EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN PROMOTING THE HIGHLY IMMERSIVE PROGRAM (HIP): A CASE STUDY

Meneroka Pengalaman Pemimpin Sekolah Dalam Memperkasakan Program Highly Immersive Program (HIP): Satu Kajian Kes

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the experiences of the school principal in facilitating the integration of highly immersive programs (HIP) within the school. Highly immersive programs encompass a spectrum of innovative educational tools such as virtual reality simulations and augmented reality applications designed to provide engaging learning experiences. The pivotal role of school principals in shaping the academic landscape, driving change, and fostering innovation within their institutions is widely acknowledged, yet the specific experiences and challenges faced by the principals to promote highly immersive programs remain underexplored. One secondary school principal and eight students are involved in this qualitative case study. Data was collected via interviews, observations, and document analysis from one school in Selangor that has implemented HIP. Thematic analysis revealed several central themes including leadership strategies, student engagement and challenges.

Keywords: highly immersive program, English Language, leadership, secondary school

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk merungkai pengalaman pengetua sekolah dalam menggalakkan integrasi highly immersive program (HIP) di sekolah. Program HIP merangkumi pelbagai alat pendidikan inovatif seperti simulasi realiti maya dan aplikasi realiti tambahan yang direka untuk menyediakan pengalaman pembelajaran yang menarik dan bermakna. Pengetua sekolah berperanan dalam membentuk landskap pendidikan, menggerakkan perubahan, dan memupuk inovasi di sekolah mereka secara meluas. Namun pengalaman dan cabaran yang khusus dihadapi oleh pengetua untuk mempromosikan suasana HIP masih belum diterokai. Seorang pengetua sekolah menengah dan lapan pelajar terlibat dalam kajian kes kualitatif ini. Data dikumpulkan melalui temu bual, pemerhatian, dan analisis dokumen dari sebuah sekolah di Selangor yang telah melaksanakan HIP. Analisis tematik mendedahkan beberapa tema utama termasuk strategi kepimpinan, pelibatan pelajar dan cabaran dihadapi sepanjang pelaksanaan program ini.

Kata kunci: highly immersive program, Bahasa Inggeris, kepimpinan, sekolah menengah

INTRODUCTION

The Education Policies evolution led to the introduction of the Highly Immersive Program (HIP) as part of the MBMMBI policy in 2016. HIP is a program that ought to improve students' English proficiency through increased exposure in schools. Findings from previous studies such as Ismail and Hamzah (2017), Jiew (2017), Kamsin and Mohamad (2020), and Abdullah and Ismail (2018) emphasize the critical importance of effective leadership strategies in planning stakeholder engagement by the adoption of highly immersive programs (HIP). By 2018, this initiative had been rolled out across all schools in Malaysia. Its primary aim is to establish a deeply engaging, language-abundant setting that encourages the widespread usage of English throughout Malaysian schools (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017). One of the crucial aspects of the Highly Immersive Program involves the dynamic engagement of its stakeholders, including principals, educators, parents, and the community (Matthew & Yamat, 2020). This initiative mandates active participation from all individuals in a child's immediate environment to establish a supportive atmosphere for the child's English language usage. This support extends beyond classroom settings or school premises, encompassing the child's everyday life beyond school hours (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017). However, despite the potential benefits of highly immersive programs, their adoption in schools remains limited. According to Wahab, Mansor, Hussin and Kumarasamy (2020) and Shahadan and Oliver (2016), one key factor influencing the successful implementation of these programs is the role of school principals. School principals play a crucial role in shaping the educational environment, setting priorities, and providing leadership to support innovation and change (Ismail, Don, Husin & Khalid, 2018). Hassan, Boon, Ahmad and Tahir (2022) and Abdul Rahman, Mohd Tahir, Mohd Anis and Ali (2020) pointed out that principal leadership and management practices can significantly impact the adoption and utilization of new educational initiatives, including the HIP.

Therefore, this research aims to explore the experiences of school principals in promoting the HIP in school. Specifically, this study will examine the challenges and their strategies to support the integration of highly immersive programs and the outcomes achieved within the context of relevant government policies and initiatives.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

There are numerous studies by Amiruddin, Huzaimi, Mohamad, and Ani, (2022), Abdullah and Ghani (2014) Boothe (2018) and Racha and Yunus (2019) pointed out that despite the potential benefits of highly immersive programs (HIP) in enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes, their adoption in schools remains limited. The effectiveness of school principals in promoting the adoption of these programs is crucial for successful implementation. However, there is a gap in understanding the challenges faced by school principals to support the integration of highly immersive programs, and the outcomes achieved. Furthermore, the interaction between government policies and the effectiveness of school principals in promoting the adoption of highly immersive programs has not been thoroughly examined. Therefore, there is a need to explore the experiences of the school principal in promoting the highly immersive programs in school. This research aims to address this gap by examining the experiences and perspectives of school principals involved in promoting the adoption of highly immersive programs and analyzing the impact of government policies on their efforts.

OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the challenges encountered by school principals in promoting the HIP in school.
2. To identify students' perceptions of HIP implementation in school.

RELEVANT THEORY

Transformational Leadership Theory was initially proposed by James MacGregor Burns in his book "Leadership" published in 1978. Burns emphasized the significance of leaders who inspire and motivate their followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes by appealing to their values, beliefs, and emotions. Later, Bernard Bass expanded upon Burns' work and developed the theory further in his book "Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations" published in 1985. Bass identified specific behaviors and characteristics of transformational leaders, including vision setting, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Since then, Transformational Leadership Theory has become one of the most widely recognized and influential theories of leadership in organizational and educational contexts.

Figure 1
Transformational Leadership Theory by James MacGregor Burns (1978)
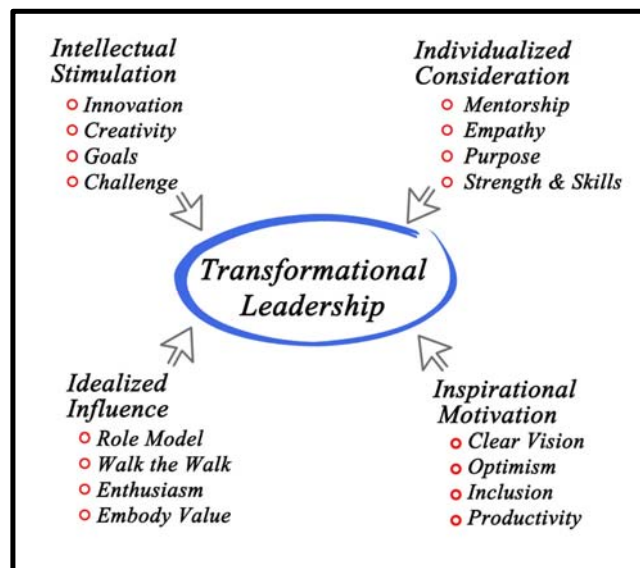
In the context of exploring the experiences of school principals in promoting the adoption of highly immersive programs, several theoretical frameworks could provide valuable insights. One such framework is the Transformational Leadership Theory. Transformational Leadership Theory, developed by James MacGregor Burns and later expanded upon by Bernard Bass, proposes that effective leaders inspire and motivate followers to achieve higher levels of performance by appealing to their values, aspirations, and sense of purpose. Transformational leaders are characterized by their ability to articulate a compelling vision, empower and support their followers, foster innovation and change, and serve as role models for ethical behavior. People who have transformational leadership possess four attributes to varying degrees.

In the context of promoting the HIP, school principals can be viewed as transformational leaders who play a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape and driving change within their institutions. They articulate a vision for the integration of innovative technologies and pedagogical approaches, inspire and motivate teachers and staff to embrace new initiatives, and create a supportive environment conducive to experimentation and learning.

These theoretical frameworks provide a theoretical lens through which to understand the dynamics of leadership and innovation in educational settings, offering valuable insights into the

strategies, challenges, and outcomes associated with promoting the adoption of highly immersive programs. By drawing upon these theories, researchers can develop hypotheses, design research studies, and interpret findings in a more refined and theoretically informed manner.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study will employ a qualitative case study approach to explore the effectiveness of school principals in promoting the adoption of highly immersive programs (HIP). Creswell (2013) stated that qualitative research is well-suited for investigating complex phenomena in natural settings, allowing for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and contexts.
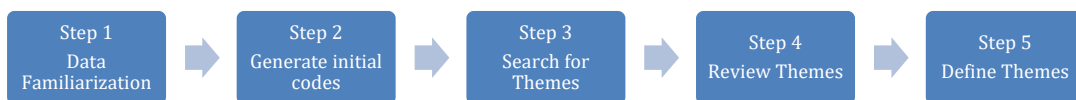
Case Selection: The study will select one of schools that have implemented highly immersive programs. Selection criteria will include the presence of HIP, active involvement of the school principal in its implementation, and alignment with relevant government policies and initiatives.

Data Collection: Data will be collected through multiple methods, including semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the school principal and students. These interviews will explore participants' perspectives on the strategies employed by school principals, challenges faced and outcomes achieved Observations will be conducted to observe the integration of HIP in classroom settings and school activities. Document analysis will involve the review of school documents, co-curricular reports and educational materials that have been implemented throughout the year.

Data Analysis: Thematic analysis will analyze the interview transcripts, observational notes, and document extracts. Data analysis will involve identifying patterns, themes, and relationships within the data related to the effectiveness of school principals in promoting the adoption of HIP. In this research, the thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clark (2006) was employed.

Figure 2
Braun and Clark (2006) Thematic Analysis Six-Phase Framework

Step 1 Data Familiarization → Step 2 Generate initial codes → Step 3 Search for Themes → Step 4 Review Themes → Step 5 Define Themes

Cross-Case Analysis: A cross-case analysis will be conducted to compare and contrast findings across different cases, identifying commonalities, differences, and unique insights. This comparative analysis will help to uncover broader patterns and themes relevant to the research objectives.

Trustworthiness: To ensure the trustworthiness of the study findings, various strategies will be employed, including member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation of data sources. Ethical Considerations: Ethical considerations will be carefully addressed throughout the research process, including obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and adhering to ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects.

DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis will be analyzed using thematic analysis, a flexible and systematic approach for identifying patterns, themes, and relationships within the data. The following steps will be undertaken for data analysis:

Data Familiarization
Initially, all data collected, including interview transcripts, observational notes, and document extracts, will be thoroughly reviewed to become familiar with the content and context.

Generate Initial Codes
Open coding involves systematically breaking down the data into meaningful units and assigning descriptive labels or codes to them. Each piece of data will be examined line by line to identify recurring concepts, ideas, or themes. These codes will capture the essence of the data and will be developed inductively from the data itself.

Search for Themes
Following the creation of the codebook, the data will be systematically coded using the established codes. This coding process will involve applying the codes to relevant sections of the data, ensuring that each piece of information is accurately categorized according to its thematic content.

Review Themes
After coding a significant portion of the data, the coded segments will be grouped together based on similarities and patterns to develop overarching themes. Themes represent broader concepts or ideas that emerge from the data and provide a deeper understanding of the research questions.
Refinement of Themes: Once initial themes have been identified, the analysis will involve reviewing and refining the themes through an iterative process of comparing and contrasting coded segments. Themes may be merged, split, or redefined as necessary to ensure they accurately capture the essence of the data.

Define Themes
Following the development of themes, the data will be interpreted to uncover meaningful insights and implications. This interpretation involves examining the relationships between themes, exploring variations within and across cases, and considering the broader theoretical and practical implications of the findings.

FINDINGS

This section presents the key qualitative findings extracted from the data analysis process. These findings offer valuable insights into the challenges of the school principal and shed light on their roles in promoting HIP. Moreover, they contribute to a deeper understanding of the principal role and provide implications for students specifically and the school in general.

From the principal point of view, the notion of good leadership skill is very crucial in creating students motivation to learn and implement HIP successfully in the school. Leadership Strategies is the theme that emerges in this study, and it encompasses the various leadership strategies employed by school principals to promote the adoption of highly immersive programs. Among the subthemes are vision setting, strategic planning, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement.

The school principal also mention on the leadership skill can impact on School Culture. This theme explores the broader impact of HIP on school culture and climate. It includes sub-themes such as fostering innovation, promoting collaboration among stakeholders, enhancing school pride, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

For students point of view, they mentioned about how they can focus and engage in their studies. Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes: The second theme is the impact of HIP on student engagement and learning outcomes. The sub-themes include increased student motivation, improved academic performance, enhanced critical thinking skills, and greater interest in learning.

Students also talk about barriers that hinders them from participating in HIP activities. Challenges and Barriers: This theme emerges as the third and it addresses the challenges and barriers encountered by school principals in promoting the adoption of HIP. It includes technical issues, resistance to change, lack of resources, and competing priorities which are the sub-themes.

These themes provide a framework for organizing and analyzing the findings of the study, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the effectiveness of school principals in promoting the adoption of HIP in school.

DISCUSSION

Leadership Strategies
Nijat, Atifnigar, Chandran, Selvan and Subramonie (2019) and Saminathan, Yin, Mustafa and Abdullah (2020) supported that effective leadership strategies play a pivotal role in driving the adoption of HIP. Principals who demonstrate visionary leadership by articulating a clear vision for integrating immersive technologies into the curriculum can inspire buy-in from teachers, students, and other stakeholders. Strategic planning ensures that resources are allocated efficiently, and goals are aligned with the school's educational objectives. Principals also engage in collaborative decision-making processes to foster ownership and commitment among staff members.

Impact on School Culture
The adoption of highly immersive programs has a transformative impact on school culture and climate. Principals observe a shift towards a culture of innovation, collaboration, and continuous improvement as teachers and students embrace new learning opportunities afforded by immersive technologies. Schools become hubs of creativity and exploration, where students are encouraged to take risks, solve problems, and think critically. The integration of immersive technologies fosters a sense of pride and ownership among stakeholders, strengthening the overall school community. These findings are supported by Rose, Curle, Aizawa and Thompson, (2019) and Hassan, Boon, Ahmad and Md Tahir (2022).

Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes
Principals observe a positive impact on student engagement and learning outcomes following the adoption of highly immersive programs. Students exhibit increased motivation, curiosity, and enthusiasm for learning when provided with immersive learning experiences. There is evidence of improved academic performance, as students are more actively involved in the learning process and develop deeper conceptual understanding through hands-on, experiential learning activities facilitated by immersive technologies. These findings are supported by Kamsin and Mohamad (2022) and Matthew and Yamat (2020).

Challenges and Barriers
Despite the benefits, school principals encounter various challenges and barriers in promoting the adoption of highly immersive programs. Technical issues, such as compatibility issues with existing infrastructure and software, can hinder the implementation process. Resistance to change from teachers, parents, or other stakeholders may also pose a challenge. Limited resources, including budget constraints and lack of training opportunities, further complicate the adoption process. Principals employ strategies to address these challenges, including providing additional support and professional development opportunities for staff members. These findings are supported by other researchers such as Abdul Rahman, Mohd Tahir, Mohd Anis and Ali (2020) and Jiew (2017).

The relationship between leadership strategies, school culture, and student engagement is essential to fostering a thriving educational environment. There is an exploration of how these elements interact and influence each other. What the researcher can derived in this finding is leadership strategies impact on school culture. Leaders who articulate a clear vision and embody core values foster a school culture that aligns with these ideals. By prioritizing professional development and resources, leaders cultivate a culture of continuous learning and improvement. Good leadership skills can promote teamwork and shared decision-making enhances trust and cooperation among staff, reinforcing a positive school culture.

When school is conducive, it enhances students' sense of safety and belonging, boosting their engagement. This culture that sets and maintains high expectations encourages students to strive for excellence and by always acknowledging student achievements and efforts fosters a sense of accomplishment and motivation. Engaged students and positive school climate provide valuable feedback that can inform and refine leadership strategies, making them more responsive to student needs. We can conclude that effective leadership strategies create and sustain a positive school culture, which in turn enhances student engagement. Conversely, engaged students contribute to a vibrant school culture, further strengthening leadership initiatives.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the exploration of the effectiveness of school principals in promoting the adoption of highly immersive programs in educational settings has provided valuable insights into the leadership strategies, challenges, and outcomes associated with these initiatives. Through thematic analysis, several key themes emerged, shedding light on various aspects of the implementation process.

Leadership Strategies
School principals play a critical role in driving the adoption of highly immersive programs through effective leadership strategies. They demonstrate vision, strategic planning, and stakeholder engagement to create a supportive environment for innovation. By providing clear direction and aligning initiatives with school goals, principals empower educators to embrace new pedagogical approaches and technologies.

Impact on School Culture
The implementation of highly immersive programs has a transformative effect on school culture and climate. Principals foster a culture of innovation, collaboration, and continuous improvement, promoting a positive learning environment for all stakeholders. By embracing change and celebrating successes, principals inspire a sense of pride and ownership in the school community.

Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes
Highly immersive programs have a profound impact on student engagement and learning outcomes. Principals observe increased student motivation, improved academic performance, and enhanced critical thinking skills. By providing interactive and personalized learning experiences, these programs cater to diverse learning styles and foster a deeper understanding of complex concepts.

Challenges and Barriers
Despite their potential benefits, the implementation of highly immersive programs is not without challenges. Principals encounter technical issues, resistance to change, and competing priorities, hindering the adoption process. However, through proactive problem-solving and stakeholder collaboration, principals address these challenges and pave the way for successful implementation.

In conclusion, the challenges of school principals in promoting the HIP are varied, encompassing leadership strategies, student engagement, challenges and school culture. By embracing these themes

and leveraging their leadership roles, principals can drive meaningful change and enhance the educational experiences of students in the digital age.

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