Current Views of the Characteristics of School Effectiveness in the context of National secondary Schools From the Perception of Principals, Heads of Department and Teachers

Dr. Mohan Gopala Iyer, EdD (University of Leicester, U.K.)

Currently Free-Lance Researcher, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
ABSTRACT

In the light of the introduction of the NPE in 2000 and the subsequent rapid developments in education in Malaysia, there was a need for fresh School Effectiveness research. This research focused on the synthesis of current and key characteristics of school effectiveness as well as a current definition of an effective school. The sample consisted of 120 respondents consisting of principals, Heads of Department and teachers from 40 national secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur. The selection was by random stratified sampling with pre-set criteria. The response rate was 84%. The instrument used was a questionnaire triangulated by interviews with respondents from two randomly selected schools. The five current characteristics selected were effective teaching and learning, principals’ leadership skills, student self-discipline, good behavior among students and greater cooperation between principal and teacher and among teachers. Five main qualities of an effective principal were also synthesized. The five key characteristics of school effectiveness selected are: A principal who is strong, purposeful and involved; effective teaching and learning; greater cooperation between principal and teacher and among teachers; greater collegiality between principal and teacher and among teachers and effective parental involvement. 22 additional characteristics of school effectiveness were suggested. The definition of an effective school synthesized in this research had one descriptor in line with the NPI and other descriptors in line with the selected current and key characteristics of school effectiveness. Records with the FIS indicated that currently majority of the national secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur were effective. The interview with the respondents from two schools indicated that their item responses had a significant ($p<0.05$) convergent validity, test-retest and parallel-form reliability in responses and that the definition of an effective school synthesized was reliable.

Abbreviations:

NPE: National Philosophy of Education
KPI: Key Performance Indicator
CDC: Curriculum Development Centre
FIS: Federal Inspectorate of Schools
INTRODUCTION

The aims of this research are

(i) to synthesize current and key characteristics of school effectiveness from the perspective of principals, heads of department and teachers of national secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

(ii) to triangulate the findings by interviews in two selected schools.

(iii) to identify the keywords or descriptors used in defining an effective school to synthesize a definition based on the keywords identified in the research.

This research is focused on national secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur. In Kuala Lumpur there are 95 national secondary schools, nine private secondary schools and four private Chinese secondary schools (School Malaysia, 2008). As the majority of secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur (88%), are national secondary schools, it is meaningful to carry out the research in national secondary schools. This is the setting of this research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of School Effectiveness

Researchers generally lack consensus on what constitutes school effectiveness: It has been argued in the input-output perspective (Cheng, 1996; Lockheed and Hanushek, 1988); in the perspective of schools in which students progress further than might be expected from consideration of its intake (Sammons and Mortimore, 1995, p.1); growth in student achievement (Willms, 1992, p.34); and on a more broader stand that should not focus on mere academic achievement (Rutter, 1983; Sammons et al.,
1996 ; Mc Gaw et al. (1992, p. 4). Reynolds et. al. (1996) are of the view that effectiveness is dependent on people and the resources available. Hence the difficulty in defining school effectiveness is dependent on people who are forced to choose from competing values. (Stoll and Fink, 1996).

HM Inspectorate of Schools in Scotland (Drever, 1991) take the view that effectiveness should be judged by the *product*, and that the ultimate product of schooling is the 'value added': what pupils have gained from their years in school. The fact that the report noted non-cognitive areas that should be part of the product are supported by other researches (e.g. Rutter, 1979; Mortimore et al., 1988a;).

There is an argument that a school is effective if school processes result in observable (not always quantifiable) positive outcomes among its students consistently over a period of time (Reynolds, 1985; Ninan, 2006) This implies that the effectiveness of a school is dependent more on its 'processes' and gauged by its 'outcomes' than on its 'intake'. 'Intake', plays only a marginal role in school effectiveness (HMI, 1977). This is in contrast with the argument that differential effects of schools plays a role in school effectiveness (Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000, p.15).

Mortimore’s view was that an effective school adds an extra value to its students’ outcomes in comparison with other schools serving similar intakes (Sammons and Mortimore, 1995). This concept of the ‘value added’ by the school resulted in a need to explicitly focus on student outcomes in all methodologies involving school effectiveness research (McPherson, 1992). This then led to methodological issues such as consistency and stability in effectiveness.

Hoy and Miskel (2001, p.290) argued that a school is deemed as effective if the outcome of its activities meets or exceeds its goals. Relevant here is the
view that an effective school is one that promotes high levels of student achievement for all students in the school (Murphy, 1990) It is no surprise, therefore that academic emphasis and frequent monitoring of student academic progress has been viewed as important correlates of an effective school (Al Waner, 2005). An effective school hence is a school that can achieve or exceed its academic goals. A rather different view is that schools are effective if their pupils perform at a higher than average level than an average school (Cuttance, 1985, p.13). school effectiveness is the ability of a school to achieve or exceed its goals. The goals set should be reflective of students’ academic ability. There is a need to take value added scores into consideration of prior achievement of pupils on entry to school (Sammons et al, 1996a in Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000, p.72). An effective school hence is argued as a school that can achieve or exceed its prior set goals.

An Australian view that effective schools are those that successfully progress the learning and personal development of all of their students (ACT, 2005) is a stark contrast from the UK and USA perspective of an effective school being judged merely by academic performance.

Though studies give various perspectives of what constitutes school effectiveness or what an effective school is, the diversified views lead to the conclusion that

‘...... while all reviews assume that effective schools can be differentiated from ineffective ones, there is no consensus yet on just what constitutes an effective school.’

(Reid, Hopkins and Holly, 1987, p.22)

Schreerens (2000) adds that

‘School effectiveness is a difficult concept to define and once defined is of a nature difficult to reason’
Hence the concept of school effectiveness has various approaches and as Firestone (1991, p.2) noted that ‘Defining the effectiveness of a particular school always requires choices among competing values’. Hence he further adds that ‘the criteria of effectiveness will be a subject of political debate’.

**School effectiveness from the Malaysian perspective**


**Characteristics of effective schools**

Researches in Malaysia on the correlates or characteristics of school effectiveness indicate similarities and differences between the characteristics chosen in Malaysia and those chosen internationally. Among the characteristics that have a commonality are

(a) A strong, purposeful and involved principal (Abdullah, 2002; Ang Thien Sze, 2002; Nazrol, 2000; Mortimore et al., 1998; Levine and Lexzotte, 1990; Sammons et al., 1995)

(c) Effective teaching and learning (Abdullah, 2002; Rahimah and Zulkifli, 1996; Nazrol, 2000, Sammons et al, 1995; Levine and Lezotte, 1990; Bergeson, 2002)

(d) Effective evaluation and monitoring (Sam Kit Mun, 2004; Lam Pow Lien, 1997; Abdullah, 2002; Sammons et al., 1995; Levine and Lezotte, 1990; Al Waner, 2005)

(e) Positive Learning Environment (Wan Zaid, 1993; Abdullah, 2002; Nazrol, 2000; Sammons et al., 1995; Vermulen, 1987)

(f) Focused professional Development (Sam Kit Mun, 2004; Lam Pow Lien, 1997; Abdullah, 2002; Siew Ban Lee, 1998; Narimah 1997; Bergeson, 2002; Sammons et al., 1995; Levine and Lezotte, 1990; Greenberg, 2001)

(g) Effective parental involvement (Abdul Halim, 1989; Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1996; Nazrol, 2000; Levine and Lezotte, 1990; Sammons et al., 1995; Mortimore et al., 1988a; Reynolds et al., 1994)

The similarity in characteristics indicate that they are widely accepted across countries and are stable over years (e.g. effective parental involvement). It is therefore not a surprise that all seven characteristics are part of Mortimore’s 11 characteristics of school effectiveness widely accepted by researchers internationally.
Among differences observed within the framework of this research. Were teachers’ attitude towards student (Abdul Halim, 1989; Nazrol, 2000), effective use of school resources (Abdul Karim, 1989), teacher job satisfaction (Hussein, 1993) and good organizational culture (Cheng, 1993).

**Malaysian Government Policy Issues**

**Accountability**

The Government of Malaysia has indicated that it wants to use Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to develop a high performance culture. Among requirements were focus on quality and accountability (Najib, 2004, p.1). In the context of a national secondary school, there is a need for accountability by teachers, administrators and the principal and to the profession, the ideals of the NPE, parents and the education service (Awang, 2003 pp.17-19). This will be assessed by the FIS to ensure compliance (Alimuddin, 2005, p.12)

**Effective Co-curricular activities including sports**

The announcement by the Minister of Education of Malaysia to make Physical Education as an examination subject as well as the need in enhancing professionalism in sports with greater focus commencing in schools reflects current expectations that schools in Malaysia need to foster (Hishamuddin, 2005, p.1). The view was endorsed by the Cabinet itself. It had recommended that Olympic medal winners be given a life-long pension (Najib, 2005, p.1).

This was further supported in the Blueprint of the Ministry of Education: Educational Development 2001-2010 (Komala Devi, 2005, p.7) where the strategy of implementation of co-curricular activities was announced. The
rationale was that extra curricular activities are important in the realization of the NPE (CDC, 2001a).

Effective principal leadership in Malaysian schools includes management of co-curricular activities (Faisal Sayuti, 1997). In the FIS assessment of school Effectiveness, (FIS, 2004, p.11) co-curriculum achievement is recognized as an important element of effective schools.

**The effective use of ICT and English in teaching and learning**

The Ministry of Education Malaysia had announced the consolidation of ICT initiatives and linking up schools with renowned foreign schools as part of educational reforms (Hishamuddin, 2006a). The views are in line with the Smart School Project with teaching-learning courseware for Malay, English, Science and Mathematics as well as Smart School Management System with software for management and administration (Ministry of Education, 2004). Teaching and learning processes are to be reinvented with the aid of ICT. Proficiency in English and ICT became a requirement for salary appraisals and promotions in the teaching profession (NUTP, 2004, p.15).

**Effective Counselling**

One of the desired outcomes in the NPE of Malaysia (CDC, 2001a) is to produce students who among other features are emotionally stable. In fact effective counselling was cited additionally as an important characteristic of school effectiveness (Mohan, 2004). Though all national schools in Malaysia have counsellors, majority of students have low awareness of its benefits (Usha, 2000). Others argue that usage is highest for emotional, achievement and social problems (Jegathesean, 1990). The argument here is not whether counselling is effective but how to make it more effective in areas such as emotional stability which in turn facilitates effective learning.
In view of an increase in crime rates among school students (Malaysia Crime Prevention Foundation, 2006, p.8) the Government started a pilot programme called *Jati Diri* (Integrity) Camps for problem students. This is perceived to assist in tackling problem students. There was even a suggestion to the Cabinet to make truancy an offence (Noh Omar, 2006) and to organize courses in parenting skills as well as highlighting parenting skills by way of TV commercials, movies and dramas (Hon Choon Kim, 2006, p.8).

Hence these government policy issues were added to the questionnaire to gauge perceptions on current characteristics of school effectiveness in Malaysia.

**INSTRUMENTATION AND METHODOLOGY**

The epistemology of this research has a positivistic paradigm with an objectivist base using quantitative analysis (Briggs and Coleman, 2007, p.20), as well as a subjectivist approach using qualitative analysis utilising an empirical scientific approach (Cohen and Manion, 1998, p.13).

Of the 95 schools forming the population, 40 schools were selected for this study with a total of 120 respondents - the Principal, Head of Department and a teacher from each of the 40 schools. A stratified equivalence sampling was done to select almost equal participants from each of the four zones schools in Kuala Lumpur are classified. There was 84.2% response rate, which is a good response rate (Babbie, 1973). The pilot sample consisted of all the nine private secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur that followed the same curriculum as the national secondary schools. It had a 56% response rate, an anticipated likelihood in postal questionnaires (Denscombe, 1998, pp.23-24).
Informed consent was obtained from the Economic Planning Unit of the Prime Minister’s Department, the Educational Research and Planning Unit of the Ministry of Education and the Director of Education of the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur in accordance with ethics in research (Johnson, 1994; Frankfort-Nachiamas and Nachiamas, 1992).

The instruments used was questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire had nine items, with an open-ended question that requested a list of keywords to define an effective school and a part open-ended section that requested further suggestions for characteristics of school effectiveness. For interviews, two schools were selected at random from the 36 schools that responded to the questionnaire. The interviews were semi-structured and with a interview guide.

A Standard Evaluation Instrument was obtained from the Federal Inspectorate of Schools Office in Kuala Lumpur. It had KPI’s based on a performance-based evaluation (Brualdi, 1998) involving knowledge and skills (Hibbard et al, 1996, p.5) with rubrics that add reliability and validity (Moskal and Leydens, 2000).

SPSS 12.0 as well as descriptive and comparative statistics was used in data analysis.

**DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

**Current characteristics** of school effectiveness was synthesized from responses to listed characteristics that emerged from the current literature review in Malaysia with a scaled score of 1 till 5 delegated as least to most important.
Key Characteristics listed the questionnaire had 14 characteristics which were synthesized from literature review local and abroad—nine had commonality and five were government policy issues.

Results

The five most important current characteristics of school effectiveness were
(i) Effective teaching and learning
(ii) Principals’ leadership skills
(iii) Student self-discipline
(iv) Good behaviour among students
(v) Greater cooperation between principal and teachers and among teachers

The five most important key characteristics were
(i) A school with shared visions and goals
(ii) Effective teaching and learning
(iii) Greater cooperation between principal and teacher and among teachers
(iv) Positive Learning Environment
(v) Effective evaluation and monitoring

A total of 22 other characteristics were suggested by respondents. They are

Principal Factors:

1. A principal who does not talk behind the back
2. Does not practice any form of discrimination
3. Values teachers’ contributions
4. Able to accept constructive criticism from teachers
5. Able to know the strengths and weaknesses of staff and hence make a fair judgment in appraisals
School Factors:

1. Competent Human Resource Management
2. Networking between schools
3. Respect and understanding among staff of all categories
4. Having a school canteen that is tidy, hygienic and with food sold at affordable prices
5. Efficient financial clerks
6. An administration that has concern for the welfare of teachers
7. Having a sufficient number of experienced teachers
8. Having effective Senior Assistants and Heads of Department

Teacher Factors:

1. Provision of financial aid in ICT for teachers and students
2. Serving as good role models for students
3. Teachers focusing on life-long and self-directed learning
4. Possessing a good personality and self-respect.
5. A focus on enrichment activities in teaching and learning
6. Intellectualism among teachers
7. Should be agents of change by being creative and innovative

Student Factors:

1. Have a vision, clear ambition and purpose to acquire knowledge

Others:

1. Involvement of other Government agencies and NGO’s.
A possible definition of an effective school synthesized from the five keywords with the five highest frequency is:

*An effective school is one with an effective and fair principal with a shared vision and mission, striving for excellence in all fields, has effective cooperation and collaboration among its staff and ensures a conducive and safe learning environment*

Among keywords that had eight and less responses were:

(i) Effective Tactical and operational planning  
(ii) Visibility  
(iii) Integrity  
(iv) Teachers equipped with ICT  
(v) Creative and innovative  
(vi) Students with high IQ and EQ  
(vii) Efficient  
(viii) Focused  
(ix) Effective co-curriculum

Among keywords with more than eight responses but not the five highest were:

(i) Charismatic  
(ii) Love and care  
(iii) Excellence in all fields  
(iv) Dedicated and knowledgeable staff  
(v) Accountability
Data from FIS Office in Kuala Lumpur:

Current data of effective schools in Kuala Lumpur indicated that 91.8% of the secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur were effective.

Interview with respondents from two selected schools:

Correlation between Questionnaire Scores and Interview Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.773*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>0.921**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>0.764*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: P-Principal; H-Head of Department; T-Teacher

The results indicate that there is a significant correlation ($p < 0.05$) between the scores between the questionnaire and interview and convergent validity is established.

Results of probe:

(a) Generosity in praises is a means to assist in collegiality and cooperation between principal and teachers.

(b) The principal is an authority for the subordinates to be accountable to.

(c) While ICT makes teaching more interesting, having a good command of ICT alone does not determine a good teacher.

(d) While one respondent agrees that parents can offer services to schools e.g. sponsor medals, another respondent says they can donate air-conditioners and books too. A third respondent feels that they should be
best outside the perimeter of the school as they are a potential source of stress. A good home is viewed by a respondent as a determinant of good schools rather than mere good principals.

(e) The local community can help to check truancy, run seminars and offer their talents to the school and organize programmes like adventure camps.

(f) While one respondent states that effective teaching and learning is the most important characteristic of school effectiveness he adds that collegiality and cooperation reduce teacher stress. Interestingly he adds that for a school to be effective, it must extend to clerks and general workers in the school too.

(g) There is recognition of the role of heads of department in effective supervision and monitoring.

The data indicate that the interviews in the two schools served their dual purposes of triangulation and probe with new or additional information and insights.

**DISCUSSION**

**Current characteristics of school effectiveness**

The choices made by the respondents in this research indicate that commonalities exist between each category of respondents and all respondents as a whole. While *effective teaching and learning and principals’ leadership skills* emerge as common characteristics between principals and heads of department, the common characteristics between principals and teachers are *student self-discipline, good behaviour among students and principals’ leadership skills*. In comparing with the choices of
heads of departments and teachers in the sample, effective teaching and learning as well as greater collegiality between principal and teachers and among teachers are common characteristics. The results indicate that there is one common characteristic of school effectiveness selected by all the respondents - effective teaching and learning.

Effective teaching and learning has emerged as a common current characteristic of school effectiveness (e.g. Mortimore et al., 1988; Levine and Lezotte, 1990; Sammons et al., 1995; Reynolds et al., 1994; Greenburg, 2001; Bergeson, 2002; State of Victoria, Department of Education and Training, 2002) and in Malaysia (e.g. Ministry of Education, 1989; Nazrol, 2000). School effectiveness is dependent on effective teaching and learning (Schreens, 1992; Mortimore, 1993; Creemers, 1994).

Principals’ leadership skills are viewed as the second most important current characteristic of school effectiveness. In Malaysia, since the role of a principal was transformed from a mere administrative head to a leader of teaching (Ministry of Education, 1982) there was a paradigm shift towards a dual function of a principal as an administrative and as an instructional leader (Sharil, 2002). To realize this objective principals had to be creative, innovative and work towards a change (Hussein, 1993, p.193), possess effective communication (Ramaiah, 1999, p.115; Shahril, 2004) and motivational skills (Zaidatul, 1999, p.108); high IQ and EQ (Shahril, 2002; Ang Thien See, 2002; Leanne Goh, 2006, p.7); ability to manage finance, curriculum and co-curriculum (Faisal Sayuati, 2001); possess leadership styles that can contribute to better academic achievement (Parwazalam, 2000); love for subordinates and serve as an effective coach (Ang Thien See, 2002); ability to ensure quality of students’ school life (Lam Pow Lien, 1997); using tactfulness and making the subordinates feel important (Lim How, 2006, p.1) and of recent mastery of English and ICT skills (Ambrin, 2005, p.7) more so with the Governments’ intention of converting all national
schools to smart schools (Ministry of Education, 2004) by 2010. As greater focus is seen towards principals’ leadership skills in most studies on school leadership since the mid 1990’s in Malaysia, the due recognition given to this role by the respondents is understandable.

Interestingly the third and fourth current characteristics of school effectiveness by the respondents focused on students-student self-discipline and good behaviour among students. The type of students a school produces is the product of schooling. In Malaysia, student self-discipline was seen as a key characteristic of school effectiveness either directly (Abdul Karim, 1989: Ministry of Education, 1989) or as part of a conducive learning environment (Nazrol, 2000; Hussein, 1993). The fact that management of student discipline is incorporated as a sub-element of management of student related programmes in schools (FIS, 2004, p.72) reflects the importance attached to student discipline in determining school effectiveness. Pressure from students has been a predominant cause of teacher stress in Malaysia (Loke Yim Pheng, 2006a) and with the increasing involvement of secondary school students in crime (Hishamuddin, 2006f) resulting in the need for discipline camps to provide counselling for problem kids (Noh Omar, 2006) it is understandable that student self-discipline and student behaviour be valued as highly important characteristics of school effectiveness by the respondents.

Greater cooperation between principal and teachers and among teachers emerged as the fifth most important current characteristic of school effectiveness. Shared vision and mission has emerged as a key characteristic of school effectiveness in studies done in Malaysia and overseas (e.g. Sammons et al., 1995; Levine and Lezotte, 1990; Sammons et al., 1995; Barber et al., 1995; Nazrol, 2000; Sam Kit Mun, 2004; Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1989). A shared vision and mission requires among others, close rapport, cooperation and collaboration between principal and teachers and among teachers (Sammons et al., 1995). Rutter et al. (1979) stressed that the
The findings indicate that the current characteristics of school effectiveness has not changed despite current changes in education policies in Malaysia. The five characteristics are similar to characteristics of school effectiveness seen in studies in Malaysia and overseas. The fact that two of the characteristics are student based indicate that students are perceived as important stakeholders of school effectiveness. The fact that the other three characteristics evolve around the teacher, and principal indicates that teachers, students and principal are acknowledged as the more important stakeholders of school effectiveness.

Key characteristics of school effectiveness

Choices of Principals
The choices of the principals reflect that none of the choices had more than 40% response reflecting a lack of consensus on priority of choices of the key
characteristics of school effectiveness. While the first three choices have similarity with the selection of current characteristics of school effectiveness, 23.9% chose effective evaluation and monitoring as the fourth choice.

Any evaluation needs monitoring (Bush and West-Burnham, 1994, p.158). Whilst evaluation may identify issues to be addressed, it is monitoring that can effectively pinpoint any remedial action to be taken (Bush and Bell, 2003, p.177). Evaluation serves the purpose of accountability and school improvement too (Bush and Bell, 2003, p.158). The implication here is a link between evaluation and accountability. Evaluation is linked with school improvement and itself is linked to QEA (Teddlie, T. and Reynolds, D., 2000, pp.219-222). In this perspective the selection of evaluation and monitoring as the fourth choice of key characteristics of school effectiveness reflects a possible understanding of its link to quality in education.

The selection of ‘Effective Parental Involvement’ as the fifth choice reflects the acknowledgement of parents as important stakeholders of school effectiveness. This is also reflected as a common characteristic of school effectiveness in School Effectiveness Research carried out in USA (Levine and Lezotte, 1990), U.K. (Sammons et al., 1995), Australia (Greenberg, 2001) and in Malaysia (Abdul Karim, 1989; Nazrol, 2000; Mohd.Sani and Zaharah, 2001). It can also have a positive effect on student achievement (Fantuzzo, 1995; Kathleen and Howard, 1997). Interestingly none of the respondents in the research sample selected effective parental involvement as a current characteristic of school effectiveness.

*Choices of heads of department*

On the choice made by heads of department, three of the five characteristics had a commonality with the choices made either by teachers or principals with effective teaching and learning emerging as the only common
characteristic selected by principals, heads of department and teachers. The first choice made by the heads were the first choice of the principals – A principal who is strong, purposeful and involved with a good majority of 52.6% of the heads selecting it as the first choice. This indicates a greater conviction on the part of the departmental heads on the importance of the role of the principal. There is also a greater focus on relationships – collegiality and cooperation. They are the only category of respondents in the research sample to select effective co-curricular activities as a characteristic of school effectiveness.

Choices of teachers

The teachers too focus on shared values in their first choice and shared relationship of cooperation as the third choice. The importance paid to effective teaching and learning as the second choice is understandable. Three of the five choices had commonality with the choices of principals indicating a coherence of perceptions between them. fourth choice of a positive learning environment that has been viewed as an important characteristic of school effectiveness (Sammons et al., 1995; Greenburg, 2001). The selection of effective evaluation and monitoring as the fifth choice indicates a realization of its importance to teaching and learning, better academic effectiveness, accountability and school improvement as discussed earlier in the chapter.

Overall choices from all respondents

The overall choices from all the respondents reflect a broad perspective but the characteristics have similarities with researches on key characteristics of school effectiveness abroad. All five characteristics were part of the 11 key characteristics of school effectiveness put forward by Mortimore et al. (1995). One or more of the five key characteristics were similar characteristics synthesized in researchers overseas. While parental
involvement in itself was seen in the study by Brookover and Lezotte (1979), it was also seen with other characteristics: with purposeful leadership (Mortimore et al., 1988; Reynolds et al., 1994); with purposeful leadership, cooperation, collegiality (Sammons et al., 1995; Levine and Lezotte, 1990; Barber et al., 1995) and effective teaching and learning in Australia (Greenberg, 2001; Department of Education and Training, State of Victoria, 2002). Purposeful leadership and collaboration was seen recently in the USA among nine key characteristics of school effectiveness (Bergeson, 2002). The results lead us to an argument that Mortimore’s 11 key characteristics remain as pillars of school effectiveness even after a decade in distant Malaysia. The fact that cooperation and collegiality emerged as two of the five characteristics indicates a conviction that teamwork is the answer to greater school effectiveness. The fact that effective parental involvement emerged as the fifth characteristic indicates an acknowledgement that parents cannot be divorced from the school processes and their involvement enhances school effectiveness.

The fact that the chi-square tests revealed that the choices made by the respondents did not have a significant relationship with position, years of service, sex, type of school and category of school adds reliability to the findings and reflects lack of bias in the findings. It also reflects that the questionnaire had stability and consistency of measurement of concept, in this case the key characteristics of school effectiveness. (Uma, 2003, p.203)

Additional Characteristics of School Effectiveness

While 23% were focused on principal factors, the majority of views (68%) were focused on school and teacher factors. The principal factors focus only on the qualities of the principal-being fair, non-discriminatory and valuing contributions of and criticisms from teachers. These suggestions are important in a multi-racial nation like Malaysia in promoting goodwill and
harmony as well as winning the respect of subordinates (Ang Thien See, 2002) that in turn can assist in collegiality (Abdul Halim, 1988), cooperation and collaboration (CDC, 1989). These will assist effective teamwork that will be necessary if schools are to achieve the aspirations of Vision 2020 in line with the findings of Hussein (1993), Shahril (2002) and the view of an effective school by Mohd. Shah (1996). Valuing contributions and criticisms are as Lim How (2006) postulates, qualities of competency in effective leadership.

Among the school factors, issues of staffing, having sufficient senior teachers as well as effective senior assistants, heads of department and clerks have been raised. Senior assistants in Malaysia act as principals in their absence and assists principals in their duties. Hence for a principal to be effective, his assistants too ought to be effective. Senior assistants fully understand the need for a vision and mission under the NPE (Jebon, 2002) and as discussed earlier form part of the effective teamwork in the school. Very few researches have focused on the role of clerks in school effectiveness and the suggestion is certainly food for future School Effectiveness Research in Malaysia and overseas.

The issue of cleanliness canteen and food sold to students has been seen as part of characteristics of school effectiveness (Greenberg, 2001; Rutter, 1979). Cleanliness at the school canteen can also be categorized under a safe and orderly environment (Lee Poh Eng, 1986; Lam Pow Lien, 1997) as cleanliness of canteen is imperative to safety of students from infection and disease. The suggestion of networking between schools as a characteristic of school effectiveness is in line with the Government’s policy of fostering ICT in teaching and learning as well as in administration and in appraisals (CDC, 2001b; NUTP, 2005; Ambrin, 2005, p.7, Hishamuddin, 2006e, p.15).
Among teacher factors suggested include qualities to be prevalent among teachers in effective schools that include life-long self-directed learning, good personality, intellectualism and being creative and innovative. This is line with the call for teachers to strive for excellence (Mohd.Ali, 2006, p.2), to work towards a better quality in education (Kuah Bee Tin, 1998; Wan Mustama, 2006, p.6), to be creative and possess increased knowledge and skills (Ambrin, 2005, pp. 7-10; Siew Ban Lee, 1998) and a commitment to continuous improvement (Najib, 2004, p.2).

The student factor of vision, clear ambition and purpose in acquiring knowledge can be categorized as recognition of students rights and responsibilities a characteristic of school effectiveness suggested by Abdullah (2002) and the need for a wholesome development of a student enshrined in the NPE (CDC, 2001a).

Under other factors, involvement of other Government Agencies and NGO’s in co-curricular activities has been clearly encouraged by the Government (Komala Devi, 2005, p.7), in the realization of the NPE (CDC, 2001a) and in the need for a holistic concept in Malaysian schooling (Ambrin, 2005).

Hence the study saw the emergence of a few characteristics of school effectiveness unique to Malaysia and not seen in studies reviewed in this study. These include

(i) effective senior assistants (deputy principals)
(ii) effective (financial) clerks
(iii) effective networking between schools
(iv) Increased concern for welfare of teachers
Descriptors leading to definition of an effective school

One of the distinctly new keywords seen from the perception of the principals is ‘charismatic’. Another distinct keyword chosen by principals, heads of department and teachers is ‘excellence in all fields’. Though it has an element of similarity with the views of McGaw et al. (1992) and ACT (2005), it is in line with the NPE (CDC, 2001a) and the holistic concept of education that Malaysia envisages currently (Ambrin, 2005).

All other keywords selected by the respondents reflect existing literature on characteristics of school effectiveness. There were three common descriptors out of the five main descriptors – conducive and safe earning environment and excellence in all fields, effective and fair principal chosen by all the respondents. This reflects a coherence in the perceptions of all the respondents in defining an effective school. This reflects a greater reliability without bias of the category of respondents. It has external validity as it provides a strong generalizability in defining an effective school in Malaysia. (Uma, 2003, pp. 203-206).

One of the most interesting features of this research are descriptors with a single response only. They contain very important descriptors that are reflective of current needs in Malaysia – EQ (Ang Thien Sze, 2006; Shahril, 2004; Wan Mustama, 2006; Leanne Goh, 2006), creative and innovative (Shahril, 2004), lesser teacher workload (Loke, 2006a), teachers equipped with ICT (Ministry of Education, 2004; Wan Mustama, 2006; Ambrin, 2005; Hishamuddin, 2006e) and focus on strength of teachers (Ang Thien See, 2002). Qualities such as integrity, visibility, progressive and considerate form part of qualities of principals which are part of community expectations in Malaysia (Shahril, 2004) and national interests (CDC, 2001a).
One last but least keyword is ‘effective tactical and operational planning’. Tactical and operational planning together with strategic planning are part of the integrated planning processes that have been incorporated into the accountability framework as well as school leadership and management (Davies and West-Burnham, 2003, pp.82-91), current characteristics of school effectiveness seen in this research.

Among the category of two to eight responses, efficient is the only descriptor not mentioned in any study reviewed. Ruin (2006) argues that once you are effective, you can be efficient. Hence effectiveness can also be viewed as a means to efficiency.

*Shared vision and mission* was chosen by all respondents except heads of department. Hence the definition of an effective school from the perceptions of the research sample is as argued earlier reliable and valid and generalizable. It reflects that the ideals of the NPE is well taken into account in their definition.

**Interviews with respondents in two schools**

The significant ($p < 0.05$) and strong correlation between questionnaire and research scores on ten selected items reflects a test-retest reliability that over a period of more than a month, the responses to items were stable. Convergent validity is also established as the instruments used were different. The respondents’ identical answers same item in the questionnaire established inter-item reliability.

There was no significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in the number of keywords used to define an effective school in the two instruments used. Hence this adds greater reliability of the keywords used in defining an effective school
in this research. Hence the definitions of an effective school synthesized in this research is reliable.

**Information from probes**

One of the most interesting information obtained is that generosity of praises assists in collegiality and cooperation between principal and teachers. Another respondent states that collegiality and cooperation reduces teacher stress, suffered by at least 69% of teachers in Malaysia (Loke, 2006a). The argument here is that if praises enhance collegiality and cooperation, then they should reduce teacher stress. If teacher stress is reduced, then more effective teaching and learning should result. The implication here is that principals of effective schools in Malaysia should be benevolent with praises if effective teaching and learning, an important characteristic of selected by all categories of respondents, is to be prevalent.

Another interesting information is the role of the local community assisting in combating truancy. The argument here is that if truancy can be reduced, then their likelihood of involvement in crime can be reduced noting an increase in crime among secondary school students in Malaysia (Malaysia Crime Prevention Foundation, 2006). In addition, indiscipline in schools can be arrested. Hence this implies that the local community can assist in effective discipline a characteristic of school effectiveness (e.g. Abdul Karim, 1989; Sammons et al., 1995)

A third information is that school clerks and general workers are also important stakeholders of school effectiveness.

Hence the interviews established their purposes of triangulation (Denscombe, 1998, p.112) and generation of new information (Gall et al., 2003, pp.238-240). They also added validity and reliability to the findings.
CONCLUSION

The fact there was a common current characteristic—effective teaching and learning among all categories of respondents in the selection of current characteristics of school effectiveness indicated a greater coherence in view that as Mortimore puts it, that teaching and learning are the core business of schools (Sammons et al., 1995, p.13). The fact that the views of respondents in the research sample were not significantly ($p < 0.05$) related to their sex, type of school, category of school or their positions added reliability and validity to the findings. The findings lead to an argument that the respondents of the research sample acknowledge that student indiscipline is their main problem and it is indeed to the extent of the necessity for discipline camps (Hishamuddin, 2006f; Noh Omar, 2006) and is a major cause of teacher stress (Loke, 2006a).

The choices of key characteristics of school effectiveness revealed one common characteristics between the respondents-effective teaching and learning. Either than the first choice of a strong, purposeful and involved principal, the selection of other choices reflects a dispersion in selection or lack of coherence between the respondents. The implication here is that the choices other than the first choice were divergent in nature. The fact that collegiality and cooperation were the third and fourth choices reflects the perception of teamwork as a key to success in effective schools. While the choice of effective teaching and learning as rank 2 is understandable, the choice of effective parental involvement as a characteristic of school effectiveness reflects a perception that parents cannot be divorced from school to be effective. The fact that the selection of the characteristics were independent of position, seniority, sex, school types and categories added reliability and validity to the findings.
The finding that the choices are among the characteristics of school effectiveness synthesized by Mortimore (Sammons et al., 1995) reflect that the correlates are stable over more than a decade. This is contrary to the Creemers and Reezigt’s view that the correlates of school effectiveness are not stable and the argument that

“...They often do not hold over time, subjects, grades, groups of students, departments within schools, districts, countries and so on.”

(Creemers and Reezigt, 1997, p.411)

Hence this research repudiates Creemers and Reezigt’s assertion and reflect that characteristics of school effectiveness can hold over time and in countries even as far away as Malaysia.

The additional characteristics of school effectiveness had 22 suggestions. Though 68% of these suggestions focused on school and teacher factors, few unique characteristics were synthesized. They are as follows:

(a) Networking between schools
(b) Having a school canteen that is tidy, hygienic and with food sold at affordable prices
(c) Efficient financial clerks
(d) An administration that has concern for the welfare of teachers

Though these new suggestions offer avenues for future School Effectiveness Research in Malaysia and abroad, it clearly indicates a perception that principals of effective schools in Malaysia should take heed- the need to value the potentials of teachers and utilize them effectively while valuing their services and being empathetic. The suggestions concerning teachers emerging from heads of departments and teachers clearly indicate a
perception that principals in Malaysia should work on a win-win situation with teachers using emotions effectively as suggested by several researchers too (Ang Thien Sze, 2002; Shahril, 2004; Wan Mustama, 2006; Lim How, 2006).

The definition of an effective school synthesized from the keywords put forward by all respondents in the research, indicated that there is only one distinct keyword: *excellence in all fields* not seen in international researches reviewed in this study. This indicates that the definition falls in line with the aspirations of the NPE (CDC, 2001a). The other keywords in the definition clearly reflect a view that characteristics of school effectiveness have been stable and fall in line with Mortimore’s 11 characteristics of school effectiveness discussed earlier. However, the emergence of new descriptors was seen. Among them were *effective tactical and operational planning*, *lesser teacher workload*, *visibility*, *has creative and innovative programmes*, *focus on the strength of teachers and students*, *EQ*, and *efficient*. Hence these descriptors offer new dimensions in defining an effective school and could steer future definitions from the conventional descriptors to new innovative descriptors.

The FIS Instrument was the criteria of determining school effectiveness and it was of ISO 9001: 2000 standards and reflective of the NPE. It was clearly spelt out in rubrics and explicitly clear to all schools in Malaysia. The fact that from their report that more than 90% of the secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur were effective, reflect that national secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur are conscientiously working towards further improvement. Hence a better quality in education is envisaged in the near future.

The interviews established convergent validity. Even in the keywords used to define an effective school, there was no significant difference (*p < 0.05*) in responses between questionnaire and interview. This indicated a test-retest
reliability and parallel-form reliability attesting to the ‘goodness of the data’ in the research (Uma, 2003, pp.203-204).

The probes offered several additional information. Among the most interesting data obtained from the probes include

(a) the mention of two new stakeholders of school effectiveness – clerks and general workers

(b) generosity of praise as a means to assist collegiality and cooperation between principal and teachers

These statements will also offer information not seen in researches reviewed. They reflect that the respondents are creative and innovative indeed.

**Recommendations and suggestions for further research**

(a) There is a need for future studies to consider the views of characteristics of effective schools from parents, local community leaders and NGO heads as well as two new stakeholders that emerged in this research- school clerks and school general workers.

(b) Another interesting comparative study would be to gauge the view of the characteristics of school effectiveness from principals, heads of department, teachers and students in private schools; rural school with urban school; a boys’ school with a girls’ school and primary with secondary schools.

(c) Another interesting perspective is obtaining the characteristic of school effectiveness from the perceptions of senior assistants or deputy principals.
In this research, the definition of an effective school was synthesized from
the keywords chosen by the respondents. An interesting feature was
commonalities in keywords that were seen.

CONCLUSION

While the characteristics of school effectiveness synthesized in this research
are a guide to areas schools need to focus in order to be effective, it is as this
research reveals, a shared and firm commitment by three stakeholders in the
school – principal, teachers and students that offer the path to greater school
effectiveness.

REFERENCES

Abdul Halim Mohd. Awin (1989), Enhancement of Collegiality as a
means to improvement in the effectiveness of secondary days schools of

Abdul Karim Mohd.Nor (1989), Characteristics of Effective Rural
Secondary Schools in Malaysia, Thesis (Ph.D), The University of
Wisconsin-Madison,

ACT (2005), What makes an effective school, ONLINE:
http://www.schoolparents.canberra.net.au/effective_schools- 1st May
2005.

Alimuddin Mohd.Dom (2005), Jemaah Nazir Sekolah (Inspectorate of
Schools), Pendidik (Educationist), No.17, 2005.
Al Waner (2005), *Correlates of Effective Schools*, ONLINE: 

Ambrin Buang (2005), KPM sentiasa mengutamakan kualiti (Ministry of 
Education always values quality), *Pendidik (Educationist)*, No.17, 2005.

Ang Thien Sze (2002), *Competencies of School Principals and School 
Effectiveness, 11th Proceedings of National Seminar on Leadership and 
Management of Education*, IAB, Ministry of Education Malaysia, 16-19 
December 2002.

Awang Had Salleh (2003), ‘Accountability in the Teaching Profession’, 
paper presented at the National Convention of Teachers 17-19 
August 2003, Kuching, Sarawak.

Babbie, E.R. (1973), *Survey Research Methods*, Belmont, CA, 
Woodsworth.

Barber, M., Stoll, L., Mortimore, P. and Hillman, J. (1995), Governing 
Bodies and Effective schools in Bush, T., Bell, L., Bolam, R., 

Characteristics of High-Performing Schools*, ONLINE: 


CDC (1989), A study of the climate in some effective and non-effective secondary schools in Penninsular Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Ministry of Education Malaysia.


Firestone, W.A. (1991) in Mortimore, P. *‘Key Characteristics of effective Schools’*, Paper presented at Effective Schools Seminar, Ministry of


Hishamuddin Hussein (2006c), *Aiming to rope in parents to help tackle
indiscipline, The New Straits Times, August 14 2006


HMI (1977), Ten Good Schools, London: HMSO


Jegathesan Rajadurai (1990), Students’ Perception of effective counselling, Research Report (B.Sc.), Bangi, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.


Komala Devi (2005), Co-curriculum helps students to develop their


Ministry of Education (2004), *Benchmarking of the Smart School Integrated Solution*, Kuala Lumpur: Educational Technology Division,
Ministry of Education Malaysia.


Murphy, J. (1990), ‘Review of The School Effect: A Study of multi-racial


NUTP (2004), *NUTP Newsletter*, July 2004


Ramaiah, A.L. (1992), *Kepimpinan Pendidikan: Cabaran masa kini*


Rutter, M (1979) in Al Waner (2005), *Correlates of Effective Schools*, ONLINE:


Schreens, J.(1992), *Effective Schooling: Research, Theory and Practice,*
London, Cassell.


Shahril Marzuki (1997), *SER in Malaysia: Five Factor Model*, Thesis (Ph.D), Bangi, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia


Uma Sekaran (2003), *Research Methods for Business: A Skill Building
Approach, New York, John Wiley and Sons.


Victoria, Australia, Department of Education (2002), *Blue Print for Effective Government schools*, ONLINE:


