

**IMPROVING REMOTE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MALAYSIA: SCHOOL
IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM
A CASE STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia introduced the Government Transformation Programme (GTP), in early 2010, a crucial programme with various strategies to reach Vision 2020. The GTP comprises of 10th Malaysia Plan, National Key Result Areas, National Key Economic Areas and the 1Malaysia concepts. There are six national key result area and priority is given in transforming education in Malaysia, focusing in strengthening the efficiency of its delivery system. The Education National Key Results Area (NKRA) is part of the GTP aims to improve student outcomes across Malaysia's school system as well as to enable access to quality education for all students. The Ministry of Education Malaysia introduces the School Improvement Programme (SIP) on March 2010 to help raise performance of schools. SIP complements the 'High-Performing Schools' (HPS) in such a way that the HPS raises the bar and set the standard for school excellence, while SIP closes the achievement gap as well as ensures that all schools especially the low performing ones are not left behind. This paper intends to share the Malaysian experience in planning and strategizing mechanism in improving and raising the bar of 209 low performing primary schools which are mostly located in remote parts of the country.

BACKGROUND

School leaders need to develop their capacity to overcome the constantly changing demands of an often turbulent educational environment. To achieve greater effectiveness, there is a need to develop and raise the standard of effective and responsible leadership. Leithwood et al, (2006) claimed that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning. School leaders do need to play major role in students learning through staff motivation and making school a good place to work among teachers. The most significant role of school leaders should be the encouragement of quality teaching, and the development of organizational environment towards educational excellence through enhancing the growth and development of all those involved in teaching and learning.

World class education is a commitment to quality education with the emphasis on excellence. Education plays an important role as a unifier in the Malaysian Society given our unique multiracial background. The Malaysian education system has received mixed review of late. It is imperative that our most precious assets are at stake: our youths, for it is to them that we shall hand over the country. It is essential to produce a generation of confident, progressive, creative and innovative youth who will transform Malaysia and be able to compete in the global market.

National Key Result Areas

The Education National Key Results Area (NKRA) is one of the components of the Malaysian Government Transformation Plan, which aims to improve student outcomes across Malaysia's school system as well as to enable access to quality education for all students. There are four imperatives based on the experiences of the world's top performing school systems to ensure **every child succeeds**.

The first imperative is to set the same high expectations for all students (regardless of background) and provide systematic help and support for children who fall behind in keeping up with others. Second, hold schools accountable for changes in student outcomes by providing empowerment to schools in exchange for significantly improved student outcomes. Third, invest in great leaders for every school (school leaders) as the primary drivers of change via extensive training and robust performance management based on student outcomes; and fourth, to attract and develop top teachers by increasing attractiveness of the profession by recruiting the most talented people, enhance quality of practical training, and put in place rigorous performance management and continuous professional development.

There are four initiatives for the Education National Key Result Area, which is the PreSchool, Literacy and Numeracy, High Performing School and New Deals for school leaders.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

The Ministry of Education (MOE) Malaysia has introduced the School Improvement Programme (SIP) on March 2010 to help raise performance of low performing schools. SIP is a comprehensive and ambitious effort to challenge, motivate and support all schools in Malaysia to improve student outcomes – especially the low performing students in rural and remote areas. SIP is necessary to provide opportunity for schools to improve their performance and contribute to the quality of education in their respective schools.

SIP complements the HPS in such a way that the HPS raises the bar and set the standard for school excellence, while SIP closes the achievement gap as well as ensures that all schools especially the low performing ones are not left behind. SIP builds on the momentum of 'big result fast' under the GTP which is meant to accelerate and enhance the existing school initiatives towards excellence. SIP comprises of three elements, namely

1. The Ranking of Schools: are based on the school's Grade Point Average (GPA) and the score of the Standard Quality of Education in Malaysian School (SQEM). Performance of schools will be based on a composite score consisting the Grade Point Average (70%) and Standard Quality of Education in Malaysia (30%). The schools are ranked from Band 1 to 7 and the best ones are in Band 1 represents the excellence schools.

2. School Improvement Toolkit (SIT): is use to analyze the strength and weaknesses of a school based on administration, teachers, students, parents involvement and infrastructure. Based on the SIT analyses, each school will draft their school improvement plan and submit it to the ministry so that the best suitable plan can be devised to help the school.
3. Service line: Based on the experience of top-performing school systems around the world, school improvement must focus on the school leaders, teachers, students and parents as well as infrastructure.

THE ROLE OF INSTITUT AMINUDDIN BAKI

Institut Aminuddin Baki (IAB) is the training division for Ministry of Education Malaysia, specializing in providing training in Educational Leadership and Management programme for school leaders. IAB spearheaded the implementation of School Improvement Partner (SIPartner) in providing service line to the school leaders of the low performing schools, that fall in the Band 6 and 7. Altogether there are 209 primary schools and 428 secondary schools fall in the category. However, this paper will only discuss the implementation of SIPartner programme for the 209 primary schools ranked in Band 6 and 7.

The approach used in the SIPartner Programme on The Leadership Coaching and Mentoring is adapted from Robertson (2005) and Landsberg (2003) models. Diagram 1, shows the implementation framework for the SIPartner Programme.

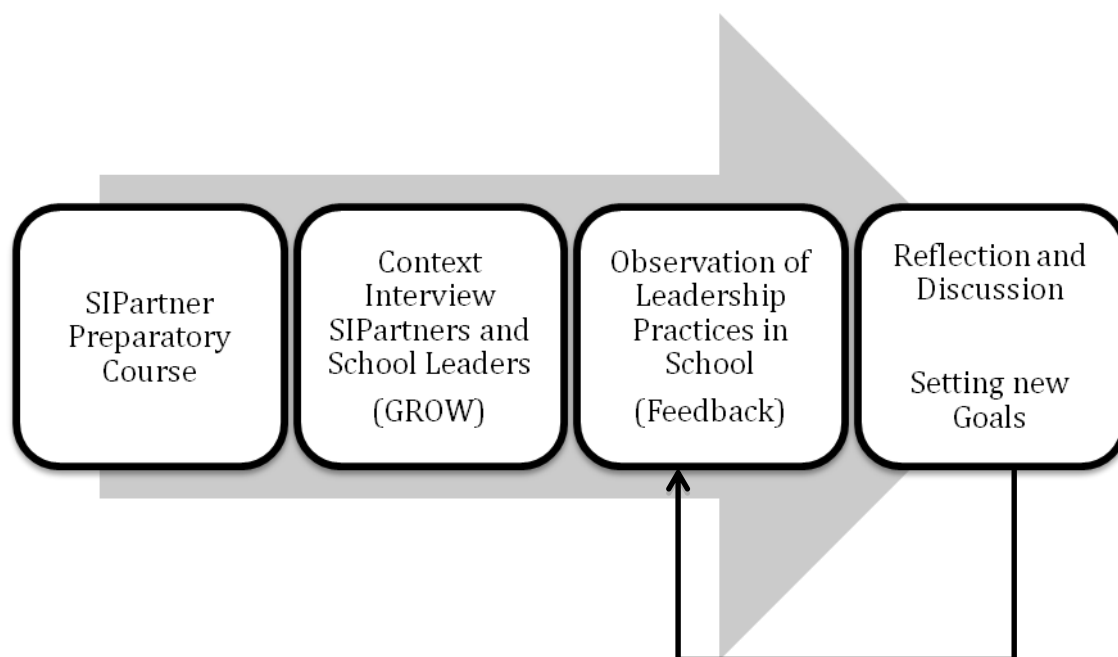


Diagram 1: Implementation Framework for the SIPartner Programme

IAB has trained a pool of Senior Principals, officers from various divisions within the ministry such as the NKRA Task Force and the School Inspectorate and its own senior lecturers in June 2010. They are equipped with the Leadership Coaching and Mentoring skills prior to their selection as SIPartners. Out of 190 trained, 119 were selected and appointed to be the SIPartners for 209 head teachers. Table 1 shows the number of schools involved in this programme.

No	State	Band 6	Band 7	Total
1	WP Kuala Lumpur	1	0	1
2	Pulau Pinang	2	0	2
3	Kedah	3	0	3
4	Negeri Sembilan	1	2	3
5	Terengganu	2	2	4
6	Johor	4	1	5
7	Selangor	5	1	6
8	Kelantan	7	6	13
9	Sarawak	11	2	13
10	Pahang	9	6	15
11	Perak	17	13	30
12	Sabah	101	13	114
Total		163	46	209

Table 1: Band 6 & 7 Primary School by State

IMPLEMENTATION OF SIPARTNER PROGRAMME

Every SIPartner was given a printout database or information extracted from the School Improvement Toolkit and the school profile extracted from the EMIS database. The data consists of the school profile including the enrolment of students and teachers, the result of the school national examination for three consecutive years, the teachers' and school leaders' attendance as well as the school action plans. The SIPartners have to internalize the data and information of the school prior to their first meeting with their appropriate partners. The first meeting is a critical event where partners and leaders applied context interviewing in order to understand the schools' situation. According to Landsberg (2003), good coaches habitually make explicit relationship with the coachee (school leaders) for the forth coming interaction. Context interview also allows building of rapport and trust in the coaching relationship.

The GROW (Goal, Reality, Option and Wrap-up) model, which is one of the most common coaching tools and are widely used by great coaches (Landsberg, 2003) is adopted. This model provides a simple four-step structure for a coaching session which is as follows:

- a) **Goal** – coach and school leaders agree on a specific issue, topic or objective for the discussion.
- b) **Reality** – coach and school leaders invite self assessment and offer specific examples to illustrate their points.
- c) **Options** – school leaders offer suggestions and choices are made
- d) **Wrap-up** – coach and leaders commit to action, define timeframe for their objectives and identifying how to overcome possible obstacles.

SIPartners were allowed to visit the schools twice during the implementation period starting from July to November 2010. The SIPartners however were reminded to work in group and to give their safety a priority as almost 80% of Band 6 & 7 primary schools were located in rural and remote areas and several small islands in Sabah and Sarawak. All 119 coaches were able to implement their coaching and mentoring session within the allocated time frame.

FINDINGS

IAB has developed its own SIPartners Online Reporting System with the help of its Technology Development Centre. All SIPartners are required to write in their report and progress through the online system during each school visit. Analysis from the SIPartners Online Reporting allows IAB to monitor the performance of the programme, gauge the contributing factors for the low performance of students in Band 6 and 7 Schools and identify measures to implement the next actions.

The 5 causal factors of low performing schools are grouped into five factors and the results are as follow; teaching and learning (44%), student's ability and background (25%), school leaders (12%), parents (10%) and infrastructure (9%). Diagram 2 shows the contributing factors of low performing schools in Band 6 & 7.

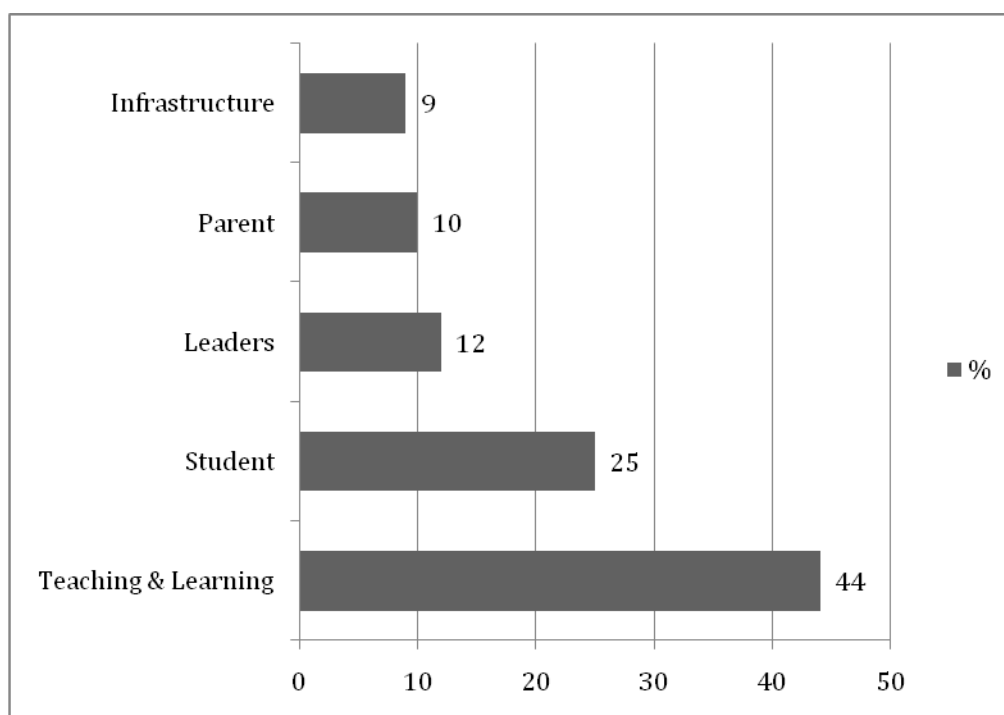


Diagram 2: Contributing Factors of the Low Performing Schools

As mentioned above, inefficiency in the teaching and learning is the most contributing factor to the low performing of a school. A further analysis showed that most of the teachers were not competent in pedagogy especially those in the Special Education Schools. Some of the teachers are fresh graduates who need guidance, motivation and creativity in teaching especially in the special education and remote schools, as well as indigenous students in the national schools. Lack of professionalism also contributed to the poor performance in teaching and learning. In SIP, the support for teachers are given by the School Improvement Specialist Coaches (SISC), a group of specialist consists of excellent lecturers from the Institute for Teacher Training as well as Master Teachers (in all subjects).

Students in the low performing schools come from various backgrounds and low social economic status. To some students the Malay language which is the medium of instruction is not their mother tongue. Some of them frequently missed school in order to help their parents in the field and some were unable to attend school due to the remoteness of their village from their school. Although these are isolated cases in some remote areas in the state of Sabah and Sarawak, the SIPartners are able to highlight the students' and teachers' plight to the District and State Education Department for further action.

Leithwood et al, (2006) claimed that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning. Their research conclude that, as a whole, leadership has very significant effects on the quality of school organization and on pupil learning. There is no single documented case of a school successfully turning

around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of a talented leadership. One explanation for this is that leadership serves as a catalyst for unleashing the potential capacities that already exist in the organisation. In our analysis, school leaders contributed 12% the low performance of their schools. School leaders who fall in this category seldom monitor the teaching and learning process, incompetent in supervising their staff as well as having communication problem with the community.

Our finding concurred with the study conducted by Hermann, et al (2008). There are several practices that can improve tremendously the performance of chronically low-performing schools. These are:

- a) the need for dramatic change with strong leadership,
- b) consistent focus on improving instruction,
- c) visible improvement early in the school turnaround process (quick wins),
and
- d) committed staff.

Impact of the Programme

Opportunately, 70% of the 209 schools showed significant improvement in the Primary School Assessment (PSA) in 2010. Table 2 shows the percentage of improvement according to the state.

No	State	Band 6&7	No of School Increase in GPA	Percentage
1	WP Kuala Lumpur	1	0	0%
2	Pulau Pinang	2	1	50%
3	Kedah	3	2	67%
4	Negeri Sembilan	3	2	67%
5	Terengganu	4	3	75%
6	Johor	5	1	20%
7	Selangor	6	6	100%
8	Kelantan	13	10	77%
9	Sarawak	13	8	62%
10	Pahang	15	11	73%
11	Perak	30	19	63%
12	Sabah	114	82	72%

Table 2: Percentage Of Improvement According To The State.

The National CGPA of Primary School Assessment show a significant improvement since 2008 as shown in Diagram 2.

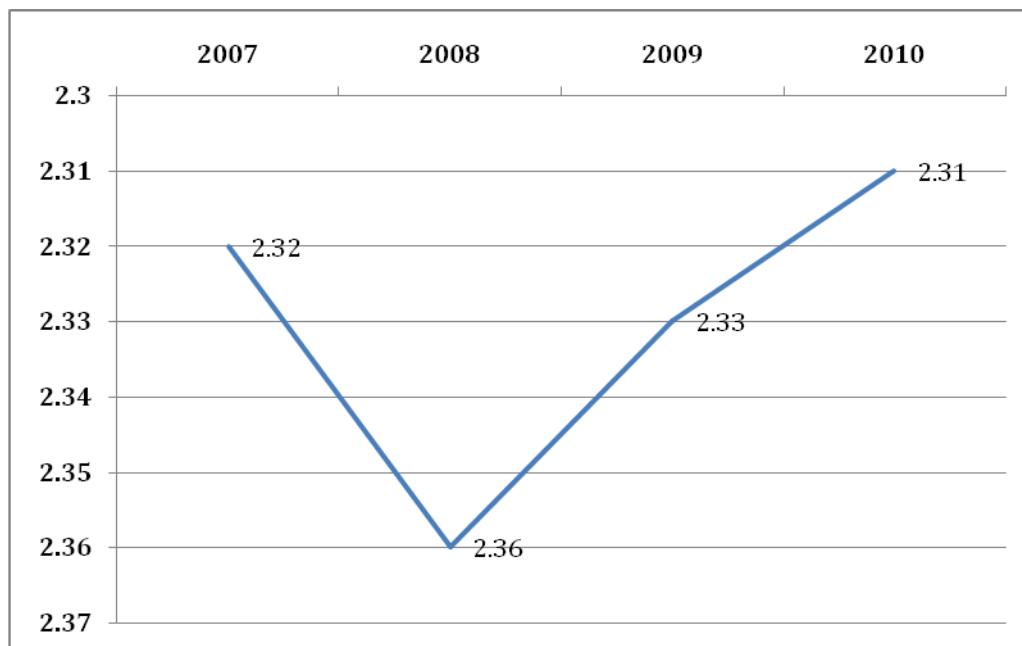


Diagram 3: Comparison Of CGPA For PSA From 2007 To 2010

CONCLUSION

The implementation of SIP in 2010 has shown tremendous result in narrowing the gap between performing schools and the low performing schools. It showed an early sign of success with a remarkable achievement in the Primary School Assessment. School leaders are motivated and committed towards their role as instructional leaders.

In addition, the implementation of SIP 2011 will give priority on Instructional Leadership in order to address the main contributing factors that influenced to the low performing schools, which is teaching and learning. Research has shown that skillful leadership of school leaders was a key contributing factor when it comes to explaining successful change, school improvement, or school effectiveness. In strengthening the School Improvement Programme, the SIPartners are ever enthusiastic to continue to coach and mentor their respective schools in order to enhance the quality of education and further enhancing partnership between school and Ministry of Education.

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