School-Based Strategy to Reduce Variation in Pupil Progress And Attainment And Improve

The Efficiency And Effectiveness Of Teaching

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[Name of The Institution]

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Executive Summary

It is a fact that a classroom environment is never uniform; instead, it constitutes students from multiple ethnic, cultural, economic, and social backgrounds. The variation also comes in their background educational level and the competency with which it was introduced to them in the past. In such a varied classroom, it is inevitable to achieve varied progress with some performing better than others. Similar, across subjects, this variation is also visible where students excel in some subjected while demonstrating power performance in the other. Having a prompt understanding of In-school variation is necessary to understand the underlying factors that are involved in it followed by devising an effective plan that not only works to minimize the in-school variations but also ensures the establishment of a competent leadership which is aware of the background factors that influence the learning competency of the students as well as working towards inclusive modes of teaching which helps students overcome their past limitations and catch up with their peers in the current curriculum that is being taught to them. This is possible when the school leadership is aware of the intersecting areas of an organization including leadership, teachers and students being actively involved in determining the learning competency of the students. In this report, I have demonstrated that the introduction of an inclusive plan for educational institutes in the United Kingdom, especially high schools, which is not only focused on removing in-school variation but also reformation of the school leadership by an inclusive analysis of the statistics available from students, can help the teachers and the other regulatory bodies to establish changed attitudes which can help in the formulation of effective and encouraging teaching methods to allow all spheres of the school organisation to work in collaboration to achieve elevated results, both in learner's progress and competitive teaching.

Problem Statement

Establishing an effective guide after the identification of internal factors in High Schools, which induce the ISV (in-school variation) which focuses around reducing ISV followed by the establishment of effective leadership practices that ensure that students follow an improved learning style with the introduction of an inclusive teaching environment to reflect an improved achievement.

Reducing In-School Variation

Background to In-School Variations

In-school variations not only results in decreased learning competency but also influences the motivational factors of students learning. Brining stable and balanced students' progress across multiple levels and subjects across the school can significantly influence the landscape of academic achievement across the region. The UK education system is believed to encompass one of the highest levels of in-school variation as established by the OECD report (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development) that reflect in-school variations in the UK are four times greater in comparison to between-schools performance variation (OECD, n.d.). The report also established that 34 per cent of the variation in student's progress across the OCED regions were contributed by between-school variations whereas 67 per cent of the difference in academic performance was the consequence of in-school variations in the OCED region. Among OCED countries, UK schools showed the highest in-school variation followed by New Zealand (OECD, n.d.). According to the article titled, "Principled Principals? Value-driven leadership: Evidence from ten case studies of "outstanding school leaders", Anne Gold in exploring the case studies identified that in-school variation in England at KS2 level is five times, which later intensifies to 11 times at KS3 level and elevating to 14 times at KS4 level (Gold, 2003). Similarly, the results obtained from the PISA report (Program for International

Students Assessment) showed that more than 80 per cent of the variation in students achievement and progress were the consequence of in-school variations resulted from compromised leadership and ineffective teaching strategies (Ray & Margaret, 2003).
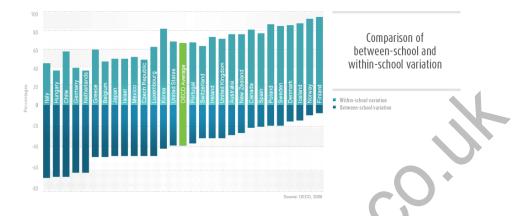

Figure 1: OECD "Highlights from Education at Glance".2009.

Figure 1 represents a summarised data reflecting the average in-school and between school variations demonstrated by OECD countries, with the UK showing higher in-school variations in comparison to between-school variations. This high level of variation determined by UK schools has multiple underlying causes, starting from primary schools and extending to higher education levels as well. The difference in academic progress in schools mostly lies at the departmental level with varied teaching methodology and practices. A joint effort was made by the DCSF (Department for Children, School and families and NCSL (National College for School Leadership) in 2003 demonstrated that identifying and improving the organisational shortcomings and improving the differences in teaching methodologies across departments can serve as potent drivers to induce improvement in varied progress among learners within a single school (Day et al., 2009). The project was devised, implemented, and analysed by the field practitioners who collected data from various schools between the years 2003 to 2007. The data was divided into two phases, one from the continued flawed leadership and the other from the improved leadership with the planned reformation in organisational structure and leadership. A comparison of students levelled students' performances and academic competence between

the first and second phase affirmed that an independent strategy devised for schools by the concerned leadership for the concerned school is an effective method of reducing varied performance by students and effective teaching, on the part of the teachers. Therefore, to minimise the variation level among student progress within schools, an effective leader not only explores the potential improvements for enhancing students' academic progress but works towards the management and leadership strategies to lead their school towards improvement in both academic and organisational spheres. It is thus the leaders of the school who work towards identifying their organisational limitation, believe that whatever happens inside their school is within their "locus of control" and effective device strategies to improve the teaching and learning capacity of both the teachers and the students. An understanding of ISV (In-school Variation), thus acts as an invitation for the school leaders to work towards better team building and educational strategies to be learned, governed, and implemented by all concerned bodies (School leadership, teachers, and Students) to employ the best practices that perpetuate uniform progress.

Identifying and Reducing ISV Factors in High Schools

The background to the ISV factors stated above has established that England experiences the highest level of ISV factors that affect the students' progress and achievement level in school. Identification of ISV factors in the school leadership is not easy but a crucial step in developing an understanding of the problematic factors and devising a strong leadership program to ratify the ISV within schools. To observe the ISF factors responsible for the varied performance of the students, five key areas were explored to determine the limitations in school leadership leading to an influenced academic performance of the students as means to deal with these limitations in improving the pupils' progress. The five key areas under focused included:

1) Collection and Use of Data relevant to ISV for a Quantitative Analysis

2) Quality of Teaching and Learning Within School

3) Role and Effectiveness of Leadership

4) Inclusion of Student Body in policymaking

5) The ratio of Standardised procedures

Collection and Use of Data relevant to ISV for a Quantitative Analysis

One of the most effective strategies to identify and implement the limitations influencing the ISV factors is to collect and analyse the relevant statistics to make informed decisions. According to Sara Bubb and Peter Earley in their book, *Helping Staff Develop in Schools,* the collection of data for quantitative analysis is "one of the easiest areas in which to make progress" in developing strategies to minimise the ISV (Bubb & Earley, 2010). A similar method was adopted for the analysis of ISV factors in Saint Peter's High School. After the successful collection of the numeric data, the shortlisted statistics were developed and converted into easily readable reports. The data was collected to identify the student's progress across the different academic levels, across the different departments, teaching methods employed, the extent of standardised testing and evaluating procedures, the extent of student's participation in academic activities, the involvement of students interests in policymaking as well as the ratio of reported complaints by the students and their ratification by the management body across the period of two-academic terms. The data analysed for the first terms reflected the statistic collected from the old management, whereas the second term reflects the statistics after introduced reformations in all the above-mentioned sectors.

The reformations introduced in the second term included newly adopted teaching methods that employed a learning-centred approach with students being the focus of content planning, teaching and assessment techniques. Apart from the reformed teaching methods, a more focused, organised, and strict organisational body was formulated which provided prompt

response to parent's complaints, did a periodic analysis to measure the students' problems and the possible measures to reduce those problematic situations. An analysis of the data and statistics collected from the different spheres mentioned above in the report helped me extract a difference in the student's progress and limitations, before and after the introduced reforms. The data collected also help the staff in formulating a critical understanding and implementation of the needed tools in the school organisational structure to minimise the ISV factors within the school.

Quality of Teaching and Learning Within School

As established earlier, the teacher plays an important role in role in determining the competency and learning efficiency of their pupil. Not only the teacher helps in imparting the relevant knowledge but is also responsible for ensuring the inclusiveness of the class environment as an encouraging method to encourage students into contributing equally to the classroom. Helen slater, Neil Davies and Simon Burgess in their work, "Do teachers matter? Measuring the variation in teacher effectiveness in England" have explored that the difference in quality between teachers has been shown to have a potentially life-changing impact on attainment for young people (Slater et al., 2012). The more inclusive the environment, the more effective is the students learning competency. To determine the ISV factors, one major step is to evaluate whether the teachers are effectively serving their role in the classroom. To evaluate the quality of teaching and learning within the school, I devised a detailed questionnaire, distributed among students of different high schools at the end of two consecutive terms, a term before the reformations and the term after the transformations in teaching method to evaluate the change in the quality of teaching and its direct influence on the learning quality among students. Among various roles of teachers, some basic roles that were analysed were teacher as a facilitator, observer, participant, evaluator, manager, prompter, assessor, learner as well as the controller of the information being imparted in the class. The questionnaire focused on

evaluating the quality of teaching by analysing whether students were able to identify the outlined roles and responsibilities of a teacher and to what extent they were satisfied with the teaching method.

The analysis of the statistics extracted from the questionnaires that focused on analysing the different roles of the teacher, it was established that the classrooms that identified maximum roles being performed had maximum academic performance expressed by the students. After the introduction of a series of workshops that focused on imparting awareness and competency among the teachers concerning several roles that they should be fulfilling in the class, it was found that there was a significant decrease observed in ISV in the second term in comparison to the first term. After making the teachers aware of the different dynamics of the classroom and how they could utilise their position in identifying and exploring the variation in academic performance, they can significantly contribute to minimising the ISV within the school as well as accelerating the quality of academic performance exhibited by the learners.

Role and Effectiveness of Middle Leadership

No matter the nature of the organisation, the leaders play a significant role in determining the competency and efficiency of their team. A leader in the central agent not only governs the whole system but also ensures that it is effectively run, maintained, and regulated by competent individuals. Having a staff that does nothing, but leisure around directly challenge the competency of the leader itself. The best leader not only keeps charge of the situation but also create an inclusive environment for the works to have equal contribution and judgment in formulating and finalising important policies for the organisation. Middle leadership in this regard plays a key role in bridging the leading components of the organisation but also ensuring a smooth flow of information and management of the organisation. Especially in schools where the teachers form the middle ground between conducting school policies for

the student, making them autonomous, aware and competent is an assurance of the smooth regulation of the system (Bennett et al., 2007). In ensuring competent leadership, embedding the elements of advocacy and action are important among the school leaders by imparting the analytical, social, and autonomous qualities along with the ability to collaborate and cooperate in a healthy environment to work towards shared goals (Bennett, 2006). To explore the competitiveness, friendliness, and cooperation of the environment among the school leadership, a separate questionnaire was devised for the workers to explore their attitudes and reflections towards the working environment and the space available for them to serve as middle leaders. The forms were distributed and collected over two terms, one following the traditional method and the second after the introduction of the reformed office environment.

A careful evaluation and analysing of the data collected reflected that the introduction of "disruptive methods" resulted in increased collaboration, cooperation, and competency. By imparting an awareness, and a sense of inclusion, among the working body of the school, it was noticed that the workers were more willing to participate, minimise the problems and collectively work towards the development of the school. The more related wanted and appreciated people feel in the working environment, the more willing they are in collaborating, participating, and leading the organisation in the challenging times as middle leaders. Along with the middle leaders, the leading body of the school, in most cases, the school principals, also need to be mindful in ensuring that the time and finances of the school are being dedicated to competent staff who is active and contributing to the growth of the school. Working in a sensitive profession, especially education where it is not only about the capitalistic gains but also about determining the competency and performance of the students, the principal needs to be vigilant, focused as well as a rigorous monitor of what goes around in the school.

Inclusion of Student Body in policymaking

Students constitute a significant part of the school body. Not only students must be equally evaluated and considered in the formation and influence of the policies directed to them but also need to be kept in focus when formulating teaching strategies to impart education to the students. In identifying the problems that hinder the competency and efficiency of the academic performance of students, they are the better evaluators since they are only closely related to the teaching strategies but equally interact with the organisational bodies (Gunter, 2011). Sian Owen, in his works, "Teaching physics: Students' attitudes towards different learning activities" have also identified that "Students are sometimes better than teachers at making comparisons across departments than staff because it's something students do informally every day" (Owen et al., 2008). Considering students opinions and evaluations, one can also help identify four different intersections that directly contribute to the ISV within schools. Out of these four factors effort and motivation level, the primary to secondary school transfer, gender attitudes and socio-cultural exclusion also play a key role in determining the competency and progress level of students in the classrooms. Extracting and evaluating data from the students helps in a prompt understands of the formulating of ways through which the motivational level of the students can be elevated, the reduction of exclusions faced by individuals in school by offering a more neutral environment as the division of more inclusive-learning materials that can maximise the interest of student towards learning and expressing greater academic performance (Ainscow et al., 2006). Students can work alongside the teachers in evaluating and testifying the value of the course content being taught. Since from the very beginning of their academic life, they are taught to be observant, they can equally employ their observation skills in identifying the limitations and restrictions at both academic, environmental, and organisational spheres that can allow the leaders to identify the factors responsible for creating ISV (Ainscow et al., 2013). In the above-mentioned sample collection, students contributed a significant portion in exploring the factors that contribute to in-school

variations as a means to resolve those issues. Students do not play the role of a "judge" rather an "observer" which does not lead to any ethical or moral questioning on the part of allowing students in evaluating more experienced and senior school staff.

In my analysis of exploring the ISV factors and their potential solutions, I utilised student's responses on the current teaching strategies, their effectiveness, the student's view of the needed reform in the educational components as well as the methods through which they were taught, I was able to introduce a "learning-based approach" in collaboration with the teaching as well as the management staff. For the "learning-centred approach" maximum changes in the learning style and learning content were made with the "students" as the central focus. In doing so, not only the dynamics of the class environment, the role of the teacher, evaluation, and assessment criteria, everything was formulated by keeping the interests of the students to the maximum.

Introducing a learning-Centered Approach to Minimise ISV

Learning is an active cognitive process that involves the participation of both the learners as well as the teachers to impact education in schools effectively. Student's need for learning is persistent. However, learning cannot be meaningful unless learners are actively engaged in it (Gao, 2009). Having an active and participative school leadership is important to allow both the teacher and the students to realise their needs and impart strategies that help minimise the variation in pupil progress as well as to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the teaching process. An effective school leadership takes the process of learning as an 'active' and 'cognitive process,' where multiple external and internal factors are involved in imparting competency and efficiency among learners. It also involves employing various techniques and approaches that assist the learners in developing their learning competency relevant to their field. The learning-centred approach was employed in the school to effectively

teach the learners to meet their target goals in effective learning and minimising variation among student's progress. It prioritised the involvement of the learner at every step, including content selection, designing syllabus content, teaching methodologies, criteria of assessment and evaluation, to ensure the increased competency and efficiency of the learner. According to English for Specific Purposes: A Learning-centered Approach, "learning is seen as a process in which the learners use what knowledge or skills, they have to make sense of the flow of new information (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Therefore, the learning-centred approach was utilised to minimise competency and academic variation since it takes into consideration the existing knowledge of the learner, their 'willingness to learn the as well as the regional and socio-political factors that play an active role in influencing the learning process. Unlike skills-centred approach, it moves beyond the techniques and target situations to develop competency but rather explores "how someone acquires this competency" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The learning-centred approach not only considers the 'learner' and 'learner's needs' as its primary focus, but it also explores the role of the 'teacher and the 'co-learners in building and enhancing the competency of the learner. The context and dynamics of the 'environment' in which the 'learner' is situated, thus become the leading factors that shape and influence the competency of the learner. In a learning-centered approach, the process of 'learning' becomes the prime focus, where the teacher is not the sole owner of the knowledge; instead, 'learning' becomes a two-way process where both the teacher and the students have something to contribute to what is being 'learned.' The teacher becomes the co-learners with the students to determine the structure and environment of the classroom for a better understanding of the knowledge.

Through the learning-centred approach, it was also determined that the teacher is responsible for determining 'specific learning objectives' that further determines the 'learning outcome' of the students instead of stating what the learner will be able to do at the end of the

classroom. The focus is on the 'practical aspect' of the knowledge instead of testing the 'memorised knowledge.' The pace of the 'learner' is also crucial in a learning-centred approach where the teacher cannot speed up the teaching process without acknowledging the pace of the learners, and the 'learners' are allowed to determine the pace of the 'teaching content' according to their competency and performance. The process of assessment is also flexible and is interwoven with the teaching of the content. The learners may come up with various parameters for the assessment and establish those parameters with the 'teacher' through communication and discussion in the classroom. The teacher can further guide and facilitate the 'learners' in improving and establishing those evaluation parameters in the classroom. Thus, the very 'nature of assessment in learning-centred approach changes, where it not only involves evaluating the progress of the learners but also facilitates the development of the learners in the classroom. Learning centred strive was considered as the prime choice since it also focuses on 'individualism,' where every learner is taken under consideration in the classroom. The approach allows flexibility and variation to be added in teaching methodologies since the competency of every learner varies. Learning centred approach not only enhances the competency of the learners, but it creates 'life-long learners' because it involves the practical implementation of the knowledge. Learning centred approach also helps the learner in exploring the 'content knowledge' through inter-personal interactions. When the learners are engaged in practical activities in the classroom, they are encouraged to interact, ask questions to each other, and try finding the answers to those questions together. Thus, 'collaborative group learning becomes an essential aspect of a learning-centred approach. Learning centred approach also involves the 'on-site' field experiences that provide the learners with an in-depth understanding of the different components and critical aspects related to their field.

Final Observations

Through the introduction and regulation of a learning-centred approach in High Schools for the Year 2019, it was concluded that was a slowed trend in inter-school variation with students becoming more involved, focused, and participating in academic activities. Centralising the student in policymaking as well as identifying the organisational shortcoming proved to be a beneficial factor since it allowed an in-depth, unbiased, and detailed understanding of the shortcomings within the regulatory body responsible for decision and policymaking. A detailed and statistical analysis of before and after the introduction of the reformed policies over two complete terms shows a positive trend in elevated academic performance and competency among students across varied departments and subjects. Not only a decreased ISV curve was observed, but the reformations introduced also allow the school regulatory bodies to reform their attitudes as well by allowing them space and authority to serve as the middle leaders. The teachers were also made aware of their responsibilities and obligations in a revised and detailed manner, for them to revise and reflect on their teaching methodologies and how they directly influenced the learning attitudes and academic performance of the students. By formulating a comprehensive and conclusive transformation that focused on every aspect and element involved in determining the academic progress and competency level of the students, I was able to formulate a cohesive and organised plan that served as a positive catalyst in bringing the desired reformations and also a potential framework for future problems related to ISV and as well as between-school variations.

Conclusion

To conclude, Inner School Variations are common in England because of the socio-cultural differences, the ineffective teaching strategies, exclusion of student body from policy and decision making, indifferent regulating bodies and uninformed teachers who lack the competency and skills to be able to effectively communicate the desired level of competence and academic skills among their students. By taking into consideration all of the factors

involved in inducing ISV within the Saint Peter's School, I was able to determine and devise a combat plan by evaluating the data obtained from the students, teachers as well as regulatory bodies to first identify various intersections causing hindrance in effective pupil's progress and second to construct measures that skillfully tackle these problems to offer a cohesive and conclusive strategy that effectively leads towards solutions. In the end, a declined curve in ISV was observed with an increased competency on the part of students and effective teaching methods employed by the teachers to maximise the progress of students among different academic spheres.

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