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CONTEXTUAL LEADERSHIP:
LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstrak

Kajian terkini ke atas kaedah yang diaplikasikan oleh pengetua sekolah yang berjaya daripada dua puluh negara membuktikan bahawa kepimpinan adalah lebih rumit pada asalnya, dan sangat bergantung kepada konteks dan tiada istilah 'satu saiz sepadan dengan semua' bagi model kepimpinan. Sebaliknya, pengetua yang berjaya telah menggubal amalan kepimpinan mereka berdasarkan konteks pemikiran yang dirasakan unik bagi mereka. Oleh kerana masih kekurangan kajian sedemikian dilakukan di Malaysia, kajian kes secara kualitatif ini dijalankan di sebuah sekolah yang berada di bandar dan di sebuah lagi sekolah di luar bandar bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti konteks sekolah yang dipraktikkan oleh kedua dua pengetua yang berjaya tersebut dan bagaimana mereka menggubal kaedah kepimpinan utama mereka mengikut konteks mereka yang tersendiri. Kajian ini melibatkan temu bual, pemerhatian kepada nota dan pengumpulan data berdasarkan penelitian dokumen sekolah. Pengetua kedua dua sekolah, tiga orang guru, pelajar dan waris serta seorang pegawai tadbir daripada kedua dua sekolah telah di temu bual dengan menggunakan protokol temu bual separa struktur. Kedua dua sekolah juga telah dilawati beberapa kali bagi tujuan pemerhatian, penelitian maklumat dan pengumpulan data tambahan daripada para responden. Analisis kes individu kepada kedua dua sekolah mendapati satu set tujuh amalan teras dikenalpasti digunakan oleh pengetua sekolah pertama manakala satu set lima amalan teras dikenalpasti digunakan oleh pengetua sekolah kedua. Hasil kajian juga mendapati kedua dua pengetua mempraktikkan enakmen kajian terperinci berdasarkan konteks. Satu analisis berdasarkan kajian yang lebih mendalam mendapati praktis utama kedua dua pengetua terdiri daripada lima dimensi yang disokong baik oleh kepimpinan dalam kesusasteraan pendidikan. Kelima lima dimensi tersebut adalah (a) Strategi; (b) Pedagogi; (c) Pentadbiran; (d) Kemanusiaan; (e) Kolaborasi. Hasil dapatan kajian dibincang dari segi pentadbiran sekolah kini dan mempunyai kepentingan kepada pengetua, penggubal polisi dan institusi latihan kepimpinan sekolah. Limitasi kajian dan penambahbaikan untuk kajian lanjutan turut dimuatkan dalam kajian kes ini.

Kata Kunci: Kepimpinan Pendidikan, Kepimpinan Berkonteks, Pengetua Sekolah, Kajian Kes, Kajian Kualitatif.

Abstract

Recent studies of the practices of successful school principals in more than twenty countries have revealed that leadership practices are more complex in nature, are heavily dependent upon the context and that there is no 'one size fits all' model for leadership. In the absence of similar studies conducted in Malaysia, this qualitative case study of one urban and one rural school attempts to identify the school contexts under which the two successful principals operate and how they enact their core leadership practices in response to their own contexts. The study utilizes interviews, observation notes and scanning of school documents for data collection. The principals of the two schools, three teachers, three students, three parents and one senior administrator from each of the two schools were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol. Both the schools were visited several times for observations, data scanning and collection of additional data from the respondents. Individual case analysis of the two schools revealed a set of seven core practices for the principal of the first school while a set of five core practices were identified for the principal of the second school. The findings also revealed specific context-based enactment of these core practices by the two principals. A subsequent in-depth cross-case analysis revealed that the core practices of the two principals fell within five distinct dimensions which are well supported by educational leadership literature. These five dimensions are (a) Strategic; (b) Pedagogic; (c) Administrative; (d) Humanistic; (e) Collaborative. While first three dimensions are well supported by the literature on the practices of successful school principals, the humanistic and collaborative dimensions have little reference and thus are new findings. The findings are discussed in the light of current school leadership literature and have significance for the principals, policymakers and school leadership training institutes. The limitations of the study and recommendations for further research are also included.

Keywords: Educational Leadership, Contextual Leadership, School Principal, Case Study, Qualitative study.

Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER ONE
BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF STUDY

1.1 Introduction

"Leadership is practiced not so much in words as in attitude and in actions."-Harold S. Geneen

Educational leadership is second only to teacher quality in important matters related to school quality, outstripping all other factors (Heck & Hallinger, 2014; Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi, 2010; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2011; Sun & Leithwood, 2015; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003; Zeinabadi, 2014). However, a large majority of the influence of leadership practices on school improvement is indirect; mediated by a range of school and classroom-related conditions which are, empirically, directly linked with enhanced student learning (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2013; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Leithwood & Louis, 2011; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Robinson, Lloyd & Lloyd, 2008).Teacher quality no doubt has the greatest effect on students' performance and school's success but the indirect effect of school leadership on students is also present through motivating teachers, thereby increasing their instructional quality (Fullan, 2001; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Sergiovanni, 2001; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2003), in their meta-analysis of 70 empirical studies carried in the past 30 years clearly demonstrate that there is a strong relationship between school leadership and student achievement. The finding is in line with the large body of qualitative research that demonstrates similar relationship (Hallinger, 2005). Almost all modern educational

reform initiatives across the globe emphasize upon the importance of school leadership and its role in bringing around positive changes in the school system.

Educational leadership has become the most researched topic in the field of K-12 education during the last decade although it has been explored by scholars since the beginning of this century. Cubberley wrote a groundbreaking book in 1916 called 'Public School Administration' which, probably for the first time in the history of education, elucidated the work of a school principal as an organizer, executive and supervisor (Cubberley, 1916). Then, Callahan with his book in 1962 called 'Education and the cult of efficiency', which could be termed as the landmark writing on the subject, became the pioneer in explaining the phenomenon of leadership in schools (Callahan, 1962). Since then, interest in understanding educational leadership, its nature and characteristics has been studied extensively resulting in a rich body of literature (e.g., Cotton, 2003; Day & Leithwood, 2007; Fullan, 2001; Leithwood & Duke, 1998; Murphy, 2002; Sergiovannoi, 1984). Educational Leadership has been studied on the basis of leadership style, behavior, competencies effectiveness, success and student achievement and was often considered to be universally generalizable (Cotton, 2003; Caroll, Levy, & Richmond, 2008; Day & Leithwood, 2007; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger, 1992; Hallinger & Heck, 1996b; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Levin & Lezotte, 1990; Northouse, 2012; Stodgill, 1988).

It is surprising then that with such a large body of empirical findings, there is still no consensus over the proper definition of educational leadership or what it actually stands for (Stack, Coulter, Grosjean, Mazawi, & Smith, 2006). Roger Gill, in his famous book 'Theory and Practice of Leadership' cites a Malaysian writer claiming that theorizing leadership is 'great fun, hugely indulgent and largely useless' (Gill,

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2012). In the same book, Gill also cites the famous management consultant Jogn Roulet as claiming that there is a surge in articles, books, documentaries and studies on leadership with 'much competing and confusing information in the public domain' (Gill, 2012). Lamenting upon the lack of consensus over a common definition for leadership, Joel Kurtzman, in his recent book 'Common Purpose' states that '… a consensus has so far failed to emerge with respect to what leadership is, how leaders develop, and – perhaps most important – how to become a more effective leader" (Kurtzman, 2010).

Educational leadership as a concept is hard to define. The term itself has been through a long journey before it took the present form, as Gunter (2004) claims that the it was initially called 'educational administration' from which it moved on to 'educational management', and ultimately to its present form of 'educational leadership'. Not surprisingly then, considering the varying focus of educational leadership from administration to management and then ultimately to leadership implies that the definition too might have changed over a period of time along with the changes in the terminology. There are numerous definitions for educational leadership, however most of these are marked with "frailties, complexities, contradictions and discontinuities" (English, 2003 pp. 27-46). Leadership as a concept has many variance. Yukl (2002, pp. 4–5) argues that "the definition of leadership is arbitrary and very subjective. Some definitions are more useful than others, but there is no "correct" definition". There is still no 'one size fits all' formula for school leaders that will bring about positive changes and school success.

The reason for such a conundrum is due to the fact that educational institutions, specially schools operate in different contexts and their leadership is highly dependent upon the specific context of the schools they work in. The efficacy of

borrowed models and practices from altogether different context are questionable (Dimmock, 2002; Hofstede, 2001; Walker & Dimmock, 2002). Schools differ is a variety of ways – in terms of geography, political climate, organizational culture, beliefs and practices and demographics. According to Leithwood, Louis, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2004), "There is a rich body of evidence about the relevance to leaders of such features of organizational context as geographic location (urban, suburban, rural), level of schooling (elementary, secondary), and both school and district size" (p. 10). Gronn and Ribbins (1996) argued that leadership practices should be studied within their respective contexts:

> Our argument is that the significance of context continues to be badly undertheorized in leadership, but that, if re-conceptualized as the sum of the situational, cultural, and historical circumstances that constrain leadership and give it its meaning, context is the vehicle through which the agency of particular leaders may be empirically understood. (p. 454)

School context is directly related to the practices of a school principal wherein he prioritizes his practices based upon the contextual conditions and addresses specific demands of specific situations (Day & Armstrong, 2016; Goldring et al., 2008, Grint, 2005). Recently, there seems to be an interest on the subject of principal's practices based upon the context (Day & Armstrong, 2016; Fullan, 2006; Hallinger, 2011; Heck & Hallinger, 2014; Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010; Papa & English, 2011). The studies clearly demonstrate that there is no 'one size fits all' formula for successful school leadership and that the practices of successful school leaders must be in response to variables like governmental policies and directives, geographical

location of the school, socio-economic factors of the parents, the number of students, school facilities, and the quality of teachers, among other which have shown a definitive effect of school effectiveness.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

School leadership matters most for school's success (Heck & Hallinger, 2014; Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi, 2010; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2011; Sun & Leithwood, 2015; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003; Zeinabadi, 2014) and is the second most important factor, besides teacher quality, in increasing student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis et al., 2010; Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). School leadership has been studied extensively during the last three decades (e.g., Cotton, 2003; Day & Leithwood, 2007; Fullan, 2001; Leithwood & Duke, 1998; Murphy, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1984) and has been explored on the basis of style, behavior, competencies, effectiveness, success, and student achievement (Cotton, 2003; Caroll, Levy, & Richmond, 2008; Day & Leithwood, 2007; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger, 1992; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Levin & Lezotte, 1990; Northouse, 2012; Stodgill, 1988). There is a rich body of literature as a result of a large number of studies conducted on school leadership around the world during the last three decades (e.g., Cotton, 2003; Day & Leithwood, 2007; Fullan, 2001; Leithwood & Duke, 1998; Murphy, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1984). This has also resulted in a large number of contemporary theories and models like Servant leadership, Transformational leadership, Emotional leadership, Instructional leadership, Distributive leadership, Authentic leadership and many more.

However, during the last decade, scholars have pointed out towards significant limitations in all major contemporary theories and models (e.g. Antonakis, Cianciolo

& Sternberg, 2004; Oplatka, 2004; Yukl, 2006 Dimmock, 2002; Hofstede, 2001; Walker & Dimmock, 2002; Western, 2008; Burns, 1978; Leithwood et al., 2004). Through a series of large scale review of researches in the field of educational leadership, scholars have also identified inadequacy of educational leadership literature from definitional and empirical point of view (English, 2003; Gill, 2012; Kurtzman, 2010; Yukl, 2002; Higgs, 2003; Benis, 2007; Bass, 1990). The reason of these drawback in the literature can be attributed to the fact that most models are considered to be one-size-fits-all models which are primarily borrowed from the western contexts (Dimmock, 2002; Hofstede, 2001; Walker & Dimmock, 2002; Western, 2008) and the fact that a majority of the models are not well-defined (Burns, 1978; Leithwood et al., 2004). Several studies have found that while some of the models work in some contexts, they do not show desired results in other contexts, thereby debunking the myth of these being 'universal' (Antonakis, Cianciolo & Sternberg, 2004; Oplatka, 2004; Yukl, 2006). Till date, there is no single universally accepted definition of educational leadership (English, 2003; Gill, 2012; Kurtzman, 2010; Yukl, 2002; Higgs, 2003 ; Benis, 2007 ; Bass, 1990) due to the fact that scholars focussed on one or the other facets of leadership, focussing on 'What' leaders do, while ignoring its 'how' and 'why' aspects.(Day, 2001; Leithwood et al., 2004). While focussing on the leader, the practices and contextual factor affecting their practices were generally overlooked (Bush & Glover, 2014; Day et al., 2009; Day et al, 2006; Day & Sammons, 2008; Gurr et al., 2007; Gurr et al., 2003).

Schools are different in terms of governmental policies and directives, geographical location, socio-economic factors, the number of students, facilities, quality of teachers, among other factors. School context is directly related to the practices of a successful school principal wherein he prioritizes his practices based upon the

contextual conditions and addresses specific demands of specific situations (Day &
Armstrong, 2016; Goldring et al., 2008, Grint, 2005). A spate of recent studies
conducted in 27 different countries around the world on successful practices of
school principals under the International Successful School Principalship Project
(ISSPP) have revealed that almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire
of core basic leadership practices and the ways in which leaders apply these basic
leadership practices – not the practices themselves – demonstrate responsiveness to,
rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work (e.g. Leithwood et al., 2008;
Day & Leithwood, 2007; Day, et al., 2007; Drysdale et al., 2008).

One of the key areas of Malaysian Government Transformation Program (GTP 1 and
GTP 2) is improving student outcomes. The Malaysian government aspires to be in
the top third of countries in terms of performance in international assessments like
TIIMS and PISA within 15 years. However, in absolute terms, Malaysian student
performance is declining alarmingly (Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025).
Malaysia is among the bottom third nations in both the international standardized
tests, PISA and TIMMS. There are several other sources that report the declining
education quality in Malaysia as a serious deterrent to its economic growth. In its
2013 report, Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
explicitly states that "Malaysia is increasingly at risk of falling behind competitor
countries as the quality of its education is declining" (OECD, 2013 p.4). Recently
the World Bank manifested dismay over the deterioration of Malaysian education
system and found it to be impeding the growth of Malaysia into a developed nation
(World Bank, 2013). This decline is despite the fact that in 2011, its expense of 3.8%
of GDP or 16% of total government spending was comparable to top-performing
education systems like Singapore, Japan, and South Korea (Malaysian Education

Blueprint, 2013). The largest government expenditure of 16% was again allotted to education in the year 2012.

Despite huge financial investment, there are a large number of schools that are not among the top Band 1 or band 2 schools in Malaysia. While there might be a number of reasons for underachieving schools, principal's performance play an important role since successful schools invariably have excellent principals as Barth (1990, p. 64) claims, "Show me a good school, I will show you a good principal". A Malaysian study in 2009 clearly demonstrates that effective school leadership is required for continuous improvement in a school (Abdul Ghani & Anandan, 2009). School principals are the biggest difference between an effective school and an ineffective school (Hussein Mahmood, 1993). Malaysian principals traditionally spend too much time on administrative chores of the school which gives them little time to focus on academic affairs, teaching, supervising teachers and observing them while teaching (NUTP, 1998, in Quah Cheng Sim, 2011). These findings were confirmed by the Malaysian School Inspectorate Report 1993 (Laporan Jemaah Nazir Sekolah, KPM, 2009 in Quah Cheng Sim, 2011) which claims that Malaysian principals rarely check upon teachers work, or teach themselves, although as per Malaysian Administrative Circular 3/67, Revised 1982, they are required to do so. The report also states that principals were ill-equipped with skills in curriculum and instruction and were not competent enough to show leadership and prepare strategic plan for the school. Traditionally school principals mostly consisted of hardworking and skilled senior teachers who were promoted to the job. The leadership skills of the senior teacher were mostly ignored at the time of promotion which led lower confidence among the principals (Rusmini Ku Ahmad, 2004). While some principals

adapted and produced results, most of them struggled leading to underachieving schools.

The decline in standards does not bode well for the government's intention of converting Malaysia as the education hub for ASEAN region and becoming a developed nation by 2020. By acknowledging that the direct effect of school leader on the success of a school is second only to teacher quality and there is a significant indirect effect of the quality of leadership on schools (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2013; Krüger, Witziers, & Sleegers, 2007; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Leithwood & Levin, 2005; Mulford & Silins, 2003, 2011; Sun & Leithwood, 2015), the Malaysian Education Blueprint proposes to ensure a high performing school leader in every school. It also proposes to use the successful principals as mentors and give them incentives to work in weaker schools (PEMANDU, 2014).

There have been a number of studies on the leadership styles of successful Malaysian school principals (Fook, 2009; Ghani, 2013; Othman, Ruslan & Ahmad, 2012). However, there is a dearth of qualitative studies on the actual practices of successful school principals that can guide the principals of low-performing schools operating in similar context. Malaysia is not included in ISSPP studies yet. In fact, out of the 27 countries which took part in the ISSPP studies, there are only three Asian countries –South Korea, China and Indonesia. Also, there is no other known research focusing primarily on contextual practices of successful school principals in Malaysia. Malaysia is a diverse country which different schools operating in different geographical locations, with students coming from different socio-economic background and diverse cultural and religious beliefs. Hence, it is vital to study what successful school leaders do in Malaysia so that the findings can be used in other

low-performing schools. Hence, there is an urgent need to study the context-based practices of successful school principals in the Malaysian context.

Following the protocols developed by ISSPP, this study will attempt to fill this gap by identifying the context-based practices of successful school principals in Malaysia. Furthermore, in view of the emphasis on leadership practices that bring about turnaround (Fullan, 2006; Papa & English, 2011), the findings of this study will act as a guide for the policy makers and practitioners interested in turnaround of low-performing schools in Malaysia. Currently Malaysia is working towards achieving its ambitious goal of attaining the status of a developed country by 2020 and education has a strategic role in realizing this mission (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2008).

1.3 Theoretical and Conceptual Perspective

This study is grounded in the interpretive constructivist theoretical perspective, which informs data collection process and its analysis throughout the course of this study. Unlike positivists and post-positivist who intend to test theories, an interpretivist/constructivist researcher, instead of starting the research with a theory, focuses on "participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell, 2003, p.8). Interpretative tradition emanates from scholarly position that claims "human interpretation as the starting point for developing knowledge about the social world" (Prasad, 2005 p. 13). The inclusion of theoretical perspective in qualitative case study research, "adds philosophical richness and depth to a case study and provides direction for the design of the case study research project" (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006 p. 54), a notion that is supported by Crotty (1998) who believes that theoretical perspective is "the philosophical stance lying behind a methodology" (p. 66). The value of researchers own perspective is highlighted by Miles and Huberman

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(1994) who claims that researchers, with their own interpretive perspective "have their own understandings, their own convictions, their own conceptual orientations; they, too, are members of a particular culture specific historical moment" (p. 7)

The philosophical assumption which underlines this study comes mainly from social constructivist philosophies which enables the researcher ample scope to ask questions such as 'why' and 'how' of the research topic (Deetz, 1996). The constructivist epistemology, the research objectives and the methodology used justifies the use of an interpretivist approach that is defined as "the study of society in the context of human beings and interacting" (Crotty, 1998, p.68). Researcher relies mostly on the views of the participants who construct their own meaning through their personal interactions with others in social situations (Crotty 1998; Neuman 2000). Since multiple meanings can be derived from the same phenomenon observed by different people, researchers are expected to be capable enough to derive meaning from multiple perspectives (Lincoln, Lynham, et al. 2011). The constructivist approach provides ample space for researcher's interpretation of the phenomenon. The approach claims that individuals look for meaning from their experiences in the world they live in and create their own meaning, looking for complexity rather than narrowing it to limited categories. Since the philosophical assumption is on the socially constructed nature of reality, ample emphasis is placed on a close relationship between the researcher and the phenomenon under study wherein the researcher observes, and investigates, and documents through interviews, going through various written texts, artifacts, and experiencing the cultural context of the phenomenon.

Conceptually, this study is informed by and draws from the repertoire of core practices of successful school principal leadership as proposed by Leithwood, Day,

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Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006) and is further informed by International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) studies in several countries around the world. Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006) introduced a set of core practices of successful school principals derived from several qualitative and quantitative researches conducted in many countries across the world. A large number of educational leadership studies use this taxonomy of practices in varied contexts (Crum & Sherman, 2008; Crum, Sherman, & Myran, 2009; Drysdale, Goode, & Gurr, 2009). The ISSPP studies, conducted by the Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Nottingham, UK, propose a comprehensive leadership model through its mixed method researches conducted around the world and conclude that there are five core practices of every successful school leader irrespective of the context (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Day, Leithwood & Sammons, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2006). These five practices are setting directions, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organisation, managing instructional programmes and coalition building.

Each of these five practices comprises a set of specific practices and these vary according to the context. The ways in which leaders apply these leadership practices are in response to the context they work in; these are not dictated by the context and the ways these are applied are significant, not the practices themselves. These five practices and the various contexts under which these are employed shall be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

There are numerous recent studies that have focused on the practices of successful principals in order to understand how they function (Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2008; Whitaker, 2003). Also there have been a plethora of studies that demonstrate a strong link between leadership practices and school effectiveness.

In a study conducted in 2004, Leithwood et al. found leadership as the second most important school-based factor in student's academic achievement and effective leaders, almost in every case are key for turnaround (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). Six years later, in 2010, the same authors published another finding which established their previous findings even more strongly. Additionally, they found that wherever the leadership practices did not affect the school effectiveness directly, it did indirectly. (Louis et al., 2010, p. 37). Understanding the practices of successful school leaders within Malaysian context would not only add to the growing literature on successful practices of school leaders but will also be beneficial to the large number of schools in Malaysia which are not so successful.

1.4 Research Objectives

With reference to the abovementioned perspectives, this study was conducted to meet three objectives.

1. The primary objective of this study is to investigate the core leadership practices of successful school leaders in one of the northern states in Malaysia.

2. It is paramount to know what leadership practices construe a successful school leader (what); however without proper understanding of the method (how) of these practices, the study of such practices will prove to be incomplete (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001. P. 23). Leadership practices are contextual and leaders choose different ways to apply these in their own respective contexts. Leithwood et al., (2008) claim that, "the ways in which leaders apply these leadership practices - not the practices themselves - demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work". Educational leaders are aware of their immediate contexts and respond in appropriation to the demands of the

circumstances they face. They do not follow a particular 'style' of leadership. They possess a large repertoire of practices which they employ based upon their contexts. This brings forth the argument that there is indeed a need to study how successful leaders employ their practices instead of looking for a universally acceptable leadership model which will work in every context. Hence, the second objective of this study was to delve deeper into the understanding of how these principals enact these core leadership practices in Malaysian schools.

3. The school context influence the ways school leaders enacts core leadership practices. These contexts are unique and act differently in different situation hence understanding the context and how it affects principal practices becomes paramount. Thus, the third and final objective of this study was to identify the context in which successful school principals work in Malaysia.

1.5 Research Questions

In accordance with the three primary research objectives mentioned in the previous section, this study will seek to answer the following questions:

Q. 1 what are the contextual factors that influence the practices of successful school principals in Malaysia?Q.2 what are the core practices of a successful school principal in Malaysia?

Q.3 how do the successful school leaders in Malaysia enact these practices within their school context?

1.6 Significance of this Study

This study aims to identify the set of basic practices employed by the successful school principals in Malaysia. Guided by the theoretical framework grounded in the core leadership practices given by Leithwood and further explored by researchers at

ISSPP, this study will also look into the methods employed by the principals to harmonize their practices according to their immediate context. Context can differ based upon geography, school type, school size, organizational culture or demographics of the school (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Considering the scant literature available on context-based successful leadership practices in of school principals in Malaysia, this study gains significance since it is one of the first such studies conducted in Malaysia. While school leadership has been studied extensively since a long time, much of much of the leadership literature is limited to what works best for the principals and what type of leadership brings effectiveness (Day & Armstrong, 2016). This study attempts to make significant contributions to the educational leadership literature, particularly on the practices of successful school principals in Malaysia. It provides a deep insight into how principals, through their context-based practices bring about a complete turnaround in their struggling schools. The findings of this study will add to the tenuous body of theoretical knowledge on school leadership practices in Malaysian context. This study will also be able to add new insights into the practices of Malaysian school principals and identify those that are unique for Malaysian context. With a rich literature on school leadership already available from western sources, the contextual understanding of Malaysian leadership practices will further enrich the understanding of the subject. Moreover, these findings will also be able to provide empirical source for policy makers and personnel in the Ministry of Education in Malaysia which can be incorporated into future leadership training and school improvement programs.

1.7 Operational Definition

Successful School Principal: Generally both 'Success' and 'Effectiveness' are used while describing a school principal of a successful school. However there is a

difference between a 'successful principal' and an 'effective principal'. Christopher Day describes the difference between the two (Day, 2007)

> 'Success includes, but is more than, effectiveness. Whereas the latter (associated with observable behaviors and outcomes which are quantifiable) is always part of the former, the former is not necessarily a part of the latter. In general, we may say that "effectiveness" is associate with instrumental outcomes of students (tests, examination results) whereas success is associated with these in addition to positive personal and social outcomes, well-being, and equity.'

For the purpose of this study, references to effective school principals and successful school principals have been made which should both be understood as implying the principal of a school who has made significant and quantifiable progress during his or her tenure at the school. Also, the successful principals for this study are those who have been awarded by the Ministry of Education for bringing about positive changes in their current school.

School Context: For the purpose of this study, we follow the description of the school as posited by Leithwood, Louis, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2004), who consider "...context as geographic location (urban, suburban, rural), level of schooling (elementary, secondary), and both school and district size" (p. 10). Although we have followed the above description of the school context throughout the study, there are instances where the definition has been expanded to include the school climate, community involvement, school achievement and physical resources of the school as well.

Leadership Practices: According to Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins (2006b), a large majority of literature on educational leadership focusses on leader's values, beliefs, skills and knowledge, which is internal to the leader, while less emphasis is laid upon the actual actions of the principal which manifest the internal states. For the purpose of this study, 'Leadership practices' of a leader is operationalized as an externally expressed attitude or actions of a successful principal which may be a resultant of his or her immediate context.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

This study is divided into six distinct chapters. Chapter 1 consists of the introduction and background of the study, which will lay out the statement of the problem, objectives of this research and theoretical and conceptual underpinnings for this study, the theoretical context, the local context and the international context of the study. Chapter 2 provides an in-depth review of educational leadership literature, focusing on educational leadership in general with particular emphasis on school leadership. Since the focus of this study is context-based leadership practices of school principals in Malaysia, the review also provides a sound conceptualization of the study. Chapter 3 focuses on research methodology, which will include epistemological and ontological assumptions, selection of methods, target groups, data collection methods, data analysis procedure, interview protocols, triangulation and trustworthiness of the findings, while chapter 4 provides the findings of the two cases. Chapter 5 presents the cross case analysis of the two cases. The final chapter 6 provides the conclusion, implications of the study and the significance of the study.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The worrying decline in the achievement of students in Malaysian schools has set alarm bells ringing for the policymakers in the Ministry of Education and the federal government. The implications of lowering of educational attainment are far reaching and have the potential of derailing the ambitious plans of Malaysia to be among the ranks of developed nations by 2020. Low achievement directly affects the supply of highly skilled workforce to carry forward the development agenda which in turn hinders the development of the nation. Malaysian government is desperately looking for a way out and finding a formula to stop the decline and move forward with improved student achievements so as to achieve its goals. The Malaysian Educational Blueprint 2013 proposes several measures which, if implemented in the right earnest might be able to help. Successful school leadership and utilizing the support of existing successful school leaders are one of their major planks of support towards improving school achievement.

This review of literature will attempt to demystify the concept of educational leadership which has been marked with "frailties, complexities, contradictions and discontinuities" (English, 2003 pp. 27-46), will explore the available educational leadership models and their effectiveness in making a school successful and then will look into the traits and practices of successful school principals through the eyes of empirical studies. This literature review is divided into three major sections.

The first section involves studies conducted on contemporary educational leadership models. The study of western literature is important since the literature of

educational leadership is heavily dominated by western paradigms, models and theories (Hallinger, Walker & Bajunid, 2005; Walker & Dimmock, 2002). During the past 10 years or so, researchers have begun re-examination of the current social science theories, including leadership models and theories with the goal of identifying the extent the values and percepts of the theories emanating from Europe and the US are tenable with non-Western individuals (Hofstede 2001; Hofstede & Peterson 2000; House 2004; Javidan & House 2001). Therefore, since chances of misplaced assumption of western perceptions of educational leadership being universal are always present (Oplatka, 2004); it is also pertinent to browse through the available literature in non-US, non-European contexts with emphasis on Malaysian context as well. The discussion of educational leadership models precede the discussion on Malaysian education system so that the emphasis given to educational leadership by the Ministry of education is clearly understood.

The second section provides a thorough study of the Malaysian education system. Historical references are called upon to put the present setup into proper context and a timeline of its progression is created. The study will include reference of different type of schools although the primary focus will be on national and national type schools since the focus area of the present study is these types of schools. National and national type schools are chosen because of the fact that these schools are run by government, are present in every nook and corner of the country and are overwhelmingly large in numbers as compared to small number of private or other type of schools. The administrative structure of the Ministry of Education and schools, policies, programs, reforms and future roadmap is also a part of this review.

The first two sections provide a perfect conceptual lens through which the third section can be viewed, enabling the emphasis on research objectives and facilitating

the evolution of a logical research method in the third section. The third section focuses on the heart of this study which is the practice of successful school leaders in Malaysia. Successful school and successful school leaders are operationalized through several studies from around the world. International Successful School Principal's Project (ISSPP) and the five core leadership practices (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Day, Leithwood & Sammons, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2006) are discussed in detail since they form the core of the conceptual framework for this study that binds the whole study together.

2.2 Educational Leadership

Educational leadership is generally viewed like being akin to leadership in any other field. Gunter (2005) argues that the current educational leadership practices have its origins in non-educational settings. Evans (1999) calls them neither 'pedagogic' nor 'educative'. They are rife with concepts from the field of business management emanating majorly from the US which overwhelms the educative purposes of educational leaders (Bush, 1995). In this section, a brief history of traditional leadership models will be examined in order to put the contemporary leadership theories into proper perspective. After the brief discussion of significant traditional leadership theories, a detailed deliberation of three prominent contemporary theories which are widely used in the field of education, namely instructional leadership, transformational leadership and distributed leadership will be carried out.

2.2.1 The traditional Leadership Theories

This discussion on leadership can be best understood by looking into the past and exploring the development of leadership as a concept and its variations through an array of subsequent models and theories. Although leadership as a concept has been studied since people began to study leadership as an academic discipline in the 1800s

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and 1900s (Smith & Tapscott, 2010), there is still lack of clarity as to how to define it in universally admissible fashion (Antonakis, Cianciolo & Sternberg, 2004; Yukl, 2006). Despite the ample literature on leadership, there is still no single definition of leadership that exists.

The earliest theory on leadership emerged in the early 20th century and was called 'Great Man Theory' and subsequently 'Trait theories'. The "Great Man Approach" assumed that leaders were born as a leader and they lead by instinct which was more important than formal training in leadership (Glasman & Glasman, 1997). The theory assumes that the leadership traits are intrinsic, implying that great leaders are not made. The belief was that great leaders rise out of justifiable situational need. Thomas Carlyle, a writer and teacher popularized this through his writings, especially the book "On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History".

Great man theory was followed by a slightly different theory called Trait theory which asserted that successful leader can only be the person who is born with the appropriate traits. This theory primarily concentrates on the characteristics, traits, intellectual abilities and personalities of a leader (Bass, 1960; Mann, 1959; Stogdill, 1948; 1974). Stogdill (1974) identified six categories of personal factors connoted with leadership: capacity, achievement, responsibility, participation, status, and situation. However he also concluded with: "A person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combination of traits" (Stogdill, 1988, p. 64). Also by examining individual traits of leaders, it became difficult to differentiate between leaders and non-leaders.

Once it was evident that no single trait or its combination was able to describe a leader, researchers began examining situational factors on leadership behavior. As a

result, situational leadership and contingency theory of leadership came into existence which aimed to match the leadership styles with the demands of different situations (Fiedler, 1966; Heresy & Blanchard, 1988).The Situational Leadership Theory was formulated by Dr. Paul Hersey, author of "The Situational Leader," and Ken Blanchard, author of the bestselling "One-Minute Manager". The theory is named after them and is called Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Theory. It states that leaders should adapt their style instead of relying on just one style; depending upon the task they are handling and the nature of the people they are leading (Hersey, 1985). The situation decides whether the leader ought to put more emphasis on task or more emphasis on relationship with the followers. There are four main styles of leadership depending upon the situation:

Telling (S1) – Leaders tell their people what to do and how to do it.

Selling (S2) – Leaders provide information and direction, but there's more communication with followers. Leaders "sell" their message to get people on board.

Participating (S3) – Leaders focus more on the relationship and less on direction. The leader works with the team, and shares decision-making responsibilities.

Delegating (S4) – Leaders pass most of the responsibility onto the follower or group. The leaders still monitor progress, but they're less involved in decisions (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977). However, situational leadership theory has been severely criticized for being "conceptually ambiguous" (Barrow, 1977) and has "substantial inconsistencies" (Graeff, 1983).

Fiedler's contingency theory emphasizes that the effectiveness of leadership is contingent upon a particular situation which is a result of interaction of two factors: leadership style and situational favorability (Fiedler, 1966). Contingency theory is

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similar to situational theory since both the theories believe that there no single way of becoming successful in leadership. However they are different in a sense that situational theory focus more on the behaviors that the leader should adopt based upon situational factors while contingency theory includes contingent factors about leader capability and other variables within the situation. Researchers find that Fiedler's contingency theory lacks flexibility and the model's validity has been disputed, despite many supportive tests (Bass 1990).

The Path-Goal theory specifies a leader's style or behavior that fits the followers (workers) and the work environment in order to achieve a desired goal (House& Mitchell, 1974).The reason behind developing this theory was to describe the way a leader supports his followers for the fulfillment of goals by following these four styles:

1. Supportive leadership- In a work environment that is stressful and uninteresting, showing concern for followers and creating a friendly work environment.
2. Directive leadership-When there is a complex and unstructured task to be carried out, eliminating ambiguity by being specific about the expected outcomes, time schedule and how the task needs to be carried out.
3. Participative leadership-When the team is expert in their field, by seeking their advice to make decisions on important aspects of the job.
4. Achievement-oriented leadership-When there is a complex task at hand and the followers are experts in their field, by setting high expectations for work and setting challenging goals (House & Mitchell, 1974).

Like most early models and theories of leadership, path-goal theory also had its criticism and interest in the theory quickly diminished. Knight, Shteynberg & Hanges

(2004) concluded that "methodological limitations and incomplete empirical support have led to a decline in research on path-goal theory".

The LMX theory is conceptualized as a process that focuses on a dyad between a leader and each subordinate considered independently (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975; Graen, 1976). Each relationship is unique; the same leader has excellent positive relationship with few subordinates while for others he comes out as a leader with poor interpersonal skills. In this dyadic relationship, the leader initiates an in-group or an out-group exchange with his subordinates (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Members of the in-group become a part of the decision-making process and are privileged of being close to the leader. The in-group subordinate, in return show greater commitment in terms of their investment of time and effort. On the other hand, members of the out-group are left alone to work within the specified guidelines of their work contract (Graen, 1975).They are not a part of decision making process and they are not close to the leader. These subordinates reciprocally consider their leader having bad interpersonal skills and do just enough to fulfill their contractual obligations. LMX theory has attracted several criticisms and has never taken off as a path breaking leadership theory. In spite of the afore-mentioned advantages of LMX theory, it has some disadvantages. The LMX theory seems to runs counter to the basic human value of fairness (Northouse, 2010), appears unfair and discriminatory (McClane, 1991) and does not address other issues related to justice and fairness (Scandura, 1999)

2.2.2 The Contemporary Leadership Theories - New paradigms

The traditional leadership theories and models discussed so far are among the few that were developed in the non-educational domains. Finding little application of traditional leadership theories and based upon early understandings of diverse

leadership practices that were proposed as synonyms for whatever was meant by "good" leadership (Leithwood et al., 2006a), researches and scholars have conceptualized a number of contemporary theories like transformational leadership (Burn, 1978; Bass, 2005), distributed leadership (Gronn, 2003; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001; 2004), substitute leadership, self-leadership and super-leadership (see Horner, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2006a), instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2005; Hallinger and Murphy, 1985) and distributed leadership (Gronn, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Spillane et. al., 2001). Among these leadership models, transformational and instructional leadership have been the two of the most frequently studied models of school leadership (Heck & Hallinger, 1999)and distributed leadership is the most exciting idea of leadership during the last decade (Hallinger & Heck, 2009).

Transformational leadership is defined in terms of leader's influence over their subordinates and the nature of leader-follower relations (Leithwood *et al.*, 2006a), distributed leadership practice is based upon the interactions among school leaders, followers, and their situation (Gronn, 2003; Spillane & Orlina, 2005) and instructional leadership emphasizes upon process of learning and instruction (Hallinger, 2005; 1989). The next three parts of this section will delve into the theoretical and practical aspects of each of the three models followed by limitations that each of these have.

2.2.2.1 Transformational Leadership

Transformational Leadership is a theory developed by Burns (1978) and later expanded by Bass (1985, 2005) and others (Avolio & Bass, 1988; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). The major premise of the transformational

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leadership theory is the leader's ability to motivate the follower to accomplish more than what the follower planned to accomplish. Burn's book 'Leadership' is considered the seminal work in the field of leadership studies. He defines leadership as an act which works in accord with the values and the motivations of both leaders and followers and is a dynamic relationship where leader and followers work together to achieve a common goal by uplifting both of them to a higher level (Burns, 1978). While the transactional approach is a reciprocal relationship, transformational leaders bring about changes through examples and articulation of an energizing vision. According to Burns, transforming and transactional leadership were mutually exclusive styles. Burns (1978) claims that the transactional leadership "…occurs when one person takes the initiative in making contact with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued things" (p19), while transformative leadership "…occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality." (p20). Burns' model, and Burn himself quickly became popular among scholars of alternative leadership for the reason that it included an ethical or moral dimension that was not included in any previous leadership models.

Bernard Bass, a student of Burns, renamed transformative leadership as transformational leadership and improved upon Burn's work by explaining the psychological mechanism behind the transformational leadership model. Bass claimed that Transactional leadership and Transformational leadership are not mutually exclusive but are a part of the same continuum (Bass, 1985). After three decades of numerous studies, publications and meta-analyses, it has been established that transformational and transactional leadership positively predicts a wide variety

of performance outcomes including individual, group and organizational level variables (Bass & Bass 2008).

In 1991, Bass together with Avolio introduced the following four elements of Transformational leadership (Avolio & Bass, 1991):

1. Individualized Consideration – The leader gives emphasis to the needs of group members, acts as a role model, mentor or coach listens to the follower's concerns and needs. The leader is supportive, appreciative of individual contributions and has an open channel of communication with them.

2. Intellectual Stimulation – The leader values creativity and autonomy, supports his followers by including them in decision-making stimulated their creative abilities to find solutions. He helps followers see the big picture, encourages them to challenge the prevailing order, learn and contribute positively.

3. Inspirational Motivation – The leader is able to inspire confidence, motivation and a sense of purpose in his followers by articulating a clear vision for the future that is appealing and inspiring to followers. The leader communicates in a way that makes the vision understandable, precise, powerful and engaging. He motivates followers to invest more effort in their tasks and they believe in their own abilities.

4. Idealized Influence – The leader becomes role models and influences others to emulate him through his personality. It is expressed through leader's willingness to take risks by following a core set of principles and values. The leader builds trust through his idealized influence, and model for high ethical behavior, instills pride, gains respect and trust.

Numerous studies conducted in the non-US, non-European countries have shown both transactional and transformational behavior in African, Indian, Chinese, Malaysian, Romanian, Turkish, Thai, United Arab Emirates researches (Butler, 2009; Kemavuthanon & Duberley, 2009; Hu, Yang & Islam, 2010; Altintas, 2010; Cheung & Chan, 2008; Fein, Tziner, & Vasiliu, 2010; Biswas &Varma, 2011). In Malaysia, Africa and United Arab Emirates, there was a distinct influence of high power distance determining the leadership style (Hofstede, 1980). The greater influence of Transactional leadership in the Malaysian, Indian and Romanian context is due to the cultural effect on the leader-subordinate behavior which is hierarchical in nature (Biswas & Varma, 2011). Leaders are considered 'paternalistic' and they prefer to be more directives in their dealings with their subordinates (Abdullah, 2001).Transformational leadership has been positively linked with satisfaction with leader (Koh, Steers, & Terborg, 1995), meaningfulness of their job (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007), perceived extra effort, organizational citizenship behaviors, and job satisfaction, trust in the workplace (Gagné & Deci, 2005) and positive relationship between leaders and their followers (Jung, Yammarino & Lee, 2009). Transformational leadership has been found to enhance job commitment and job satisfaction of teachers wherein principals worked towards improving their morale (Joo, Yoon and Jeung, 2012; Sin, 2001).

Although Transformational leadership is the most-often studied leadership concepts (Bass & Riggio, 2006) and there is an abundance of studies available of this model (Riggio, Bass & Orr, 2004), it has not been able to establish itself as a universal leadership model due to its several apparent weaknesses that studies have pointed out. Transformational leadership overlooks situational dynamics and works on the assumption that subordinates aspire to work towards a bigger goal. It is also not

effective in situations where subordinates lack motivation and don't possess the required skills to carry out the task. Transformational leadership theory lacks conceptual clarity and the MLQ instrument which underpins the entire philosophical framework of the theory itself is conceptually flawed since its elements are not sufficiently distinctive (Northouse, 2007). Yukl criticizes the lack of qualitative and quantitative studies relating to "arousal of motives or emotions, increased self-efficacy or optimism, modification of beliefs about reward contingencies and increased task commitment" (Yukl, 1999). Tourish questions the charismatic behavior of a transformational leader by stating that "transformational leaders are assumed to be intensively charismatic and it is here that the mythologizing of leadership begins" (Tourish, 2008).

2.2.2.2 Instructional Leadership

The notion of instructional leadership developed with the establishment of modern schools in the 19th century (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 20079). Instructional leadership model truly accentuated in the 80s and several models were proposed within a short span of time (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). Among all these models, the model proposed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) is the most frequently used model in empirical studies (Hallinger, 2008; Hallinger & Heck, 1996a). This model was developed as a result of examining the instructional leadership behaviors of elementary principals and a comprehensive review of literature on school effectiveness. As a result of thorough empirical and theoretical analyses, Hallinger and Murphy developed the model consisting of three dimensions, namely: Defining the School's Mission, Managing the Instructional Program, and Promoting a Positive School Learning Climate

(Hallinger, 2008; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). These dimensions have several other functions that will be discussed briefly.

Defining the School's Mission: The first dimension consists of two functions - Framing the School's Goals and Communicating the School's Goals. This dimension defines the central role of a school principal which is setting goals, defining vision in a concrete and time-bound fashion. The principal garners support for the vision and goals from other stakeholders and communicates it clearly to the school community.

Managing the Instructional Program: The second relates to the control of instruction and curriculum and incorporates three leadership functions: Supervising and Evaluating Instruction, Coordinating the Curriculum, Monitoring Student Progress. These functions require principals to be expert in teaching and learning.

Promoting a Positive School Learning Climate: This dimension includes 6 functions: Protecting Instructional Time, Promoting Professional Development, Maintaining High Visibility, Providing Incentives for teachers, Developing High Expectations and Standards, Providing Incentives for Learning. This dimension focuses on placing high standards and expectations for students and teachers and develops a culture of continuous improvement and well-defined purposes and practices (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Heck, Larson, & Marcoulides, 1990; Leithwood &Montgomery, 1982). The principal leads by example my modelling values and practices and helps create an environment that is conducive to learning (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986).

Although Instructional leadership has been used as a leadership model since several decades, it has entered a stage where its definition itself is questioned. There are several scholars disagreeing with its single-minded focus on instructional practices in a school, sidelining other important factors. In the last decade, school leadership has

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been given several names like 'leadership for learning', 'learning centered leadership', 'student-centered leadership' and 'leadership of learning' (Dempster, 2012; Hallinger, 2010, 2011; Robertson and Timperley, 2011). Recent concepts of leadership include moral purpose connected to vision and not solely limited to an instructional leader (Fullan, 2002). Hallinger, who is credited with developing the most widely used instructional leadership model (Hallinger& Murphy, 1985) now claims that the present effective educational leadership models subsume the features of instructional leadership, transformational leadership and shared leadership (Hallinger, 2010). Historically, it is assumed that the principal is the instructional leader in a school, however Hattie (2009; 2012) argues that in fact the teacher is an instructional leader within the classroom.

2.2.2.3 Distributed Leadership

The term 'distributed leadership' was first used by Gibb in 1969 (Gronn, 2003, p. 62). Although relatively new, distributed leadership is receiving increased attention by researchers and practitioners alike (Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2006) and anew conceptualization of leadership is replacing the model of 'a single "heroic" leader at the top of organization chart making all the decisions (Camburn, Rowan & Taylor, 2003: 348). Leadership is considered to be activities and interactions between many people and a range of situations (Camburn *et al*., 2003). Elmore and Spillane have done pioneering work in the field of distributed leadership, along with host of other researchers. Elmore (2000, p. 15) claims that the view of leadership has been 'romanticized' which is problematic in education since without practicing distributed leadership, it is impossible for a principal to carry out all the tasks within a school. He defined distributed leadership in the following way as "Distributed leadership, then, means multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of

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expertise in an organization, made coherent through a common culture." (Elmore, 2000).

Spillane (2006) presented the distributed leadership framework as a diagnostic and design tool to enable practitioners to understand how these practices are 'stretched over' (p.23). Spillane argues that the situation is the key factor in implementing any form of distributed leadership. He maintains:

> "A distributed perspective offers an alternative way of thinking about leadership in schools by foregrounding leadership practice and by suggesting that leadership practice is constructed in the interactions between leaders, followers, and their situations…distributed leadership offers a framework for thinking about leadership differently. As such, it enables us to think about a familiar phenomenon in new ways that come closer to approximating leadership on the ground than many of the conventional popular recipes for school leadership." (p. 26)

With all the excitement centering on distributed leadership, it is worthwhile to recognize that this model has its fair share of controversies and criticisms. It has been found to be having substantial overlap with other well-developed leadership models like democratic, participative and collaborative and there are possibilities that distributing leadership may well become distribution of day to day administrative and managerial tasks (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). Being a relatively new concept, empirical studies of distributed leadership is still lacking and whatever exists is not ample (Mayrowetz, 2008; Angelle, 2010; Hulpia, Devos & Rossell, 2009). Other scholars have taken a rather strict stance on distributed leadership by claiming it to be an attempt to encourage teachers to do more work, a

way of reinforcing standardization practices and a way to maintain the 'status quo'(Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008; Hargreaves & Fink, 2009; Hartley, 2009). Hargreaves and Fink (2009) caution that distributed leadership might be another name for democratic leadership used for delivering top down policies. Leithwood *et al.* (2009) maintain that purposefully planned distribution of leadership task can indeed help schools in becoming effective; however it has to be implemented under the guidance of a leader or the principal. It is thus paramount that the principal be at the center of any leadership initiative and his active and purposeful support, nothing significant can be achieved.

2.3 The Educational Leadership Conundrum

As briefly discussed in the introduction chapter, although educational leadership has been studied extensively for the most part of this century, resulting in a spate of leadership theories, models and its applications, there is not a single universally acceptable definition of educational leadership upon which scholars have consensus. This leads to a pertinent question that when scholars cannot even agree upon one universal definition of educational leadership, how is it possible for them to come out with one definitive model of educational leadership that is universal in nature? The lack of a mutually agreed upon and common definition of leadership which can be utilized for its evaluation and general disagreement over the methods of exercising it in various situations has frustrated scholars for years (Hackman & Wageman, 2007; Higgs, 2003). While Bennis (2007) expresses disappointment over the lack of one universal definition of educational leadership, Bass (1990) chuckles that its seems that the number of definitions of educational leadership is the same as the number of scholars who have attempted to define it, implying that each person defines educational leadership differently.

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While searching the literature, a plethora of established definitions of educational leadership can be uncovered. From these definitions, it is apparent that scholars have focused on one of the many aspects of leadership while defining; from behaviors, to actions and eventually to social phenomenon. Some of these are depicted in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Few definitions of leadership and its aspects

S. No.	Definition	Author	Aspect of Leadership
1	Leadership may be considered as the process (act) of influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts toward goal setting and goal achievement	Stogdill, 1950: 3	Action
2	Leadership is the influential increment over and above mechanical compliance with the routine directives of the organization.	Katz & Kahn, 1978: 528	Behavior
3	Leadership is the process of influencing the activities of an organized group toward goal achievement.	Rauch & Behling, 1984: 46	Behavior
4	Leadership is the process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group in efforts toward goal achievement in a given situation.	Hersey & Blanchard, 1988: 86	Action
5	Leadership is a development of a clear and complete system of expectations in order to identify evoke and use the strengths of all resources in the organization the most important of which is people.	Batten, 1989: 35	Action
6	Leadership is the process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group in efforts toward goal achievement in a given situation.	Hersey & Blanchard, 1988: 86	Behavior
7	Leadership is a development of a clear and complete system of expectations in order to identify	Batten, 1989: 35	Action

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	evoke and use the strengths of all resources in the organization the most important of which is people.		
8	Leadership is an interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of members…Leadership occurs when one group member modifies the motivation or competencies of others in the group. Any member of the group can exhibit some amount of leadership.	Bass, 1990: 19-20	Social Phenomenon
9	Leadership is the art of influencing others to their maximum performance to accomplish any task, objective or project.	Cohen, 1990: 9	Action
10	Leadership is that process in which one person sets the purpose or direction for one or more other persons and gets them to move along together with him or her and with each other in that direction with competence and full commitment.	Jacques & Clement, 1994: 4	Social Phenomenon
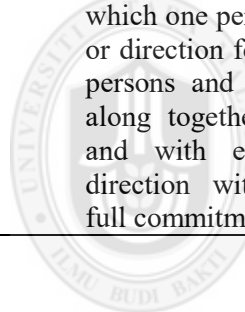
No wonder then that Burns (1978) argues that although there is an overabundance of observation of leadership phenomenon, it is also one of the least understood! Hackman and Wageman, (2007) try to reason out the lack of a common definition of leadership when they observe, "Among the many possible reasons for this gloomy state of affairs is that leadership scholars over the years may have been asking questions that have no general answers, thereby adding complexity but not clarity to our understanding (p.43)".

This begs the question then, that what would be the right questions to ask, in order to come to a meaningful conclusion? One of the first steps, as evident from the literature is to make an empirical and conceptual distinction between the actions of a

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leader, in given circumstances that are impactful from those actions that do not have any influence (Avolio, 2007; Chan & Brief, 2005; Hackman & Wageman, 2005; Vroom & Jago, 2007; Wasserman, Nohria, & Anand, 2001). Studies have demonstrated that certain actions work on certain situations with stupendous results while they fail to make any impression in other situations. While situational leadership models (Vroom & Jago, 2007) and modifiability of traits among effective leaders (Steinberg, 2007) have its advantages in certain situation, as discussed in the earlier section of this chapter, scholars agree that neither of the two attributes, traits or situational, are capable of explaining the effectiveness of leadership on their own. However, the interaction between these two attributes can explain, to a certain extent, the effectiveness of leadership (Hackman & Wageman, 2007).

Another aspect that also needs careful consideration is to find and answer to the question whether leadership is all about quality, behaviors and traits of a leader, as propagated by several social theories, or it is a phenomenon that is generated through the interactions between the leaders, the followers and the context. Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich (1985), in their popular work 'The Romance of Leadership' exhibit similar sentiments while claiming that the outputs, either favorable or unfavorable, are often credited to the leader while the other aspects like the followers and the contexts are ignored. Several other scholars have looked at leadership in a variety of ways; it is the dynamics between a leader and its follower (Maccoby, 2000); ability of the leaders to create a conducive environment (Thamhain, 2004); inspirational (Bennis, 1989); transformational (Kumle & Kelly, 2000) or creating an environment of mutual trust and respect (Weathersby, 1999). However, all these aspects of leadership touch only but a part of the phenomenon. The closest that a scholar came in defining leadership that is all-encompassing and a social phenomenon by the

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definition given by Osborn, Hunt and Jauch (2002) who claim that leadership is not only limited to the influence that leaders have on their followers alone but is a sum total of the incremental influence he or she exerts on the whole system. Apart from the behavior and traits of the leader, the contextual factors play a crucial role in determining the outcome. Scholars have been advocating the importance and greater consideration of the role of contextual factors, the system itself, on the effectiveness of leadership during the last two decades in their theoretical promulgations while constructing operational definitions of leadership (e.g., Avolio, 2007; Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; Shamir & Howell, 1999), however Porter and McLaughlin (2006, p. 573) believe that "it is apparent that the impact of organization context on leadership is an under-researched area."

2.4 The role of a School Principal

During the last two decades, there has been a significant shift in the role of a school principal; from a traditional organisational manager in charge of providing basic administrative support for the school and managing its day to day operations to a rather specific role of a school leader responsible for learning (Hallinger, 2011; Walker & Hallinger, 2015). The principals have become more accountable and are expected to multitask in a more complex school environment than ever before. This shift in the role of the school principals can be attributed to several factors; the proliferation of computers and the internet (Fullan, 2014; Sheninger, 2014), increasing levels of diversity among the students (Ryan, 2006; 2007; Shields, 2010), and most importantly, to the plethora of school reforms across the world which have led to student-centered learning, enhanced parental involvement and encouragement of school-based assessment (Cheng & Walker, 2008; Ng, 2010; Rahimah, 1998)

resulting in new accountability standards for school principals (Lee, Walker, & Chui, 2012; Leithwood, 2001; Murphy, 2013).

Although the transformation in the role of school principals began, not surprisingly, in the USA , it has now covered most of the regions of the world (Cravens & Hallinger, 2012; Day, 2009; Hallinger, 2011) including the nations in the region of south-east Asia where educational reforms have become high on governments' agenda (Walker & Hallinger, 2015). In their new role as school leaders, the school principals not only act as managers but also perform their important duties towards being the instructional leaders of their schools. They are required to wear a number of hats during their work day, from being a visionary guide to the members of the school community to being a good role model, supportive to teachers and staff, resourceful, and an enabler in building a strong and conducive school culture wherein every student learns to his or her full potential. He is an administrator, a businessman, an orator, strategist, motivator, and educationalist and tries to meet the "… often conflicting needs and interests of many stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, district office officials, unions, state and federal agencies," and "…are expected to be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations/communications experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special programs administrators, as well as guardians of various legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives" (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007).

2.5 What being a successful principal means

In the discussions thus far, it has become evident that although the three contemporary leadership theories are popular and have shown positive results in a

variety of situations, they still are not clear of controversies and criticism. It is also clear that the definition of educational leadership, as defined by various scholars is confusing at best and there is no agreement on one universal definition. From the criticism of these theories, it is apparent that there exists no empirical evidence that points towards universality of these theories. School leadership has become such a complex task over a period of time that it seems unlikely that there will ever be one single theory that will prove to be universally effective, irrespective of the contextual realities like geography, socio-political environment or cultural diversity.

Historically, the role of a principal has generally been defined by their managerial expertise (Wiseman, 2005; Church, 2005).The focus from a single individual managing a school on set criteria has shifted towards focus on a dynamic leader with vision, attitude, skills and expertise that will provide leadership to the school instead of just managing it (Murphy, 2002). In a report, University of Washington used an interesting allegory to explain school leaders by calling those who do everything themselves as "one-man bands", the ones who delegate to others as "jazz combo;" and the ones who practice distributed form of leadership as "orchestral leaders," (Portin, Schneider, DeArmond & Gundlach, 2003). No matter what kind of a leadership a school leader practices, he or she still is at the center of school development efforts.

In a review of research commissioned by The Wallace foundation in 2005, (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe & Meyerson, 2005), the expanding role of a modern school principal has been vividly captured as under:

Principals are expected to be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations and

communications experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special programs administrators, as well as guardians of various legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. In addition, principals are expected to serve the often conflicting needs and interests of many stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, district office officials, unions, and state and federal agencies. (p.3)

The literature on successful school leader provides an array of roles and dimensions for a successful school leader. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) define three primary roles of a school principal; Defining the Schools' Mission, Managing the instructional program and promoting a positive school learning climate. Jantzi and Leithwood (1996, pp. 514-15) define the following six dimensions of an effective principal: identifying and articulating vision; fostering the acceptance of group goals ; providing individualized support; intellectual stimulation; providing an appropriate model and high performance expectations. According to the Wallace Foundation's research report, the most successful principals carry out these five functions: 1. Shaping a vision of academic success for all students, 2. Creating a climate hospitable to education, 3. Cultivating leadership in others, 4. Improving instruction, and 5. Managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe & Meyerson, 2005). Leithwood et al., (2008) make the following claims about being a successful school leadership:

1. School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.

2. Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.

3. The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices – not the practices themselves – demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work.

4. School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions.

5. School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed.

6. Some patterns of distribution are more effective than others.

7. A small handful of personal traits explains a high proportion of the. (p.3)

Among the most widely studied and latest framework of the dimensions of being a successful school principal is the one proposed by Leithwood et al., (2006) which claims that every successful school principal, irrespective of the context, carries out the following four core practices: a. Building a Vision and Setting Directions, b. Understanding and Developing People, c. Redesigning the Organization, and d. Managing the Teaching and Learning Program. In subsequent studies (Drysdale, Goode, & Gurr, 2008), a fifth dimension of 'Coalition building' was added to the original set of four core practices based upon the results of a large number of studies, both qualitative and quantitative, conducted in several parts of the world. Recent studies on successful school Principalship have drawn heavily from Leithwood et al's (2006b) taxonomy of contextual practices of principals (Crum & Sherman, 2008; Crum, Sherman, & Myran, 2009; Drysdale, Goode, & Gurr, 2009). Each of these five dimensions is discussed in detail in a separate section of this chapter later.

Table 2.2

The core practices of a successful school principal

S. No.	Core Leadership Practices of a Successful Principal
1	Building a vision and setting directions
2	Understanding and developing people
3	Redesigning the organization
4	Managing the teaching and learning programme
5	Coalition building

A careful examination of the other models reveal that most models offer similar dimension as those being proposed by Leithwood et al., hence for this study, the basic conceptual framework refers to this dimension, unless specified.

Generally, both 'Successful' and 'Effective' are the most commonly used adjectives used while describing a successful school principal. However there is a difference between a 'successful principal' and an 'effective principal'. Christopher Day describes the difference between the two (Day, 2007)

'Success includes, but is more than, effectiveness. Whereas the latter (associated with observable behaviors and outcomes which are quantifiable) is always part of the former, the former is not necessarily a part of the latter. In general, we may say that "effectiveness" is associate with instrumental outcomes of students (tests, examination results) whereas success is associated with these in addition to positive personal and social outcomes, well-being, and equity.'

For the purpose of this study, references to effective school principals and successful school principals have been made which should both be understood as implying the principal of a school that has brought quantifiable success to the school.

2.6 The Malaysian Context

Understanding the context in which Malaysian schools operate is crucial while attempting to grasp the complexity of the task that a school leader undertakes. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society with a total population of 28.3 million consisting of the ethnic groups Bumiputra (67.4%), Chinese (24.6%), Indians (7.3%) and others (0.7%) (Government of Malaysia, 2014). According to 2010 census report, approximately 61.3% are Muslims, 19.8% are Buddhists, 9.2% are Christians, 6.3% are Hindus and 1.3% practice Confucianism, Taoism and other Chinese religions while the remaining either declared no religion, or practice other religions (Government of Malaysia, 2014). All ethnic Malays are considered Muslims by the Constitution while 83.6% of the Chinese population is Buddhist and 82.2% of Indians follow Hinduism. Although Bahasa Malayu is the official language of Malaysia and is spoken by a large majority of Malaysians, Peninsular Malaysia contains speakers of 41 other languages including Cantonese, Mandarin, Hokkien, Hakka, Hainanese, Fuzhou, Tamil as well as Thai. (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2014).

Such a rich linguistic, racial, religious and ethnic diversity brings its own challenges as well. Hence, the Malaysian educational philosophy encapsulates the essence of accommodating its multi-ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural society while still keeping its traditional Malay and Islamic philosophies intact (Sang, 2008; Nooraini & Khairul, 2011) by the formation of the National Education Philosophy (NEP)

through which all educational processes at the national level are carried out. The NEP summarizes the national educational philosophy as under:

> *"Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards and who are responsible and capable of achieving a high level of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the betterment of the family, society and the nation at large"* (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. ix).

With the rapid improvement in technology, growth in knowledge society, new scientific discoveries, globalization and cultural exchanges, schools are experiencing altogether different contextual realities than ever before. These developments have blurred the boundaries and differences between social groups, and diluted the credibility of traditional knowledge and expertise, particularly in the field of school education. These developments together have made a big impact on the contextual factors of schooling (Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE), 2004) leading to a broader, personalised curriculum and educational delivery in most countries around the world (Leadbeater, 2004a, 2004b, & 2005) leading to structural reforms in school systems (Marginson, 1997; Hartley, 1997; Levin & Riffel, 1997).

Inline with the reforms agenda prevalent in moist countries around the world, the Malaysian government has also launched its latest reforms of the national education

system. The National Education Blueprint of 2013, while acknowledging the consistently declining achievement in government schools, proposes an 11-point agenda for change, with the aim of stemming the decline and pushing the academic achievement upwards and puts effective educational leadership as the key to achieving this goal (Malaysian Education Blueprint, 2013). Malaysian principals traditional spend most of the time in carrying out various administrative task with little time left to focus on academic affairs (NUTP, 1998, in Quah Cheng Sim, 2011). It was also found that principals are left with no time to carry out important tasks like monitoring "teaching records, or supervise the teachers in the classroom – as they are required to do, according to the Malaysian Administrative Circular 3/67, Revised 1982" (Quah Cheng Sim, 2011). Other than limited time allocated by the principals to academic affairs, lack of competency and low confidence have also being found to be a contributing factor towards the declining results (Rusmini Ku Ahmad, 2004).

Realising that school success is a result of an effective principal, the Malaysian Ministry of Education has begun rewarding the successful principals as 'New Deal for Principals' (Bai'ah) which carries a cash reward and higher remuneration (PEMANDU, 2010). To receive the award, the principal should fulfil a stringent set of criteria which involves observations by several departments of the Malaysian Ministry of Education which includes the Federal School Inspectorate Division, the Schools Division and the National Institute of Educational Management and Leadership (PEMANDU, 2010). It also involves opinions of various stakeholders of the school. The shortlisted candidates are then interviewed by a panel of officers from the Malaysian Ministry of Education which looks into various aspects of school leadership like academic orientation, school performance, and relationship with the stakeholders and leadership vision. Thus, while the principals are encouraged to

perform and be rewarded, they also face a greater accountability for improving the academic and co-curricular achievement and gain positive collaboration from other stakeholders of the school.

While reforming the role of the principals of Malaysian school in terms of responsibilities and benefits, the Malaysian government is keen to uplift the critical state of its education through various policies and programs. The following section of this review will look into the salient features of all such important policies and programs.

2.6.1 Efforts of the Ministry of Education, Malaysia

Since independence from Britain in 1957, Malaysian government has put highest priority in building a highly skilled and efficient workforce by spending heavily on education. The Malay schools established under the British rulers were converted into 'national schools' in stages between 1957 and 1968, and English, Chinese, and Tamil schools were incorporated as 'national type' schools. The Education Act of 1961 announced free and compulsory primary education to all children. Since then, a number of government policies and programs were formulated to achieve the lofty goal of nation building with highly skilled workforce.

2.6.1.1 The National Education Philosophy (1988)

Considering the urgent need for a uniform educational philosophy for the country and building a progressive, modern society, the National Education Philosophy (NEP) was formulated in 1988, in congruence with the National Principles (*Rukun Negara*) (Ministry of Education, 2001). The top priority of NEP was to fulfill the needs of every citizen of Malaysia and work towards its unity and integrity (Sang, 2008). Sang (2008) has summarized the role of NEP as under:

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(a) Provide guidance and direction to the efforts to expand and improve education;

(b) As basic policy and consideration for determining the national education goals;

(c) As a reference for educators (local or overseas) to understand the educational system in Malaysia;

(d) As a guidance for educators to perform educational tasks;

(e) As the basis and foundation for determining the curriculum, teaching materials and learning and teaching strategies;

(f) As controller on distortion of education policy activities and to eliminate misunderstandings, doubts or disputes while putting effort to perform educational tasks or activities;

(g) To avoid any inconvenience that may arise during implementation of a particular curriculum or its component;

(h) As basic considerations while planning for the reform or change in the education system.

The Ministry of Education (2001) Malaysia has categorized the elements of the National Education Policy into 15 sub-groups, clearly stated in the manual entitled "National Education Philosophy, Goal and Mission" (*Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan, Matlamat dan Misi*). The sub-groups are: (a) education is an on-going effort, (b) developing the potential of individual, (c) develop the potential in a holistic and integrate manner, (d) a balanced and harmonious individual, (e) intellectual element, (f) spiritual element, (g) emotional element, (h) physical element, (I) firm belief in and devotion to God, (j) Malaysia citizens who are

knowledgeable, (k) Malaysia citizens who are competent, (l) Malaysia citizens who possesses high moral standard, (m) Malaysia citizens who are responsible, (n) Malaysia citizens who are capable of achieving a high level of personal well-being, and (o) Malaysia citizens who are able to contribute to the betterment of the family, society and the nation.

2.6.1.2 Government Transformation Plan (GTP)

The Government Transformation Program, or GTP as it is popularly known as was introduced by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Najib Tun Razak in 2009 as a roadmap for improving public services in Malaysia. Implemented under the purview of the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU), the GTP is deeply rooted in the motto of 1Malaysia of 'People First, Performance Now'. The GTP is "an ambitious, broad-based program of change to fundamentally transform the Government into an efficient and rakyat-centred institution." (Pemandu, 2014). It consists of a series of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in seven priority areas for the government which are termed as National Key Result Areas or NKRAs. The responsibility of implementing the GTP lies with Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU). GTP is the flagship project of the government with generous budget and widespread publicity. It is considered to be a unique model of public sector reform that has attached accountability of the government with their service delivery (Mahbob et al., 2013; Najib, 2013).

According to the official GTP website of Malaysian government (Pemandu, 2014), the first three years of GTP, known as GTP 1.0 have been successful in meeting the targets set by the government. The new deal initiative for principals and head teachers was deemed a success against the stated goal of awarding 3% of primary

school head teachers and 2% for secondary school principals. The actual percentages were 5.2% and 4.2% respectively. The criteria for choosing such principals were as follows (GTP Annual report, 2012):

1.   A target composite score of above 84% for primary schools and above 88% for secondary schools, or a year on- year improvement of 2,050 places for primary schools and 300 places for secondary schools, or for schools with large enrolments a year-on-year improvement of 1,250 places for primary schools and 300 places for secondary schools.

2.   An Annual Appraisal Report (LNPT) score of higher than 90

3.   A clean (unqualified) financial audit report from the state education department

4.   A history of no disciplinary action

5.   Achievement of school literacy and numeracy targets (for primary schools) (p. 107)

Although the targets were met but they were set against an extremely low base; still approximately 95 percent of principals and head teachers don't meet the excellent quality indicators. However, since the primary goal of GTP "… was to arrest the decline in the NKRAs and to sow the seeds of mentality-change that would lay the foundation for the remainder of the transformation programme" (PEMANDU, 2014), it did manage to achieve its purpose.

After the first phase of GTP concluded in 2013, GTP 2.0 was launched with the stated aim of expanding the initiatives of GTP 1.0 that bore fruit and introducing new initiatives. Among the new initiatives, focus on maintaining the quality of the

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existing High Performing Schools and increasing its number to 100 and streamlining the principal's appointment process and succession planning are major focus areas.

2.6.2 National Key Result Area (NKRA)

According to the Government of Malaysia, "If the GTP is the overall engine of change, the National Key Results Areas (NKRAs) are the pistons within" (PEMANDU, 2014). The seven key result areas that are mentioned in NKRAs have been identified through the opinion of general public, intellectuals and parliamentarians and were finalized after a series of intense discussions. Educational transformation is one of the seven NKRAs. It is termed as 'Improving Student Outcomes' and comes directly under the purview of Ministry of Education, Malaysia. The reasoning behind the inclusion of education in the key result areas is simple-unless student achievement increases, Malaysia's dream of becoming a developed nation by 2020 is likely to remain unfulfilled. As the government itself states while explaining the rationale behind its inclusion "A highly-educated workforce is a crucial component in ensuring that Malaysia reaches its goal of becoming a high-income nation" (PEMANDU, 2014).

2.6.3 School Types

Education is the responsibility of the Government in Malaysia. Primary and secondary education is under the Ministry of Education (MoE) while higher education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). Children from seven years to thirteen years go to primary school which is divided into 2 three-year phases. Primary School Achievement Test is given to all students at the end of sixth year of primary school. Secondary education is provided for students who are between thirteen years and seventeen years of age. Like primary school,

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secondary school is also divided into lower secondary (three years) and upper secondary (two years). Standardized tests are given to students at the end of both the stages of secondary school. A one-year Post-secondary education (age 17-18) prepares the students for university.

The 'Sekolah Kebangsaan' (SK) or the National Schools are the most abundant primary schools in Malaysia. Most of the students in SK are of Malay ethnic community; however other minorities also study in these schools although they are small in number. The SK teaches Bahasa Malayu and English but does not offer lessons Chinese, Mandarin or Tamil languages. The majority Muslim students study 'Pendidikan Islam' (Islamic studies) while non-Muslims study 'Pendidikan Moral' (Moral studies). The medium of instruction is Bahasa Malayu however science and maths are taught in English.

The Sekolah Jenis Kebaangsaan Cina (SMK C) or National Type Chinese Schools consist of majority Chinese students. Majority of these types of schools are built by Chinese people who want their children to study their mother language, Chinese or Mandarin. Almost all Chinese students go to these types of schools with few exceptions. SJK C offers the Chinese Mandarin lessons along with Bahasa Malayu and English. The medium of instruction is Chinese Mandarin. Maths and Science are taught in two languages, in Mandarin and in English.

Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil (SJK T) or National Type Tamil Schools cater to students who are ethnically Indians and speak Tamil as their first language. These types of schools are fewer in number, considering that Indians are a small minority compared to Chinese. Like SJK C, SJK T offers Tamil language along with Bahasa Malayu and English while the medium of instruction is Tamil.

The Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan (SMK) or national secondary schools are the most common type of secondary schools in Malaysia. The five years of SMK are divided into two parts; the lower secondary (Form 1 - Form 3) and higher secondary (Form 4 - Form 5). The medium of instruction is Bahasa Malayu.

Sekolah Asrama Penuh (SAP) or National Boarding Schools are residential form of SMK. Students stay in the school hostels and are allowed to go home during weekends or school holidays. The Sekolah Menengah Jenis (SMJK) or National Type Secondary Schools are similar to SMK; however unlike primary schools, these are not fully funded by the government.

2.6.4 The Changing Role of School Principal in Malaysia

In a study conducted by the Malaysian School Inspectorate in 1993 (Laporan Jemaah Nazir Sekolah, KPM, 2009 in Quah, 2011), it was reported that a large majority of the school principals in Malaysia focused on routine administrative tasks and spent little amount of time on curricular matters, supervise teacher's teaching and learning activities and did not participate directly in the teaching activities of the school. Although the findings were still significant in 1993, it did not come as a big surprise since majority of the principals around the world acted more as managers, taking care of routine administrative tasks. The findings were corroborated in another study conducted five years later, in 1998, by the Malaysian Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP, 1998, in Quah, 2011) which reported that a large majority of school principals in Malaysia spent all their time on carrying out administrative tasks of the school, ignoring their direct involvement in teaching and learning process altogether although they are required to do so by the Malaysian Ministry of Education. The major reason for their apparent aloofness from school's teaching and learning activities was attributed, by the report, to their apparent lack of knowledge,

experience and skills in the field of curriculum and instruction. Principals were also reported to be lacking competence since they could not adapt to their new role of being a leader since they have developed a strong mind set of being a follower throughout their career. A large majority of principals in Malaysia are those that have been promoted from the position of teachers and often lack in leadership qualities. Very few of them are trained to be school leaders before they are promoted. In a survey conducted in 2004, a majority of these promoted principals reported that they lacked confidence and struggled to meet the expectations of the parents and the community (Rusmini Ku Ahmad, 2004).

With this situation in view, the Malaysian government has taken several steps to improve the quality of school leadership and ensure that all its schools are led by a competent and trained school principal. The Aminuddin Baki Institute or IAB, as it is popularly known as, was set up in 1979 with the stated vision of becoming the "Centre of distinction for educational leadership development" (Ministry of Education, n.d.). IAB conducts training programmes for planners, administrators, supervisors, teachers, teacher trainers and administrative support staff at national, state and district levels. It performs six main functions, namely, training, assessment, consultancy, research, publishing, and acting as a think-tank. Through its arm of National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders (NPQEL), IAB has been providing specialized leadership training to school leaders who participate in a five-month rigorous training program which includes a blend of face-to-face and integrated online learning. After successful training of NPQUEL, there is a further Residency and Immersion Programme (PRIme) for all the future leaders which run for a period on one year which is intended to gradually induct the future leaders into their jobs of school principals. These candidates usually work under an experienced

principal who mentors them and enables him to gain hands-on experience and knowledge under expert guidance.

With the launch of GTP in 2010, one of the Six National Key Results Areas (NKRAs) as identified by the government is "Improving Students Outcomes" which focuses on increasing the educational achievement for all students (PEMANDU, 2010). Naturally, school principals have been identified as the key drivers to meet this objective. The government has initiated a scheme called 'New Deal Incentive' (PEMANDU, 2010), with the aim of rewarding the principals who are exceptional performers in motivating students to increase educational outcomes and performance. The success criteria for school leaders are determined by leader's individual competency and the performance of the school as a whole as well (Ministry of Education, 2013). The basic competencies for a successful school leader, as proposed by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia consists of nine standards (Aminah, 2012) as given shown in the following table:

Table 2.3

Professional Standards for Malaysian School principals

S. No.	Standards
1	Organizational management and leadership
2	Curriculum and instructional leadership
3	Co-curricular programs leadership
4	Management of students' development, learning and wellbeing
5	Financial and asset management
6	Administrative leadership
7	Management of learning environment and physical facilities
8	Personnel and professional development
9	External relations and partnership development

For determining success for a school, the Ministry of education uses a composite score of academic excellence and holistic achievement and rates the school into seven bands from highest (Band 1) to lowest performing (Band 7). The details are given below:

Table 2.4

The calculation of school Bands

Band	Composite Score
Band 1	>85%
Band 2	75% - 84.9%
Band 3	65% - 74.9%
Band 4	55% - 64.9%
Band 5	45% - 54.9%
Band 6	35% - 44.9%
Band 7	< 35%

The top 2% of high achieving principals receive a cash reward of RM7,500 (approximately US$2,550) each. Apart from receiving cash rewards, the high performing principals also become entitled for being posted in reputable institutions or receive and expedited promotion with a higher salary scale. Since its implementation, the scheme has shown positive results and is expected to provide much higher, quantifiable results in the coming years.

The Ministry of Education has also mandated that in order to promote a teacher to leadership position, seniority alone will not be the only yardstick to be used (PEMANDU, 2010). The aspirants of leadership positions must demonstrate their

leadership qualities and must successfully participate in the leadership training conducted by IAB. Moreover, people who are already in the leadership positions must constantly upgrade their knowledge and skills. Instead of resting on their laurels, leaders must constantly "upgrade" themselves as a part of their continuous professional development (CPD) (PEMANDU, 2010).

2.6.5 Declining Achievement compared with International Standards

PISA stands for Programme for International Student Assessment which is an international study conducted by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The purpose of this study is to assess and compare the preparation of 15-year-old students from 65 countries to meet real-life opportunities and challenges. The 65 countries that participate in the study make up 90 percent of the world's economies. The rationale of this assessment of OECD is that student achievement in math and science are a strong indicator for future economic success and nations with good schools will have good economies as well. PISA tests critical thinking skills of students in math, science, and reading, regardless of grades, achievement and socio-economic status. Questions emphasize on problem solving skills and disregard memorization.

The latest PISA report for 2012 shows that Malaysia was ranked 52nd out of 65 participating countries (OECD, 2012). The reading score of Malaysia was a mere 398 which is significantly lower than the average point of 496. This also is a decline from the previous score of 414 in 2009. Malaysia showed a marginal improvement in mathematics, from 404 in 2009 to 414 in 2012 but this score is still below the average of 421 points (OECD, 2012). In scientific literacy, Malaysia is well below the average of 501 at 421 points which is also a decline from its 2009 score of 422 (OECD, 2012). It is obvious from the 2012 report that Malaysia is declining in its

performance since 2009 and is also well below the OECD averages. Against the stated target of being among the top third of OECD countries in academic performance, Malaysia is languishing at the lower end of the bottom third of OECD nations.

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) is an international assessment of the mathematics and science abilities of students from across the world. Students participating in TIMMS tests come from a variety of backgrounds in terms of economic development, geographical location, and population size. 4,500 to 5,000 students are samples from each education systems and are evaluated. For each student, contextual data on the learning conditions in mathematics and science are also compiled through the students, their teachers and their principals are also collected through a questionnaire. The first study was conducted in 1995 and since has been conducted every fourth year.

The TIMSS latest results in 2011 proved beyond doubt that the performance of Malaysian students in both the key subjects are going down. Malaysia's ranking in Math fell from 20th in 2007 to 26th in 2011 while its ranking in Science fell from 21st in 2007 to 32nd in 2011. The average Math score fell from 474 in 2007 to 440 and average Science score fell from 471 in 2007 to 426 in 2011.

As is evident from the international assessments, there is a rapid trend of declining student achievement in Malaysia. A low number of cluster schools; 3% of the total schools, is a clear sign that the steps taken by the government is not bringing results.

2.7 Context-based Leadership Practices

With the rapid improvement in technology, growth in knowledge society, new scientific discoveries, globalization and cultural exchanges, schools are experiencing

altogether different contextual realities than ever before. These developments have blurred the boundaries and differences between social groups, and diluted the credibility of traditional knowledge and expertise, particularly in the field of school education. These developments together have made a big impact on the contextual factors of schooling (Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE), 2004) leading to a broader, personalised curriculum and educational delivery in most countries around the world (Leadbeater, 2004a, 2004b, & 2005) leading to structural reforms in school systems (Marginson, 1997; Hartley, 1997; Levin & Riffel, 1997).

There is ample empirical evidence that the processes and organization of schools are the reflection of the context within which they function. The school context are the economic, social and cultural aspects of the school community, including the ones brought in by the students, teachers and the parents and by local, regional, national and global processes along with the governmental policies and expectations (Carrasco-Rozas 2010; Lupton, 2004, 2005; Lupton & Thrupp, 2007; Mills & Gale 2009; Thomson 2002). Each school functions within its own local contextual complexity and needs appropriate responses from the leadership. Several studies have demonstrated that school context may vary within a country and between several countries in terms of scale, place, background history, age (established school or new school), leadership structure (top down or democratic), teaching-learning philosophy, qualifications of staff and their professionalism, student diversity, resources and culture (Gurr et al., 2005).

The role of school leadership in the development of a school and its effectiveness has been highlighted time and again through conceptual and empirical studies throughout the world. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) have stated that "Scratch the surface of an excellent school and you are likely to find an excellent principal. Peer into a failing

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school and you will find weak leadership" (p.64). The success of any school is significantly dependent upon its leadership which is instrumental in developing its culture and provides structure for learning and improvement (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999; Mulford & Silins, 2003). Schein (2004) believes that leader's own personal assumptions and practices based upon the immediate context are greatly responsible in developing an organization's culture and values.

2.8 Empirical Findings of the Practices of School principals

Numerous empirical studies conducted in schools have identified a diversity of specific leadership practices in school principals (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). In a significant study, researchers from the University of Minnesota and the University of Toronto, in 2010 declared that: "… we claimed, based on a preliminary review of research that leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning. After six additional years of research, we are even more confident about this claim (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010, p. 9)".

Researches have been interested in identifying the practices of school leadership that make significant indirect impact on student achievement. Several researchers have focused on investigating what leaders do in real-life context to find out 'contextualistic, interactionistic, and dynamic aspects' of school leadership (Dhunpath, 2000, p. 545). There is ample literature available on several models of successful leadership practices that make such an impact (e.g. Hallinger & Heck, 1996b; Leithwood, Harris & Strauss, 2010). Unfortunately, these models are extremely contextual and vary from one study to the other. Leithwood and Duke (1999) classified these models of leadership practices into six categories:

1. Instructional leadership practices which concentrates on the role of school principals in coordinating, controlling, supervising, and developing school curriculum and instruction (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger, 2000);

2. Transformational leadership practices which emphasizes on a collaborative culture which inspires members and develops an organization's innovative capacity (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; 2000);

3. Moral leadership practices , which is about ethical aspects of leadership;

4. Participative leadership practices , which emphasizes on decision-making process of a group, including "teacher leadership" and "distributed leadership";

5. Managerial and strategic leadership practices involving functions as specified in classical management literature;

6. Contingent leadership practices which emphasizes the uniqueness of organizations and leader's adaptation to the needs.

Instructional leadership, transformational leadership and distributed leadership are most widely used models of leadership practices. Instructional leaders are considered to be those who are primarily responsible for the enhancement of teaching and learning activities within a school (Hallinger, 2005; Heck & Hallinger, 1999). Andrew and Soder (1987) claimed that an instructional leader primarily acts as a resource provider, instructional resource, communicator, and has a visible presence in the school. Transformational leadership theory that evolved from leadership theory developed by Bass (Bass, 1985; 1997) claims that this type of leaders practice support, care, inclusion and leads to enhanced student learning outcomes through promoting collective teacher efficacy (Mulford, Silins & Leithwood, 2004). Leithwood and Jantzi (1999), based upon the theory of Bass, constructed a model of transformational school leadership comprising and four management and six

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leadership dimensions. Distributed leadership, which has started gaining currency recently, posits that leadership that is widely distributed is a positive influence on organization and student achievement (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008). Distributed leadership promotes shared, collaborative, democratic and participative leadership concepts (Leithwood et al., 2004). Scholars have proposed similar concept under different names such as collective leadership and democratic leadership (Moos, Krejsler, Kofod, & Jenson, 2005). However distributed leadership, its cultural norms and structures are heavily depended upon how the principal enacts them in formal school settings (Leithwood et al., 2007). A recently published Wallace Perspective report based upon several empirical studies conducted in 24 different states in the United States identified five practices which were seemingly common to all successful school leaders:

1. Shapes a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards;

2. Creates a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit, and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail;

3. Cultivates leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision;

4. Improves instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn at their utmost; and

5. Manages people, data and processes to foster school improvement.

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(The Wallace Foundation, 2012)

Recent studies have shown clear signs that the three major models of leadership practices are converging and are connected. Hallinger (2005) has suggested modifications in his instructional leadership model by amalgamating the idea of 'shared sense' and 'school culture and values'. Similarly, Leithwood *et al.* (2006) modified the transformational leadership model by appending the instructional aspect of 'monitoring teaching and learning' (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Morrison (2002) adds further complexity to leadership models by contending that principals can combine the practices of transformational leadership, transcendental and servant leadership, quantum leadership, and distributed leadership to create a complex model that works for them. Cotton (2003), on the other hand identified 26 practices of a school principal through a meta-analysis of empirical studies conducted during 1979-2000. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) on the other hand identified their own '21 responsibilities' that every school principal undertakes. Robinson (2007) condensed several good practices of successful school principals into five general dimensions.

As evident from the above discussions, there is a rich literature available on the varied leadership practices. The school leadership practices have been described by scholars in many different ways, suggesting a plethora of models. It was also evident that there is a distinct overlap of practices from one model to the other and that the taxonomies are becoming convergent and creating complexities in defining a specific model for leadership practices.

2.9 The Core Leadership Practices

With the convergence of common models of leadership practices, the practices can be classified into five 'core practices' (Leithwood & Day, 2007). These core practices are what every successful school principal uses although the enactment of these practices differs from school to school. These categories of practices of school principals have been confirmed by a several empirical studies conducted during the last decade. The five core practices are as follows:

2.9.1 Setting direction

This category of practices is about the establishment of shared purpose as a basic stimulant for people to synergize for the organizational success. Practices that are specific to this dimension are building a shared vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals and demonstrating high performance expectations (Hallinger & Heck, 2002). The goal-based theories of human motivation profess that people are motivated by goals which are achievable but personally compelling and challenging to them. (Bandura, 1986; Weick, 1995; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Successful principals create and propagate a vision for the school (Mulford, 2005). Identifying and articulating a vision, creating shared meanings, creating high performance expectations, fostering the acceptance of group goals, monitoring organizational performance and communicating falls under this category of core practices (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) found that principal who was most active in setting up a direction for the schools were also successful in improving student outcomes. Setting a clear direction for success was also highlighted by Alig-Mielcarek and Hoy (2005), Hallinger (2003), and McGuigan and Hoy (2006).

2.9.2 Understanding and developing people

Successful school leaders accomplish their goals by influencing the development of the people in their schools. They develop the capabilities of their staff and make full use of their capacities by helping employees reduce frustration and increase enthusiasm, optimism and sense of mission (McColl-Kennedy & Anderson, 2002). While making a significant contribution to motivation, the practices in this category primarily aim in developing skills and knowledge of teachers and also developing commitment, capacity and resilience to persist in the application of knowledge and skills. Specifically, the practices include providing individualized support and consideration, fostering intellectual stimulation, and modelling appropriate values and behaviors (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Being collegial, considerate and supportive, good listener and generally looking out for teachers' personal and professional welfare are other practices in this category. In other words, successful school principals develop their people by offering intellectual stimulation, providing individual support and by providing an appropriate model to follow (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Mulford, 2005).

2.9.3 Redesigning the organization

Successful school leaders promote structural modifications to develop positive conditions for teaching and learning activities in their schools (Louis & Kruse, 1995). A successful school leader strengthens the school culture modifies the organizational structure to be more meaningful and effective and builds a collaborative process within the school community (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). The practices in this category are primarily concerned with establishing conducive work conditions in which teachers benefit from their motivation, commitment and capacities. Some specific practices are building

collaborative cultures, restructuring and reculturing the organisation, building productive relations with parents and the community, and connecting the school with its wider environment (Louis & Kruse, 1998; Chrisman, 2005).

2.9.4 Managing the instructional program

Many studies have proved the effects of closely monitoring school's instructional programs on student achievement (Alig-Mielcarek & Hoy, 2005; Gaziel, 2007; Marks, Louis & Printy, 2003; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) and Hallinger (2003c), in their separate empirical studies have highlighted the significance of close monitoring of a school's teaching and learning program for the success of that school. The specific practices of this category aim to create productive working conditions for teachers by fostering organisational stability and providing strong infrastructure of the school. Staffing the educational programmes, providing teaching support, overseeing school activity, and reducing distractions are some of the other practices within this category (Duke 2004; Hallinger, 2003). Monitoring is a key part of successful leaders' behaviors.

2.9.5 Coalition Building

Drysdale, Goode and Guur (2008) describe the practice of coalition building of a school principal as "Specific initiatives undertaken by our successful principals to build coalitions entailed making connections with, and influencing, agencies and groups external to the school (government, professional groups, community groups and district staff)". Coalition building enables school principals to utilize their intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies, often called as social intelligence, to garner support from various stakeholders to maximize student learning and achievement. Social intelligence skills have been stated by Leithwood and Day (2007) as the aptitude of a school principal to comprehend various emotional factors

and behaviors of people he or she interacts with in social situations. While it is important for a school principal to build meaningful relationships with other stakeholders, successful principals also self-monitor and use their skills of emotional understanding of self and others to provide appropriate response during their interaction with others. Social intelligence has been described by Goleman (2007) as the capability of understanding what others are thinking and feeling during interactions. Thus, school leaders "must learn to lead not from the apex of the organizational pyramid but from the nexus of a web of interpersonal relationships" (Murphy, 2002).

Although all successful educational leaders demonstrate these five core practices, it does not necessarily mean that they do all the things all the time. Instead, "…the way a leader enacts each set of practices will certainly vary by circumstance (and likely by personal style, as well)" (Leithwood & Day, 2007, p. 8).

2.10 International Successful School Principal Project (ISSPP)

Although there are huge amount of empirical studies on educational leadership, unfortunately a large majority of these studies are based upon just one data source - principals. Although the views of principals and teachers on various aspects of a school are often found to be in accord (Gurr 1996, Gurr, 2002), it has also been found that principals often turn out to be more optimistic on leadership effects than teachers (McCall et al., 2001; Mulford, Kendall, Kendall, Bishop, & Hogan, 2000 : 2001). Hence just depending upon principal's evidence for empirical findings may often give misleading results.

In response to these trepidations, the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) was initiated in 2001 by its founder, Professor Christopher Day who is also its current coordinator. Initially it included researchers from eight different

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countries – Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, England, Norway, Sweden and the US. It has grown since then and has added ten more countries. The study includes evidences from students, parents, teachers and principals. In the first phase, ISSPP conducted a series of case studies from the participating eight countries and the results made public.

The findings of case studies in the above countries clearly demonstrate that leaders adjust their practices according to their own school context which is established within a larger national context. The contextual differences identified both within countries and across countries were in location, size, leadership structure, school-wide pedagogy, background history, stage of development staff competence and professional disposition, student mix and resource need, and culture (Gurr, et al., 2005). The most common feature of the successful principals in these countries was that all successful principals were passionate to the cause of education, their commitment to the development of students and service to their community.

Table 2.5

Key findings of the successful principals' practices from 8 countries

S. No.	Country	Key Findings
1	The USA	A principal of a struggling school turned it around into a successful school by her cautious, inclusive and respectful approach in building a cordial and fruitful relationship with the school community, while at the same time being stern in bringing back discipline to make the school environment safe (Giles, Johnson, Brooks & Jacobson, 2005)
2	China	The principals succeeded in improving their failing schools by acting as change agents and restoring the focus of students and teachers on teaching and learning process by being compassionate and sensitive and setting high expectations for all (Wong, 2005)
3	England	The successful principals could handle tensions and dilemmas by adapting to the local context, driven by their own value systems (Day, 2005). They sustained success by setting directions, modelling behavior, and supporting their staff and

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		demonstrated the value of building trust, maintaining identity and never-ending passion for education.
4	Norway	The findings from Norway demonstrated that the moral aspects of teaching and learning became the guiding force for the successful principals (Møller et al., 2005). With student learning as the school's central philosophy, collaboration, open communication and professional negotiation were the hallmark of these principals. Empathy, intuition, trust and care were the other salient features of the practices of successful principals in Norway.
5	Sweden	All successful principals created a good learning structure and developed a culture of learning in their schools (Höög, Johansson & Olofsson, 2005). The driving force behind these principals was their desire to achieve a balance between overall developments of students along with their academic achievement. They worked hard, were always visible to the school community, and were credible change managers and effective leaders.
6	Denmark	One of the successful principals was a pedagogical leader who concentrated on individualized, student-centered teaching and demanded high standards (Moos et al., 2005). He believed in collaboration and delegated for better outcomes. The other principal was a skillful administrator, great listener, and skilled collaborator and conflict manager although he was very shy by nature. He emphasized on social adjustment for his students more than academic results for the school. The two principals were similar in a sense that both delegated responsibilities and were followers of distributed leadership ideas. However, they differed in their personality traits and priorities for their schools.
7	Australia	The successful principal of 14 Australian schools demonstrated honesty, openness, flexibility, commitment to the school, empathy, and believed that every child was important and has the capacity to succeed (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2006). They collaborated with their school community towards a common vision and set up structures to support a learning environment within their schools. They were highly sensitive to the contexts in which they operated and adjusted accordingly. They empowered staff, delegated and had high expectations from all.
8	Canada	The three successful principals focus on professional learning, collaboration, behavioral and academic expectations, while minimally involving parent and the community and paying less attention to provincial test scores. (Winton & Pollock, 2011).

The ISSPP study is unique in a sense that it records the views of all the stakeholders of a school rather than that of the principals only. The findings show several similarities and differences between the practices of successful school principals in these countries. Although the differences are aplenty, all countries have in common is self-management, change management, accountability and aims of higher achievement.

2.11 Conclusion

The review of literature in this chapter demonstrates that although there has been a tremendous excitement in the field of educational leadership research in the recent times, not much has been included in the literature on what successful school principals actually do on the daily basis (Day, Leithwood & Sammons, 2008). The studies that exist focus more on the empirical data collected by the principals which is often not the real picture (Leithwood et. al., 2006b). A number of school leadership models have been discussed in detail, however the literature clearly demonstrates that most of the these models are based upon lofty ideas of ideals and while 'leadership by adjective' (Leithwood, 2007) may be able to throw some light on the art of successful Principalship, it also encourages a misplaced belief that the model is a perfect and complete leadership model rather than just a 'slice of the whole job' (Mulford, 2008, p. 38).

In the Malaysian context, there are hardly any empirical studies conducted on the practices of successful school principals. In the scant literature available of school leadership in Malaysia, an array of popular, western leadership models have been suggested as 'ideal' leadership models in a prescriptive way. The MoE itself suggests Malaysian schools to follow distributed leadership model for becoming successful (Malaysian Education Blueprint, 2013). Meanwhile, the students' achievement is

declining alarmingly as depicted by the internationally recognized PISA and TIMMS standardized tests (Malaysian Education Blueprint, 2013). Although the government has announced a plethora of reforms and schemes, nothing seems to be working right now. Considering the impact of effective school leadership on student achievement, both direct and indirect, the lack of empirical studies in this area comes as a striking weakness despite immense progress been made during the past decade elsewhere. With the underdeveloped state of the local research in the area of practices of successful school leaders, there might be a risk of overdependence upon the trend of borrowing and adopting western leadership models which do not fit the local context (Dimmock & Walker, 2005).

So far, principal leadership research around the world has exemplified the significance of Principalship in school administration. In the absence of a universal 'one size fits all' model of school leadership, efforts are being made to identify the core practices of successful school leaders around the world. Leithwood and Day (2007) found that every successful school principal around the world enacts 4 core practices of leadership which are, setting directions, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organization and managing the instructional program. Subsequent studies indicated a fifth core practice which is 'Coalition building'. They also claimed that the manner in which a leader enacts these practices depends upon the context he works in and differs from one school to the other.

The ISSPP studies conducted in several countries around the world clearly demonstrates that the successful principals in these countries although enacted the same 5 core practices as suggested by Leithwood and Day (2007), were also were dependent upon their immediate context and enacted these core practices in their own unique way which was dictated by their own context. Thus, the successful

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principals were not the one who followed one particular model of leadership but were the ones who could react to their context effectively.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In the two preceding two chapters, the background, purpose, objectives and theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of this research was discussed in detail. This qualitative study, based on the constructivist paradigm, employs a multi-case study methodology in which primary data was collected from interviews of participating school's principals, teachers, students and parents employing a common, semi-structured interview protocol developed specifically for this study to answer the research questions mentioned in chapter one. The secondary data was collected through journal and document scanning. In this chapter, the methodology and justification for the choice and use of this approach will be discussed. The chapter also aims to elucidate the analytical boundary of this research and justify the research paradigm and is divided into nine distinct sections.

The first section gives an overview of this chapter while the second section outlines the description of various paradigms that are used by researchers and the justification for using the paradigm for this study. The third section justifies the use of case study as the research methodology by explaining the case study process. The fourth section explains the unique the role of researcher in a qualitative study as a data collecting instrument. The fifth section demarcates the scope of this study and the research objectives and questions mentioned in Chapter one are restated to elucidate the research framework. The sixth section explains the sampling process and justification of site selection. The seventh section informs about the data collection process while the eighth section delves into the analysis of data to derive meaning. The ninth

section informs the ethical consideration and privacy issues related to this study while the 10th section summarizes the entire chapter.

3.2 Research Paradigms

Burns, 1997 describes research as a systematic investigation or inquiry in which a researcher collects data, analyses and interprets in to "understand, describe, predict or control an educational or psychological phenomenon or to empower individuals in such contexts" (Mertens, 2005, p.2). With a plethora of research methods being used today, particularly in the social/applied sciences, the defining of simple arguments have become far more complex in recent times (O'Leary, 2004). Being distinct from theory, the theoretical framework of a study that influences the study and interpretation of knowledge is sometimes referred to as the research paradigm (Mertens, 2005; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), which influences the way knowledge is studied and interpreted. The research paradigm is the first step upon which the choices of methodology, methods, or research design are decided upon. Paradigm can be defined as "a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research" (Bogdan & Biklen 1998, p.22) or the philosophical motivation for carrying out the study (Cohen & Manion 1994, p.38). Alternatively, a paradigm can also be referred to as a conceptual model of an individual's worldview and the associated assumptions which mainly consist of ontology which is the nature of reality and truth, epistemology which is the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and the would-be-known, and methodology which is the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, 2005; Mertens, 2003).

Rather than being referred as paradigm, it has also been defined in terms of 'knowledge claims' (Creswell, 2003); epistemology or ontology; or even research

methodologies (Neuman, 2000). In the literature, many different paradigms have been discussed, such as: positivist (and post positivist), constructivist, interpretivist, transformative, emancipatory, critical, pragmatism and deconstructivist. With such a large array of paradigms, complexities and confusion is bound to happen while deciding upon the correct paradigm for a study. Some of these paradigms are briefly discussed below.

Positivism is considered to be 'scientific method' or 'science research', which is "based on the rationalistic, empiricist philosophy that originated with Aristotle, Francis Bacon, John Locke, August Comte, and Emmanuel Kant" (Mertens, 2005, p.8) and "reflects a deterministic philosophy in which causes probably determine effects or outcomes" (Creswell, 2003, p.7). Positivists test theories or explain a phenomenon "through observation and measurement in order to predict and control forces that surround us" (O'Leary, 2004, p.5). Post positivists assume that a research is influenced by the theory that is being tested as well as by other one well-developed theories (Cook & Campbell, 1979, p.24).

The interpretivist-constructivist paradigm is based upon Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and Wilhelm Dilthey's and other German hermeneutics (Mertens, 2005, p.12 citing Eichelberger, 1989). Interpretivist/constructivist researchers strive to fathom "the world of human experience" (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p.36), while professing that "reality is socially constructed" (Mertens, 2005, p.12). The interpretivist/constructivist researchers depend upon the "participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell, 2003, p.8). Interpretivist-constructivist researchers do not start their study with a theory as opposed to postpositivists. Instead, they "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings"

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(Creswell, 2003, p.9) as the research progresses. These researchers rely on qualitative methods or a combine qualitative and quantitative which is called as mixed method.

During 80s and 90, a sense of dissatisfaction with the dominant research paradigms started creeping in which led to the creation of a new paradigm called the transformative paradigm Mertens (2005). Another reason for the rise of transformative paradigm was perhaps the notion that a majority of sociological and psychological theories that were the driving forces for the dominant paradigms "had been developed from the white, able-bodied male perspective and was based on the study of male subjects" (Mertens, 2005 p.17). Transformative researchers collect and analyze data in a similar way as the interpretivist/constructivists researchers, however, by using a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, they are able to develop a structure for their research which is "more complete and full of portraits of our social world through the use of multiple perspectives and lenses" (Somekh & Lewin, 2005, p.275), which allows us to comprehend "greater diversity of values, stances and positions" (Somekh & Lewin, 2005, p.275).

Pragmatist researchers, instead of committing themselves to a particular system of philosophy, focus on the 'what' and 'how' of the research problems (Creswell, 2003, p.11). Although, pragmatism provides the philosophical framework for mixed-methods research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Somekh & Lewin, 2005), a few mixed-methods researchers find themselves comfortable with the philosophically with the transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2005). The researchers following a pragmatic paradigm place "the research problem" as central and apply all approaches to understanding the problem (Creswell, 2003, p.11).

This study focuses on the leadership practices of successful school principals in Malaysia. Since the ontological assumption of this study is that the practices of successful principals vary according to their contexts, quantitative response would not have been able to acquire the real snapshot of the practices of successful principals, or the philosophy behind these practices and how they enact their practices as a routine. The qualitative approach is best suited since the primary objective of this research is to gain understanding about *what* and *how* successful principals practice leadership roles in their respective contexts. According to Stake (1995), researchers play a number of roles during the research process; however the role of gatherer and interpreter is profound (Stake, 1995), "Most contemporary qualitative researchers nourish the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered … The world we know is particularly a human construction" (p. 99). According to Stake (1995), the belief of constructivism largely comprises social interpretations as compared to awareness of an external reality, thus interpretive-constructive paradigm would be best suited for achieving the objectives of this study and best suited for the philosophical framework for this research.

Qualitative approaches are often associated with research which is carried out in an interpretative frame in which the concern is with the production of meaning. This qualitative study focuses on the context-based leadership practices of two successful school principals. Qualitative inquiry has been pronounced as a practice that consists of three generic activities that are connected together (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). They go on to further explain that a qualitative researcher is bound by his own beliefs that shapes his worldview and "The gendered, multiculturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that he or she then examines in a specific

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way (methodology, analysis)" (p. 28). The researcher's beliefs are known as paradigms which consist of an interpretive framework that includes epistemological, ontological, and methodological. "Each interpretive framework makes a demand on the researcher, including the questions they will ask and the interpretations he or she will bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 31).

Social constructivism is the chosen theoretical framework that informs this study. Social constructivists, instead of beginning with a theory in mind, work towards developing a theory during the research. According to Creswell (2009) "The more open-ended the questioning the better as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life settings. Often the subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. They are not simple imprinted on individuals but are formed through social interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individual's lives" (p. 8). This positioning of the social constructivist researcher is based upon the premise that the knowledge and understanding acquired through this process would be more in-depth and meaningful as compared to the knowledge and understanding that is simply introduced (Creswell, 2013, 2007). The researcher's personal worldview is derived from his long association of working with schools, both in the capacity of a teacher and then more than 15 years as a school principal. The researcher has personally experienced the learning that takes place in a social setting that is so typical in every school. Social constructivist researchers depend heavily upon the *participants' views of the situation* and tend to ask broader questions on the contexts while observing the interactions between different individuals and their context (Creswell, 2009).

A close scrutiny of these traditions depict common characteristics of centrality of social reality and humans, investigation of changing reality and making meaning out

of this reality in a constructive manner. The naturalistic tradition of social constructivism would be more appropriate for this study since the practices of the principals will be observed in its natural setting and the respondents would be able to share information freely in their own familiar surroundings. The researcher's background as school principal and informal discussions with few principals informed that principals would willingly contribute to this study and the findings would be varied and meaningful if their response was not restricted by boundaries of a questionnaire and if they were provided ample scope of adding their thoughts and views over a variety of topics within their domain as a principal. Additionally, as Berry (2002) cautioned that "interviewers must always keep in mind that it is not the obligation of the person to tell us the truth" (p. 680), and to get multiple perspectives, interviews with teachers, school administrators, parents and students will also be conducted to place the responses of principals into proper perspective.

After selecting the research paradigm, it is necessary to select an appropriate research methodology for data collection and analysis. Case study fits the requirements of this study perfectly.

3.3 Case Study

This study uses a case study approach because of its suitability and usefulness. Qualitative research is carried out in a natural setting and attempts to explore human behavior within a particular context. The qualitative researcher wants to answer the "what" of a phenomenon, person or a program, whereas, the "how" looks at the effects it on all stakeholders within a bounded system (Hatch, 2002). The study was conducted in a natural setting attempting to explore the practices of successful school principals. A case study is a special kind of qualitative work that investigates a contextualized, contemporary phenomenon within a specified boundary (Yin, 1994)

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which perfectly fit the requirement of this study. According to Merriam (1988), a bounded system in education can be "…a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group" (p. 13). Recalling real-life accounts as well as witnessing principal leadership in action in its natural environments provided insight into how a successful school principal carries out his responsibilities. Case study uses the researcher as a data collection instrument through which it examines a subject bounded in time and space, provides a detailed description of context of the case setting, and gathers a variety of material from multiple sources in order to provide an in-depth picture of the case (Creswell, 1998).

Case study research is one of the most widely used qualitative approaches by researchers (Thomas, 2011). Prominent authors and researchers have immensely contributed towards its popularity (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Ragin & Becker, 1992; Stake, 2010, 1995; Yin, 2009). Case study provides researchers with the flexibility that is absent in other qualitative approaches. The case study approach proposed by Stake (1995) and Merriam (2009 is situated in a social constructivist paradigm. According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research is "…an inquiry process of understanding based on methodological traditions of inquiry that explores a social or human problem" (p. 15). Yin (1994) describes this method as a methodology that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence where there are no clear demarcation between the context and the phenomenon. (p. 23).

3.4 Role of the Researcher

According to Creswell (1998), a researcher in qualitative research "… builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (p. 15). A researcher acts as a data collection

instrument in a qualitative research (Merriam, 1988; Hatch, 2002; Patton, 1990; Stake, 2010; Yin, 1994,). The researcher should be used to the environment under study. In this study, the researcher as a data collector will conduct interviews, observe, collect field notes and review documents. He has more than a decade-long experience as a principal and additional experience as a teacher in a variety of school settings which will give him insight into the various aspects of school operations. Additionally, he holds a Master degree in Education with specialization in educational administration which has provided him with ample theoretical knowledge to go along with his practical experience.

The Epistemological perspective in interpretive-constructivist paradigm is that the researcher, through his own prior knowledge of the area of study, understands through his perceived knowledge, focuses on the specific and concrete and seeks to understand specific contexts. The goal is for the researcher to get close to the subject being researched since the researcher intends to experience what is being studied and governs their actions through feeling and reason (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Gronhaug, K., 2001). By being the 'insider', the researcher is able to meet the research objectives effectively. On the other hand, the researcher believes that the concept of reflexivity is an essential component of ensuring the research integrity. Reflexivity is defined as the researcher's ability "to keep track of one's influence on a setting, to bracket one's biases, and to monitor one's emotional responses" (Hatch, 2002 p. 10). Since the previous experience of the researcher might influence the response of the participants, therefore careful attention was given to this influence upon the participants, and the researcher's preconceived notions of the subject by continuously reflecting upon and reassessing biases, as suggested by Morrison (2002).

3.5 Scope of This Study

As mentioned in preceding chapters, there is a dearth of qualitative studies of the practices of successful school principals around the world. More importantly, this issue is still untouched in Malaysian context. The findings from other contexts which are predominantly western, cannot be used as a reference point for the practice of Principalship in Malaysian schools. Hence, this study aims to explore the practices of successful school principals in Malaysia by identifying their core practices and how they enact them within their own context.

The central concept underpinning this study is to understand the successful leadership practices of school principals. Leadership practice is often described as an integrative conception of leadership encompassing leadership as a practice of social interactions within a specific context (Carroll, Levy, & Richmond, 2008; Densten, 2008; Elmore, 2008; Spillane & Orlina, 2005). The holistic perception of leadership that it depicts is about what leaders do and how they provide leadership within diverse, multiple contextual influences. Thus, this study covers three major areas, which are: a) the core practices of a successful school principal in Malaysia; b) the ways in which school leaders in Malaysia enact these practices within their school context; and c) the contextual factors that influence the practices of successful school principals. The first focus of this research was to identify the common leadership practices of successful school principals. These practices might converge on certain generic aspects which would explain the common practices that Malaysian school leaders enact to lead their schools. These would become a repertoire of the core leadership practices of successful Malaysian school principals.

The second focus of this study was to understand how successful school principals enact the core leadership practices in response to their unique context. Existing

literature has verified the diversity of the ways in which leadership practices are enacted in schools, hence focus on the enactment of these practices was able to discern the theoretical and practical patterns exhibited by successful Malaysian school principals.

The third focus of this study was to explore the contextual factors that affect the enactment of core leadership practices of successful Malaysian school principals. This interest is the result of the thought process that principal leadership practices are shaped by the interactions among individual, organizational and societal variables which coexist with a structural order, each with its own forms (Goffman, 1983). Hence, Leadership perceptions and actions are directed by individual perceptions, interpretations and contextual elements (Morrison, 2002). Thus, the study also explored the contextual factors which enabled an explanation for the enactment of core leadership practices.

To summarize, the scope of this study constitutes a logical sequence of the three focus areas. The first and the second focus areas not only aimed to explore the core practices of successful school principals and how they enact these practices but also as a validation of existing research findings on principal leadership practices, through ISSPP or otherwise. Potentially this study also expected to discover any new phenomenon in leadership practice within Malaysian context, which have been overlooked or undiscovered in the studies conducted in other contexts. The third focus of this research was to put the findings of the first and second focus areas into proper contextual perspectives.

3.6 Sampling

The list of schools selected for this study was on the basis of purposive sampling, at first based upon the success criteria as established by the Malaysian Ministry of Education, and then was further refined through additional criteria set for the purpose of this study. The following criteria were applied to trim down the list of schools provided by the Ministry of Education for the study:

1.   School is led by a principal who has been recommended as successful principal by Ministry of Education, Malaysia.

2.   The school has shown quantifiable progress under the current principal. The school must have moved up at least by one Band level during the tenure of the current principal. School bands are ratings given to schools by the Ministry of Education with Band 1 being the highest rated school and Band 7 being the lowest rated school.

3.   The successful principal has worked for at least two years in the same school

It was expected that only a handful of such schools would make it to the list. The personnel of Ministry of Education were consulted and their recommended was sought for the site selection since the criteria for a successful school principal for this study was based upon the criteria set by the Ministry of Education which is based upon a series of indicators of success. The state education office provided a list of six schools, the principals of which were deemed successful based upon the criteria set by the Ministry of Education and who fit the purpose of this study.

From the original list of six schools provided by the Ministry of Education, three schools were removed because the principals had worked for less than two years. The remaining three schools fit the selection criteria for this study, however

immediately after the site selection and before the data collection began, the principal of one of the three schools was transferred to another school, rendering him unsuitable for the study. Thus the study was conducted on the principals of two schools from the one of the northern states in Malaysia, whose schools demonstrated quantifiable success under them and was recommended by the Ministry of Education. Three teachers, parents and students each were selected as respondents based upon the criteria that they should have been at the school for at least two years or more so that they are able to give firsthand information of the practices of their principals and have spent sufficient amount of time to witness the changes. One senior member of the management committee was also selected based upon the same criteria.

3.7 Data Collection

In this case study, the main methods used to collect data were:

1. Interviews with the principal, three parents, three students, three teachers and one member of the school management.

2. Observation of various aspects of the school

3. Document scanning which includes review of the school documents like school handbook, attendance sheets, marketing pamphlets, students' progress reports, activity calendar and minute of meetings.

4. Field notes

Table 3.1

Data collection details

Method	Dates
Interviews	March 17, 2016, March 25, 2016, August 24, 2016 and September 14, 2016
Observations	14 visits altogether between February 12, 2015 to September 24, 2016
Document Scanning	Between March 17, 2015 to August 17, 2016
Field Notes	Ongoing, during every visit

The principals were contacted by the researcher after getting the permission from the Ministry of Education, as per the norms laid down by the ministry for researchers to conduct a study in any of its public schools. The principal were officially informed by the ministry before the researcher contacted them, however the principals had no prior details of the nature of the study. The selection of teachers, students and parents was done by the researcher in consultation with the principals who then made arrangements for their interviews and gave necessary permissions. Participation of the parents, students and teachers were on a voluntary basis and they had the right to pull out of the study at any time during the study, which no one did. Use of multiple perspectives was necessitated keeping in mind the research objectives, in order to remediate the perceived limitation of the lack of measurable criteria for assessing leadership success.

3.7.1 Interviews

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed which focuses on the topic of research but at the same time allows the participant enough flexibility to construct their own stories through which they can understand their own perceived experiences related to school leadership practices (deMarais & Lapin, 2004). Separate interview protocols were created for the principal, teachers, parents, students and the member of the school management. The interview protocols are annexed; see annexure D-H. The interviews primarily focused on three major questions:

1. What are the practices that have brought about success to the school?

2. What are the contextual factors that affect these practices?

3. How are these practices been adapted to the specific school context?

Choosing interview as a method of data collection was due to its adaptability and the voice that it gives to the participants. Interviewing, if used by a skilled interviewer could provide richness in data collection far superior than any other method, even though it is time-consuming and highly subjective, thus posing a danger of bias. Semi-structured interviews encourage interviewees to respond open-endedly and ensure that adequate information was gathered and questions were clarified. According to Scott and Morrison, (2007 p.133), "Through interviews, participants could yield different kinds of data and explain in detail what they wanted the researcher to capture, while allowing the researcher to probe further and ask for clarification". It allows the interviewer to observe facial expressions and sincerity of the responses. Interviewees can convey their inner feelings and tell real stories while the interviewer can help them clarify or expand their responses or explain questions when respondents are in doubt (Drever, 1995). Interviews also assist researchers to

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see situations as participants see them which enable them to comprehend the meanings associated with them (Sharp & Howard, 1996). Note-taking and tape-recording was used to keep records. Interviews were recorded with the participants' permission for the purpose of transcription and analysis later on.

Principals were interviewed as they met the criteria for "information-rich participants" and the interviews were conducted in their respective school at their given time to ensure that participants felt comfortable in their own environment. Students, administrators, teachers and parents were also interviewed for the same reason and for the additional reason of providing information on contextual background from the perspective that is other than the principal's own. A variety of probing questions were incorporated depending upon the responses of the initial questions, asking the interviewees to examine their own transcripts for accuracy while leaving enough room for open discussions on ethical issues. The "member checking is submitting notes to informants to ensure that their perspectives have been recorded accurately" (McMillan & Wergin, 2006, p. 96). Although the interviews were focused on specific areas, there was enough room left for the interviewees to volunteer additional information during the interviews which they felt would be important in their description.

Reliability of an interview is considered to be the extent to which a research instrument produces similar results when the study is replicated. However Brewerton and Millward (2001) point out that interviews have limitations with reliability: "…due to their openness to so many types of bias, interviews can be notoriously unreliable, particularly when the researcher wishes to draw comparisons between data sets" (p. 74). Creswell (2013) too points out that reliability of semi-structured interview is 'elusive'. With this in mind, to ensure internal and external reliability of

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the semi-structured interview data, the researcher took careful notes while recording interviews, conducting member checks to remove ambiguity in the data and triangulating the claims with observations data.

The semi structured interview protocol was adapted from the one that has been widely used by over 100 studies by the ISSPP. The questions were discussed with two experts in the field and it was decided that no major revision needs to be made since the questions were broad-based, open ended and fit the purpose of the study. Once the data collection began, the emerging codes were constantly referred to the two experts who ensured that the contents were unambiguously being categorized. Any ambiguity among the codes was immediately dealt with while the data collection through interviews and the coding process continued.

3.7.2 Observation

Observation of regular school events like routine job of the principal, morning assemblies, sport activities, classrooms and administration office was carried out to verify the data collected during the interviews. Access to team meetings was not given by both the principals due to privacy reasons, however the principal was made aware of the kind of meetings that were held and about the topics that are usually discussed in such meetings. The visit to SMK urban was made on the 12th of February, 2015 during which the researcher met the principal and explained the purpose of research. There were seven more visits made during the next seven months. The first visit to the SMK rural school was made on the 17th of August 2015 and five more formal visits were made in the subsequent six months. For each of the visits, field notes were taken and an electronic reflective journal was maintained to record observations and responses to events. The researcher observed the morning assemblies; the way students are welcomed to the school in the morning,

achievement data, flyers, school yearbook, school functions, display boards and information boards regarding attendance and academic and co-curricular achievement data. This enabled the researcher to verify the claims made by the respondents during their interviews and helped in triangulation. There were a number of small informal interviews held with the principal, and occasionally with the teachers to clarify certain events during the observations in order to make sense of the events through their understanding.

Table 3.2

Observation checklist

S. No.	Date	School	What was observed
1.	17 March, 2015	SMK Urban	Morning assembly Morning Assembly, Welcome students at the Main Gate.
2.	25 March, 2015	SMK Urban	Also observed a class of teacher Rose and spent time in the staffroom observing teachers preparing their lessons, marking papers and interacting with each other.
3.	April 7, 2015	SMK Urban	Shadowed the principal for the rest of the day.
4.	June 2, 2015	SMK Urban	Observed the morning assembly and a Qur'an reading competition. Shadowed the principal for the rest of the day.
5.	June 15, 2015	SMK Urban	Attended the assembly and teacher's facilitation function. Shadowed the principal for the rest of the day.
6.	August 24, 2015	SMK Rural	Observed the morning assembly.
7.	September 14, 2015	SMK Rural	Shadowed the principal for half day.
8.	September 21	SMK Rural	Shadowed the principal. Observed two teachers in their class. Observed students being received by the teachers and students.
9.	September 24	SMK Rural	Attended religious singing competition. Observed the assembly and interacted with teachers in the staff room. Observed parent volunteers in action, helping in the function.

3.7.3 Document scanning

In order to support the data gathered through interviews and observations, relevant documents were collected and analyzed. These documents include planning documents, brochures and prospectus, reports, events, schedules, calendar and marketing documents. For example when a claim related to, say, improved academic achievement was made during the interview; the documents pertaining to academic achievement provided documentary support to the claims. Additionally electronic sources such as website and Facebook pages were also scanned. Similarly, the claims related to improved attendance, disciplinary issues, co-curricular achievements were substantiated through document scanning. Additionally, documents related to academic planning, extra-class schedules, photographs and activity list of field trips of the students and staff, and minute of meetings were also scanned which helped the researcher to contextualize the empirical data and built a greater understanding.

3.7.4 Field Notes

Field notes are maintained by a qualitative researcher for observed behaviors, activities and events (Schwandt, 2015). For this study, the researcher maintained a record of every observable activity in order to produce meaning of the observed phenomenon. These notes were extensively referred to while carrying out the data analysis.

3.8 Data Analysis

Stake and Merriam are both believers of social constructivism and are foundational methodologists for case study research. Both hold similar views for analyzing qualitative case study data, with minor variations. Stake (1995) defines data analysis of a qualitative case study as "a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations" (p. 71) and believes that "analysis essentially means taking

…our impressions, our observations apart" (p. 71). He gives utmost importance to the researcher's understanding of the data and claims that the analysis is the act of sense making and finding meanings. He claims that although a protocol will "help draw systematically from previous knowledge and cut down on misperception," he still believes that researchers intuition and impression has precedence over any protocols (Stake, 1995, p. 72) and that "Each researcher needs, through experience and reflection, to find the forms of analysis that work for him or her" (Stake, 1995, p. 77).

Merriam's definition of qualitative data analysis of a case study resembles closely with that of Stake, wherein she defines data analysis as "the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning" (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). Unlike Stake who is more flexible with the methods employed for analysis, Merriam shows more stringent application of constructivist epistemology which includes consolidation, reduction and interpretation of the data which goes above and beyond mere impression and intuition of Stakian perspective.

Merriam refutes the positivist notion that the analysis of data is conducted once all the data is collected, "Quite the opposite. Analysis becomes more intensive as the study progresses, and once all the data are in" (Merriam, 1998, p. 155). This belief emanates from the fact that qualitative methodologists strive from an 'emerging design', implying that initial analysis of the data may modify the way further phases of data collection and interpretation. Merriam proposes clear directions for analysis techniques and procedures leading towards the development of theory resulting from the data analysis.

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Based upon the established guidelines of data analysis within interpretative-social constructivist framework, the data analysis began as soon as the first data was collected. Both inductive and deductive methods were used (Patton, 1990) to analyze interview transcripts, relevant documents, and field notes. Field notes, journal entries of observations and all digital audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and analyzed concurrently. For each individual case, the data collected from document scanning was used to scrutinize the themes that came out from data collected during interviews, meetings and observation. In a study conducted in 1990, Patton (1990) observed: "the analysis of the empirical data aims to make sense of the massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal" (p. 377). Hence, the data was first analyzed individually and then a codebook of common themes was developed that was regularly updated throughout the coding process (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2013; Saldaña, 2009). Through the use of thematic analysis to identify patterns in seemingly random information and of content analysis to facilitate "... data reduction and sense making" (Patton, 2002, p. 453), the researcher was able to construct each individual case.
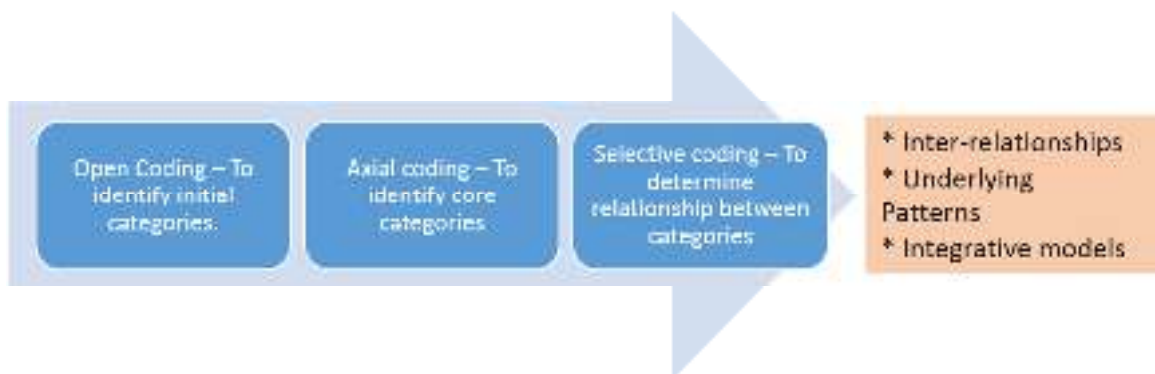
Figure 3.1. Overall Process of Qualitative Data Analysis

The criteria of internal homogeneity, i.e. how data in a given category holds together in a meaningful way, and external heterogeneity, i.e. how differences among categories are apparent, were used. The coding and classifying of convergence and divergence in data analysis facilitated the use of inductive and deductive analysis which led to the emergence of themes and categories. Inductive analysis of the case narratives were carried out to discover themes and patters while deductive analysis of these themes and patterns answered the research questions. The data analysis was an amalgamation of all the data that was collected. After identifying the findings of each individual cases separately, a cross case analysis of the two cases was carried out in the end to identify the common themes emerging from the study.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

In any research involving human subjects, the ethical issues become paramount and it becomes the responsibility of researcher to ensure that no harm to the subjects are done in any ways. Hughes and Hellings (1991) cautioned: "Researchers must always be conscious of problems their study can create and make every effort to minimize or eliminate any harm to their subject" (p. 226). Ethical concerns have traditionally centered on topics of *informed consent* (receiving consent after truthfully informing about the research), *right to privacy* (keeping the subject anonymous), and *protection from harm* (physical, emotional, or any other form) (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

To address the ethical concerns described by Fontana and Frey (2000), and also adhere to the regulations of the office of education under the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, the first step was to obtain approval from the Ministry of Education to

conduct such a study. The prescribed form for seeking permission was filled and sent through proper channels. Only upon receiving approval (Appendix A), an introductory contact was be made with each of the participating principals. An email was sent first to both the principals (Appendix B), followed by a telephone call to set up the first appointment to outline the whole process. Both the principals agreed to be responsible for participating in the study and also being a part of selecting teachers, students and parents. After careful selection of 'information-rich' participants, informed consent was taken from the participants only after they had clear insight into research design and their understanding of the role as a research participant (Appendix C). A letter of consent to the participants requesting to participate in the study was sent to all the principals participating in the study. This letter briefly explained the purpose of the study, the reasons for their selection, their right to privacy, and their protection from harm.

The questions asked during the interview were strictly related to the purpose of the study and in no way intruded the privacy of the participants. Participants had the right to decide what aspects of their personal opinions, beliefs, or practices needed to be communicated during the interview. Principals were informed before the interview itself, what potential benefits this study can bring to their schools and to them professionally. They were also explained how the research was designed to gain information on the effective practices of successful school principals like them, with the intention that this might be helpful to the principals who needed help.

One of the most popular methods used by researchers to hide the identity of their respondents is by anonymization. Although there have been growing instances of respondents wanting to be identified in research outputs (Grinyer, 2002; BERA, 2004), as was the case of all but one of the respondents in this study through a

written consent, nonetheless this study uses pseudonyms throughout this thesis in order to keep the identity of the respondents, their schools and the locality anonymous. The Social Research Association (SRA) advises to use pseudonyms but at the same time warns researchers to ensure that there is no potential damage to the data due to the change in identities of the respondents: 'Social researchers need to remove the opportunities for others to infer identities from their data. They may decide to group data in such a way as to disguise identities … or to employ a variety of available measures that seek to impede the detection of identities without inflicting very serious damage to the aggregate dataset … Some damage to analysis is unavoidable in these circumstances, but it needs to be weighed against the potential damage to the sources of data in the absence of such action' (SRA, 2003: 39). The nature of this study is such that use of pseudonyms will not impede data in any way and at the same time provide anonymity to the respondents.

3.10 Trustworthiness

In a multisite case study research, there are a number of elementary key elements that need to be integrated in the design to augment the quality of the study and its rigor and trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985), in their landmark work called 'Naturalistic Inquiry', posit that the issue of trustworthiness in a qualitative study is of utmost importance for its worth and proposed a set of four criteria – credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability – which has become the bedrock for ensuring the rigor and trustworthiness of a large number of subsequent qualitative studies. Credibility concerns with the confidence in the truthfulness of the study, transferability concerns with the applicability of the findings to other contexts, dependability concerns with the consistency of the findings and its ability to be

repeated while confirmability is concerned with the neutrality of the study leading to the elimination of researcher's bias.

In order to ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of this study, the techniques proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to implement their four criteria of trustworthiness was followed throughout the study. The remaining part of this section will illustrate these in detail.

3.10.1 Credibility

The credibility of a research establishes the research as believable by the richness of the information gathered for the analysis. For this study, a number of steps were taken to ensure credibility which is discussed in the following sections.

3.10.1.1 Triangulation

To ensure the rigor and credibility of a study, data should be collected from multiple sources which is called triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Robson, 2005 Triangulation is a term used for research designs where a variety of methods and sources of handling data are used to answer the research questions (Merriam, 1998; Picciano, 2006; Richards, 2005). It "involves the use of multiple and different methods, investigators, sources and theories to obtain corroborating evidence" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 239). For this study data was not only collected through interviewing the principal but also from the students, teachers, parents and the members of the school leadership team. Additionally, documents like school website, record of achievement data, behavioral records, academic achievement data, and achievement record in sports, attendance record, and information on the display board were scanned and observations were carried out for providing exhaustive triangulation. For example, when the principal claims that the attendance of the

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school is consistently over 95%, it was checked from the attendance records and on the attendance display board (scoreboard) for verification and triangulation.

3.10.1.2 Member Check

Member check is a technique used by qualitative researchers to validate the accumulated data from the informants for accuracy, explanation of additional information. Member check ensures that "…data and interpretations are continuously tested as they are derived from members of various audiences and groups from which data are solicited" (Guba, 1981, p. 85) and is crucial to ensure credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). For this study, all interview transcripts were given back to the respondents who read the transcripts and validated the data. The respondents suggested corrections and in some cases, provided additional information for clarification purposes. Member check also eliminated any chances of researcher's bias in interpreting the data.

3.10.1.3 Persistent Observation

The issue of rigor in data collection is of utmost importance for a qualitative researcher who strives to ensure that an in-depth study has been carried out for data collection (Bitsch, 2005, p. 83). Thus, extended observation of the site enables the researcher to acquire a deeper understanding of the key characteristics of the site (Guba, 1981). For this study, both the sites were visited several times over a long period of time which helped the researcher to thoroughly understand the essential elements of the setting and enabled in relevant data collection until no new information was forthcoming.

3.10.2 Transferability

Transferability of a research involves the degree of suitability of the research to be fit of other contexts as well. To achieve this, the researcher needs to provide extensive details of the steps for data collection, analysis and methods. In this study, following steps were taken to achieve transferability.

3.10.2.1 Thick description

Thick description "enables judgments about how well the research context fits other contexts, thick descriptive data, i.e. a rich and extensive set of details concerning methodology and context, should be included in the research report" (Li, 2004, p. 305). The purpose of providing think description of a qualitative study is to enable other researchers to successfully carry out other similar studies, without which, "… it is difficult for the reader of the final account to determine the extent to which the overall findings "ring true"(Shenton, 2004, p. 69). According to Guba, 1981, thick description allows easy transferability by providing "…comparison of this context to other possible contexts to which transfer might be contemplated (p. 86)". For this study, the researcher made sure that every step provided a thick description of the context and the method to facilitate easy transferability.

3.10.2.2 Theoretical/Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling can be defines "as selecting units (e.g., individuals, groups of individuals, or institutions) based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study's questions" (Teddlie & Yu, 2007, p. 77). Purposive sampling is done to ensure that the researcher is able to collect data from the respondents who are knowledgeable of the issues that are being studied (Schutt, 2006). The sites for this study was carefully chosen by the researcher through purposive sampling technique

which involved going through the achievement records provided by the local office of education of numerous principals who fit the selection criteria. The final site was chosen only when the researcher was convinced that it will provide rich data that will fulfil the objectives of the study.

3.10.3 Dependability

The dependability of a study is achieved by reporting each process in detail so that it can be repeated in similar contexts to achieve similar results. For this study, dependability was achieved through the following steps.

3.10.3.1 Audit Trail

An audit trail can be described as a transparent description of all the steps taken, from start to finish, to carry out the study including the methods of data collection, its recording, analysis and reporting (Bowen, 2009; Li, 2004). For this study, every step of the process has been justified with relevant support from the literature and has been specifically mentioned in the various sections of this thesis.

3.10.3.2 Code-Recode Strategy

According to Chilisa and Preece, (2005), to ensure the dependability of coding, a researcher needs to code and recode data more than once to eliminate any discrepancy and ensure the robustness of the codes and enhances its dependability. Manual coding was employed since it brings the researcher closer to the data and enhances understanding (Javed, 2012). Code-recode also helps the researcher to be closer to the data for better understanding and its subsequent presentation. The coding of the data for this study began as soon as the first data was collected and continued, with refinements and modifications, as new data was collected. Thus, by

the end of the whole process, the codes were re-coded a number of times which has enhanced the dependability of the study.

3.10.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is the aspect of a qualitative inquiry through which other researchers can confirm its results (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). It is "concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination, but are clearly derived from the data" (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 392) which can be achieved through an audit trial, triangulation, and thick description (Bowen, 2009; Koch, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Bowen (2009) emphasises the importance of audit trail in providing confirmability by claiming that "audit trail offers visible evidence—from process and product—that the researcher did not simply find what he or she set out to find" (p. 307). Miles and Huberman (1994) believe that for confirmability, it is important that the researcher's own predispositions is explicitly mentioned, including underpinning beliefs and the reasons for selecting one approach over the other. To provide confirmability for this study, a thorough audit trail was left with thick descriptions and triangulations. The researcher also explicitly described the underpinning epistemological beliefs that guided this study along with his own experience in the field of school leadership which guided the course of this study.

3.11 Summary

The chapter clearly elucidates the selection of a qualitative multi-case study as the appropriate method to study the practices of successful school principals. The epistemology and ontological philosophy is explained along with the paradigms in the beginning followed by an explanation how the case study approach uses the

researcher's data collection technique and the role of the researcher in detail. The sampling, data collection method, data analysis and ethical consideration are also explained. The next chapter will focus on the structure of reporting the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS OF INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDIES

Silverman (2000) equates the macrostructure a qualitative report with story-telling. He further explains that a qualitative thesis is telling story in a way that is "…a more conversational way of writing" (Silverman 2000: 243) which should elaborate the key concepts of the study, elicit explicitly how the findings support these concepts and how they align with the research objectives and the literature that was reviewed instead of hoping the somehow "…the reader will eventually find out these matters; telling an analytic story lays everything out on a plate at the outset" (Silverman 2000: 243). Other than the generic overview of what should be included in the 'story' of a qualitative data analysis, Silverman did not add much in terms of concrete guidelines. Surprisingly, while there is ample and ever-growing literature available on the guidelines for data collection, research design, interpretation and analysis of data, there is still a lack of specific procedures and guidelines when it comes to presenting the findings in the form of reports. "The reporting of study results confronts the qualitative researcher with a difficult problem", declares Kathleen and Marion (1984). Lamenting on the lack of enough structures for reporting qualitative findings, they go on to add that "Unlike the person who has undertaken an experimental or survey study, the qualitative researcher has no well-codified, generally accepted, protocol available as to how the methodology and findings of such a study best can be communicated". It does not come as a surprise then that the reports of qualitative findings have followed several different formats, (Glaser & Strauss, 1966; Klenow, 1981), including a significant number of those that follow highly unorthodox approach which confuses the readers who are used to reading highly structured accounts of experiments and surveys.

In an attempt to provide a semblance of structure to qualitative report writing, Dickson, Buma and Atkinson (1987) suggest that the style, structure and substance of the reports should be able to successfully address all the stated objectives of the research and should be written in a way that is able to convince its audience that each of the objectives has been addressed effectively.

Both Stake and Merriam claim that data collection and its analysis should begin simultaneously and that there is no specific point of data collection in a qualitative study which signals the beginning of data analysis (Flick, 2014; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2010, 1995). With the above in mind, for this study the analysis of data began as soon as the collection of data began and continued until the last bit of data was collected from the schools. The data was coded employing a repetitive process using tentative categories at the beginning and then further recoding and classifications were carried out as more and more data started pouring in until specific categories emerged. Cross validation of data collected from various sources for the purposes of triangulation was constantly carried out to "find regularities in the data" and "to compare different sources, situations and methods to see whether the same pattern keeps recurring", which has been recommended by MacMillan and Schumacher (2010: 379). For example, the claims of 'Coalition Building' by both the principals was cross-checked by the claims made by the parents, or the claims of 'Providing extra support' was cross-checked by the information collected from personal observations, the students, parents and the teachers. As an additional triangulation method, several documents like the school year book, school website, attendance records, data on achievement in the field of sports and co-curricular activities and the information boards in the school offices were scanned. The data analysis was the amalgamation of all the data. Several documents were After completing the

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individual case analysis, a thorough cross-case analysis and reflection on the categories of individual cases was carried out, integrating the findings which resulted in the five common themes which have been reported as five common dimensions in Chapter 7. The word "dimension" is borrowed from the manner in which Robinson (2007: 5) employs it for educational leadership contexts to explain "a set of related practices".

Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011), while explaining the importance of honoring the voice of participants in a qualitative study, states that "Today . . . voice can mean not only having a real researcher—and a researcher's voice—in the text, but also letting research participants speak for themselves" (p. 123). The interpretive qualitative approach demands an emphasis and honoring of the participants' voice and its meaning and knowledge which are crucial while presenting the findings of a qualitative research, since it enables the readers to experience the voice of the participants as closely as it is possible (Chandler, Anstey & Ross, 2015). They further claim that:

> Decisions about the representation of voice raise questions about
> the subjectivity of the "knower" and the process of sharing
> research findings. Negotiating the voice of the researcher with
> the voice of the participant in the dissemination process is an
> important part of qualitative research" (p. 2).

With the above suggestions in mind, the researcher finds it prudent to first report the findings of both the cases separately. The findings are purely based upon the responses from the participants and the observations and interpretations of the researcher which enables the readers to be closer to the voice of the respondents

while the discussion section presents a thorough analysis of the qualitative data in the light of recent studies and theoretical underpinnings. The findings are the result of a two-stage analysis consisting of stage one which resulted in individual case interpretations for the two cases and stage two in which a cross case analysis of the 'shared processes' among the cases was carried out. Shared processes are evolving interactions or responses in relation to a situation or context that bring about change (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2006). To articulate the findings of each individual case coherently, each case is depicted individually with a brief overview followed by an extensive description of the case. The case description includes the physical setting, the background of the principal, the background of the school and the background of the key respondents that participated in the study. The two individual reports of the cases provide a rich description of the context, the core leadership practices of individual principals and the enactment of these core practices by the successful principals in their respective schools. Each case description ends with a summary highlighting the important findings.

Silverman's suggestion of gripping and coherent storytelling was used as a guiding light. He advices reporting a qualitative case study in the following manner:

> 'In a sense, whichever story you choose can be safely left to personal choice. More important is whether you are telling some coherent story. …This means that the structure of your thesis should only rarely flow from the chronological order in which you happened to find out things' (Silverman 2000: 243-44)

4.1 The Case of SMK Urban

SMK Urban is located in the capital city of one of the larger states in northern Malaysia. It is the second largest city in the state and is the home for approximately 400,000 inhabitants. The city is the center for state administration and boasts of a large percentage of urban, educated and financially well-off population. The primary source of income for the state is farming however its capital city is growing rapidly thus a large amount of adjoining farms have been converted into housing developments and commercial buildings. Being the administrative center for the government, a significant number of people are government servants and the elected representatives of the state for the local assembly. However, it is also an important center for business. Being a historic city, it boasts of a number of historical places which attracts thousands of tourists each year which adds to the economy of the state. The climate throughout the state is tropical monsoon and the state receives ample rain throughout the year with September and October beings the wettest months which brings rains almost every day. During summers, the temperature reaches 35 degrees with high humidity while it is close to 30 degrees on an average throughout the year. Although a large majority of the people follows Islam as their religion, there is still a significant number of Chinese and Indians who provide a rich mix of diversity to the city. The city sits on the north-south highway which is the major road connecting the north of Malaysia with the south and is well connected with the other part of the country through trains, water and air.

Figure 4.1. Map depicting the Geographical location of the school

SMK Urban was established on the 1st January, 1965, and was originally known as another name which was changed in 1968. While waiting for the school building construction, the students were registered at three different schools; the male students were registered in one school, the females into another and the Chinese students were registered into a third school. The building construction completed in 1968 and students from the three schools moved to their new building on the 23rd September, 1968. Due to the increasing number of students, the building was extended with further construction to 24 classrooms. However, within a short period of time, these rooms too were not enough to accommodate the student inflow. Thus, to cater to the increasing numbers, the school operates in two sessions, one in the morning until noon and the other from noon until late afternoon. The school was renamed on the

21st of October, 1974. On the 2nd of April, 1975, the school was officially open with the new name and the officiating ceremony was attended by the Sultan Duli Yang Teramat Mulia Tunku Abdul Malik Ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Badlishah. There are currently over 800 students out of which approximately 60 percent are males. The school continues to progress in terms of infrastructure wherein a third floor has been added, and prayer room, dormitories, dining hall, Mechanical Drawing Lab, CAD Lab, library and accommodation for the students have been added over the years.

4.1.1 Principal's Profile

Arif (Pseudonym), the Principal of SMK Urban was born on the 12th of May, 1959. Principal Arif, as he likes to be called, has been in the field of education for over 31 years now, both as a teacher in the initial stages of his career and subsequently as an administrator for more than 9 years till date. He holds a bachelor degree in chemistry and a master's degree in educational management. During one of the meetings, he mentioned that he enrolled for a Ph.D. in information technology around 10 years ago but could not complete since he was too busy with his career. When asked whether he would still like to continue, he laughed it off citing that it was too late for Ph.D. now!

Principal Arif was appointed as the principal of SMK Urban on the 1st of January, 2012. Prior to accepting the position, he worked as the principal of a sports college, a job that he enjoyed a lot since he considers himself as a sportsperson. He is mild mannered and extremely friendly. When the researcher contacted him for the first time, he instantly met him without any appointment. When the idea of the research was explained, he immediately called one of his teachers and the first of a series of interviews was finalized in the first meeting itself. The researchers never had to wait

for an appointment; every time he was requested an appointment, he obliged. He is a fit person, reflecting his love for sports. His hobbies also include reading.

4.1.2 Other Respondents Profile

Apart from the principal, there were ten other people from the school that were interviewed. 3 teachers, 3 parents, 3 students and one administrator were selected. The administrator of the school is a part of the school management committee and plays a major role in all the decision-making at the school. He has been in the school for 5 years and has worked under the previous principal as well. Thus, he was able to provide with rich description of significant changes that happened at the school since the arrival of the current principal. The three teachers were all senior teachers who were at the school for at least nine years which provided rich description of not only the practices of the current principal but also of the previous principals. One of the three teachers has been at the school for 33 years and is due to retire in 2017. He had a wealth of information to share and provided significant information not only during the interviews but in subsequent visits as well. The parents and the students reported to be in the school for at least 4 years. One of the parents had been at the school for 6 years already and has two children in the school. He has been actively involved with the school affairs and the principal Arif often consults him when he needs advice from the parents. All these were with the principal for all of his tenure in this school and have witnessed the progress of the school. The table below gives a brief description of all the respondents:

Table 4.1

List of respondents from SMK Urban School

Name	Age (In Years)	Years in School	Gender	Position
Zuber	51	5	M	Administrator
Chang	58	33	M	Teacher
Azlina	37	13	F	Teacher
Rose	53	9	F	Teacher
Farida	48	6	F	Parent
Liza	43	4	F	Parent
Farizah	54	4	F	Parent
Farha	16	5	F	Student
Amin	17	5	M	Student
Atiqah	16	5	F	Student

4.1.3 The school context

The first objective of this study was to identify the contextual factors that influence the practices of the school principal. This section will attempt to answer this question. The findings of SMK Urban School's study identified a range of internal, external and the principal's own personal contexts in which the school operates. Internal contexts are the important issues that pertain within the school environment, mostly related to academic achievement, discipline of students, teachers and staff

members and the overall work environment within the school. The external contexts are related to the socio-economic background of students, the geographical location of the school, the guidelines and supervision of governmental agencies, the parents and the community. The personal contexts of the principal pertain to his training, experience and personal traits. Detailed findings of these contexts are given below.

Table 4.2

The School Context of SMK Urban

S.No.	Type of context	Context
1	Internal Context	a. Teacher's motivation b. Discipline c. Student's academic and co-curricular achievement d. School environment
2	External Context	a. Expectations of the Ministry of Education b. Parents and community engagement
3	Personal Context	a. Personal traits

4.1.3.1 Internal Context

Out of the three main contextual factors, the findings indicate that the internal context had maximum influence on the practices of the principal of SMK Urban which was shared by a majority of the respondents. There were four distinct manners in which the context manifested itself which are explained below.

Motivation of the teachers: The findings revealed that when the current principal joined the school, there was a severe lack of teamwork, teachers were divided into several factions and there was a general lack of motivation among them. For the principal of SMK Urban, teachers are the most important factors in the school success. "First priority is the teachers", he declares matter-of-factly. Although he did not mention specifically, it was apparent from several of his statements, and

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expressions that when he joined the school in 2012, the teachers did not work as a team and were not very motivated. Groupism was strife and no one was eager to join school activities. The principal states, "If we have teachers that are only mingled in selective groups and do not want to be involved in any programs, it is not good." It was apparent that he was not talking about the general characteristics of a good teacher; he was talking about the general state of affairs among the teaching staff of SMK Urban when he joined the school. He espouses similar sentiments a little while later in the interview when he states:

> The teachers must be hard working, close to each other. They do
>
> not have groups. Only certain teachers have groups but mostly are
>
> not.

The views about the teachers are corroborated by what the admin Zuber had to say in the following words, "…some teachers also have (had) problems before. There was no teamwork".

In a subsequent chat with Mr. Zuber, it was apparent that there were several teachers who were least motivated to work and indulged in groupism which harmed the team spirit of the rest of the members of the school. He also implied that the school was fortunate that few of those teachers no longer work for the school due to being transferred to other schools.

Discipline: The findings revealed that when the current principal joined in 2012, the school was notorious for its disciplinary issues. As clearly stated by student Amin, "this school was (in)famous because of discipline issue", the school had serious disciplinary problems which was affecting teaching and learning in the school. Student achievement was low as students weren't interested in studies. One of the

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teachers who were interviewed, teacher Chang was very vocal about the issue. He has been around for 30 years in the school and claims that discipline was always the biggest problem that the school faced. For him, although the discipline has shown some improvement, it is still a challenge that the principal faces, "The discipline, until today, it is quite hard." According to parents as well, discipline was one of the major issues. Parent Farida points out that when the current principal was appointed, "… most of the students are (were) quite naughty. Some always didn't come to the school." Another parent Liza also mentions discipline as the main area that the current principal had to deal with when she mentions that truancy, especially among the students in the school dormitory was too high, "…students who stay in the dormitory…now we do not hear any play-truant cases."

Students' academic and co-curricular achievement: The performance of a school in Malaysia is measured through a composite score that includes the academic achievement of the students and also their performance in co-curricular activities. As a result of poor performance in both the areas, the school was languishing at a below-average band 5, as per the criteria set by the Ministry of Education. There were no enrichment programs for the students, there was no individualized support for struggling students and the teaching and learning program was not focused.

The co-curricular activities were even worse, both in terms of quantity and quality. There were limited organized co-curricular activities and the students were not interested in them. The principal and the staff were also not very focused on this area. Admin Mr. Zuber puts the lack of interest for the activities among students in the following words:

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"Before this present principal, nobody was interested to join any activities. In terms of the performance of academic and co-curriculum, it was also not really impressive before.

Similar sentiments were offered by teacher Azlina when she says, "Some (the students) did not even like to involve in the sports."

The school environment: The findings clearly indicated that before the arrival of this principal, the school environment was not conducive to effective teaching and learning activities. As stated under the motivation section, the teachers were divided into several groups and were not willing to participate in school activities, which were already too few in number. The previous principal was authoritarian and would not involve anyone in the decision making process. He was tough with students and staff alike. Teacher Chang explains:

Last time, the principal was very stern. No argument with him. He will punish those students who didn't come to the school. This (current) principal he tries to do some psychology talk.

Teacher elaborates upon the 'regimental' style of work by the previous principal which had never allowed the school environment to be positive:
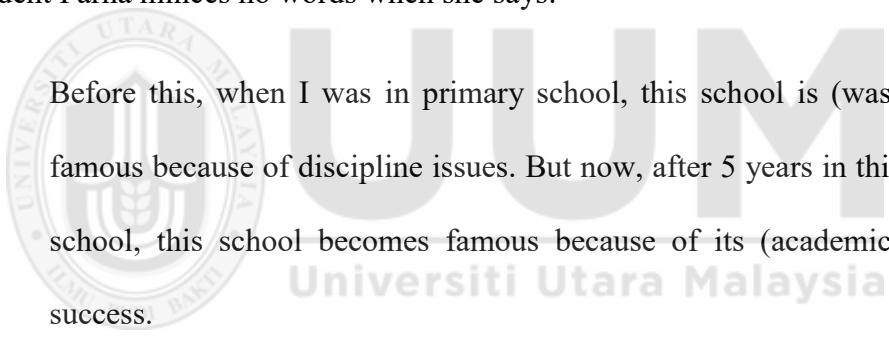
… she was like regiment attitude kind of leadership. So there was a lot of pressure. When there is such much pressure on you, you rebel. Right? When you rebel, things getting, like...negative, the students get pressured too much. The students questioned her. The teachers questioned her. When you are questioned by your sub-ordinate or students, it shows that the amount of respects that she is receiving and the working environment.

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4.1.3.2 External Contexts:

Apart from the internal contexts, there were a number of external contexts that influenced the practices of the principal of SMK Urban. These contexts are as follows.

Expectations of the Ministry of Education: When the current principal joined the school as its principal in the year 2012, SMK Urban was designated as a band 5 school by the Ministry of Education. Band 5 is considered to be an average school by the Ministry of Education standards. Being in the capital city of such a large state, the school was expected to be known for its academic performance. However, the school was more famous for its disciplinary issues that academic achievement. Student Farha minces no words when she says:

> Before this, when I was in primary school, this school is (was) famous because of discipline issues. But now, after 5 years in this school, this school becomes famous because of its (academic) success.

During the interviews and observations, it was evident that the single most important driver for this school was to improve the school rating from Band 5 to a higher band. The principal claims that when he joined the school for the first time, he was not happy with the school rating, as is evident when he says "...the school was in band 5. Band 5 is considered as a lower rank." Low rating of the school due to lower achievement was one of the biggest challenges for the principal who was determined to change the status quo. The principal declares poignantly:

> There is no point if we just do our work without achieving something and no progress at all.

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The Ministry of Education, Malaysia (MoE) carried out a comprehensive review of its education system in 2011 with the aim of completely transforming its education system to international levels by the year 2025 (Malaysian Education Blueprint, 2015-2025). In order to achieve this vision, the ministry is heavily dependent upon improved achievement from its schools. As a result, expectations from the schools have increased.

The ministry emphasizes on achievement in STEM areas. From the next year, passing the English language exam is made compulsory by the Ministry of Education. Teacher Chang explains the expectations:

> … we need to stress on the Science and Maths …we focus on science and math and bring up the students...more science and maths orientated.

Parents and the community: Parents and members of the community form an important part of the school success as the key stakeholders (Burcu and Sungur 2009; Epstein 1991; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; Olivos 2012). When the school principals encourage and involve parents in the education of their children, the academic achievement of the students increases (Bartel, 2010; Zhao and Akiba, 2009). At SKMTAM, parents and the wider member of the school community were not involved in the education process. There was no formal system in place for their participation and activities that involved them were rare. The PTA did not meet regularly and parents felt that they were not welcome to come to the school. Parent Farida was very upfront when she claims that "…the last time (previously), the parents are (were) not very welcome".

4.1.3.3 Personal Context

The personal attributes of the principal of SMK Urban had a significant role to play in defining the practices of the principal. There were a number of ways in which the personal contexts manifested itself. Principal Arif's friendliness and approachable attitude came out as his biggest assets. His warmth and caring nature enabled him to win hearts of all, be it parents, teachers or students. He knows his strength and deliberately uses it to his advantage. Teachers look up to him in their times of need; whether professional or personal in nature. Parents, who felt unwanted before the principal came to the school felt welcome because they find principal Arif welcoming. Teacher Rose's remark on principal Arif's personal trait is telling: "…he is different from the other principals before. … I think his friendliness, his better PR…I feel that he really cares about the teachers". Similar sentiments were conveyed by other respondents who praised the principal for his friendly and approachable behavior. For example, teacher Chang claims "…and he is very friendly person.." and the administrator Mr. Zuber finds him strict but a friendly person when he claims that he is "strict but friendly." Parent Farizah, claims him to be "very friendly" and claims that he is easily approachable, "we just come to the school to meet him".

4.1.4 The Core Practices

The second research question for this study was to identify the core practices of the school principal. This section will attempt to answer the question.

According to Leithwood, (2006), "Core practices are not all that people providing leadership in schools do. But they are especially critical practices known to have significant influence on organizational goals" (Leithwood et al., 2006b, p. 19). Although these core practices are common to all successful principals, these practices themselves do not bring success unless enacted according to the unique

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contextual environment of the school. Successful school principals draw from the reservoir of their own value system which, in turn, influences their actions and directions for institutional purpose (Day et al., 2000). Table 5.2 depicts the list of core practices of the principal of SMK Urban in response to his own unique context. In the previous sections, the school contexts under which principal Arif operates were identified through the findings was laid down. This section will focus on the core practices of the principal and how these core practices were enacted in response to the contexts identified above. The findings revealed that the principal of SMK Urban has a repertoire of seven core practices that he uses in his day to day work that has brought him success. These seven core practices are given in table 4.3.

Table 4.3

The seven core practices of the principal of SMK Urban

S. No.	Core practices
1.	Providing vision & specific goals for the school.
2.	Improving curricular and co-curricular activities.
3.	Being friendly and approachable.
4.	Developing teachers and staff members.
5.	Creating positive work environment.
6.	Collaborating with stakeholders.
7.	Creating behavioral expectations and maintaining discipline.

The core practices are themselves immaterial unless we know how these core practices are enacted in response to the context of SMK Urban. The following

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section will describe the core practices along with the enactment of these practices into the day to day activities of the school. The findings are reported individually for each of the seven core practices, which are as follows.

4.1.4.1 Providing vision & specific goals for the school

The principal of SMK Urban provides clear vision and goals to the members of the school community. One of the most prominent findings of this case study was the way the principal of SMK Urban articulates his vision and goals for the school. The study clearly indicates that school's vision and goals were well articulated and reinforced regularly so that the goals were never out of sight from the members of the school community. Evidence also clearly indicates that although the vision and goals are clearly derived from that of the Ministry of Education, the principal took it upon himself to make it as a personal goal. He states it very clearly that the vision is derived from the expectation of the ministry regarding the school ranking:

> …we know about the current status which (what) is the ranking of
>
> this school? So we should have vision when come to a school.

In every meeting that the researcher had with the principal, he always pointed out the school goals and linked all his efforts towards achieving the goals. He informs that the first thing that he did here in 2012 was to let teachers know what his expectations are from the school:

> I let the teachers know that we must move from lowest rank to the
>
> higher rank. It is quite embarrassing because this school is OK (in
>
> terms of location and socio-economy). There is no point if we just
>
> do our work without achieving something and no progress at all. Let
>
> us together bring our students and this school to achieve success. I
>
> want the students to have good (academic) qualifications.

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Another striking finding under this category was that the principal not only provides with the overall goals for the school but also breaks it down into specific, time bound targets. Right at the beginning, he quantifies the overall goals like 'Achieving something', 'success', 'academic qualifications' into specific targets and explains to all the stakeholders so that there was a clarity of purpose among all:

> Now we have target, our current level is band 5. So how are we going to get on to band 4? What is the score for Band 4? Each Band has its own score composite and I need to explain this to the teachers. Then the teachers realized about this (score composite). Now I have targeted of band 2. In order the school to achieve band 2, students must score at least 70 (marks) minimum and above.

He not only explains the goals for the school to the teachers but also ensures that students know what they are set out to achieve. The band system of the Ministry of Education is made clear to them explicitly:

> The score for Band 1 is around 90 to 100. Band 2, 80 to 90. So Band 3 now is 70 to 80, Band 4, 60 to 59. Band 5, below. They (the students) need to have at least 1 to 2 As. So we tell them (the students) if they get only 50 is not impressive. If they get 50, then you have to target 60 and above.

In fact, as a true transformational leader, he inspires his team to internalize these goals as their own so that each member of the school aims towards achieving the same goal. The administrator, Mr. Zuber's statement regarding the goals for the school was as if it was his own personal goal for the school, "Our target is Band 2. That is our challenge".

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Teacher Azlina also conveys the same sentiments when she speaks about improving the academic achievement:

"…then only we can go to Band 2. That is a challenge for us."

4.1.4.2 Improving curricular and co-curricular activities

The principal of the SMK Urban improves curricular and-co-curricular activities in the school. Findings from the case study strongly suggest that academic achievement was the highest priority for the principal. All his efforts are driven by his single-minded determination of improving teaching and learning activities in the school which would improve academic achievement of all the students.

I identified what are the weaknesses of this school. So, I know in which level the school is now. … Then, why their achievement is not impressive. We also compared the achievement of students in every subject.

He is a very much a hands-on principal when it comes to following up with the achievement data. He is data-driven and works with teachers and identifies all the students who are not performing in any of the subjects. He calls it 'headcount'.

We analyzed the student's achievement. There are headcount in each class. Every subject also has headcount. So did the students could not score this (hand gesture to show high) mark? Then we (the teachers) studied and discussed amongst the teachers in the meetings and we also have post-mortem. Every test we have (post-mortem), why students cannot score 73, for example. During this discussion, students can share what are their problems and teachers can also discussed about the problems (regarding the students' problem) too.

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Armed with the data, he immediately tasks teachers to commence extra classes for the students who need assistance. Admin Zuber also points out how the principal takes keen interest in academic improvement of students and monitors student achievement closely. He mentions the policy of headcount and corroborates what the principal had to say:

> In this school, we have headcount of students. So will analyze the data in terms of the increase or the decrease of students' score. He checks on the percentage almost every month. From that, the principal can make sure that students with poor result will be given briefing, advice, or warning so that the students can make improvement with their scores.

The principal is also keen on improving the co-curricular standards of the school. He personally supervises these activities and whenever possible, attends personally to encourage students. The school website clearly indicates a number of achievements by the students in co-curricular area where they have won accolades at state level and national level during the past three years.

4.1.4.3 Being friendly and approachable

Most of the interviewees claim that the principal was friendly and approachable to all the stakeholders. The principal himself claims that he deliberately portrays himself as a friendly and approachable person to win the hearts of his people. He believes that it is easier for him to get work done out of people if they like him. If people do not like him, they will not work voluntarily:

> They still do their works but in their hearts, they also say something (facial expression shows negative feelings), they get angry, they don't

like people. What kind of principal is that! (Hand gesture to indicate

people are not satisfy with the principal), usually it is like that. Later,

everybody will not like the principal. That is why the principal should

have good personality in order to make people to feel happy. They will

work voluntarily.

The principal believes that being friendly with everyone leads to a better

school environment which leads to better results. Being friendly or

approachable is a human trait but he deliberately uses these to great effect:

So that I know them and they also can get to know me better. First

thing to make a successful school (is that) I want us to have friendly

and devoted relationship.

4.1.4.4 Developing teachers and staff members

The principal of SMK Urban works towards developing his teachers and staff

members. When asked what he did first when he joined the school as its principal,

the principal was quick in his response:

First priority is the teachers. We could (hand gesture to indicate

shape) any students however, teachers' commitment is more

important.

The findings clearly demonstrates that the principal Arif focusses on developing his

staff, especially the teachers with the firm belief that they were the ones who would

eventually become instrumental in bringing positive results for the school. He wants

the school to have a strong academic team which will work towards higher academic

achievement:

They must be a strong team. It is important, because (if) the
teachers works for student, the academic results will come later
(eventually). The priority is the teachers and staff.

He believes that he needs to prioritize teachers first, build up a close relationship
with them so that it will be easier for him to give work to teachers and they would be
willing to do it:

I believe I should prioritize the teachers is because I need to ask
help or assistance in term of cooperation from them. If we do not
have close relationship with the teachers, how can we ask help from
them?

The administrator Mr. Zuber points out that the principal personally takes interest in
the professional development of his staff members:

He himself will teach the teachers on how to implement certain
things. He also likes to use ICT method and tell the teachers to use
technology in their teaching method…he always use this method to
help the teachers and monitor all activities and advice the teachers
to improve in teaching skills

Teacher Azlina is one of the many teachers who was encouraged by principal Arif to
pursue further studies. Teacher Azlina just completed her Master's degree. She is
gracious in thanking the principal for encouraging and motivating her for the degree:

Since like...I am one of the... I am (have) just done with my masters.
He encourages most of us... if possible...all of us... He wants us to
(get more skills and qualifications).

Teacher Rose corroborates what teacher Azlina had to say about the principal being
very encouraging in developing his staff members:

encourages the teachers to further their studies for their masters (degree), and he makes it easier. If you cannot come on Friday, if you have activities on Friday or Saturday, it is fine with him. OK. Education first for the teachers.

4.1.4.5 Creating positive work environment

The principal of SMK Urban creates a positive work environment for the teachers and staff members. His practices towards creating such an environment within the school are strongly guided by his belief that:

> They (teachers) must have close relationship amongst themselves and they (should) do all things together. … Teachers (should work) with high commitment, initiative, cooperative, collaborative and teacher who is happy and healthy.

He does not put any undue pressure on teachers to do certain things. He leaves them alone while at the same time, gradually, suggests something new and then asks for their advice on what he suggests them to do:

> I do not put pressure on them to do other new things. I just let them proceed with whatever they are doing and then have a discussion on any further program that can be done in the future. So that they can give any suggestions to be practiced in the future programs.

He ensures that teachers have a conducive working environment. He provides them with opportunities to participate in sports activities so that they can come together and remain healthy. He conducts field trips and team building activities which helps "… develop quality time amongst them." He trusts his team and delegates work among them frequently.

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While stating that the principal supports them in whatever they do, teacher Azlina believes that the principal has created such a positive work culture in the school where people cooperate with each other that he doesn't need to put pressure on teachers to complete a task:

> He did not give us pressure when he asked things for us to do. So, It should be OK with us. We already have good (work) culture; work for each other, then it should be no problem.

Teacher Chang feels that the interaction of the principal with his staff using 'human touch' is the key to a great working environment within the school campus.

> if you got any problem, you can consult with him and he will listen to you. He will cut it short. Other type of headmasters, the previous headmasters, few of them very authoritative. My words mean my words. So, they do not have that human touch to (for) you. You can feel it.

Teacher Azlina believes that the principal always supports them in trying out new programs or methods irrespective of whether they will be able to succeed or not. He just lets them give it a try. There are no repercussions for failures and he doesn't blame anyone for trying out new things.

4.1.4.6 Collaborating with the stakeholders

The principal of SMK Urban builds up a strong relationship with the stakeholders including the parents and other members of the school community. He uses his alliances that he has developed so carefully, with the parents, government agencies

like AKEPT, the Ministry of Education offices or local hospitals to the advantage of his school. He calls the relationship between the school and the parents as "this is our base." He elaborates:

> The success of the school is also contributed by the parents and community. We establish a relationship between teachers and the parents and other stakeholders. That is our base.

4.1.4.7 Creating behavioral expectations and maintaining discipline

The principal of SMK Urban creates explicit behavioral expectations for students and maintains discipline in the school. For principal Arif, discipline forms the bedrock of the school environment. Student's attendance is a big issue for him. When he joined in 2012, absenteeism was rife, ranging between 80 percent and 90 percent which was confirmed by the past records. He makes constant efforts, through awareness, programs and supervision to ensure that attendance is always more than 90 percent on any given day. Parent Farida points out that absenteeism was a problem but with the efforts of the current principal, it has improved. Parent Farizah also talks about low attendance and how it has improved under the current principal. The researcher, during his numerous visits to the school personally observed the attendance to be between 90 to 95 percent on an average. On two occasions, it was more than 96 percent! He achieved this by making 'the school an interesting place', as he puts it.

The Administrator, Mr. Zuber elaborates on other aspects of the discipline in the school. He believes that the principal considers discipline as something that is extremely important and expects teachers to take charge and ensure proper discipline. The discipline has improved since the current principal has taken charge.

> All the students follow the discipline and not many discipline cases
>
> such as play-truant…We have religious approach. … in order for

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the school to overcome discipline problem amongst these students

is to give teachers to be in charge.

Student Atiqah was very forthcoming when she talks about the improved discipline among students due to the strict efforts of the current principal:

before this, the discipline in this school was very disappointing. But now, if the student has discipline issue, the principal will expel the student from this school. Problematic students will be fixed but those who could not be fixed anymore will be expelled.

Parent Ms. Liza, whose child stays in the dormitory of the school, talks about how the dormitory students were unruly before and now it is rare to hear any disciplinary issues out of the dormitory:

For example, the students who stay in the dormitory, now we do not hear anybody play truant cases. The principal gives instructions to the teachers and always monitor. Since my child stays at the dormitory, I rarely hear any problems there.

4.1.5 Enactment of the core practices

The third research question of this study was to identify the context-based enactment of the Core practices of the school principal. This section will attempt to answer this third research question. The following table 4.4 summarizes the enactment of the seven core practices of principal Arif:

Table 4.4

Enactment of the seven core practices

S.No.	Core Practices	Enactment of core practices
1	Providing vision & specific goals for the school.	a. Formulating common goals for the school b. Determining the focus c. Improving the school rating
2	Improving curricular and co-curricular activities.	a. Data driven analysis of the current situation b. Improving the academic achievement of the school c. Developing co-curricular activities d. Taking into account the socio-economic factors
3	Being friendly and approachable.	a. Using personal traits with strong human orientation b. Developing inter-personal relationships
4	Developing teachers and staff members.	a. Focus on building coalition with teachers b. Providing individualized attention
5	Creating positive work environment.	a. Decision making through consultations b. making gradual changes c. Motivating students and staff d. Creating positive work environment, collegiality and teamwork
6	Collaborating with stakeholders.	a. Involving parents in the school affairs b. Reaching out to community
7	Creating behavioral expectations and maintaining discipline.	a. Improving attendance b. Being firm and fair with teachers and students c. Improving discipline among students.

The remaining part of this section will explain in detail the findings for the enactment of the core practices of principal Arif.

4.1.5.1 Enactment of the core practice of providing vision and specific goals for the school

Inheriting a school that lacked vision and direction, principal Arif was able to transform a directionless school to a school that had concrete time-bound goals. He

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believes that a school without proper goals to achieve will ultimately achieve nothing. Although public schools in Malaysia are governed by the vision statement given by the Ministry of Education, it is still schools responsibility to create concrete goals that will enable them to realize the vision. Principal Arif, in consultation with his teachers and staff members analyzed the current state of affairs within the school, identified the areas that need improvement and set specific goals for each individual. His goals are directed by his intentions to improve upon the school rating, one step at a time. Due to his focus, the school has already moved from Band five to Band three and is poised to be a Band 2 school during next year. Principal Arif enacts this core practice into the following three ways:-

a. Formulating a common goal for the school: The Ministry of Education, Malaysia provides all the schools with a common vision and mission and all the schools are expected to abide by them. Hence, the principal does not have to create a separate vision and goals for the school.

> We do not have our own vision and mission. We should follow the
>
> vision and mission that is given from the ministry. We need to achieve
>
> the given vision and mission by the achievements of the students.

However, from within the vision of the Ministry of Education, he has made specific goals for his school and makes sure that every member of the school community is aware of the goals and is working towards achieving it collectively. He acts as a transformational leader and inspires his staff members to inculcate these goals as their own goals and work towards its achievement:

> that is our vision and mission, to make our students to be outstanding
>
> in both curriculum and co-curriculum … we tell the teachers to be

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responsible to reach the education philosophy. As teachers, what are our roles, because working is part of our 'ibadah' (worship) and responsibility, accountability, integrity, trustworthy? In order to achieve these (qualities) we encourage them (the students) by organizing courses, professionalism development. This is part of their responsible so they must do it.

Two most important goals for the school are to achieve Band 2 status and the attendance to be in between 90 to 95 percent every day. Each member of the school community, during their interviews knew that this is the goal. The principal not only ensures that the goals are well communicated to the members of the school community during meetings, assemblies and personal talks, but also takes active part in identifying the areas that need improvement, formulating a plan to set things right and being a part of the implementation process as well. As the administrator Mr. Zuber points out:

> he will analyze the data in terms of the increase or the decrease of students' score. He checks on the percentage almost every month.

b. Determination and focus : One important trait of the principal that stood out in terms of the school was his determination and focus to achieve the goals at all cost. Among his first goals was to increase the attendance, which was in the lower 80 percent in 2012 to over 90 percent every day. The attendance board outside the school office clearly depicted the improvement in the attendance which was consistently over 95 percent for the current year. Several attempts in the past went futile and the attendance never really picked up. However, with his determination, he was able to

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achieve the target and the attendance is more in the region of 90-97 percent every day. He took several steps to achieve his target. The admin Mr. Zuber explains some of them:

One concept of our school is, we call it as 'Sekolah Penyayang' (Loving School), (that) every day any of eight senior assistants, the admin staff, will stand on the school gate to monitor the attendance of the students. One of these staff will have to stay there with the principal to receive students' attendance. This can make students feel that they are welcomed to come to this school.

Teacher Rose, while talking about the success the school has achieved in sports also praises the principal for his focus and determination to achieve when she says "… his determination, he is serious about the things that he asked people to do.." Teacher Azlina also talks about how focused the principal is "… he is passionate on (about) it, so he focuses on it." The principal himself talks about being determined and focused in the pursuit of school's goals. It was due to his determination that in a short span of three years, the school moved to band 3 from band 5. He explains in detail how he planned this and how he urged his academic staff to focus on the goal:

Before, this school was in Band 5. Band 5 is considered as lower rank. There are 42 secondary schools around Kedah, and now this school is in 20th rank. From this, we can have target and be involved to improve the school. So I let the teachers know that we must move from lower rank to the higher rank.

c. Improving the school rating : Every effort of the school principal of SMK Urban culminates into the one greater goal which is to become a band 2 school in the next couple of years and then aim for the ultimate prize of being a Band 1 school. During the interview with the principal, the reference to school rating was made on numerous occasions. Other members of the school community also indicated how their collective efforts are geared towards achieving the greater goal of earning the highest possible rating. He believes that having a higher goal is the purpose of working in a school "There is no point if we just do our work without achieving something and no progress at all. Let us together bring our students and this school to achieve success." This mantra seems to have worked since the school has moved from Band 5 to band 3.

The target of higher school rating has been well-communicated to the members of the school community and each member seemed to be motivated to do their best in fulfilling the dream. The Admin Mr. Zuber informs, with a tinge of pride that "But now our school is Band 3 school. Score composite for this school almost reach to Band 2." Teacher tang also seemed focused on achieving Band 2, however he thought that it may happen in two to three years.

4.1.5.2 Enactment of the practice of improving curricular and co-curricular activities

The principal of SMK Urban firmly believes that for the school to become successful there should be a balance between academic and non-academic activities and the school should excel in both the areas, "we provide facilities for sport such as courts. For me, I don't want them (students) just to focus on academics only. I want students to be more (Hand gestures to say balance)." He is also well aware that to achieve

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higher band, his school must perform well in both academic achievement and co-curricular activities, especially sports.

a. Data driven analysis of the current situation: The principal believes in studying the current situation first, in order to improve teaching and learning within the school. The principal himself states that "First, I identified what are the weaknesses of this school (in academic achievement). So, I know in which level the school is now." He recalls that when he came to the school in 2012, the first thing that he did was to carefully study the status of the school in terms of the school environment, academic achievement and the background of the students:

> In the first month, … I looked into the achievement of teachers and studied everything, including the culture of the students and it guides me to a conclusion. From that, we know about the current status.

He believes that data is everything and a principal should master the data. His decisions are all data driven:

> my decision must be based on the data. We cannot just talk...that is why we should have data. Study it first. … All achievement should be recorded in the data, including co-curriculum and sport. … because we want to make post-mortem to find why couldn't achieve certain things? A principal must master the data.

It was observed by the researchers that he keeps all the achievement records and its analysis in his office and refers to these regularly.

Figure 4.2. The data files kept in the principal's office in SMK Urban

From the data that he collected, he identified the areas of growth and chalked out plans for improvement. Admin Zuber elaborates upon how the principal uses data to study the situation by stating "So he will analyze the data in terms of the increase or the decrease of students' score. He checks on the percentage almost every month." The principal involves teachers into the analysis of the current situation. This becomes apparent when he says "Then we studied and discussed amongst the teachers in the meetings and we also have post-mortem. Every test we have post-mortem."

For new students, to give more personalised attention according to their needs, he looks into their records at the time of admission and streams them according to their ability so that they can get focused attention of their teacher teachers. He explains the procedure of doing so:

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We separate them (the students) when they (the students) came to this school. We didn't select them (the students); they (the students) choose to come to this school because this school is not a premiere school. This is the general school. When we separated them (the students), we studied their (the students) achievement, looked at their As (subject score) and separated them according to their achievements (subject score).

b. Improving the academic achievement of students: The principal's vision for the school is quite straightforward; he wants it to be the best in academic performance. He believes that school's academic performance is the key to achieve its goals. His major focus since 2012 is to uplift the performance of the students. He focuses on the achievement of each and every student. Here is how he explains the process how he evaluates their performance:

We analyzed the student's achievement (after each test). There are headcount in each class. Every subject also has headcount. So, the student could not score this (hand gesture to show high) mark. Then we (the teachers) studied and discussed amongst the teachers in the meetings and we also have post-mortem. Every test we have (post-mortem), why students cannot score 73, for example. During this discussion, students can share what are their problems and teachers can also discussed about the problems (regarding the students' problem) too. For example they (the students) do not attend school.

Mr. Chang attributes the success of the school to the relentless pursuit of improving the school performance by the principal when he says "He is quite concerned with

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the student's performance." The principal knows exactly what he wants to do to enhance the rating of the school. He explains in detail:

In order for us to achieve better band (rank) … we must put a standard on our school. It is unlike the primary school, so we need to push and do it. Then, we discuss with the teachers about what programs should we have/make for the students. … Then we create activities and programs (for the students). Now we have target, our current level is Band 5. So how are we going to get on Band 4? What is the score for Band 4? Each Band has its own score composite and I need to explain this to the teachers. Then the teachers realized about this (score composite). Now I have targeted Band 2. In order the school to achieve Band 2, students must score at least 70 minimum and above. From here, students also know that they should score 73 marks. If the students are not able to score (70 and above), (they are) referred to the headcount of the students. Each teacher has to find why this group of students couldn't score 75 marks in the test. … That is why we need to let the teachers know how to get Band 2 and Band 1. I want teachers to know what they supposed to do for the students.

Student Atiqah too acknowledges his focus on academic achievement and individual attention that he places on every student:

The principal always concern about the academic of the students. If student has low marks, then the principal will call the student and ask the students politely why the students couldn't score. He is very caring to the students in term of academic.

The admin Zuber also corroborates this opinion when he states that "From that (data), the principal can make sure that students with poor result will be given briefing, advice, or warning so that the students can make improvement with their scores."

Student Amin also finds the principal to be focused on improving the academic achievement of all the students, while explaining various programs that were initiated by the current principal, Amin couldn't stop himself from comparing the present principal with his predecessor:

> With the old principal, we don't have so many programs (for academic improvement). But now, with the new principal, he makes many programs such as 'Permata' (Diamond) Program, 'Quality Program' and then 'Harapan' (Hope) Program. … and after midyear exam, he will bring us to Pendang Lake Resort, to make academic program there.

c. Developing Co-curricular Activities: Before joining SMK Urban, the principal of was in a sports school. Thus he is keen on developing co-curricular activities within the school, especially sports. He gives co-curricular activities priority rooted in the knowledge that it counts towards the success of the school. He claims that "to get Band 2, it is the combination of school performance, environment and sports achievement." Driven by this knowledge, he has created a climate in the school that gives great importance to sports. Student Atiqah explains how he focuses on sports, encourages students and actively participates in giving them encouragement:

> also co-curriculum such as netball and football. The netball team, under fifth category, of this school is a Champion in a netball competition in District Level. The under 8th category is the Runner

Up in District Level. He likes to give us support. Even if the team has

lost the game, but he still supports them. He wants us not to feel

under self-esteem when we lose a game.

Parent Farizah is very appreciative of the efforts that the principal makes to collaborate with other schools and gives exposure of out-of-school environment to the students. She explains how the principal cooperates with other schools to his benefit:

Sometimes we have like this, for good students we have the

collaboration with other schools also. We have PERMATA group for

the excellent students. We have targeted for example to get 4 As. So

the counsellor makes collaboration with other school like Science

School Pokok Sena, last year we have Jenan School. This year we

went to Pokok Sena school. Sometimes they go to Sungai Petani

Science School. So we have the collaboration with other schools also.

Teacher Chang also praises the principal for his active involvement in co-curricular activities, especially sports. He concentrates on one sport at a time, excels in it and moves on to the next one:

He is quite focused. For example, sports. He will go (attend) every

game. He started to focus on football. Then, now he is focusing

in....what we call 'bola jaring' in English (Net ball)?

Teacher Rose is all praise for the principal in the way he has brought a complete turnaround in the area of sporting achievement for the school when she declares proudly "…in the past few years our school has established a name with the football team and the netball team", and this has all happened because of "his determination;

he is serious about the things that he asked people to do. He shows his support in terms of monitoring."

The admin Zuber explains how the school was not doing well in co-curricular activities and how the present principal has brought a turnaround:

Before this present principal, nobody was interested to join any activities. In terms of the performance of academic and co-curriculum, it was also not really impressive before…. he also close to the students; it drives the students to feel motivated to be successful. If the students were invited to any competition, he will encourage and support the students. The students will always do all out and full of commitment in the competition. In fact, the principal also always attend all competition to give support to the students.

d. Taking into account the Socio-economic factors: While concentrating on academic and co-curricular activities, the principal takes into account the socio-economic factors of the students. This enables him to better understand the student's background and focus on how he can use this knowledge to improve achievement. He links socio-economic factors with student achievement and wonders "For students, their socio-economy is good because this school is located in urban area. Then, why their achievement is not impressive." He further states that "There (is a) relation between academic qualification and socio-economy and we do not expect students with bad achievement." It is worth noting that the school is situated in an urban area and most of the students come from quite well-off families. However there are still significant number of

students who come from low socio-economic backgrounds. Among the significant findings was the way he managed to ensure that students from lower socio-economic background with limited space at home to study are given opportunity to study within the school late in the evening:

> The children at their (the parents) house; if they (the students) do not have appropriate space to study, we provide them with the facilities here (hand gesture to show at this school) for students to study at night. For example, some poor houses are with no good facilities. So I asked them (the students) to come to the school and study. We provide (the facilities) to them up to this level.

In these evening and night classes, there is always a teacher to supervise them. For students who are extremely in need of accommodation, the school offers them facilities, again supervised by school teachers. "Because some families, they are poor and they do not have space (in their house) to study. Small house. Usually Malay people have plenty of children...so a bit difficult", he states matter-of-factly.

4.1.5.3 Enactment of the practice of being friendly and approachable

The personal traits of the principal stood out among all the practices of SMK Urban. Everyone who was interviewed talked about how friendly and approachable the principal was and how it helped in building up a motivated and dedicated team. His personal traits came to the fore in a number of ways. It seems the principal of SMK Urban has made a deliberate attempt to be friendly and approachable. He is aware of his personal quality and he uses it to his advantage. He explains:

> I seldom become angry to people. I am so friendly and never get mad to people. Anybody can be hard working, but to attract and be kind to

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people is quite difficult. We always have to approach them, touch

them by shaking hands, say hello...it is some kind of personality that

is not quite hard to do. It comes naturally.

The principal of the SMK Urban is always available to the members of the school community and interacts with them in a very friendly manner. Among all his core practices, his interpersonal skills stand out. Almost every respondent finds him friendly and approachable. Teacher Rose is quick to point out the fact that his friendliness and PR skills sets him apart from the previous principal and brings him closer to the teachers:

he is different from the other principals before. In terms of his.... I

think his friendliness, his better PR. Ok, because I feel that he really

cares about the teachers' need.

Similar sentiments are conveyed by student Atiqah when she says "he is very friendly" or by teacher Chang claiming "…and he is very friendly person.." Although the administrator Mr. Zuber finds him strict, he is quick to point out that the principal is "strict but friendly." Parent Farizah, while calling him "very friendly" also likes the way he is approachable anytime to anyone:

you know, it is easy to share or you talk to him. In fact, you don't

have to go to see him personally in his office. If he walks along,

then you can go and see him.

Parent Liza also feels that the principal is friendly and if the parents want to see him and he is available, he always meets them. She explains how easy it is for the parents to approach the principal:

Usually the parents will call the school and ask whether the principal has free time for consultation on that day. If it is confirmed that he is available, then we just come to the school to meet him.

a. Using personal traits with strong human orientation: During the interviews and observations, it became apparent that his friendly and approachable demeanor has won the hearts of every member of the school community. Teacher Rose could not help but compare him with the previous principal in terms of his friendliness "he is different from the other principals before, in terms of his.... I think his friendliness, his better PR." The admin Zuber agrees with Teacher Rose when he says "He is friendly" and so does parent Farizah when she claims that the principal is "friendly… friendly oriented." Mr. Chang too claims that the principal is too friendly; so much so that sometimes students take advantage of his friendliness "When you being too friendly to the students, some of them will take advantage". However parent Farida disagrees somewhat when she says "He is very friendly, but strict."

The admin Zuber lists down a lot of personal qualities that he sees in his principal while stating that "He is strict but in the same time he is a loving person and friendly … He has integrity, and the way he talks...he respects people." Teacher Chang is impressed by the 'human touch' of the principal and he could not help comparing his personal traits with his predecessors. He explains how principal Arif always allows teachers to leave the school campus and attend to urgent personal matters first:

If you have any problem, you can just discuss it with him. He will let you go. 'Do not worry about the school; you can leave the school now.

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If your children are sick, you can go'. That is the human touch, very

hard to find this kind of people nowadays, especially big boss like him.

… he (the principal) is very good as compared to the previous

principals.

Teacher Rose is also fascinated by his kindness and personal touch. She calls an

incident which touched her heart:

We can just WhatsApp him or SMS him. Text him like "Sir, I am not

feeling well", He understands. I was once having severe headache,

my class started late around 11.00 a.m. So I SMS him (the principal).

"Sir, can I come late? I am having severe headache." Then he replied

"OK, have a rest first." Can you get a principal like that? He is so

understanding.

Student Farha is so impressed with the personality of the principal that she claims

that "he is like a father at this school"! She feels welcomed in the school and praises

the principal for being a great motivator when she says:

He always gives us advice on how to improve our languages of type of

studies and he likes to give motivation and after he would always makes

something that can make ourselves improved. He doesn't let us down.

Just like Amin, Student Atiqah also declares that "He is like a father for all students

in this school." Student Amin shares similar sentiments: "He is kind person, loving,

he always takes care about us" while adding that he has "integrity" and is "non-

compromising."

b. Developing interpersonal relationships: The principal stood out as someone who

believes in team work, collaboration and dealing with each other based upon human

values and close relationships. Among the first few things that he did upon his arrival

in 2012 was to work towards building strong interpersonal relationships, driven by his belief that this will bring success to the school:

> in my first and second month here, I established good relationship amongst teachers and also the relationship between teachers and me.. myself. So that I know them and they also can get to know be better. That is the first thing to make a successful school. I want us to have friendly and devoted relationship.

He deliberately works towards building good relations with teachers because he believes that being in good relations with teachers will enable him to get work done, "If we do not have close relationship with the teachers, how can we ask help from them… if I have close relationship with teachers, it is easy to get work done and get cooperation from them." He followed a number of strategies to come closer to the staff initially and turned it into a deeper relationship in due course. He improved upon the facilities for the staff and provided them "with comfortable place such as teacher's room with air-conditioned…parking lot for their cars." He established teachers club where teachers could meet informally and participate in fun activities. He organized trips to places like Krabi in Thailand so that "they can develop (spend) quality time amongst them." He opened up all the school facilities for the staff to use and organized sporting events only for the staff members. He has built good relationship with the parents as well. According to parent Liza "he is very close with the parents… he always appreciates the parents."

4.1.5.4 Enactment of the practice of developing teachers and staff members

It has been established that teachers play the most important role in the development of students and enhancing academic achievement. Developing teachers and staff is

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the process in which staff skills and competencies are developed in order to increase achievement. Principal Arif focuses on the continuous development of his staff members. He encourages them to pursue further education and a number of teachers are already in the process of completing their Master degree. He provides ample opportunities for them to meet and discuss issues related to teaching and learning and motivates them for professional development. He provides individualized attention to teachers, listens to their professional and personal problems and displays sincere concerns while suggesting solutions. He provides teachers with a positive and conducive environment where they can work with respect, motivation and mutual trust. He develops his teachers in the following two ways:

a. Focus on building coalition with teachers: The principals' core practice of constantly developing teachers is evident in the way he focuses on improving, motivating and supporting his teachers. During the interview, when the principal was asked why his first priority was teachers rather than students, his reply provided an insight into how highly he prioritizes developing the teachers in his endeavor of making the school a successful school:

> First priority is the teachers. We could shape any student, however, to
>
> achieve this, teachers' commitment is more important. If we have
>
> teachers that only mingled with their own groups and do not want to
>
> be involved in any programs, it is not good.

Upon further prodding, he explained in detail why he believes that giving teacher priority is indeed an important step towards success:

> I believe I should prioritize the teachers because I need to ask help or
>
> assistance in term of cooperation from them. If we do not have close
>
> relationship with the teachers, how can we ask help from them? For

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example, I need help from those teachers to come and teach the students during night class program … So when I asked for their cooperation, they are willing to join, they feel they can do it and be confident. Then, all people including students and teachers can involve in the programs.

From the above, it is evident that the principal gives priority to teacher since he knows that to get work done; he needs to build working coalition with them. However, he also knows that just by building positive relationship with them, it would not work. Hence he also reminds the teachers, from time to time, about their responsibility as an educator. For work, he uses the term 'ibadah', which means worship and has significant psychological effects on teachers:

I tell the teachers to be responsible to reach (achieve) the educational philosophy (objectives). As teachers, what are our roles, because working is part of our 'ibadah' and responsibility, accountability, integrity, and trustworthy (trustworthiness).This is part of their responsibility, so they must do it.

Teacher Rose explains how by building this coalition, by touching the 'hearts of workers', he had built up a 'give and take' relationship that makes teachers work. She is quite vivid in her explanation:

He gives and takes. He is not that very demanding. … he touches within the hearts of the workers and colleagues, (and) they work for you … he appreciates, (and) I think that actually starts the whole scenario, you know, people working hard for him...you know, the give and take attitude... the appreciations that you (referring to the

principal) give to them (the teachers). OK. I think that is the first

thing that I see (find) in him as a successful principal.

He does not stop at only building working coalition, give and take relationships and motivating them to work. He gives them encouragement, motivates them and appreciates their efforts. The admin Mr. Zuber says:

He also gives motivation, acknowledgement and supports to the

teachers. These can make teachers feel good and they feel appreciated.

Teacher Azlina, echoing similar sentiments, agrees and adds that the principal encourages them to go for higher qualifications so that they can further improve students' achievement, when she says:

He is one of the...what to say... supportive principals. He always

encourages us. Like me and my friends, some of us...he (the principal)

encourages us to gain new knowledge, so that we can do something

for our students.

b. Providing individualized attention: The principal of SMK Urban believes that by providing individualized attention to teachers and staff, he would be able to develop them to be even better. During one of the follow-up sessions, the principal spoke about why he believes that providing individualized attention will help teachers and staff members develop further. He attends to their personal problems with compassion and facilitates them to further their education and training. His reasoning is that if they become better teachers through education, they will be able to serve the students in a better way which will, in turn, improve the achievement of the students. He says:

I want teachers to be happy. I look after them; I give them personalized

attention and to their personal problems. This builds up good

relationship. I want them to get training and study further which will

help the students indirectly.

Figure 4.3. Professional Development activity in the school in April 2016

Teacher Azlina corroborates what the principal says and explains how he gives

personal support to teachers:

> He is... supportive principal. He always encourages us. Like me and my
>
> friends, some of us...he (the principal) encourages us to gain new
>
> knowledge, so that we can do something for our students. I have just
>
> done with my masters. He encourages most of us... if possible...all of
>
> us... He wants us to..so that we can do something, we have a quality in
>
> our teaching.

Teacher Rose echoed similar sentiments when she mentions about how supportive

the principal is by giving flexibility in work timings for those teachers who would

like to further their study:

he encourages the teachers to further their studies for their masters, and he makes it easier. If you cannot come on Friday, (even) if you have activities on Friday or Saturday, it is fine with him. OK. Education (is the) first (priority) for the teachers.

Admin Mr. Zuber explains how the principal monitors each and every teacher and supports them if he finds that there is a need. For example, he is a great fan of using IT in teaching and learning process. He encourages teachers to use it as much as possible and "…personally helps them in learning if they have any problems with IT." Mr. Zuber further adds that individual attention is given to teachers who need support in their teaching, "…he always helps the teachers and monitors all activities and advice the teachers to improve in teaching skills and also be close to the teachers."

4.1.5.5 Enactment of the practice of creating positive work environment

The principal of SMK Urban actively focusses on creating a positive work environment in which all teachers and staff members feel valued, respected and supported. His personal traits, combined by his personal belief that a positive work environment in the school brings success, have brought in positive results for him and the school. In this study, the school environment is an uncontrolled variant. The school environment is reflected by collaboration and teamwork among where they share ideas, discuss issues and come to a collective decision. Cooperation among the teachers of SMK Urban indicates that the principal allows freedom, collectivism, and trust and creativity among teachers. The findings also demonstrate that by creating a positive school environment, the principal ensures that the school policies are implemented through volitional actions by the staff members.

a. Decision-making through consultation: Although the principal is particularly hands-on; he likes to be a part of everything that happens in the school, he believes in consultation and collective decision-making in all major issues, especially when it comes to academic matters. He explains how he discusses the results with the teachers and students and consults them further course of action for improvement:

> … we (the teachers) studied and discussed amongst the teachers in the meetings and we also have post-mortem. Every test we have (post-mortem), why students cannot score 73, for example. During this discussion, students can share what are their problems and teachers can also discuss about the problems (regarding the students' problem) too. For example they (the students) do not attend school.

The admin Zuber opines that since he involves teachers in decision making by asking their opinion on important matters, they feel appreciated and their motivation increases. This helps in creation of a positive working environment for all:

> provides support to the teachers and asks for their advice in important matters. These can make teachers feel good and they feel appreciated.
>
> … In order to improve the quality of works, he always has information to be shared on the meeting. The working environment becomes positive.

He often asks for advice from the parents and considers their suggestions on important matters, as parent Fadzila points out, "As parents, he asks for advice on important matters and we can give any suggestions." Parent Farizah concurs with her and explains how the principal involves them in decision making through the Islamic concept of 'Mashwirah' (consultation):

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we all give him the pros and cons, so he chooses which one is the best. Sometimes we use like technique, like…like….(long pause) … pros and cons…we debate on the topic and finally we come with the consensus.

It was apparent during the interviews that everyone felt appreciated and valued and worked in a positive working environment.

b. Making gradual changes: When the principal joined the school in 2012, the school was at a band 5 level which is considered to be an average school. There were discipline problems, there was no team spirit among teachers, academic achievement was low and the co-curricular activities were dismal. There was an immediate need for transformation and any new principal would have been tempted to make sweeping changes from day one if he intended to make improvement. However the principal did not rush to make changes. He spent time to study the current situation, identified areas that need immediate attention and took one step at a time. He wanted the change to happen gradually with the teachers on his side. For that to happen, he first wanted to build trust and good working relationship with the teachers. He explained his change management process and how he handled it carefully to pull it off without adversely affecting the already negative school environment:

So in my first and second month here, I established good relationship amongst teachers and also the relationship between teachers and me.. myself. So that I know them and they also can get to know be better. That is the first thing to make a successful school. … During that time, I could not disturb what they were doing, … I did not put pressure on them to do other new things. I just let them proceed with whatever they are doing.

On further probing why he concentrated on the teacher's and building a positive working environment before implementing any changes, he explained the reasons quite eloquently that by concentrating on building a positive working environment first, he was able to build a strong team with positive outlook which enabled him to go for further improvement in other areas with teachers backing him up fully:

> The culture of the teachers and positive work environment (was priority). These teachers are (now) hardworking and their teamwork is good. They have close relationship amongst themselves … and they are with high commitment, initiative, cooperative, collaborative and teachers are happy and healthy.

Once the positive relationship was built, he gradually involved the teachers into discussing how things could be made better, "and then has a discussion on any further program that can be done in the future, so that they can give any suggestions to be practiced in the future programs."

c. Motivating students and staff: The principal is a great motivator. Almost everyone that was interviewed was of the opinion that they felt motivated to work with him and try to do their best to achieve the goals that are set for the school. The admin Zuber claims that the principal "… gives motivation, acknowledgement and provide support to the teachers", while teacher Rose feels that because people feel motivated, they work harder, and with their heart:

> because I feel that he really cares about the teachers … in other terms, like, within the hearts of the workers, colleagues, they work for you. … he appreciates. I think, that actually starts the whole scenario, you know, people working hard for him...you know, … the appreciations that you (referring to the principal) give to them (the teachers)...

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Teacher Chang agrees with what teacher Rose says in terms of receiving encouragement and support from the principal which, in turn, motivates people to do better:

> He works closely with all of us, he motivates us with his encouragement and support to do better each time, increase our knowledge and improve students.

Mr. Chang also praises the current principal as the best he has worked under because he is a great motivator:

> he is one of the best. He is a great motivator. He works closely with all of us, he motivates us with his encouragement and support to do better each time, increase our knowledge and improve students.

He not only motivates teachers and staff for improving the academic achievement of the students but, being an avid sports lover, he actively participates in all sporting activities the students participate in. He is there to cheer them and although he wants success, he doesn't blame anyone when the results are not favorable, as teacher Rose remarks, "He just says you must win, but if we come back losing, he say it is OK. You have done your best." He makes sure that he attends most of the sporting activity himself which motivates the students and staff to perform better.

Although the pressure to succeed is felt by the teachers at times, but since the teachers are assured that there would not be any repercussions if they don't, they try their best. In fact teacher Rose says that "… pressure is wonderful sometimes." Teacher Azlina echoes similar sentiments when she says "That will be a bit pressure for us. Just a little bit, when we go for a tournament, we must win … sometimes we need it."

d. Positive work environment, collegiality and team work: The principal encourages collegiality and team work and ensures that there is a positive climate within the school campus. While concentrating on the teachers as his first priority, he declares that "The culture of the teachers and positive work environment" is at the top of his list. He wants to see his teachers "… with high commitment, initiative, cooperative, collaborative and teacher who is happy and healthy. No unhealthy teachers." He takes a number of steps to encourage collegiality and teamwork to create a positive and healthy work climate. He ensures that teachers get ample opportunity to collaborate, discuss issues and suggest improvements in a non-threatening environment. He organizes co-curricular activities for teachers and staff on a regular basis wherein they play sports, compete in fun-filled activities and come closer to each other. He has constituted 'teacher's club' which organizes informal dinners and fun trips even to places like Krabi in Thailand:

> and we held an event for dining session like a feast so that the teachers
> can gather and discuss any topics while eating. We have teacher's club.
> One of the programs in teacher's club is to go on a tour during school
> holiday for example this year we are going to Krabi, Thailand.

Teacher Azlina believes that the trips and informal gatherings have really helped in bringing people closer and most of them are friends with each other:

> When we have this kind of visiting, we know each other better. Not
> formally. So when know "Oh the principal, is like this...." and we can
> be closer with our friends.

He consults them regularly and asks them for their opinion on issues and future programs to make the teachers believe that they are a part of the big team and that their opinions are valued during "… discussion on any further program that can be done in the future, so that they can give any suggestions to be practiced in the future programs."

The admin Mr. Zuber acknowledges the contribution of the current principal in making the school environment better. He remarks:

> What I can see, he is very close to people. He makes the working environment as a conducive place. He makes sure there is no gap between workers; it doesn't matter if you are in higher position of lower position. He treats people fairly. He is friendly.

Parent Liza is impressed with the school environment and the teamwork shown by the teachers. She points out the manner in which the principal develops teamwork:

> He is for building close relationship with the teachers. The school environment is very positive and everybody works as a team. If any problem occurred, he quickly consults teachers and asks what the problems are and how they can solve it.

According to teacher Chang, the principal is always there in their times of need and displays collegiality, "He is concerned. If you have any problem, you can just discuss it with him." This attitude had been cultivated among teachers as well and they consider themselves as a member of a large team working together. While talking about collegiality and how the principal has managed it in the school, Mr. Zairy quipped "… he is the mastermind … you need the whole team to work. You need a very good team"!

4.1.5.6 Enactment of the practice of collaborating with stakeholders

The principal of SMK Urban believes in strong collaboration with stakeholders and makes conscious efforts to engage them meaningfully. His collaboration with the 'internal' stakeholders; students and teachers, has been discussed earlier. He believes that strong collaboration between the school and the 'external' stakeholders like the parents, the governmental agencies and the larger community is also the basis of the school's success. He manages to take along stakeholders by creating opportunities for them to participate in school affairs, not only in co-curricular activities but also in the matters related to curriculum, instruction and discipline. The findings are in line with what Jeynes (2007), in a meta-analysis, found that that there is a strong positive relationship between involving parents and the community in the school affairs and student achievement.

a. Involving parents in the school affairs: The principal considers parents as an important part of the school and engages them to the benefit of the school. He conducts regular surveys of the parents, requests their feedback on a number of issues and acts upon them. The parent teacher association (PTA) is functional and meets regularly. He involves parents in the school activities and encourages them to help with the co-curricular activities:

> there are certain representative (parents) who also active in co-curriculum for students' training.

Teacher Azlina believes that the principal has a good rapport with the parents and he engages them to get their cooperation:

> He knows how to tackle parents' heart. He lets them know what he wants from them and for the students. He has a good rapport with the parents and he engages them in consultation.

Parent Farida finds the present principal more welcoming and friendly compared to his predecessor. While talking about the positive environment with respect to parent's involvement in the school, she says:

the last time (long pause), the parents are not very welcome…

However, she quickly added that this was perhaps due to the reason that previous principal was too busy with meetings and other work. Her explanation was more to be politically correct than a justification for the unwelcoming behavior of the previous principal.

The administrator Mr. Zuber acknowledges the fact that parents are involved actively by the principal, they are welcome and are consulted in decision making. He says that "Even for small issue, the school will invite parents to come to the school. You can see at the office, parents are coming almost every day."

Parent Farizah explains the culture of cooperation that has been initiated by the principal wherein parents are invited to sit with the teachers and discuss issues related to academic or non-academic matters. She explains how it is carried out:

Usually when they (the school) find that students are weak in that year, so we teachers and parents, they collaborate together, they come and sit together, especially during Parents Teachers meeting, you know. And then they come and discuss. What sorts of program? Certain subjects…what subjects? So they have to get about that subjects. They (parents) sit with the teachers and come to consensus.

b. Reaching out to community: The admin Zuber believes that community involvement is a regular feature of the principal's desire to engage the stakeholders into the school affairs. He gives an example:

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> The school has programmes which the community can join, for example, co-curriculum. We have program with the Military College, the students go to the camp and learn from there.

Parent Farizah gives credit to the entire school community for the success of the school. She believes that the principal creates ample opportunities for the community to come together and help in activities, fund raising, social gatherings and other similar occasions:

> like, sometimes we have, like this year, 'Jubli Emas' event, or sometimes entrepreneurship day, we come and support. When they sell the coupons, we support by buying the coupons, we come to the school and then they attended the seminar here. … they (community members) buy all the foods. That's how the community give support.

The principal maintains a great working relationship with the governmental agencies like the Ministry of Education, the district office PPD and AKEPT. The relationship is built due to the adherence of their directives and constant improvement in the performance of the school. The trust translates into help from these agencies when required:

> I give my credits to the PPD – 'Pejabat Pegawai Daerah' (District Office) who always helped.... they support....in term of teachers, financial... Sometimes we don't have enough teachers. Since we are good with them (PPD), they provide us with replacement teachers.

4.1.5.7 Enactment of creating behavioral expectations and maintaining discipline

Behavioural nonconformity is a big issue for the principal of SMK Urban who believes that if children do not meet the expected behavioural expectations, they are likely to become habitual delinquents which will result in lower academic achievement. Among the major Changes that he brought to the school on his arrival was a policy of low tolerance for bad behavior; be it the issue of absenteeism or delinquency. He has laid down clear behavior expectations for students and has ensured that teachers and staff work together to meet the expectations. A number of measures towards achieving this goal is in place in the school and all the respondents were unanimous in accepting that by focusing on behavior, the principal has not only succeeded in minimizing the disciplinary issues in the school but has also indirectly benefitted by improving the academic achievement.

a. Improving Attendance: One of the first major tasks that the principal undertook upon his arrival was to work towards improving the attendance of the students. In 2012, the attendance was dismal; in the range of 80 to 90 percent which, according to the principal, reflected in the poor academic achievement of the students. He claims:

> If they do not come to the school, they could not get marks what the
>
> other punctual students get. If they just stay at home, they could not
>
> have the education.

Teacher Farida corroborates what the principal says, "He (is) really concerned about the attendance and believes that the attendance will make the students excel academically."

The principal identified reasons of students not coming to school regularly. He found that since the school is located in an elite area, there are too many attractive places

nearby which attracts the students more than the school. He explains, "The students went to the paddy fields, they went to catch fish, and they did not want to attend the school."

To ensure high attendance, "over 90% everyday", the principal took several steps. First of all he worked towards making the school an attractive place for the students with lots of engaging activities. Then he started a unique program of rewarding the student with perfect attendance. He also rewarded the class which had perfect attendance for a certain period of time:

> I established 'Program Penyayang' (Loving program) for those who always come to the school. For example...(long pause)..in 3 months, (students) who have full attendance, they will be rewarded … And also class, if the class is full, they will receive gifts too.

The admin Mr. Zuber, while stating proudly that "… the attendance is consistent, 95% to 97%...and above" sheds more light on the Program Penyayang:

> every day any of eight senior assistants, the admin staff, will stand on the school gate to monitor the attendance of the students. One of these staff will have to stay there with the principal to receive students. This can make students feel that they are welcomed to come to this school.

Principal Arif also involves parents in welcoming the students in the morning. Members of the PTA, together with the management of the school welcome students in the morning to cultivate a culture of caring and affectionate parents.

Figure 4.4. Parents welcoming students in the morning

While acknowledging that poor attendance was indeed a challenge which was overcome by the efforts of the current principal, parent Farida adds that teachers were also involved in the process whereby the principal advised them to investigate each and every instances of absenteeism and contact the parents, if necessary:

> The principal has worked hard, ... created several activities for students, gave them tokens for good attendance and involved teachers in the process to monitor. He asked teachers will (to) check the attendance every day and call the students (who absent) or parents and ask for the reasons.

The principal also studies other schools to see what approaches they adopt to improve the attendance in their schools. He is always open to adopt new ideas that would enhance the attendance in his school. Teacher Rose explains, "… we went to Behrang, Selangor, to look at what the school does to improve attendance and he adopts the system here."

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Student Amin also talks about the problem of attendance before this principal came and how the attendance has improved due to his persistence and determination, "after he entered this school, the attendance has increased because he didn't compromise with students that didn't come to the school." Amin also adds how he has used the school prefects to improve the situation, "Every day before going to the class, the prefects will check our attendance."

b. Being firm and fair with teachers and students: The principal, although he comes out as a very friendly and approachable person, is also firm and has non-compromising attitudes when it comes to issues that he feels need to be taken care of at any cost. He calls himself an 'autocratic' at times but perhaps he wanted to mean firm and strict more than being an autocratic leader, as his following explanation makes it clear:

> we cannot be soft all the time, … we have to be more autocratic. If we
>
> only be friendly, they might take advantage. So autocratic, but friendly.
>
> Before this, "first time...ok...no problem...you can do it better next
>
> time", but after that, "you must do."

One of reasons that the principal gave for his firm attitude comes out of his belief that since they have achieved so much success in the past three years, people will start taking things for granted and become complacent. Thus, he makes a conscious effort to ensure that people are on task and are constantly working towards maintaining the current standards and further improvement:

> to maintain the band, we have to put pressure on teachers. because they
>
> (the teachers) are human too. In the end they can become complacent,
>
> and.... (facial expression to show difficult).

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Parent Farida believes that he is very friendly with the students but he is firm and strict when he needs to be, "He is very friendly and at the same time he is very strict for the things that he thinks should be changed." Teacher Rose too says that he is firm when it comes to work but is fair, "In the official meetings or work, he seems tough, but in real life, he is a nice person and fair." Teacher Azlina echoes similar sentiments when she says, "He is strict sometimes but reasonable. If you say can do..or cannot do, you must come with a reason, why? We have to give a reason. Or else you have to follow the instructions."

Parent Farizah explains about one more practice of the principal to counter absenteeism, which has improved seems to work:

> so he will see and find out the absentees and with the helps and aids by the counsellors. The counsellors will go to the (students) house, and see what and why…what was the problem and then see how it can be overcome.

c. Improving discipline among students: Before the arrival of the current principal, the school was known for its bad discipline, achievement was low and it was not a school of choice for many families. Student Amin makes a profound statement on the discipline issue before the arrival of the current principal and the present state, "Before this when I was in primary school, this school is famous because of discipline issue, but now, … this school become famous because of the success."

Parent Liza explains that for discipline issues, the principal Arif has put systems in place and involves counsellors, teachers and parents to solve such issues, "Any problems related to discipline, the students will be referred to the counsellors and the

counsellors will call the parents." She also sees market improvement in the student's discipline because of his efforts:

> For example the students who stay in the dormitory, now we do not hear any play-truant cases. That is the cooperation amongst the teachers. The principal gives instructions to the teachers and always monitor. Since my child stays at the dormitory, I rarely hear any problems there.

Student Atiqah, while referring to the dismal discipline levels before this principal joined is of the opinion that the principal solves most of the disciplinary problems within the school and even goes to the extent of expelling few students who would not come to terms:

> before this the discipline in this school in very disappointing. But now, if a student has discipline issues and is not listening, the principal will expel the student from this school. However, most of the problems are fixed within the school but those who could not be fixed anymore will be expelled to set example.

She compares the current principal and the previous principal and finds the current principal stricter on undisciplined students:

> The most standing quality that I can see is he is very strict in discipline. He will expel problematic student, usually those who don't want to study anymore. Previously, the principal just accepts the students to continue in this school even though their discipline is bad. But now, he will just expels (them).

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The admin Zuber also talks about the problematic students being expelled by the principal. He even talks about some of the teachers who had discipline problems and how they were transferred to other schools by the current principal:

> The discipline of the students is improved from time to time. I am sorry, I have to say this, some teachers also have problem before. There was no teamwork. But, the principal has encountered the problems successfully. Some teachers became better teachers due to his efforts, but those teachers who could not tolerate; they were transferred from this school…. He expelled troublesome students from this school as well.

While acknowledging that the discipline problem is only "1% or 2%" now, teacher Chang believes that the current principal is too soft! It is not surprising because Mr. Chang believes in corporal punishment and feels that that is the only way discipline can be solved. He is aware that government is against corporal punishment and implies that this is the reason why students cannot be disciplined according to his liking:

> But I feel, I failed to educate the students in the discipline field. Because now, as you know.. Malaysian Education, they do not allow us to punish the students. We cannot use cane on them. Before this, we used to use harsh punishment. Now, we cannot.

4.1.6 Discussion

The purpose of the study was to identify the contextual factors under which the principal of SMK Urban operates, and then identify what are his core practices and how he enacts his core practices with response to his own unique context. The extensive data collection and analysis have elicited a number of contextual practices,

some common to most of the schools and some unique to SMK Urban. Our findings are consistent with the existing studies conducted on the context-based practices of successful school principals which have demonstrated that successful principals react to their own unique contexts with appropriate responses in order to be successful. This section will attempt to extensively discuss the findings in the light of existing literature and recent empirical evidence to better understand the contextual practices.

The findings of the case study of SMK Urban have demonstrated that the principal Arif has been able to successfully respond to the each of the seven contextual factors under which the school operates. One of the major premises of this study was the existence of a number of school contexts and that the contexts are unique to schools, even for schools that are within close vicinity to each other. These seven contextual factors for SMK Urban are a mix of four internal contexts that are within the school, two external contexts that influence the school from the outside and his personal contexts that have played an important role in shaping his practices. The four internal contexts are teacher's motivation, discipline, students' academic and co-curricular achievement and the school environment while the two external contexts are expectations of the Ministry of Education and parents and community engagement. Along with these six contextual factors, he also brings in two of his own personal contexts which are his experience and personal traits.

In response to the seven contextual factors, the core practices of the principal of SMK Urban can be grouped into seven basic categories. The remaining part of this section will attempt to discuss these core practices in detail, along with its enactment and its relationship with the existing literature.

1. Providing vision and specific goals: The first core practice of the principal of SMK Urban is providing vision & specific goals for the school. Hallinger and Heck (1996a) conducted a meta-analysis of the effect of school leaders on achievement and concluded that setting goals and vision is extremely impactful for student learning. This conclusion was reaffirmed by Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008) who identified vision and goals as next to instructional emphasis as the most significant contributing factor for academic achievement. While vision is a broader depiction of the direction in which the school is expected to move, goals are specific milestones that lead towards achieving the vision (Hallinger and Heck, 2002). Principal Arif, upon his arrival was faced with a situation where the teachers operated without a concrete vision for the school; thus there were no set goals for the school.

Among the first actions that he took was to create an open discussion on what the school wanted to achieve in the long run (vision) and how the school community would work towards realizing the vision through goal-setting. He consulted his teachers, elicited ideas from them and worked with them towards formulating vision and goals for the school. This practice has been backed up by substantial literature on the core practices of successful school principals. In fact, setting direction is one of the four core practices as identified by Leithwood et. al (2006). Instructional leadership and transformational leadership literature has emphasized the role of goal setting and vision as crucial to school improvement initiatives (Hallinger and Heck, 2002; Ylimaki 2006). While instructional leadership literature focuses on academic achievement and issues related to teaching and learning in matters of setting goals and vision (e.g., Hallinger and Heck 1996a; Murphy 2002; Robinson et al. 2008), transformational leadership focuses more on values and philosophical guidance of

the school as the vision and goal (e.g., Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005; Mulford and Silins 2003).

Principal Arif's practice of creating vision and setting goals for the school focuses on instructional practices rather than on the philosophical aspect, thus depicting his focus as an instructional leader. His focus on academic achievement is evident in the way he analyses achievement data, identifies areas of growth and sets a time-bound goal to rectify the situation. Several empirical findings favor the instructional aspect of setting vision and goals (e.g., Leithwood et al. 2006, 2010; Robinson et al. 2008) for the improvement in academic achievement. Principal Arif's focus primarily on instructional aspects is perhaps driven by his belief that since he works in a public school, the vision for the school is directly derived from the vision statement of the Ministry of Education given to every school in the country. However, he does display aspects of transformational leadership through motivating his students, teachers and staff members to work towards the goals set for the school. This is in line with the 'inspirational motivation' as proposed by Bass's (1985) model which is also articulated by Podsakoff as "aimed at identifying new opportunities for his or her unit….and developing, articulating, and inspiring others with his or her vision of the future" (1990, p. 112).

In a study of schools with a successful history, Hallinger and Murphy discovered that although these schools worked with a clearly defined vison and mission, they lacked specific goals to achieve (Hallinger and Murphy 1986). On the other hand, schools that had recently demonstrated success had clearly defined goals as well. The findings of this study confirms the above since principal Arif inherited a school that was low on achievement and had no vision, mission or goals until he was able to turn it around.

2. Improving curricular and co-curricular activities: The second core practice of the principal of SMK Urban is improving curricular and co-curricular activities within the school. Leithwood et. al (2006) have identified managing instructional program as one of the core practices of every successful school principal and the findings of this study conforms their observation. It requires the school principals to spend a significant amount of their time in creating and sustaining a stimulating, goal-oriented learning environment where students excel in their academic and co-curricular pursuits. Success of public schools in Malaysia is determined by its rating and the upward movement in the school band which, in turn, is determined by a composite score consisting of both academic and co-curricular achievement. Principal Arif is well aware of this contextual factor; thus, his focus on both these areas is evident in his practices. His previous experience in sports school comes in handy and within three years of his tenure in SMK Urban, he has not only improved the school in terms of academic achievement but has also made the school a dominant force in sporting achievement within the district and the state.

Traditionally, the concept of instructional leadership follows a narrow aspect in which the administrative responsibilities are seen as a separate entity from instructional responsibility, and a much broader aspect in which, apart from direct instructional responsibilities, it also includes areas such as goal setting, developing school culture that enhances learning and the actions that enable achievement of academic and co-curricular goals (Murphy, 1988; Sheppard, 1996). Principal Arif has the broader view of instructional leadership responsibilities and is hands-on on directly managing the curricular and co-curricular activities while creating a positive, goal-oriented environment as well for effectiveness. Even though he has time-constrains, he himself analyses achievement and works with teachers to identify

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ways and means to improve upon those areas in which the school struggles. These practices are supported by numerous recent studies, and are crucial for the success of a school (Hallinger and Heck 2010, 2011a, b; Heck and Hallinger 2014). Also, in order to succeed, the principal needs to possess knowledge and skills in teaching and learning along with a desire to make the school better. Principal Arif has been in the field of education for more than three decades, with almost 20 years as a teacher. He uses his vast experience and expertise to his benefit and combines his determination to succeed to garnet success. Principal Arif is 'data-driven' and encourages his teachers to always analyze achievement data for effectiveness. Thus he is able to monitor the progress being made and take corrective measures as soon as it is evident from the data. The practice of principal Arif to monitor the progress through data-driven technique confirms the findings of Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2003), who found significant positive leadership effects on achievement where leaders who were focused on student progress constantly monitored and evaluated the data. Hallinger's (2003) model of instructional leadership consists of "monitoring student progress" while it is also included in Yukl's (1999) model of eleven effective managerial practices.

3. Being friendly and approachable: The third core practice of principal Arif, according to the findings was being friendly and approachable to the staff, students and the parents. In fact, it was the most commonly elicited response from the interviews. Principal Arif turns out to be an extremely friendly and approachable leader who is always available to the members of the school community. He follows 'open door policy' and has no appointment book; people are free to approach him whenever he is available for matters ranging from teaching and learning issues to personal matters of students and the staff. There is a significant amount of supporting

evidence from the literature for the friendly and approachable demeanor of principal Arif. Successful principals spend significant amount of time in developing and maintaining positive relationships and cultivate environments of mutual trust, respect, compassion, care and professionalism (Connors, 2000). In order to achieve this, a principal needs to be visible and approachable, despite time constraints (Rieg, 2007). Principal Arif's practice of being friendly and approachable shows aspects of invitational leadership, as proposed by Stoll and Fink (1996) wherein school leaders emphasize upon personal values and inter-relationships for success. Although there is ample evidence of indirect effects of principal's leadership behavior on the success of a school, much of it is related to administrative or instructional practices (e.g. Hallinger and Heck,1996). There is scant available literature that specifically emphasizes the effects of principal's friendly and approachable behavior on school's success. However, the findings of this study reveal that personal traits of successful principals play an important role, "it actually starts everything", as one of the teachers points out. Thus, this finding can be considered as a new aspect of looking at the successful practices of a principal. Being approachable to the school community for conversations can be an organizational strength, especially for a principal facing the problem of closed communication channels among the school community. Many principals provide an 'open door policy' however they do not make attempts to encourage teachers, parents and students to actually make use of it. Principal Arif often indulges himself into informal conversations and invites people to 'drop by' occasionally. Thus, he is able to break any invisible barriers that stop people from making use of his open door policy. He claims that he had deliberately developed his friendly and approachable demeanor since he believes that if he is friendly with teachers, he will be able to get work done easily. This give and take

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relationship is quite similar to what the transactional leadership model proposes (Bass, 2008).

4. Developing teachers and staff members:

The fourth core practice of principal Arif is developing teachers and staff members. Principal Arif believes that teachers come first among all the aspects of the school, even before students. He believes that if a school has a dedicated team of effective teachers and staff members, learning will take place and the academic achievement will improve. There is ample empirical evidence that demonstrates that effective teachers are able to foster passion for learning, decrease absenteeism, increase engagement, and create a community environment in the classroom (e.g. Baker et al., 2010; Kelly, 2012). His focus of teachers is firmly backed up by literature which emphatically considers teachers as the single most important factor in school effectiveness (e.g. Darling- Hammond, 2000; Glewwe et al. 2011; Hattie, 2009; Mourshed, Chijioke and Barber 2010; Sanders and Rivers,1996). Principal Arif claims that upon his arrival three years ago, he found that teachers were disoriented and teaching and learning process in the school was directionless. "…teachers come first", he declares, and making teacher development his first priority, he went about his efforts to develop them in their knowledge, skills and behavior.

He has developed a positive relationship with them by listening to their problems; both professional and personal in nature, and advised them on ways to improve. He consults them on important matters related to the school and listens to their advice. One important feature of his practice of staff development was to encourage them to pursue higher education to gain more contemporary knowledge which would, in turn, benefit the school. Teachers who are pursuing higher education claimed that the principal encourages them and offers flexible timings for them during exams or when

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the submission of important assignment dates are due. There is a research consensus, especially in the field of mathematics education that further education is likely to improve achievement (Goe, 2007; Rice, 2003). Goe (2007) however cautions that there is still some uncertainty over the effectiveness of on subjects other than Mathematics.

5. Creating a positive work environment:

The fifth core practice of the principal, as identified by the data analysis is creating a positive work environment. Positive working environment and team spirit is not only essential for teacher's morale and job satisfaction but is also crucial for student achievement which has been empirically established by a number of studies (e.g. Hirsch, 2005a; Hirsch, 2005b, Marks & Printy, 2000). Positive work environment helps teachers in both their cognitive and affective states by increasing their efficacy, job satisfaction, commitment, engagement, pedagogical knowledge and by reducing their stress (Leithwood, 2006). Principal Arif believes that teachers should work together as a team. He inherited a school where teachers worked in isolation; there was no collaboration and teamwork. The previous principal was authoritarian and teachers felt demotivated. Principal Arif, on the other hand has great inter personal skills. He made conscious efforts to befriend his teachers. He engaged them in conversations regarding issues related to the school and sought their advice. This created a sense of belonging among teachers. Teachers felt valued and their motivation level increased. He suggested changes that were necessary but did not pressurize teachers to rush into it. Instead he asked for their advice on how to go about the changes. His practices are quite similar to what Douglas McGregor's leadership theory Y proposes (McGregor, 1960); successful Y leaders encourage and motivate their workers to get the best out of them and show trust, respect, and respect

to them. Transformational leadership theory (Bass, 2008) also supports similar philosophy.

He created ample formal and informal opportunities like retreats, sports, family days etc. for the teachers, students and parents to interact with each other. This enabled him to bring the school community close to each other and gradually they started functioning as a team. Positive relationships are important in a school, especially where teachers and parents can model positive behaviors and interactions for students to follow. SMK Urban has become a truly family-friendly school. Henderson, Marburger, and Oom (1986) define such schools as those which "create a climate in which every aspect of the school is open and helpful." Such schools work towards establishing partnerships with all the members of the school community, be it the parents, teachers or students and members of the wider school community. Principal Arif's deliberate decision to focus his time on creating a positive school environment is an illustration of his understanding that it is at the core of school's improvement and growth. He has successfully empowered and instilled confidence in teachers and parents who feel valued and voluntarily participate in the development of the school.

6. Collaborating with parents and the community:

The sixth core practice of the principal of SMK Urban is collaborating with the parents and the community. There is ample empirical evidence that supports the positive effects of parental and community involvement in school's success in terms of improved academic achievement, irrespective of the age and family background of the students (e.g. Adamski, Burke, 2013; Epstein, 2008; Frase & Piero, 2013). School and community partnership creates a shared responsibility in the functioning of a school which leads to positive outcomes that benefits both the school and the

community. Principal Arif has created an environment where parents feel valued and are involved in school affairs by a system of shared decision making that has been carefully developed by him. The parent-teacher association has been reactivated which was not active before the arrival of Principal Arif. Parents regularly meet with the principal, thanks to his open door, consultative policy. Parents are invited to be a part of major school functions and celebrations wherein they not only participate as invitees but also play an important role in planning and executing.

Literature on parent and school partnership clearly indicates its benefits and identifies six distinct types: parenting, communication, volunteering, decision making, home learning and collaborating with community (Epstein, 1995). Parenting and home learning refers to the ways in which parents support schools by providing conducive environment at home while the remaining four are related to the ways in which parents involve themselves with the school for mutual benefit. Principal Arif's practices support every aspect of the above. He organizes home visits of teachers, and occasionally himself visits parent to understand how children work at home. In cases where he finds that due to poverty, students do not have access to a suitable place for home learning, he provides them with space in the school during evening time every day. He communicates regularly with the parents, seeks their advice in major and minor issues in the school, involves them with school's activities and provides them with ample opportunities to volunteer.

Principal Arif has established a good rapport with the extended members of the school community, especially with governmental agencies like teacher's council and the office of education in the district. He claims that he has made a deliberate effort to develop this partnership since he receives timely help from these agencies in his

times of need, especially when he is short of teacher due to long absence or when a teacher leaves or is transferred.

7. Creating behavioral expectations and maintaining discipline:

The seventh core practice of the principal of SMK Urban was creating behavioral expectations and maintaining discipline. Principal Arif, teachers, parents and the students were unanimous in claiming the before the arrival of principal Arif in the school, the school was known for its dismal disciplinary record rather than its academic achievement, which was low anyways. Upon his arrival, principal Arif found that there were several aspects of indiscipline in the school; however he was especially concerned about the absenteeism with the attendance being as low as 85 percent. Although he was concerned about the other acts of indiscipline as well, he decided to focus, first and foremost, on improving the attendance. He believes that regular attendance not only increases academic achievement but also reduces other disciplinary issues in the school. Principal Arif's belief on attendance is well supported by literature. Attendance has been found to have strong relationship with school effectiveness, (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007), is a clear indicator of student achievement (Sheldon, 2007), and is strongly linked negatively with truancy and risky behaviors (Wang, Blomberg, & Li, 2005). Principal Arif, in order to encourage students to attend the school regularly, initiated several programs which made the school attractive for students and rewarded those who attended school regularly. He let teachers wait for students at the main gate every day and joined them occasionally so that the students get a warm welcome to the school every day. He started schemes which rewarded students who had perfect attendance every semester. Due to his sustained efforts, the attendance has risen dramatically and on any given day; it is close to 95 percent, on an average.

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Although attendance has resulted in downfall in disciplinary issues, he still faced many issues that were not related to attendance. He involved parents, teachers and members of the student council in discussions and chalked out a school-wide discipline policy which was less on punitive nature and more on promoting positive discipline with specific behavioral expectations. The school has a zero-tolerance policy for indiscipline and it has been communicated to all the school stakeholders. Infractions are dealt with immediately with the teachers being at the front line. Students with repeated behavioral issues are referred to the counselors. Having an audience with the principal is the last resort and it rarely happens in the school. There are consequences for repeated indiscretions and from the interviews it was understood that during the initial years of the principal's tenure, there were a number of students who were removed from the school. This sent an example for others and during the last year and a half, no student was asked to leave due to disciplinary issues. Principal Arif's stand on disciplinary issues in the school is well supported by the literature. Scholars have concluded that effective disciplinary practices in schools lead to enhanced academic achievement and a safe and conducive learning environment (Hoffman, Hutchinson & Reiss, 2009; Putnam, handler & Fienberg., 2005) while on the other hand, there are empirical studies that have established a negative effect of discipline problems on student achievement (Adams, 2008; Carrell & Hoekstra, 2009; Yang, 2009).

4.1.7 Summary

The study of Principal Arif's practices in SMK Urban reveals behaviors and actions that are a combination of his personal traits of friendliness, being approachable and his incessant efforts to mobilize his team members to achieve the goals of the school. He displays a thorough understanding of the contextual realities of his school and he

is able to respond to each of them appropriately. His success comes to the fore in the manner he sets clear goals and direction for the school, engages teachers and members of the school community in a positive manner, makes decision that are data driven, creates a positive and conducive school environment and emphasizes on reaching out to students so that the school's overall achievement is enhanced.

The study reveals the following seven contextual factors under which he operates:

1. Teacher's motivation

2. Discipline

3. Students' Academic and Co-curricular Achievement

4. School Environment

5. Expectations of the Ministry of Education

6. Parents and community engagement

7. Personal traits

The study also reveals the following seven core practices that Principal Arif demonstrates,
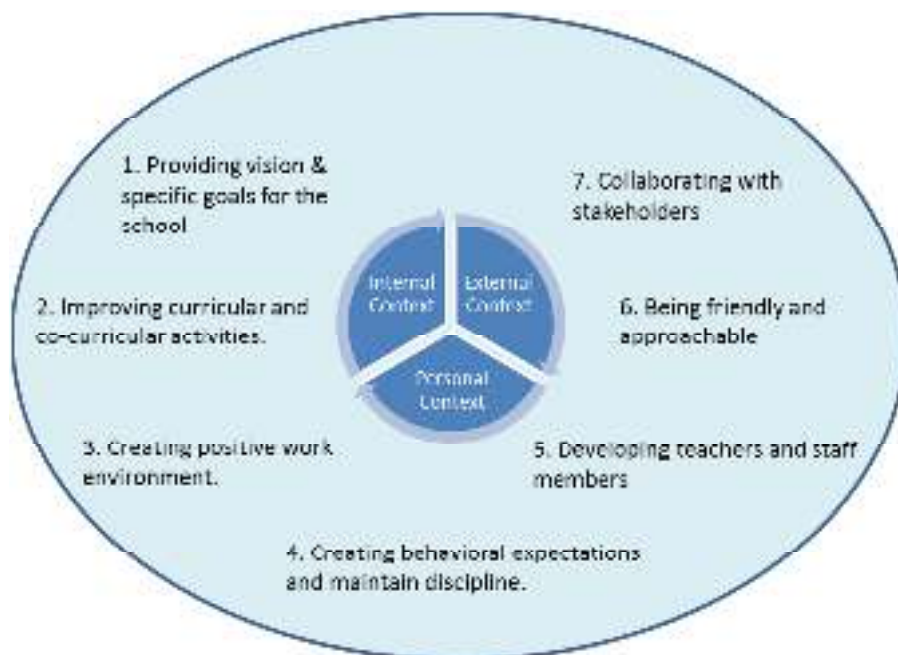
Figure 4.5. The core practices of the principal of SMK Urban

A thorough investigation of the enactment of his practices reveals that he has the ability to sense his contexts, prioritizes his practices and then moves ahead with a single-minded focus and determination to meet his goals. Furthermore, it was established through the study that principal Arif overcame the challenges that he faced through a combination of his own personal strengths and by drawing upon his prior experience that came in handy. It was also apparent that there was a definite relationship between the core practices and the contextual factors, and the practices had influence over the other practices to a certain extent; for example, focus on teachers also led to the establishment of a positive school environment while establishing behavioural expectations had its effect on teaching and learning program resulting in better academic achievement. Although each context was unique and had importance for the principal, it was the expectation of the Ministry of Education that came out to be the biggest driving factor for the principal. All his efforts were directed towards making improvement in order to move to the next school band.

4.2 The case of SMK Rural

SMK Rural is located in one of the remotest districts of a large northern state of Malaysia. The district is a sparsely populated district with a total population of 63000 only. It is a mountainous region bordering Thailand and is known for its scenic beauty with a number of lakes and Valleys.There are no major cities in the district which consists of a few small towns and several villages called 'Kampungs' which forms the prominent population centers in the district. The closest major cities are at least 40 kilometers away from the school with the state capital being at 50 kilometers from there.

The school, SMK Rural (Pseudonym) began its operation on the 1st of January 1997.

It is spread over 7 hectares of land. Apart from facilities like furnished classrooms,

science laboratories, music room, language room, library and history/geography

room, it also boasts of a newly built hostel for the students and a partially covered

hall for school functions. The school has a large grassed playground which is used by

the students for outdoor sports like football, netball etc. It also has a unique 'English

hut', donated by the parents, which is a shelter made for students who would like to

speak in English. SMK Rural is a coeducational school with 608 students, mostly

catering to students from nearby villages. A large majority of students are Malays,

with significant number of Siamese Malaysians and are a small number of Chinese

students as well. The number of students has not grown much in recent years which

can be attributed to small population living in that area. The map below (Source:

Google.com) clearly shows the topography of the area and the sparsely populated

human settlement.

Figure 4.6. The topography map of the SMK Rural's geographical location

There are total of 55 teachers and 17 support staff members. There are 31 male teachers and 24 female teachers while 10 support staff members are males and 7 are females. A majority of teachers are above 30 years in age. Most of the teachers and staff members are locals and live in the nearby villages. The principal of the school is Mrs. Noor (Pseudonym). The school currently is a Band 4 school and the principal aspires to raise it to a Band 3 school soon.

4.2.1 Principal's Profile

Principal Noor (Pseudonym) is an educator with approximately 30 years of experience in the field of education. She is 52 years old and holds a bachelor degree in Biology, the subject which she taught for a number of years. She did not pursue her master degree since she started working early and became too busy to further her studies. She was appointed the principal of SMK Rural in 2013 and is in the process of completing her third year in the school. Before coming to SMK Rural, she worked in another public school in the same district as the Deputy Principal with the additional responsibility of being in charge of the student's affairs. She worked there from 2007 until 2013.

Principal Noor is a warm and friendly person who gets along well with people. When she was contacted for the first time, she did not hesitate to invite the researchers for data collection. She asked about the nature of the study and inquired if there was anything that she needs to prepare for her interview. When the researcher met her for the first time, she was welcoming and offered tea and refreshments before actually starting with the interview. The staff seemed to know about the nature of the study which reflects her well-organized personality. She is a nature lover and she likes to read a lot.

4.2.2 Other Respondent's Profile

Principal Noor was asked to recommend a list of teachers, students and parents who were with the school for at least last three years. The researcher selected the respondents from the list, picking respondents that were with the school for longer duration and represented a variety. There were ten respondents in all, three parents, teachers and students each and one senior administrators who was a part of the school management. The details of all the respondents are in the following table:

Table 4.5

List of respondents from SMK Rural School

Name	Age (In Years)	Years in this School	Gender	Position
Noor	53	3	Female	Principal
Zane	47	9	Male	Counsellor
Haidi	46	6	Female	Teacher
Zeenat	33	8	Female	Teacher
Shifa	47	11	Female	Teacher
Zak	43	8	Male	Parent
Raz	41	6	Male	Parent
Zia	39	5	Female	Parent
Aman	16	4	Male	Student
Nuri	17	5	Female	Student
Naz	16	4	Female	Student

4.2.3 The School Context

As per the first objective of this study, this section will attempt to identify the contextual factors that influence the practices of the school principal which will answer the first research question. The findings of SMK Rural School's study produced a list of contexts under which the principal operates. These contexts can be divided into three distinct categories: Internal context, external context and personal context. Internal contexts are related to the school environment, which includes academic achievement, discipline of students, teachers and staff members and the overall work climate within the school while the external contexts are the factors that are outside the school but still has significant impact on the functions of the school. Personal contexts are traits and behaviors of the principal that affects the school

Detailed findings of these contexts are given below.

Table 4.6

The School Context of SMK Rural

S.No.	Type of context	Context
1	Internal Context	a. Physical environment
		b. Academic and co-curricular activities
		c. Teacher's development
		d. School demography
	External Context	a. Expectations of the Ministry of Education
		b. Parents and community engagement
	Personal Context	a. Personal traits

4.2.3.1 Internal Contexts

Internal factors had a significant effect on SMK Rural. At the time of the arrival of the current principal, the school was languishing at Band 5 level with the school ranking at 1979 out of 2208 schools that were ranked in Malaysia. The internal contexts had a role to play which manifested itself in the following four ways. The following section will explain each of the above four internal contexts in detail to elicit how these effected the school

Physical Environment: The first comment that the Principal Noor made on the school was its "sorrowful" condition. She says that upon her arrival in the school, she found that the school had a sad outlook with no physical environment that made it attractive. There were no flowers, no plants, the paint on the building had faded and it looked unattractive for students and staff. "How could anyone like to come to such a sorrowful looking school?" she commented while she was showing around the school. Most of the respondents commented on the physical environment of the school few years ago wherein the school had no display boards to show student work, no noticeboards and all the walls had an empty look. There were limited opportunities for students to sit and indulge in discussions outside the classroom since there was no place for the students to sit. The physical environment within the classroom was similarly glum. The room had walls and huge windows with no displays on the wall of curtains on the windows. When the sun was high, the room would become hot which would make students uncomfortable. Several other respondents commented on the bare look and non-conducive physical environment of the school.

Academic and Co-Curricular Achievement: When the current principal joined the school, the school was among the bottom 10 percent schools of the country and was

ranked 1979 out of 2203 schools. "it was bottom school. All schools in Malaysia are 2203, and we were at 1979 out of 2203. This was in 2012. So when I came here, I looked at these matters", informs the principal Noor. Focus on academic achievement was low and students scoring 'A' was rare, as student Aman, points out, "Before nobody can score straight A's here". Teacher Haidi confirms the misplaced focus of the previous principal when she claims that "Before this, the focus was only on the extra co-curricular activities, not on the academic (achievement)…he focused more on co-curriculum and he paid less attention on academic". There were hardly any enrichment plans and rarely few extra classes were organized to uplift the performance of struggling students which bore little fruit, as parent Zia states:

They made extra classes, but not as efficient as the new principal. Before this, extra classes only done after school session only. But now, the new principal proposed to make extra classes starting after Subuh (6.45am).

It was also apparent that although the respondents' claim that the focus of the school during the tenure of the previous principal was on co-curriculum activities and not on academic achievement, the records clearly shows that with all the focus on co-curricular activities, the school wasn't achieving much in that area as well. They performed poorly in interschool and regional tournaments and had hardly won any medals to show for the effort. Student Aman points out, "Before this, for athletics / sports, out of 9 schools (in the region), we didn't even achieve 5th place in any tournaments". Thus it was apparent that both academic and co-curricular achievement was low at the time of the current principal joining the school.

Teacher Development: When the current principal joined the school, the school already had a great bunch of teachers that were well qualified and could get along

well with each other. However, they did not have any sense of direction and were not motivated to take initiative to work towards the upliftment of student achievement. Without proper guidance and leadership, they went about their work in a routine manner. The principal claims, "Before this, they have teamwork, however, they did not know how to...how to conduct the students to achieve the target". Teachers received no acknowledgement for their work, there was no appreciation and they weren't internally motivated. One of the members of the school management committee, the counselor Zain was alluding to this fact when he states, "human are different. In order to manage human, there should be one special touch such as this new principal uses…". Teacher Shifa concurs with Counsellor Zain when she says, "she gives us support, inspiration to do something...and she also gives us appreciation, compliments verbally". During the visits to the school, the researcher himself observed a great sense of camaraderie between the teachers, both in the staffroom and outside.

Demography: The demography of the school was a significant context for the school. The school is located in a remote location which serves students living over a large spread of rural and underdeveloped area. The school records show that a large majority of the students come from farming families who are not well-off economically. One of the parents, Zak, links the lower socio-economic status of the families with the lack of interest for studies and lower academic achievement of the students, "they (have) lack of interest to study. They don't have interest to learn and come to school, because they come from different family background, poor families and so on". Although a large majority of the students come from Muslim households, there are a significant number of students who come from Siamese families. Siamese Malaysians are of Thai ancestry and a majority of them follow Buddhism and try to

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preserve their cultural heritage. The researcher also discovered that a significant number of parents are not well-educated and are, therefore, unable to help their children at home with their studies. The schools is disadvantaged in two different way in terms of student's abilities: one, a large majority of the students that join the school are weak in academics and low achievers, and two, students who improve and start getting 'As' quickly move on to other schools which are better ranked and are full- boarding schools. Principal Noor had the following to say:

our students are very weak and they are not from the selected one, because the good students who score more A's are already enroll to another schools, unfortunately not to this school. Because there are Science schools, MRSM and other full boarding schools available. So most of good students (scorers), they prefer to go to these schools instead of this school. If we want to depend on them, they are not here. So, I polish everyone who we have here until they can be better students.

The school also caters to 25 students who are academically challenged. They have been separated from the mainstream students and study on the first floor in five different classrooms. A significant amount of resources are allocated to cater to these students although the school is not well-equipped to handle these students appropriately.

Students were not generally interested in education which might be due to the fact that their families were not well educated or illiterates. Principal Noor explains, "we have a problem with our students, they have less interest in studying". The Admin echoes similar sentiments when he states that:

Before the present principal, we had issue in the parent's awareness on the importance of academics for the students. The students liked to skip school. We used to have high rate of skipping school percentage.

Parent Raz adds that the low level of interest in academics is also reflected on the number of students who would opt for joining extra classes to improve their learning. He informs that "Before this, there were only 15 students who were involved in tuition classes" which was conducted with the support of the District People's Representative of Pedu (Aduan daerah Pedu).

4.2.3.2 The External Context

Apart from the internal contexts mentioned above, the school also operated under a variety of external contexts as well. The findings clearly identify two main external contexts that affect the school. The two external contexts are explained below.

Expectations of the Ministry of Education: At the time of the current principal joining the school, the school was languishing at a Band 5 level and was among the bottom 10 percent of all the schools in Malaysia. The principal explains the apathy shown by the Ministry of Education towards the non-performing school very succinctly, "it was like the JPN (The office of Education) didn't know about it....but not really they didn't know, it (was) just (that) this school did not really stand out before, especially in terms of academic and there was no any involvement in state levels". Since the school was not performing, there was little support from the JPN. The Ministry of Education supports the performing schools with more funding and facility that enables the school to perform even better. The ministry expects a consistent improvement both in terms of improvement in ranking as well as upward movement to a higher band.

Parents and community engagement: Parent support is the backbone of any school, however there was little parental involvement in the school affairs which deprived the school in benefitting from a great resource. Parent Raz, who has been with the school for several years explains the situation of parental involvement under the tenure of previous principal:

when I was here for my first time, it was a lady principal. She refused to allow community to use the school field. We are not allowed to enter the school and use the facilities such as the field. Her attitude is like she is the only one who does the right thing. Nobody can say anything to her. There is no use if we talk to her.

He goes on to say that although the next principal had a better relationship with the parents, he still did not involve parents in the school affairs. During an informal conversation on one of the visits, one of the parents told that it was for the first time that the parents understood that they had an important role to play in their child's education and that if they are involved, it helps their children to learn in a better way. Earlier, they felt that their job was over when they dropped their kids at the school's gate. They felt that they were 'unwelcome' in the school and were 'kept at bay'. There was also negligible involvement of the parents and the community, depriving the school of valuable resources.

4.2.3.3 The Personal Context:

Apart from the four internal and two external contexts, the findings demonstrated that the personal context of the new principal plays an important role in defining the school's success and the various methods in which it operates. The personal traits of the principal have been one of the strongest context under which the school operates. The respondents mentioned a stark contrast between the personality of the current

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principal and the principals before. It was also evident from the responses and the researcher's personal observation that most of the practices of the principal, and that of the others, had a distinct reflection of the personal traits of principal Noor. Principal Noor is an extremely friendly person and is liked by all in the school. She is treated as a family member; the students are not hesitant to call her 'Mom'! Parent Raz claims that "Her personality, she is so humble and down to earth she never brings her high position to any where she goes. She can just eat anywhere and with anyone". 'She is kind', 'caring', and a 'positive thinker', he adds. Almost all of the respondents were of the similar opinion. Parent Zak explains her close relationship with people by claiming that "she has no gap with people' while student Aman says that "She is friendly, she is close to us". He goes on to compare her with the previous principal and says, " If I want to make a comparison, we didn't have a close relationship with the previous principal… because he was not really close to us". Teacher Haidi claims that "She has a good behavior…she is caring…she is a good friend". Teacher Shifa concurs, "Yes , she is very friendly", and then goes on to claim,

With students, she shows that she is friendly by treating them as her own children. She always takes care of our students. She likes to talk to them. She asked them whether they are OK today. Not only to the students, but also to the staffs.

Teacher Zeenat is impressed with her 'human touch' and claims that "she has no gap with students, teachers or anyone…she also touches our hand politely, it doesn't matter for her".

The personal observation of the researcher also confirms the findings from the respondents. Principal Noor came out to be very pleasing, soft spoken, friendly and

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cooperative person. When she was approached for the data collection for the first time, she was welcoming and cooperative. She made sure that people who were selected for interviews had ample free time for discussions. She personally took the researchers for a round of the school and while walking, it was observed that she would stop at every person we met, greet them, smile and say a nice thing or two before moving on. Perhaps that is how she was able to garner respect from her staff and inspired them to try harder.

4.2.4 The Core Practices of the principal of SMK Rural

This section answers the second research question pertaining to the core practices of the school principal. The principal of SMK Rural shows a keen awareness of her own context and her practices manifests her adjustments in a manner that is greatly influenced by her personal traits and belief system. The analysis of the qualitative data collected through the interviews, observation, document scanning etc. revealed the following core practices of the principal Noor:

Table 4.7

The five core practices of the principal of SMK Rural

No.	Core Practices of Principal Noor
1	Providing specific goals and targets.
2	Improving academic Achievement.
3	Developing teachers and staff members.
4	Creating Meaningful Coalitions
5	Creating a Positive and Conducive Overall School climate

These practices are explained in detail as under.

5.2.4.1 Providing vision and specific goals for the school

The first thing that one notices in the school is the manner in which the school vision and mission is displayed prominently all around the school. She claims that not having the vision and mission clearly displayed in the school campus does not create a proper learning environment. She speaks about how teachers and staff need to have specific goals so that they know which direction they are moving. The principal of SMK Rural is a goal-oriented leader who always operates with specific goals in her mind for the school. "She is Goal oriented", teacher Zeenat claimed in one of her informal conversations. The principal herself claims that she sets goals and targets and lets the teachers be aware of what they are out to achieve, "I explained clearly about the objectives to the teachers, the mission must be clear, I explained that our mission should be to get quality teaching for the students". She does not seem to set long term goals for the school but rather relies on short term goals which are enhanced each time the goal is achieved. During our conversations, it was evident that she has set specific targets for the school in the past and has achieved those targets. Her next target is to improve school ranking by another 300 places to be among the top 800 schools in Malaysia. She also has targets be a Band 3 school in the near future although she believes that it is extremely difficult target to achieve given the kind of students who enter her school "very difficult to achieve because our students are very weak". However her immediate target is to improve the school ranking rather than the school band, "I target for school ranking, not for Band because it is very difficult. I already increased the ranking to 800, from Band 5, the score is 53...so I increased it to 57 and got Band 4. To get Band 3, I need to increase another 10 points which can be attained". Teacher Zeenat confirms this while

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explaining the target of achieving Band 3 in the next year, "we want to increase the school band. When she came here, the school was Band 5, now, the school is Band 4…Going to be (Band 3) next year". The counsellor Zain explains that another major goal for the school being set by the principal is to achieve an attendance of 98 percent. The attendance has already been improved from a lowly 80% to a respectable 93 percent on an average during the last three years. He explains:

We also want to increase the percentage of attendance until it achieved to 100%. The target given by the ministry is 98%. So, it should be only 2% of students who are absent. That is what we want to try to solve. "

Parent Zak states that the principal encourages other stakeholders to set targets for themselves as well, "She has target, her own target, we have our own goal and target, and the effort to achieve the target". Principal Noor's other target is to receive the Ministry of Education award for a third consecutive year, as Counsellor Zain explains, "She has also targeted to receive the SPM award from the Ministry of Education for the third year in a row". She not only sets targets for students as well but also lets them know ways to achieve the target, as one of the students explains," the principal always tell us her target to achieve Band 3 next year, and she also tells us what we should do. We will put our effort to achieve that. We want to get bai'ah (award) 3 times consecutively".

4.2.4.2 Improving Academic Achievement

Principal Noor has a single-minded focus on academic achievement of the students of SMK Rural, to an extent that co-curricular activities have taken a back-bench. She rightly believes that only way the school can progress is through an increased focus on academic improvement of all its students. The counsellor Zain is very clear about

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the main focus of the principal, "Her main focus, of course, is academic". Teacher Zeenat concurs with the counsellor when she claims, "So here, the focus is more on academics". Similar sentiments have also been echoed by teacher Haidi who says, "focus on academic was 100%... all the previous principals did not focus on academic performance". Almost all the respondents were unanimous in proclaiming that principal Noor strives to improve the academic achievement of all the students of SMK Rural and uses a variety of methods and techniques to achieve her target. While going through the records, the researcher found that due to her single minded focus on improving academic achievement, the school has prospered and has shown significant and consistent growth in the results. Student explains that while there were very few 'A' students before she arrived, now there were many students who scored 'A's and the pattern of enhanced performance was not limited to just one subject but was spread across all the subjects, both in the science stream and humanities. Due to her relentless pursuit of academic excellence, the school has shown tremendous progress and has not only improved in the school rankings but has also moved to a higher school band. While agreeing that when she arrived at the school, her biggest challenge was to improve the academic achievement of the students, Principal Noor proudly claims that she could receive academic excellence award from the Ministry of Education which is a proof of her efforts, not once but twice in a row. She is also confident that she will get the award this year as well, making it three in a row.

4.2.4.3 Developing Teachers and Staff members

Principal Noor works closely with her teachers and pursues a policy of continuous development of all teachers which she believes will enable her to achieve her goals of academic excellences. She explains that when she joined the school, the teamwork

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of the teachers was alright but they were unaware of the strategies to improve achievement, "Before this, they have teamwork, however, they did not know how to...how to conduct the students to achieve the target". She quickly realized that the team of teachers that she had was good in quality and knowledge but they were not motivated and they did not feel the drive to excel. They lacked inner strength and conviction in their capabilities. She informs about the situation of teachers, "They (were) good already, but I still had to build their strength, especially teacher's inner strength". She believes that once the teachers have the inner strength and have their self-esteem, then "they will work vigorously and honestly". She constantly motivates them and supports them. She is quick in recognizing the strengths of her teachers and assigns them tasks that they are good at, as one of the teachers points out, "When she wants to appoint us for certain posts, she knows our potential… she can easily recognize our individual ability or strength".

4.2.4.4 Creating Meaningful Coalitions

Principal Noor builds meaningful coalitions with various stakeholders of the school; be it the parents, external agencies, various government departments or school teachers and staff, to achieve her goals. One of the parents appreciates her efforts and states, "…she (is) always close with the non-governmental organization". Principal Noor realizes the benefits of developing meaningful relationship with the parents and the community and uses it to the maximum advantage for the school.

Principal Noor has converted the disinterested parents into her strongest allies who have helped the school immensely; both in terms of adding new facilities and providing manpower to carry out various activities in the school.

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She has good connections with the prominent public figures of the region. She uses her connections to support various initiatives. For example, she organized a PTA meeting in the island of Langkawi which was sponsored by her connections with a prominent VIP. Parent Raz was all praise for her connections, "We even had our meeting in Langkawi… Our trip was sponsored by the VIPs who are close to the Principal. I thought this trip was impossible in the first place, however the principal really make it success". Principal Noor is very friendly with her students who like them a lot. In fact, student Aman claims that "she encourages us to address her as 'Bonda' (mother)".

4.2.4.5 Creating a Positive and Conducive School Environment

Principal Noor works hard to create a positive school environment for all; both in terms of improved physical environment and in terms of creating and promoting harmony and camaraderie among all the stakeholders. While showing off the physical environment, which the researcher found to be attractive and informative, Principal Noor claims that she worked very hard to create such an environment from a 'gloomy' and 'sorrowful' environment that she inherited. She explains:

What you see today, you can notice that the school view looked cheerful, beautiful and conducive. The classes now are more conducive as compared to before I came here. At the previous time, there was nothing has been done for school environment, there were no learning huts, no signboards, the school vision and mission were also not shown clearly and the school looked gloomy. It was like nobody bother on the school environment

One of the parents claims that "she will make sure all classrooms are convenient and teachers' room are comfortable enough". Another parent also echoes similar

sentiments while explaining the focus of Principal Noor on improving the physical environment of the school:

she made changes the school's environment. You can see, she repainted the school wall. She goes through the classrooms and check whether it is conducive or not. She changed the curtains in all rooms.

He goes on to add that since she was aware that students have less interest in studying because they found the physical environment not conducive, that's why she decided that "we must prepare the environment first". Student Aman also comments on the enhanced physical environment under principal Noor, "The new principal changed the building colour…new curtains for all classrooms and also the table cloth". Student Nuri echoes similar sentiments when she states "school was so sorrowful, but now the school looks fine…she wants to give comfort to students to study…classrooms are (now) more cheerful than before".

Principal Noor not only works on improving the physical environment of the school but also ensures that there is a climate of mutual trust, respect and familial surroundings within the school. Parent Zia praises the principal on her motivational talks to the students which helps them to "be better and more positive in studying". She treats all the staff, students and the parents as her family, encourages students to call her 'mother', personally wishes her teachers and staff on important occasions and celebrations. She claims that teachers tell her that "they never had such kind of things before". The admin explains how she strives to create a family-atmosphere in the school, "She has different approach… her management has more family-based approach". Teacher Zeenat concurs with the admin and claims that teachers get 'support and inspiration to do something".

4.2.5 Enactment of the core practices

Table 4.8

Enactment of the five core practices by the principal of SMK Rural

S.No.	Core Practices	Enactment of core practices
1	Providing specific goals and targets	a. Setting priorities b. Creating common goals c. Improving the school ranking
2	Improving academic achievement	a. Data driven analysis and improving teaching and learning b. Providing extra support c. Seeking external help d. Creating a conducive learning environment
3	Developing teachers and staff members.	Being a mentor, coach and guide for teachers and staff members b. Using personal traits of excellent interpersonal skills
4	Creating meaningful coalitions	a. Involving parents to volunteer in the school matters b. Encouraging parents for monitory and material contributions c. Building relationships with external agencies.
5	Creating a positive and conducive overall school climate	a. Providing positive physical environment for everyone b. Enabling psychological well-being for all

4.2.5.1 The enactment of the practice of Providing vision and specific goals for the school

Principal Noor inherited a school which was hopelessly languishing at the bottom ten percent of the schools in Malaysia. The school had no concrete goals to achieve; neither short term goals nor long term goals. Although teachers in the school were of good quality and there was ample team spirit, they got away by doing their routine work with nothing concrete to achieve. Principal Noor's claim, which was seconded by other respondents demonstrates the state of affairs, "they did not know how to…conduct (and) achieve target. I showed them the way and told them what we

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want to do". Principal Noor enacts her practice of providing vision and specific goals for the school in the following 3 ways:

a. Setting priorities: Principal Noor, upon her arrival immediately realized that the task that awaits her is enormous and that she needs to break it down to smaller tasks and pick up the ones that need her immediate attention first before moving on to the others. Although she had no doubt that her topmost priority would be to improve the academic achievement of her students, but she also knew that unless she creates a conducive environment for teaching and learning, her ultimate goal of improving academic achievement would not materialize. Thus, to achieve her ultimate goal, she broke down her tasks to smaller goals which would lead her to success. She set priorities for herself and strategized to achieve her goals.

First of all, she focused on teachers, invited them for discussions and ensured that they are all clear about what they have set out to achieve. She explains, "I explained clearly about the objectives to the teachers" so that the mission is clear to them, which was "to get quality teaching for students' effectiveness". She claims that teachers were quite positive about the objectives since now they could see clearly what they were out to achieve since earlier "they did not know the future direction of the school".

Her second immediate priority was to improve the physical environment of the school so that it becomes conducive for teaching and learning. Since the school had limited support from the Ministry of Education in terms of funds due to its low ranking, she turned to the parents for support. She rallied them around her goal of enhancing the physical environment by explaining how it will benefit their children. Parents responded positively when they realized the benefits and soon they

contributed in the form of new curtains for the classrooms, new paint for the school building and 'learning huts', which students could use for their study during their spare time. Most of the respondents claim that the improvement of the physical environment of the school had tremendous positive effect on the learning attitude of the students.

Her third priority was of improving the morale of her staff and the students in order to create a sense of belonging among them so that they feel motivated to achieve their goals. As Admin puts in succinctly:

Actually, all principals focused on academics, however humans are different. In order to manage humans, there should be one special touch such as this new principal (who) uses family-based approach.

For this, she encouraged a family-oriented environment in the school where everybody was treated as an important member of the family. She organized several meetings with the teachers where she showed them the way forward and also helped them in identifying what to do for progress. She created WhatsApp group of all the teachers through which they could discuss any issues related to the school or personal matters. She began the tradition of celebrating important occasions like birthdays or anniversaries where everyone could get together, cut cake and enjoy togetherness. She even began home visits to meet their family members. Her 'personal touch', as explained by her has been confirmed by all the respondents. Her gesture has worked wonders as the teachers and staff members feel more connected and motivated. She explains:

They said they never have such kind of this thing before. And then we have birthday party for the teachers, those who have birthday on July, then we will celebrate all of

them in one birthday party. Since I wish them through SMS, the same day, I will also give them birthday card. I touched their heart. After that, I always involve myself in any programs here. Some teachers, they are so committed to the schools. They are willing to spend more times here in the school, so I go to their house and meet with their family members. For example, I see their husband and family.

One of the senior teachers, teacher Haidi showed traces of emotion when she tells how she is considerate when someone in the family of any teacher or staff falls sick:

When one of our family members is sick, she would come to our house and pay a visit and when teachers ask for leave (when somebody in the family is sick), Ok, go take care of your family and you don't have to come…because she said to us, 'family comes first in that situation'

If improving the morale and creating a positive attitude among the teachers and staff was her priority, then the researcher finds her to be very successful in her actions since the sense of family atmosphere was clearly evident during his observations. Principal Noor implies that she uses her personal touch deliberately because she knows that if she forces people to work, they won't work with their heart:

I used more personal touch because, for me, if I use strict approach, the teachers are not afraid of it anymore. Let say when I said, if you don't work, then your achievement will be decreased. They don't bother about it anymore nowadays. Even if I squeezed them, it would not work. Because in our laws …even we have warning letter to the problematic teachers, but what I can see, it seldom (leads) to a teacher being terminated for misbehaviour. … So, we must build close relationship with them.

Although when she came to the school, attendance was not on her immediate priority list because the school attendance was at 82 percent, which, according to her was poor but other matters were more pressing "so I did not put my focus on the attendance". However, after a year, in 2014, she shifted her focus on improving the attendance of the students. She set a target of improving the attendance to at least 90 percent first and then move towards the ideal target of 98 percent as been advised by the Ministry of Education. In consultation with the teachers, staff and the parents, she devised a schoolwide program, called 'Improving Attendance Program" where she created a committee which was in charge of monitoring the attendance. If a student missed the school without any genuine reason, he/she would be kept in a 'school skipping zone'. A letter would be sent home for the parents demanding an explanation why the child skipped the school. For repeated offenders, there were consequences like cleaning the school. The counselor Zain gushes when he speaks about the success of the priority on improving attendance:

Before the present principal, we have issue in parents' awareness on the importance of academics for the students. The students liked to skip school. … However, now the percentage is increasing up to 94.6% which is good. This year we maintained the attendance above 90%.

The researcher himself observed the attendance to be over 90 percent on all his trips to the school. Student Naz explains that she comes to school every day because "if I don't go to the school, my parents must (will) be angry" and also that she is scared to skip school because "the school have (has) 'skipping zone'… the discipline teachers will take action".

b. Creating Common Goals: Although it was observed that most of the goals for the school were made by the Principal, they were made with intense consultation with the teachers and other members of the community. Ones the goals were set, principal Noor makes sure that these are well communicated to the students, parents and the teachers in order to make it a common goal for all the stakeholders. Most of the stakeholders, while talking about the goals mentioned them as if they were their own goals. Principal Noor elaborates that while she explains the goal to the teachers, she does it with the intention that the "mission must be made clear" which makes the acceptance easy since "they see (clearly) what we want to achieve". Almost all the respondents knew fairly well what the ultimate goal for the school was. Principal Noor states that "I target 300 (places) jump and get ranked in 800" among all the schools in Malaysia. Also she targets to be a Band 3 school soon, however she wants the school ranking to be among top 800 schools first. One of the parents concurs and is very positive that the school will be a Band 3 school within the next two years. She explains to the students that since there are 100 students who would sit for the exams this year, to achieve 100% results, each of the students is worth 1 percent towards the achievement. Similarly the goal of achieving more than 90 percent of attendance was known to all the stakeholders, including the students, and all the respondents mentioned it during their interviews or during informal conversations.

c. Improving the School Ranking: Principal Noor works tirelessly towards improving the school ranking by setting up short term goals, achieving it and then setting up another. She was able to move the school from the bottom 10 percent of the schools in Malaysia to a respectful top 50 percent. She has her next target of being among the top 800 schools which will move the school among top 35 percent of all schools in the country. She believes that by focusing on school ranking, she will be able to

improve all the areas of the school since school ranking depends upon the academic achievement and the achievement in co-curricular areas. Improved ranking also brings financial benefits from the Ministry of Education which, in turn, enables her to further improve the school. She explains, "I target 300 jump and get ranked in (top) 800 and also principal new deal award". She has been awarded by the ministry for the last two years and the money that she receives is promptly utilized to improve the school, as parent Raz informs, "she will spend the money wisely…she is not stingy, for her, there no point in keeping money". She also complements the way she is quick to invest in resources without keeping unused funds, "She never keeps school budget for long time; every time we have donation or financial support, she will quickly plan for the improvement of the school".

She understands that for the school ranking to improve, enhanced academic achievement plays a very important role. Hence a majority of her focus is on setting achievable target for improving the teaching and learning activities within the school campus. "I make sure that the PDP (Malay acronym for Teaching and Learning) must be efficient, which means teaching must be of (high) quality for the students learning". For that, she consults teachers, analyses the student scores and, along with the teachers, sets targets for individual students. Thus, buy setting targets for each individual students, she is able to steadily improve the academic achievement of the students which, in turn, helps her to realize her bigger goal of improving the school ranking.

4.2.5.2 Enactment of the practice of Improving Academic Achievement

Principal Noor's second core practice is to consistently work towards improving the academic achievement of her students. There is a great deal of evidence from the

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data that strongly support principal Noor's leadership practices in overseeing the instructional programs at the school. She organizes regular meetings with the teachers where matters related to improvement in teaching and learning and other curricular matters are discussed, as counselor Zain points out, "Her main focus, of course (is) academic". When she arrived at the school, there were hardly any straight 'A' students, as one of the students points out, "nobody could score straight A's here, but now there are many of us who score 8 As". She uses a variety of context-specific actions which have proven effective and have produced positive results. The academic achievement of student has increased tremendously which has been reflected upon the ever-increasing ranking of the school.

Principal Noor enacts her practice of improving academic achievement in the following 4 ways:

a. Data driven analysis and improving teaching and learning: Principal Noor emphasizes of constant study of student achievement data so that she is able to identify the areas that need improvement and then she formulates programmes to rectify the situation. Her love for data and making decisions based upon the data is not lost on the teachers, as one of the teachers, Zeenat, states matter-of-factly, "The present principal, … used to be the Science Senior Teacher, so she is so efficient with numbers and statistics". She goes on to add that "the present principal knows everything as a whole". The researcher too observed that the data and numbers were at her fingertips and she would backup her claims instantly with numbers without actually consulting any piece of paper. When she came to the school for the first time, she claims:

…when I came here, I needed to see how was the teachers' and students' situation at that time. I studied them first for 6 months. I had meetings with all members, study the students and did everything. First was the meetings, the teachers must know the headcounts of the students for the class examination.

She believes that teachers must be aware of the strength and weaknesses of the students so that they can formulate effective plans to improve their performance. She explains, "The teacher's must know the strength of the students, how many can score A, how many can score B and so on, and then what did they do to plan for the improvement".

She goes on to elaborate that teachers must break down the achievement to individual subject level and then work with the students on each subject for improvement. Teacher Shifa, confirms her claim and elaborates, "After the midterm examination, she rearranges the performance improvement according to students' ability, students' results." in each subject. Principal Noor expands upon her claim:

for subjects such as Bahasa Malaysia, Biology, Science, English, History, Chemistry, Maths, the teachers must know. By then, they can study again and form tuition or extra classes for the students from June to October before the examination. So, the teachers must know the subjects those students could not understand. They (students) must know all subjects.

Principal Noor, upon receiving the information on the areas that need improvement, then focuses on improving the teaching and learning activities in the school. She claims that, "I make sure that PDP (Teaching and Learning) must be efficient… which means the teaching must be of quality for students' learning".

Principal Noor also monitors the progress made by the students closely. She divides the students into groups called a 'batch' and assigns a teacher as their supervisor who constantly monitors their progress. The supervisor is called 'Manager'. The counselor Zain explains:

> in terms of the management of the academic, every manager must look after one batch. For example, one manager is in charged in one Form. He or she will hold a position as a leader of the batch. This manager knows deeply about the batch information. If we want to know about certain batch, we will refer to the batch manager first.

Principal Noor begins to prepare the students for their exams early, two years prior to their actual exams. Early preparation enables the students to perform well as parent Zia who seems to be happy with her practice claims, "when my daughter was enrolled for Form 4, she already started her preparation for SPM (Malaysian Secondary Examinations) at the end of the semester. That's mean; the students have early preparation for Form 5 and SPM. Teacher Haidi is equally glad with the principal's practice of giving extra focus on exams and could not stop herself from commenting upon the previous principal who did not pay much attention to exams:

> When she came here, she focused on the examination. The focus on the academic was 100%. We had compact academic programmes for Form 5 students. Since she put her 100% focus to improve examination, the teachers were so happy. This is because the all previous principals didn't put focus on the academic performance. When she came here, our students' performance in the academic has increased.

Teacher Zeenat also echoes the same sentiments when she claims, "we provide them with early preparation for SPM even they are still at Form 4, to be ready for next year".

Providing Extra Support: Principal Noor provides a variety of extra support to ensure that the weaker students are taken care of and they improve their learning. Extra classes for different group of students are held at different times, beginning as early as 6.30 am to late in the evening. These classes are held during school days and also during semester breaks and other vacations. Parent Zia claims that the extra classes provided by the school have helped a lot in improving the achievement of the students. She informs:

Before this, extra classes only done after school session only. But now, the new principal proposed to make extra classes starting after Subuh (6.45am). So our children start their learning session earlier….they have extra classes every day after school session, for the whole year.

Student Aman believes that the improvement in academic achievement is because of the extra classes being conducted by the teachers, "This is because she always provides us with supporting programs such as tuition classes". Another students concurs when she claims, "she provides us with many useful programmes, extra classes especially for us".

Principal Noor also invites expert teachers from other places, including from overseas from time to time, for improving the English ability of the students. One of the students praised her mentor from Singapore who enabled her to learn the language and now she is comfortable with the language. The researcher found her language skills in English to be excellent.

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Principal Noor personally supervises the extra classes to ensure that the programmes are working as intended. She often attends these classes, including the night classes, as one of the students pointed out, "She always attends night classes…even though we are still in form 4, but we already are required to attend night classes". Utilizing her motivational skills, she has created a strong team of committed and determined teachers who are not averse to working after hours, even for night sessions. The admin points out that, "the teachers have strong commitment because they teach until night time regardless of weekend (or) holidays…The teachers are always available here".

Principal Noor was a science teacher during her early career days. Although she has been into leadership positions for a long time, she still likes to teach students, specially the ones that need extra help in the subject. Parent Raz is impressed with her teaching and hopes that she continues doing so in the future as well:

she is quite busy with her work, but she still wants to teach. She likes to teach science subject and last year many students succeeded to score A for that subject. We also hope the same for this year too

On the other hand, teacher Zeenat believes that Principal Noor focuses too much on academic achievement, so much so that she has not focused too much on co-curricular activities, "she puts more focus on the academics but co-curriculum is conducted as always". She goes on to elaborate how the principal organizes various programs for the students:

the classes start earlier than the other school. … we provide them

with early preparation for SPM even they are still in Form 4 and

be ready next year. We also have class for every holiday. We

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never missed it. We have the SPM preparation class two weeks

right after the school semester finishes. Then the students are

given another few weeks to rest, and when they come back for

new semester, we will continue the preparation class early which

is on February. The extra classes are held day and night for the

students.

The researcher observed that the noticeboards displayed clearly what all extra classes that are organized by the school complete with the list of students, timings and the name of the instructors. Perhaps this is one way of displaying a snapshot of all the extra academic activities that are conducted by the school.

Seeking external help: Principal Noor is not shy of utilizing external help, particularly from the parents to forward her agenda of improved academic achievement of her students. A majority of respondents elicited how parents and external agencies are involved in various academic programs that the principal implements in the school. The results of the encouragement that the parents receive to involve in the teaching and learning activities is evident when parent Raz claims, "for teaching and learning, we do help the teachers". Before every exams, she invites parents to meet the teachers where the teachers advice the parents on the areas that the student needs to work on at home under parental guidance. The parents are also made aware of the targets that have been set for the student, as teacher Shifa explains, "We also call for the parents before the examination so that know can set the target for their children".

Parent Raz explained that while most of the parents are unable to help directly with the teaching and learning activities because of their own limited educational

background, nonetheless they participate in providing logistic support for the various extra programs that the school organizes. He elaborates:

We can call for them to help teachers in the school, for example extra classes during night time. The parents or community volunteered to guard the school and make sure that the students are safe. We have special committee to make sure of students' safety, they will bring students who don't have transport to the school and also bring them back when the session has finished. We might not help our children in academic (directly), but we can help their learning process.

Principal Noor also mobilizes the parents for motivational talks which, in turn, help the students to see the importance of academic achievement in their future life. Parent Zak elaborates, "We make programs, we work together with the teachers and the counselors were parents and teachers focus on students motivation". "It is very important", he quips. He also elaborates upon how parents guide the students to be more focused on academic achievement so that they understand "what is the importance of academics in their future life".

Principal Noor also gives suggestion to parents how they can help their children to study at home and how they can monitor their children when they get distracted. Parent Zia had the following to say:

The principal ask us to observe our children. We must be aware of what our child is doing. For example if our child stays too long in the room, we must advise them not to waste time. Nowadays, is advanced technology era, we cannot just let them be. We need to monitor them. When I see my child focus too much on her phone, I just take the phone and ask her to focus on studying. After she finishes her study, then I

will return the phone. The principal asked us to observe our children so that they can focus and get excellent score.

Utilizing the help of outside agencies for the benefit of students is another practice that is employed by the Principal Noor. She has developed excellent relations with RISDA which helps the school to provide free private tuitions to the struggling students. PERKASA and GPMS are two other organizations that help and support various academic programmes being conducted by the school. Parent Raz explains:

Another thing about this new principal is she is always close with the non-government organizations, for example RISDA. They provide free tuition classes for our children. (she) met the officers from RISDA, she pleaded to them to continue giving tuition classes for the school, and it was successful. This was also supported by the District People's Representative (ADUN DAERAH PEDU). Before this, only 15 students were involved in the tuition classes.
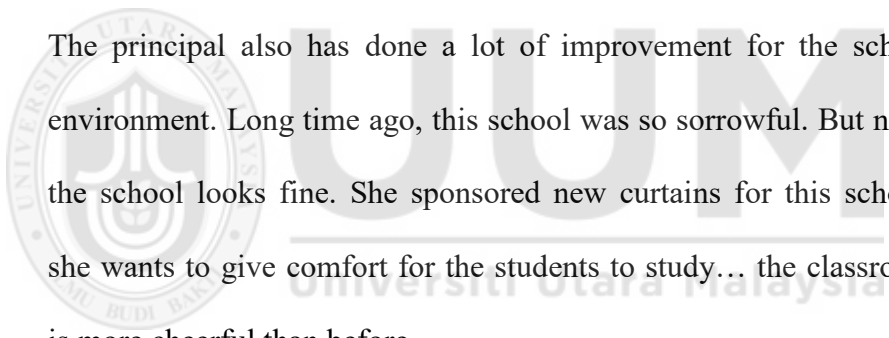
His point was confirmed by parent Zak who was pleased with the way the principal manages to garner extra support for the students in terms of additional funds for extra tuition classes.

Creating a Conducive Learning Environment: Principal Noor ensures that the students go about their learning in a conducive learning environment. All the respondents were unanimous in their observation that the physical environment and the overall working environment of the school has improved significantly since the arrival of the new principal. Upon her arrival, principal Noor found the school environment 'sorrowful' which, according to her was not at all conducive for learning. The school walls were dull, there were no flowers, no greenery, no display boards and the students had no special areas where they could sit and study in an

informal learning environment. Parent Zak considers her focus on developing a conducive environment for learning as very important since he believes that "as human being we know we must prepare for conducive classroom for students, especially for learning". He goes on to claim that the principal knows that conducive environment keeps the students engaged in learning, "she knew that we have problem with our students, they have less interest in studying, so we must prepare the environment first". Similar sentiments were echoed by another parent, Raz, who said that "she will make sure all classrooms are convenient (for learning)".

Her efforts of improving the school environment is not lost on the students as well. One of the students, Nuri, points out:

> The principal also has done a lot of improvement for the school environment. Long time ago, this school was so sorrowful. But now, the school looks fine. She sponsored new curtains for this school; she wants to give comfort for the students to study… the classroom is more cheerful than before.

Principal Noor herself uses the same adjective 'sorrowful' to explain the environment of the school upon her arrival. She further elaborates the condition of the school to emphasize the point that the environment was not conducive to teaching and learning:

> What you see today, you can notice that the school view looked cheerful, beautiful and conducive. The classes now are more conducive as compared to before I came here. At the previous time, there was nothing been done for school environment, there were no learning huts, no signboards, the school vision and mission were also

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not shown clearly and the school looked gloomy. It was like nobody

bother on the school environment.

For uplifting the 'sorrowful' school environment, principal Noor turned towards the parents for help. Due to her efforts, she was able to persuade then to donate generously which helped the school in repainting the walls, installation of curtains in the classrooms and construction of special learning areas within the school campus where students could sit in their spare time and learn.

4.2.5.3 Enactment of the Practice of Developing Teachers and Staff Members

Principal Noor works tirelessly to develop her teachers and staff members to be better in what they do, through a series of innovative strategies. She used her prior experience as a teacher and in charge of curriculum and instruction to the fullest to maximize the learning output from the teachers. Through a judicious mix of her personal traits of being family oriented, and her skills in coaching and mentoring, she continuously developed her teachers and staff. Her practice of developing her teachers and staff came to the fore in two distinct ways:

a. Being a mentor, coach and a guide for teachers and staff members: Principal Noor claims that when she arrived at the school, the school was already blessed with qualified people who were willing to work together. However, in the absence of an effective leadership, they were clueless about what they were supposed to achieve. They lacked motivation and went along their work in a routine manner which led to the stagnation of the school. She points out:

Actually all of them are quality teachers, but before this, they could not see clearly any target they want to achieve; they did not know the future direction of the school

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Teacher Shifa concurs with the principal and explains the weakness on the part of the previous administration to ignore the development of teachers into more proactive, target-oriented teachers, "their management was not quite efficient, teachers had teamwork but there was no strong support from the administration". Thus Principal Noor set about making improvement. She invited teachers for discussion, both individually and in groups. She went through the data of each individual student along with the teachers, and made them aware of the importance of referring to the data for making further improvement. She taught them how to analyze achievement data, how to identify the areas that need improvement and set targets. She also coached them to improve their teaching skills using new methods since she believes that improved teaching and learning activities bring positive results and make teachers more confident. She spent considerable amount of time coaching and mentoring them to enable them to begin making conscious decision towards improving their teaching and learning activities for providing quality education to the students. She explains her efforts:

Each of us has our own focus and mission. Mission is given by the Ministry, which is to produce superior quality students and also quality education. From here I think about how to adjust this vision and mission for quality education (with our own mission). How to manage in order to get quality education? If they are aware about this, then they know what to target in SPM examination. So, they (the teachers) must know the quality program for the students.

Her efforts bore fruit and teachers became more competent resulting in better results. As a result, she claims, that "teacher's acceptance was very positive because they could see what we (school) wanted to achieve".

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She encourages teachers to pursue higher qualifications and emphasizes on ongoing professional development activities. In fact, according to one teacher, she has made it compulsory for every teacher to spend at least seven days of undergoing specialized courses/training programs so that they can further develop their skills.

Principal Noor acts as a role model for others to emulate. She herself teaches few classes in order to set examples for others to follow. Teachers were impressed by the way she provides herself as a role model as was evident from their responses.

b. Using her personal traits of excellent interpersonal skills and family-oriented attitude : Principal Noor follows a 'family oriented' approach towards her teachers, using her excellent interpersonal skills which enable teachers and staff members to thrive, feel motivated and feel intrinsically motivated to work towards the betterment of the school. She is aware of her strength and is very confident or her being capable of influencing anybody with her personal touch. She claims "…I am not fierce; I can just touch anybody, by being friendly". She never forgets special days for the teachers and celebrates with the members of the school community:

> personally I wish them. They said they never have such kind of this thing before. And then we have birthday party for the teachers, those who have birthday on July, then we will celebrate all of them in one birthday party. Since I wish them through SMS, the same day, I will also give them birthday card. I touched their heart. After that, I always involve myself in any programs here (for the celebrations).

Principal Noor believes that using her 'personal touch' enables her to get work out of teachers, even the ones who would normally drag their feet. Since the school is a government school and all the teachers and staff are government employees, it is

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very difficult to begin official proceedings against them and get results. It is difficult to dismiss or suspend a government employee. However, when she is extra friendly with them, they feel obligated to work for her, fearing embarrassment:

I used more personal touch because for me, if I use strict approach, the teachers are not afraid of it anymore. Let say when I said, if you don't work, then your achievement will be decreased. They don't bother about it anymore nowadays. Even if I squeezed them, it would not work, because in our laws, even we have disciplinary action, it is difficult to implement it. Let say if a teacher refuses to go and teach in the class, we cannot do anything. The ministry has already given us with policies that we need to follow and obey. Even we have warning letter to the problematic teachers, but what I can see, it is seldom that a teacher is being terminated for misbehavior. This action takes time to investigate and process. So, we must build close relationship with them. They can easily feel shy and respect to us.

The admin confirms her claims and states that "She has a different approach; her management has more family-based approach". He goes on to claim that it is the primary job of the principal to focus on academic achievement and every principal does it, however since we are dealing with human beings, "there should be a special touch such as the principal uses family-based approach". All the teachers had too many positive comments on the way the principal employs her family-based approach. Teacher Haidi claims, "she always WhatsApp us when we have birthday celebrations … she wishes us and she gives cards and fresh flowers, usually roses and also cakes". She even feeds them the cake with her own hands! Similar sentiments were echoed by other two teachers as well.

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Principal Noor praises teachers regularly and rewards them whenever they accomplish something. This helps in motivating them to do even better next time. Admin informs that "she likes to give rewards to the teachers, either verbally or (gifts)". He goes on to say that giving compliments is her habit, so much so that she not only give compliments for extraordinary work but for "anything related to them, … all work and task done by the teachers". Teacher Shifa informs, "Usually, she gives us support, inspiration to do something, she also gives us appreciation, compliments verbally".

For building close relationships with the teachers and staff, Principal Noor not only uses her interpersonal skills on the teachers but extends it to their family members. She makes it a point to visit them at their homes, meet their spouse, children and family members, specially when there is any occasion or if someone is unwell at home. Teacher Haidi points out, "When one of our family members is sick, she would come to my house and pay a visit, because she says to us, 'family comes first'". Principal Noor herself explains the reason why she makes a conscious decision to not only be friendly with her teachers and staff members but also with their family members:

> Some teachers, they are so committed to the schools. They are willing
> to spend more times here in the school, so I go to their house and meet
> with their family members. For example, I see their husband and
> family.

4.2.5.4 Enactment of the Practice of Creating Meaningful Coalitions

Coalition building has been found to be bedrock of successful leadership practices and Principal Noor uses this practice to the fullest. She is adept at building coalitions

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not only with the parents but also with a range of external agencies that have hugely contributed to the welfare of the school. Most of the respondents unequivocally mentioned her strength in this area and explained how she manages to achieve it. The researcher himself observed several examples of the contribution being made by the stakeholders and external agencies and how these contributions add value to the school's programmes. Principal Noor enacts her core practice of building meaningful coalitions in the following three ways:

a. Involving parents to volunteer in the school matters: Upon her arrival to the school three years ago, principal Noor noticed that parents were alienated from the school. They seemed to be kept at bay and were not involved in the school matters, except for attending PTA meeting once a year. Teacher Zeenat mentioned that previous principals did not bother much about the parents:

People like her approach. Like what I have mentioned earlier, the previous principal didn't have close relationship with the parents. The previous principals were more direct. They do not bother about parents.

Similar sentiments were echoed by other respondents who felt that parents were generally ignored by the previous principals. For example, parent Raz informed how the parents were treated under one of the previous principals:

> We were not allowed to enter the school and use the facilities such as
>
> the field. Her attitude is like she is the only one who does the right
>
> thing. Nobody can say anything to her. There is no use if we talk to
>
> her.

On the other hand, principal Noor is welcoming and invites parents to voice their opinion on important matters, as parent Raz informs:

She is different from the previous principal. She welcomes
everybody to meet her and come to her office. Every time she gives
speech in PTA meeting, she also welcomes every parent to say
whatever they want or give any suggestions to her. She really
welcomes the parents to see her.

However, due to the conscious efforts of the current principal to build a meaningful
coalition with the parents, the parents and community are very supportive, as claimed
by the principal:

The committees in PTA are very supportive and close to me. They
are very helpful to our school. Some of them shared to me, before
this they were not very helpful, but now they are supportive.

Principal Noor seeks and obtains help from the parents in various academic,
disciplinary and non-academic matters like volunteering for school activities. Parent
Raz further elaborates that now the parents take active part in teaching and learning
activities of the school and help the teachers. He goes on to explain that although
they cannot help their children directly in academic areas (teaching them), they still
participate indirectly by helping the school in organizing extra tuition classes for the
students who are in need. He elaborates:

we recognize every people in this area. We know who their families'
members are. We can call for them to help teachers in the school,
for example extra classes during night time. The parents or
community volunteered to guard the school and make sure that the
students are safe. We have special committee to make sure of
students' safety, they will bring students who don't have transport to

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the school and also bring them back when the session has finished.

We might not help our children in academic, but we can help their

learning process.

Parent Zak explains how the principal involves some of the parents to work with the

school counselors and teachers to organize motivational programs for the students

which proves beneficial for the students in terms of appreciating the value for

studying hard to be successful in their future life:

we make programs, we work together with counsellors and teachers,

and we have programs like motivation where teachers and parents

will focus on students' motivation. It is very important. … We tell

them about how the future life will be. We explain to them what the

importance of academic are in their future life.

Principal Noor also uses the parents to help and motivate other parents so that they

are able to support their children for variety of issues like discipline, absenteeism,

and in some cases, even financial. For example, when a student is often absent from

the school, teachers will go and visit the parents along with few other parents of the

neighborhood "to try to find the problem and try to solve the problems", as one of the

parents points out. The parent further explains that since the parents are involved,

they show more empathy towards the family of the students which enables them to

solve the problem easily. He further adds that, "This is because we treat them equally

and treat them as our own children".

b. Encouraging parents for monetary and material contributions: The greatest benefit

that Principal Noor brought to the school due to her core practice of building

meaningful coalition is in terms of monetary and material contribution from the

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parents. Since the school was languishing at the bottom of the schools ranking in Malaysia, there was little in terms of funds to cater for the extra facilities that the school needed. She won upon the parents to make generous contributions which not only added new facilities in the school but enabled the school to get additional funding from the Ministry of Education since the school dramatically improved in the ranking. Parents contributed generously when the principal approached them to give the school a new coat of paints and install curtains in the classrooms. She explained to the parents how the change in the physical environment would provide students with a better learning environment. She also impressed upon the parents to contribute towards building various learning areas in the school campus called 'learning hut' which would enable students to use the facility for studying during their spare time. Parent Zia elaborates on how the parents support the school financially:

> When the school calls for us to certain events in the school, for example Yassin Recitation event, we helped the school to prepare the food for the students and teachers. We never booked (order from outside) the food, everything is cooked by the parents. Meaning, we help to decrease the burden of this school financially. We helped the school in terms of setting up the food servings. The teachers only buy the groceries and the parents volunteer to cook all food together. So that the school can use (saved) money for other much important things rather than paying for food service. It might be costly if we pay the food catering. We don't charge the school when we help them to prepare the food. We did it because we feel happy to help. That is our support.

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Parent Raz concurs with him and further adds:

> The principal tell the parents, and the parents agree and help to
> support her. One thing I want to say, we always volunteer to help the
> school. For example, for this curtain, we bought the cloth, sewed it
> and set it up here. We did everything as volunteers. We even painted
> the school ourselves and we did not charge the school.

Teacher Haidi acknowledges the enormous help that principal Noor managed to
receive from the parents due to her coalition with them. She recounts:

> They (parents) helped to build the community hall in this school,
> outdoor study areas for students, and small huts for student to have
> discussions. These facilities were given by the parents for free. They
> provide us the budget and they also built it. Those are the donation
> from the community.

Principal Noor also seeks the help of parents to provide monitory help to those
parents who are unable to pay the school's dues and also contribute in terms of cash
to run the various academic programs of the school. Parent claims, "Yes, parent...we
donate some money to the school so that the school can have supporting programs
and tuitions for the students". Parent Raz explains that if a child is unable to pay the
school fee and is not coming to the school, the principal will request parents to come
along with her to visit their home where they tell them "If they have financial
problem, it is OK. We can help them, the school can allow the students to come and
learn".

c. Building relationships with external agencies: Principal Noor not only has strong relationship with the parents but also actively seeks the help of a number of external agencies to support the school. For example, as parent Raz points out:

Another thing about this new principal is she is always be closed with the non-government organizations for example RISDA. They provide free tuition classes for our children. Before this, this tuition classes were cancelled due to certain problems. When (the new principal) came, met the officers from RISDA, she pleaded to them to continue giving tuition classes for (the school), and it was successful. This was also supported by the District People's Representative (ADUN DAERAH PEDU). Before this, only 15 students were involved in the tuition classes.

Principal Noor sought the help of the department of agriculture to support the school in generating extra income. For this, she utilized the help of a well-connected parent who had links with the department. She was successful in persuading the department to sponsor lime tree plantation in the school which would become a regular source of income for the school. Parent Raz, who is also the head of the school PTA explained:

We appeal to the Department of Agriculture to contribute lime tree to this school, we plant lime tree to help for school income. We have already planted the tree; it is at the back of this school

The researcher himself observed the plantation and upon inquiry, he was told that the income would be able to sponsor a lot of extra classes that the school runs which will free up additional funds to improve upon the school facilities.

4.2.5.5 Enactment of the Practice of Creating a Positive and Conducive Overall School climate:

While principal Noor prioritizes on providing a conducive learning environment for the students for better academic achievement, she goes a step further by providing an overall school environment which enables everyone to have a sense of belonging, internal motivation to perform optimally and feel at home. She not only focused on enriching the physical environment but also works towards building a cordial atmosphere within the school in which parents, students, teachers and the other members of the school community feel welcome and valued. Teacher Zeenat sums up the overall school environment beautifully during her interaction with the researcher:

> This place is wonderful. This place has positive feeling. I told her when we come, not only the school, but the whole region, you feel very peaceful when you come here.

The findings demonstrate that principal Noor enacts her core practices in two distinct manners which are explained as under:

a. Providing positive physical environment to everyone: Principal Noor believes that without a pleasant physical environment in the school, it is not possible for the people to perform optimally, be it students or the teachers and the staff members. She claims that upon her arrival, she found the school 'sorrowful', an observation which was confirmed by other respondents as well. The school has no bulletin-boards, no flowers, the paint had faded, the staff room were shabby and the classrooms unattractive. The researcher observed that the physical environment was pleasant and cheerful, there were display-boards installed all around the school which were tastefully decorated. The school had a nice colour and the classrooms were beautifully maintained with ample materials on display. The staffrooms and other

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offices had a smart look with comfortable furniture and ample light and fresh air. This all was made possible during the last three years under the leadership of the current principal. Principal Noor recalls:

> At the previous time, there was nothing has been done for school environment, there were no learning huts, no signboards, the school vision and mission were also not shown clearly and the school looked gloomy. It was like nobody bother on the school environment.

Students were unanimous in claiming that the positive changes in the school's physical environment have given more 'spirit' to the school which makes it more conducive for them to study. Student Aman points out, "she repainted the school and changed everything, she sponsored new curtains for all classrooms and the table cloth", which had positive effects on the students and "we became more spirited to study." Student Naz adds, "The environment of this school is beautiful, colourful, we have ASEAN aisle where we can learn about other countries, such as Indonesia and Singapore. For example, we can learn about other money currency".

Parent Raz spoke about how she made the classrooms and the teachers room comfortable for teachers, " she will make sure that all classrooms are convenient and teachers room are comfortable enough" to work efficiently. Of course, she used her personal traits and the core practice of building meaningful coalitions for all the improvements that was made in the school's physical environment.

b. Enabling psychological well-being for all: Principal Noor not only focuses on the improvement of the physical environment but also gives due focus to the improvement of the well-being of the teachers, students and the staff members,

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which makes the overall school climate conducive, friendly and positive. A number of respondents voiced their opinion that the school has an excellent team work and all the members of the school, young, old, seniors and juniors are treated with equal respect. Thus there is no prevalent groupism and everyone works as a team towards one common goal for the school. As teacher Zeenat points out:

> Even the newly transferred teachers or newly assigned staffs here are close to each other. It doesn't matter whether you are a senior teacher or new teacher. We can sit together.

Principal Noor uses her great interpersonal skills to make everyone feel important and valued. She involves everyone in decision-making and openly discusses issues, as teacher Shifa informs, "she calls for us for meetings and she asks and discusses with us how to solve these problems." Teacher Zeenat points out that, "she is good in approaching people; she has human touch, she has no gap with students, teachers and anyone". Her small gestures, as gently touching hands while talking, as pointed out by one of the respondent, means a lot for the people around her. Parent Raz points out that she works as a part of the family and doesn't bring her high position between cordial relationships with the people. He points out, "she is so humble and down to earth, she never brings her high position anywhere she goes". Parent Zak mentions how the close the principal is with everyone in the school, "since she is good in leadership, she has no gap between the parents and the management people."

Principal Noor is open to new ideas, even if they are opposed to what she believes. Thus people are open to approach her with ideas that they believe will be beneficial for the school. The admin appreciates her practice and commends her for her open-mindedness:

she is open-minded; she can listen to us and accept whatever we suggested to her. She can tolerate other people's opinion. She would never reject anyone's idea just like that. So, she uses this approach to manage this school….even how small the decision is, she will consider the management's decision.

Principal Noor works closely with the students and acts as their 'mother' rather than a principal who is beyond reach. She is extremely supportive and takes care of student's needs, no matter how small they are. Student Nuri had the following to share while she explained how caring she is for the students:

The principal is a very kind person. She always takes care about the students. If the students have problem, she would always settle the problem. For instance, she has motherly side. We can talk about any problem with her, such as personal problems, student achievement problem, family problem, she always be there to help the students.

Principal Noor's shares her personal experiences with the students to inspire them to work harder. Student Naz had the following to share when she spoke about how the principal provides inspiration to them:

She always spends her time with us whenever she has free time. She always gives us motivation and advises us to be more inspired in studying. She shares her experience in university and the working environment. If we failed, then we couldn't get better job in the future.

4.2.6 Discussion

The basic premise of this study was to identify the contexts under which the principal of SMK Rural operates, what were the core practices of SMK Rural and, most importantly, how does the principal of SMK Rural enact her core practices in response to her immediate contextual environment to make her school a successful school. Data was collected through multiple sources wherein multiple interviews were conducted, documents were scanned, observation of the school and various aspects of its operations were carried out and notes were taken. After a thorough analysis of the collected data, several distinctive themes emerged that point towards the unique contextual practices of the principal. It was revealed that all the core practices were in sync with one or more core practices of successful principal's practices in a number of similar studies conducted in other countries. Although the core practices themselves did not bring forth any surprise, the way these practices were enacted by the principal were indeed unique to the contextual realities of the school.

The data analysis revealed that the school operated under seven major contexts that effected the school. The study of principal's practices revealed that the principal of SMK Rural displayed a set of five core practices that she enacts in response to her unique school environment. These core practices come to the fore in a variety of ways. This section will attempt to discuss each of these core practices under the light of established literature and how these practices relate to the unique context of SMK Rural.
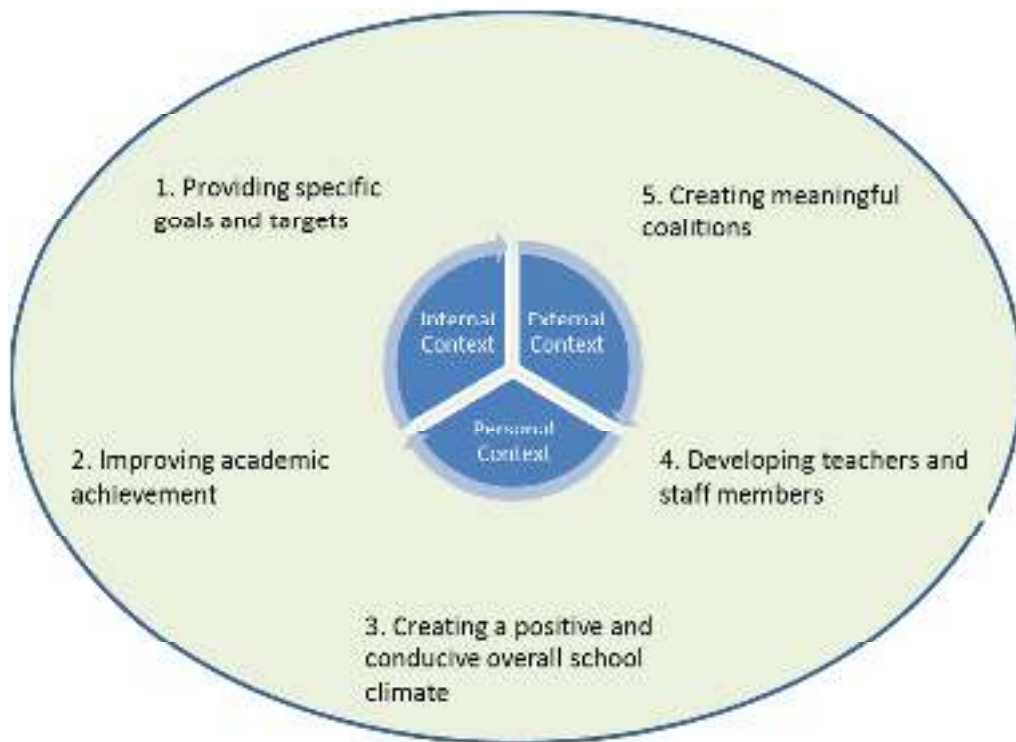
1. Providing specific goals and targets

5. Creating meaningful coalitions

Internal Context External Context

Personal Context

2. Improving academic achievement

4. Developing teachers and staff members

3. Creating a positive and conducive overall school climate

Figure 4.7. The core leadership practices of the principal of SMK Rural

Leithwood and colleagues claim that one of the core practices of a successful principal which is common in almost all studies of successful school principals is that the principals provide vison and set goals for the schools that lead them towards success (Leithwood et. al., 2006). In another study, Leithwood and colleagues again emphasize that among all the dimensions of an effective leadership practice is the practice of setting direction (Leithwood et. al., 2008). Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009), in their synthesis of numerous studies on the influences of leadership on learning outcomes, identified "establishing goals and expectations" as the most important dimension among the eight identified dimensions. They explain that goal setting is "the setting, communicating and monitoring of learning goals, standards, and expectations and the involvement of staff and others in the process so that there is clarity and consensus about goals." Evidence from the interviews and observation at SMK Rural clearly demonstrate that principal Noor's practice embodies the

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findings of the above synthesis and the findings of Leithwood and colleagues in 2008. She has targets for everything that happens in the school. She believes that the school will go nowhere unless it is driven by a clear mission, "the mission must be clear, I explained (to the teachers) that our mission is to get quality teaching for students' effectiveness". However, it was also evident from the findings that principal Noor, apart from claiming to be focused on excellence in academic achievement, concentrates more on short term targets which is incrementally enhanced once the goals are achieved. She has set no long term goals for the school other than that of achieving academic excellence. One of her short-term goal is to improve another 300 places on the Malaysian schools ranking to be among the top 800 schools. There is no higher target set beyond that yet, however, considering how she makes a new target immediately after achieving the current target; most probably she would set a new target once the school is among top 800 schools in Malaysia. Her practice has strong theoretical base within the studies conducted by Locke and Latham in 1990 and in 2002 wherein they claim that having a complicated, high long term target has demotivating effect while goals that are short and straightforward, or proximal goals as claimed by Bandura (1986), tend to enhance motivation and improved learning (Locke and Lataham, 2002; 1990). High long term goal in this case is the general goal of improving academic achievement while short term, fairly less complicated goal as set by principal Noor is to improve the school ranking by 300 within one year.

The evidence indicate that when the principal arrived at the school three years ago, the school did not have specific goals and targets which resulted in teachers being clueless about the direction in which the school was going and they went through the

routine task of teaching and learning. Under such contextual environment, her first response was to let the teachers be aware of the mission and see the way forward.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) believe that "building vision and setting directions" is one of the most important core leadership practices of a successful leader. They emphasize that successful leaders motivate others and lead them towards achieving common goals. They further claim that, successful leaders do not merely set directions but also work with others in order to create a shared purpose and create conditions that enable others to effectively work towards goal achievement. In a similar study conducted by Leithwood and Sun (2009), it was found that leaders become effective when they create a shared vision and lead to positive outcomes like enhanced teacher motivation, commitment and efficacy and creation of a conducive school culture. Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) point out towards the significance of these positive outcomes on enhanced student learning and academic achievement. Principal Noor involves the management and parents in the goal-setting process, as the admin informs, "For the determination of the school targets, the management will put the target, and parents are also involved". During all the interviews, it was evident that most of the respondents spoke about 'our target' implying that the targets set by the school was shared by every member of the school community and was internalized as a common, shared target.

Louis et al., (2010) enumerate the following aspects of the practice of setting direction for the school and its effect on academic achievement:

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Table 4.9

Setting directions and its effect on academic achievement. Adapted from Louis et. al., 2010

The practice of Setting Direction	How These Help in Enhanced Instruction
Creating a Shared goal	Focuses on students achievement
Facilitating acceptance	Teachers become conscious about the academic achievement
High performance expectation	Teachers focus on higher achievement
Effective communication of the goals	The school community focuses on higher academic achievement

Principal Noor has been successful in these four aspects as the evidence conclusively points towards the community embodying the goals set by the school and working tirelessly towards achieving higher academic excellence. The shared commitment was evident when parent Zak informed, "we know what the goals are and how to get the achievement and (through) what programs", and student Naz declared, "we will put our effort to achieve that!"

Being a government school, the broad vision and goals are provided to all the schools in Malaysia by the Ministry of Education. However, principal Noor adapts the vison and mission according to her own contextual needs and creates a series of short term goals in order to achieve the larger goals given by the ministry.

By making the goals simple, principal Noor was able to garner acceptance from the teachers.

Thus, from the above discussion, it is evident that principal Noor's practices are strongly in line with established theoretical evidences from previous researches by Leithwood et. al., (2006, 2008), Locke and Lataham, (2002, 1990), Louis et. al.,

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(2010) and Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009), among many others. Principal Noor emphasizes upon setting directions for the school by formulating a series of short term goals to keep teachers motivated, communicates effectively to all the stakeholders so that they are aware of the goals, works towards creating a shared vision of the school and sets higher expectations each time a target is achieved.

Every school principal, regardless of the type of school, location or the demography of its student population, is directly held accountable for the academic achievement of its students. Principals play an important role in organizing and support teaching and learning programmes within a school with the sole objective of increasing the academic achievement of the students. However, despite the principals' direct accountability for students' academic achievement, almost all significant empirical evidences point minimal or no direct effects of principals actions on academic achievement of students within a school setting (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Kaplan, Owings, & Nunnery, 2005; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). Thus, it seems to be unfair to hold a principal accountable for something on which he or she has no direct effect, unless we look at the indirect effects of principal's leadership practices on student achievement for which there are ample empirical evidence. Principal's leadership practices have been found to be significantly influential, indirectly, on increasing the academic achievement of students and this effect is found to be second most important factor, just after teacher's quality (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1997; Bulris, 2009; Leithwood, Louis et al., 2004; Robinson, 2007; Waters, et. al., 2003).

The analysis of data indicates a strong commitment on the part of principal Noor towards the upliftment of the academic achievement of the students of SMK Rural. She uses a variety of strategies to create an environment where students enjoy

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learning and teachers practice their teaching and learning activities. After inheriting a school which was in the bottom 10 percent of all the schools in Malaysia, principal Noor's persistence on improving the student achievement has brought the school among the top 50 percent of all the schools in Malaysia, which strongly points towards her commitment. The study found four distinct ways in which principal Noor enacts her practice of improving the academic achievement of the students.

There is an enormous amount of empirical evidence that establishes the role of collecting achievement data and its dissemination for improving academic achievement (Fullan, 2005; Guskey, 2003; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). Principal Noor regularly collects achievement data, specially after exams and examines the data to identify the areas of improvement. She discusses the data with the teachers in order to plan ways to take corrective measures, as she claims, "The teacher's must know the strength of the students, how many can score A, how many can score B and so on, and then what did they do to plan for the improvement". Utilizing data for critical decision making in curricular areas enables her to consistently focus on the betterment of teaching and learning process, which is one of the major traits of an instructional leader (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Consistent emphasis on data dissemination and the resultant focus on teaching and learning processes within the school enables her to address the weaknesses which results in improvement which is a practice that is consistent with all successful principals (Fullan, 2005). Her analysis of data does not just stop by identifying the areas that need improvement but, is followed by effective remediation of the areas that need improvement (Guskey, 1997). Continuing with what was already been done is insignificant unless new methods and strategies are incorporated, alternative learning strategies are deployed to engage students into a more meaningful learning. Her

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involvement of teachers into the process of data analysis also is in line with the findings of Zmuda and colleagues who claims that when teachers are actively involved in the dissemination of achievement data, it invariably results in improving academic achievement (Zmuda, Kuklis & Kline, 2004).

While principal Noor strives to improve the formal teaching and learning practices within the classrooms during regular teaching hours, she is also aware of the academic needs of students that cannot be met during the regular school hours due to their limited knowledge. Thus, she organizes a number of extra classes for the students, before school hours, evening classes, night classes and classes during the holidays. The additional classes in any of these aforementioned forms have strong empirical roots and are often termed as "double dosing" (Hanley, 2005). 'Double dosing' or increasing instructional time for low achieving students has been found to be one of the most effective intervention method that leads to enhanced student achievement (Lauer et. al., 2006). In a meta-analysis of 35 studies on the outcomes of extra classes, Lauer et al. (2006), identified significant achievement in reading or maths and in both the areas for high school students. Principal Noor's practice of focusing on extra classes for higher achievement has already shown positive results. From negligible number of students obtaining 'A's in core subjects, there are now a number of students who are doing exceptionally well and scoring straight 'A's in many subjects. As a result, the overall achievement of the school has gone up dramatically, resulting in the school getting recognized by the Ministry of Education for the past two years continuously. Extra classes not only help students who are generally weak in curricular areas but also prove to be effective in SMK Rural school for those students whose parents are unable to help them do their homework or who aren't able to study at home for several other reasons. Principal Noor not only

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organizes these extra classes but also personally supervises to ensure that the classes are conducted properly. Several respondents mentioned how she is regularly present during the night classes or come early to supervise the early morning, before-school classes.

Principal Noor not only utilizes the help of her teachers for improving the academic achievement but is not averse to taking outside help to maximize her resources and garner additional resources. She was able to convince the parents to volunteer during extra classes to guard the school, or pick-up and send off students during late classes. She also is able to seek and get the help of several non-governmental agencies who support extra tuition classes which frees her much needed, scarce funds for other school related expenses. Principal Noor's emphasis on involving the parents and the community for enhancing the overall academic achievement of the students has solid empirical backing. Parental engagement in school affairs has been found to play a significant role in improving achievements (Blok, Fukkink, Gebhardt, & Leseman, 2005; Deforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Melhuish, 2010; Powell et al., 2010). Principal Noor also sought the help of the parents in constructing several learning areas within the school campus, called 'Learning Huts'. These were built by the support of the parents and the community for the students who would like to study during their spare time and were unable to find a suitable place. The learning huts, as were observed by the researcher are nice covered areas outside the classrooms with shaded sitting areas where students can take advantage of the peace and quiet of the nature and study.

Creating a conducive learning environment for the students is one of the other ways in which principal Noor enacts her practice of improving the academic achievement of the school. There is strong empirical evidence that poorly maintained schools go

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hand in hand with low achieving schools and also have a negative effect on the morale and engagement of teachers and students, resulting in a negative academic outcome of the students (Filardo, 2008). True to the findings, principal Noor inherited a school which, according to her and other respondents was 'sorrowful' which was a term used for an school environment which did not encourage students to learn, and was abysmally low on academic achievement. With her efforts, she transformed the physical environment of the school into a friendly and cheerful place where students were motivated to learn in a conducive environment and teachers were motivated to carry out their teaching activities comfortably. Better physical learning environment create positive conditions which mediate several indicators of enhanced student learning such as physical, mental and cognitive well-being (Gibson, 1977). She installed decorative boards that clearly displayed the vision and mission of the school, constantly reminding the members of the school community about the objectives that the school has set itself to meet. She used her excellent interpersonal skills to encourage parents to build learning huts around the school which enabled students to study outside their classrooms, utilizing their spare time to the fullest. She repainted the walls and installed curtains inside every classroom to make it cozy and comfortable. The classroom is the most important area in the school for a student's academic and emotional development (Fraser, 1994; Kilgour, 2006). The perception of a classroom environment plays an important role for student's perception of learning, which can be positive or negative depending upon how he perceived the physical environment of the classroom. Learning environment consists of all the physical sensory elements within the learning space and can consist of its colour, décor, furniture among others (Anekwe, 2006). He further describes a

physical learning environment as a place that encourages learners to feel motivated to learn at their optimum.

A quality teacher can be defines as a teacher who provides "instruction that enables a wide range of students to learn" (Darling-Hammond, 2012). In an overwhelming number of studies, quality teaching has been found to be the single most direct source of improvement in academic achievement of students (e.g. Hanushek, 2011; Nye, Konstantopoulos, and Hedges, 2004; Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain, 2005). The data shows that principal Noor is aware of this fact and constantly strives to develop her teachers into being better teachers. Several aspects of transformational leadership practices were prominently identified by the data analysis (Bass, 1985). She provides individualized consideration to her teachers and staff and also provides inspirational motivation through her actions. She uses her personal trait of being friendly and 'family-oriented' and has consciously developed close and informal relationship with her teachers and staff members. She celebrates their special occasions, visits their homes to meet their family when someone is sick and congratulates them on their achievements, no matter how small they are.

Here practice of building close relations with teachers has been substantiated by the effective school leadership literature. Principal-teacher relationship plays a significant role in shaping the role of teachers within a school (Walsh, 2005). Principals primarily provide professional and emotional support to teachers through motivation and inspiration resulting in teachers feeling better about themselves and being aware of the school's mission of achieving academic quality and thus become more effective in their teaching. Recent studies reveal that there is a spurt in number of studies focusing on the personal aspects of a school leader which has been called

the principal's emotional intelligence, purportedly capable of motivating teachers and staff through emotions:

Recent evidence suggests that emotional intelligence displayed, for example, through a leader's personal attention to an employee and through the utilization of the employee's capacities, increases the employee's enthusiasm and optimism, reduces frustration, transmits a sense of mission and indirectly increases performance (McColl-Kennedy & Anderson, 2002) (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 24).

Gimbel claims that one of the most important behavior of a principal is to build a relationship of trust with his teachers through developing one to one relationships (Gimbel, 2003). An informal interaction with teachers on a regular basis facilitates such trust-building. Principal Noor consciously makes it a point to appreciate her staff members for their accomplishments. Public recognition of accomplishments motivates teachers since they feel a sense of appreciation and gratitude. Verbal recognition works fine, however principals often give rewards, both in terms of gifts and cash to motivate their teachers. Hanushek (2002) points out a total lack of recognition for high performing teachers who managed to improve the scores of the students they teach:

Teachers who elicit academic gains from their students are not rewarded for their achievements. Most teachers are hardworking and doing the best they can, but in the absence of incentives to improve, additional resources are not directed to maximising student output" (p.1).

Principal Noor uses verbal appreciation, praises teachers using the school WhatsApp group and also provides rewards for teachers who have accomplished something.

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Several teacher respondents were seemingly happy with her practice and reported this fact while explaining the friendly trait of the principal. Although principal Noor has managed to get positive results from her teachers using rewards by increasing the morale of teachers which, in turn, produces positive results, research has also established that merit pay (rewards) has nothing to do with student outcomes and does not positively alter teacher behavior; on the contrary, it negatively effects student learning (Fryer, 2011; Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006; Springer et al., 2011). Thus, although teachers do report rewards as one of the factors that make them happy, rewards themselves might not be the direct contributing factor for the positive outcomes.

A definite contributor to the positive development of teacher's skills and development is the practice of principal Noor to constantly coach and mentor teachers to improve their teaching skills. She believes that for the effectiveness of the school, teaching and learning processes must be developed and teachers need to constantly improve themselves. She has brought in a culture of continuous professional development activities for the teachers and herself teaches classes to set examples where others can learn from her and improve. Leading by example is a set of common practice of a leader to set example for others to follow and is strongly associated with models of authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Locke (2002) claims that modelling best practices in one's own practice encourages others to readily follow. Harris and Chapman identified successful principals who "modeled behavior that they considered desirable to achieve the school goals" (2002, p.6). Southworth (2002) considers modeling, where the principal uses his own teaching as an example for teachers, as an important aspect of leaders practice in developing teachers, thereby improving academic achievement of the students.

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Principal Noor's core practice of building meaningful coalitions with parents and other members of the community was found to be having a paramount effect on the school's success. Parental involvement can be broadly described as a set of direct and indirect behavior and attitude that can take the shape of parent-child interactions at home (Muller, 2009), or an interaction of the family with the school in the form of providing donations, volunteer services, discussions with teachers and the management, assisting in organizing school functions and events and being involved in decision making process for the affairs of the school (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Hill & Taylor, 2004). Parental engagement has strongly been attributed to enhanced learning outcomes among students in a variety of ways (Castro et al., 2015; Fox & Olsen, 2014; Perkins & Knight, 2014). Parental engagement has been found to be beneficial for students' social and emotional development as well (Chazan-Cohen et al., 2009; Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004; Mistry, Benner, Biesanz, & Clark, 2010; Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010). Parents at SMK Rural are engaged in all the activities of the school and are consulted on important matters. From outsiders, as they were considered before the arrival of the current principal, they have become an integral part of the school community.

Parents have played a significant role in improving the facilities within the school and developing its physical environment. Three years ago, principal Noor inherited a school which was short of funding because the Ministry of Education wouldn't provide extra financial support to a school which was languishing at the bottom ten percent of all the schools in Malaysia. Principal Noor was aware that unless the facilities of the school are improved and the physical environment is uplifted, there is less chance of improving the academic achievement of the school. She also realized that to get additional help, she needs to develop a strong coalition with the parents

and the community, hence she turned towards the parents and the community for help and support. She began with encouraging parents to visit the school and welcomed them to be a part of several decision making process. Several studies have pointed out that the school Principals plays a crucial role in creating a positive school climate for enhanced parent engagement using a variety of practices, such as communication, attitudes and expectations (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Drysdale, Goode, & Gurr, 2009; Giles, 2006; Gordon & Louis, 2009; Mleczko & Kington, 2013). There is also ample evidence that point towards a better parental engagement when the parents feel welcome to the school. If the parents find the school climate welcoming, they are more likely to be actively involved in the school affairs (Robinson & Harris, 2014; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000). Also, parents contribute to the school climate when they are engaged into the school affairs (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton, & Luppescu, 2010; Parcel & Dufur, 2001; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Principal Noor not only provided a welcoming and open environment for the parents to engage, but also gave them motivational talks where she emphasized the importance of parental involvement into the school affairs and how it benefits the students in raising their achievement. Once the parent felt welcomed to the school and realized the importance of their contribution towards the benefit of their children, they soon bought-in the idea of contributing towards the betterment of the school. They raised funds to repaint the school, install new curtains in the classrooms to give the rooms a better ambience for enhanced learning, improved the staffrooms to provide teachers a better working space and constructed a number of reading areas called 'learning huts' where students could sit in their spare time and study. There is an ASEAN corner and an 'English Zone' in the school that has been created with the help of the parents.

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Although a significant number of parents are unable to directly assist their children in academic affairs due to their own limited educational background, nonetheless they have been tactfully involved in the academic affairs of the school, indirectly, by the principal. Parents now help in organizing extra classes for the students; they provide guard duties during night and morning classes and provide transport for students from the community who join tuition classes. They have been coached by the principal on how to supervise their children at home in doing homework or revision. Parental involvement, direct or indirect, has been found to be having a positive overall effect on student achievement, hence principal Noor's practice of involving parents in the academic affairs of the school has solid empirical backing. There is ample empirical evidence that points towards a pivotal role of parental and the community involvement in school affairs that lead to better educational outcome (e.g. Brabeck & Shirley, 2003; Jeynes, 2003, 2007; Leana & Pil, 2006). Parental involvement has been also found to be having positive effects on higher grades, improved attendance and school completion (Epstein et al., 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; Herman & Yeh, 1983).

Principal Noor not only builds a strong coalition with the parents but has also been successful in attracting significant contributions from the external agencies and other members of the community. When she needed to take her teachers out on a holiday trip to the beautiful island resort in Langkawi, she used her interpersonal skills to get the trip sponsored by an influential person from the community. She used her contacts in the department of agriculture to establish Lime plantation within the school campus, free of cost, which would become a steady source of income for the school by the next year. Other agencies, governmental and non- governmental, have been generous in providing support in running a variety of extra tuition classes

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within the school campus which has improved the academic achievement of the students. Agencies like RISDA help the school in providing free tuition classes while District People's Representative (Adun Daerah Pedu) has also contributed towards some of the extra classes.

Further findings of this study revealed that principal Noor constantly works towards creating a conducive and positive school climate and physical environment that enables students and teachers to work towards higher achievement. Almost all the respondents were of the opinion that they feel happy when they are in the school since the school looks cheerful and inviting. They also opined that there is a sense of 'family atmosphere' all around the school which adds to the positive atmosphere. Parent's perception of school climate effects the way in which they interact with the school (Hoover-Dempsey et. al, 2005). According to an analysis by Griffith (1998), positive impressions of school climate lead to increased amount of parental engagement. Parents at SMK Rural School are actively engaged with the school which is a good indicator of their positive perceptions of the school climate. The researcher also felt the warmth and the camaraderie among the people he met in the school during his visits, be it students, parents or other staff members. The physical environment was also appealing with tastefully decorated display-boards, flowers, painted walls and clean and tidy classrooms and other areas on the school.

In order to create an overall conducive school environment at SMK Rural, principal Noor focuses on two major areas; the positive climate for the stakeholders and the physical environment of the school. There is a strong empirical evidence that signify the importance of creating a positive school climate by successful schools for enhanced academic achievement, positive behavior and a conducive learning environment (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009; Herman et al., 2008).

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School climate can be defined in terms of the atmosphere, ethos, people, and its community (Hoy, 2008). School climate can also be defined in terms of its safety and interpersonal relationships between the stakeholders (teachers, staff, parents, students, community and the principal), and academic activities, and the its physical environment (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009), which significantly influences students' social and behavioral attitudes (D. Gottfredson, 2000; G. D. Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005; McIntosh, Chard, Boland, & Horner, 2006; Walker & Shinn, 2002). Positive school environment enhances academic achievement (Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, & Dumas, 2003; Wang, Selman, Dishion, & Stormshak, 2014); personal attitudes (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995); attendance (Brand et al., 2003; Welsh, 2000); and reduces discipline problems within a school (Battistich & Horn, 1997; Kuperminc, Leadbeater, & Blatt, 2001; Welsh, 2000). It is the responsibility of the school leaders to ensure that teachers have strong connections with their school since they are more likely to identify with it if they feel valued. This cannot be accomplished if the people involved in the school do not trust the principal. For building trust, the principal must be friendly, approachable, compassionate and, most importantly, must be visible to staff, students and parents everywhere in the school and participate actively in all school activities (Hopkins, 2000). Principal Noor is active in all the activities of the school; from welcoming the students and parents to being present during extra classes even if it is during the night or early morning or being to all school activities to encourage students and staff. One of the respondents pointed out that even if there are more than one activities going on simultaneously, she would ensure that she attends all of them, even if it means for only a short while in each activity.

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Principal Noor creates a 'family oriented' environment within the school wherein everyone feels respected leading to a sense of belonging. Principal Noor does not practice working in isolation; she involves teachers and parents in decision-making and consults them often. Involving teachers in decision making process not only gives a sense of belonging to the teachers but also leads towards a system of collective leadership within the school which plays an important role in a school's success. Participatory decision making by teachers has been found to be instrumental in increasing school effectiveness and enhanced academic achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Hulpia, Devos, & Van Keer, 2011, 2010; Somech, 2010). While including teachers in decision making process, principal Noor demonstrates important aspect of distributed leadership practices.

Teachers and students work best when their working environment is positive, healthy and pleasant (Wang, Selman, Dishion, & Stormshak, 2014). Principal Noor has transformed the school environment from a dull, 'sorrowful' place to an attractive, pleasant and cheerful place where people feel motivated to produce their best. Hallack (1990) claims that physical facilities have a significant effect on student achievement and goes on to claim that lack of sufficient facilities and aesthetic beauty within a school with unattractive building contribute to lower academic achievement. Similarly, Adams (2004) and Earthman & Lemasters (2009) opine that a pleasant and aesthetically attractive physical environment uplifts the mood of the teachers and students and improves their performance. Poor physical working condition has been found to be a contributing factor towards mental fatigue, behavioural issues, frustration, health issues and lack of comfort which lead to lower students' academic achievement (Blincoe, 2008; Bullock, 2007; Duran-Narucki, 2008; Tanner, 2009). Upon arriving at the school, one of the first changes that

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principal Noor did was to uplift the school's physical environment which is a proof of her belief that improving physical environment ranks high up in her priority list. Since there was a serious lack of funds at that time, she sought the help of the parents who were generous enough to contribute towards the upliftment of the school's physical environment. The school now has a pleasant, aesthetic look with comfortable classrooms, teacher's room, display boards, flowerbeds and flower pots, and several learning areas called 'learning huts which is used by the students during their spare time for studies. As evident by ample literature cited above, better physical environment within the school has definitely helped the school in increasing the academic achievement of its students and productivity of the teachers.

4.2.7 Summary

The study of Principal Noor's practices in SMK Rural reveals her core practices that are a conscious mix of her personal trait of being friendly and family-orientated demeanor, her incessant desire towards uplifting the academic achievement of all her students and her friendly and welcoming attitude towards parents and the community who are her strongest allies. She displays a keen sense of knowledge about her immediate context and her practices are in response to each of the contextual factors.

Principal Noor's practices were found to be strongly linked with the seven school contexts under which she operates. She shows a keen awareness of all the above-mentioned contexts which reflect through her core practices that were found to be in direct response to the contexts. A thorough analysis of her practices as revealed by multiple sources of data collection reveals a set of five core practices that Principal Noor demonstrates, which are Providing specific goals and targets, Improving academic Achievement, Developing teachers and staff members, Creating Meaningful Coalitions and Creating a positive and conducive school environment

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The first thing that strikes a person upon meeting principal Noor is her warmth and friendly demeanour with which she welcomes people. Right from the first time when the researcher contacted her on phone to request a meeting to all the subsequent meetings, she was extremely friendly. She would herself take the researcher around the school, show off all the facilities of the school while all the time explaining the minutest details that she could. She invited the researcher for meals in the school cafeteria and would make sure to invite teachers and parents along, whoever was present at that point of time. During the visits, she would always find time to meet people, be it teachers, parents or other visitors and not once did she loose her pleasant smile that she wears so proudly all the time. Her office is a hub of activity and, as she claims, everybody is welcome to see her anytime without any prior appointment. There was a positive buzz all around the school; during the school assembly which was quite informative for the students to the times when students moved around, either going for lunch or play sports in the large playground. It seems that her positive attitude and welcoming personality had rubbed off on teachers and staffs as well as the researcher were greeted by everyone with either a warm smile of greetings. All the interviews were held in a quiet office room which was reserved for the entire duration of the interviews, without any distractions. She had herself supervised the arrangements in such a way that, except for one short duration of time in the afternoon which was prayer time, the researcher did not have to wait for interviewees. Her office is in a strategically placed location from where a majority of the school building is visible from the door. The admin staff sits in the adjoining which enables her to interact with them conveniently. The counsellor's office is also nearby. The school, although located in a remote area with hardly any building around it, was nevertheless a pleasant place with well-kept trees and plants. There

was ample parking space which had well marked parking bays. The playground and the open space outside the building is full of huge trees and decorative plants that were well trimmed and maintained. The school building itself was painted with bright colour and there were display boards all around the school depicting pictures of various activities being conducted in the school, inspirational quotes, vision and mission of the school and data regarding various achievements. However, as reported by several respondents, the school had a depressing physical look few years ago due to negligence. It was only due the efforts of the current principal that the physical structure has become so appealing. Upon entering the main building, there was a huge rectangular open area in the middle of the school, with the three-story school structure built around it in a rectangular manner. This open area is used for conducting school activities and other major events where all the students and staff members participate. There is also a large covered space on the eastern end of the building which is used for prayers and other activities. One of the parents was quick to point of that parents have contributed generously towards the construction of this space. The hostel rooms are located within the close proximity of this covered space

Figure 4.8. The colorful school building of SMK Rural

although it is outside the main structure. A picture of the colourful school building from the inside is given below. The bright colours, curtains on the classroom windows, an open platform in the large open central space and few display boards are clearly visible.

The school caters to students, a large majority of whom are from rural background. Most of the students come from families who are farmers and are not well educated. It was reported that the best students from the region prefer to go to a science boarding school and SMK rural only gets students who are either rejected by that school or did not go to other schools due to several other reasons. This was one of the major contextual factor under which the school operates. The findings reveal that the school was among the bottom ten percent of all the schools in Malaysia due to its dismal academic performance. However, the findings also reveal that despite the fact that principal Noor inherited an underachieving school and incoming students are

academically weak, there has been a spurt in educational achievement of the students during the last three years under the current principal.

Another contextual factor that affects the school is the high expectation from the Ministry of Education. Since the school was not performing well three years ago, the ministry was not supporting it with extra funds and support. In fact, the principal went on to state that the ministry was acting as if the school did not exist for them. However, during the last two years, with the dramatic increase in the academic achievement, the ministry has supported the school with additional funds which has been given to the school as a part of the rewards that the principal received for two consecutive years for her excellent performance. Although the school has made progress, the principal wants to receive such awards in the coming years as well which will not only move the school towards higher ranking but will bring additional funds for the school to be utilized for better facilities.

The data analysis revealed that there was no support system for the development of the teachers few years ago. Teachers found themselves without any inspiration and were directionless due to the lack of clear mission and goals. They went about their jobs in a routine manner which resulted in lower achievement. The advent of the new principal changed everything. Teachers became more involved in the affairs of the school and found a mentor and a coach that guided them towards achieving excellence. Principal Noor taught them how to analyze achievement data, how to find areas that need improvement and how to plan and execute corrective measures. A spate of extra classes, even early in the morning and night were launched and, with positive motivation, teachers worked wholeheartedly. The results demonstrated that these measures worked well; both in giving a sense of direction to the teachers and a better learning environment for the students where they could perform optimally.

It was also found that the school had limited interaction with the parents and the community at the time of the arrival of principal Noor. Parents reported that they felt unwelcome and were not involved in the affairs of the school in any way. Thus the school was deprived of an excellent resource for improvement. Previous principals were unfriendly and there was a huge power distance between them and the other members of the school community. Teachers barely interacted with the principals and students reported that the principal was out of their reach. Using her personal trait of friendly demeanour and family-oriented approach, principal Noor changed the school climate for the better. She built up a strong coalition with the parents and the community which helped the school in garnering much needed additional funds and resources. Parents are now active participants in the decision making and voluntarily help in school events. Teachers have found a friend, a coach, a mentor and a family member in the form of principal Noor which has changed their attitude towards a more positive one which has enabled them to perform at their optimum. Students report that they find the principal more as their family member; they even call her 'Mom, and the principal is in constant touch with them and helps them improve in all the areas of their school life. The attendance of the school has improved to respectable levels and there are fewer cases of behavioural breaches.

However, there were few findings that have been not in line with the findings of other significant studies in the area of successful school leadership. Although principal Noor regularly consults with teachers and seeks their opinion in important matters which points towards traits of distributed leadership orientation, she still springs out as someone who likes to keep all the decision making to her. Although there is a functional management committee which meets regularly, the findings reveal that the real power is always in the hands of principal Noor who always has a

final say. It might be due to the fact that things were like this before her arrival and since she had to develop a positive work culture from the scratch, she took matters in her own hands. However, the signs of her working towards developing a more serious distributed leadership structure in the school are there and hopefully in the coming years, the school will be able to improve in this area as well.

Although the school has improved in the area of co-curriculum achievement along with the academic performance, it seems that it is more because of the improved work culture and the overall environment of the school rather than as a result of solid, concerted effort on the part of principal Noor. Most of the respondents spoke about her incessant focus improving the academic performance of the school with little mention of her efforts on co-curricular areas. Since the school ranking and the school band consists of points scored by the score in co-curricular areas as well, it would be advisable for the principal to extend her focus on this area as well which will enhance the upward movement of the school.

Overall, the findings point towards a vibrant school that is still in the process of transformation. The principal is well aware of the context under which the school operates and her practices are clear indicators of her responding to the contexts in an effective manner. She aptly uses the elements of all the three established leadership models like distributed leadership, transformational leadership and instructional leadership and knows what works best for her in what context. With principal Noor's determination and high spirits, there is little doubt that, as the school goal states, the school is poised to move to the next Band level soon and will be among the top 800 schools in Malaysia.

CHAPTER FIVE
CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS OF THE TWO CASES

5.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters (Chapter 5 and 6), the findings of the individual case study sites were reported in detail. The focus, aligned with the research questions, was on the contexts, the core practices of the principals and the enactment of these practices within the boundaries of a particular research site. This chapter attempts to build upon the findings of the two individual cases and provide a cross-case analysis of the research in order to critically examine the relationship between the various elements of the two cases. Data analysis has been explained by Mouten (2001) as "breaking up the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships". The analysis of the individual case studies resulted in a set of themes that could explain the contexts, core leadership practices and the enactment of core leadership practices of the individual principals of the school. The cross case analysis analyzed and interpreted the themes emerging from the findings in order to make sense of the data leading to the answers for the research questions. Mouton (2001) claims that "data analysis also helps the researcher to answer the research question in a systematic way". While reporting, ample use of existing literature is made to describe, narrate and analyses the findings. The cross case analysis for this study provided insights into the core leadership practices and its enactment by successful school leadership as well as information on the immediate contexts under which the school operated and how successful principals responded to these contexts.

5.2 Cross-Case Analysis

Miles & Huberman (1994) point out that the process of inductive cross-case analysis offers a rich source of information on the phenomenon that is under study. The analysis of a single case provides a thorough description of a particular case while the cross-case is used to compare and contrast the findings of two or more cases and is used to reinforce validity and provide theoretical elaboration. The thematic analysis of cases for comparison in order to find similarities and differences is referred to as cross-case analysis (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2003). Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis is a well-known theory generated through cross case analysis. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), to begin with, researchers carry out individual descriptive case studies to provide 'thick description' of the cases. This is where emergent patterns from each individual case are identified. This is followed by an attempt to identify the similarities and differences between these patterns and look at the possibility of providing alternatives to these patterns which appear in multiple cases in the form of common themes. A 'variable-oriented analysis' is carried out for the themes from all the cases which lead to the creation of a meta-matrix through "stacking" of variables from multiple cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This method of conducting a cross case analysis not only helps the researchers in retaining the description of individual cases but also provides a rich description of overall themes from multiple cases.

For this study, the themes that emerged through within case analysis of individual cases were used to carry out an inductive analysis for cross-case analysis. As suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), the themes that emerged from the individual cases formed the beginning of the cross case analysis. Cross case analysis involves expanding, merging, collapsing or creating of categories in a way that is

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able to represent the within-case findings of the cases in the best possible way (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As a result, themes that were common to both the cases were retained. The themes were represented in the form of a master display matrix which was able to represent the final categories and how these categories were arrived at.

The findings of the individual case studies resulted in a set of core practices of the school principals which are tabulated below:

Table 5.1

The core practices of the principals of the two cases

S.No.	SMK Urban	SMK Rural
1	Providing vision & specific goals for the school.	Providing specific goals and targets.
2	Improving curricular and co-curricular activities.	Improving academic Achievement.
3	Developing teachers and staff members.	Developing teachers and staff members.
4	Creating positive work environment.	Creating a Positive and Conducive Overall School climate
5	Collaborating with stakeholders.	Creating Meaningful Coalitions
6	Creating behavioral expectations and maintaining discipline.	
7	Being friendly and approachable.	

The seven core practices of SMK Urban and the five core practices of the SMK Rural in the study are grounded in the data and are identified by the themes emerging from data analysis of the two schools under this study. These core practices are strongly related within the individual schools and demonstrate how these enabled the principals to bring success to their schools. Also evident from the data and depicted in the above table was that five core practices were common to both the principals

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while there were two practices of the principal of SMK Urban that were distinct and stood out strongly as separate core practices, although the elements of these practices were also present in the practices of SMK Rural as well. The cross case analysis further shed light on distinct features of these core practices and after a careful reflection on the themes, five distinct dimensions were generated. Term 'dimension' has been used in the literature within the context of educational leadership practices for a set of related themes, where Robinson (2007) denotes it as "a set of related practices". Table 5.2 depicts how the core practices of the two successful principals used in this study were grouped into five dimensions.

Table 5.2

Dimensions of the core practices of the two principals

Dimension	SMK Urban	SMK Rural
Strategic	Providing vision & specific goals for the school.	Providing specific goals and targets.
Pedagogic	Improving curricular and co-curricular activities.	Improving academic Achievement.
Administrative	Creating positive work environment. Creating behavioral expectations and maintaining discipline.	Creating a Positive and Conducive Overall School climate
Humanistic	Developing teachers and staff members. Being friendly and approachable.	Developing teachers and staff members.
Collaborative	Collaborating with stakeholders.	Creating Meaningful Coalitions

The next section will use the five dimensions of successful leadership practices of Malaysian school principals, which are firmly grounded in the data as identified by this study, to signify its important contributions to the theory on successful school leadership. These dimensions, although similar in both the case schools, were not uniformly distributed, were interrelated and interdependent. The theoretical significance of these five dimensions would be apparent through a discussion of how these dimensions interact with each other within their specific contexts.

5.2.1 The 'Strategic' Dimension

Henry Mintzberg (2003: 79-83) formulated the widely cited definition of strategic dimension as "seeing ahead", "seeing behind", "seeing above", "seeing below", "seeing beside", "seeing beyond" and "seeing it through". Essentially it is the manner in which a school leader looks at the school in the wider context of its current situation and its future while focusing on the skills and strategies that will lead there. A successful educational leader uses a variety of sources of information, conducts thorough analysis of the data in hand about current practices and then formulates vision, mission, and goals with high, measurable expectations for everyone in the school community. Providing specific vison, goals and targets have been found to be one of the key core practices of successful school leaders around the world (e.g., Hallinger, 2010; Leithwood & Sun, 2009; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2008). According to Hill (2001), the primary task of a school leader is to exercise leadership in such a way that it results in the creation of a shared vision for each member of the school to be pursued. This is consistent with framework provided by Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006a) in which they claim that creation of a shared vision and setting direction has to be one of the most important practices of a successful school principal. However, they are

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quick to point out that, just like the other core practices of successful school principals, the enactment of these practices vary in the way they are developed and articulated in individual schools, since the contexts play a major role in such decisions (2006b).

Almost all significant scholars in the field of educational leadership, through their extensive research over a period of last 20 years claim that setting clear goals and vision for the school is crucial to the success of the school (Bush & Glover, 2003; Day et al., 2005, Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger, 2010; Harris & Chapman, 2002; Leithwood et al., 2006a). Although Bush & Glover (2003, p.4) state that 'vision is increasingly regarded as an important component of leadership', however in the same breath they also claims that although vision seems theoretically important, it is practically problematic. Their observation is also supported by Fullan who makes the following observation:

> "The current emphasis on vision in leadership can be misleading. Vision can blind leaders in a number of ways . . . The high-powered, charismatic principal who 'radically transforms the school' in four or five years can . . . be blinding and misleading as a role model . . . Principals are blinded by their own vision when they feel they must manipulate the teachers and the school culture to conform to it,"

> (Fullan 1992, p.19)

Although the study revealed a distinct attempt on the part of both the principals to establish clear goals and objectives for the school and establish a shared vision, it

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was also apparent that the strategic dimension, as identified by the study, although important, did not alone bring about any positive change in the school directly. It was the goals that addressed the immediate issues of teaching and learning, school climate, discipline, school climate and the community that brought about the changes. Leithwood et al., (2006) posit that successful school principals work towards the development of their teachers and indulge in capacity building which is an important feature of distributed leadership (Harris &Chapman, 2002). However, in both the case schools for this study, it was apparent that although the principals did work towards developing its people, there was a stark absence of distributed leadership in the schools. Leadership was highly centralized although both the principals did involve teachers in discussions and decision making, the final decision was always in the hands of the principals. Theoretically it implies that although distributed leadership has its benefits, in certain contexts, a more centralized leadership also produces results.

Both the principals under the current study emphasized upon the importance of vision, goals and setting direction for the schools, however there were visible variations in the way they set about setting the goals for the schools and what goals were set. The articulation of a specific vision is exemplified in both the schools as was evident from the documents that were scanned and the display-boards around the school which clearly advertised general goals of the school. While speaking with the students and the parents of both the schools, it was evident that the sense of shared vision had indeed cascaded to all the stakeholders of both the schools. However, the analysis of data also revealed that there was a significant difference between what SMK Urban had set out to achieve and the goals and targets of SMK Rural School. In SMK Urban, the emphasis of the principal was on achieving the higher band

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(Band 2) within the next one or two years. All his efforts were on letting the stakeholders be aware of this goal, (and reinforcing it from time to time) and working towards improving areas that will accumulate enough points required for the higher band. On the other hand, the goals of SMK rural were more modest, specific and short-term. For example, she targeted getting the award from the Ministry of Education for the coming year, improving the school ranking by another 300 places and improving the academic achievement of the students so that more students score A's next year compared with the current year.

The variations in the goals for the school can be attributed to the significant variations in the contexts of the school. SMK Urban is located in an urban area and most of the students coming to the school come from families that are financially well-off and the parents are educated. Students have significant support at home in terms of parents helping with their studies. Also, SMK Urban is a school of choice for most of the students. This enables the principal to spare some of his time on focusing on improving areas other than academic improvement as well. For example, the principal of SMK Urban has been able to improve the school's achievement in sports by involving himself directly into co-curricular activities of the school. On the other hand, SMK urban is located in a remote area of an underdeveloped state of Malaysia. Students come from mostly financially challenged household with a majority of the parents themselves uneducated or with limited education. These parents are unable to help their children at home resulting in the school spending a lot of resource, both financial and human, on providing extra classes to the students. Thus, even a modest increase in educational attainment is considered as a significant achievement by the parents and the school community. The principal and teachers spend much of their time in providing additional after-school academic assistance to

its students leaving them with practically no time for co-curricular activities. Although SMK Rural has made significant improvement during the last three years, its pace of improvement is slower compared to SMK Urban which has moved up quickly.

While the variation in school's vision and goal was apparent, it was also apparent that there was a significant variation in the way it was driven in the school. There was evidence that the creation of the vision and goals for the school was more collective in SMK Urban. Goodman (1997) stressed that teachers should be at least a part of creating the school vision, if they cannot be its only creator. In SMK Urban, the vision of the school seems to have been created by the collaboration of the teachers, although it was apparent that it was principal-led. Evidence from the conversation with the stakeholders confirmed the principal led collaboration for the creation of the school vision. On the other hand, the creation of the school vision and goals in SMK Rural emanated from the principal and then articulated to the teachers and other stake holders of the school. Bush and Glover (2003) frown upon the practice of a leader who overwhelmingly imposes his own beliefs in the vision of the school although Haberman (2003) believes that it is the job of a principal to create a clear school vision and for its effectiveness, build a team for its implementation, and produce commitment for the tasks. On her part, the principal of SMK Rural believes that this was necessary initially for her to set direction for the teachers who were directionless and lacked purpose at the time of her arrival. The principal also made significant efforts to ensure that the entire school community embraces the vision and makes it a collective responsibility to implement it.

The study revealed that even-though both the principals differ significantly in the way they set direction and vision for their schools; nonetheless this dimension of

their leadership practices had a major role to play in bringing success. Leadership literature is replete with ample evidence that direction setting is one of the bedrocks of successful leadership practices of a school principal. Success comes due to the fact that direction setting motivates people to do even better (Corker & Donnellan, 2012 ; Hallinger & Heck, 1998), and establishes a "moral purpose" (Fullan, 2003; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006) as an elementary tonic for one's work. Both transformational and charismatic leadership models emphasize upon the importance of creating strong vision for success. Locke (2002) also one of the major benefits of having a clear vision for an institution is its power of "…tying all the processes together so that they are not only consistent with one another but actively support one another". The cross case analysis of both the cases also revealed that although both the principals followed different paths on order to formulate the vision of the school, both the principals ensured that the vision was clearly articulated to all the stakeholders and that it was a 'shared vision' for the whole school which is in line with the findings of Rahimah Ahmad and Ghavifekr (2014) in a study in Malaysia. Sergiovanni (1990) claims that, "School leaders have not only a vision but also the skills to communicate that vision to others" (p. 216). The principals employed a variety of methods to communicate their vision ways, such as at staff meetings, at PTA meetings, during community celebrations, display boards, and personal modeling. Unless each individual of the school considers the institutional goal as his or her personal goal, the institution's goals will have no motivational value. Thus it was evident from the analysis that both the principals spent considerable amount of their time ensuring that their practices were "….aimed at promoting cooperation among [teachers] and getting them to work together toward a common goal" (Podsakoff et al., 1990, p. 112)". Sergiovanni (1991) claims that principal is the

"head follower" of the shared vision which reflected conclusively from the practices of both the principals under study. While the principal of SMK urban himself participated in the data analysis and preparation of the action plans for further improvement of the school, the principal of SMK Rural not only participated in formulating the strategies for improvement but also actively participated in its implementation and supervision.

5.2.2 The 'Pedagogic' Dimension

Significant studies during the past two decades have established beyond any doubt that school principals have a substantial, if indirect, effect on student learning (e.g. Hallinger and Heck, 1996, 1998; Heck et al., 1990; Hendriks and Scheerens, 2012; Leithwood et al., 1990; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Successful leaders provide pedagogical leadership by planning, implementing and supervising teaching and learning activities in a school (Hallinger, 2011; Maulding, Townsend, Leonard, Sparkman, Styron, & Styron, 2010) and by motivating staff members for academic improvement of students (Crum, Whitney, & Myran, 2009; Tajasom, 2011). The pedagogic dimension of the practices of the principals in this study aligns with the claim of Bush and Glover's (2009) that internationally, managing teaching and learning programme of a school is one of the most important activities of a school leader. Bush and Glover (2009) go on to further expand that a successful school leader with a pedagogical mind-set ensures that lessons take place, continuously evaluates the achievement data, and carries out the teaching and learning program of the school through constant monitoring. The analysis of the available data overwhelmingly demonstrated that both the principals were keen on improving the academic achievement of their students and used a variety of strategies to carry out their tasks.

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The principals of both the case schools ensured that teaching and learning went along unhindered and those students attended all the classes. The schools reported lower attendance during the initial days of the principals in the school; however both the principals ensured, through a variety of strategies that attendance grew from lower eighty percent to the vicinity of ninety five percent on a regular basis. Teachers in both the schools kept up-to-date attendance records which could be seen from the well-maintained teaching records that all the teachers kept. Teachers at both the schools informed that they always welcomed students to consult them during their non-teaching hours, thus adding up to their actual teaching hours. More *'time on task'* (Jansen, 2000, 2001) has been found to be an important feature of successful teaching and learning activity in schools which was empirically established by the studies of Malcolm, Keane, Hoohlo, Kgaka and Ovens (2000) and Christie, Butler and Pottorton (2007), in high-performing schools.

Wayman's (2005) and Kerr, Marsh, Ikemoto, Darilek, and Barney's (2006) reports that school leaders play a pivotal role in creating a culture of using data within schools. Both the principals made pedagogical decisions in their schools based upon the achievement data of the students. However, there was a significant variance in the approaches of both the principals. The principal of SMK Urban involves himself personally into analyzing the achievement data. At the end of each exam, he meets with the individual teachers and painstakingly goes through the results, focusing on the students who are underachieving or showing poor results. He questions teachers on the reasons and formulates remedial actions with the teachers with concrete achievement target for the students. He is quick with numbers the data was on his fingertips. Supovitz and Klein (2003) claim that "the fingerprints of strong leadership are all over the data activities" (p. 36) in successful schools. It was also observed that

he kept the files of all achievement data in his office and regularly referred to them. His practice of making teachers accountable for student's achievement is in line with the assertions of (Gipps & Goldstein, 1983) for improving learner achievement. On the other hand, the principal of SMK Rural relied upon the analysis of the achievement data provided by the teachers themselves. At the end of each exam, she would receive the reports from all the teachers and would consult a group of teachers to create groups of similar ability students, assign a teacher as the 'manager' of the group and implement extra classes for the students as a remedial measure. Although she too claimed to be making pedagogical decisions based upon the achievement data, she demonstrated more reliance on the data provided by the teachers unlike the principal of SMK urban who follows more hands-on approach. Also, although not specifically mentioned during any of the visits, it seemed that the principal of SMK Rural did not hold teachers accountable for low academic achievement. For her, more classes during breaks, before school or afterschool was the solution for improving achievement. The practice of data-driven pedagogical decision-making by both the principals is well-supported by evidence that successful principals make data-driven pedagogical decisions for their schools (e.g., Ikemoto & Marsh, 2007; Mandinich & Honey, 2008; Wohlstetter, Datnow, & Park, 2008;Young, 2006).

Both the schools provided additional support to students through a variety of extra programmes. The principal of SMK Urban involves teachers and students in dissemination of exam results and provides additional help in the form of extra classes for the students. Most of these classes are afterschool and teachers volunteer to provide supervision and guidance. Students who come from underprivileged background and do not have appropriate learning space at home are provided learning space in the school. On the other hand, the provision of extra classes in

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SMK rural is more elaborate and consists of classes early in the morning, afterschool until late in the evening, during school breaks and weekends. Students are divided into groups based upon their ability and are assigned to a teacher for supervision and guidance. Parents are involved in providing transport and guard duties. It was clearly evident in both the schools that the principals were able to inspire and motivate their teachers who showed exceptional commitment and willingness to sacrifice their own time for the betterment of the students. They worked hard and cooperated with each while showing genuine concern for their students to provide high-quality education to their students, both inside the classrooms and voluntary extra lessons. The data analysis revealed that while in SMK Urban, it was not compulsory for learners to participate in extra-tuition classes organized by the school, it was compulsory for the students in SMK Rural to attend such classes.

While both the principals provide ample guidance and motivations for the teachers to provide volunteer services, the principal of SMK rural provided herself as an excellent model by herself teaching the students. Her practices align with the assertion of Southworth (2002), who claims that modeling is a significant aspect of principal's practice that helps in developing teachers, which leads to improvements in the academic achievement of the students. The principal of SMK Urban did not teach any classes, a practice that was found to be different from the principal of SMK Rural. While both the principals focused on improving the achievement of struggling students in their schools, the principal of SMK Urban also focused on gifted students of his school and provided ample support through specific programs for such students. On the other hand, there was no specific activity for gifted students in SMK Rural.

There is a strong empirical support for the importance of co-curricular activities on student's learning and academic success (Ainley, 2011; Bergen-Cico, 2013; Guest & Schneider, 2003; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Mezuk, Bondarenko, Smith & Tucker, 2011). Thus, co-curricular activities, while not directly a part of the cognitive domain, still has strong impact on how students would perform academically. Studies on the impact of co-curricular activities on the cognitive domain of the students range from its effect on critical thinking skills (Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1999) to enhancement of written and oral communication skills (Beeny, 2003; Pike, 2000). Evidence from longitudinal studies (Astin, 1993), nationwide investigations (Pascarella, Seifert, & Blaich, 2008; Pascarella, Whitt, Nora, Edison, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1995) and continuous observation (Sandeen, 2003), have overwhelmingly established that involvement in co-curricular activities plays a significant role in the cognitive development of students. While both the principals were found to be focused on improving the academic achievement of their students, there was a significant variance in the way they approached co-curricular activities in their schools. SMK Urban's principal once used to work in sports schools hence his past experience has a very strong impression on his practices in the current school as well. There was a comprehensive program for sports in the school and achievement in sporting activities was a part of the strategic goals for the school. The school has done exceedingly well in interschool competitions during the last three years and have brought in a lot of medals to show for the achievement. The principal takes active interest in all the games that students participate in and has makes sure to be present in most of the games played by the students. On the other hand, the principal of SMK rural is not big on sporting activities of the school. Although students participate in sports and interschool competitions, the record shows that that there is

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no significant achievement to show for their efforts in the last three years. Data also revealed that there was a general indifference on the part of the principal when it came to co-curricular activities other than sports. Although students of SMK Urban did participate in quizzes and debates, it was not the primary focus area of the principal. In SMK Rural, such activities were not even mentioned by any of the respondents.

5.2.3 The 'Administrative' Dimension

Apart from being an instructional leader of the school, a school principal needs to be an able administrator as well. The administrative dimension of a school principal's practice refers to all those actions of a school principal which facilitate the instructional activities of the school through the provision of improving school climate, building collaborative processes and setting behavioural expectations for the school which has been posited by Leithwood et. al., (2006) as one of the important core practices of a successful school principal. Collaboration among teachers have been considered as "one of the core requisites of contemporary school reform" (Slater, 2008, p. 324). Cooperation and collaboration among teachers are critical functions leading to school effectiveness (Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). The principals of both the schools under this study have espoused the importance of creating collaborative team for success and make conscious efforts to achieve that in their respective schools. The principal of SMK Urban inherited a school where teachers did not work as a team and were divided into groups which did not go along well with each other. There was an absence of collaboration and exchange of ideas among the teachers. On the other hand, the principal of SMK Rural inherited a school with an excellent team of teachers; however they worked in isolation since there was no effort on the part of the previous principals to build a

culture of collaboration among the teachers. The principal and the teachers of SMK Rural reported that teachers went about their jobs in a routine manner and hardly interacted in the matters of school improvement. To create a collaborative culture in their schools, both the principals employed similar strategies although there were few practices that were unique to both of them. The principals of both the schools worked towards building trust among teachers by using their excellent interpersonal skills and created a culture wherein teachers met regularly, both in formal settings and informal settings, and collaborated towards achieving common goals for the school. Slater's (2008) study also claimed that the participants considered the principals' support as crucial in shaping the collaborative culture of their schools. Successful principals invest their time and effort tremendously to create such a culture in their schools. Principals need to demonstrate commitment and possess excellent interpersonal skills, as Emihovich and Battaglia (2000) posit, collaboration is "very emotional work, where the various partners should expect to remain committed for a considerable period of time" (p. 236). Both the principals showed commitment and were aware of their excellent interpersonal skills which enabled them to be successful. Although a collaborative culture was evident in both the schools, Beatty (2000) warns that authentic relationships might not be possible in all the cases in a school although it might seem so at superficial level. While SMK Urban's principal believes in rewarding the teachers who perform well based upon the expectations, the principal of SMK Rural motivates them through public appreciation, personal notes and encouragement. Teachers of both the schools reported a better team spirit and camaraderie among teachers since the arrival of their new principals.

Another significant finding within the administrative dimension was the manner in which both the principals modelled the behavior that they expected from their staff

members and led by example. Leading by example is strongly associated with common characteristics of authentic leaders (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Modelling best practices encourages followers to emulate these practices readily (Locke, 2002). Positive modelling by the principals is closely associated with Bass's "idealized influence," which is a key element of his transformational leadership model. Successful principals are the ones who "modeled behaviour that they considered desirable to achieve the school goals" (Harris & Chapman, 2002, p.6). Both the principals strived towards maintaining high visibility in the school which is closely associated with meaningful interactions between the staff and the principal (Hallinger, 2003; Waters et al., 2003). The principal of SMK Rural makes it a point to be present at most of the late evening classes, a practice that is appreciated by the teachers. While the principal of SMK rural does not closely follow the extra classes, he ensures his visibility in all the school functions and sports activities. The data revealed that modelling by the principals had a definitive effect of encouraging the staff members, which is exactly what can be found in a number of recent studies. Harris and Chapman (2006, p.6) claim that successful principals "modeled behaviour that they considered desirable to achieve the school goals" (2002, p.6). Modelling behaviors and practices by leaders "…sets an example for employees to follow that is consistent with the values the leader espouses" (Podsakoff et al., 1990, p. 112).

The principals of both the schools work towards establishing norms and expectations for both the students and staff in the schools. Both the principals were successful in bringing up the attendance of the students to a respectable level through a series of concerted efforts involving the students, teachers and the parents. Reid (2006) claims that attendance is the single most critical variable effecting student's achievement, therefore, it is important for principals to ensure that students regularly come to

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school. However, the issue of attendance and its effects on academic achievement is debatable when some studies have demonstrated otherwise (e.g. Berenson, Carter & Norwood, 1992; Moore, 2003). Nonetheless, the improvement in attendance in both the schools under study has coincided with the improvement in academic achievement and both the principals cite the improvement in attendance as one of the reasons. While the principal of SMK Urban positive reinforcement by rewarding the students for perfect attendance, the principal of SMK Rural relied more on punitive measures. The principal of SMK Urban himself waits at the school gate to welcome the students every morning and encourages teachers and some of the parents to join him as well. His practice has roots in the assertion of DeSocio (2007) that many students who skip school feel hopeless and alienated, hence encouragement from adults creates positive and counteracts their anxieties and other negative feelings. The principal's action allows the crucial human-to-human connection and lets the student feel welcome to the school. Although teachers at SMK Rural also welcome the students at the school gate every morning, it is more for security reasons rather than an effort to provide a warm welcome to the students. The principal of SMK Rural herself does not practice welcoming students in the morning. While the problem of low attendance has been tackled successfully by both the principals, the study nevertheless identified a complex mix of home, school and individual factors which results in truancy. The primary reasons for low attendance at SMK Urban were different from that of SMK Rural. While the principal of SMK Urban attributed truancy to central location of the school with plenty of attractions for the students to draw away from the school, the SMK Rural principal and teachers feel that it was due to the lower socio-economic family background of the students that led to lower attendance.

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Both the schools reported dramatic improvements in the physical facilities of the school since the arrival of the new principals. Physical environment has been strongly linked with school effectiveness literature. The physical environment has been considered to be a crucial part of conducive learning environment (Lippman, 2010) and consists of ,but not limited to, spatial elements such as windows, walls and equipment such as desks, chairs computer equipment etc. (Fisher, 2008). The principal of SMK Rural came out as more keen on uplifting the physical outlook of the school than the principal of SMK Urban. One reason that came out of the data for this might be the fact that the principal of SMK Rural inherited a school that depicted a 'sad look', bereft of any fresh paint, curtains, flowers and plants while SMK Urban has no such issues. Thus while the principal of SMK Urban focused on expanding the infrastructure of the school in the form of new computers, better internet and dormitory for the students, the principal of SMK Rural had to first provide the bare necessities for the school before moving her focus on other facilities. On her part, she not only managed to repaint the school, enhanced the gardens, provided meaningful displays around the school and improved the conditions within the classrooms and the teachers room, but also was able to build a covered area for school activities, build a new dormitory for students and build new learning areas in the school where students could sit and learn in their free time. Although improving the overall school climate seemed to be the priority for both the principals, the principal of SMK Rural seemed to be more enthusiastic about it.

5.2.4 The 'Humanistic' Dimension

During the last decade or so, researchers have been focusing on the 'humanistic' dimensions of school principals, how the principals develop their people through personal attention to utilization of their capacities, enhance their enthusiasm and

optimism and inspire them to perform better (e.g. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Apart from demonstrating managerial behavior of the managerial taxonomy (supporting, mentoring, developing, recognizing, and rewarding) these recent researches have also demonstrated that this dimension has become central to the core practices of successful school principals (Miller & Rowan,2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Hallinger & Heck, 2002). The data analysis of the practices of the two principals reveal a concerted effort on the part of both the principals to build closer relationships with their staff members and make attempts to develop them into better professionals. While both the principals focused on developing their people, there was a distinct variation in their approaches. The principal of SMK Rural, while being extremely friendly with her staff members, employed a more personalised approach where she developed personal relations with them. She visits their families at home, celebrates their important occasions like birthdays and anniversaries and greets them personally. On the other hand, the principal of SMK Urban, while being friendly with his staff members, keeps his relationship at a professional level and does not often socialize with them on personal level.

The teachers, staff members and the students of both the schools claimed that their principal is friendly an approachable, however there was less data confirming this for SMK Rural compared with the overwhelming data available for the principal of SMK Urban. The data reveals that while the principal of SMK Rural seems to be genuinely friendly with her staff member, the principal of SMK Urban makes a conscious effort to befriend them. This is evident from his belief that if he is friendly with them, it will be easier for him to get work done. His relationship with his teachers and staff members is more of a 'give and take' type, as was revealed by a teacher during one of the interactions. His practice of developing 'give and take'

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relationship with his teachers is a classic example of the transactional leadership model of Bass (Bass, 2008). Both the principals follow an 'open door' policy where teachers, students and other members of the school community can approach them without any prior appointment. However, the data analysis revealed that neither of the two principals took additional steps in encouraging the members of the school community to make use of this policy. It must be added though that the principal of SMK Urban does occasionally, and informally, invite people to 'drop by' in his office for informal chats.

Both the principal believe in appreciating good work done by the teachers and reward them for their work. The principal of SMK rural, except for one formal occasion in a year where high performers are formally rewarded, believes in motivating her teachers through personal appreciation. On the other hand, the principal of SMK Urban makes a big deal of any extraordinary work done by the teachers and rewards them publicly. Rewards and appreciation have been established as having the potential for motivating teachers towards better performance (Lavy, 2002; Dee & Keys, 2004). However, there are recent studies that not only point towards no significant positive effects of rewards on teachers' morale and even negative effects in few cases (Fryer, 2011; Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006; Pink, 2011; Springer et. al., 2011). While there are conflicting claims as cited above, nonetheless it seems to be having some positive effects on the teachers of both the schools. While it is also established that for teachers who find rewards as not motivating, non-tangible rewards like satisfaction from high student achievement, recognition, influence, learning new skills, and personal growth does it (Tomlinson, 2000).

While both the principals worked hard towards inspiring and motivating their teachers through their friendly approach, it was evident that the principal of SMK

Urban was keen on professional development of his teachers, a trait that did not come out very strongly for the principal of SMK Rural. Principal of SMK Urban encourages his teachers to pursue higher studies so that they can improve their knowledge and skills and are better prepared to serve their students. He provides them extra time for studies and is always supportive when the teachers request time off because of their exams or working on crucial assignments. His practices are strongly rooted in his belief that teachers need to update their skills constantly and better teachers produce better results. His belief resonates the findings of several recent studies that establish this fact the teaching quality, which can be defined as "instruction that enables a wide range of students to learn" (Darling-Hammond, 2012), is the single most important factor in the academic achievement of the students (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005). The principal of SMK Rural also believes in continuous professional development of her teachers. She acts as a coach and a role model for them, a practice that was not evident in the case of SMK Urban. She also encourages her teachers to participate in regular professional development activities held within the school and outside, although there was no evidence of her encouraging teachers to enroll for higher educational qualifications like degrees and diplomas.

5.2.5 The 'Collaborative' Dimension

The data revealed that there was a deliberate attempt on the part of the principals of both the schools to engage the parents and the community to build meaningful coalition for the benefit of the school. While there was ample supporting evidence of such practice for the principal of SMK Urban, the data revealed that coalition building was the biggest strength of the principal of SMK Rural. Shifting the focus from inside-the-school towards a broader focus on both inside the school and

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collaborations with the parents and members of the school community is crucial for school improvement, specially those schools that are facing challenges (Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll & Russ, 2004). There is a rich body of evidence that towards improved academic evidence due to family involvement (e.g., Coleman, 1966; Finn, 1989). The principal of SMK Rural has, over a relatively short period of three years, transform the inward-looking only school culture to a school which has tremendously benefitted from the parents and the community by following the policy of deliberately building a meaningful coalition with them. Parents actively participate in all the aspects of the school, from giving advice on important matters to being active participants in organizing school events and functions. The principal of SMK Urban too realizes the importance of parents and members of the community and involves them actively into school affairs. The parents of both the schools reported a climate of trust in the schools and felt welcomed by the principal and staff members. The parents of both the schools appreciated the friendly approach of the principal and their role in making the school a better place.

However, the similarity between the practices of the two principals in collaborative dimension ends here. The principal of SMK Rural has taken this practice to an altogether different level. Through her efforts, the parents have contributed to the school in a number of ways. They have raised funds to furnish the areas that needed uplift, provided curtains to the classrooms and built a number of special areas in the school that could be used by the students in their spare time. Parents have also provided volunteer services to the school by helping with transporting students for extra classes, cooking during school events, stitching the curtains and installing it in the school building and helping in repainting the school building. Parents also do guard duties during late evening classes and ensure the safety of the students. Much

has been written about the effects of parental involvement in the school with a number of contradictory evidences. The data analysis revealed a distinct variance in the way the two principals involved the parents in the school. While in SMK Urban, parental involvement was more formal in nature, the parents of SMK Rural were more spontaneous and displayed a sense of pride in their involvement. The difference in the two approaches can be attributed to the fact that urban teachers and administrators tend to formalize parental involvement through policies and procedures, so much so that their involvement becomes a formal ritual rather than being a personalised practice, as in the case of rural schools (Preston, 2012). Studies have found that rural communities are more social and cohesive, perhaps due to the lack of other avenues for engagement as compared with urban communities which have been found to attend fewer school events, are reluctant to volunteer for committees, and are less likely to volunteer (Putnam, 2000). Thus, SMK rural being located in a rural area demonstrated much more enthusiastic involvement of the parents as compared to the parents of SMK Urban School.

In the case of SMK Rural, while parents had no role in direct teaching and learning activities, they did support these by indirectly supporting academic activities through their efforts in guard duties during extra classes or facilitating students participation in extra classes by providing them with transport or by improving the overall school climate which provided students with a more conducive place to learn. As for SMK Urban school, the principal engaged the parents in academic activities by encouraging them to provide suitable place and time for the students at home to study and supervising their homework. While studies claim that active parental involvement leads to enhanced academic achievement (e.g. Burcu & Sungur 2009; Cook, 2008; Epstein, 2011; Hill & Craft, 2003; Lee & Bowen 2006; Michael, Dittus

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and Epstein, 2007; Prins & Toso, 2008), there are other studies that claim no effect on student achievement (e.g. Domina, 2005; El Nokali, Bachman & Votruba-Drzal, 2010). The contrast in findings might be attributed to the facts that the studies focused merely on the direct effects of parental involvement why ignoring the immense indirect benefits that the parental involvement brought.

The other significant findings of the study was the efforts of the principal of SMK Rural to rope-in outside agencies to provide free tuitions or helping the school by donating lime trees and mushroom farm for the school to generate extra income which, in turn, was utilized for improvement in the school facilities. Such practice was absent in the practices of the principal of SMK Urban, perhaps due to the fact that there was no paucity of funds in the school. However, the principal of SMK Urban made deliberate attempts to collaborate with various governmental and non-governmental agencies that help him out in his times of need, like what he claims that when he needs a substitute teacher, his call for help is always promptly answered by the local district education office.

The variance in the extent at which the principals of the two schools involved the parents and the community in the school affairs can be attributed to the difference between the socio-economic status and the geographical location of the two schools. Rural schools have been found to be more actively seeking collaboration with the parents and the community as compared to urban schools, since rural schools are relatively smaller and the social setting of the parents is more cohesive and connected (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998; Mitchell, 2000; Parker, 2001), which leads to more active community involvement. SMK Rural is located in a remote rural area and although the families of the students are spread over a large geographical area, they are well connected with each other and claim to know every member of the

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school community. On the other hand, SMK Urban is located in the heart of an urban population and although it serves a relatively smaller geographic population, the school community in not well connected and cohesive. Another reason why the principal of SMK Rural was more successful in involving the parents and the community in the school might be due to the fact that rural parents are more likely to consider the school approachable (Newton, 1993) and are more likely to participate in school sponsored events (Prater, Bermudez, & Owens, 1997) as compared to urban parents.

5.3 Summary

This chapter reported on a comprehensive cross-case analysis of the two schools under this case study. The chapter identified the common dimensions of leadership practices and placed them into five distinct categories. These dimensions demonstrated a range of common leadership practices of the two principals and how these principals enacted these practices in their respective school for success. The dimensions clearly demonstrated that the actions of the principals is not solely dependent upon, what is generally perceived, teaching and learning activities within their schools but transcends to a wider dimensions which involved the managerial and administrative tasks, developing teachers and staff members, creating and nurturing a friendly and conducive school environment, and crucially, building meaningful coalitions with the parents and other members of the school community.

Both the principals viewed improvement in academic achievement of their students as their primary goals while the other core activities acted as enablers for their goal achievement. Bothe the principals had a friendly nature and an open, people centered approach which resulted in an improved school environment. Also, both the principals showed immense determination and conviction which enabled them to

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constantly strive towards achieving their goals. While there were similarities in the core practices of the two principals, there was ample evidence to show that the enactment of their practices were varied and appropriate according to their own unique context which was different for both the schools. Nonetheless, both the principals demonstrated through their practices that their overarching aim was always to bring success to their schools by creating conditions that enable every member of the school community to perform at their optimum level, for the students to aim for higher academic achievement to the teachers aiming for better teaching and learning activities.

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

This study has made significant contributions to the educational leadership literature, particularly on the practices of successful school principals in Malaysia. It provides a deep insight into how principals, through their context-based practices bring about a complete turnaround in their struggling schools. Although school leadership was studied extensively before 2001 as well, and is being studied even more today, much of such studies were limited to school effectiveness, answering the 'what' part of the leadership question, ignoring the more important 'how' and 'why' aspects of leadership (Day & Armstrong, 2016). The findings of this study demonstrated that although the two schools covered by this study were located in two diverse geographical locations, the problems that they faced were quite similar. Both the schools were facing the issue of low academic achievement, low teacher morale and a sense of 'stagnation', which reflected in their low school ranking by the Ministry of Education. This study however not only highlighted the problems but was also able to dig deeper and identify the causes that were unique to the respective schools and led to these problems. It was also revealed that the principals rather than fitting into the existing system demonstrated a determination to face the challenges head on and were able to bring a complete turnaround to their schools through their practices. Bothe the principal demonstrated a keen awareness of their contexts and aligned their practices accordingly to bring success. While both the principals demonstrated ample evidence to work under the five dimensions of leadership practices, as identified by this study, they were different in the manner in which they conducted themselves. It

can thus be concluded that irrespective of the manner in which leaders enact their practices, their core practices are derived from a set of the five dimensions.

6.2 Significance of Study

The study has important significance for principals, policymakers and school leadership institutes. In this chapter, the significance of this study and its empirical and theoretical implications are elaborated.

In the light of limited literature available on the successful practices of a school principal in Malaysia and the absence of published studies on context-based leadership practices of successful school principals in Malaysia, this study becomes significant since this is the first such study conducted in Malaysia. The study of the practices of successful school principals began in 2001 and so far has been conducted in 25 countries around the world resulting in a rich body of evidence on how individual principals respond to their own unique contexts and bring about positive changes through their practices (Day & Armstrong, 2016). Although school leadership was studied extensively before 2001 as well, and is being studied even more today, much of such studies were limited to school effectiveness, answering the 'what' part of the leadership question, ignoring the more important 'how' and 'why' aspects of leadership (Day & Armstrong, 2016). The findings of this study demonstrated that although the two schools covered by this study were located in two diverse geographical locations, the problems that they faced were quite similar. Both the schools were facing the issue of low academic achievement, low teacher morale and a sense of 'stagnation', which reflected in their low school ranking by the Ministry of Education. This study however not only highlighted the problems but was also able to dig deeper and identify the causes that were unique to the respective schools and led to these problems. It was also revealed that the principals rather than

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fitting into the existing system demonstrated a determination to face the challenges head on and were able to bring a complete turnaround to their schools through their practices.

Although some of the findings of this study conform to the already established evidence from similar studies conducted elsewhere, there are, nonetheless, findings which might offer crucial new insights into school leadership and leadership development in Malaysia. The fourth and fifth dimensions, the Humanistic dimension and the collaborative dimension, of the core practices of a successful leader as identified by this study is largely given just a passing thought in the literature or altogether ignored in many cases; hence this can be terms as the new finding of this study, placing it on equal terms with the first three dimensions. While both the successful principals differed in their approach towards these five dimensions, nonetheless they always demonstrated a sturdy emphasis of their respective schools on managing teaching and learning, developing teachers, building meaningful coalitions with other members of the school community and creating a friendly and conducive work atmosphere in their schools through their personal traits.

6.2.1 Significance for school principals

An important significance of the findings for the principals can be to spend more time on academic aspects of the school, be it observing teachers, involvement in setting academic goals or providing mentorship to teachers. A notable finding of this study is the incessant emphasis of both the principals to make teaching and learning in their schools as their top priority. Building meaningful coalitions from outside the school community was another highlight of the findings which the principals may find significant. The findings provide significant insight for the principals into the

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advantage of building such relationships for the benefit of the two case schools. The finding becomes even more significant since a number of other studies have shown how reaching out to the wider school community brings benefits to the schools (Prew, 2009). Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu, & Van Rooyen (2009), in their study of South African schools claim that 'family pathway' is likely to bring success, especially in schools that are in socio-economically backward areas, as was the case of SMK Rural. This also explains why the principal of SMK rural was more active in coalition building. Although the two schools differed in the way they involved the community with SMK Rural being more aggressive compared to SMK Urban, it was more due to the contextual requirements of the two schools than the willingness of the principals. Being friendly and approachable was the key to success for both the principals which may be of significance for other principals who would be encouraged to be more friendly and approachable.

6.2.2 Significance for the policymakers

For the policymakers, the findings are significant since they demonstrate a departure from the traditional and historical role of school principals in Asian countries which are primarily managerial in nature with little emphasis on teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2004; Pan & Chen, 2011; Walker & Hallinger, 2015; Walker, Hu, & Qian, 2012). Policymakers may be encouraged to relook at the role of the school principals and emphasize more on their role as a pedagogical leader while reducing some of their administrative tasks. The findings will also provide insight to policymakers on the importance of the context for individual schools who may, in turn, encourage principals to act according to the context of their own schools for better results.

6.2.3 Significance for the leadership training institutes

There are important takeaways for leadership training institutes in Malaysia as well. While the study acknowledges the importance of the role of various leadership models for success, it also points towards a contextual approach to adopting these models where in principals adapt their practices to their own contextual requirements. Thus training institutes may want emphasize upon the role of the context in determining the practices of the school principals and ensure that the leadership models are not understood as one-size-fits-all solution for the trainees.

6.2.4 Significance for the conceptualization of school leadership in Malaysia

This study makes significant contribution to both the conceptualization of school leadership in Malaysian context as well as to the international theoretical literature on educational leadership, highlighting the inadequacies of existing theories which are unable to explain the dimensions of Malaysian school leadership practices which are unique in nature. The existing leadership theories, for example transformational leadership, distributed leadership or instructional leadership theories are too much focused on the strategic, pedagogic and administrative dimensions while paying little attention to the humanistic and collaborative dimensions which were important findings of this study. Researchers from the field of educational leadership in Malaysia maybe encouraged to focus their new studies on the humanistic and collaborative dimensions of school leadership as well

6.3 Limitations of the study

The study was limited to a multisite case study of two public schools in a northern state in Malaysia, hence no claim for generalization of the findings are being made. However, the methods are transferable to other similar studies. Also, the primary focus of the study was on the context based practices of successful school principals,

irrespective of the leadership styles, cultural orientation and the models that the principals adhered to. There are three basic limitations for this study. The first limitation of this study is the language issue. Although most of the interviewees could understand English quite well, almost all were hesitant to speak fluently in English. Hence, for some interviews help was taken from competent translator who acted as an interpreter between the interviewer and the interviewees. Thus, there is a possibility of potential loss of information for few expressions in Malay language that are hard to translate into English. Although there was limited use of Bahasa Malayu language during the interviews and extreme care was taken while translating, there still remains a risk of certain nuances and intricacies being lost in the process.

The second limitation of this study is that its theoretical foundations that are primarily borrowed from the western context. Although there is a rich literature on the subject of educational leadership in Malaysia, there is a significant dearth of studies that have been conducted on the context-based leadership practices of school principals resulting in a lack of theoretical foundations originating from Malaysia for this study. Although appropriate interpretations were made wherever possible, but it was limited in scope and overdependence on western theoretical contexts existed during most of the study.

The third limitation of this study is the lack of involvement of every type of schools in Malaysia. In Malaysia, there are several types of schools that are recognized by Ministry of Education. For this study, only national schools and national type schools were selected. This limitation in the scope of study may result in the applicability of its findings to the schools that are other than the ones used in this study.

6.4 Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

The study of the practices of successful schools all over the world has gained momentum although little has been done in this area in Malaysia as well as other Asian countries. In view of the limitations of this study, the following are recommendations for further research.

While case studies can help us understand complex inter-relationships of a phenomenon within a bounded system, its nature restricts the generalizability of its findings. Hence, it is recommended for the future researchers to carry out quantitative studies on larger samples which can be generalizable to larger populations. The study was conducted on two secondary schools in Malaysia. In view of a significant number of ISSPP studies conducted on elementary schools as well, it is recommended for future researchers to conduct similar studies in elementary schools of Malaysia as well. Keeping in mind that there are several different types of schools in Malaysia, future researchers should attempt to explore successful school leadership practices in other type of schools as well. Different type of schools function differently as their goals and objectives are different, hence the contextual factors affecting the practices of the principals might be different. This study was conducted in two schools of one northern state in Malaysia. Malaysia is a diverse country consisting of states that are significantly different from other in terms of demography. Similar studies should be conducted in the schools of other states as well to get a clearer picture of the successful practices of principals in the country.

The study may provide materials for informed policy-choice in the future policy goals related to school leadership. Future researches may also want to study the aspects of the current policies that may need policy adjustments in the light of the new findings.

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APPENDIX A
Permission Letter from EPRD to conduct the Study

Ruj. Kami : KP(BPPDP)603/5/JLD.11 (169)
Tarikh : 12 Disember 2014

Mohammad Noman
107 Taman Teja
Jalan Teja 4
06070 Changlun
Kedah

Tuan/Puan,

Kelulusan Untuk Menjalankan Kajian Di Sekolah, Institut Pendidikan Guru, Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Dan Bahagian-Bahagian Di Bawah Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia

Adalah saya dengan hormatnya diarah memaklumkan bahawa permohonan tuan /puan untuk menjalankan kajian bertajuk:

" **Contextual Leadership Investigating The Practices Of Successful School Principals In Malaysian Context** "diluluskan.

2.   Kelulusan ini adalah berdasarkan kepada cadangan penyelidikan dan instrumen kajian yang tuan/puan kemukakan ke Bahagian ini. **Kebenaran bagi menggunakan sampel kajian perlu diperolehi dari Ketua Bahagian/Pengarah Pendidikan Negeri yang berkenaan.**

3.   Sila tuan/puan kemukakan ke Bahagian ini senaskah laporan akhir kajian/laporan dalam bentuk elektronik berformat Pdf di dalam CD bersama naskah hardcopy setelah selesai kelak. Tuan/Puan juga diingatkan supaya mendapat kebenaran terlebih dahulu daripada Bahagian ini sekiranya sebahagian atau sepenuhnya dapatan kajian tersebut hendak dibentangkan di mana-mana forum atau seminar atau diumumkan kepada media massa.

Sekian untuk makluman dan tindakan tuan/puan selanjutnya. Terima kasih.

"BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA"

Saya yang menurut perintah,

(DR.HJ.ZABANI BIN DARUS)
Ketua Sektor
Sektor Penyelidikan dan Penilaian
b.p. Pengarah
Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelidikan Dasar Pendidikan
Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia

APPENDIX B
Letter of Invitation – Principal

INVITATION

Dear Principal,

My name is Mohammad Noman, a Ph.D. candidate from the School of Education, SEML, College of Arts and Sciences, UUM, Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia. I am writing this to request your participation in my research entitled "CONTEXTUAL LEADERSHIP: EXAMINING THE PRACTICES OF SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN MALAYSIAN CONTEXT".

This study has three major focus áreas:

1. investigate the core leadership practices of successful school Principals in Kedah, Malaysia

2. delve deeper into the understanding of how these principals enact the core leadership practices in Malaysian schools.

3. identify the context in which successful school principals work in Malaysia.

The research will be conducted through multi-site case study method. Data will be collected through a variety of methods which includes interviews of the participants, observation, and data scanning. The interviews might last from 30 minutes to one hour. A follow-up interview will be requested if more information is needed at a later stage.

Please bear in mind that the interviews will be recorded. The researcher promises to use the recording only for transcription purposes. I fully understand that confidentiality and anonymity are vital principle of this process. If for any reasons, you would not like your name to be revealed, please indicate so while giving your acceptance. I promise to abide by your wishes. If you accept this invitation, kindly sign your name and return it to me. Thank you very much, in advance, for accepting this invitation.

Regards,

Mohammad Noman

E-Mail: mdnoman@yahoo.com   Phone: 016-4098794

Consent: I accept the invitation and I am glad to be a part of this research.

I ALLOW / DO NOT ALLOW my name to be included in the research.

Name:

Signature:

APPENDIX C
Letter of Invitation – Other Participants

INVITATION

Dear _____

My name is Mohammad Noman, a Ph.D. candidate from the School of Education, SEML, College of Arts and Sciences, UUM, Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia. I am writing this to request your participation in my research entitled "CONTEXTUAL LEADERSHIP: EXAMINING THE PRACTICES OF SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN MALAYSIAN CONTEXT".

This study has three major focus áreas:

1. investigate the core leadership practices of successful school Principals in Kedah, Malaysia

2. delve deeper into the understanding of how these principals enact the core leadership practices in Malaysian schools.

3. identify the context in which successful school principals work in Malaysia.

The research will be conducted through multi-site case study method. Data will be collected through a variety of methods which includes interviews of the participants, observation, and data scanning. The interviews might last from 30 minutes to one hour. A follow-up interview will be requested if more information is needed at a later stage.

Please bear in mind that the interviews will be recorded. The researcher promises to use the recording only for transcription purposes. I fully understand that confidentiality and anonymity are vital principle of this process. If for any reasons, you would not like your name to be revealed, please indicate so while giving your acceptance. I promise to abide by your wishes. If you accept this invitation, kindly sign your name and return it to me. Thank you very much, in advance, for accepting this invitation.

Regards,

Mohammad Noman

E-Mail: mdnoman@yahoo.com   Phone: 016-4098794

Consent: I accept the invitation and I am glad to be a part of this research.

I ALLOW / DO NOT ALLOW my name to be included in the research.

Name:

Signature:

Principal

Note: Begin with a brief introduction of the researcher and the study. These are just guiding questions; follow-up questions may be asked depending upon the replies.

1. Begin with question about the background of the principal

- Educational attainment

- Prior experience before coming to this school

- General interest

2. Question about the initial impression of the current school

- In what condition was the school inherited

- Major challenges

- Internal and external school environment

3. Question about the contextual factors of the school

- The demography of the school

- Teachers' qualification, attitude and motivation

- Students achievement, both academic and co-curricular

- Discipline

- Support from the parents and the community

335

- Relationship with the governmental and non-governmental agencies

4. Question about the action taken in response to the contextual factors

- How was the teamwork developed

- What steps were taken to improve achievement

- How were the parents involved and why

- How was the community involvement

- How was the relationship with governmental and non-governmental agencies improved

5. Questions on the adaptability of the principal and logic behind each action

- What is the vision and goals for the school

- What determines success for the principal

- How does the principal define achievement

- What is the logic behind some of the principal's actions

- What are the new challenges ahead and how is the preparation to face it

- What is the decision making process and what philosophy guides it

6. General

- Probe to find out any additional informal that the principal might like to volunteer.

APPENDIX E
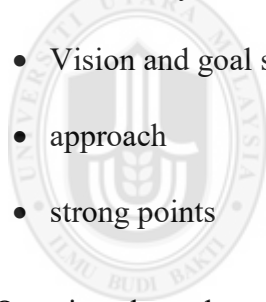## Semi-Structured Interview Guide

<u>Teacher</u>

1. Begin with question about the background of the teacher

- Educational attainment

- Teaching experience

- General interest

2. Question related to the current principal

- Personality

- Vision and goal setting

- approach

- strong points

3. Question about the contextual factors of the school

- The demography of the school

- Students achievement, both academic and co-curricular

- Discipline

- Support from the parents and the community

- Relationship with the governmental and non-governmental agencies

4. Question about the practices of the principal

- How is the teamwork

- What are the significant changes in the school

- What steps were taken to improve achievement

- How were the parents involved and why

- How does the principal react to situation

- How is the principal's relationship building

5. Questions related to success of the principal

- What determines success for the principal

- How does the principal arrive at decisions

- What is the logic behind some of the principal's actions

- What are the new challenges ahead and how is the preparation to face it

6. General

- Probe to find out any additional informal that the teachers might like to volunteer.
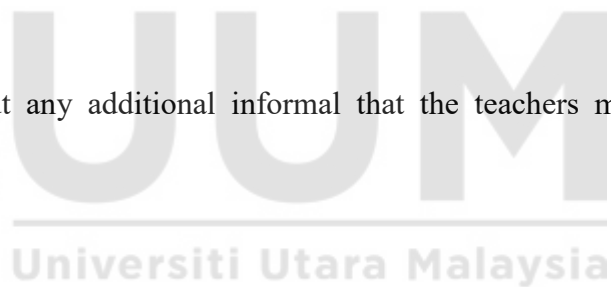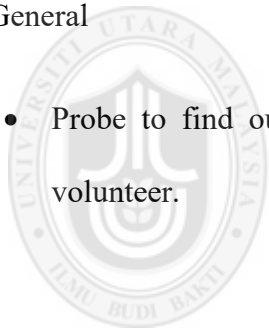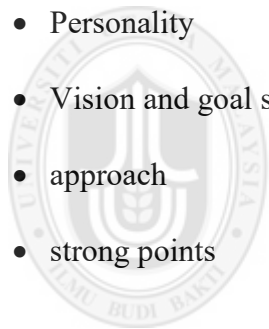
Member of the Leadership Team

1. Begin with question about the background of the teacher

- Educational attainment

- Role in the school

- General interest

2. Question related to the current principal

- Personality

- Vision and goal setting

- approach

- strong points

3. Question about the contextual factors of the school

- The demography of the school

- Students achievement, both academic and co-curricular

- Discipline

- Relationship with the parents, governmental and non-governmental agencies

4. Question about the practices of the principal

- How is the teamwork

- What are the significant changes in the school

- What steps were taken to improve achievement

- How does the principal react to situation

- How is the principal's relationship building

5. Questions related to success of the principal

- What determines success for the principal

- How does the principal arrive at decisions

- What is the logic behind some of the principal's actions

- What are the new challenges ahead and how is the preparation to face it

6. General

- Probe to find out any additional informal that the respondent might like to volunteer.

APPENDIX G
Semi-Structured Interview Guide

<u>Parent</u>

1. Begin with question about the background of the Parent

- How many children in the school, their age, grade level

- Since how long has the parent been in the school

2. Question related to the current principal

- Personality

- Vision and goalsetting

- approach

- strong points

3. Question about the contextual factors of the school

- Students achievement, both academic and co-curricular

- Discipline

- Support from the parents and the community

4. Question about the practices of the principal

- Role of parents in the school; how are they involved and how often

- What are the significant changes in the school

- What steps were taken to improve achievement

- How is the principal's relationship building and personal traits

5. Questions related to success of the principal

- What determines success for the principal

- What are the new challenges ahead and how is the preparation to face it

6. General

- Probe to find out any additional informal that the parent might like to volunteer

APPENDIX H
Semi-Structured Interview Guide
Student

1. Begin with question about the background of the student

   - Name, age, grade level
   - Since how long has the student been in the school

2. Question related to the current principal

   - personality
   - approach
   - strong points

3. Question about the contextual factors of the school

   - Students achievement, both academic and co-curricular
   - Discipline

4. Question about the practices of the principal

   - What are the significant changes in the school
   - What steps were taken to improve achievement

5. Questions related to success of the principal

   - What determines success for the principal
   - Vision and goals for the school

6. General

   - Probe to find out any additional informal that the student might like to volunteer.