

A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERS IN DEVELOPING STRATEGIC PLANS FOR SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Nour Abuateyh

The British University in Dubai, UAE

ABSTRACT

One of the most important actions that school leaders pay attention to and spend time to develop is setting a strategic plan for their school as it helps in shedding the light on the upcoming achievements and developments that their school aims to and require to achieve in a certain period of time. It is more important at this stage to think about preparing strategic plans that support the schools in times of crisis, as per the current pandemic of Covid 19 that the whole educational systems in the world got affected by and the leaders worked hard to run their schools in the best ways possible. Schools have faced a very challenging and unexpected time of ambiguity and uncertainty for more than a year now and only good leaderships were able to carry on professionally with high standards and expectations. Having a strategic plan in place that considers the unexpected scenarios is a very positive and valuable step that school leaders do to be ready to face any changes or challenges smoothly, as the role of the leadership team at these times is keen and essential for the success of the school. This paper will highlight the role of school leaders in developing a strategic plan that helps in supporting the school and its community at the times of crisis, this will be presented in a systematic literature review method that will prove the significance of working on such strategic plan and the significant role of school leaders at the uncertain times.

***Keywords:** Times of crisis, Strategic plan, School transformation*

INTRODUCTION

Background: One of the most important actions that school leaders pay attention to and spend time to develop is designing a strategic plan for their school. The attention to having a strategic plan in place at private schools has raised in the last decade, because it helps to shed the light on the upcoming achievements and developments that the school aims and requires to achieve in a certain period of time. It is even more important at this stage for schools' leaders to think about preparing strategic plans that support schools in times of crisis, as per the current pandemic of Covid 19 that the whole educational systems in the world got affected by and schools' leaders worked hard to run their schools in the best ways possible.

Problem statement: The current pandemic caused schools in the worlds to face a very challenging and unexpected time of ambiguity and uncertainty for more than a year, where only good leaderships were able to carry on professionally with high standards and expectations. Some schools weren't successful in handling the situation and therefore they ended up with schools' closure because of the lack of experience of finding alternative and prompt solutions. Having a strategic plan in place that considers the unexpected scenarios is a very positive and valuable step that school leaders have to do to be ready to face any changes or challenges smoothly, as the role of the leadership team at these times is keen and essential for the school success and development.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the role of school leaders in developing a strategic plan that helps in supporting the school and its community at times of crisis and to shed the light on the importance of considering unexpected scenarios in the designed strategic plan. i.e., it is time to think and plan for what may happen not only planning for what we would like to achieve.

Research questions: This will be investigated through the following two research questions: 1. How efficient is the role of school's leaders in designing a transformational strategic plan that consider times of crisis? 2. To what extent do school leaders benefit from setting transformational strategic plan that supports the school at times of crisis? This will be explored through highlighting and presenting conceptual and theoretical framework in the next sections, in addition to addressing and identifying the problem as well as analysing and evaluating several theories and views relevant to the topic. The research questions will be answered through a systematic literature review analysis, followed by implications, limitations, and conclusion of the study.

The significance of the study: This paper can be beneficial for schools' leaders to grab their attention to how strategic plans can be very valuable in moving schools forward during the times of crisis, as it is encouraging them to plan strategically highlighting the future achievements and developments of the school as well as any changes that may occur during the school year by being reflective on the current effects of Covid 19 at schools. Also, this paper can be considered as a guideline for school leaders when designing a transformational strategic plan.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Education field is one of the most constantly developing field, therefore; working in this field means to be up to date with are the requirements and updates that are subject to change from time to time. There are several important concepts to highlight, the first one is "Educational strategic planning" which is one of the trending terms used in education, it is the process of setting long terms objectives for the school to achieve in a certain period of time considering the future achievements and developments. It is the school big picture of the curriculum,

teaching and learning and policies. Strategic planning document directs people towards the school's needs and requirements in the future and how to fulfil them as explained by [7]. Billingham (2012) defines strategic planning as determining goals process and thinking of ways to achieve them using the suitable resources required for that process.

One other important concept to explain here is transformational leadership, which means when the school leaders have the skills to exceptionally function the school at the time that can affect the school development. This can happen through setting new goals and choosing different tasks and behaviour for different staff members to promote consistent development of the school [14].

The third essential concept is "Times of crisis" which has recently become common term after the experience of Covid 19 pandemic. Facing challenges is a common human beings' reaction for too many years ago, but these challenges is getting more difficult and serious in the present time which caused a clear risk. There is no one specific definition of a "risk" however, the use of this definition is to refer to "uncertain events" as per [1]. The global risk that has international effects is defined as the uncertain condition that when happens, can make serious and negative results on some countries for several years (The Global Risk Report) similar to what we have recently witnessed with the crise of Covid 19 so far.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

There are many definitions for Leadership as it is a very interesting area for research not only in education field but also in many other fields. Educational leadership can be defined as influencing and inspiring others to do their best to fulfil the organization educational goals, it also means, the consistent management and of the school's educational system [5]. There are several theories related to the educational leadership, some of them related more to the leadership roles and responsibilities in times of crisis, which is one important element of this paper, such as: the transformational, the situational and the contingency theories. The transformational theory is the collaboration between leaders and followers to make the best achievements to the school in a high level of motivation. This definition emphasises on the importance of the leader as a role model for the ones who cares about in fulfilling the school's mission and vision as well as making others aware of the mission and vision with a clear consideration of the needs and concerns of the followers, in addition to supporting them by assuring the capacity of the team in both moral and technical dimensions [4]. While situational leadership represents an unfixed style of leadership that changes as per different situations which may require to make some changes on the individuals' roles to match the current situation in a way that secures the school's development and continuity. This style forces more directive mode of leadership than a socially supportive one depending on the teachers' competency and adjustment with the situations [10]. The contingency theory matches with the situational theory as it is directed by the situation, leaders in this theory need to match the best leadership

style with certain situation and circumstances. However, this theory is not very common in education, because according to this theory, when urgency occurs, the leader may be changed to assign someone who is able to deal with the situation, or the situation needs to be engineered to match the leader's ability [10], both of these options are uncomfortable in education field and therefore, the situational and transformational theories are getting more attention in this domain and match better with this research paper.

METHODOLOGY

The method will be used in this paper is a systematic literature review focusing of the importance of strategic planning, the significant role of school leaders, considering the times of crisis, school transformational process and strategic plan review process.

As per [3] Systematic literature review is a method that can be used to address and identify the problems along with critically analyzing the views, ideas and findings. This method makes possible to broadly address study questions with the potential of providing more practical implications. [12] states that the systematic literature review has seven stages to go through that are: 1. Scoping (formulating the research questions, 2. Planning (breaking down research questions into smaller components, 3. Identification, 4. Screening, 5. Eligibility (introducing eligible articles), 7. Deciding the data collection method (quantitative / qualitative) which is not applicable at this paper as there is no data collection or analysis process.

There are several of previous studies have been viewed in order to conduct this paper, however all of these studies have addressed one aspect only of my study, for example, [8] addresses only the leadership role in times of crisis, which is one important aspect of this study. However, [9] and [16] both address the significance of educational strategic planning, which is a very significant aspect of this study. The value of this paper is that it is taking into consideration both aspects broadly, trying to make it as a comprehensive solution for schools' leaders in times of change.

SYSTEMATIC LIERATURE REVIEW

The importance of educational strategic planning for schools' development

Strategic planning is like the institution roadmap to the future achievements by having the ideas of what can be done for the success of the school and reduce the barriers that may challenge the success. Also, strategic planning helps in being aware of the opportunities and making people more flexible and adjustable to changes, which is a very important benefit for school's leaders. And it facilitates in prioritizing the urgent and serious actions that need to be taken in order to

achieve the schools' vision as well as making staff more involved in the school's community and more committed to fulfilling the goals of the strategic plan to move the school toward its development and celebrate the school's success at the end [13]. Nowadays, education development has become a must for all schools, and to guarantee this the schools' structure and aims may get changed in response of some conditions, that changes in structures and aims may include the staff roles, the school's rules, the relationships across the school, values, beliefs and the cultural aspect [16]. Having strategic plan in place that highlights all the above points and includes the potential changes is highly important and recommended for schools for the continuous development in spite of any uncertain events that could occur. These two points shed the light on the answer to the research question by proving the benefits that school's leaders get by planning strategically, especially in times of crisis.

The significant role of schools' leaders in implementing strategic plans

It is widely known and agreed that competent school's directors are able to actively and smoothly run the school with high consideration of the teachers and students' performances levels at the highest possible levels. The role of schools' leaders is crucial because they are the ones who are meant to guide teaching and learning, manage the organized activities and programs implementation [2]. At the same time, they are expected to be ready for innovative developments, individual support and development, hosting positive environment and relationships in the school, designing the school's vision and mission statement hosting core values, setting high expectations and manage the budget [9].

The schools' leaders have many incredible roles they have to do in order to lead the school toward the success, one of these roles is staff directing and management for achieving the aims and goals of the school, in addition to creating the educational policies and sharing them with the teachers to make them aware of these polices and implement them in action, also, performance evaluating and records of the work with consideration of training teachers to prepare them to meet the school's expectations and then achieve goals, and make sure the school has friendly environment across the whole school community with high recognition of the staff and students wellbeing [2].

Moreover, more of the most important roles of the schools' leaders is to motivate the staff and involve them in the school's development by sharing the strategic plan with them and highlight their roles in it, in addition of encouraging them to take part in contribution of the school's community as a whole not only to the taught subject. A large majority of leaders mentioned that making plans and applying them supported them to see the big picture for the school's future and success [2] This view makes sense because it reflects that the role of the schools' leaders is not only to design and make plans and policies, but also to deliver them to the staff and follow up on the implementation process, so they are involved in the whole process from A to Z.

It is extremely important for schools' leaders to spend some time at the start of the academic year to design the school's strategic plan, however, they may face some difficulties while doing this due to budget planning as an example or the high level of teachers turn out in the school which makes a very negative impact on the school development and the plans implementation, therefore, leaders need to be aware of the challenges and have a room for developing and solving them in while setting the targets of the strategic plan [16]. These views make a highlight on the first research question by providing some evidence that the roles of school's leaders is keen in designing and implementing a successful strategic plan in place, the school's leaders play the most important role in making this happen in action.

[6] states that schools' leaders have to go through three stages when planning an educational strategic plan:

A. Sector Analysis: in which leaders should do their diagnosis of the situation analysis by collecting the data to review the function of the current system and examine any other forces that affect the system just like socio-demographic and macro-economic situations or conditions. The aim of looking and review the mentioned sectors is to spot the weaknesses and strengths of the school in order to create an action plan and include it in the strategic plan. Also, they evaluate the efficiency, effectiveness, and the relevancy of the school's processes in addition to the inputs and outputs of the current system, which plays an important role in spotting critical challenges and issues to be taken into consideration while creating the strategic plan.

B. Policy Design: when starting the design process, there are several elements that need to be recognized, such as: the national and international contexts, the school's system requirements and the future orientations. The policy should foster the success and the coordination of the projects and programs should be accessible to the teaching staff. This includes all the educational polices in place such as: teaching and learning, inclusion, child protection and safeguarding, language, admission, and BYOD policies.

C. Action Planning: setting the main priorities and goals as well as establishing the outline of the operation at the first step of designing the strategic plan. This stage is the implementation preparation with the highlight of the strategies and tools that will be used for that. Also, this stage needs to go through negotiation and consultation procedures with the relevant and responsible members of the schools' leaders where they have to use different techniques and strategies in developing the plan.

The above divisions of the strategic planning stages support in organizing the process in order to have a smooth implementation of the policies and the plan, as it is noticed that the educational polices, action plans and strategic plan are linked to each other and all need to be in place for a successful implementation and goals achievements.

School transformation and strategic planning in times of crisis

Many different factors and circumstances can affect the function of the schools at any time of the year, therefore; school's leaders are expected to always perform in a high level of leadership skills for the school development's sake to make the school able to get out from any mess that could happen by managing smooth transition in hardships. This is why the transformational leadership is keen at this stage and is an important quality of the schools' leaders [15].

Schools require consistent transformation, school's leaders should have transformational leadership skills in order to support the school in the times of crisis, having a clear vision in place is an important step for accomplishing the success of this process, because that helps in being focused on certain and determined targets and sake [15] so, as mentioned earlier, also the strategic planning needs to depend on a clear vision, this makes the school vision one of the most important elements that leaders have to consider when creating a strategic plan for school transformation in times of crisis. The clear vision is characterized by being shared and accessible to the school's members, ongoing, comprehensive, and cohesive [15].

Times of crisis can be described in many ways; it can be a health pandemic such as what happened recently because of Covid 19 virus spreading around the world. It can be a school critical financial situations due to many reasons, such as the decrease of students' numbers or other economic reasons. Any type of crises or changes need to be reacted in a timely manner to secure the school development process.

[3] states that human power of learning enables us to make the necessary changes when needed as "learning makes us human" we have the ability to change ourselves and even change the environment around us and the context's environment.

Strategic planning review and evaluation process

Review and evaluation are essential stages for policies and plans improvements, the review task is done by the members of leadership team who are responsible of running activities. It is a process that is done annually not frequently, as it can take place termly or yearly for the purposes of adjustment, improvements or correcting the flow of the school's programs and activities. The focus of the review process is on the effectiveness of the strategic plan and assess the extent of the success of the implementation of the actions and the expected outcomes. It is the school's leader's role to prepare the data and the internal and external sources of information for the review process such as the annual inspection report, surveys, staff performance reports, students' progress and attainment and assessments' data analysis [6].

Evaluation is a process that follows the review as a complete examination of the operation of the school's programs, it can be done by the school's leaders as internal examiners or by other decision makers as external examiner such as the school's board or governors in order to support the school's leaders and the stakeholders to highlight the learnt lessons and refer to them for future designs with the main focus on sustainability and impact. Strategic planning evaluation process may take place at the end of the completed phase to assess instant impact or after the end of the phase or project completion for the assessment of the long-term impact of the plan and its sustainability [6].

DISCUSSION

It is crucial to stress in the meantime on the importance of thinking in comprehensive way when it is time to design a school strategic plan, as it is equally important to consider the school transformation and times of crisis in the designed plan to come up with the best results possible in implementing the plan. It all starts from Bregman's view of the power of human to make changes and to go beyond the changes, this understanding is significant to be present and believed in by the school's leaders and stakeholders to be able to work effectively and positively in the uncertain hard times. Also, just like going through any process, some stages need to be completed before the others, therefore; Chang's stages of strategic planning are sensible as he started to make the highlight from the very beginning of the process and from the outside to the inside. However; some useful details are missing such as examples of the types of strategic plans and or some suggestions of the best design, in this regard the "SWOT" analysis should be mentioned as the most common type of strategic planning and action planning that schools' leaders are currently use, it is a tool of analysis matrix that consider the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and the threats of the school, this tool helps the school's leaders to build the strategic plan to fulfil the determined goals and improve the programs implementation [14]. This tool is relevant because the times of crisis can be highlighted under the "threats" element so, the strategic plan will be addressing scenarios of unexpected changes. Another common tool is "VMOSA" Vision, Mission, Objectives, Strategies and Action Plans, which covers most of the areas of the strategic planning and it is a helpful tool to support the leaders to remain organized and define the school's vision and bring out the needed changes practically [11]. However, there is no one way or certain best method to follow to design a successful strategic plan, it is flexible and may take any form but should include all the elements and go through all the stages. The keys of the strategic plan success are summarized in three points; firstly: getting everyone on the same direction, because having misunderstandings of what the strategic plan includes and focuses on hinder the process of quality planning, for that, sharing the approach is essential at early stage. Secondly: Collaborative work is needed and urgent for raising ideas and developing them to action the plan. Thirdly: engaging the community in the planning process leads to having a successful, meaningful, and supported strategic plan by considering the thoughts of all people that matter [11]. Nevertheless, considering the unexpected

scenarios and changes is an essential key that needs to be added to Porter's keys of strategic planning success.

IMPLICATION AND LIMITATION

This study is directed to the school's leaders to get their thoughts toward creating strategic planning that support them to run the school in times of crises as it is providing them clear stages and elements to be recognized when designing the plan. Strategic planning is a keen requirement at schools nowadays, especially after the pandemic of Covid 19 and all the effects on the education systems. If the schools' leaders have not yet started to plan strategically so far, they must start right away and they need to consider the requirements of the school's transformation in the times of crisis in the created strategic plan.

Although there are some guidelines to follow to design a successful transformational strategic plan, there are some limitation in implementing it such as; meeting the high expectations of the schools' owners and governors can be challenging, because of the timeline that can be set to fulfil the outcomes of the strategic plan and sometimes the flexibility of the staff to deal with urgent changes, so, transformational and situational leadership modes have to be applied in action at the times of crisis.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the article underscores the critical importance of a well-structured and adaptable strategic plan in the effective leadership of educational institutions during times of crisis. This assertion reflects the core premise that educational organizations must engage in ongoing development and improvement to meet the dynamic and evolving needs of their students and the broader educational landscape.

In the realm of educational leadership, the development and execution of a clear, effective, and meticulously crafted strategic plan constitutes a fundamental imperative. This plan serves as an indispensable navigational tool, delineating a path of purpose and direction that all stakeholders within the institution can align themselves with.

Furthermore, astute educational leadership necessitates a forward-thinking approach that goes beyond immediate concerns and takes into account the potentiality of crises that might culminate in school closures or disruptive events. By proactively considering these contingencies, leaders can develop strategies that not only address the exigencies of the moment but also contribute to the long-term resilience and sustainability of the institution.

The strategic planning process must be approached with due diligence and a collaborative ethos. This entails the active engagement of diverse stakeholders,

including educators, support staff, parents, and the broader community. Such inclusive participation ensures that a multifaceted array of perspectives is brought to bear in the formulation of the strategic plan, thereby enhancing its comprehensiveness and efficacy.

In addition to a meticulous design, the implementation of the strategic plan must traverse well-defined stages. A methodical and systematic approach ensures that each component of the plan is executed with precision and efficiency, thus fostering its successful realization.

Effective leadership also hinges on the critical facet of communication. Educational leaders bear the onus of not only conveying the strategic plan comprehensively but also ensuring that it is unequivocally comprehended by all members of the teaching staff. The articulation of roles and responsibilities within the plan is of paramount importance, as it bolsters clarity and unity of purpose.

Sustaining the trajectory of the strategic plan entails an ongoing regimen of monitoring and evaluation. This iterative process serves as the fulcrum upon which progress is assessed, deficiencies are identified, and requisite adjustments are made to maintain alignment with the plan's objectives.

Lastly, an indispensable aspect of educational leadership is the ability to adapt and evolve in response to changing circumstances. Following the review process, a meticulous internal or external evaluation is undertaken. This evaluative endeavor furnishes invaluable insights that underpin the refinement and adaptation of the strategic plan to fortify the institution's readiness for prospective challenges and opportunities.

In summation, the core assertion of the article underscores the imperative for educational leaders to embody foresight, collaboration, and strategic acumen. By adhering to a meticulously structured strategic plan that exhibits adaptability in times of crisis, leaders can adroitly steer their educational institutions toward a trajectory of continuous development, ensuring that they remain robust and effective in both customary and challenging circumstances.

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