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Quality and Change Management at the Malaysian Public School System. The Case of SIGS

Firend Rasheed, PhD

Noorazah Binti Mohd Hussien

Abstract

The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between total quality management implementation in Malaysian public schooling system, student passing rate and achievement, and the level of governmental spending on public education. This research aims to develop better understanding of the underlying principles to such high student performance in the general examination, and whether substantial governmental investments in public education can yield over time such high performance. This research is a case study of a public school in southern Malaysia, whereby a public school was examined for the high quality and outstanding achievement of its students in the national primary exam. It was found that number of factors contributed to such high achievement, with the implementation of total quality management principles being at the heart of the organizational policy, which is largely attributed to the availability of government funding to such programs.

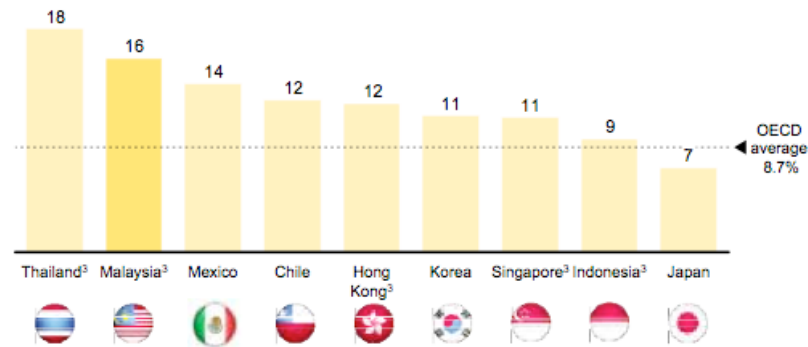
Keywords: Malaysia public schools, primary schools in Malaysia, government funding, TQM in education.

Introduction

Public education in Malaysia is undergoing great reforms. Such reforms represented in great investments in the public schooling system by the Malaysian government. Total Malaysian government investment in primary and secondary education is the highest in East Asia as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (The Malaysian Education Blue Print of 2013-2025). Total government spending in 2011 was 3.8% of GDP (The Malaysian Education Blue Print of 2013-2025), which is higher than the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development “OECD”, average (Figure 1).

Basic education expenditure¹ as a percentage of total government expenditure for Malaysia and peers²

Percent (2008)



1 Includes operating expenditure and capital/development expenditure for basic education (primary and secondary)
 2 Peers based on the following categorisation: Asian Tigers (Hong Kong, Singapore, S. Korea, Japan); SEA neighbours (Indonesia, Thailand Singapore), and comparable GDP per capita (Mexico and Chile)
 3 Data for 2010
 Note: Data from 2008 or 2010 depending on latest available data
 SOURCE: Ministry of Education Malaysia; OECD – Education at a Glance 2011; Singstat; Ministry of Finance Thailand; Ministry of Finance Indonesia; Education Bureau of Hong Kong.

Figure 1: Source: The Malaysian Education Blue Print of 2013-2025

This puts Malaysia in the same rank with top performing economies such as Singapore, Korea and Japan. In 2012, a 37 billion Malaysian Ringgit was allocated to education in Malaysia, which counts for 16% of the total budget (The Malaysian Education Blue Print of 2013-2025). Primary school enrolment in Malaysia has been increasing steadily at 1% annually since 2004 (The World Bank Report) to make it at 101% in gross primary school enrollment (The World Bank Report).

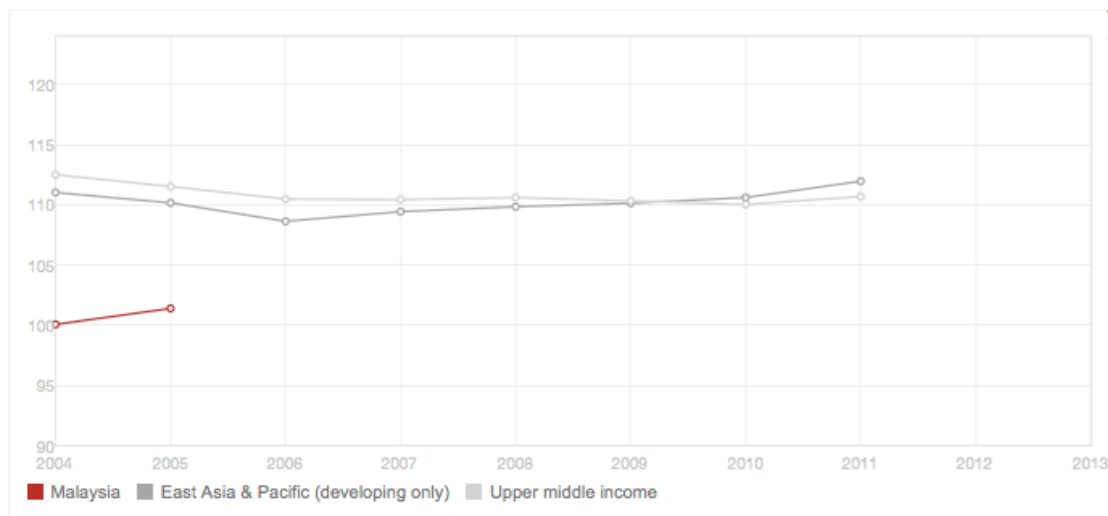


Figure 2: Malaysia vs. East Asia primary school enrolment.

Source: The World Bank & UNESCO Institute for Statistics



Figure 3: East Asia including Malaysia primary school enrolment in comparison to income.

Source: The World Bank & UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Such large investments in education since the early 1980's must have yielded a progressive public schooling system over the years. However, a measurement of performance from prospective of quality management of the schooling system will add another dimension to the understanding of such massive investment in public education. Hence, an interest asorse in examining the relationship between total quality management in public schooling system, high student passing rate and achievement, and the level of governmental spending on public education.

Literature Review

There is a wealth of literature that links adequate government funding to higher student performance. King, Swanson, Sweetland (2002) make such connection by arguing that suitable government funding almost always produce more Equity and Efficiency in the public education system. Ladd and Hansen (1999) also confirms King et. al. argument. West and Peterson (2007) concur to such argument by stating that adequate public school funding is a viable alternative strategy in the pursuit of improved public education in the United States as an example of poorly funded public education system. Yinger (2004) provided a compelling examples of how lack of adequate funding for the public schooling system in the United States is a matter of lack of government priority, which impacts a substantial segment of the American populous to be left behind socially and economically.

Swanson and King (1996) provided historical examples of the impact of lack of proper funding for public schooling and education in general on the learning outcome and the economy at large. Such link Swanson and King argue that is policy based and has proven to have devastating impact on education in the United States. Ladd and Hansen (1999) argue that Unites States government spending of \$300 billion on public elementary and secondary education is

wasted when measured with students' results in examinations. Ladd and Hansen argue that lack of quality and performance by American teachers is directly linked to students' achievements.

Cassidy (1996) makes the argument that total quality management can be streamered in education and provided evidence of successful TQM streaming in education. Aly and Akpovi (2001). Weller and Hartley (1994) provided a compelling example from the State of Georgia's experience in reforming education and the implementation of TQM as crucial element in such reform. Ngware, Wamukuru, and Odebero (2006) described the triumphant experience in applying TQM principles in Kenyan public education system. Doherty (1994) long argued that TQM is not insufficiently applied in the education system. Doherty contend that the application of TQM principles in the education field can significantly contribute to students' learning outcome.

Sallis (2002) described TQM as a philosophy that can be applied to any group of people organized to achieve set of objectives. This is particularly true in the case of education according to Sallis. Cooper, Gustafson and Salah, (2013) noted that schools administrators play a essential role in creating an motivated teachers and controlling ultimatly students performance. Cooper et. al. suggested a model for ideal schooling with TQM as one of the primary corner stones of such model.

Significance of the research

The significance of this research stems from the better understanding of the underlying principles to such high student performance in the general examination, and whether substantial governmental investments in public education can yield over time such high performance. Such knowledge would be significant to the education world and to available literature.

Research objectives

The research objectives are as following;

1. To determine whether there is a relationship between government financial investment and quality in the public schooling system
2. To examine the relationship between TQM implementation in public schooling system and students achievement.
3. To understand the relationship between student population in numbers and TQM implementation

Research hypotheses

H₀: higher government spending on public education may not necessarily improve students' academic standings

H₁: higher government spending on public education can improve students' academic standings

H₀: Implementation of TQM in education cannot make a difference in students' achievement

H2: Implementation of TQM in education can make a difference in students' achievement

Methodology

The approach to this research is exploratory qualitative, whereby one school is chosen with large student population to be examined as a case study for the purposes of this research. The chosen school is Sultan Ibrahim Girl School (SIGS), which is located in the Southern city of Johor Bahru, Johor. The school is a representative sample of the Malaysian public schooling system, since the school has 30 teachers and 1500 students from standard one (1) to standard six (6). SIGS is established as one of the top five school in Johor Bahru, Malaysia because of the 100% students passing rate in the national primary school evaluation test "UPSR", which is a test that must be taken by all Malaysian primary students at year six, prior to them entering secondary school.

Data Collection

Primary data was collected from teachers at SIGS. Public school record were also available for examination and comparasnt. Structured and semi-structured interviews was the method of data collection with school administrators, teachers, and students at random.

Theoretical Development

The theoretical bases of this research is that there is a widely accepted assumption that despite higher governmental spending on public education in Malaysia, students at primary level still lack the basic requirements that allows them to compete and unable to move to the secondary education level. This is conjoint with lack of association between the values of TQM and learning at primary levels in South East Asian public education in general. To determine wheather such assumption is well founded, an assessment was needed by examining a school that combines TQM as an integral part of their learning approach.

Statistical Testing

Cronbach alpha and Guttman coefficient are performed as measurement to test for goodness of fit, and how how well the statistical model fits the observations by encapsulating discrepancies between observed values and the values expected under the model in question

Analyses and findings

SIGS decision to utilize Total Quality Management "TQM" principles to improve the learning process, that is made out of awareness of the relavence of TQM to successful learning outcome. Government funding to public schools across Malaysia, allowed school such as SIGS to utilize quality management tool and principles across the school to achieve higher standards and results. The school administration, which is comprised of the principle, the administrative team, and teachers attribute the ability to get training and implement TQM principles as an essential component of their daily tasks, to the availability of funds and financial support available to the school.

SIGS utilization of available government funds to improve the quality and well-being of education provided, teachers, and students educational experience. Geotsch and David (2013) stated that the essence of excellence in organizational quality management, is continual improvement of people, processes, products, services, and the overall surrounding environments. When examining the implementation of quality management principles at SIGS, it was found that there are emphases on practices of quality in curriculum training, quality in orientation training, and quality in ethical training.

It was found that teachers are involving students by providing planing tools to them during curriculum development. Extensive discussions with students consist of students outlining their needs to prior to the planing of activities. Such needs includes required uniforms, adequete number of required equipments such as balls and rakets for each game, helps teachers develop a comprehensive picture of students need to attain higher interest, participation and student involvements in each activity.

Teachers and administrators of the school were systematically engaged in progress review. Such review focuses on achieving consistency of performance in total quality setting and improvements as such are measurable to all parties invloved. Students recognition was an central component of the TQM system. Achievement recognition by awarding students for various standings helped motivate students and intensified the feeling of belongining amongst them.

Applying TQM in learning

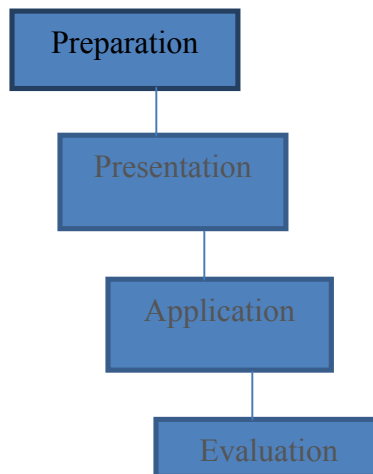


Figure 4: The four steps approach to TQM application in learning.

The approach taken by SIGS to achieve higher standards and improve the learning process included the four layers approach outlined in figure 4.

A culture was established by the principle whereby every Monday of every week, a discussion would take place between teachers and the principle to highlight the current and important issues to be tackled. The briefing would also include highlighting the approach to be taken by teachers in planning their lessons and get preparing necessary material. This is stage one of the TQM approach, which allowed for early preparation.

The presentation stage involved student, whereby they must present their planned lesson and discuss issues of concern to them with fellow peers. This is done through a question and answer setting, which is believe held by teachers that this approach highly contributes to the development of self-confidence.

Following the presentation sessions, teachers provide students with the opportunity to apply the lesson learned through practice with students. The objective is to increase the value of concepts learned through supporting activities, in which role-playing becomes hands-on approach to developing new skills and play as a change agent in the learning environment to improve the overall learning experience. The final stage of the TQM approach consists of correction measure. This is done through the systematic evaluation of teachers' performance to take correctable measures early on. This stage also reinforces a shared believe held by the principle and teachers that is performance must be measurable.

Data analyses (Table 1) further showed high correlation coefficient at .832, which suggests positive correlation between TQM implementation and students' performance, which cause to reject both null hypotheses, and the acceptance the alternative hypotheses. This is supported by the goodness of fit tests performed using Cronbach Alph and Guttman coefficient. Performance assessment variables such as grade attained per subject, and passing grade in the UPSR exam is the effective means by which the school determines their success rate in relation to performance results, and the performance results in relation to TQM implementation, which is used as an a tool to measure performance to attain the high set of standards. Testing of variables in (Table 2) shows Alpha (α) of 0.481 and Guttman coefficient of 0.382.

Element	Correlation Coefficient	Alpha (α)	Guttman
Performance Assessment	.832	0.481	0.382

Table 1: SPSS results of Correlation coefficient, Cronbach alpha, and Guttman tests, by using aggregate variable values

Conclusion

SIGS management headed by the principle and teachers were found to be heavily involved in the implementation of school plans to achieve the set objectives. This in turn contributed to such high student performance in exams. The implementation of quality improvement training in the education process at SIGS reflected positively on students performance in the UPSR exam.

Although further research is needed in this area by examining other schools in different parts of Malaysia, it is evident that substantial financial support, coupled with adequate training provided and high commitment by teachers, can positively impact student learning experience and ultimately their scoring results in the national examination.

The impact of TQM in the education setting in Malaysia can help improve the culture of learning comprehensive participation by app syakeholders including students. The training curriculum approach showed to help in the development of positive relationship between teachers and students when examining the case of SIGS. Such approach might be considered for wider implementation across Malaysia, to play as a positive change agent in achieving the aspired standards set by the government of Malaysia.

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