Challenges beyond the Singapore Future-Ready School 'LEADER' Qualities

Authors : Zoe Boon Suan Loy

Abstract : An exploratory research undertaken in 2000 at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic examined the changing roles of Singapore school leaders as they lead teachers in developing future-ready learners. While it is evident that 'LEADER' qualities epitomize the knowledge, competencies, and skills required, recent events in an increasing VUCA and BANI world characterized by massively disruptive Ukraine -Russian war, unabating tense US-Sino relations, issues related to sustainability, and rapid ageing will have an impact on school leadership. As an increasingly complex endeavour, this requires a relook as they lead teachers in nurturing holistically-developed future-ready students. Digitalisation, new technology, and the push for a green economy will be the key driving forces that will have an impact on job availability. Similarly, the rapid growth of artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities, including ChatGPT, will aggravate and add tremendous stress to the work of school leaders. This paper seeks to explore the key school leadership shifts required beyond the 'LEADER' qualities as school leaders respond to the changes, challenges, and opportunities in the 21st C new normal. The research findings for this paper are based on an exploratory qualitative study on the perceptions of 26 school leaders (vice-principals) who were attending a milestone educational leadership course at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. A structured questionnaire is designed to collect the data, which is then analysed using coding methodology. Broad themes on key competencies and skills of future-ready leaders in the Singapore education system are then identified. Key Findings: In undertaking their leadership roles as leaders of future-ready learners, school leaders need to demonstrate the 'LEADER' qualities. They need to have a long-term view, understand the educational imperatives, have a good awareness of self and the dispositions of a leader, be effective in optimizing external leverages and are clear about their role expectations. These 'LEADER' qualities are necessary and relevant in the post-Covid era. Beyond this, school leaders with 'LEADER' qualities are well supported by the Ministry of Education, which takes cognizance of emerging trends and continually review education policies to address related issues. Concluding Statement: Discussions within the education ecosystem and among other stakeholders on the implications of the use of artificial intelligence and ChatGPT on the school curriculum, including content knowledge, pedagogy, and assessment, are ongoing. This augurs well for school leaders as they undertake their responsibilities as leaders of future-ready learners.