

7 System Leadership Study

Exploring Leadership Development, Leadership Practice and System Performance

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OVERVIEW

This research study¹ is a detailed and systematic comparative analysis of leadership development and practice in 7 differentially performing education systems (Australia, England, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Russia and Singapore). The study explores the way in which education systems in different parts of the world are preparing and developing school leaders. Most importantly, it investigates the relationship between leadership development and leadership practice in differentially performing education systems. The study aims to provide new evidence about the nature and practice of leadership in different systems through a contemporary, comparative and contextual analysis.

¹ This study (2012-2015) is funded by the University of Malaya and was initially known as the South East Asia Leadership study

The primary goal of this empirical study is to contribute to the educational leadership knowledge base and to add to the international educational improvement literature (Harris and Chrispeels, 2008). This research study is focusing on leadership development and leadership practice across a range of systems, not only those performing at the highest level. It is exploring the relationship between leadership development and leadership practice through grounded and validated comparative evidence. The study draws upon organizational theory and organizational learning to broadly frame and inform its design and findings (Resnick and Spillane, 2006; Argyris and Schon, 1978). It also encompasses the findings from the international school and system improvement evidential base (Chapman et al, 2012; Reynolds, 2010; Hargreaves and Shirley, 2012).

RATIONALE

The substantial literature on effective school leadership reinforces that the influence of leadership upon student learning is second only to the influence of teaching (Louis et al, 2010; Day et al, 2009). Evidence suggests that the direct and indirect effects of school leadership on student learning are small but significant (Louis et al 2010; Day et al, 2009). Studies of high performing education systems (Barber and Mourshed, 2007; Jensen et al, 2012) reinforce teacher quality and leadership quality as central contributors to highly effective school systems. As a result, many educational systems are investing heavily in developing teachers and school leaders as a way of improving performance (Stewart, 2012).

It remains the case however that contemporary analyses of the links between leadership and system performance tend towards high performing systems as the main reference point (Stewart, 2012). The current preoccupation with the 'best education systems' means that there is no comparative analysis of leadership practice from a more diverse or differentiated group. In reviewing the literature, it is also clear that few empirical studies have compared leadership practice in the East and the West (Reynolds and Farrell, 1996). Consequently, this research study intends to provide a contemporary, comparative analysis of leadership development and leadership practice in a diverse range of education systems.

This research study involves 7 education systems that are all at various stages in their implementation and embedding of leadership development. Australia has introduced standards for school leaders and has a national body for teaching and school leadership². In Malaysia there is a 'National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders' (NPQEL)³ that is mandatory. This qualification is based upon the 'National Professional Qualification for Headship'⁴ (NPQH) in England. In Singapore and Hong Kong there are well-established, internationally known and highly effective programmes of leadership preparation (Ng, 2012; Pang, 2006). In Russia programmes of leadership development and preparation are offered but there is no national programme or qualification. In Indonesia, a national qualification for all school leaders has recently been introduced but leadership development is still heavily dependent on local provision.

² Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

³ <http://aplikasi.iab.edu.my/npqel/default2.aspx>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/national-professional-qualification-for-headship-npqh>

Such system-wide variation provides an important opportunity for exploring the relationship between leadership development, leadership practice and performance in different education systems. The findings from this study should afford new insights into the way in which school leadership is understood, enacted and supported in differentially performing systems⁵.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The research objectives are as follows:

(i) Descriptive: To capture and illuminate the way in which leadership development programmes are designed to meet the needs of schools in different education systems. To identify the predominant forms of leadership practice in each of the systems and how they connect to leadership development and practice.

(ii) Heuristic: To work with school leaders in different systems to identify their understanding and their practical responses to the various leadership programmes and approaches;

(iii) Analytical: To analyse how far leadership programmes impact upon leadership practice in different systems;

(iv) Theoretical: To contribute to theory building about the relationship between leadership development and school/system performance.

(v) Policy, Practice & Research Informed: To use the knowledge gained from (i) - (iv) to inform the international debate on differential system performance and to directly contribute to the evidential base about the most effective forms of leadership development.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research is using a mixed methods design, incorporating principal and teacher surveys and multi-site qualitative studies involving semi-structured interviews, focus groups and classroom observation. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are being used for cross-validating data and findings. The aim of using mixed methods approach is to discover significant patterns and relationships by using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Yin, 1994; 2003).

Case study accounts are being developed using a *common analytical framework* that will support *systematic comparisons* between leadership development and leadership practice in the 7 systems (Creswell, 1998; Eisenhardt, 1989). Qualitative data collection and data analysis are being closely integrated and dialogically linked. Specific cross-case analysis techniques are being deployed, such as

⁵ Measured through international comparative data (i.e. PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS).

case-ordered effects matrix, variable-by-variable, casual models and casual networks (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994). ATLAS.ti is being used to analyse the semi-structured interview data, focus group data, video and other multimedia data collected to date. A range of documentary evidence is also being collected for each system along with national education statistics and performance data.

Literature reviews for each country have been compiled and a number of data collection visits have been made to each country. In each system, there is an expert to advise and support the work of the project and to assist the data collection process in context. This expert team is working with the project leaders and their researchers, to assist with data collection, analysis and writing. They are also assisting with context specific information that will enrich and enhance the individual system-level analysis. The project leaders are working with this expert team to ensure that the data collected is consistent, reliable and valid. A group of high profile academic advisers, who hold visiting positions at the University of Malaya, are part of the project team and are offering support plus expert guidance.

The outcomes from this research project will include:

- Articles based on initial, emerging and final findings (2014/2016)
- A project report (2015/16);
- A book to be published by Springer Press (2015);
- A special edition of 'Asia Pacific Journal of Education Journal'⁶ (2015)
- Dissemination through the Asia Leadership Summit 2014, 2015 and 2016;
- Presentations at international conferences (ICSEI, AERA);
- Invited international seminars and workshops (2013 – 2016);
- Within country presentations by each expert team (2013 – 2016);
- Keynotes and invited international presentations (2013 – 2016);

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⁶ ISI Journal Tier 2

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