

TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FULLY PRIVATELY RUN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Abstract: *The objective of this paper is to identify teachers and principals' perception towards the implementation of fully privately run public schools (FPRPS) in Malaysia. Under the Malaysian Educational Blueprint (MEB) 2013 - 2025, it is clear that the programmes and activities that would encourage and allow parents, the public and private sectors, NGOs, and society to forge a partnership with the school will benefit especially concerning values education. These school community partnerships can be related to the ninth shift in the Blueprint which is "partnering with parents, community and private sector at scale," although, the emphasis of this shift is more on students' academic progress. This study was conducted for three months periods, involving 87 teachers and principals, 13 schools in 3 Districts Education Office (PPD) which are Petaling Utama, Wilayah Bangsar-Pudu and Hulu Langat, 11 private sectors and 10 regulatory bodies. The qualitative method was used in this study where the interview (in form of focus group discussion –FGD) has been implemented for teachers and principals. The data had been processed by using Atlas to – Windows 8 and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). From the interviews conducted on FPRPS, all of the respondents (i.e. teachers and principals) indicated that they are not aware of FPRPS and are ready and willing to accept the FPRPS implementation. This is because FPRS offers huge potential benefits to them. These include improvement in students' skill, teacher training, academic performance, employability, financial support, infrastructures, facilities, security, maintenance, workload, school efficiency, productivity, teachers' skill, profit, and salary.*

Keywords: Stakeholder, Malaysian Educational Blueprint, Partnership, Fully Privately Run Public Schools (FPRPS)

Introduction

The Ministry of Education has recognized the role of external agencies in assisting the education sector, especially in ICT since 2000. It started when the national education system was directly involved in the production and supply of human resources with ICT skills. KPM's efforts to create computer labs across the country, introducing ICT subjects and introducing Smart School Applications in the same year also encouraged other sectors' interests to assist the ministry.

The involvement of private companies in the education sector is particularly serious when the government itself encourages partnerships especially in areas with high expertise. Smart partnership implementation can produce the following benefits:

- Saves the cost of system development
- Improve overall government agency performance
- Facilitate sharing of data and resources
- Improve skills, knowledge and expertise
- Reduce the gap between government agencies that are more capable with less-capable agencies in building IT applications
- Establish coordination between government agencies in IT development
- Assisting the overall economic development and recovery efforts of the country

Based on the benefits or advantages it earns, Ministry of Education looks a step further to fully involved the private sector in the operation or management of the secondary schools in Malaysia.

School as a distinct social system and become an agent of change of society should be according to community change. This is because the problem of society is a school problem too. In this case, inevitably communities need to cooperate with schools to achieve the ideals of schools and countries (Ibrahim, 2001). Even education institutions provide the most up-to-date and lasting service to almost all societies. The emergence of education issues can influence and be influenced by society, parents and private sectors. Hence, the involvement of the private sector in the form of partnerships for the common interest can make the dream come true.

Smart or smart partnership is a strategic alliance that brings synergistic benefits to all parties involved. In the context of the public sectors, smart sharing takes place when agencies or companies share expertise, adopting experience or products in a field that has proven to be successful and appropriate.

In 2012, the Ministry of Education (MoE) had launched the National Education Blueprint (2013-2025). The blueprint outlines 11 shifts required to transform the national education system to be on par with and comparable to that of developed nations, over the next 13 years. As part of the blueprint, the MoE will conduct comprehensive "stock-takes" in 2015, 2020 and 2025, in which all stakeholders will be able to provide input. Blueprint focuses on six student attributes - knowledge, thinking skills, leadership, bilingual proficiency, ethics and national identity. To achieve desired student outcomes, reform of education system to be approached in 11 shifts (The Stars 2012).

In shift no.9, MoE will partner with parents, community and private sectors at scale in order to reform our educational system. Due to this shift, among the strategies underlined by MoE is to get involved private sectors in the context of raising international education standards, the Government's aspiration of better preparing Malaysia's children for the needs of the 21st century, and increased public and parental expectations of education. So, the main objective of

this study is to explore the perceptions and expectations of the main stakeholders towards FPRPS and to conduct the feasibility study on Fully Privately Run Public Schools by Ministry of Education, Malaysia in urban area. This is to execute the Ministry's plan to expedite the involvement of private sectors and secure right sponsors for the Public Private Partnership Initiative which in line with MEB 2013 – 2025 (Ministry of Education 2013)

Problem Statements

The total contribution of private companies in helping the education sector hit hundreds of millions of ringgits since it was introduced. The donations and assistance given are seen as something that is very valuable and needs to be utilized for the good of the education sector. Existing and on-going programs include those relating to hardware, software, ICT training, host schools, application and management system solutions. The Ministry of Education Malaysia sees this development as a positive indicator towards strengthening the nation's education and making it a smart partnership in education.

In 2011, Institute for Democracy and economic Affairs (IDEAS) held an event on Public Private Partnership (PPPs) in the school system which was centred around sharing international experiences and creating buy-in from key policymakers in order to support the growth of PPP in schools. By then, PPPs in education were beginning to take off in Malaysia with the Prime Minister's Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) playing a role in this. The Malaysian Education Blueprint 2012 – 2025 (MEB) has discussed PPP as one of the ways to improve the quality of education in Malaysia (KPM 2015)

According to the government, the reasons for adopting PPP in the provision of public assets and services includes to relieve their financial and administrative burden, improve efficiency and productivity, facilitate economic growth, reduce the size and presence of the public sector in the economy, and to help meet the national economic policy targets (policy (Antoni and Mauro 2017).

The Public-Private Partnership (PPP) initiative, which has been implemented in Malaysia for more than 30 years, has managed to contribute significantly towards Malaysia's rapid economic growth, said Chief Secretary to the government Ali Hamsa (Arran 2014). Ministry of education (MoE) has compiled a transformation to be implemented in three waves (13 years): Wave 1 (2013 - 2025) - transforms the system by supporting teachers and focusing on key skills, second wave (2016 - 2020) - drive system upgrading and the third wave (2021 - 2025) - shifts towards excellence through increased self-regulation (Komuniti Segamat 2017)

The Critical Success Factors for Public-Private Partnership (PPP) in Education

The following factors were found (empirically) to be critical success factors for PPPs in education.

Active Partnership

The equality of all partners necessitates the active engagement of staff for effective partnerships (Sebalj et al., 2007). It was found that partners would like more active engagement and once created need to be nurtured and extended so that there exists a strong as well as sustainable partnership system, which not only involves the active and participating of government (ministry of education) and Private sectors, but a very broad group of stakeholders. These stakeholders will need to provide “peripheral support in terms of policy enhancement, sustainable streams of funding, etc. and opportunities for continuous improvement” (Fraser et al., 2009). This active engagement necessitates also the need for a definition and restructure of the roles and responsibilities of partners. Enabling equal power distribution between the partners is also essential and requires commitment to collaborative working at all levels. By

establishing commitment to collaboration, school leaders (management) enable organisational networks to “mobilize support and overcome well-known barriers to sustaining collaboration” (Harris, 2010, p.32), which is the aim of PPP initiative.

Appreciation of partner’s contribution

It is important to have a “mutual respect for each other’s areas of knowledge and expertise” (Briggs et al., 2007, p.27). If MOE want their expectations met and their support appreciated, then they need to “listen to these professionals and recognise the value of the contribution they make” (Benefer et al., 2009, p.44), and the priorities they want to pursue (Bosma et al., 2010). All categories of staff should be involved in some capacity. For Rogers et al., (2011), the key question is not about how to convince the partner organisation(s) of their capability, but rather, how the partner organisations together can improve their work. This requires mutual commitment and responsibility (Sigurdardottir, 2010).

Clear Communication

A key requirement for the successful implementation of PPPs at any level of education is an effective communications and awareness strategy. Such a strategy should include communication with stakeholders must be a part of the daily life of the organisation (Bosma et al., 2010), with well-developed communication routines and competence in using different methods to communicate with different stakeholder groups. All communication should be “clear; concise; has a clearly defined action plan; targets appropriate audience; allows constructive feedback; follow-up to determine effectiveness; acted upon; proactive rather than reactive, and follows agreed timeline”. This also involves clarity of roles (Eddy, 2010).

Consistent Approach and Policy

Understanding what is required for effective partnerships is important in determining when and how to engage in these collaborative arrangements (Amey, Eddy & Campbell, 2010). This requires the examination of the forces that foster its development and facilitate or challenge its implementation. It is also critical to determine the appropriate outcomes, measures of success, and forces that lead to continued collaboration (Hoffman-Johnson, 2007). At the partnership level there is a need for pragmatic 21st century solutions for partnership provision across “wide geographical areas and across busy cities; coherent systems and personalised support for learners to evaluate, take up and succeed in the opportunities open to them” (Briggs et al., 2007, p. 2).

Experience and Expertise

The emphasis should be on the right people to manage and operate the partnership (Waller, 2009). It is important to choose credible, experienced and expert teams and work to clear ethical guidelines (Bosma et al., 2010), but there is value in targeting credibility and different levels of seniority across organisations. To make PPP effective, partnership should create a common vision (McCray et al., 2011).

Supportive Structure and Environment

To undertake the effective partnership, academic and support staff professionals in the school need the “space, freedom and infrastructure to work with each other and relevant collaborators across partnerships” (Benefer et al., 2009, p. 44). Other environmental conditions such as the creation of lateral and hierarchical communication channels, plus the provision of a supportive work environment were important for effective partnerships (Sebalj et al., 2007).

Sustainability

Another important dimension of partnership is to make it sustainable (Eddy, 2010). Sustainable partnerships are based on being flexible to new inputs and adjusting accordingly. If partnership

is seen as part of the organisation's academic processes and therefore longer-term, new ways of conceptualising and planning for the partnership need to occur, including considering how it will be sustained and institutionalized" (Amey et al., 2007, p. 12).

Objectives

Based on the aspiration and Strategic Planning in Malaysian Education System, 9th shift in transformation plan, a feasibility study has been conducted in order to perceive the possibilities of implementing Fully Privately Run Public Schools (FPRPS) by MoE. The objectives of the study are as follows: -

- i. To explore the perceptions and expectations of teachers and principals towards the implementation of Fully Privately Run Public Schools (FPRPS).
- iii. To identify the challenges and opportunities in managing FPRPS.

Methodology

Research design of this study is by using qualitative method. In this qualitative method, the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and interview sessions were conducted with teachers and principals for getting primary data. The secondary data was gathered from reports, articles, newspapers and journals.

Interview (Focus Group Discussions)

There were three groups of participants involved in the study; teachers and principals, Federal and District Education Office and private sectors. About 87 teachers and principals (Table 1) involved in the focus group discussions. There were 23 Federal and District Education offices participated in the focus group discussions providing insights to establish the FPRPS.

Table 1: Distribution Number of Teachers and Principals

No.	School	Coding	No. of Teachers and Principals
1.	SMK Bandar Baru Ampang	SC1	6
2.	SMK Bandar Tun Razak	SC2	7
3.	SM Teknik KL	SC3	8
4.	SMK Sri Aman	SC4	6
5.	SMK Seri Hartamas	SC5	6
6.	SMK Tinggi Kajang	SC6	8
7.	SMK Aminuddin Baki	SC7	6
8.	SMK Tropicana	SC8	6
9.	SMK Seri Bintang Utara	SC9	7
10.	SMJK Yu Hua	SC10	7
11.	SMK Bdr Baru Bangi	SC11	9
12.	SMK Jln 4	SC12	6

13.	SMK International Islamic Holistic Schools	SC13	5
	Total: 13 Schools		87

Secondary Data

Secondary data was used to look into FPRPS trends, needs and requirements. The current policies implemented in the public private partnership between government and private school's management.

Findings

In addressing the first research objective, analysis of data concluded three dimensions shape the perceptions and expectation of the main stakeholders namely teachers and principals towards the concept of FPRPS.

Perceptions and Expectations of Teachers and Principals Towards FPRPS

Awareness

The first dimension that shaped teachers and principals' perceptions is awareness. The term aware is used to describe the state where the observer (stakeholders) is conscious of events or thoughts without necessarily implying understanding. This dimension constitutes awareness in three situations. First, awareness is merely non-existence. The data shows that generally teachers and principals were not aware of FPRPS. When they were interviewed by the researchers, the common respond was "*I have never heard of it before, this is the first time*", "*I would say I never come across of this concept, perhaps you may want to give me an example of what they are?*" and "*I am not aware of the model in particular and what more the framework and details of FPRPS*". This indicates that participants were not having knowledge or conscious about the concept.

Extending to this line of thought, when asked about their perception on the concept, there were teachers and principals who showed some level of knowledge. This second dimension recognises awareness in the sense that they have heard about the concept but have no clue on the details. The following quote exemplifies the situation:

"Someone talked about this before but it does not stick on my mind. I don't know how it works" (Participant PS7)

The third dimension of awareness is when participants claimed that they have a basic understanding on the concept but not sure of the definite meaning. They perceived FPRPS as a concept familiar to them for instance model run at some trust school or vernacular school as quoted by participant SC4:

"I have not heard of this fully run type of school but I have been to the trust school who are equipped with consultants like this one, from my understanding, this is like the SJKC model" (Participant SC4).

As conclusion, based on the above findings, participants are generally have limited knowledge of FPRPS. Researches in many instances took the liberty to explain the concept of FPRPS in order to proceed with subsequent questions, which would further scrutinise their perceptions and expectation towards FPRPS. The level of awareness is necessary because it

helped the relevant participants to be more receptive to the concept. Hence, the effort to create awareness among the stakeholders should be emphasized.

Readiness

The second criterion investigated in this study is the readiness of respondents to the implementation of FPRPS. Below are some of their statements regarding readiness on FPRPS.

SC5: "We have no problem in adapting it"

SC3: "If it is me, I agree to it".

SC7: "Parents here will accept it if they feel it will yield benefits to them"

Most of the respondents interviewed stated that they are ready to accept the implementation of FPRPS.

Pilot Project

The respondents would like to have a pilot project conducted before the real implementation of the FPRPS:

SC11: "For sure, this involves a lot of costs. Maybe they can try one school and see how effective it is"

PS2: "For me, it is better to do a pilot first to avoid failure".

Direction

Some emphasized on the direction of the school.

R1: "For me, what is the direction of the school. What do we want to become after this?"

Expert from the Industry

Some also would like to stress on the use of expert from the industry in teaching and learning.

R1: "We are not transforming this government school. We make this new private school to focus on skill. Then, take their own staff and build their own system."

R2: "For example, electrical"

R3: "For example, we have a private sector with a technological expertise, embed into our curriculum, to use their product for our students" success."

Investment

Some regard the implementation as a good investment.

R1: "This is an investment that is attractive to them".

Corporate Social Responsibility

The implementation area could also be based on corporate social responsibility.

R1: "That one I agree. For example, if you are a corporate body, the use of CSR system is good."

Workload and Teacher Training

The teachers and principals are also concerned with workload and teacher training.

R1: "Managing in terms of workload should be emphasized more"

R2: "For me, teachers should be given more training". Some would like the changes be done gradually: "It should be done in stages...".

Profit and Fees

Others would see the implementation of this type of school would be based on profit and fees will be charged to the students:

R1: "I do not think the sponsor would want to sponsor if there is no profit. He will not waste his money"

R2: "Yes. More students are coming and certain fees will be charged. Because they have to make money from there" and "I think Al Amin charges RM 150 per month".

Some agree that only minimal fees will be charged to the students, as saying.
R3: "I agree to the minimally-charged fee..."

Selection of Students and Entry Requirements

R1: some teachers and administrators commented: "The private sector will select their own staffs" son and daughters for the school",

R2: "I do not like to choose student. So, the Ministry will decide which student is selected for the school"

R3: "It could be a high-performance school whereby entrance to the school be based on UPSR results"

R4: "We could also have a placement test if a child wants to go into the school".

Performance and Reward (Hire and Fire)

Some believe that the power will be given to the private sector to decide on that issue which will be reflected upon their performance and reward.

R1: "I think it will happen",

R2: "When it is privatised, the teacher will also be privatised, and we have to look at the benefits as well rather than hire and fire alone"

R3: "The implication for the teachers is that they will be given rewards but they have to look at their performance first".

Location, Workforce Capacity, Teacher-Student Ratio, and Long-Term Plan

There are also suggestions from the teachers and administrators to locate the school in the city, increase the capacity of the workforce in order to reduce the student-teacher ratio, and have a long-term plan.

R5: "If the school is in the urban area, it will have no problem"

R6: "Too many students in a class will make control more difficult"

R7: "It is better to have at least a 5-year plan instead of 2 or 3 years plan first so that the students would not be a victim".

Clear Directions

PS1: "The government must set the direction they want to cover".

PS2: They can do privatisation. They have to be clear with the structure. Academic matters must be handled by academicians (clear structure).

PS3: I think for me, what's important is to have a standardised guideline. It won't changes every year. So, we have to stick to the one.

PS4: Must be consistent in the delivery, satisfaction.

To Identify the Challenges and Opportunities in Managing FPRPS

Challenges faced by the teachers and principals were as follows:

Fee

There are weaknesses of the FPRPS identified from the interviews of teachers and principals. Fees are some of the concern of the respondents.

SC2: When we talk about private, it means increase in cost. If you look at the environment here, in terms of economic areas, we will have problems. Parents income here are well below RM3,000 per month.

Moral

Other respondents addressed the issue of moral.

SC1: When the objective is to make a profit, other areas such as moral is being neglected.

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is also being discussed during the interview.

SC4: We also have to work on Saturdays probably. We chose to work under the government because we want to spend more time with our family. However, if we are privatised, the time with our family will be limited.

Pension Plan

The respondents are also worried about their pension plan.

SC11: I have an anxiety about my pension plan once the school is taken over by the private sector.

Teacher Stress

Teacher stress is also being highlighted in the discussion.

SC5: When outsiders came in, there will be restructuring. This will be stressful for the teachers. Lesson plan will be longer. Therefore, the teachers will be exhausted.”

Urban Poor

There is also a weakness in this type of school if they impose a higher fee to the students’ particular for those who are in the urban poor category.

SC1: Although our school is located in the urban area, however the population are mostly poor.

Act

Another concern is that this type of school is still under the jurisdiction of the government. Therefore, any actions are subjected to the laws.

SC11: Since we are still under the government, any actions are subject to the education acts and laws.

Conclusion

One of the areas of concern in this study is regarding the terminology used; in particular, the words “fully privately run”. In order for the implementation of FPRPS to work, this word has to be clearly defined first to avoid confusion and misunderstanding.

In the findings from the survey and interviews conducted, all of the respondents i.e. teachers and principals expressed their readiness and willingness in accepting the FPRPS implementation. The regulators are the most favourable group in accepting FPRPS. These positive results are due to the fact that there are huge potential benefits in FPRPS implementation. These includes improvement in students’ skill, teacher training, academic performance, employability, financial support, infrastructures, facilities, security, maintenance, workload, school efficiency, productivity, teachers’ skill, profit, and salary.

Teachers and principals also are ready and willing to accept FPRPS. However, they have certain ambiguity. With the inclusion of the private sector in their school, they fear that their salary, benefits, workload, and career path could be in jeopardy.

Most teachers and principals agreed to be involved in this project however with certain conditions. These conditions are quota for student intake and autonomy in decision making. Firstly, they would like to have a hand in recruiting of student in the school for their own staff’s children. Secondly, they would want MOE to bear the cost of hiring of their staff who is involves in teaching of the school students.

Finally, are the challenges as highlighted by the teachers and principals. They are: operation and legal conflict, management, clear structure, and infrastructure and funds. In terms of operation and legal conflict, there is a question whether there is a conflict in terms of the law

between the private sector and public sector operations. Management wise, the issues raised include how to set the teacher salary, resources allocation to the schools, authority and hierarchy. According to the regulators, there must be a clear structure in the hire and fire issue as well as curriculum used by the school. The FPRPS must also have funds in improving its infrastructure like the private schools.

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