

The Role of Headmasters of Rural Schools in Attaining High UPSR Achievement, Malaysia: Teachers Perspectives

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Abstract

The foremost purpose of this study is to examine the role of the headmaster of rural schools as perceived by teachers, in attaining pupils' high academic achievement, particularly in the UPSR - Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah or PSAT - Sixth Year Primary School Achievement Test). The samples are consisted of two hundred teachers from twenty selected rural excellent primary schools in the State of Johor Malaysia who participated in the study as respondents. The researcher employed the mix-method approach, which is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to accumulate data through questionnaires and interviews. The study reveals that, the teachers perceived their headmasters executed their roles remarkably well in contributing to the success of pupils in the UPSR examination through the coordination of various factors even with the lack of resources and exposure. Based on the findings, the researcher recommends that the headmasters make full use of the authority entrusted upon them to come up with new ideas to cope with the rapid changes of the educational field; construct conducive, organized, and disciplined learning and teaching environment; acquire benefits from the resources; and be prepared with systematic planning.

Introduction

In the tremendous velocity of changes occurring globally in general and specifically in the realm of education, there are some schools that are allocated in isolated areas, which deny them the exposure and privilege of adaptation. The surrounding factors influencing the way of living from day to day are inevitable that the lack of all aspects, from the infrastructure, material, resources, communication, facilities, budget and the limited access to books, supplies, and opportunities to enhance their studies, all these will in some degree impede in the progress of the learners to excel optimally and the process of teaching and learning.

Literature Review: The Role of Headmasters

The fundamental focus on academic achievement would be on the role of the headmasters toward it, which implies that the headmasters are perceived as the foundation of the matter, which in any tough situation or outcome, they would be considered as the most reliable people to overcome it through the tasks entrusted upon them. Studies have shown that the headmasters play a vital part in contributing to the high academic achievement in schools. The headmasters ensure that the process of learning and

teaching is carried out effectively in their schools through innovative educational programmes with the aim of attaining the zenith standard of accomplishment and simultaneously minimizing the failure rate percentage.

The headmasters have to show leadership, power, authority, organized management, and efficient administration. They also require the ability to implement interpersonal influences in school settings through the communication processes, they are viewed as the resource managers, as well as the organization and staff leaders (Sergiovanni, 1991; Watkins, 2005). Bell (1992) listed five functions of the headmaster: (i) Testing and orienting children and colleagues. (ii) Directing and promoting the professional activities of teachers. (iii) Managing resources according to priorities. (iv) Public relations to various audiences. (v) Acting as the core of administration including the financial and resource management of the school.

According to Lipham and Hoeh (1970), Chee (1980), Mengeiri and Arnn (1985), and, Greenberg and Baron (2000) the headmaster has a multi-dimensional role. Perhaps the best description that can be given to him is 'the captain' of the 'ship', that is his school. He charts the course, leads it along the right path to its destination and is responsible for and gravely concerned with the safety of everyone and everything on board.

Osman (1997) observed that the role of Malaysian headmasters has been subjected to change over time. Prior to independence, the role of headmasters in Malaysia was still ambiguous and different from one school to another due to the diversity of the organizations that controlled the schools, such as, religious organizations, private organizations, state and federal governments. After independence, the headmaster's roles became more distinct (Kachar 1989). The principal are responsible for implementing educational programmes at the school level, and for achieving educational objectives through their efforts to counsel and influence others (teachers and students) in the schools. Ramaiah (1995) stated that they are required to have a positive influence on the students' learning, either directly through his relation with them or directly through his relation with teachers.

Kochar (1970) and Knoll (2002) noted that the headmaster's roles encompass everything in the school, such as the plans, staffs, curriculum, methods and techniques of teaching, co-curricular activities and human relations. The headmaster is also an organizer, leader, business director, philosopher and friend.

Abd Hamid (1989), Mahmood (1993), and, Abd Ghafar (2002) put forth the role of the headmasters in Malaysia includes; (i) To achieve the accomplishment based on the education policy. (ii) To manage and administer the school, the curriculum, the extra-curriculum activities, student affairs, teachers and the supporting staffs. (iii) To cater the needs for the effectiveness in the process of teaching and learning. (iv) To enhance and create a better school culture.

Cotton (2003), Zimmerman (2003), and, Gruenert (2005) stated that, collaboration creates power, trust breeds confidence, and confidence facilitates growth. The principal can be the catalyst for successful teacher evaluation, leading to a consistent and flourishing system of school improvement. When there is positive rapport, trust, and respect between teacher and principal, the likelihood of improved pedagogy and increased student achievement is almost assured. Principals' behaviours,

expectations, and perceptions help build the climate of a school and these data suggest that these teachers are looking to their principals to be leaders in this critical domain of assessment.

Williams (2000) as cited by Zimmerman (2003) suggested that teachers look to their principals for competent guidance in all aspects of educational experience, including professional evaluation, and to provide direction toward the ongoing goal of teacher and school improvement.

The formal role of the headmasters was first introduced in the Cabinet Committee Report, 1979, which included: (i) Performing all educational programmes. (ii) Leading teachers. (iii) Supervising and observing students. (iv) Creating relationship between schools with parents and society (Ministry of Education Malaysia 1979).

In fact, The Ministry of Education (1987) had listed 222 roles to be performed by the headmaster. The main domains are: (i) Educational programme. (ii) School organizational structure. (iii) Non-academic staff management. (iv) Student affairs. (v) School office management. (vi) Financial management and school accounts. (vii) Management of school building and facilities. (viii) Hostel management. (ix) Human relation. (x) General duties and responsibilities directed by the Ministry, State Education Department and District Office of Education from time to time.

Purpose of the Study

The foremost function of this study is to determine in what way the headmasters played their roles to accommodate the whole management of the schools and constructing the desired learning and teaching surroundings as professed by the teachers in the selected rural primary schools in the State of Johor, and relate the effectiveness of them doing so, with the pupils' academic achievement in the UPSR examination. Through this, exemplary actions can be replicated or adopted to enhance the development of other institution of learning.

Research Questions

Specifically, the research seeks to counter the following research questions:

1. What is the most essential Headmasters' contributions in facilitating conducive learning and teaching environment, and curriculum management?
2. What are the Headmasters' contributions in optimizing the effectiveness of teaching resources?
3. What are the Headmasters' roles in the high achievement of pupils in UPSR?

Research Methodology

This study uses the mixed-method approach, which involved the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data via interviews and questionnaires. The particular approach is preferred because of its relevance to educational researches. (Hallinger & Murphy, 1993).

The questionnaire was used to gather data because it was thought to be the most cost efficient means for collecting data in favour of such purpose. It is also considered to be a lot more efficient as it requires less amount of time and able to accumulate data from a much larger sample (Mohd. Ashraf, 1995). Another advantage of using the questionnaire is that it can assure the respondents of total

anonymity, unlike the face-to-face interview (Babie, 1989; Dilman, 1978; as cited by Mohd. Ashraf, 1995).

The questionnaire consists of structural questions that have twenty five closed statements. The questionnaire is divided into two parts: Part A and Part B. Part A is about the demographic data of the respondents. Part B investigates the degree of agreement of the respondents on 25 statements concerning the headmasters' role in academic achievement of pupils in UPSR.

The respondents were asked to indicate to what extent do they perceive is the frequency of their headmasters performing their roles by ticking one of the five responses which are: 'Frequently', 'Always', 'Sometimes', 'Seldom', and 'Never'.

Population and Sample

The samples are consisted of two hundred teachers from selected twenty rural excellent primary schools in the State of Johor, Malaysia who participated in the study as respondents. The schools are considered as rural schools according to the administration of the Ministry of Education, Malaysia. These schools achieve good academic achievement in UPSR in 2010. These schools were selected because they matched the aspects of the research questions. These schools are considered as effective schools as they tremendously revealed their ability by the increasing percentage in excellence in the UPSR examination. The schools involved in the study included of Sekolah Kebangsaan Kompleks Sultan Abu Bakar, Sekolah Kebangsaan Tiram Duku, and, Sekolah Kebangsaan Pendas Laut.

This research acknowledges the achievement of these schools as high achieving schools. This study seeks to find out teachers' perceptions towards how far the headmasters had contributed to the schools successes.

Results and Findings

The results of the study are discussed in four sections as presented in the following sections. The demographic data are explained in the first section. The second section addresses the research question on the teachers' perceptions towards their headmasters' contributions specifically in facilitating a conducive teaching and learning environment, and curriculum management. The third section addresses the research question on the teachers' perceptions towards their headmasters' contributions in optimizing the effectiveness of teaching resources. Finally, the fourth section describes the teachers' perceptions on their headmasters' role and the relationship with student's achievement in UPSR.

Section 1: Demographic Data

The data shows, the age of respondents rank between less than 30 years old and 60 years old. The researcher had classified the participants in this study into two major groups: the younger group with age up to forty and the older group consisting of forty-one years and above. The majority of the teachers (80%) belong to the younger age group. The distribution shows that the majority of respondents were in the average age of a teaching career. Most of the respondents 73.3% were female and only a few were male 26.7%. This is a typical scale in Malaysian schools. Distribution of respondents according to ethnic

groups, were Malays 66.7%, followed by Chinese 20% and Indian 13.3%. There is no any teacher from other ethnic groups who teaches UPSR in the respected schools.

A relatively high percentage of teachers (60%) hold just an upper secondary school certificate in education, Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE-SPM) 13.3%, Malaysia Higher School Certificate (HSC-STPM) 46.7%, followed by those with Diploma 33.3%, and those with Bachelor Degree 6.7%. The years of teaching experience among the teachers who teach in the UPSR classes in the schools involved are 73.4% of the teachers in these schools have the experience of more than five years, while only 26.7% of the teachers have less than five years experience.

Section 2: Headmasters' contributions in facilitating conducive learning and teaching environment, and curriculum management.

Table 1 shows the perception of teachers towards the headmasters' contributions in facilitating conducive teaching and learning environment, and curriculum management. Under this domain of the headmasters' roles, ten items were identified.

Table 1:
Headmasters' contributions in facilitating conducive teaching and learning environment, and curriculum management.

Item	Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Providing school climate that stresses on high learning standard.	3.40	0.74
2	Planning the testing and evaluation process in pupils examination	3.74	0.46
3	Reassessing and analyzing the test and exam results with the heads of subjects	3.60	0.83
4	Using the test marks to help enhance students' performance	3.40	0.63
5	Helping teachers in enforcing the school academic guidelines	4.06	0.70
6	Supervising and monitoring the teachers teaching in classes	3.40	0.99
7	Giving relevant recommendation to teachers after the observation	3.87	1.19
8	Working together with teachers to ensure the pedagogical objectives are on track with the school mission	3.20	0.77
9	Reviewing the head of subjects' reports and doing the follow up actions based on the reports	3.27	0.88
10	Discussing the ways to enhance pupils' achievement in UPSR.	3.93	0.80
Overall		3.59	0.79

The mean score of these items ranges between 3.20 and 4.06. It was found that the role of the headmasters helping the teachers in enforcing the school academic guidelines scored very high (means = 4.06, standard deviation = 0.70). Thus, it can be considered as the main role of the headmasters for these schools. The second important role of the headmasters in these schools is discussing the ways to enhance pupils' achievement in UPSR (mean = 3.93, standard deviation = 0.80). It shows that the headmasters are concern about the marks and methods to improve students' performance in UPSR every year.

Then, the items, which asked about whether the headmasters are working together with teachers to ensure the pedagogical objectives are on lined with the school mission, received the lowest mean and standard deviation (mean = 3.20, standard deviation= 0.77). This shows that the headmasters in these schools are less likely to work together with teachers to meet the pedagogical objectives.

Section 3: Headmasters' contributions in optimizing the effectiveness of teaching resources.

In this section, there are 10 items identified to be under this domain. The analyses of the results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
Headmasters' contributions in optimizing the effectiveness of teaching resources

Items	Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
11	Provide teachers with the needed teaching materials	3.40	0.74
12	Involve the teachers in planning and making the teaching resources	3.73	0.46
13	Support teachers in trying new method of teaching	3.60	0.46
14	Encourage teachers in using the financial allocation for each subject to innovate their pedagogical capabilities.	3.40	0.63
15	Emphasize on the role of resource centre in students' achievement in UPSR	4.07	0.70
16	Encourage students and teachers to use the Resource Centre and School Library services	3.40	0.99
17	Emphasize the basic facilities and services of Resource Centre	3.87	1.19
18	Get outside resources for students to have the optimum benefits from education	3.20	0.77
19	Encourage teachers to make their own teaching materials	3.27	0.77
20	Cooperate with teachers to identify and ensure all resources available are used to its fullest	3.27	0.88
	Overall	3.52	0.77

Based on the Table 2 above, from ten items related to optimizing the effectiveness of teaching resources contributed by the headmasters, there are four items (12,13,15,17), which the respondents scored more than the overall mean (mean = 3.52, standard deviation= 0.77). The item-by-item analysis suggests that the teachers perceived their headmaster had played their roles in the achievement of pupils especially under the domain of optimizing the effectiveness of teaching resources.

From the table also shows that the main contribution of the headmasters towards the effectiveness of teaching resources is by emphasizing the role of the resource centre of the library in students' achievement in UPSR (mean = 4.07, standard deviation = 0.70). It means the headmasters are always concern in promoting the role of the resource center of the schools as to enhance the students' performance in UPSR. Teachers and students should utilize all the services available in the schools' resource centres to ensure excellent performance.

Besides that, from the table we can see that, the headmasters made insufficient effort in getting external resources for students to get the optimum benefits from education (mean= 3.20, standard deviation= 0.77). It means that the headmasters made inadequate endeavours to obtain the exterior resources to maximize the potential benefits for the students, in other words, getting outside resources and information is basically up to the teachers and students.

Section 4: Headmasters' roles and the achievement of students in UPSR.

There are only five items that are identified to be under this domain. The analyses of the results are as shown in the table below:

Table 3: The main role of the Headmasters

Items	Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
21	Having extra class for all UPSR candidates	4.40	0.50
22	Focusing on the weaknesses of the students in their achievement by having remedial class	4.27	0.70
23	Planning programs to advance students' achievement in UPSR	3.80	0.77
24	Providing motivational talk for all UPSR candidates	4.27	0.70
25	Organizing parent-teacher dialog with parents whose children are taking UPSR	3.67	0.72
	Overall	4.08	0.71

From the table above, five items are related to the role of headmaster in the achievement of students in UPSR. The main role of the headmasters in this domain is to have extra classes for all UPSR candidates

(mean= 4.40, standard deviation= 0.50). It shows that the headmasters gave crucial attention to accommodate extra classes for the students to be readily prepared for the examination.

The next important role of the headmasters is to focus on the weaknesses of the students in their achievement by having remedial class and provide motivational talk for all UPSR candidates with mean of 4.27 and standard deviation of 0.70. It shows that the headmasters in these schools do not neglect the weak pupils and they are consistently concern about these pupils to go on the same level as other students. Motivation is imperative for these pupils to develop their self-esteem for the examination. Most of the headmasters of these schools feel that motivation is important towards the achievement of the students in UPSR.

Then, the third role of headmaster in the achievement of students in UPSR is to execute programmes to promote students' achievement in UPSR (mean=3.80, standard deviation= 0.77). It shows that the headmasters also gave full attention in planning different programmes to improve students' achievement.

In general, the roles of the headmasters are important towards the achievement of students in UPSR. It is because the headmasters plan in advance numerous programmes and activities to raise the student's achievement. For example, the headmasters in these schools had organized extra classes, remedial classes, motivational courses, and teachers-parent dialogues.

Interviews:

To support the data, the researcher had organized five interview sessions with five teachers from each school who teaches UPSR candidates. Each teacher was interviewed for approximately an hour. The interview was conducted using one-on-one approach, which means one interviewer and one interviewee at a particular time. The teachers were encouraged to respond in whatever manner they felt appropriate, and the researcher did provoke them to speak out to obtain additional information. Besides taking notes, the researcher also recorded these sessions to double check in ensuring data precision. All data were analyzed and summarized as follows:

The teacher from 'school A' said, for the UPSR candidates, the headmaster conducted extra classes on Saturdays. The classes start at 8a.m until 1.30 in the afternoon. The teachers who teach in these classes are the connoisseurs for the four essential subjects: science, mathematic, English, and Malay language.

This same brilliant scheme was strongly supported by the teacher from 'school B'. She said that the headmaster of her school at all times participated in the Saturday additional classes. She added that for the UPSR examination preparation, periodically, the headmaster took cautious measure by having night classes when he perceive as needed. These added classes were conducted twice a week when seemingly required, of course with the involvement from the parents. They began at 7.30 in the evening up to 10.00 at night.

Nevertheless, the teacher from 'school C' also pointed out the extra classes programme that the headmaster had in store for the school. Since this particular school had only morning session, thus, the advantages of after school hours were fully used to their extent. Three out of five school days, the UPSR candidates had to attend additional classes right after school, this was seen as to avoid them to come to

school on Saturdays, so they can spend quality time with their families which in return contribute to their social well-being.

As for the teacher from 'school D', with no surprise he also mentioned on how the headmaster got the teachers cooperation to conduct supplementary classes according to the teachers' ease. Some teachers conducted extra classes after school hours, while others on Saturdays, and even in fact, one or two of them held the classes at the comfort of their own home. The collaboration and flexibility is just astonishing.

Another programme which all of the interviewees had in common was the facilitation of motivational courses. Although all of them came from different schools but the initiative of conducting such programme seems almost identical. Numerous motivational programmes were held at each school, as they are believed to play a major factor in helping pupils confronting examination stress. As mentioned in a proverb, "pressure turns coal into diamond, but too much pressure will break it.

All of the headmasters made it compulsory for the UPSR candidates to attend motivational courses. These motivational programmes are perceived to be able to develop students' self-esteem. Various approach of such courses were implemented for instance, the schools invite external motivational speakers to give motivational talk, and since all of the schools involved are in the district of Johor Bahru, they even held a motivational camp called 'Operasi Bina Semangat' (Operation: Developing Exuberant Students) in Sekakap, Mersing as an annual event to boost the pupils potential.

As for the Muslim pupils, every Friday morning these schools used up the first period of the school timetable to recite the 'Surah Yaasiin'(a Chapter from The Quran) and conducted a short 'Tazkirah'(reminder/advise) whereby during this time the teachers motivate the pupils, meanwhile, the non-muslim pupils attend moral education session. The main purpose of these programmes is to produce magnificent students with excellent academic achievement and moral standard.

The next point would be, the advancement of the students' achievement lies primarily on the implementation of parent-teacher conference. The teacher from 'school E' said it best when pointing out that the conference was conducted after a certain test was held for the UPSR candidates. This is due to the fact that, after the assessment, the teachers can distinguish the weaknesses of particular pupils, thus, through this the teachers are able to discuss the matter with the parents to acquire support, collaboration, and solutions.

The teacher from 'school B' added that the Parent-Teacher Association helps enhance in the growth of the students' mental and physical well-being. A few dialogues were held cooperation between the teachers and the parents in resolving conflicts that could impede annually to keep everyone involved up-to-date with latest situation. The teacher from 'school A' mentioned that the headmaster always makes sure in the beginning of every year to organize a Parent-Teacher Association meeting to build rapport with the parents, clarify any misunderstanding, and deliver the expectations entrusted upon them.

The teacher from 'school D' elaborated on the fact that the headmaster took the parent-teacher dialogue very seriously as it exposes a lot of information regarding the pupils as a whole and the UPSR candidates in particular.

Further on the discussion, the teacher from 'school A' explained that the headmaster of the school played his role brilliantly in the achievement of all pupils including the low-achievers and never neglected them in any way. He structured some remedial classes for these students as a technique to give them the prospect to catch up with the others concerning what they are lacking in. This is to ensure that the weak pupils are almost at the same stage of competency as the others in facing up to the UPSR examination.

While according to the teacher from 'school E' that annually there would be about two or three low-achievers for them to help out in the preparation for the examination. Those students are usually put together in one class so as the teachers can monitor their progression and simultaneously give extra attention to facilitate their weaknesses. More often than not, the headmaster would choose the appropriate teacher to teach those students as he see fit, this is due to the fact that inexperienced teachers are thought to be unable to deal and cope with slow learners as they need somewhat special attention and approach in teaching them.

The teacher from 'school C' did share some experience of how the headmaster made all the endeavours necessary as to smooth the progress of learning for the slow-learners, whereby they were never neglected nor seen as a burden to the school. Some efforts taken were repeating the prior lessons and they were given sufficient learning exercises to enhance their comprehension. Meanwhile, the teacher from 'school D' talked about how the headmaster approached to low-achiever according to their individual learning style, for example if the pupil is a visual learner then visual teaching aid will be put to use as an assistance, and if the pupil is an auditory learner then auditory learning aid will be used to help out. The researcher would like to justify such action is never seen as bias, righteousness means to give more privileges to those with less advantages.

In the broad-spectrum, from the interviews conducted, they all have the same opinion that their headmasters played their roles perfectly well in attaining magnificent success for the pupils in the UPSR examination. It is seen that those with authority to call the shots, and if they put it to proper use and take the needed efforts, would produce astonishing triumph no matter how difficult the obstacles may be. All of the interviewees illustrated how their headmasters utilized the supremacy invested in them to assist pupils in succeeding their first National Examination in their lifetime. The devotion within the headmasters and the inspiration that they portrayed were remarkable.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has reached three foremost conclusions:

First, it is obvious that the teachers perceived that their headmasters executed their roles tremendously by making available favorable teaching and learning setting, and curriculum administration. The headmasters in these schools were very concern about providing a conducive school ambiance, which stresses on the apex of learning standard to ensure no disturbance what so ever will intrude in the process of teaching and learning, and make full use of the advantages given for the development of the pupils especially in the academic achievement. The whole environment of the schools will be embedded in the pupils' minds as an unforgettable experience.

The second conclusion would state that the teachers also recognized that their headmasters contributed towards the efficacy of the teaching resources by providing a number of teaching assets such as teaching supplies and aides to meet the demands and requirements, the library and the resource centre acting as the foundations for references and fresh information. The things mentioned are seemingly essential in constructing implementations striving for the development of the academic achievement, whereby the materials and infrastructures are vital factors in enhancing progression, thus, given the uncountable constraints in the fast evolving world of education, no one can help but admire and appreciate the capability of the headmasters in attaining and maintaining funds to realize the needed features.

The third and final conclusion demonstrates that the teachers identified that their headmasters played their roles in the accomplishment of pupils in the UPSR examinations by systematizing numerous agendas such as additional and corrective classes, stimulus courses, and parent-teacher dialogues. With the coordination of all those attributes, although they do not guarantee any promises in the outcome, but they do present the best possible likelihood for success.

From the findings, with all due respect, the researcher would like to recommend a few propositions to the headmasters which are perceived as relevant towards the betterment of their pupils' accomplishment. To start it off, the headmasters are recommended to make optimum use of their authorities to which they can realize the atmosphere of disciplined teaching and learning fundamentally by an effective system to enhance pupils' performance to its peak, benefit to the fullest extent from the resources attained, and cutback unnecessary time wasting where possible.

The next idea suggested is that the arrangement of the agenda, curriculum, syllabus, course outline, and prospectus ought to be on the pathway in promoting the pupils' achievements without disregarding their physical and social development. All unneeded and pointless plans should be put aside if they are seen as to be irrelevant to encourage the process of learning.

Extending from the idea just given, it is essential that all vital agendas are planned out before hand to be implemented systematically initiating from the beginning phase of every school year so they can be implemented in the best possible way to attain wonderful outcomes. Although, along the line there would be some required adjustments to facilitate and adapt with the unexpected changes.

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