes beyond the simple idea of acquiring new knowledge if quality is at the core of education strategies. To understand the factors that impact school quality, learning in both public and private schools should be shed light on. During the last twenty, the number of international schools has increased to accommodate foreign and local students. Parents prefer to enroll their children in international schools in a quest to allow their children access the highest quality of education. This has made a number of scholars investigate the quality in international schools (Barrett, Chawla-Duggan, Lowe, Nikel, & Ukpo, 2006; Bates, 2010; Hall, 2017; Thompson & Hayden, 2013). School quality has attracted wide attention and been studied to unpack what constitutes it and what undermines it.

According to AIMS, the number of international schools in Malaysia has increased from 10 schools in 1997 to 40 schools in 2019. The more schools there are, the more competition there is. This leads to pay attention to teaching quality factors as shown by some studies (Guolla, 1999; León, Medina-Garrido, & Ortega Viera, 2018; Mayer, Mullens, Moore, & Ralph, 2000).

The application and development of quality is not limited to the management which is responsible to adhere to the best practices of quality. Quality necessitates the concentration on the customer, the product, and the culture, i.e., how individuals perceive quality and its importance. Sallis (2014) states quality requires a well-developed system and procedures in addition to a culture focusing on transformational culture. The workers in this system are required to bear responsibility in order to contribute to the accomplishments of the institutions (Sallis, 2014).

A good question is what education should cultivate and prepare students for. In the last century, students were prepared for certain jobs. With the passage of time, the number of jobs has increased since technology has never ceased to develop. The marketplace has put certain demands for jobs that were not there a few decades ago. Through viewing job advertisements, it can be said that specialization in artificial intelligence or multidisciplinary jobs such as mechatronics seems to grow more in demands. That is why education attracts attention of different sectors in any country, and the roles and abilities of teachers are also more important to the process of learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000). The role of teachers is not only to convey the latest information and knowledge in a certain knowledge area, but also to stir passion and interest in students to learn. If students are motivated enough, they are ready to make an effort to learn regardless of time and difficulty (Rost, 2006). So, teachers need to focus on what makes students excited. Upon doing so, teachers will be able to empower students to successfully learn. Once students are eager to learn, they construct their

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own perceptions and experience by themselves. Hence, quality education becomes urgently essential and call educators and researchers to think what factors should be studied and found in schools in general, and international schools in particular.

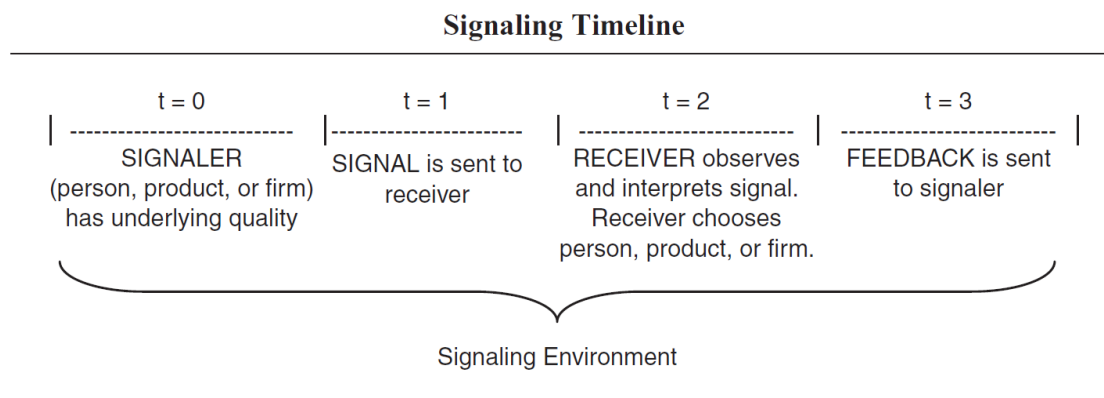
In order to comprehend quality, one needs to define it, assess its factors, and assess the adherence of international schools to these factors. It is the job of all managerial and admin staff and teachers. The ultimate goal is to enhance the learning process and to send quality signals to customers and potential customers. Due to the limitation of the current study, it is leadership that efforts were focused on to have a better analysis and examination of the quality factor.

2. LITERATURE

The researcher made use of the signaling theory by Spence (2002) to provide the theoretical framework. This theory can be used to explicate the significance of signals and how they are connected to quality factors. The theory states that the variability of information shall be reduced between parties to enhance quality. Later on, other researchers have been using this theory in different disciplines (Ahlers, Cumming, Günther, & Schweizer, 2015; Bamberger, Biron, & Meshoulam, 2014; Bergh, Connelly, Ketchen Jr, & Shannon, 2014; Clark & Martorell, 2014; Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011; Eddleston, Ladge, Mitteness, & Balachandra, 2016; Fontana, Geuna, & Matt, 2006; Mavlanova, Benbunan-Fich, & Koufaris, 2012; Ndofor & Levitas, 2004).

In the beginning, Spence (1973) studied the process of employment, then compared it to the lottery. A newly hired employee is not always a good investment until he spends some months on the job to prove that. Spence discovered that some characteristics such as race and gender were fixed, while other characteristics were not. The adaptable characteristics were identified as signaling ones. The manipulation of these signals may cost the company when it decides to endeavor to make changes to these signals (Stiglitz et al., 1975).

According to Connelly, the signaler and the receiver, two main factors, are identified during the transmission of a signal. Quality is linked to the unobservable attributes of the signaler that are necessary to meet the demands of observer of the signal. The study has proven that some management researchers recognize quality-dependent signals which affect positively or negatively the reputation of the business. In the case of sending signals that lack a strong correlation with unobservable quality of the signaler, the reason is said to be poor signaling. The more fit the signal is, the more correlated it is to the unobservable quality (Connelly et al., 2011). This relation pertains to the signal, the signaler's unobservable quality, the information whether that targets the public and that is kept private. Since institutions, be private or public, keep evolving or regress, if not closed down.



Note: t = time.

Figure 1: Signaling Timeline (Connelly et al., 2011, p. 44)

One of the significant contributions of Spence's theory is that school-quality factors are identified. The theory states that information that is not public yet but accessible to individuals inside the organization can be made public or withheld according to the school management's discretion. International schools may follow several strategies to attract new students or retain old ones. Of these strategies is either to disseminate information that promotes their reputation or stop the circulation of negative information. The engagement of such activities is viewed necessary since competition between international schools is increasing.

The signaling theory gives a chance for the integration of an interactive theory of communication utilizing symbols and linking it with social benefit with other theories of adaptation and strategic action (Bliege Bird et al., 2005). The decision to signal quality to customers

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is left totally to the school management (Connelly et al., 2011). Once school have highly qualified teachers, they will not hesitate to signal the teaching staff qualification. On the contrary, they may decide to hide the faculty's qualification if the signal may be with a detrimental effect. Although schools may be required to disclose the qualification of teaching staff to the accreditation visiting team, they can choose to keep it unavailable to all including the stakeholders. In schools, information shared about upgrades to facilities, curricular and extracurricular documents and activities, accreditation and other stuff may lead to the improvement of the school image. However, one may wonder is signaling enough or there are other factors. According to Connelly et al. (2011), signal observability refers to the ability of outsiders to recognize and acknowledge the signal. The signal does its job once an outsider can notice the signal. In school setting, parents, learners, and potential families are the one to be targeted with market campaigns that promote such signals. Capitalizing on sending a proper signal to parents, whether current ones or prospective ones, is essential to retain existing learning and attracting new ones who may be hesitant to choose from several schools.

Leadership refers to the role of a school manager, headmaster, principal etc. In a 15-year study on the role of a principle, the researchers find that a principal impact learning in certain conditions (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). The findings also indicate the significance of delineating school processes and criteria. The study talks about school processes such as school mission, academic expectations, academic learning time, instructional organization, and student opportunity to learn are part of the school processes. The study too manages to identify the relationship between student's achievement and school leadership and goals and structure.

Some scholars point out that school leadership influence student learning (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). They highlight the importance of effective reform to transfer learning. According to the researchers, three main conclusions are identified as follows:

- Each study should attempt to concentrate on the success of leadership
- There is no agreement on the term instructional leader whether it designates a teacher, a superintendent, or a principal.
- Distributive leadership, although popular, lacks clarity and seems unrestrained.

According to Leithwood et al. (2004), the fundamental functions of instructional leaderships are developing staff, setting directions, and redesigning the institutions. This illustrates the responsibility on school leaders to ensure the constant growth and achievement of goals. The diversity of practices and ability to be selective overweighs the delivery of ideal practices that may not suit the changeable environment in schools. A good school leadership is the one that is flexible and adjustable to overcome challenges with innovative approaches. The continuous changes in the world today obliges administrators to keep following the best practices to meet all students' needs (Leithwood et al., 2004). It is the job of both administrators and teachers to diagnose and determine the next step in student's success. The time to have one person assuming all responsibility has come to an end, and all administrators have to collaborate and coordinate with teachers (Hilliard & Jackson, 2011). In the new model if schools allow teachers and administrators to share responsibility, they are engaged in building trust and strengthening relationships and roles.

Other scholars performed a study that examined student achievement and leadership influence, and concluded that when shared leadership, trust, and instructional leadership are interacting positively, acquisition of learning is achieved (Seashore Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010). Shared leadership is argued to impact positively student learning. On the other hand, it is found that to influence high school students is more complicated than those in elementary schools.

According to Leithwood et al. (2004), four common goals are identified and impact the level of success of students. The first goal is to create and sustain the competition with other schools. As a result, students may be inspired (Leithwood et al., 2004). The second goal is concerned with the engagement of others in decision making processes. The third goal is about providing guidance through studied instructions. The last goal focuses on the thoroughly developed and implanted plans. By taking these goals into consideration the researchers could measure the success of the school leadership on impacting student learning. Students' progress and learning have many factors such as class-size, group activities, teachers' instructions, and monitoring quality. Additionally, the other factors including school climate, programs, policies, and training programs for teachers should not be neglected. On the school leadership is the responsibility to be supportive and provide suitable programs, policies, school climate, professional chances to develop and train their educators. School leaders need to prioritize the above features and other goals to enhance school quality.

Another study shows the importance of leadership and suggests seven areas that affect school quality (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). They are as follows:

- The development of a shared sense of clear goals

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- The promotion of school's constant improvement through periodic planning in coordination with several stakeholders.
- The encouragement of having high expectations and an environment of innovation and resourcefulness.
- The concentration on the outcomes of learning and curriculum coordination
- The school's mission should be reflected on the reward structure
- The organization of activities and trainings for staff
- The representation of the desired values

When administrators focus on these specified areas, they help students to become successful.

A new stage in education is called transformational leadership which is linked with the ability of leaders to adapt to respond to social changes (Burns, 1978). Burns (1978) state that potential motives and higher needs should be sought in followers who must be engaged too. Transformational leaders, who are either born or made, focus on motivations and later depend on relationships to advance effectiveness. The relationships and shared purposes or goals are reiterated to highlight their importance in the creation of transformational leaders.

Northouse (2021) defines transformational leadership as "the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leaders and the follower" (Northouse, 2021, p. 162). The interest in maintaining the common good of all is part and parcel of transformational leadership, according to Northouse. There are specific features, such as moral agents, altruistic inclination, liberal, and conscientious, true transformational leaders possess (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). A true transformational leader assists subordinates to reach through their fullest through accurate comprehension of their potentials and needs (Northouse, 2021). To help improve the school environment to be quality-oriented, inspiration and motivation of teachers are augmented by leaders who, in turn, employ best practices (Barth, 1990; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Lambert, 2002)).

Subordinates are expected to improve and be motivated in school settings where transformational leaders work toward such goals (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). These leaders inspire followers to see the significance of the school goals, focus on the institution, and the leaders help school staff to handle their needs. It is the job of the teachers to stick to and support the school's guiding statements (Collins, 2006).

Some scholars such as Bass and Avolio (1994) attempted to unpack the leadership elements in regard to transformational leaders (Bass & Avolio, 1994). They put forward four elements: inspirational motivation, idealized influence, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. The charismatic personality of leaders motivate and intellectually stimulate staff. Leaders also are passionate enough to acknowledge the achievement of their subordinates. Higher job satisfactions are expected to rise when interactive engagement between leaders and staff is maintained (Northouse, 2021).

The school principal, as a transformational leader, has influence over subordinate's job satisfaction, school performance, and staff turnover (Griffith, 2004). Such an influence lowers turnover and raises job satisfaction. Accordingly, this reflects positively on the achievement of learners as a result of teacher's high productivity. All these build up school quality as perceived and expected by leaders (Griffith, 2004).

Teaching staff have their own expectations of leadership. Unless school leaders show respect, support, visions, encouragement, ability to solve problems, teachers may not consider them effective. This may also lead to less turnover of teachers. According to Griffith (2004), transformational leaders usually have clear, well-formulated objectives, assign tasks, engage others in decision-making processes and problem solving, encourage fair treatment and equitability, and alleviate stress at work. Once the satisfaction of teaching staff rise, the turnover declines accordingly. This also has been showed by another study that states school leaders contribute greatly to teacher retention (Kelly, 2014). Another factor that helps to retain teachers is the continuity of the vision and mission of the school even if the school administration has been replaced (Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2011). They found that the principal needs to stay in office for six years to affect reform. To bring continuity in the positive change in an international school, the turnover should be low. On the other hand, a study found that an average turnover of administrators was reported to be 2.8 years (D. Hawley, 1994; D. B. Hawley, 1995). This number is considered high and may hinder any effective change from occurring, for a minimum of three years should be allowed to affect such a change (Hardman, 2004). On the other hand, a minimum of five years should be given to affect substantial change (Fullan, 2007). The question is why school principals leave school early and what factors make them stay longer. According to Hawley (1995), the election of school boards which have a clear vision and pinpointed policies helps school

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principals remain longer (D. B. Hawley, 1995). Competition comes from proprietary schools whose number continues to swell. The governance structure of these schools is not well organized and hinder them from being successful (James & Sheppard, 2014). According to James and Sheppard (2014), proprietary schools hardly have education-trained board members. Furthermore, a study conducted in the USA shows that 70% of school heads are fired (Littleford, 2015). Furthermore, it confirms that the turnover of school heads is correlated with the length of board chair's term. The change of school heads is detrimental to quality of teaching staff who become lazy to improve. Thus, the more a school head continues in office, the more effective student learning is (Fullan, 2007).

There are other scholars who focus on emerging concepts in school quality. For example, love-based leadership is considered an important factor to augment quality (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012). In 2011, a consortium was formed at a university to examine love-based leadership factors such focusing on positive characteristics of people, open channels of communications, creating friendly environments, and trust. If achieved, this kind of atmosphere enhance the learning processes. The researchers found that the way to improve self-worthiness and self-efficacy can be accomplished through the leaders' sensitivity and responsiveness to: 1) the needs, 2) creativity, 3) initiative, 4) autonomy, and 5) desire to overcome challenges (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012). The base of this approach is the motivation a principal shows to enable teaching staff and admins to have autonomy in directing the learning processes into prosperity. Similarly, this approach is considered a practical method to support the learning of learners to benefit themselves and the society (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012).

Some researchers identified the link between instructional leadership and teacher collaboration which goes hand in hand with academic achievement (Goddard et al., 2010). The participation of teachers in decision making and collaboration has been proved to result in the improvement of math and reading comprehension. Those school heads who allow teachers to participate in leadership empower the teachers' autonomy to work and cooperate to make students successful (Blase & Kirby, 2008). Such an environment gives a teacher a sense of support and trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). "The more principals monitor instruction, share decision making, and perform as knowledgeable instructional leaders, the more likely are teachers to collaborate formally, frequently and around instruction" (Goddard et al., 2010, p. 16).

The application of collaborative teaming has emerged in professional learning communities globally (DuFour & Eaker, 2009a, 2009b; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Lunenburg & Fred, 2010; Raff, 1999). It is identified as the continuous learning so the effectiveness of staff grows with the aim to increase the learning process of learners (Hord & Sommers, 2008). The presence of excellent and effective professional learning communities (PLCs) provides support to learning styles and teaching methods. School quality becomes at the heart of the collaboration between teaching faculty and administrative workers.

The creation of high-quality PLCs provides an opportunity to teachers to cooperate and share ideas to improve the targeted standards wholly and respond to needs of learners (DuFour & Eaker, 2009a). The existence of a forum enables teachers to exchange best practices, support themselves first and learners second, design plans, and examine progress data. Teaming up means the ability to support and engage with learners, and share their passion to teach and help students.

The improvement of instruction leads to better learning results since the interaction between teachers and students takes place (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Thus, it is crucial to improve the quality of instructions to guarantee that learning occurs smoothly. It is absolutely necessary for well performing schools to improve learning outcomes through the improvement of instructions. The clearer the instructions, the better the interaction between teachers and learners, which is symbolic of the quality of instruction (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Schools are responsible for ensuring that learners obtain quality instructions.

It is believed that principals have to evaluate their school settings and learning data, foster involvement in decision making processes, execute and apply best practices, and expose themselves and others accountable for maintaining the success of learning processes (Hord et al., 2010). They reassert that in order to accomplish and ensure learners' success, the key to school quality requires the application of best practices together with the effective implementation of PLCs (Hipp & Huffman, 2003). It is essential that teachers have a voice in the learning process in addition to the decisions that affect the school in totality.

Educational leadership is so significant to the extent it must not be overlooked if the augmentation of school quality is the goal. It is incumbent upon school principals to adjust the tone and expectations to fulfil both teachers' and students' needs. It is the job of the principal to identify, model, and bring "the policies and procedures to life. The principal's actions, not just his or her words, make

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believers out of teachers. Moreover, beyond the principal's actions, it takes the actions of the teacher leaders to create inclusive leadership" (Hord & Sommers, 2008, p.29).

3. CONCLUSION

To achieve school quality, a number of quality factors should be scrutinized and prioritized. The researchers believe that leadership quality is at the top of these school quality since its interconnectedness is so obvious. Additionally, the traditional role of a school principal has been overlooked in favor of leadership quality that allows and sustains the growth of teachers and enhances learners' progress. The more a school principal is ready to abandon centrality and start sharing the vision, the message, and responsibility, the more effectively teachers continue to do their tasks, and the more academically students continue to grow.

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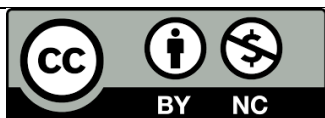
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