

The Evolution of School Inspection towards the Attainment of International Comparative Evaluation in Education

Azlin Azlan Philip Kinjawan, Chan Yuen Fook and Leele Susana Jamian

Faculty of Education, University Teknologi MARA, UiTM Puncak Alam Campus, 42300 Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

Keywords: School Inspection, Leadership Performance, Standard Quality of Education in Malaysia.

Abstract: School Inspection is regarded as the core mechanism of quality improvement in education. Undeniably, the current demand for greater quality assurance and accountability has emerged as the prominent force in education influencing sustainable development goals of a nation. International comparative evaluations of education systems such as TIMSS, PISA and PIRLS have further prompted continuous reforms to fulfill the requirement of student attainment. These have created significant demand towards the changing face of school inspection. Henceforth, this study aims to investigate the leadership roles to meet the demand of change and growth in school inspection as a monitoring system in education. A mixed-methods approach was employed for the analysis and comparison of data from 120 leaders of the Malaysian High Performing Schools and three inspectors of the Malaysian School Inspectorate. Findings of this study identified the prominent roles of leadership featured in the inspection manual known as the Standard Quality of Education in Malaysia contributed to the leadership performance which gives rise to student outcome. This is parallel with the aspiration of the organization to promote improvement through school inspection in nurturing the quality of teaching and learning, leadership and management as well as the overall educational standards.

1 INTRODUCTION

A number of Asian countries have utilized the mechanism of school inspection as the central monitoring system in education. The early stages of school inspection can be traced back to the nineteenth century when public schools were established and were required to adhere to centralized mandated rules and regulations. In the recent evolving global wave, international surveys assessing and comparing students' outcome have become the news headline as countries are ranked according to their students' performance. International comparative evaluations of education systems such as TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), PISA (Programme for International for International Student Assessment) and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) have induced a continuous urge of reforms and refinement in the effort to meet the requirement of higher student performance outcomes. Significantly, international surveys function as the main source of information and data for governments to keep track of the progress in systems where leaders allocate resources to match

up the needs of various sector. Also, data of global analysis surveys is beneficial for schools and leaders to reflect and consider appropriate recommendations with regards to instructional practices. The surveys additionally provide supplementary data and information for national research and professional development programmes aiming towards the improvement in education.

As Malaysia is approaching on a mission of Vision 2020 which targeted to become a fully developed nation by the year of 2020, one of the biggest challenges is to prepare its human capital as the fundamental assets. Hence, the Ministry of Education (MOE) carries vital responsibilities in shaping the desired human capitals (Malaysia, 2010). In addition, the emergence of the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025) has posed a further demand for greater quality assurance and monitoring as well as organizational efficiency and accountability. The recent development in education additionally poses a global achievement gap due to the global shift from an industrial economy to a knowledge economy which demanded students to master divergent competencies to survive the coming world of work. In order to ensure the

attainment of these current demands and policies, the MOE has to have strong and influential governance and monitoring of quality education which is designated to the Malaysian School Inspectorate.

Dedering & Mueller (2011) gave prominence to the evaluative and systematic assessment upheld by the practice of school inspection. In Malaysia, one of the major contributions of the Malaysian School Inspectorate has been the dissemination and publication of the Standard Quality of Education in Malaysia featuring the inspection framework and tool to assist schools in self-assessing their current operational quality and condition. The instrument and tool provide quality standards with regards to the core operations in schools and offers attainable benchmarks to be adopted as a resource of internal review for Malaysian schools. This contributed to the assurance of the elements of transparency as the widely shared framework of inspection indicates how inspection judgments are formed. Over the years, this solitary inspection framework and instrument continues to contribute as a significant guide for school inspection and has been highly regarded by the Malaysian schools as well as educational stakeholders.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Vanhoof & Van Petegem (2007) traced the development of school inspection by signifying the increasing demand for quality education in schools. De Wolf & Janssens (2007) identified that external inspections in schools focused on the attainment of standards of quality. Ehren & Visscher (2008) further noted that the practice of school inspection is not merely for the purpose of monitoring, rather it is closely linked to the expectation of improvement. Fundamentally, Dedering & Mueller (2011) agreed that school inspection is greatly concerned with evaluative and systematic assessment based on standardized criteria related to working methods, conditions of work and student outcome.

Past literature on school inspection has significantly shown the importance of evaluating schools based on standardized quality expectations and frameworks determined by educational authorities. In reference to quality, various prominent domains such as school culture, leadership, instruction, management as well as quality development are merged and transformed into the tool or instrument of inspection. Dedering & Mueller, 2010; Gaertner & Pant (2011) emphasized

that the instrument widely utilized in school inspection consisted of the objective and data-based evaluation. In the light of quality, assessments are strictly based on data gathered through multiple methods such as questionnaires, interviews, lesson observation and document analysis of which will finally be produced into a detailed-final report to be delivered to schools and educational authorities.

The current demand for evolution in the practice of school inspection came into existence due to the increase in autonomy and responsibility entrusted to schools. This policy direction has apparently resulted in a greater demand for accountability to match the increased autonomy. For that reason, the practice of school inspection has become one of the central mechanism of school evaluation which serves to effectively track the progress and development in schools. This has witnessed the start of advancement in school inspection which has gradually shifted by a great amount from its historical roots and purposes. Inspection is now becoming a complex component of a broad and contemporary concept of public sector management and governance which strives for quality, improvement, accountability, transparency and cost effectiveness. In this vein, it is interesting to note on the fact that school inspection has become an interesting instance of how the changing political policies and governance placed significance impact on the management and delivery of public services. In the past, school inspection was exclusively concerned with compliancy of regulations and policies in terms of school evaluation whereby recently, the development of it is more concerned with establishing a regulatory framework to allow for greater autonomy in schools while at the same time holding them responsible for student performance.

The most recent theories of public sector governance in most countries in Asia were predominantly driven by creating autonomous professionals and the demand to impose accountability through effective inspections. In Malaysia, through the effort to provide transparency on improvement and adherence to regulations to educational stakeholders, an external monitoring system such as school inspection sufficiently attended to the demand for accountability. As the focal key of accountability is geared towards school improvement and performance, inspection becomes a fundamental mechanism not only to evaluate schools but to improve them to a certain standardized level of quality where they can take charge of their own progress.

This current conceptualization of school consequently suggests that an updated and contemporary inspection models to be adopted and practiced to cater to the demand of accountability in education. Findings by Husain, W.H.B.W & Othman, N.B. (2018) indicated that the current batch of contemporarily-trained school inspectors in Malaysia was ready to face the recent change and demand in the current education sphere. Another finding by Roberts & Sampson (2010) also revealed on the advancement in terms of competence and professionalism among the present assembly of school inspectors. On that account, the Malaysian School of Inspectorate and Quality Assurance, Ministry of Education Malaysia stands in need to develop and evolve in respect of evaluation literacy and innovation capacity to improve the system of education as well as to accommodate the call for advancement in international students' performance.

Reflecting on the broad concept of inspection, the present paper explores on the impact of the recent alteration on the evaluation tool which fulfills the function as the inspection model in Malaysia generally known as the Standard Quality of Education Malaysia (SKPMg2 hereafter). This document is utilized to check and evaluate on the compliance on the five main standards inclusive of Standard 1: Leadership Practice, Standard 2: Organizational Management, Standard 3: Curriculum, Co-Curricular and Students' Affair, Standard 4: Teaching and Learning, Standard 5: Students' Outcome. This external monitoring gives prominence to raise Malaysian schools' adeptness towards self-evaluation in order to enable them to respond and adhere to current changes and reform in national education systems. This paper purposely investigates on Standard 1 which consists of the leadership practice specifically focusing on the leadership performance measured by the recently revised and improved tool of inspection.

This paper embarks on placing the practice of school inspection in the context of the amendment in education as one of public sector governance in Malaysia. It further investigates on the factor of leadership performance measured in school inspection which consists of the three prominent roles of school leaders to achieve high-performance leadership. The three distinct roles contained in the recently revised inspection tool consisted of the roles as the Frontrunner, Guide and to Inspire.

3 METHOD

To increase the credibility and validity of results, this study utilized a methodical triangulation of quantitative and qualitative approach. In specific, this study employed a mixed-methods approach with convergence parallel research design for the analysis and comparison of data from two High Performing Schools and three branches of School Inspectorate in Sabah, Malaysia. The participants involved in this study comprised of 120 school leaders and senior teachers in the Malaysian High Performing Schools. Clustered-stratified-random sampling was used in determining the sample of 120 respondents representing the population of school leaders in the High Performing Schools.

The survey method was employed quantitatively to explore school leaders' views on the roles of school administrators as instructional leaders. The instrument in this study is based on the recently reviewed SKPMg2 (Inspectorate and Quality Assurance, 2017) which is the document and inspection tool used in the practice of school inspection in Malaysia. For the purpose of quantitative data gathering, respondents were expected to appropriately respond to questionnaires pertaining criteria of High Performing Leadership as set forth in the SKPMg2 document consisted of school leaders' roles as the Frontrunner, the Guide and to Inspire. A descriptive analysis employing mean score and the standard deviation was used to interpret the quantitative findings.

The investigation into qualitative data which included three school leaders as participants which were coded as School Leader 1 (SL 1), School Leader 2 (SL 2) and School Leader 3 (SL 3) was employed to support and triangulate the quantitative findings. For this purpose, open-ended questions and semi-structured interview were used in the qualitative approach to explore school leaders' views on the pertinent roles of school leaders as instructional leaders. Open coding was used to identify concepts and properties through comparative analysis to discover and categorize the variables according to their similarities and differences based on the emerging from the analysis.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned earlier, this study aims to examine the factors of leadership performance measured in school inspection. From a broad perspective, the

leadership performance measured during the conduct of school inspection in the Malaysian setting correlates with the theoretical constructs originated from a diverse principal of leadership models as well as the inspection tool known as the SKPM which corresponds with school effectiveness. Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger (2003) prescribed on the need of appropriate guidelines and starting point to effectively investigate the impact of leadership performance on students' attainment as they outfit the analytical framework to interpret on what makes schools effective.

In the virtue of school inspection, this perspective aims for transformation in education which drives schools towards improvement. Gray and Wilcox (1995) advocate that school inspection and improvement are indeed interconnected to each other as it is because of the process of inspection that schools are required to undergo constructive changes which lead to improvement.

4.1 Leadership Performance Measured in School Inspection

The quantitative data were analyzed in order to present the findings where descriptive analysis employing mean score and the standard deviation was used to interpret the data. Table 1 shows the mean score on school leaders role as an instructional leader.

The finding indicates that school leaders have successfully utilized all three facets of high leadership performance. All three roles of high-performance leadership gained a relatively high mean scores ranging from 4.05-3.96. Of the three roles, leadership as the frontrunner has the highest roles, leadership as the frontrunner has the highest mean score of 4.05, followed by leadership as the guide (3.98). In contrast, the role to inspire has the lowest mean score of 3.96. Henceforth, the finding exhibited that the predominant factors to achieve high-performance leadership are by performing the roles as the frontrunner, followed by being an effective guide and taking the initiative to inspire others.

In the present study, the factors of high-performance leadership measured in school inspection corroborate with the three critical roles stipulated in the SKPMg2 as the exclusive tool of inspection to evaluate the performance of Malaysian school leaders. As prescribed by Witziers, Bosker & Kruger (2003), factors on the attainment of leadership performance needed to be investigated and set in place as a starting point to effectively

generate the desired impact of school leadership on student outcomes. Within the virtue of school inspection, Gray & Wilcox (1995) affirmed that inspection and leadership improvement are interconnected as it drives leaders to undergo constructive evolution which leads to advancement.

Table 1: Leadership performance measured in school inspection.

Dimensions	N	Mean	SD
The role as the Frontrunner	120	4.05	.588
The role as the Guide	120	3.98	.658
The role to Inspire	120	3.96	.540
Overall	120	4.01	.545

Scale: 1= Strongly Agree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat Agree,4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree

In correspondence with the above literature, the quantitative results revealed school leaders' notable endorsement on all investigated roles to meet the current requirements to be adopted in school leadership which is in line with the demand of globalization in education. Botha (2013) draw attention on the need of continual reform and adjustment in schools to meet the current concept instructional leadership which have shifted to a global discourse. In a similar manner, there exists an expanding demand for school leaders to acquire specific knowledge to keep abreast with vast changes occurring in the delivery system of education. Botha (2013) further emphasized that a vast change is needed in the province of leadership for the philosophy and adaptation to be best institutionalized in schools.

4.1.1 The Role as the Frontrunner

Table 2 indicates that the role of a school leader as the frontrunner opens the door for consistency and effectiveness to govern the school the precise direction by addressing the exact key areas to be improved. Subsequently, it also accommodates to lead the planning and preparation of the school development plan. Furthermore, the role as the frontrunner provides sustainable guidance to lead the instructional activities in teaching and learning. To sum up, factors supporting the enhancement of the role of a school leader as the frontrunner conceivably provide clear direction to the main goal of instructional leadership towards the attainment of students' performance.

Table 2: The role as the frontrunner.

Items	N	Mean	SD
Consistently and effectively aligning the school's direction based on key areas	120	4.13	.709
Leading the planning and preparation of the school development plan	120	4.09	.674
Leading the instructional activities in teaching and learning	120	4.04	.666
Overall	120	4.05	.588

Scale: 1= Strongly Agree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat Agree,4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree

4.1.2 The Role as the Guide

Table 3 demonstrates the role of a school leader as the guide by providing professional and effective guidance to teachers and staff. Following this, it also furnishes professional and systematic guidance to middle leaders of the school. In brief, findings of this current study specified that the role of a school leader to guide was acclaimed to be of great assistance in the province of directing teachers and middle leaders by extending professional course of route towards future improvement.

Table 3: The role as the guide.

Items	N	Mean	SD
Providing professional and effective guidance to teachers and staff	120	4.08	.784
Providing professional and systematic guidance to the line of school leaders	120	3.88	.611
Overall	120	3.98	.658

Scale: 1= Strongly Agree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat Agree,4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree

Table 4: The role to inspire.

Items	N	Mean	SD
Providing professional and effective motivation to school citizen to carry out their responsibilities	120	4.14	.714
Providing professional and organized inspiration to the school citizen by setting an excellent example	120	3.88	.511

Providing professional and effective motivation to the school citizen to share input for the purpose of school development	120	3.87	.564
Overall	120	3.96	.540

Scale: 1= Strongly Agree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat Agree,4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree

4.1.3 The Role to Inspire

Table 4 shows the role of a school leader to inspire by the virtue of providing professional and organized inspiration to the school citizens by establishing an excellent example. The role also contributes as professional and effective motivation to the school citizens through the practice of sharing information for the purpose of development. Finally, the role equips the school citizens with constructive motivation to carry their responsibilities professionally. Succinctly, findings of this current study concerning the role of a school leader to inspire was pronounced by educational leaders as an essence in yielding professional and functional ground of inspiration for the whole school citizen to execute their given responsibilities which will capacitate towards school development as well as students' attainment.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

Findings from the qualitative data supported and corroborated with the main findings discussed above which distinguishes school leaders' discernment and acknowledgment on the significance of high-performance leadership as a vital factor towards the effective management of their schools.

"High-performance leadership concerned with the ability of a leader to motivate and inspire staffs to work towards achieving the goal of the organization". (SL 1)

"Being able to listen and consider all sorts of ideas and opinions put forward by the staffs and in the end adamant making an important decision". (SL 3)

"High-performance leadership is accomplished when an institution performs and produces good performances". (SL 2)

School leaders also substantially manifested confidence on the prominence of all three leaders' roles mentioned above in allowing for distributed leadership to take place in school.

"in fact, we have what we called a G-10 meeting every week for one or two hours to discuss the issues of management in the school. My senior assistants, head of

departments and counselors will be involved in this 'think-tank' like meeting. We brainstorm and try to find solutions for every issue being brought up by the management team and teachers, students and the non-teaching staffs." (SL 1)

"Through discussions, brainstorming sessions and meetings, issues in school will be identified or brought up, and the management team will try to come up with solutions to address them". (SL 3)

"As the school leader, collaboration and cooperation are maintained through fellowships and meetings". (SL 2)

On the whole, both the quantitative and qualitative findings revealed school leaders' perspective towards the relevance of leadership qualities measured in school inspections to boost high-performance leadership in the Malaysian institutions. Mustamin & Yasin (2012) pointed out that it is the prime role of an effective school leader to work hand-in-hand with the stakeholders and school community to meet the urgent need of accountability for quality education and school effectiveness.

5 CONCLUSION

Having explored and investigated the variable of leadership performance in measured school inspection sufficiently indicated on the prominent roles of school leaders to lead the school as the Frontrunner, to Guide and to Inspire the school citizen towards achieving greater performance. Visscher (2010) postulated that the principal of leadership is constructed around the behavior of ownership of findings and action plans geared up to attain overall school improvement. Recent research in the USA further affirmed that it is a role of the school leader to be in total charge of external as well as internal accountability for the school to accomplish improvement (Knapp and Feldman, 2012). This implied that successful school leaders exploit external forces such as those measured and highlighted in the practice of school inspection to navigate expectation in supporting the growth of accountability and leadership performance.

As an important constituent in education, school inspection emerged as a formal process to evaluate the quality and performance of school leaders by a distinctive criterion. In recent years, it has appeared that many countries adopting the practice of inspection as a mechanism of evaluation have re-examined their system to meet the current demand of the globalization which called for schools' accountability and transparency. Botha (2013) prompted that "there must be a major shift in the

definition of educational leadership" to facilitate the regenerating of thinking and adaptation of sound leadership practices.

Essentially, the role of high-performance leadership is considered one of the prominent factor contributing to the success in schools. Huber (2004) noted that to ensure success in schools, leaders must possess competency and practice sound leadership process. This has been affirmed by the OECD (2009) in highlighting the need to distribute school leadership by employing wider participation amongst the management team. Leithwood (2012) confirmed this by stating that leaders should distribute leadership broadly among staff to establish active participation in decision making.

All in all, both the quantitative and qualitative findings revealed school leaders' outlook on the current practice of school inspection. The qualitative data is conceived to be pertinent as part of the triangulation measure to reinforce the main findings derived from the quantitative data. On the whole, there seems to be a mutual consensus and parallelism from both quantitative and qualitative findings in portraying school leaders' endorsement of the work of the Malaysian School of Inspectorate and Quality Assurance, Ministry of Education Malaysia. However, some inadequacy with regards to the current practice of school inspection was also discerned in this current study. Above all, both methodologies of quantitative and qualitative were engaged to present the empirical findings of school leaders' perspectives on the current practices of school inspection towards leadership performance.

It can be deduced that findings of this present study are aligned with studies of Angelo, 2005 and Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis, & Ecob (1988) which have highlighted that leaders in effective schools were corresponded to effective reform movement and specific leadership attributes associated to excellent student achievement. Perhaps it can be inferred that all of the qualities of school leaders emerged as a result of this current study can be further associated with the relentless effort for school leaders to meet the standard of high performing leadership in the Malaysian schools. As prescribed in the 'Shift 5' of the Malaysian Education Blueprint, it is of crucial requirement that high performing school leaders will give rise to effective and excellent schools.

In sum, the paper embarks by placing school inspection in the context of evolution and improvement of public sector governance. It examines some of the factors that have led to the rapid change of inspection as a school governance

mechanism. It also goes on to propose that developing a dynamic tool for inspection is one of the ways in which inspection can be employed to achieve the range of outcomes with which it is tasked are leading to an evolving toolkit of inspection approaches and models. This tool was investigated in detail with a view not only to the description but in terms of whether some of the requirements posed on schools are, in point of fact, realistic and effective in practice. The changing face on the practice of school inspection is indeed inevitable in keeping up with the current demand in education as well as to increase students' performance in the international comparative evaluations.

REFERENCES

- Angelo, J. F. (2005). *An Analysis Of Principal Leadership Affecting Student Achievement In A High Performing High Poverty Middle School: A Case Study*. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation), The George Washington University, United States.
- Botha R.J. (2013). *Epistemological beliefs and leadership approaches among South African school principals*. Educational Studies, 39 (4), 431-443. doi: 10.1080/03055698.2013.776944
- Dederig, K., & Mueller, S. (2011). *School improvement through inspections? First empirical insights from Germany*. Journal of Educational Change, 12, 301–322.
- De Wolf, I. F., & Janssens, F. J. G. (2007). *Effects and side effects of inspections and accountability in education: An overview of empirical studies*. Oxford Review of Education, 33, 379-396.
- Ehren, M. C., & Visscher, A. J. (2008). *The relationship between school inspections, school characteristics and school improvement*. British Journal of Educational Studies, 56, 205–227.
- Gaertner, H., Husemann, D., & Pant, H. A. (2009). *Effects of school inspections from the perspective of principals*. Empirische Padagogik, 23, 1–18.
- Gray, J. and Wilcox, B. (1995). *Good School, Bad School: Evaluating Performance and Encouraging Improvement*. Buckingham, Open University Press.
- Huber, S.G. (2004). *School leadership and leadership development: Adjusting leadership theories and development program to values and the core purposes of school*. Journal of Educational Administration, 42(6).669
- Husain, W.H.B.W. & Othman, N.B. (2018). *Penilaian Tingkah Laku Nazir Sekolah Baharu Dalam Membuat Pertimbangan Tahap Kualiti Institusi Pendidikan*. International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling, 3(14), 31-47.
- Inspectorate and Quality Assurance. (2017). *Standard Kualiti Pendidikan Malaysia Gelombang 2*. Inspectorate and Quality Assurance, Ministry of Education Malaysia: Putrajaya.
- Inspectorate and Quality Assurance. (2017). *Standard Kualiti Pendidikan Malaysia 2010*. Inspectorate and Quality Assurance, Ministry of Education Malaysia: Putrajaya.
- JNJK, KPM. (2012). *Laporan Pemeriksaan Khas Kelestarian Sekolah Berprestasi Tinggi: Tahun 2012*. In Jemaah Nazir dan Jaminan Kualiti, K. (Ed.), *Laporan Kebangsaan Putrajaya*.
- Leithwood, & Sun, J. P. (2012). *The Nature and Effects of Transformational School Leadership: A Meta-Analytic Review of Unpublished Research*. Educational Administration Quarterly, 48(3), 387-423. doi: Doi 10.1177/0013161x11436268
- Malaysia. (2010a). *Government Transformation Programme*. Putrajaya: PEMANDU.
- Michael S. Knapp and Susan B. Feldman. (2012): *Managing the intersection of internal and external accountability: Challenge for urban school leadership in the United States*. Journal of Educational Administration, Vol. 50 Issue: 5, pp.666-694, <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231211249862>
- Mortimore, P., Sammons, P., Stoll, L., Lewis, D., & Ecob, R. (1988). *School matters: The junior years*: Open Books.
- Mustamin, & Yasin, M. A.-M.-z. M. (2012). *The Competence of School Principals What Kind of Need Competence for School Success*. Journal of Education and Learning, 6(1), 33-42.
- OECD (2009). *Integrating Climate Change Adaptation into Development Co-operation: Policy Guidance*. OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264054950>
- OECD (2003b), *The PISA 2003 Assessment Framework – Mathematics, Reading, Science and Problem Solving Knowledge and Skills*, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2002c), *Programme for International Student Assessment – PISA 2000 Technical Report*, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2002d), *Reading for Change: Performance and Engagement across Countries*, OECD, Paris.
- Roberts, K. & Sampson, P. (2010). *A study of graduate student ethics in leadership preparation programs*. National Council of Professors of Educational Administration. Version 1.1 (dec)
- Vanhoof, J., & Van Petegem, P. (2007). *Matching internal and external evaluation in an era of accountability and school development: Lessons from a Flemish perspective*. Studies in Educational Evaluation, 33, 101–119.
- Visscher, K. and Visscher Voerman, J.I. (2010): *Organisational design approaches in management consulting management decision*. 48:713-31.
- Witziers, B., Bosker, R. J., & Kruger, M. L. (2003). *Educational leadership and student achievement: The elusive search for an association*. Educational Administration Quarterly, 39(3), 398-425. doi: 10.1177/0013161x032534