

The Effectiveness of School Leaders' Leadership in National Special Education School in Kuala Lumpur

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ABSTRACT. Every school needs a comprehensive plan to produce well-rounded students who meet their physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social needs. Therefore, the success of a school is determined by the cohesive cooperation between the school community and the stakeholders managed by the school leader. However, a research study found that leaders in special education schools still need to understand the necessary leadership strategies to implement. Failure to do so can result in weak or ineffective leadership. Hence, this study analyzed the leadership level of school leaders in special education schools in Kuala Lumpur. The data was obtained through a quantitative method, which involved conducting a survey using questionnaires as the research instrument. The questionnaire was distributed to 66 special education school teachers. The results showed that the leadership level of special education school leaders for the domain of creating a conducive school environment (overall min: 2.70), improving the competence of school members (overall min: 2.48), and creating partnerships and networking (overall min: 2.63) was at a modest level. Therefore, the stakeholders in the Regional Education Office, State Education Department, and the Malaysian Ministry of Education need to collaborate and channel their efforts towards raising the leadership capabilities of special education school leaders to the highest possible level. It will enable the implementation of the PPPM 2013-2025 goal to place high-achieving leaders in every school.

Keywords: *Leadership effectiveness, Special education school leader, Special education*



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INTRODUCTION

The success of a school is the result of a combined effort between the school and its stakeholders. To achieve this success, school leaders must have a clear vision and extensive experience in the required fields (Crow & Whiteman, 2016). It is because the school leader is the support that plays a major role in improving the quality of education covering the academic, social and co-curriculum areas (Donohoo & Katz, 2017). As in Malaysia, the Ministry of Education, through the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, has set a goal to place high-achieving leaders in every school. To achieve this desire, school leaders must be clear on the vision and mission set (Leko et al., 2015). The same applies to special education school leaders. The Special Education Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia, has set a vision to increase the achievement of students with special needs that align with national education. Therefore, school leaders need to proactively organize leadership strategies in managing schools to achieve the vision.

Thus, there is still a need for a group that can serve as a guide to the leader in understanding the tasks and responsibilities that have been assigned. School leaders must have a deep understanding of these strategies in order to guide and provide direction effectively. As noted by Naidoo (2019), there is a need for school leaders to improve their understanding of efficient leadership strategies. It implies that they should continuously strive to enhance their knowledge and skills in this area. By doing so, school leaders will be better equipped to take charge and provide guidance to their teams. Marshall et al. (2020) emphasizes the role of school leaders in taking charge and providing guidance. It requires not only a willingness but also the competence necessary for the tasks entrusted to them.

Therefore, it becomes imperative for school leaders to possess extensive knowledge of leadership. Antonopoulou et al. (2021) highlight the significance of competence in fulfilling the responsibilities bestowed upon school leaders. Having the necessary competence enables them to effectively carry out their duties while ensuring positive outcomes for both students and staff members. In conclusion, school leaders need to possess extensive knowledge in leadership as it equips them with the competency required to fulfill their roles effectively. By continuously improving their understanding of efficient leadership strategies, they can confidently take charge and guide them within educational settings. Indeed, having a deep understanding of efficient leadership strategies is crucial for school leaders.

As highlighted by Tran and Nghia (2020), it is essential for them to continuously enhance their knowledge and skills in order to guide and provide direction effectively. It means that school leaders should be proactive in seeking opportunities to improve their understanding of leadership. The role of school leaders goes beyond just taking charge; they also need to guide their teams. It requires not only willingness but also the competence necessary for the tasks entrusted to them. Therefore, possessing extensive knowledge in leadership becomes imperative for school leaders in the special education line. Competence plays a significant role in fulfilling the responsibilities bestowed upon school leaders (Bafadal et al., 2019). By possessing extensive knowledge in leadership, school leaders can confidently navigate educational settings and make informed decisions that benefit everyone involved. In conclusion, school leaders need to possess extensive knowledge of leadership. Continuously improving their understanding of efficient leadership strategies equips them with the competency required to fulfill their roles effectively. By doing so, they can confidently take charge and guide within educational settings while driving positive outcomes for students and staff members alike.

A leader is an individual who influences a subordinate to join the leader in conducting and carrying out their operations. (Ginting & Haryati, 2012). Leaders are also described as capable and able to influence other individuals in their organizations. (Haromaini, 2019). This fact is also endorsed by Flint (2017), who describes a leader as an individual who uses influence and gives influence to the members of his organization. According to Azzahra and Afriansyah (2019), a leader is an individual responsible for leading a group or organization. So, a leader is an individual who leads an organization that uses its influence on the members of the organization.

The efficacy and impact of school leaders must be balanced. The effectiveness of school leaders plays a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape and determining the success of students, teachers, and the overall school community. A strong and capable leader possesses the ability to inspire, motivate, and guide both staff and students toward achieving academic excellence (Pamuji & Limei, 2023). The significance of effective school leadership lies in its ability to foster a positive learning environment where students feel supported, encouraged, and empowered to reach their full potential. According to Jafari and Ahmadi Safa (2022), a proficient leader possesses a deep understanding of instructional practices, curriculum development, student assessment strategies, and data-driven decision-making. By harnessing these skills, they can effectively collaborate with teachers to implement innovative teaching methods that cater to diverse learning needs (Maroungkas et al., 2023).

Moreover, an effective school leader serves as a role model for their team by embodying qualities such as integrity, transparency, empathy, and strong communication skills (Pizzolato & Dierickx, 2023). They foster a culture of trust and open dialogue among staff members, which leads to increased collaboration and improved outcomes for all stakeholders. Candrasari et al. (2023) say that through strategic planning, effective resource allocation, and continuous professional development opportunities for staff members, these visionary leaders ensure that schools remain at the forefront of educational excellence. Research consistently demonstrates that schools led by effective leaders experience higher levels of student achievement across various academic indicators (Tedla & Kilango, 2022). These leaders not only prioritize academic growth but also recognize the importance of holistic development by promoting social-emotional well-being among students. In conclusion, effective school leadership is crucial for creating successful educational institutions where students thrive academically while also developing essential life skills. By investing in professional development programs for current leaders and nurturing aspiring leaders through mentorship opportunities, we can ensure a future where every student has access to exceptional education guided by exemplary school leadership.

School leaders are always emphasized as key guidelines in efforts to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of a school. According to Crockett (2018), the leader of this national special education school starts with his knowledge to form an organization, establish collaboration with a variety of stakeholders and be able to provide immediate responses as well as being able to influence others in focusing on the needs of students with special needs. Furthermore, according to Thompson (2017), the head of the national special education school is an individual who is responsible for carrying out the trust and duty over the authority given. Thus, the leader of a national special education school with competence is an individual leader in carrying out the leadership of a school he leads (Suzana Basaruddin, 2021; Mary Lynn Boscardin & Lashley, 2018; Heli, 2021). In conclusion, the leader of a national special education school should have the competence of a leader that matches the school's needs and plays a key role in fulfilling the aspirations, visions and missions towards the excellence of the national special education school.

The National School of Special Education provides special education for those incapables of self-determination in obtaining full or partial input due to lack, whether from birth or aging (Norliah & Amin, 2016). These people with special needs are also known as disabled people (OKU). The Malaysian Department of Public Welfare (2021) has defined OKU as a person incapable of self-determination in obtaining all or part of an individual's normal needs. It cannot live fully in society due to deficiency, whether from birth or later. This definition more clearly explains the diversity of types of incapacity experienced by individuals, either physically or mentally. To meet the educational needs of the special needs, national schools of special education were created to meet these demands. These national special education schools refer to exceptional intellectual, physical, social or emotional education, achieving normal growth and fertilization once they have benefited fully from the primary school plan. National special education schools are needed to develop further the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical abilities of students with special needs (Mosbiran et al., 2020). In conclusion, national special education schools are provided for children who are hearing impaired, visually impatient, intellectual impairment, physical disability, or learning difficulties who will follow a special education stream in a special school or program.

Therefore, this study was conducted to analyze the effectiveness of the leadership level of national special education school leaders in Kuala Lumpur. The findings of this study will enable stakeholders to assess the level of leadership among special education school leaders. With this knowledge, they can develop strategies to enhance and optimize their leadership capabilities.

METHOD

This section deals with the following topics:

Research design. This study uses a quantitative method of survey type. Data were collected using a research survey instrument.

Population and Sampling. Sampling is selecting a group of individuals to be chosen as study respondents. This selection is important because it represents the generalizable study population (Gay & Airasian, 2000). This study involved as many as 66 Sekolah Kebangsaan Pendidikan Khas (SKPK) teachers in Kuala Lumpur. This sample size aligns with the views of (Ghafar, 1999) and Siegel and Castellan (1988) that social science studies to study human behavior should be at least 30 people.

Instrument of Study. This study used a questionnaire as the study instrument. According to Mohd Majid Konting (2005), a probing question is a suitable tool used in a study to get information about feelings, beliefs, and facts. The researcher chose the research question as the study instrument because this study is a survey study. According to Mohd Ashraf (2010), reviewers must choose the right instrument to obtain research information. This instrument was adapted from three survey instruments, namely from the studies of Hussey et al. (2019), Abd Khalil Adnan (2017), and Frost and Kersten (2011). This instrument is used because it has been tested and has a high-reliability value. It is in line with the opinion of Mohamad et al. (2015) that the higher the reliability value (Cronbach value), the more reliable the resulting data. In summary, this research question has two parts: part A on the demographic factors of the respondents (5 items) and part B on the leadership of the national school leader of special education (22 items). This survey question used a five-point Likert scale to obtain feedback on the level of leadership of the national school leader of special education.

Pilot Study. Before the probes were used, the instrument was submitted to two experts for content validity. The researchers have also conducted a pilot study involving the instrument's reliability. Cronbach Alpha test was conducted among 30 SKPK teachers. The test result was 0.926. This minimum value for Cronbach Alpha is over .60 acceptable (Konting, 2005).

Data Analysis. This study used descriptive statistical analysis involving frequency, percentages, min and standard deviations. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 27 for MacBook (SPSS). To determine the leadership level of SKPK leaders, the interpretation of min scores concerning Pallant's (2020) study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This section discusses the following topics:

Respondent Demographics. Respondents' demographics were obtained from part A of the study's research question, which included age, gender, service grade, service period and position held. Respondent demographic information is in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic Information of Respondents

Demographic Characteristics		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age	Less than 30 years old	13	19.7
	31- 40 years	47	71.2
	41- 50 years	3	4.5
	51 years and above	3	4.5
	Total	66	100
Sex	Male	20	30.3

Female	46	69.7
Total	66	100
Grade of Service		
DG 41 and below	42	63.6
DG 44	21	31.8
DG 48	3	4.5
DG 52 and above	0	0
Total	66	100
Service Period		
Less than 5 years	2	3
5- 10 years	39	59.1
11- 20 years	18	27.3
21 years and above	7	10.6
Total	66	100
Position in charge		
Senior assistant	3	4.5
Head of the committee	13	19.7
Academic teacher	50	75.8
Total	66	100

Leadership of school leaders of special education schools. The results of the analysis of school members' views on the leadership level of national school leaders of special education are divided into three domains, namely a) creating a conducive school environment; b) improving the competence of school members; and c) creating partnerships and networking. Table 2 presents the study results for these perceptions, which are presented through the results of the min, standard deviation and interpretation of the leadership level.

Table 2 Leadership of SKPK Leaders - Conducive School Environment Domain

No	Statements	Min	SD	Stage of Effectiveness
<i>A conducive school environment</i>				
1	I foster a culture of mutual trust in teacher colleagues' competencies	2.79	1.10	Moderate
2	I have a harmonious relationship with my co-teachers	2.77	1.11	Moderate
3	I have easy access to academic reading materials to improve my own competence	2.74	.90	Moderate
4	I enjoy carrying out my duties as a school leader	2.74	.98	Moderate
5	I have easy access to office facilities and equipment when performing my duties. Example: Photocopier	2.73	.90	Moderate
6	I have easy access to effective communication. Example: internet convenience	2.71	1.11	Moderate
7	I have access to data to make school decisions. Example: Counseling Unit data on student discipline	2.58	.91	Moderate
8	I have sufficient ICT facilities and equipment. Example: Computer	2.56	1.01	Moderate

Note. n=66 people

Table 2 shows that all levels of leadership of special education school leaders providing a conducive school environment are implemented at a modest level (min range between 2.56 to 2.79). The findings indicate that the leadership level of SKPK leaders needs to be improved to provide a conducive school environment.

Table 3 Leadership of SKPK Leaders - Domain of improving the competence of school members

No	Statements	Min	SD	Stage of Effectiveness
<i>Improving the competence of school members</i>				
1	I am open to the idea of improving my work quality	2.83	1.21	Moderate
2	I support teacher competency development programs	2.77	1.11	Moderate
3	I am recognized for a high level of knowledge, skills and values on government policies related to students with special needs.	2.68	.91	Moderate
4	I have teachers who teach based on areas of expertise	2.59	.96	Moderate

5	I am involved with the curriculum update activities of students with special needs	2.39	.93	Moderate
6	I conduct teacher competency development programs not on weekends	2.38	.84	Moderate
7	I am recognized as an individual expert in the field in my area	2.24	.77	Moderate
8	I conduct a needs analysis study before implementing a teacher competency development program	2.24	.82	Moderate
9	I am involved with school decision-making activities at PPD level	2.23	.87	Moderate

Note. n=66 people

Table 3 shows that all SPK leaders' leadership levels in improving school members' competencies are implemented at a modest level (min range between 2.23 to 2.83). The findings indicate that the leadership level of the SPK leader needs to be improved, especially for the competence of school members.

Table 4 Leadership of SKPK Leaders - Domain of creating partnerships and networking

No	Statements	Min	SD	Stage of Effectiveness
<i>Creating Partnerships and Networking</i>				
1	I get cooperation from fellow teachers to improve student learning with special needs	2.80	1.10	Moderate
2	I get solid support from parents	2.73	1.12	Moderate
3	I have the solid support of the JPN and PPD.	2.68	1.00	Moderate
4	I have created networks with the specialist individuals of JPN and PPD in managing school resources related to students with special needs Example: Teaching staff	2.59	.94	Moderate
5	I am given some power by the PPD to make some decisions about the school.	2.36	.82	Moderate

Note. n=66 people

Table 4 shows that all the stages of the SPK leader's leadership in creating partnerships and networking were implemented at a modest level (min range of 2.36 to 2.80). The findings indicate that SPK leaders' leadership level needs to be improved in creating partnerships and networking.

Discussion

The study results indicate that the leadership stages of the SKPK leaders are at a modest level. This result illustrates that SKPK leaders effectively carry out leadership practices to create a conducive school environment, enhance the competence of school members, and establish partnerships and networking at a modest level. It differs from Hussin's (2021) opinion that SKPK leaders naturally possess a high level of leadership in performing their duties. The reason why leaders with exceptional leadership skills are so effective is because they consistently deliver outstanding results and achieve desirable outcomes (Mansaray, 2019). Their ability to produce high-quality outputs is a testament to their strong leadership abilities (Samaden, 2021). It aligns with the desire of the Special Education Philosophy in Malaysia, which prioritizes the development of students with special needs (KPM - Bahagian Pendidikan Khas, 2022).

Furthermore, this study requires additional support to reinforce the findings of Abd Khalil Adnan and Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani (2020), which highlight the role of leaders in creating a supportive school environment. Additionally, a crucial aspect of improving and maintaining teachers' teaching practice is the role of school leaders. They play a vital role in ensuring effective leadership across all areas, including classroom facilities the school environment, fostering a virtuous school community, and building positive relationships with stakeholders (Siahaan et al., 2023).

Having a high level of leadership is crucial for leaders in this SKPK. It ensures that they are able to effectively guide and inspire their team towards success (Bricker et al., 2022). While a more modest level of leadership may be fine in certain situations, it may hinder the overall performance

and growth of the organization. Therefore, as Atasoy (2020) mentions, it is highly recommended that leaders possess a strong level of leadership skills to drive their teams forward effectively. The Ministry of Education Malaysia has expressed a strong desire to ensure that accomplished and successful individuals lead every school in Malaysia. This commitment is clearly outlined in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013 to 2025, as stated by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2022). By placing high-achieving leaders in schools, the ministry aims to create an environment that fosters excellence and encourages growth among students (Garcia, 2020).

The study results have revealed that the leadership skills of SKPK leaders in Kuala Lumpur are truly commendable. Hence, the stakeholders in PPD, JPN, and KPM must come together and collectively harness their energy towards achieving the vision outlined in PPPM 2013-2025 (Salleh, 2023). By working in synergy, they can effectively bring about the desired outcomes and aspirations of this initiative. It is in line with the findings of Daniels et al. (2019), which suggest that leaders in special education schools are aware of their areas for improvement as well as their strengths and actively work towards enhancing their leadership skills. For SKPK leaders, it is crucial to maintain awareness and stay focused with their leadership approach (Minor, 2022). Staying vigilant and consistently evaluating the effectiveness of their strategies is essential for ongoing growth and success. In order to effectively lead the SKPK, leaders must stay ahead of their subordinates (Boon, 2021). SKPK leaders serve as exceptional role models for both teachers and students within the school. Thus, it is only natural that a keen sense of leadership excellence is highly prioritized.

Indeed, the role of SKPK leaders cannot be underestimated when it comes to ensuring that the leadership stage of leaders' needs is at its peak. They play a pivotal role in driving the desired outcomes envisioned by PPPM 2013-2025, which aims to have high-achieving school leaders in every school (Yaacob, 2019). To make this vision a reality, those in charge of PPD, JPN, and KPM need to take further action. By implementing strategic measures and providing adequate support systems, they can create an environment conducive to developing effective school leaders (Melgarejo et al., 2020). One crucial step would be to offer continuous professional development opportunities for SKPK leaders. It could include training programs, workshops, and mentoring sessions tailored specifically to enhance their leadership skills and knowledge (Woulfin & Jones, 2021). By investing in their growth and development, we can ensure that they are well-equipped to guide other school leaders effectively.

Additionally, creating platforms for collaboration among SKPK leaders across different schools can foster knowledge sharing and best practices exchange (Khalid, 2022). This collective effort will not only strengthen their capabilities but also promote a culture of continuous improvement within the education sector as a whole. Furthermore, these governing bodies must establish clear guidelines and criteria for selecting competent SKPK leaders. Douglass (2019) stated that by setting high standards during recruitment processes and ensuring that only qualified individuals are appointed to these positions of influence, we can guarantee quality leadership at all levels. In conclusion, recognizing the significance of SKPK leaders in driving educational excellence within our schools and taking proactive steps towards supporting them effectively through professional development opportunities and strategic collaborations between governing bodies such as PPD, JPN, and KPM will ultimately pave the way for achieving our goal of having high-achieving school leaders in every institution.

CONCLUSION

As a suggestion for the follow-up study, conducting a qualitative study in the form of interviews is indeed a valuable approach to exploring the real issues pertaining to SKPK leadership in more depth. Through interviews, we can gain unique insights and perspectives from leaders themselves, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of their experiences and challenges. Such a qualitative study has the potential to provide rich data that can be used as a guide in analyzing the

need for the development of a special model for special education school leaders. By delving into the specific issues faced by SKPK leaders, we can identify areas where improvements or additional support may be required. The findings from this study could serve as valuable guidelines and references for leading SKPKs effectively. Having a dedicated model specifically designed for special education school leaders would provide them with practical strategies and best practices tailored to their unique context. Overall, conducting qualitative interviews would not only deepen our understanding of SKPK leadership but also contribute to enhancing educational practices in this important field.

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