

HEADS OF DEPARTMENT'S PERCEPTIONS OF
THEIR NEED FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
IN SOME MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS
IN TAIPING, PERAK

Abstract

The topic of the professional development of heads of department in Malaysia is a relatively new phenomenon. Frequent attention has been given to the training of administrators like headmasters and principals, but heads of department are a largely neglected group of administrators.

In recent years, the teaching profession has come under much public scrutiny and administrators in schools are being confronted with a range of challenges and threats which are surely changing the expectations of what the heads of department's role should be.

Academic leadership of a higher level is still a pre-requisite of departmental management. A considerable range of potential tasks, roles and training needs exist for heads of department. Not all heads of department will have to perform the same tasks or undertake the same roles because there is a significant variation in circumstances and interpretation of roles by the principals.

Therefore, there is a necessity for a wide range of training and developmental needs for heads of department. In Malaysia, training should be adapted to suit the different departments, namely the Science, Language, Humanities and Vocational and Technology departments. Traditional styles of training like in-service courses are useful, but different and more effective training strategies should be employed to create more interest in professional development.

A survey in the form of an interview was carried out in six secondary schools involving 15 heads of department with the objective to determine whether or not heads of department need professional development. To what extent and in which areas do they

perceive their most urgent needs? What kind of professional development do they prefer?

The findings in the survey, although limited in scope, revealed that heads of department perceived themselves as a much neglected group of educators who need more guidance and training to induct them into their posts. They may need periodical training to keep them updated with the latest strategies, information and technologies in the teaching profession.