

The Aspiring Headteachers' Performance in Leadership and Management Assessment: A Preliminary Study

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Introduction

In recent years, educators and policy makers have agreed that school leaders are critical to school success and have repeatedly pointed out the need to aggressively recruit and select highly qualified and suitable candidates. This is in line with the executive's aim to promote headteachers who can work towards achieving world-class education system, where achievement is valued and every pupil has the opportunity to develop individual potential to attain excellence (PIPP, 2006). The post of headteacher, no matter the size of school, carries great responsibility and challenge, but brings the reward of leading and shaping the work of pupils, teachers and other staff. In this context, headteachers need a clear view of the economic and social context in which their schools operate and the direction their school should take. They must also have the knowledge, understanding and skills to lead schools effectively.

Surprisingly, however, the evaluation or assessment of school leaders has attracted much less interest, compared to the evaluation of teachers and students' performance. Recent policy documents on school leadership have largely ignored the topic, and the empirical research base is very thin (Hart, 1993). However, growing pressure to increase student achievement has generated new thinking about the role of school leader's evaluation in boosting individual and organizational performance. This is in line with the notion that school leaders are now seen as the prime mover and hence critical to student performance and school success. Therefore, at this juncture, it is critical to devise suitable instruments in evaluating and selecting highly qualified and suitable candidates for school leaders.

Literature Review

Appointing the right headteacher for their school has always been one of the important tasks that a governing body, i.e. the Ministry of Education (MOE) must perform. As such, one of the many ways that the MOE can decide in order to select and appoint the right candidates for the headteacher is through assessment. In this context, the assessment process helps to provide the Ministry of Education additional evidence on each of the candidates, thereby providing a clear picture of the sort of future leader a school needs. Hence, the assessment process also helps the MOE in identifying the right person to head a school.

The exercise for assessing aspiring headteachers is not isolated to the Malaysian context; it is being practised worldwide, though in a slightly different framework. Lashway (1999) noted that there were many leadership assessments available, but that few were specifically designed for school leaders and that none could directly measure job performance. However, used as part of a carefully crafted assessment and development process, these instruments were capable of offering insights into principals' leadership behaviors and skills. Hackney (1999), however, focused on principals

coming up with portfolios, which were not actually instruments but "conceptual containers" into which principals could place a wide variety of artifacts documenting their achievements.

The education system in the United Kingdom, for another, formulates that the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) is the benchmark qualification for aspiring headteachers and has been designed to prepare candidates for the challenging but rewarding role of headship. In fact, the National College of School Leadership (NCSL), United Kingdom that from 15 April 2004, it is mandatory for all first-time heads to hold NPQH or be working towards it within four years of their appointment thus from 1st April 2009, the mandatory requirement will be that all those appointed to their first headship post will need to hold the NPQH qualification (NCSL, 2005).

The scenario with regards to NPQH, however, is slightly different for Malaysia. While Institut Aminuddin Baki (IAB) is still producing NPQH graduates till now, and that these graduates should already be recognized as qualified headteachers, only 414 out of 1365 of this group has been appointed as headteachers in the primary or secondary schools (Schools Division, MOE, 2005).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to analyze the aspiring headteachers' performance in leadership and management assessment conducted by Leadership Assessment Centre, Institut Aminuddin Baki (LACIAB). The leadership assessment program which runs since December 2006 is set up to assess aspiring headteachers who show potential and competence into becoming good headteachers. To date, 3000 non-graduate candidates across the country were assessed for DGA 34 post based on their performance in various elements of the assessment.

Objectives of Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To analyse the performance of aspiring headteachers of DGA 34 in the leadership assessment program based on the element of multiple-choice questions (MCQs).
2. To analyse the performance of aspiring headteachers of DGA 34 in the leadership assessment program in the fields outlined in the Standards of Principalship Competencies of Malaysian Schools (Standard Kompetensi Kepengetuaan Sekolah Malaysia - SKKSM). The eight fields of management in the SKKSM comprise of these areas; Curriculum, Co-curriculum, Student Affairs, Finance, Workplace, Human Resource and Development, School Physical Infrastructure and Environment and Schools' Relations with Community.
3. To analyse the performance of aspiring headteachers of DGA 34 in the leadership assessment program according to category of questions, i.e. knowledge, application and values.
4. To find out the performance of aspiring headteachers of DGA 34 in the leadership assessment program by gender.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, the research questions are as follows:

1. What is the overall performance of aspiring headteachers of DGA 34 in the leadership assessment program based on the element of multiple-choice questions (MCQs)?
2. What is the performance of aspiring headteachers of DGA 34 in the leadership assessment program in the fields outlined in the Standards of Principalship Competencies of Malaysian Schools (*Standard Kompetensi Kepengetuaan Sekolah Malaysia - SKKSM*)?
3. What is the performance of aspiring headteachers of DGA 34 in the leadership assessment program according to category of questions, i.e. knowledge, application and values?
4. Is there a significant difference of the performance of aspiring headteachers of DGA 34 in the leadership assessment program by gender?

Method

The leadership assessment program started when IAB received the names of candidates for assessment from the Human Resource Division, Ministry of Education. These names were the list of potential headteachers who had submitted their application to the respective State Education Department (SED). SED would then shortlist the candidates and forward this list to the Human Resource Division, which then conducted their own selection process to produce the final list of names to be assessed by IAB. The final list of names would then be submitted to LACIAB, and these names would be called to be assessed.

Based on the leadership simulation program, the candidates were assessed using five elements of assessment. These five elements comprise of computer-based multiple choice questions, Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI), in-tray exercise (*amalan pengurusan harian*), role play and interview. All candidates must go through all the elements which is conducted as a day event.

Instrumentation and Analysis

For the purpose of this analysis, the data was taken only from the results of the computer based multiple choice questions (MCQs) from five states. The rationale for choosing five states in this analysis was mainly because the data (from these five states) had been well-sorted out and finalised. There were 40 questions in the MCQs for the first element of the assessment and these questions were designed based on the eight areas of management in the Standard of Principalship Competencies of Malaysian Schools (SKKSM). The 40 questions of the MCQs were categorized into three; knowledge, application and values, and they were based on the Item Specification Table as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1:
Item Specification Table for MCQs

No	Areas of Management	Knowledge	Application	Value	No Of Qs
1	Curriculum	1,2,3,5,6	4	7	7
2	Co-curriculum	8	9, 11, 12	10	5
3	Student Affairs	13, 15, 17	14,16		5
4	Financial	18, 19, 20, 22		21	5
5	Office	27	23,24,25,		5
6	School Physical and Environment	30	29	28,31	4
7	Human Resource Development	32,34	33, 35, 36		5
8	Schools Relations with Community.	37,38	39,40		4
Total					40

In this study, the results from the MCQs were the only element that was analyzed and studied. The data was analyzed quantitatively using the SPSS version 11.5. The data was analyzed descriptively and using T-test for research question 4.

The MCQ questions used were developed, upgraded and finalized by a group of experienced principals and headteachers, Senior and Super Principals as well as IAB lecturers.

Apart from that, experienced, selected representatives from other divisions in the Ministry of Education were also invited in the development, upgrading and finalizing of the questions. In this context, LACIAB was trying to involve as many experienced personnel as possible in the Ministry of Education.

For the assessment, all candidates were required to sit for the computer-based MCQs, together with other elements of the assessment throughout the day. The results of the MCQ test were obtained after the one hour test. This was done in conjunction with other element of the assessment; the ECI.

Findings

For the first question, it was found out that the overall performance of aspiring headteachers of DGA 34 in the leadership assessment program based on the element of multiple choice questions (MCQs) with mean 24.50, and standard deviation of 3.11 (see Figure 1). This means that for the MCQs element of the assessment, based on the data (n = 502), the candidates' performance was only average.

For the second question, the performance of aspiring headteachers of DGA 34 in the leadership assessment program in the fields outlined in the Standards of Principalship Competencies of Malaysian Schools (*Standard Kompetensi Kepengetuaan Sekolah Malaysia - SKKSII/4*) were quite varied. Candidates seemed to perform better in these fields of management; Curriculum, Co-curriculum, Workplace and, School Physical Infrastructure and Environment. The candidates' performance in other management fields of Student Affairs, Finance, Human Resource and Development, and School Relation with Community was average and above average with mean ranging from 2.32 to 2.74 (see Table 2 in relation to Table 1).

For the third question, the performance of aspiring headteachers of DGA 34 in the leadership assessment program according to category of questions, i.e. knowledge, application and values was also varied. For the 'knowledge' based questions, the performance was average with mean 9.94, the 'application' based questions, the performance was above average with mean 11.36 and the 'value' based questions, the candidates' performance was also above average with mean 3.21 (see Table 3).

For the final question, the t-Test analysis shows the significant value of $t(0.137)$ is less than $\alpha(0.05)$. This means that there is no significant difference by gender of performance of aspiring headteachers of DGA 34 in the leadership assessment (see Table 4a and 4b).

Based on the overall findings, it can be observed that candidates as aspiring headteachers generally performed averagely in the element of MCQ in the leadership assessment program and has no significant difference between the male and female candidates.

Conclusion

From the observation and findings that we encounter in this preliminary study, what can this mean to IAB, as a management and leadership training centre and the aspiring headteachers themselves? It can be observed that since the performance of the candidates of aspiring headteachers in the element of MCQs was average, certain measures need to be thought of and considered. This is important considering that the MCQs are a set of questions that test the basic knowledge of education leadership and management. In this context, if the performance of aspiring teachers in the basic knowledge of education leadership and management was average, then IAB has to think about providing more support and training to the newly appointed headteachers, more so if bulk of these aspiring headteachers were appointed as headteachers in the near future. The training for newly appointed headteachers then should take into account the areas of management which aspiring headteachers seem to lack considerably here, hence, this includes the basic knowledge of leadership and management, school-based assessment and evaluation, student affairs, finance and school relation and community management.

In the contexts of the leadership and management assessment as well as the need to be an able headteacher, this preliminary study suggests that candidates for aspiring headteachers need to prepare themselves in terms of basic knowledge of leadership and education management as well as to acquire experience in assuming management roles and tasks in schools.

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Appendix

Figure 1 :

Overall Performance of aspiring headteachers in leadership and management assessment

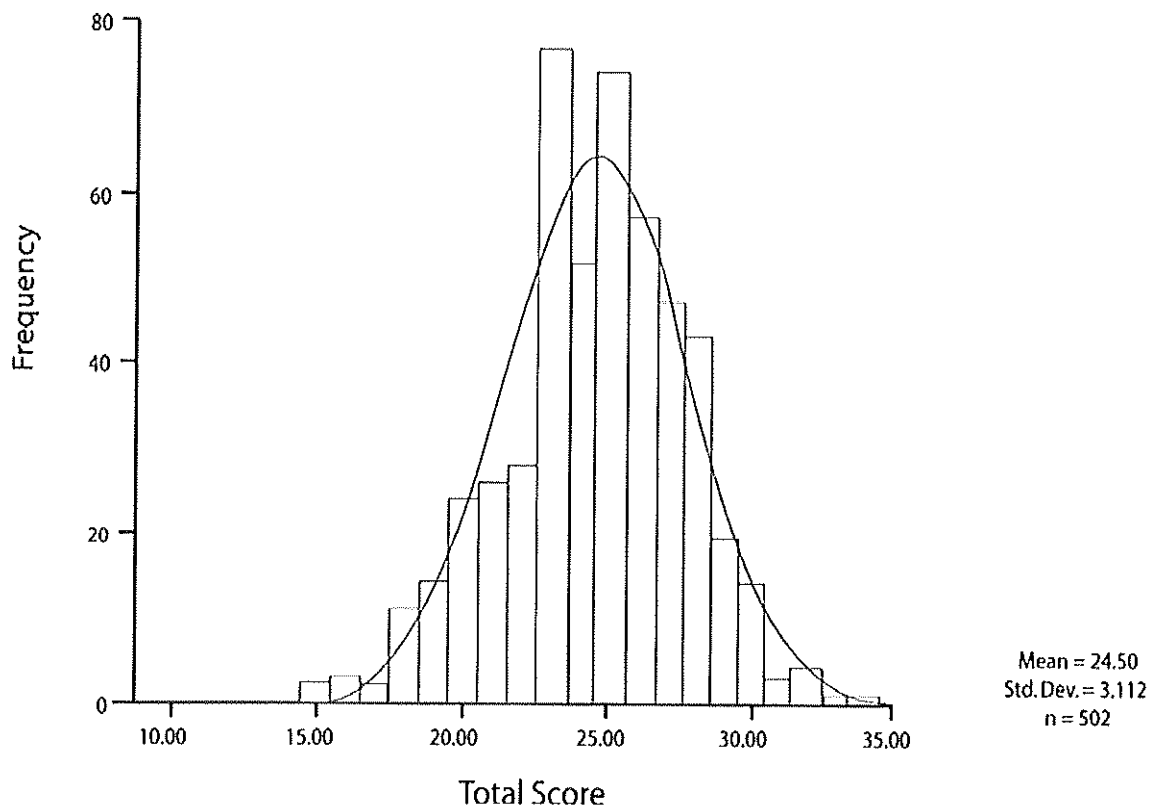


Table 2 :
Performance of aspiring headteachers by fields of management

Fields of Management	Mean	Standard Deviation
Curriculum (7)	3.92	1.32
Co-curriculum (5)	3.70	1.01
Students Affairs (5)	2.32	0.96
Finance (5)	2.47	1.11
Workplace (5)	3.48	0.85
Human Resource and Development (4)	2.56	0.64
School Physical Infrastructure And Environment (5)	3.31	0.93
School Relation with Community	2.74	0.93

Table 3:
Performance of aspiring headteachers by category of question.

Level	Mean	Standard Deviation
Knowledge (19Qs)	9.94	2.10
Application (16Qs)	11.36	1.64
Values (5Qs)	3.21	0.89

Table 4a:
Performance of aspiring headteachers by category of question

Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation
Male (n=287)	24.68	3.047
Female (n=215)	24.26	3.19

Table 4a:
t-test for performance of aspiring headteachers by gender

	Value	df	P
MCQs	1.49	500	0.137