



Leadership of the Head of Panels of Malaysian Primary Schools: A Need to Implement Leadership Elements

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Abstract

This paper discusses the leadership of the head of panels (HoP) in primary schools (PS) in Malaysia, based on the model proposed by Harris et al. (2001). In addition, the study delves into the seven essential elements of effective leadership for HoP, as outlined by Harris et al. (2001). The study also found that there was a need to apply a leadership element to the HoP of PS committees in Malaysia to ensure that they were truly competent to be the HoP and to be able to lead their committee effectively. In addition, the leadership element is an important component to be applied in the planning and management of middle-level leadership in schools, as well as the need for close cooperation from various organizations and professional bodies such as the Ministry of Education (MoE), State Education Department (SED), District Education Office (SEO), Institute Aminuddin Baki (IAB) and universities to ensure the effectiveness of HoP leadership in schools. Studies also found that HoP leadership have a good impact on student achievement and school performance if the elements of leadership can be applied and managed carefully.

Keywords: leadership, head of panels, middle leader, competent

Introduction

Leadership plays a critical role in moving an organization, especially in the context of Malaysian education. The school's leadership encompasses not only the principals or headmasters but also the crucial role of the heads of panels (HoP), who serve as the middle leader (ML). According to several studies (Bryant & Walker, 2022; De Nobile, 2018; Ekaterini, 2011; Muhammad Nasaruddin Al Hussaini Shaari, 2020), ML plays a crucial role in both teaching and learning. Grootenboer et al. (2015) define ML as an individual who plays an important role as an educational leader in teaching and learning in addition to holding a leadership position in an education institution, being someone responsible for implementing organizational strategies, and being an example to the subordinate staff (De Nobile, 2018; Grootenboer, 2018).

The Malaysian Ministry of Education (MoE, 2022) found that the HoP of the primary schools (PS) committee was the ML in the school. The HoP has various responsibilities such as managing the subject team, annual team, curriculum team and main team (Sonia Blanford, 2011). The HoP must also have the role and responsibility to be (i) teacher leader, (ii) team leader and (iii) team member leader (Shafila Jumaat, 2008). They are also known as experts in the field of pedagogy (Kahila et al., 2020) and are responsible for leading change among teachers and students (Edwards-Groves et al., 2019). With brilliant leadership, the HoP can motivate teachers and students and create a conducive learning environment alongside building a positive school culture.

Purpose of the Leadership for the Heads of Panels

The HoP's leadership has a significant impact on school performance. By 2025, the MoE will lose approximately 4,000 retired principals or headmasters (MoE, 2013). In addition, the MoE has taken the initiative to develop the school leader competence model known as KOMPAS, the Malaysian School Leadership Competence Standard (SKKSM), and the National Professional Qualification Course (NPQEL), which focus on the competence of the principals or headmasters or future principals or headmasters. However, this model does not cover all the educational leadership that exists in the school (Sukor Beram et al., 2022). Therefore, the MoE needs to continue to move to strengthen the leadership of the HoP, as the process of future replacement of the principals or headmasters should start with the HoP as envisaged in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025 (MoE, 2013). Despite this, ensuring sustainable leadership in schools has identified the replacement process for school leaders as an urgent and important issue (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Fink, 2010). Despite the issue of replacing school leaders, the MoE has begun to understand the importance of providing information on the selection and planning for replacement processes.

Therefore, it is important to equip the HoP with leadership skills, given that countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom have begun steps to identify the leader of the cover among the inexperienced educators, including the HoP. Naturally, the country has introduced training programmes for these teachers with a focus on leadership development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2012). Thompson (2010), suggested that all levels should incorporate leadership development into their planned efforts rather than leave it to chance.

Furthermore, the HoP's leadership plays a significant role in shaping the quality of teaching and learning among instructors. A clear mission and vision that prioritizes student performance achieves this. Various studies (Hammond, 1999; Hanuscin et al., 2012; Leithwood, 2016; Turner, 2005; Wenner & Campbell, 2017) have highlighted the impact of such leadership on the educational process. Investigating the need to implement leadership elements of HoP as a leader of instructors and its impact on improving teaching quality, which ultimately leads to maximizing student accomplishment, should be a significant research effort. Several recent studies have found that leaders can effectively guide schools by enhancing teacher collaboration, sharing best practices, promoting teacher professional development and offering support for subject-related issues (Curtis, 2013; Muijs & Harris, 2003; 2006).

Simultaneously, implementing the leadership element of the HoP is a necessity today, as it equips the HoP with the same leadership skills as the United States, the United Kingdom, Finland, and some other developed countries, thereby assisting teachers in becoming leaders rather than merely enhancing their competence (Gul et al., 2019). This provides an emerging research area for the current author's study of leadership preparation for HoP.

Particular Leader Elements of the Head of the Panels Leadership

Harris et al. (2001) found that there are seven elements related to the leadership role of the HoP in leading the respective committees. All seven leadership elements of the HoP were found to influence the leadership of the HoP (Adawati Suhaili et al., 2021) and have been linked to the leader of the HoP

in improving the academic achievement of students (Gordon, 2005; Malloy & Leithwood, 2017). According to Harris et al. (2001), good HoP leadership in the context of the curriculum involves technical expertise, knowledge expertise, understanding, and the ability to manage the class, as well as, most importantly, the ability of the HoP to create a positive and meaningful learning environment for all students.

Diagram 1 describes these seven elements, including (i) knowledge and expertise; (ii) cognitive power and strategy; (iii) level of integrity; (iv) competence in communicating and building relationships; (v) leadership in supervision; (vi) strategic management; and (vii) teaching and learning skills.



Diagram 1 : The Head of Panels Leadership Model by Harris et al. (2001)

Source. Modify. Harris, A., Busher, H., & Wise, C. (2001). Effective training for subject leaders. *Journal of In-Service Education*, 27(1), 83–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674580100200139>

Diagram 1 shows that the leadership element of HoP by Harris et al. (2001) is suitable to guide the HoP in carrying out the task effectively. By mastering the necessary leadership elements, HoP can become effective leaders and solve problems quickly and effectively. However, these elements are considered essential for HoP to guide colleagues beyond their teaching responsibilities. For example, good oral communication skills are critical for HoP to carry out tasks when standing in front of students, teachers, parents, and the community. A HoP capable of delivering clear messages, ideas, and information can take initiative and give direction more effectively. Similarly, effective communication can help HoP reduce conflict and avoid elements that can contribute to the failure of educational programmes.

According to Harris et al. (2001), to improve learning quality, measure student understanding, and make learning interactive, HoP must be content experts in their subjects and skilled in teaching and learning technology. They must understand the advantages and disadvantages of different learning

software types to ensure effective use. Rather, a recent study by Cosenza (2015) found that teaching and leadership are two different jobs, but every good leader will teach. As a result, effective HoP leadership among school teachers must set an example for students, colleagues, and local communities.

Implications for Malaysia's Education System from the Principal Aspect of the *Head of Panel*

To ensure that the leadership of HoP in PS is efficient in its leadership and in its ability to perform its duties effectively, the leading elements of the HoP must consider the views of academics and experts in the field of education so that the aspects of leadership used by the HoP are relevant to the evolution of the times.

The Institute Aminuddin Baki (IAB) needs to establish close cooperation with universities both abroad and locally to improve the quality of HoP in PS leadership as future school managers and leaders. The IAB provides HoP in PS with a reasonable opportunity to pursue courses at selected universities, enabling them to gain knowledge and enhance their marketability as future school managers and leaders.

MoE, as a policymaker in education in Malaysia, must always be sensitive to the development needs of HoP as the main agency of change in school. The results of this study can be used as a basis for the selection and development of quality HoP professionalism. In addition, it can also be used to guide MoE in developing and improving policies related to HoP, as contained in the HoP task guide.

Conclusion

The leadership of HoP in PS in Malaysia plays an important role in achieving the country's educational goals. Effective leadership not only improves academic achievement, but also forms a generation of quality students. Today, the leadership element of the HoP become a necessity for restructuring the nation's education. In addition, the implementation of the leadership element for the HoP in the PS enables the HoP to lead its counterparts and can help them lead the committee and carry out their duties effectively. To enhance the HoP's ability to coordinate efforts towards optimal educational achievement, we should emphasise the leadership elements of the HoP.

The suitability of the leadership elements is determined by the knowledge of the content of leadership and the leadership skills required based on the main area of the task specification of the HoP. The study discovered that the HoP's leadership element can improve understanding, clarify the knowledge of the HoP's content, and provide the leadership abilities and professional attitudes needed to effectively lead and manage the committee.

Furthermore, it is time for the MoE to concentrate on the leadership of the HoP by adapting leadership aspects to them. To enhancing leadership effectiveness and advancing educational leadership in Malaysia, particularly in HoP PS, the findings of this study can serve as a guide for HoP, review their leadership practices and organize activities for continuing professional growth. Several other important milestones in the effective implementation of the HoP of Malaysian PS leadership include the roles and support of the District Education Office, the State Department of Education, the IAB and the MoE. We need to collaborate closely to put HoP leadership into practice and achieve the objective of the government in the PPPM (2013–2015) program, which is to build HoP leadership in all schools that is both competent and high-achieving. In addition, it is suggested that advanced research be conducted to promote the growth of educational leadership in Malaysia.

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