

Strategic Planning for Enhancing School Excellence

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Abstract

Strategic planning is an essential element in ensuring school excellence through the systematic, focused, and continuous implementation of programs. This paper aims to analyse the role of strategic planning in enhancing school excellence based on two key articles: *Sustaining School Improvement Initiatives: Advice from Educational Leaders* by Koh et al. (2023) and *Strategic Action Plans for School Improvement: An Exploratory Study About Quality Indicators for School Improvement Plan Evaluation* by Carvalho et al. (2022). This paper employs document analysis of both articles, supported by recent literature on strategic planning in education. The study by Koh et al. (2023) involved 12 educational leaders from four educational organisations in Australia through semi-structured interviews, whereas Carvalho et al. (2022) analysed 663 school Strategic Action Plans (SAPs) in Portugal using content analysis. The findings indicate that Koh et al. (2023) identified seven key themes: clear program selection, strategic leadership, continuous professional development, data and feedback sharing, time and resource management, distributed leadership, and a school culture that supports change. Meanwhile, Carvalho et al. (2022) identified nine quality indicators for strategic action plans and found that most action plans resembled lists of activities rather than strategic plans that systematically guided school improvement efforts. Overall, this paper demonstrates that successful strategic planning depends on distributed leadership, data utilization, a collaborative culture, continuous monitoring, and program sustainability in enhancing school excellence.

Keywords: Strategic Planning, School Excellence, Distributed Leadership, Strategic Action Plans, Educational Management

Introduction

Strategic planning is one of the essential elements in ensuring that schools can achieve sustained excellence in line with the ongoing changes in the contemporary educational landscape. In the context of twenty-first-century education, schools do not merely function as institutions for knowledge delivery but also play a role in developing students' potential holistically, encompassing academic achievement, character development, social skills, and emotional well-being. Therefore, schools require systematic and well-structured planning to

ensure that all educational programs and initiatives are implemented effectively and generate a significant impact on school performance (Carvalho et al., 2022).

Strategic planning involves identifying organisational needs, establishing clear objectives, selecting appropriate strategies, allocating resources, and monitoring progress towards intended outcomes. Effective planning enables school leaders to make informed decisions and coordinate the efforts of teachers and other stakeholders. Fullan (2023) highlights the importance of organisational capacity and continuous improvement in educational change, while Leithwood et al. (2022) emphasise the contribution of effective school leadership to successful school development. These perspectives suggest that school excellence depends not only on the preparation of strategic plans but also on the capacity of school communities to translate planned objectives into meaningful action.

Despite its importance, implementing strategic planning effectively remains a challenge for schools. Improvement initiatives may become fragmented or difficult to sustain when schools face limited resources, time constraints, heavy teacher workloads, insufficient professional development, or inadequate organisational support. Koh et al. (2023) highlight the importance of leadership, professional development, resource management, data and feedback sharing, and a supportive school culture in sustaining school improvement initiatives. Similarly, Carvalho et al. (2022) demonstrate that school strategic action plans may contain lists of activities without establishing sufficiently comprehensive connections between identified needs, objectives, strategies, and monitoring processes. These findings indicate that the existence of a strategic plan does not automatically ensure effective implementation or sustained school improvement.

Addressing these challenges requires attention to both the quality of strategic planning and the organisational conditions that support its implementation. School leaders need to establish clear priorities, use relevant data to guide decisions, encourage collaboration among teachers and stakeholders, and monitor progress continuously. Harris and Jones (2022) discuss the importance of professional learning and leadership in school improvement, while Schildkamp et al. (2023) highlight the relevance of data-based decision-making in supporting educational improvement. Together, these perspectives reinforce the importance of integrating systematic planning with collaborative leadership, evidence-informed practices, and continuous evaluation.

In the Malaysian context, strategic planning is relevant to ongoing efforts to improve school quality, leadership effectiveness, and student outcomes. The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 established priorities for strengthening educational quality and school leadership (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). However, the effectiveness of school improvement initiatives depends on how strategic priorities are translated into practical actions that respond to individual school needs. Challenges involving resource allocation, teacher workload, professional development, and stakeholder collaboration further highlight the need to examine how strategic planning can be implemented and sustained effectively in school settings.

Although the two selected studies address school improvement from different perspectives, their findings can be examined together to provide a more comprehensive understanding of

strategic planning. Koh et al. (2023) focus on the leadership and organisational conditions that support the sustainability of school improvement initiatives, whereas Carvalho et al. (2022) examine the quality of strategic action plans and the indicators required to evaluate them. The distinction between these perspectives provides the basis for the present paper's analysis: understanding school excellence requires consideration of both the quality of the plan and the organisational capacity to implement and sustain it. This paper therefore brings together insights from these two studies to examine how systematic planning and collaborative organisational practices can complement one another in supporting school improvement.

The novelty of this paper lies in its comparative synthesis of organisational sustainability factors and strategic action plan quality indicators within a single discussion of school excellence. Koh et al. (2023) highlight the leadership and organisational conditions required to sustain school improvement initiatives, whereas Carvalho et al. (2022) examine the quality indicators necessary for evaluating school strategic action plans. By bringing these two perspectives together, this paper examines how the quality of strategic planning and the organisational capacity to implement and sustain improvement initiatives complement one another. Its contribution to the social sciences, particularly educational management and leadership, is an integrated analytical perspective on the relationship between strategic planning, distributed leadership, data-informed decision-making, stakeholder participation, and programme sustainability. This synthesis also provides a basis for discussing the implications of strategic planning for school management in the Malaysian educational context.

Specifically, the paper pursues three objectives:

1. To analyse the role of strategic planning in enhancing school excellence based on the findings of two selected articles.
2. To examine the contributions of distributed leadership, data use, collaborative culture, and continuous monitoring to effective school strategic planning.
3. To discuss the challenges and implications of strategic planning for school management and the Malaysian education system.

To achieve these objectives, this paper draws on two key articles as the primary sources of analysis, *Sustaining School Improvement Initiatives: Advice from Educational Leaders* by Koh et al. (2023) and *Strategic Action Plans for School Improvement: An Exploratory Study About Quality Indicators for School Improvement Plan Evaluation* by Carvalho et al. (2022). Although the studies were conducted in different national contexts, both provide complementary insights into strategic planning for school improvement. Koh et al. (2023) highlight the importance of strategic leadership, distributed leadership, professional development, and organisational support in sustaining school improvement initiatives. Meanwhile, Carvalho et al. (2022) examine the quality of school strategic action plans, providing insights into the importance of clear objectives, data use, and systematic monitoring. Taken together, these two articles provide a basis for understanding how strategic planning can enhance school excellence, as well as the challenges and implications for school management and the Malaysian education system.

Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations

Distributed Leadership Theory

This paper adopts Distributed Leadership Theory as one of its theoretical foundations for explaining how strategic planning contributes to school excellence. Distributed leadership emphasises that leadership responsibilities are shared among various members of an organisation rather than being concentrated solely on a single individual. In the school context, this perspective highlights the importance of collaboration between school administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders in establishing organisational priorities and achieving common educational goals.

In relation to school strategic planning, distributed leadership provides a useful perspective for understanding how the active involvement of school members can support the development and implementation of improvement initiatives. Strategic planning requires more than the preparation of formal documents by school administrators; it also requires the collective participation of teachers and other stakeholders in identifying school needs, determining priorities, and carrying out planned activities. When responsibilities are shared, school members can contribute their knowledge, professional expertise, and experiences to support organisational improvement.

The findings of Koh et al. (2023) highlight the importance of strategic leadership, distributed leadership, professional development, and organisational support in sustaining school improvement initiatives. Their findings suggest that the sustainability of improvement programmes depends partly on the ability of educational leaders to encourage collaboration and establish a supportive organisational culture. These findings are consistent with the central principles of distributed leadership, particularly shared responsibility and collective participation in achieving school goals.

Within the scope of this paper, Distributed Leadership Theory therefore provides a theoretical basis for explaining the importance of strategic leadership, teacher involvement, collaborative working culture, and organisational support in enhancing school excellence. It also highlights that the effectiveness of strategic planning depends not only on the quality of the plan itself but also on the collective commitment of the school community to achieving its intended objectives.

Strategic Action Plan Model

In addition to Distributed Leadership Theory, this paper draws on the Strategic Action Plan (SAP) Model as a conceptual basis for examining the planning processes associated with school improvement. The model focuses on the development of structured action plans that connect identified school needs with organisational objectives, strategies, activities, and mechanisms for monitoring progress. Within educational management, this approach provides a systematic basis for translating school priorities into planned actions and evaluating their contribution to school improvement.

Effective strategic action planning requires schools to establish clear and realistic objectives, select appropriate strategies, allocate resources, and identify indicators for assessing progress. Planning should also take into account the specific context of each school, the needs of students, the professional development of teachers, and the participation of relevant

stakeholders. These elements help ensure that strategic plans serve as practical management tools rather than merely fulfilling administrative documentation requirements.

Carvalho et al. (2022) examined the quality of 663 Strategic Action Plans developed by schools in Portugal and identified nine quality indicators for evaluating school improvement plans. These indicators include alignment, responsiveness to the student population and school context, comprehensiveness, SMART goals, evidence- and research-based strategies, parental and community involvement, implementation, data-based decision-making and monitoring, and a focus on professional development. Their findings revealed weaknesses in several dimensions, particularly the comprehensiveness of plans, the use of evidence-based strategies, data-based monitoring, and the integration of professional development.

These findings demonstrate the importance of developing strategic plans that establish clear connections between school needs, objectives, strategies, implementation activities, and evaluation processes. A plan that merely lists activities may not provide sufficient direction for achieving sustainable school improvement. Instead, strategic planning should be supported by reliable data, clearly defined performance indicators, and continuous monitoring to determine whether the intended objectives have been achieved.

In this paper, the Strategic Action Plan Model provides a basis for explaining how systematic planning, data-informed decision-making, resource management, and continuous monitoring can contribute to school excellence. When considered alongside Distributed Leadership Theory, the model also highlights the importance of combining structured planning processes with the active participation and shared commitment of school stakeholders.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this paper integrates Distributed Leadership Theory with the Strategic Action Plan Model to explain how strategic planning can contribute to school excellence. Distributed Leadership Theory provides a perspective on the collaborative and organisational dimensions of school improvement, whereas the Strategic Action Plan Model emphasises the systematic processes involved in identifying school needs, establishing objectives, formulating strategies, implementing programmes, and monitoring progress.

Within this framework, strategic leadership and collaborative school culture form important organisational conditions for effective strategic planning. The involvement of teachers and other stakeholders supports shared decision-making and strengthens collective responsibility for achieving school goals. At the same time, the systematic use of data enables school administrators to identify priorities, formulate appropriate strategies, and evaluate the effectiveness of planned programmes.

The framework further incorporates professional development, resource management, continuous monitoring, and programme sustainability as important considerations in school strategic planning. These elements are relevant because improvement initiatives require appropriate organisational support and consistent evaluation to maintain their effectiveness over time. The findings of Koh et al. (2023) highlight the importance of leadership, professional development, and organisational support in sustaining improvement initiatives,

while Carvalho et al. (2022) emphasise the quality of strategic action plans and the importance of systematic planning and monitoring.

Accordingly, the conceptual framework proposes that the integration of collaborative leadership and systematic strategic planning can support the implementation of more coherent and purposeful school improvement initiatives. These practices are expected to contribute to improved school management, more effective implementation of educational programmes, and the achievement of school objectives. School excellence is therefore understood in this paper as the intended organisational outcome of strategic planning supported by effective leadership, stakeholder collaboration, evidence-informed decision-making, and continuous improvement.

Overall, the integration of Distributed Leadership Theory and the Strategic Action Plan Model provides a conceptual basis for understanding strategic planning as both a structured management process and a collaborative organisational practice. This framework guides the discussion of how strategic planning can enhance school excellence and provides a basis for examining the challenges and implications of school strategic planning within the Malaysian educational context.

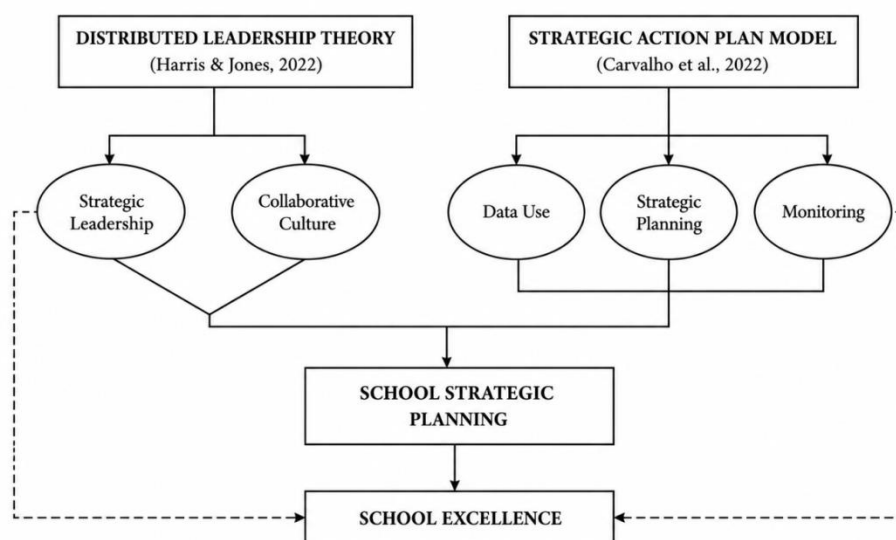


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the Selected Studies

a. Analysis of Koh et al. (2023)

Koh et al. (2023), in their study entitled *Sustaining School Improvement Initiatives: Advice from Educational Leaders*, examined the factors that support the sustainability of school improvement initiatives. The study employed a qualitative research approach involving semi-structured interviews with 12 educational leaders from four educational organisations in Australia. Through the analysis of interview transcripts, the researchers identified seven key themes associated with sustaining school improvement: clear programme selection, strategic

leadership, continuous professional development, data and feedback sharing, time and resource management, distributed leadership, and a school culture that supports change.

One of the central findings concerns the importance of establishing a clear direction for school improvement initiatives. The selection of appropriate programmes enables schools to focus their efforts on priorities that are relevant to their organisational needs. Without clear priorities, school improvement initiatives may become fragmented and difficult to sustain. Strategic leadership is therefore important in ensuring that improvement activities remain aligned with school objectives and that available resources are directed towards meaningful outcomes.

Another important finding is the role of distributed leadership in sustaining improvement initiatives. The study highlights the importance of involving a core group of individuals in leading and supporting improvement efforts rather than depending exclusively on one person. This approach encourages shared responsibility and strengthens collective commitment among school members. In this regard, the involvement of teachers and other stakeholders can help ensure continuity when school leaders or organisational circumstances change.

The study also highlights the importance of continuous professional development, data and feedback sharing, and effective resource management. Professional development helps school members acquire the knowledge and skills needed to support educational change, while the sharing of data and feedback enables them to evaluate progress and identify areas requiring improvement. In addition, appropriate management of time and resources helps schools maintain their improvement initiatives without placing excessive demands on individual staff members.

Furthermore, Koh et al. (2023) emphasise the importance of developing a school culture that supports change. A positive organisational culture encourages collaboration, professional learning, and the continuous refinement of school practices. These conditions are important because school improvement is not simply a short-term activity but an ongoing organisational process that requires sustained commitment and support.

Overall, the findings of Koh et al. (2023) indicate that the sustainability of school improvement initiatives depends on the interaction between leadership, professional development, organisational support, resource management, and a culture of continuous improvement. The study provides useful insights into the organisational conditions that enable schools to maintain improvement initiatives over time.

b. Analysis of Carvalho et al. (2022)

Carvalho et al. (2022), in their study entitled *Strategic Action Plans for School Improvement: An Exploratory Study About Quality Indicators for School Improvement Plan Evaluation*, examined the quality of Strategic Action Plans (SAPs) developed by schools in Portugal. The researchers used qualitative content analysis to examine 663 school strategic action plans. The purpose was to identify quality indicators that could be used to evaluate the comprehensiveness and quality of school improvement plans.

The analysis resulted in nine quality indicators: alignment, responsiveness to the student population and school context, comprehensiveness, SMART goals, evidence- and research-based strategies, parental and community involvement, implementation, data-based decision-making and monitoring, and a focus on professional development. Together, these indicators provide a structured basis for examining whether school strategic plans adequately connect organisational priorities with planned improvement activities.

One of the main findings was that many strategic action plans resembled lists of activities rather than comprehensive strategic documents that systematically guided school improvement. Although the plans included information about identified problems, goals, proposed activities, and implementation, the connections between school needs, objectives, and proposed solutions were often insufficiently developed. This finding suggests that the existence of a strategic plan does not necessarily indicate that the planning process is comprehensive or effective.

The study also identified weaknesses in the formulation of SMART goals and the use of evidence- and research-based strategies. Clearly defined and measurable goals are important because they allow schools to determine what they intend to achieve and assess whether the planned improvements have been successful. Similarly, strategies should be supported by relevant evidence to ensure that the selected actions address the actual needs of the school.

Another significant finding concerns data-based decision-making and monitoring. Although the plans contained indicators and references to data collection, information about monitoring procedures, responsibilities, and feedback mechanisms was often limited. This weakness may make it difficult for schools to determine whether planned activities are producing the intended results or whether adjustments are required.

Carvalho et al. (2022) also highlighted the importance of parental and community involvement and professional development in school improvement planning. These dimensions indicate that strategic planning should consider both the organisational processes required to implement improvement initiatives and the people whose participation and development contribute to their success.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the quality of school strategic action plans depends on the extent to which they establish coherent relationships between identified needs, objectives, strategies, implementation, data use, and monitoring. Carvalho et al. (2022) therefore emphasise the importance of evaluating the quality of strategic planning rather than assuming that the preparation of a formal plan automatically leads to school improvement.

c. Comparative Analysis of the Two Studies

Although Koh et al. (2023) and Carvalho et al. (2022) examined school improvement from different perspectives, their findings provide complementary insights into strategic planning for enhancing school excellence. Koh et al. (2023) focused on the experiences and perspectives of educational leaders regarding the sustainability of school improvement initiatives, whereas Carvalho et al. (2022) examined the quality of school strategic action plans

through the analysis of 663 documents from Portugal. Consequently, the two studies address different but related dimensions of school improvement.

A major contribution of Koh et al. (2023) is their emphasis on the leadership and organisational conditions required to sustain school improvement initiatives. Their findings highlight strategic leadership, distributed leadership, professional development, data and feedback sharing, resource management, and a supportive school culture. These elements demonstrate that the effectiveness of school improvement depends partly on the capacity of school leaders and stakeholders to work collaboratively and maintain organisational commitment over time.

In contrast, Carvalho et al. (2022) provide a structured perspective on the quality of strategic planning documents. Their nine quality indicators highlight the importance of alignment, contextual responsiveness, comprehensive planning, SMART goals, evidence-based strategies, stakeholder involvement, implementation, data-based monitoring, and professional development. Their findings reveal weaknesses in several dimensions of the plans analysed, particularly the connection between school needs and planned actions, the use of evidence, and the specification of monitoring processes.

Despite these differences, both studies highlight the importance of data use, stakeholder involvement, and professional development in supporting school improvement. Carvalho et al. (2022) demonstrate the need for strategic plans to incorporate data-based decisions and monitoring mechanisms, while Koh et al. (2023) emphasise the importance of sharing data and feedback as part of the organisational processes that sustain improvement initiatives. Together, these findings suggest that data should not merely be collected for reporting purposes but should inform planning, guide implementation, and support continuous evaluation.

The studies also complement each other in their treatment of leadership and organisational collaboration. Koh et al. (2023) explicitly highlight distributed leadership and a school culture that supports change, whereas Carvalho et al. (2022) identify parental and community involvement as one of the indicators of strategic action plan quality. These findings suggest that school improvement requires both a coherent planning structure and meaningful participation by the people responsible for developing, implementing, and sustaining improvement initiatives.

A further point of comparison concerns the relationship between planning and implementation. Carvalho et al. (2022) show that strategic plans may lack comprehensiveness even when they contain goals and proposed activities. Koh et al. (2023), meanwhile, demonstrate that sustaining improvement initiatives requires leadership support, professional learning, effective resource management, and a culture that accepts change. Taken together, the studies indicate that the quality of a strategic plan and the organisational capacity to implement it are complementary considerations in school improvement.

Overall, the comparison demonstrates that neither strategic planning documents nor leadership practices should be considered in isolation. High-quality strategic planning requires clearly defined objectives, evidence-informed strategies, and systematic monitoring,

while sustainable implementation requires collaborative leadership, professional development, organisational support, and shared responsibility. The integration of these dimensions provides a useful basis for understanding how strategic planning can contribute to sustained school excellence.

Discussion

The findings from the two selected studies indicate that strategic planning should be understood as both a systematic management process and a collaborative organisational practice. Carvalho et al. (2022) highlight the importance of the quality and comprehensiveness of strategic action plans, while Koh et al. (2023) emphasise the leadership and organisational conditions necessary to sustain school improvement initiatives. The synthesis of these perspectives suggests that effective school improvement requires not only a well-developed plan but also the organisational capacity to translate its objectives into coordinated and sustained action.

Strategic Leadership and Shared Responsibility

Strategic leadership emerges as an important consideration in enhancing school excellence. The findings of Koh et al. (2023) suggest that improvement initiatives are more likely to be sustained when leadership responsibilities are shared and supported by a core group of individuals. This indicates that school administrators should not be viewed as the only individuals responsible for school improvement. Instead, teachers and other relevant stakeholders should be encouraged to contribute to planning, implementation, and evaluation.

This finding is consistent with the principles of Distributed Leadership Theory discussed in the theoretical foundations of this paper. The theory provides a basis for understanding how shared responsibilities and collaboration can strengthen organisational commitment. When school members participate meaningfully in improvement initiatives, they have greater opportunities to contribute professional knowledge, identify practical challenges, and support the continuity of planned activities.

Nevertheless, shared leadership requires clear coordination and accountability. Distributing responsibilities without establishing common objectives and clear roles may create confusion rather than improve organisational effectiveness. Therefore, school leaders need to combine collaborative decision-making with clear strategic direction, appropriate delegation, and continuous communication.

Strategic Planning as a Systematic Management Process

The findings of Carvalho et al. (2022) demonstrate that the preparation of a strategic action plan does not automatically guarantee effective school improvement. Plans that primarily list activities without clearly connecting school needs, objectives, strategies, and performance indicators may provide limited guidance for implementation. This finding highlights the importance of treating strategic planning as a systematic management process rather than merely an administrative requirement.

The Strategic Action Plan Model provides a useful conceptual basis for interpreting this issue. Effective planning should begin with the identification of school needs, followed by the

establishment of clear objectives, the selection of appropriate strategies, the allocation of resources, and the identification of indicators for evaluating progress. Monitoring and evaluation should then provide information that can be used to revise strategies and improve subsequent actions.

The nine quality indicators identified by Carvalho et al. (2022) reinforce the importance of comprehensive planning, SMART goals, evidence-based strategies, implementation, and data-based monitoring. These elements can help school administrators assess whether their strategic plans are sufficiently detailed, relevant to the school context, and capable of guiding practical improvement activities. Accordingly, schools should evaluate not only whether a strategic plan exists but also whether its components are logically connected and useful for decision-making.

Data-Informed Decision-Making and Continuous Monitoring

Data use is another important connection between the two studies. Carvalho et al. (2022) identify data-based decision-making and monitoring as quality indicators for school strategic action plans, while Koh et al. (2023) highlight the importance of data and feedback sharing in sustaining improvement initiatives. Together, these findings suggest that data should be incorporated throughout the strategic planning process rather than used only after a programme has been completed.

In practice, schools can use relevant information about student achievement, attendance, teaching and learning, and programme implementation to identify priorities and assess progress. However, collecting information alone is insufficient. School leaders and teachers need to interpret the available data, discuss its implications, and use the findings to make appropriate decisions. Feedback mechanisms should also enable school members to identify implementation difficulties and recommend adjustments where necessary.

Continuous monitoring is particularly important because school improvement initiatives may encounter changing needs, resource constraints, and unexpected implementation challenges. A consistent monitoring process enables schools to determine whether planned activities remain relevant and whether adjustments are required. Thus, monitoring should be regarded as an integral part of organisational learning and improvement rather than solely as a reporting requirement.

Collaborative Culture and Professional Development

The findings also indicate that a collaborative school culture and continuous professional development are important for sustaining school improvement. Koh et al. (2023) highlight professional development and a supportive school culture as factors associated with the sustainability of improvement initiatives. Similarly, Carvalho et al. (2022) include professional development and parental and community involvement among the quality indicators for school strategic action plans.

These findings suggest that school strategic planning should account for the knowledge, skills, and collaborative relationships required to implement planned changes. Professional development should be linked to identified school needs and improvement priorities rather than conducted as a separate activity without a clear connection to organisational objectives.

Teachers should have opportunities to develop relevant competencies, share experiences, and reflect on the effectiveness of their practices.

A collaborative culture can further strengthen these processes by creating opportunities for professional dialogue, shared problem-solving, and collective responsibility. When teachers and other stakeholders understand the purpose of a school improvement initiative and can contribute to its development, implementation is more likely to reflect the needs and circumstances of the school. Nevertheless, collaboration needs to be supported by adequate time, resources, leadership commitment, and clear communication.

Implications for Enhancing School Excellence in Malaysia

The findings of the two studies have relevant implications for strategic planning in Malaysian schools. First, school administrators should ensure that strategic plans are developed around clearly identified school needs and measurable objectives. Plans should establish explicit connections between problems, priorities, strategies, activities, and performance indicators. This approach would help schools move beyond preparing documents primarily for administrative purposes towards using strategic plans as practical guides for organisational improvement.

Second, school leaders should strengthen collaborative leadership by involving teachers and relevant stakeholders throughout the planning and implementation process. Participation should extend beyond consultation during the preparation of strategic documents to include the review of priorities, implementation of programmes, monitoring of progress, and evaluation of outcomes. Such participation may help strengthen shared responsibility and organisational commitment.

Third, schools should improve the use of data and feedback in decision-making. School administrators and teachers need opportunities to develop the skills required to interpret relevant information, assess programme effectiveness, and use evidence to refine improvement strategies. Monitoring processes should also clarify responsibilities, establish appropriate review periods, and ensure that findings lead to practical follow-up actions.

Finally, school strategic planning should incorporate sustainability from the outset. Improvement initiatives need to be supported by appropriate resource allocation, professional development, leadership continuity, and organisational routines that allow effective practices to continue over time. These considerations are particularly important when schools experience changes in leadership, priorities, or available resources.

Overall, the two studies suggest that enhancing school excellence requires the integration of structured strategic planning and collaborative organisational practices. Carvalho et al. (2022) provide insights into the quality of strategic action plans, while Koh et al. (2023) highlight the conditions that support the sustainability of improvement initiatives. When interpreted together through Distributed Leadership Theory and the Strategic Action Plan Model, their findings provide a conceptual basis for understanding how leadership, planning, data use, stakeholder participation, and continuous monitoring can support sustained school improvement.

Conclusion

Overall, this paper demonstrates that strategic planning is a key element in enhancing school excellence through the systematic, focused, and continuous implementation of programs. Based on the analysis of the articles by Koh et al. (2023) and Carvalho et al. (2022), the effectiveness of strategic planning is influenced by effective leadership, a collaborative working culture, data-driven decision-making, the active involvement of school members, and continuous monitoring and evaluation. The findings also demonstrate that high-quality strategic planning does not merely fulfil documentation requirements but serves as a catalyst for sustaining school improvement programmes and achieving organisational goals.

In addition, the application of Distributed Leadership Theory and the School Strategic Action Plan Model was found to be complementary in explaining the importance of cooperation, shared responsibility, and structured planning in ensuring the successful implementation of school initiatives. Therefore, comprehensive, data-informed strategic planning based on the actual needs of schools should be strengthened to ensure that planned programmes are implemented more effectively and contribute to sustained improvements in school excellence.

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