Reflections of Two Distinct Principals: Preliminary Perspectives on How the Principal Preparation Programme Contributed to their Self-Efficacy Development

SANTHANAMARY AP R. ANTHONY
santhanamary68@gmail.com

HAMDAN BIN SAID
University Technology Malaysia

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Abstract - Effective principal preparation is a strategic necessity to face the forthcoming “tsunami” of challenges associated with the leadership position in the 21st century. This recognition of the need for specific preparation for aspiring school leaders has been slower to emerge worldwide and in many developing countries such as Malaysia, preparatory training is still not a prerequisite requirement for appointment as a principal. This paper reports on the preliminary findings on the principal preparation program in Malaysia and the effectiveness of the program elements in contributing to the self-efficacy development of the aspiring principals. The qualitative study captured the “live experiences” of two distinct principals and presents their perspectives on how specific elements within their principal preparation program catered to their self-efficacy development. Reflections of the principals led to the conclusion that, although the principal preparation program was viewed as effective in imparting knowledge and skills needed for principal leadership but it could still
improve on inducing purposeful elements or experiences to enhance the sources of efficacy beliefs which are vital for self-efficacy development.

**Keywords** - Self-efficacy, Principal Preparation Program, Aspiring Principals, Sources of Efficacy Beliefs, Self-Efficacy Development.

**INTRODUCTION**

There is generally a common agreement among the researchers that the demands associated with the 21st century leadership, need school leaders with extraordinary competencies and capacities (Hoy & Miskel, 2001; Fullan, 1991). This is followed by the recognition of a need to redesign new ways to train and prepare tomorrow’s school leaders to face the changing environment (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Daresh, 2004; Fry, Bottoms & O’Neill, 2005; Yukl, 2006). The principal preparation programmes certainly have a tremendous role in this endeavor. However, researches are still relatively few on how the principal preparation programmes can be developed and built in a new perspective that prepare these kinds of educational leaders (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). In this respect, the Social Cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) asserts that along with knowledge and skills, self-efficacy is an essential element in contributing to a leader’s success. Literature reviews provide concrete evidences on the significant impact of self-efficacy beliefs on leadership on the whole (McCormick, 2001; Paglis & Green, 2002) and on principal leadership in particular (Hartnett, 1995; Dimmock & Hattie, 1996; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). This paper investigates the impact of the principal preparation programme in Malaysia on the self-efficacy development of the aspiring principals.

The findings reported in this paper provide an insight into what are the sources of self-efficacy beliefs that are evident in the principal preparation program and how they influenced the self-efficacy beliefs of the aspiring principals.
The development of principal preparation programmes has become an international phenomenon in recent years. Many developed countries require a participation in a preparatory training course or an extensive development programme usually concluding with a certificate or a license. Countries such as United Kingdom, United States, Singapore, France, England and even Scotland, Estonia, Slovenia and Malta have introduced leadership preparation programmes and require aspirants to acquire the mandatory or compulsory national qualifications for school headship (Brundrett, Slavikova, Karabec, Murden, Dering & Nicolaido, 2006; Brundrett and Crawford, 2008; Bush, 2008; Huber & Hiltmann, 2010). It was found by Bush & Jackson (2002) that there are considerable similarities in the content of the educational leadership programmes in different countries. They advocated that there exists an ‘international curriculum’ in these programmes as there were similarities in the main components of the curriculum which are leadership, teaching as well as learning and management. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is an understanding at the international perspective of the critical curriculum of knowledge and skills that must be transferred to aspiring principals and they should be prepared in the critical areas of leadership as identified by Bush & Jackson (2002). It is interesting to note that these main component that was identified by Bush and Jackson (2002) as ‘international curriculum’ is also evident in the syllabus of the principal preparatory training in Malaysia; The National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). This shows that the NPQH training components in Malaysia are in line with the international curriculum relevant for aspiring principal preparation programme.

The need for systematic and effective preparation for headship in Malaysia was realized with the introduction of the ‘National Qualification for Headship’ (NPQH) principal preparation programme. Currently, it is known as the National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders (NPQEL). The NPQH framework in Malaysia is based on the United Kingdom NPQH training framework (Lodge, 1998). The National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) is the recognition of the Malaysian Government that professional development for school leaders needs to be planned consistently and coherently to develop aspiring principals to take up the challenging and significant role of headship. It is a one – year programme underpinned by the
Malaysian National Standard for Headship (Ministry of Education, 2006) for the preparation of school leaders. It was introduced in 1999 by the Malaysian Ministry of Education and to date is conducted by the National Educational Management and Leadership Institution; IAB (Institut Aminuddin Baki).

The first part of the training involves a 6 months of fulltime course which covers six main areas of study into educational management and leadership. The second part of the programme is the Attachment or internship phase for another 6 months in the participants’ respective schools. The Diploma in School Management and Leadership is awarded at the completion of the NPQH programme (Institut Aminuddin Baki, 2004). It was envisaged that in the years to come, the NPQH would be a necessary criterion for selection and appointment of new school heads. Even though the enrolment for NPQH programme, continues to this day, however, it is still not a mandatory requirement for the selection of new school heads in Malaysia.

Generally, from the limited number of studies done locally on the NPQH programme there exist positive reactions by the participants about the programme effectiveness. Basically, all the studies, had found the training to be satisfactory, however assert that there is vast room for improvement in all areas of the training to further enhance the programme effectiveness (Aziz, 2003; Educational Planning & Research Development, 2006; Rusinah Joned & Lee Leh Hong, 2006; Gurcharan Singh, 2009; Kamaruzaman Moidunny, Norasmah Othman & Siti Rahayah Ariffin, 2009).

This preliminary study hopes to add knowledge about this training and contribute to the limited literature on this subject in the Malaysian contexts. It attempts to provide insights on the elements that are perceived to contribute to the development of self-efficacy beliefs of the aspiring principal in the NPQH training and to prepare them for the demands of their leadership position. Therefore, the following discussion on self-efficacy and leadership will provide a background for understanding the significance of self-efficacy in leadership training.

Self-efficacy and Leadership

Self-efficacy is “people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (Bandura, 1986, p. 391; Bandura, 1997, p.3;). However, according to Bandura (1989), self-efficacy must be defined within the frames
of the behaviours that are being studied, in order to be useful to researchers. Therefore, a principal’s sense of efficacy is defined as the principal’s belief of his or her capabilities to set a course of action to produce the desired impact in the school he or she leads (Bandura, 1997).

Several researches have shown that there is a positive relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and individual, group as well as organizational outcomes (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998; Jin Nam Choi, Richard & Amiram, 2003). Significance of self-efficacy to leadership and its effects on important organizational outcomes are also well established (Dimmock & Hattie, 1996; Gist and Mitchell, 1992; Bandura, 1997; McCormick, 2001). Research by Wood and Bandura (1989), Gist and Mitchell (1992) and Tschannen - Moran and Gareis (2004) showed that self-efficacy beliefs have significant and decisive impact on goal setting by individuals.

Paglis and Green (2002) further emphasized that in addition to direction setting, leadership self-efficacy is also related in gaining followers’ commitment and in managing obstacles to change. These self-efficacy beliefs affect the development and skillful implementation of functional leadership strategies (McCormick, 2001). This is consistent with Tschannen and Gareis’ (2004) findings that principals with strong self-efficacy beliefs were able to persist in pursuing their goals and adapts strategies to meet contextual conditions. On the other hand, principals with low self-efficacy beliefs were not able to control the environment and to modify strategies. Dimmock and Hattie (1996) also found that the ability to accommodate and cope with change was also significantly related to principals’ self-efficacy beliefs.

Hence, based on Bandura’s (1986) theory, the dramatic changes that are taking place globally and in the educational environment would certainly have a high degree of affect on the principals’ self-efficacy to perform their task effectively. A highly efficacious principal will be able to persist in the face of challenges. On the contrary, a low efficacious principal will not prevail. Thus, it can be concluded that the principals’ success of implementing the knowledge and skills learnt in their training lies on the self-efficacy beliefs that the principals’ possess in them.

Consequently, it is extremely important to provide the principals with training to increase their self-efficacy to enable successful execution of the knowledge and skills learnt in the training while coping with vast change and uncertainties. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) further affirms that knowledge about the contributing factors to principals’ self-
efficacy belief can support the improvement and development of principal preparation programme. This certainly warrants for further investigation into the contributing factors of principals’ self-efficacy beliefs. According to Bandura (1989, 1997), the development of efficacy beliefs are influenced by the sources of efficacy beliefs namely; a) Mastery experiences b) Vicarious experience, c) Social persuasion and d) Physiological arousal.

Today, self-efficacy theories are widely applied in many fields including the educational settings. Nevertheless, literature of its application in the education field is somewhat is limited, especially on principal’s sense of efficacy belief but intriguing results obtained had created enthusiasm (Tschannenn-Moran & Gareis, 2004) to study this construct in this area of expertise. This research is also a result of such enthusiasm.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the study is to explore the effectiveness of the NPQH training programme in Malaysia and determining the programme elements that most influenced in how the self-efficacy beliefs of the aspiring principal were changed or developed. Specifically, it aims to explore how specific elements within the NPQH preparation programme contributed to the development of the aspiring principals’ self-efficacy beliefs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The findings reported in this paper are the qualitative part of the mixed methodology design of the study. This study employed the case study research design with two distinct secondary school principals as samples from the State of Johor in Malaysia. The samples were selected through purposeful sampling based on their unique and diverse backgrounds. The qualitative methodology was adopted as this method will allow a detailed description and a deeper understanding of the phenomena under examination (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990, Denzin, & Lincoln, 2005). In addition, Patton advocates the importance to adopt qualitative inquiry is to capture the meaning of the programme experience to participants, “in their own words, through interviews, and in their day-to-day programme settings, through observation” (p. 273).
“The Self – Efficacy Interview Protocol” which consisted of 10 interview questions was utilized for this reason. The interview protocol enquired the principals on how specific elements of their preparation programmes influenced the development of their self efficacy through mastery experience, vicarious experiences, social persuasion and arousal states. “The Self – Efficacy Interview Protocol” was adapted from Versland (2009) and was back translated into the target language; the Malay Language which is the National Language of Malaysia. Further confirmation on the validation and reliability of the instrument was made by pilot testing it to these two secondary school principals. Prior to the interview, both the principals were contacted via phone to get their appointment. During the first appointment, the researcher explained the intent of the study and got the consent from them for an interview session. During this time, the translated version of ‘The Self-Efficacy Interview Protocol’ was given to the principals to allow them some time to reflect on the questions. It was found that both the principals did not quite comprehend the term ‘self-efficacy’. The researcher then handed a prepared definition of the term self-efficacy in English and in the Malay language and explained the term briefly. The content validity for the interview protocol for the qualitative section of the study was checked by relating the interview questions them. Their feedback, ideas and suggestions was also sought on the questions so that improvement on the interview protocol can be done prior to the actual study.

The interview was later carried out on the second appointment in the principals’ respective schools. This is done in line with Foster’s (2004) suggestion that to “enhance contextual richness and minimize fragmentation” (p.230), all participants should be interviewed in their naturalistic environment or settings. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Field notes were also taken during the interview to record other information. This was later triangulated to produced more in-depth data (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990). The emergent themes based on the reflection of the two distinct principals on their experiences of their principal preparation programme were then analyzed and interpretations made. All ethical considerations were followed as to protect the rights of the respondents in the study.
Characteristics of the Study Respondents

The respondents in this study are two principals from the secondary schools in Malaysia. Both these principals were participants of the NPQH principal preparation programme. However, they are very distinct in background and experiences. ‘Principal A’ had the experience of being a principal prior to attending the NPQH training. His was a unique case as he was appointed under unforeseen circumstances as a principal, just after several months of his first posting in the East Malaysia. He held the principalship for one and a half years in East Malaysia. The shortage of qualified personnel in the East Malaysia to take over the position could have accounted for this situation. However, upon returning to West Malaysia, he was not appointed as a principal. On the contrary, he held all the middle managers positions (Afternoon Supervisor, Senior Assistant of Student Affairs, Senior Assistant of Curriculum) in several schools for many years before holding the principalship position again. It was only after about 20 years later that he attended the NPQH training.

Generally in Malaysia, the appointment of headship is not done by recruiting and selecting a fresh candidate for the post, except in rare cases. The selection to a certain extent can either be through ‘time – based’ promotion or based on the expertise of a teacher in his or her field of teaching. The Headship appointment in Malaysia is based on the Civil Servants Legislation which states that those government officers will only be promoted according to their seniority in the post taken into account (Cabinet Committee Report, 1979). Beginning from January 2007, the Education Ministry had made some revision to the appointment of headship whereby those interested in the post can apply and shortlisted candidates will be called for an interview. However, to date, the career path to principalship in Malaysia is through several administrative positions or posts such as The Head of Subject Panel, The Head of the Department, Senior Assistant of Co-curriculum, Senior Assistant of Students’ Affairs and Afternoon Session Supervisor still prevails (Sazali, 2006). This explains the situation of ‘Principal A’ as to why he had to become a middle manager upon returning to West Malaysia.

The second principal, ‘Principal B’ on the hand, was one of the young participants among the senior middle managers and principals who attended the training. Principal ‘B’ was a Senior Assistant when he attended the NPQH training. He had no principalship experience as of Principal ‘A.’ However, it
should be noted that Principal ‘B’ also held several administrative positions prior to becoming a principal. These two principals participated in the NPQH principal preparation training and it is obvious from their background experiences that both these principals would have had varying degrees of self-efficacy beliefs prior to attending the NPQH training. The discussion below presents the reflections of these two principals regarding their principal preparation programme (NPQH) and their perspectives on how specific elements within their principal preparation programme catered to their self-efficacy development.

RESULTS

The analyses of the data collected from the principals’ interviews are done according to the main ideas of the interview protocol. The discussion on the findings will be done in subsections with the emergent themes presented with relevant quotes from the responses received from the interviews.

Initial Self-belief about principalship.

Two emerging themes were found from the responses of both the principals to this interview question. The emergent themes were experience, encouragement and selection procedure. It was found that, even though Principal ‘A’ had prior experience being a principal and also as middle manager but he expressed an average self-belief in his ability to become a principal at the onset of the training. This was accounted to the knowledge and skills that he acquired which were more from a ‘trial and error method’. Therefore there were vast areas of doubts that needed to be cleared. Principal ‘A’ admitted that his experience did help in building his self-belief only to a certain extent but according to him, the input received on educational management and leadership from the NPQH training was very relieving in the sense that it made clear all grey areas.

Principal ‘B’, on the other hand, although was young and had less middle management experiences compared to Principal ‘A’, expressed a high self-belief in his ability prior to attending the training. He accounted his high self-belief to the encouragement that he received from his former principal, peers and also to his experiences of holding various middle manager positions. The strong encouragement received from his former principal was seen a real boost to his self-belief in his capability. He mentioned,
“.... my former principal gave me an overview of the training, positive encouragement, coaching, support and exposure that I needed to participate in the training. She believed that I had the capability. I too had a strong self-belief that I have the ability since I managed to get through the stringent selection procedure to the training.”

Both principals however, agreed that their self-beliefs were enhanced or further developed during the training as the inputs given on all aspect of school leadership gave a sense of authority in the area.

**Instructional Practices**

The responses of the principals for the kinds of instructional practices that impacted their self-efficacy, pointed to four emergent themes; namely group work, field work, discussion, presentation and hands-on activities. Principal ‘A’ related that the instructional practices adopted in the training were mainly group work and discussion and were not only limited to theory-based lectures. The training required the participants to discuss, express their views and opinions while creating lots of opportunities to display leadership qualities. Principal ‘A’ stated that group discussion provided an avenue for sharing and at the same time taught how to become democratic leaders as it related that the ideas and opinions of others need to be taken into account during decision-making. Principal ‘B’ expressed that other than group work, discussion and presentation, assignment which required participants to gain first-hand experience from field work was also encouraged. In addition, Principal ‘B’ also related that the ICT component in the training had great impact particularly on him, due to its hands-on application and its innovative applicability in schools. These instructional practices were agreed by both principals to have enhanced their self-efficacy beliefs in school leadership.

**Coursework**

One specific theme that emerged from the interview responses was coursework involving field work. Specifically, field work in the aspects of school management and leadership. Principal ‘B’ related;

“......assignments that required trainees to do field or practical work provided a lot of experiences. For example, in understanding financial management, trainees had to go to schools to gather information and discussion with the respective principals provided valuable knowledge”
The information was later presented in their respective groups during the training. According to Principal ‘B’, as groups consisted of participants from various backgrounds and experiences from all states in Malaysia, thus their approaches to problems and solutions were also diverse. This provided a vast room for learning from authentic experiences of others. Both principals also agreed that they gained tremendous knowledge and experiences from the six months internship in schools. The course works during their internship which required them to complete three portfolios; personal and projects, provided a platform for them to apply the theoretical input learnt. This inevitably enhanced their self-efficacy beliefs in their capacity to meet the challenges of school leadership.

**Peer Influence and Personal Interaction**

One emergent theme for the kinds of personal interactions during the training is diverse participants’ background and experiences. Both principals agreed that the diversity in the participants in terms of age, race, gender, background and experience brought about various personalities in their personal interaction. Principal ‘B’ for example expressed;

“...... yes, there were a lot of inputs from interacting with the peers as there were at least participants from three diverse categories that are; principals, officers from The Ministry of Education and the Education Departments as well as middle managers in schools.”

These personal interaction regardless whether it was purposeful instruction or not, created great impact on the principals personalities as the sharing session (formal and informal) offered vast opportunities to understand and learn about people, as well as relationship. The one year duration of the course further strengthened the personal interactions. The diverse experiences of the participants who showed glimpses of theory and reality had positive impacts on both Principal ‘A’ and principal ‘B’s self-efficacy. Even though challenges and problems faced, were related by the peers during these interactions but both Principal ‘A’ and ‘B’ reported that their self-beliefs were not affected by them. Principal ‘A’ asserted that he just ‘observed’ and ‘absorbed’ these challenges related by his peers as he himself had experiences undergoing such challenges during his principalship for almost 2 years. Principal ‘B’, being young reported that he viewed these challenges as ‘part and parcel’ of principal leadership and thus took them as lessons to be learnt.
Most influential ‘role model’

One particular emergent theme that seems to jump out of the data for this interview question was credibility of the teaching staff/faculty. Both principals related that the credibility of the lecturers/facilitators was an importance element in influencing their self-efficacy. Both principals supported that the teaching staffs had very good personal relationships with the trainees and adhered to the principles of adult learning theory. They were encouraging and supportive. However, it was disappointing that many of them did not have prior experiences of being a principal. Principal ‘A’ for example said;

“…… many were ex-teachers and middle managers who did not reach the level of the principal position. As they lacked the experience of being a principal, their teaching and discussion are mainly theory driven and not supported with evidences of live experiences. There was something missing.”

The credibility of the teaching staff was an important factor in developing the self-efficacy of the trainees. Since teaching staff lacked credibility, their impact on the trainees were not great. For example, Principal ‘A’ was not able to recall the name of any particular teaching staff and this shows that the degree of influence of these teaching staff on him was only moderate.

Principal ‘B’ also shared the same concern as Principal ‘A’. He further explained that the teaching staff without principal experiences functioned more like a ‘moderator’ and depended on experiences related by participants for discussion. He added that the lecturers with principalship experience were able to impart vast knowledge with concrete experiences of approaches to leadership. These lecturers made a marked difference. However, Principal ‘B’ recalled that the time when he attended the training, there were a few lecturers who had prior principal experience whom he viewed as his ‘role model’. Principal ‘B’ was also able to name a few prominent ‘role models’ who had great influence in enhancing his self-efficacy in leadership. He further explained that,

“…..their combination of input, style of delivery and experiences made their lectures very interesting whereby they were able to mirror the reality of school leadership effectively.”

These findings showed that the credibility of the teaching staff is vital to ensure the development of the self-efficacy beliefs of these principals.
Experiences to Replicate

The responses for the kinds of experiences or interactions in the NPQH training that they would like to replicate pointed to only one emergent theme; benchmarking. Both principals unanimously agreed that benchmarking provided avenue to learn from the successes of other principals. It increased their self-beliefs that they too can carry out similar activities or projects in their respective schools. Principal ‘B’, expressed his preference on an ‘extended benchmarking’ such as internship with benchmarking in overseas would be more effective. This, according to him would provide even greater exposures and opportunities to learn from various successful school leaderships from other countries.

Elements of Stress

Distance and being away from the family were two emergent themes that both the principals found to be the stressful experience during the training. The distance of the training centre and their homes which was about five to six hours journey posed stress as they had to return home every week to be with their families. Inflexibility of some lecture hours especially on Friday afternoon caused some stress as they had to reschedule their trips home for weekend. Responsibility and dealing with problems associated with family from a far was also reported to be stressful. On the other hand, both principals agreed that coursework did not cause much stress as they were mainly done as group work and lecturers were accommodating. Other minor stress was also reported to bring positive effect such as, stress to complete an assignment.

Unplanned Experiences

Both principals were not able to provide concrete unplanned experiences that contributed to their self-efficacy. However, internship and travel were the two emergent themes mentioned again for unplanned experiences that they found to contribute to their self-efficacy development. Principal ‘A’ related that there were many unplanned experiences during internship that gave a lot experiences in an informal manner. For example,

“I did my internship in a new school. Hence, I learnt how to manage and lead a new school.”
Principal ‘B’ in addition, mentioned that the travelling to and fro the training centre and home every week also required a strong and determined heart as well as energy to withstand the rigor of the training amidst all other unplanned experiences that is associated with it.

**Future development**

Selection to the training and credibility of the teaching staff were two emergent themes on how the principal preparation programme can do better to positively affect aspiring principals. Principal ‘A’ suggested that the selection criteria be revised to include senior principals who are waiting for time-based promotion to be considered for the training. He further asserted that it is high time for the training to be made a prerequisite requirement for the appointment of school principal. In his words,

‘... it is high time it is made mandatory. ...... there is weakness in the selection criteria. Those in-lines for principalship should be given priority. ......Those still young after completing the training, will have to wait too long to hold the position. Then there is the question of transfer of knowledge.’

Principal ‘B’ further added that the credibility of the principals be taken into consideration. As mentioned earlier, it would be better to recruit those with principalship experiences in schools. He related;

‘......on option is to bring in excellent principals as ‘guest speakers’ to fill in some slots in the training. Now - is not a time for theory. We can get that from books, internet etc., we need authentic experiences that cannot be bought’.

On the whole, the findings showed that although both principals had different backgrounds and varying degrees of self-efficacy beliefs prior to attending the NPQH training, they agreed that the NPQH training was able to develop their self-efficacy beliefs. They also agree that the NPQH training is an effective principal preparation training which should be continued with some revision.

**DISCUSSION**

The findings revealed some of the emerging themes from the preliminary interviews. As presented earlier, the initial analysis revealed themes such as experience, fieldwork, hand-on activities, internship, credibility and distance in the early stage of data analysis. All data were then re-analyzed
and re-categorized in terms of new set of common themes according to Bandura’s sources of efficacy beliefs namely; mastery experience, vicarious experiences, social persuasion and psychological arousal. This was done to meet the aim of the study which is to explore how specific elements within the NPQH preparation programme contributed to the development of their self-efficacy beliefs. Therefore, this discussion will focus on how the main emergent themes identified from the principals reflections, earlier in the study (specific elements in the NPQH training programme) contributed to the principals’ self-efficacy beliefs in relation to Bandura’s (1989, 1997) four sources on efficacy beliefs.

This study found the initial emergent themes identified such as fieldwork, hands-on activities, benchmarking and internship can be categorized into a new common emergent theme that is; authentic experiences mastered in the training. These authentic experiences are associated with Bandura’s sources of efficacy beliefs which are mastery experience. These are experiences that are gained when success is achieved. The perception that a performance has been successful raises efficacy beliefs and helps in the development of a strong sense of self-efficacy. On the other hand, failure lowers efficacy beliefs and contributes to the belief that future performances will also be low (Bandura, 1993).

Responses from both principals revealed that successful experiences that they gained from instructional practices especially working with principals in particular schools during fieldwork helped to develop their self-efficacy. In addition, experiences which assisted in successful problem solving and provided various strategies to overcome challenges while working in group with peers of diverse backgrounds strengthened mastery experiences. These group activities was also able to build successful relationship and displayed that consensus is important in decision-making. Experiences gained during discussion and sharing of views created lots of opportunities to display their leadership qualities. In addition, their internship during the training provided an avenue for the theoretical application to reality. These activities provided authentic experiences about the reality of school leadership. This inevitably enhanced their self-efficacy beliefs in their capacity to meet the challenges that awaited them. The analyses showed that both principals placed utmost importance to learning through authentic experiences or in Bandura’s term, mastery experience. The study found mastery experience contributed the most to the development of their self-efficacy beliefs in leadership.
evidence supports Bandura’s (1993) propositions that mastery experience is the most effective and influential source in efficacy development.

The second initial emergent theme identified from the interviews pointed to the personal interaction among peers and credibility of the teaching staffs. The emergent new theme revolved around **learning experiences by observing others**. These are learning experiences from personal interactions with participants of diverse backgrounds and experiences, which regardless of purposeful instruction or not, created great direct impact on these principals’ experiences. These interactions offered vast opportunities to understand and learn about people, as well as to build relationship. Negative experiences related during these interactions were observed and absorbed as lessons that need to be learnt. These **learning experiences by observing others** can be are associated with Bandura’s (1989, 1997) second source of efficacy beliefs which is **vicarious experiences**. According to Bandura (1997), a vicarious learner bases the success and failure of the social model as a benchmark of his or her own competence. Vicarious experiences of both principals were developed when they used observation as a source to develop a concept of themselves (Bandura, 1997). Modeling peers’ successes that they can closely relate to enhances their self-efficacy beliefs and failure decreases it (Bandura 1997). This study found that personal interaction with peers enhanced both the principals’ vicarious experiences. In addition, benchmarking in schools provided Great Avenue to learn from the successes of other principals. This strengthened their vicarious experiences which developed self-efficacy beliefs to carry out similar leadership strategies in their respective schools to gain successes. This supports Kelloway and Barling (2000) findings that mastery experience and modeling to be effective in the training of transformational leaders.

However, it was a setback that there were not much vicarious experiences from the teaching staff that brought positive effect on both principals’. This was due to the fact that most of the lecturers were not able to provide vicarious experiences due to their lack of credibility as many did not have prior principal experiences. Therefore, the principals did not have many lecturers whom they can closely relate to as their ‘social models’ to learn from. This lack of credibility was viewed as a vital ‘missing element’ in enhancing vicarious experiences to develop self-efficacy beliefs. These findings reflect Bandura’s idea that the more closely the individual identifies with the social model and the actions observed, the stronger will be the
impact on the efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997).

The third emergent new theme is *endurance and determination* which is closely related to the initial emergent theme of stress elements (course works, travelling and dealing family matters from a far) identified in the training. Bandura (1997) termed it as *physiological arousal* which refers to the actual physical reaction an individual, would have to an event or action. This study found that the training was not too rigorous, therefore the physiological arousal were perceived and interpreted by the two principals as energizers, rather than hindrances. Both principals endured the stresses and faced the challenges in a constructive way due to their determination. Therefore, this study supports Bandura’s claim that a moderate levels of stress is beneficial as it heighten attentiveness and assist in application of skills (1997, p.108). However, the researcher found that the degree of these physiological arousal could further be heighten in the training as the analysis of response from both the principals showed that this source of efficacy belief needed to be emphasized through more rigor in the training.

Another interesting finding from the analysis was that Bandura’s (1989, 1997) fourth source of efficacy belief which is *social persuasion* was not explicitly evident in the study. Social persuasion or verbal persuasion refers to the feedbacks from others (Bandura, 1986). Positive feedback and genuine verbal persuasion are likely to raise one’s self-efficacy to mobilize greater effort to succeed. Negative feedback and not genuine verbal persuasion lowers’ one’s self-efficacy beliefs to preserve in difficult times (Bandura, 1986). The data in this study did not provide any concrete emergent themes on this source of efficacy belief during the training. However, there were some traces of evidences of the presence of social persuasion prior to the training. The verbal encouragements and support gained prior to attending the training which uplifted the initial self-belief about principalship was identified by one of the principals. This supported (Winter, Rinehart and Munoz’s 2000) study which found that the strongest predictor for aspiring principals to apply for the principal position is their self -perceptions of their ability to do the job well.

The study also supports that social persuasion is an important source of self-efficacy as it has the power to boost self-efficacy enough to allow an individual to embark in a new task, to apply new methods or to strive to find success in their actions (Bandura, 1986). However, this source did not emerge as a strong theme. The explanation for this situation could be as advocated
by Bandura (1986) that, the effectiveness of the persuasion depends on the credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of the person who provides this persuasion. This reason has solid evidences as credibility of the teaching staffs was highlighted as a concern in the training as most did not have prior experience of being a principal. This could have accounted for the efficacy source of social persuasion not having much impact on these two principals during the training.

Therefore, **authentic experiences mastered in the training, learning experiences by observing others,** and **endurance and determination** are specific elements of efficacy beliefs in the NPQH training which can be associated with Bandura’s (1989, 1997) sources of efficacy beliefs. The overall analysis of the study showed that **mastery experiences** was found to be the most influential source of efficacy belief in the NPQH training. **Vicarious experience** was the second source of efficacy influence which was gained more through peer interaction than from the teaching staff. **Physiological arousal** was identified as the third source of efficacy belief as it was perceived and interpreted as energizers, although its intensity in the training could be heightened. Finally, the fourth source of efficacy belief which is **social persuasion** was not very evident in this study.

Hence, findings based on the reflections of the principals suggests that the combination of these sources provided support that self-efficacy beliefs were developed in the NPQH training. However, the NPQH training could still improve on inducing purposeful elements or experiences to enhance the sources of efficacy beliefs which are vital for self-efficacy development. As recommended by Gist and Mitchell (1992), training programme structures should include the four sources self- efficacy beliefs to enhance aspiring principals’ efficacy perceptions which will enhance their capabilities. This study has also provided data that have supported many views expressed in literature review in overseas (Dimmock & Hattie, 1996; Hartnett, 1995; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004) and the previous studies done locally (Aziz, 2003; EPRD, 2006; Gurcharan Singh, 2009; Kamaruzaman Moidunny, Norasmah Othman & Siti Rahayah Ariffin, 2009; Rusinah Joned & Lee Leh Hong, 2006), in Malaysia on the NPQH training. The study’s implication adheres to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) suggestion that knowledge about the contributing factors to principals’ self- efficacy belief can support the improvement and development of principal preparation programme.
CONCLUSIONS

The study explored how specific elements within the NPQH preparation program as reflected by two distinct principals contributed to the development of their self-efficacy beliefs. It found three specific elements in the training that are; authentic experiences mastered in the training, learning experiences by observing others as well as endurance and determination contributed to their self-efficacy development. These three elements are closely associated to Bandura’s sources of efficacy beliefs which are mastery experience, vicarious experience and psychological arousal. These preliminary findings contribute to the identification and analysis of the elements that should emphasized in the NPQH training to develop the self-efficacy beliefs of the aspiring principals. The self-efficacy development in these principals can bring marked differences in the principals’ sense of efficacy beliefs which will subsequently influence leadership behaviour and performances of these aspiring principals in schools.

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