

Leading the Vision and Mission of Special Education Schools: Experiences from Malaysian Education Authorities

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Abstract: Special education in Malaysia requires leaders who can lead schools with a clear and effective vision and mission. Therefore, this study aims to develop a construct for the special education leadership dimension, especially in the formation of school vision and mission. The main objective of the study is to produce a clear vision and mission that is widely disseminated through expert consensus. This study uses the Fuzzy Delphi Method to achieve expert consensus on all items studied. The study findings show that expert consensus on all items is acceptable including the construct for formation of vision and mission; a clear vision and mission and a widely disseminated vision and mission. The impact of this study is for special education leaders to place more emphasis on the aspect of leading the school vision and mission, with the hope of improving the quality of special education in Malaysia.

Keywords: Special Education, Leadership Model, Vision and Mission, Expert Consensus, Fuzzy Delphi Method, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Special education in Malaysia plays a crucial role in providing tailored educational experiences for students with diverse needs. Effective leadership within special education schools is essential to ensure that these institutions can fulfill their mission and vision, thereby enhancing the quality of education provided. Leaders in special education must possess the ability to articulate and disseminate a clear vision and mission that aligns with the goals of the school and meets the needs of the students (Causton et al., 2023). This study aims to develop a leadership model that emphasizes the formation and dissemination of a clear and effective vision and mission for special education schools in Malaysia.

The importance of a well-defined vision and mission cannot be overstated, as they serve as guiding principles for the school's operations and strategic planning. A clear vision provides a long-term direction, while a mission statement outlines the school's purpose and primary objectives (Kamara et al., 2024). In the context of special education, these elements are vital for addressing the unique challenges and opportunities that arise in catering to students with special needs. By establishing a robust leadership model, this study seeks to empower special education leaders to lead their schools more effectively and improve educational outcomes for their students (Adams et al., 2025; Nordin et al., 2020)

Despite the importance of strong leadership in special education, there is a lack of comprehensive models that guide leaders in the formation and dissemination of school vision and mission. The absence of such models can lead to inconsistencies in leadership practices and hinder the overall effectiveness of special education schools (Barrio, 2021; Corbin et al., 2024; Radd et al., 2021). This gap in the literature highlights the need for a structured approach to developing and implementing vision and mission statements that are both clear and widely accepted.

This study addresses this gap by developing a construct for the special education leadership dimension, focusing on the formation of school vision and mission. The Fuzzy Delphi Method, which involves multiple rounds of surveys to achieve expert consensus, is employed to ensure that the proposed model is robust and reliable (Dawood et al., 2021; Roldan Lopez de Hierro et al., 2021). By achieving expert consensus through this method, the study aims to provide a clear and widely accepted vision and mission that can be used by special education leaders to improve the quality of education in Malaysia. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and provide practical guidance for special education leaders in their efforts to enhance school leadership and educational outcomes.

Review of Related Literature

Importance of Special Education in Malaysia

Special education in Malaysia is essential for delivering customized educational experiences to students with varying need. The Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 emphasizes the importance of providing quality education to all students, including those with special needs, and outlines strategies to achieve this goal (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). The blueprint advocates for inclusive education practices, ensuring that students with special needs have access to mainstream schools and are provided with the necessary support to succeed (United Nations Educational, 1994). This commitment is further reinforced by the

Persons with Disabilities Act 2008, which mandates equal educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their disabilities (Ang, 2014).

Leadership in Special Education

Leadership in special education is crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive practices. Effective leaders are expected to articulate and disseminate a clear vision and mission that aligns with the goals of the school and meets the needs of students with special needs (Alkaabi et al., 2022). The formation of a clear and widely accepted vision and mission is essential for guiding the school's operations and strategic planning, and for fostering a supportive and inclusive environment (Sandoval et al., 2021). Research has shown that inclusive leadership practices significantly impact the quality of education and the overall school climate (Moya et al., 2020).

Challenges in Special Education Leadership

Despite the importance of strong leadership in special education, there is a lack of comprehensive models that guide leaders in the formation and dissemination of school vision and mission. This gap in the literature highlights the need for structured approaches to developing and implementing vision and mission statements that are both clear and widely accepted (Óskarsdóttir et al., 2020). The absence of such models can lead to inconsistencies in leadership practices and hinder the overall effectiveness of special education schools. Additionally, leaders often face challenges such as limited resources, lack of training, and resistance to change, which can further complicate their efforts to implement effective leadership practices (Movahedazarhouligh et al., 2021).

Vision and Mission in Special Education

The importance of a well-defined vision and mission cannot be overstated, as they serve as guiding principles for the school's operations and strategic planning. A clear vision provides a long-term direction, while a mission statement outlines the school's purpose and primary objectives (Nikula et al., 2021). In the context of special education, these elements are vital for addressing the unique challenges and opportunities that arise in catering to students with special needs. By establishing a robust leadership model, this study seeks to empower special education leaders to lead their schools more effectively and improve educational outcomes for their students (Zarate et al., 2022). The development and dissemination of a clear vision and mission can also enhance stakeholder engagement and support, contributing to the overall success of special education programs (Mathews, 2021).

Fuzzy Delphi Method in Special Education

The Fuzzy Delphi Method has been identified as an effective tool for achieving expert consensus on complex issues, including the development of leadership constructs in special education (Yaakub et al., 2020). This method involves multiple rounds of surveys to achieve consensus among experts, ensuring that the proposed model is robust and reliable. The Fuzzy Delphi Method allows for the incorporation of expert opinions and the refinement of constructs based on feedback, making it a valuable approach for developing leadership models in special education (Jamil et al., 2024). This method has been successfully applied in various educational contexts to identify key elements and constructs, demonstrating its effectiveness in achieving consensus (Zain et al., 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs the Fuzzy Delphi Method (FDM) to develop a leadership model for special education leaders in Malaysia, focusing on the formation and dissemination of school vision and mission. The FDM is chosen due to its effectiveness in achieving expert consensus on complex issues, making it suitable for this study's objectives.

Research Design

The research design involves several key steps to ensure a comprehensive and systematic approach:

Literature Review: A thorough review of existing literature on special education leadership, vision and mission formation, and the Fuzzy Delphi Method is conducted. This review helps identify the key elements and constructs relevant to the study (Lyn et al., 2021).

Expert Panel Selection: A panel of experts in special education leadership is selected. The panel includes experienced educators, administrators, and researchers with extensive knowledge in the field. The selection criteria ensure that the panel members have the necessary expertise to provide valuable insights and feedback (Gilmour et al., 2024).

Data Collection

The data collection process involves multiple rounds of surveys to gather expert opinions and achieve consensus (Aidil et al., 2023; Mustapha et al., 2023):

Round 1: An initial questionnaire is developed based on the literature review and input from the expert panel. The questionnaire includes items related to the formation and dissemination of school vision and mission. Experts are asked to rate the importance and relevance of each item using a 7-point Likert scale.

Round 2: The responses from the first round are analyzed using fuzzy logic to identify areas of agreement and disagreement. Items that do not meet the consensus criteria (threshold

value, $d \leq 0.2$), percentage of experts in agreement $> 75\%$, and fuzzy score with a minimum value of 0.5) are revised or removed. A revised questionnaire is then distributed to the expert panel for further evaluation.

Subsequent Rounds: Additional rounds of surveys are conducted as needed to refine the items and achieve a higher level of consensus. The process continues until the expert panel reaches a satisfactory level of agreement on all items.

Data Analysis

The data analysis involves several steps to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings (Aidil et al., 2023; Mustapha et al., 2023):

Fuzzy Logic Analysis: The responses from each round are analyzed using fuzzy logic techniques. This analysis helps quantify the level of agreement among experts and identify items that meet the consensus criteria.

Defuzzification: The fuzzy scores are defuzzified to obtain crisp values, which are used to determine the final set of items for the leadership model. The defuzzification process ensures that the results are interpretable and actionable.

Validation: The final set of items is validated through additional expert reviews and pilot testing. This validation process helps ensure that the leadership model is robust and applicable to the context of special education in Malaysia.

Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to ethical guidelines to ensure the integrity and credibility of the research:

Informed Consent: All expert panel members are informed about the purpose of the study, the data collection process, and their rights as participants. Informed consent is obtained from all participants before they take part in the study.

Confidentiality: The confidentiality of the participants' responses is maintained throughout the study. Data is anonymized to protect the identity of the experts and ensure that their feedback is used solely for research purposes.

Transparency: The research process is conducted transparently, with regular updates provided to the expert panel. The findings and conclusions are shared with the participants to ensure that they are aware of the outcomes of the study (Caeymaex et al., 2023; Vivek, 2022).

FINDINGS

The following are the findings of this study.

Dimension: Leading the School's Vision, Mission

The following are the findings for the dimension of leading the school vision and mission.

Table 1.1*Details of Dimension: Leading the School's Vision, Mission*

No.	Construct	Threshold Value, d	Percentage of Expert Consensus	Average Defuzzification	Initial Ranking	Priority Ranking
1.	Formation of vision and mission	0.000	100%	0.967	1	1
2.	Clear vision and mission	0.014	100%	0.962	2	2
3.	Disseminated vision and mission	0.036	95%	0.954	3	3

Based on Table 1.1, the constructs for the dimension which is the vision and mission of the school, are prioritized according to the threshold value, (d); percentage of expert consensus; and average defuzzification. The first position is for the construct of vision and mission formation, with a 100 percent expert consensus and an average defuzzification value of 0.967. The second position is for the construct of clear vision and mission, with a 100 percent expert consensus and an average defuzzification value of 0.962. The third position is for the construct of disseminated vision and mission, with a 95 percent expert consensus and an average defuzzification value of 0.954. Therefore, the priority ranking remains unchanged for the dimension of leading the school vision and mission, as follows:

- 1.1 Formation of vision and mission;
- 1.2 Clear vision and mission; and
- 1.3 Disseminated vision and mission.

Subsequently, the findings for each item are described according to the priority ranking obtained.

Findings for Construct 1.1 - Formation of Vision and Mission

The following are the details for construct 1.1, which is the formation of vision and mission, according to the threshold value d , percentage of expert consensus, average defuzzification, and priority ranking as shown in Table 1.2

Table 1.2*Details of Construct 1.1: Formation of Vision and Mission*

No.	Element	Threshold Value, d	Percentage of Expert Consensus	Average Defuzzification	Initial Ranking	Priority Ranking	Expert Consensus
1.	Special education leaders establish direction based on general statements.	0.000	100%	0.967	2	1	Accept

2.	Special education leaders act promptly on improvement information.	0.072	100%	0.929	25	2	Accept
3.	Special education leaders delegate authority during the formation of vision and mission.	0.075	100%	0.910	7	3	Accept
4.	Special education leaders seek the views of the school community for improving the vision and mission.	0.072	100%	0.905	8	4	Accept
5.	Special education leaders use a consultative approach in decision-making.	0.072	100%	0.905	17	4	Accept
6.	Special education leaders make decisions based on the majority voice rather than individual voices.	0.072	100%	0.905	20	6	Accept
7.	Special education leaders establish the direction of special education with a focus on skills rather than knowledge.	0.068	100%	0.900	13	7	Accept
8.	Special education leaders accept all opinions, even from individuals in lower positions.	0.068	100%	0.900	22	7	Accept
9.	Special education leaders discuss school activities at the end of the current year to form the school calendar.	0.068	100%	0.900	30	9	Accept
10.	Special education leaders establish the direction of special education with students mastering basic self-management skills.	0.062	100%	0.895	12	10	Accept

For construct 1.1, the formation of vision and mission, all 10 elements are accepted as they meet the minimum acceptance criteria of the Fuzzy Delphi Method with a threshold value ($d \leq 0.2$ and expert consensus percentage $\geq 75\%$). Therefore, the priority ranking based on average defuzzification for construct 1.1, the formation of vision and mission, is as listed according to priority.

Findings for Construct 1.2 - Clear Vision and Mission

The following are the detailed findings for construct 1.2, which is clear vision and mission, according to the threshold value d , percentage of expert consensus, average defuzzification, and priority ranking as shown in Table 1.3

Table 1.3*Details of Construct 1.2: Clear Vision and Mission*

No.	Element	Threshold Value, d	Percentage of Expert Consensus	Average Defuzzification	Initial Ranking	Priority Ranking	Expert Consensus
1.	Special education leaders explain the school's direction to teachers and staff.	0.075	100%	0.924	2	1	Accept
2.	Special education leaders set school goals based on capabilities agreed upon by teachers.	0.076	100%	0.914	4	2	Accept
3.	Special education leaders supervise the progress of each activity assigned to teachers.	0.076	100%	0.914	6	2	Accept
4.	Special education leaders set targets that can be seen in numerical form (e.g., 20 students with straight A's in SPM).	0.075	100%	0.910	1	4	Accept
5.	Special education leaders discuss learning activities to achieve the set goals.	0.072	100%	0.905	5	5	Accept
6.	Special education leaders explain the direction to the school community to gain their support.	0.072	100%	0.905	8	5	Accept
7.	Special education leaders prioritize evaluation activities for each school activity.	0.072	100%	0.905	9	5	Accept
8.	Special education leaders choose the best views to improve school achievement.	0.068	100%	0.900	7	8	Accept
9.	Special education leaders set higher targets if current targets have been achieved.	0.047	100%	0.886	11	9	Accept
10.	Special education leaders explain the school's direction to parents.	0.026	100%	0.876	3	10	Accept

For construct 1.2, Clear Vision and Mission, all 10 elements are accepted as they meet the minimum acceptance criteria of the Fuzzy Delphi Method with a threshold value (d) ≤ 0.2 and expert consensus percentage $\geq 75\%$. Therefore, the priority ranking based on average defuzzification for construct 1.2, Clear Vision and Mission, is as listed according to priority.

Findings for Construct 1.3 - Disseminated Vision and Mission

The following are the detailed findings for construct 1.3, which is disseminated vision and mission, according to the threshold value d , percentage of expert consensus, average defuzzification, and priority ranking as shown in Table 1.4

Table 1.4*Details of Construct 1.2: Disseminated Vision and Mission*

No.	Element	Threshold Value, d	Percentage of	Average Defuzzification	Initial Ranking	Priority Ranking	Expert Consensus
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		Expert Consensus							
1.	Special education leaders seize opportunities to convey the school's direction during major school events.	0.072	100%	0.929	11	1	Accept		
2.	Special education leaders hold parenting talks to make parents aware that educating students is a shared responsibility with the school.	0.075	100%	0.924	9	2	Accept		
3.	Special education leaders post the school's direction on the school website.	0.075	100%	0.924	13	2	Accept		
4.	Special education leaders allocate specific time during weekly student assemblies to communicate the progress of school goals.	0.076	100%	0.919	2	4	Accept		
5.	Special education leaders establish strategic partnerships with NGOs to communicate the progress of school goals.	0.076	100%	0.919	7	4	Accept		
6.	Special education leaders share information about strategies to implement the school's direction with parents.	0.076	100%	0.919	19	4	Accept		
7.	Special education leaders allocate specific time during PTA meetings to communicate the progress of school goals.	0.076	100%	0.914	4	7	Accept		
8.	Special education leaders have a Facebook page that displays the school's direction.	0.076	100%	0.914	16	7	Accept		
9.	Special education leaders use the Community Union platform to communicate the progress of school goals.	0.072	100%	0.905	6	9	Accept		
10.	Special education leaders share information about strategies to implement the school's direction with teachers.	0.072	100%	0.905	18	9	Accept		

For construct 1.3, Disseminated Vision and Mission, all 10 elements are accepted as they meet the minimum acceptance criteria of the Fuzzy Delphi Method with a threshold value ($d \leq 0.2$ and expert consensus percentage $\geq 75\%$). Therefore, the priority ranking based on average defuzzification for construct 1.3, Disseminated Vision and Mission, is as listed according to priority.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the critical role of special education leaders in forming and disseminating a clear vision and mission for their schools. The consensus achieved through the Fuzzy Delphi Method underscores the importance of these elements in guiding the school's operations and strategic planning. This section discusses the implications of the study's

findings for special education leadership in Malaysia and provides recommendations for practice and future research.

Formation of Vision and Mission. The study reveals that the formation of a clear vision and mission is paramount for effective leadership in special education. Leaders who can articulate a well-defined vision and mission are better equipped to guide their schools towards achieving their goals (Hughes et al., 2021). This aligns with previous research indicating that a clear vision and mission are essential for setting the direction and priorities of educational institutions (Mathews et al., 2023). The consensus among experts in this study further validates the importance of these elements in special education leadership.

Dissemination of Vision and Mission. Effective dissemination of the vision and mission is equally important. The study finds that special education leaders must actively communicate these elements to all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and the broader school community. This ensures that everyone is aligned with the school's goals and can contribute to achieving them (Wynarczyk et al., 2020). Previous studies have highlighted the role of communication in leadership, emphasizing that leaders must engage with stakeholders to foster a shared understanding and commitment to the school's vision and mission (Sider et al., 2021).

Challenges in Special Education Leadership

Despite the importance of forming and disseminating a clear vision and mission, special education leaders face several challenges. Limited resources, lack of training, and resistance to change are common obstacles that can hinder effective leadership practices (Zarate et al., 2022). Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions and support from educational authorities (Skura, 2024). The findings of this study suggest that providing training and resources to special education leaders can enhance their ability to lead their schools effectively.

Practical Implications

The developed leadership model provides a practical framework for special education leaders to articulate and disseminate a clear vision and mission. This framework can be used to guide leadership practices and improve the quality of education in special education schools. Educational authorities should consider implementing training programs that focus on the formation and dissemination of vision and mission statements. Additionally, resources such as templates and guidelines can be provided to assist leaders in developing these elements.

Policy Recommendations

The study offers several policy recommendations for educational authorities to support the implementation of the leadership model. These include:

1. **Training Programs:** Develop and implement training programs for special education leaders that focus on the formation and dissemination of vision and mission statements.
2. **Resource Allocation:** Allocate resources to support the development of clear and effective vision and mission statements in special education schools.
3. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Encourage special education leaders to engage with stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and the broader school community, to foster a shared understanding and commitment to the school's goals.

Future Research

The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on special education leadership and provides a foundation for future research. Further studies can build on the findings to explore additional aspects of leadership in special education and refine the proposed model. Future research could investigate the impact of different leadership styles on the formation and dissemination of vision and mission statements. Additionally, studies could examine the effectiveness of various communication strategies in engaging stakeholders and fostering a shared understanding of the school's goals.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided valuable insights into the critical role of special education leaders in forming and disseminating a clear vision and mission for their schools. By employing the Fuzzy Delphi Method, the research has successfully achieved expert consensus on the essential elements of effective leadership in special education. The findings underscore the importance of a well-defined vision and mission in guiding the school's operations and strategic planning, ultimately enhancing the quality of education for students with special needs. The developed leadership model offers a practical framework that special education leaders can use to articulate and communicate their school's vision and mission. This model not only addresses the current gaps in leadership practices but also provides a structured approach to achieving a cohesive and unified direction for special education schools. The emphasis on stakeholder engagement and the use of consultative decision-making processes further highlights the need for inclusive and collaborative leadership.

The implications of this study are far-reaching. Educational authorities are encouraged to implement training programs and allocate resources to support special education leaders in

developing and disseminating clear vision and mission statements. By fostering a shared understanding and commitment among all stakeholders, these leaders can create a supportive and inclusive environment that promotes the success of students with special needs. Moreover, the study's findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge on special education leadership and pave the way for future research. Further studies can explore additional aspects of leadership in special education, such as the impact of different leadership styles and the effectiveness of various communication strategies. By building on the foundation established by this research, future studies can continue to refine and enhance the proposed leadership model.

In conclusion, the importance of strong and effective leadership in special education cannot be overstated. Special education leaders who can articulate and disseminate a clear vision and mission are better equipped to guide their schools towards achieving their goals. This study provides a robust framework that can be used to improve leadership practices and enhance the quality of education in special education schools in Malaysia. The journey towards excellence in special education leadership is ongoing, and this research represents a significant step forward in that journey. By embracing the findings and recommendations of this study, special education leaders can make a profound and lasting impact on the lives of students with special needs, ensuring that they receive the quality education they deserve.

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