

## **The Development of Capitals in Malaysian Transformed Schools: A Multiple-case Study**

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### **Abstract**

*Studying the role of different types of capitals collectively in school transformation is a newly emerged trend in the field of education. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the four types of following capitals: spiritual, social, intellectual, and financial in two selected transformed schools in Malaysia. The data were collected through observations, document reviews, and semi-structure interviews from 28 participants including school heads, administrators, and teachers. The findings revealed that the four types of capitals existed in both case schools where different methods were used to develop and strengthen them. Theoretical and practical implications and suggestions for future research are also discussed.*

**Keywords:** Capitals; school transformation; leadership; Malaysia.

### **Introduction**

The economic and human capitals of any country depend highly on its ability to provide quality education to its masses. The Malaysian government also considers education as one of the major factors improving the quality of life and providing social and economic gains and benefits to the nation (Tahir, Mohd Nihra, Khadijah, Shafeeq, & Aqeel, 2015). For this reason, Ministry of Education Malaysia (MoE) has taken numerous initiatives to improve the quality of education and meet international standards and expectations. One of the main initiatives in this regard is to transform its low and average-performing schools into High-performing schools (HPS)—the “schools with ethos, character and identity in all aspects of education” (Ministry of Education, 2014).

MoE not only intends to transform schools in terms of cognitive dimensions by improving their intellectual capitals only, but also on social, financial, intellectual and spiritual dimensions as well. Hence, a school must strengthen and utilize each of four types of capitals to transform successfully into an excellent or high performing school. Caldwell and Spinks (2008) have

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conceptualised four types of capitals as intellectual, social, spiritual, and financial capitals in transformed schools.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the development of intellectual, social, spiritual, and financial capitals in selected Malaysian transformed schools. Studying roles of different types of capitals collectively in school transformation is relatively a newly trend in the field of education. However, due to remarkable effects of different capitals on school transformation, a great interest is being witnessed on the topic by current researchers from the field (e.g., Caldwell, 2009; Caldwell & Harris, 2008; Chen & Pan, 2016; Harris et al., 2009). Such studies have been conducted China, Finland, United States, Australia, and Wales. However, Malaysian schools being culturally different from schools in other countries may employ different practices and strategies for the development of these capitals (Harris et al., 2009; Muhammad Faizal, Saedah, Norfariza, & Faisal, 2011). Therefore, there is a critical need to explore the development of intellectual, social, spiritual, and financial capitals in Malaysian transformed schools through in-depth qualitative studies.

### **Model of Capitals for School Transformation**

In the countries with most effective education systems, an international project was framed to analyse the factors that give rise to a transformation in their secondary schools. The countries involved in this project were China, Finland, United States, Australia, and Wales. School transformation, for this project, was defined as a systematic and sustained change for the achievement of all students in a given setting (Caldwell & Harris, 2008). From extensive case studies, it was found that transformed schools create, strengthen, and align four kinds of capitals/resources (Caldwell & Harris, 2008; Caldwell & Spinks, 2008; Harris et al., 2009). The four types of capitals identified were intellectual, social, spiritual, and financial capitals. Besides, it was claimed that these capitals are strong and aligned with each other as well as with needs of students and goals of transformation. Moreover, school governance and leadership were found to play the most important role in strengthening and aligning of the above-mentioned capitals.

The knowledge, skills, competencies, and capabilities of people working in or for school reflect the intellectual capital of transformed schools. For instance, talented, hardworking and trained teachers along with, educated, committed, and determined school leaders constitute intellectual characteristics of transformed schools. These aspects are acquired by continuous professional development, encouraging innovation and creativity and managing the instructional process.

Social capital stands for the formal and informal partnership between schools and parents, community, other schools, business, and agencies that can support the schools. It focuses on developing collaboration by cooperation, participation, and teamwork among all stakeholders inside and outside the school. Financial capital, on the other hand, refers to monetary resources. It involves alignment of funding to make all students successful in all conditions through provision of quality education. According to Caldwell and Spinks (2008), financial capital is not the most influential factor affecting the school transformation, as was thought previously, but one of the capitals required for transformation along with intellectual, social, spiritual capitals. The last capital is spiritual capital that focuses on morality, ethics, values, and religious beliefs. Caldwell and colleagues claim that school transformation cannot be achieved without considering the spiritual aspects.

## **Methodology**

### **Selection of cases**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2009) was to explore the development of four important types of capitals in selected transformed schools, in Selangor, Malaysia. Two schools that were literal replications of each other were selected as cases through purposive sampling.

### **Data collection and analysis**

For data collection, interviews, observations, and document reviews were used as tools. School leaders (principal in school A and headmistress in school B), six administrators like those that senior assistants and head of the departments, and twenty teachers were selected through purposive sampling from both schools collectively as interview participants. While nineteen observation sessions were conducted in school A and fifteen in school B ranging from two hours to nine hours per session. For documents, all formal written documents like minutes of meetings, yearly plans or reports were reviewed to achieve the research objective. In addition, triangulation, member check, expert opinion, and peer check were methods used to enhance the trustworthiness of the study (Merriam, 2009).

The data analysis, on the other hand, was based on two different approaches. Firstly, being multiple-case study, it involved the description of each case first and then comparison with each other in order to provide more insight on the phenomenon (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2009). For the description of each case, grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008) was employed through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The

researcher initially formed a relatively larger number of emerging themes. Later identified themes were reanalysed where few themes merged under one theme while others were divided into sub-themes. Then, the themes from the both cases were synthesised and aggregated to explore the differences and similarities. ATLAS.ti 7 was used as software to systematically organise and retrieve data. It also helped in making networks and relationships between different themes and sub-themes.

## **Findings**

The data possessed strong evidence for the existence of four forms of capitals: intellectual capital (IC), social capital (SoC), spiritual capital (SpC), and financial capital (FC) in both case schools. The procedures and strategies to develop, and align these capitals were more similar between the two schools. One of the reasons behind these similarities might be that both schools were national schools where the programs, policies, and donor agencies were almost the same.

### **Intellectual Capital**

The both case schools possessed a strong IC where different methods were used to develop and strengthen it. Firstly, the findings revealed that a culture of innovation and creativity prevailed in the schools where innovation and creativity were being practiced, encouraged, and appreciated. Besides, being up-to-date about current programs, policies, and practices was one of the practices common in both case schools. The focus of both case schools was on incorporating more modern and innovative teaching techniques instead of traditional chalk and talk. A room equipped with 21<sup>st</sup> century learning equipment such as computer tablets, smart boards, high-speed internet, multi-media and a self-assess room for English language learning were fully functional in school B. While, school A was a five-star Smart school, the highest rank for the schools that are having a high rate of ICT usage in teaching and learning and school administration. The most important thing found in both schools was the use of social networking websites and applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram to teach, communicate, appreciate, and update by school members. For example, one of the senior teachers from school A who was about to retire informed that she has created a Facebook and WhatsApp groups as teaching forums where she uploads objectives, activities, and required information in the group with students. Moreover, the schools also had planned to incorporate research in school in order to help teachers to solve their own classroom problems through systematic studies and remain updated about current practices. However, these were in its infancy in both schools.

Additionally, a culture of acquiring and sharing professional knowledge prevailed in the both case schools to develop their IC. The schools had different types of professional development methods: internal professional development sessions, collaborative teaching among teachers, external training, reflection sessions, book reviews, and outbound professional development programs. In the both schools, all teachers had to attend seven days capacity development programs per year to fulfil the professional development criteria by MoE. However, they were found to go beyond this and provided more opportunities to the school members for their professional growth.

### **Spiritual Capital**

The methods to develop SpC in school A were slightly different from school B because it was catering students from different ethnic groups with different religious and cultural beliefs and values. Conversely, school B was catering students with the single ethnic group. Despite the differences, the ethical values and practices were at the centre of both schools' operations and functions. Respect, responsibility, loyalty, care, love, honesty, integrity, punctuality, companionship, patience, sympathy, character building, and instilling moral values were the ethical values being practiced by the school communities. The diversities were accepted and respected in both case schools in order to maintain a cultural and religious harmony of the school. The school A celebrated every religious and cultural ritual contentedly. These practices reinforced a sense of love respect and unity among the school members. In school B, where the teachers were from different ethnic background mentioned that everyone was loved and welcomed in the school that resulted in creating a positive and healthy working environment.

Both of the schools were having compulsory courses intended to familiarise students with religious and moral values and practices. Moreover, they were organising different talks, seminars, and workshops aimed to make school members morally sound. The religious beliefs and practices were used as a mean to instil moral values, beliefs, and practice among school members. Every Friday, both schools conducted special prayers for Muslim students. Students from other religions were also given opportunities to organise programs according to their religions. One of the most important things found in both schools was the role of parents and community in organising different programs for students moral and spiritual well-being.

The discipline unit, counselling unit, and students' affair department were extremely efficient in their duties and had developed a strong coordination among each other to enforce ethical conducts in schools. Nonetheless, teachers and leaders were also playing their roles in this regard. From the interviews, it

was found that both schools faced minor discipline issues among teachers like punctuality. Two methods were being used to discourage such conducts. The first and most preferable method used by both school leaders was using soft approaches like suggestions and advice. If soft approaches were failed, then they used hard approaches such as show cause notice, written explanations, and transfer.

### **Social Capital**

The findings revealed that SoC in case schools was developed by establishing a strong bond among school members. For that, firstly, a positive relationship among school members existed. For example, a motherly or fatherly attitude was developed and towards students from teachers and leaders. Especially, the teachers had an affection and a soft corner for students and were ready to help them through friendship and sharing.

A culture of cooperation and teamwork existed among teachers. Discussion, sharing, consulting, and helping were common practices found among the teachers. A teacher from school B about the relationship between teachers claimed, "... we communicate very well and the closeness, the bond is here. There is a well-maintained relationship..." A teacher from school B argued, "cooperation and teamwork is one of the main properties of the school".

Additionally, a strong partnership was evident among the school, parents, community, NGOs, and some business organisations. The schools had programs intended to involve parents and community. The participants highlighted two main programs. Parents-Teachers Association (an elected body), which was involved in decision-making. Sarana Ibu Bapa is a non-elected committee, with a parent coming towards and helping the school and teachers in any program. The parents, on the other hand, were fully committed to the school. They were supporting the school financially, technically, and as well as emotionally.

The school has developed networking with other schools, where school A has developed strong partnerships with other schools for the exchange of knowledge and resources, while school B, along with schools in Malaysia, as also developed international partnerships. The school has established a partnership with schools in Thailand and Australia. This network helps them to share their experiences, research, or in other words learn from each other.

### **Financial Capital**

For both schools, the government was the main source of funding. The funds received every year from the government were distributed among different department and co-academic clubs and as well as a part of this was allocated

to teachers professional development. School B received a huge amount from the MoE as incentives after getting the status of the high-performing school. However, the school the leader and the teachers from school A also received an amount from the MoE as a token of appreciation for their hard work and commitment after getting ‘New deal’ (a title given to the schools for academic and co-academic success and minimising students discipline related problems).

Nevertheless, both schools considered this amount not enough to help the school to run its operations efficiently. Therefore, the school secured following additional financial sources. The school organised a few fund raising programs. The teachers also shared that the school has also organised different programs and carnivals where the funds were raised through selling tickets and food. The both schools were active in entrepreneurial approaches. The school had rented a canteen and a stationary shop, without photocopy and printing facilities. Additionally, to generate more funds, the library had kept a photocopy machine where the amount of photocopy could go to the library. The school was also taking a small amount as informal fee from the other schoolteachers for attending training programs organised in the school.

The parents were one of the main contributors in school after the government funding. The school was charging an informal fee from each family as a donation. The teachers also reported that the parents were very cooperative in terms of financing different activities for their kids. Usually, the parents donate through PTA. However, sometimes they donated individually as well. The teachers reported that the parents had contributed in up gradation of different school facilities. For example, the canteen , the library , and the classrooms . It was also indicated that the parents who are working in big companies and business organisations help to generate funds from their organisations as their corporate social responsibility. While the ones who have their own businesses, would contribute financially a well.

### **Discussion, conclusion, and implications**

School transformation is complex and multidimensional therefore demands extra efforts and hard work as well as innovative thinking from school leaders. The past literature holds strong evidence that any remarkable transformation is not only dependent on school monetary resources and funds, but also on social, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions of school (Caldwell & Spinks, 2008). For example, Sekolah Kebangsaan Ulu Lubai, a national primary school, situated in the remote jungle of Sarawak, Malaysia, with extremely disadvantaged and socially deprived community experienced a sudden extensive and intensive change, involving cultural, and social aspects of the school.

The teachers in these schools also have a notably higher level of support from their principals; the time spent on teachers' professional development is comparatively high. In response, teachers become disciplined, hardworking and committed to their work (Aziah & Abdul Ghani, 2012; McGee, 2009; Mulford et al., 2008). Similarly, in this study, it was found that transformed schools provide a favourable and constructive school environment, which is conducive to students learning in addition to basic physical, social, and intellectual resources (Aziah & Abdul Ghani, 2012; McGee, 2009; Mulford et al., 2008).

An atmosphere of collegiality, teamwork, cooperation, celebration, participation is created and maintained in these schools. Strong bonds exist among all school members where importance is being given to relationship building (Mulford et al., 2008). Outside the school environment, parents and community involvement form an important element of school transformative process, in which schools actively engage parents and community members in academic and non-academic matters. Consequently, the parents and community members offer their skills, competencies, and financial support for improvement of the school (Aziah & Abdul Ghani, 2014; Caldwell & Harris, 2008).

The transformed schools not only use the school budget efficiently to avoid wastage but also generate more funds to fulfil the school requirements through donations and entrepreneurial approaches. Correspondingly, they use religion and cultural values and beliefs to develop a culture of respect, trust, honesty, loyalty, harmony, and transparency. These values unquestionably influence the success of schools (Chen & Pan, 2016; Fullan, 2001; Kanokorn, Wallapha, & Keow, 2013).

It is also obvious from the findings that the development and alignment of all these capitals strongly depend on effective leadership (Caldwell & Spinks, 2008; Harris et al., 2009). Leaders in these schools are adaptive and use situational leadership along with transformational and instructional leadership. Their focus is not only on managerial practices by focusing on achievements and tasks, but they also give importance to relations, change, and ethics in their schools.

Consequently, in order to change schools successfully, ample consideration should be given to the development of the four types of capitals: intellectual, social, financial, and spiritual capitals (Caldwell & Harris, 2008; Harris et al., 2009). The findings of this study gave a comprehensive explanation of school transformation by highlighting the required capitals. Therefore, the findings may be used as a guiding tool by MoE Malaysia to make policies, plans, and

design programs to encourage and motivate schools to develop their identified capitals. Additionally, sufficient attention can be apportioned in incorporating all strategies that school leaders used for the development of capitals in their schools in leadership capacity development programs and training for current and prospective leaders. Besides, the school leaders who are struggling to transform their schools may adopt the procedures and methods to develop the necessary capitals in their schools.

It is worth mentioning here that the case schools, in this study, were national schools. Researchers are encouraged to explore the types of capitals in Malaysian national-type vernacular schools, religious schools, and private schools for further understanding of the role of capitals in school transformation. Cross-cultural studies between transformed schools in Malaysia and other Asia-Pacific countries would be an important and interesting area for future research too. Especially, the Asia-pacific countries with world-leading education systems like Singapore, Honk Kong, and Japan. Analysing the influence of different types of leadership behaviours on different types of capitals would also be an interesting and valuable topic for future research studies in order to get a comprehensive and detailed view of the role of leadership in development and alignment of these capitals.

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