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# A Comparative Review of Principals' and Teachers' Perspectives on School Improvement Planning as a Strategic School Improvement Mechanism

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**Abstract**

School Improvement Planning (SIP) has become an important mechanism for translating strategic planning into school-level improvement by enabling schools to identify needs, establish priorities, implement interventions, and monitor progress. Its relevance is increasingly evident in Malaysia as the Ministry of Education (KPM) promotes differentiated school development through Focus Schools, Aspirational Schools, and Inspirational Schools, while the Malaysia Education Plan (RPM) 2026–2035 places greater emphasis on guided autonomy and strengthened institutional capacity. This article adopts a comparative review approach to examine principals' and teachers' perspectives on SIP, drawing primarily on Carvalho et al. (2023) and Hakouz and Zumpe (2026). The review compares how the two professional groups perceive the purposes, processes, and challenges of SIP implementation. The synthesis indicates that principals tend to emphasize strategic leadership, decision-making, resource allocation, stakeholder engagement, and monitoring, whereas teachers place greater emphasis on participation, professional learning, collaboration, and the practical implications of SIP for teaching and learning. Despite these differences, both perspectives converge on the importance of leadership, data use, and collaboration in supporting school improvement. Common challenges include limited time, bureaucratic demands, resource constraints, and uneven stakeholder involvement. The review concludes that SIP is most effective when principal leadership, teacher participation, and data-informed decision-making are integrated within a continuous improvement process. In the Malaysian context, SIP can serve as a complementary mechanism for translating national educational priorities into contextually relevant school improvement actions.

**Keywords:** School Improvement Planning, Strategic Planning, Principal Leadership, Teacher Involvement, School Effectiveness

## Introduction

Strategic planning is an important component of educational management because it provides schools with a systematic means of establishing direction, allocating resources,

implementing improvement initiatives, and evaluating organisational outcomes. In contemporary education systems, however, strategic planning extends beyond formal plans or administrative documents. Schools are increasingly expected to respond to changing student needs, demonstrate accountability, use evidence in decision-making, and sustain improvement over time. These expectations have shifted school improvement towards a continuous organisational process involving planning, implementation, evaluation, learning, and adaptation (Bryk, 2020; Fullan, 2016; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020). Recent research further indicates that sustainable improvement depends on systemic leadership, organisational capacity, professional collaboration, and ongoing organisational learning (Viano, Shahrokhi, & Hunter, 2024; White, Lowery, & Johnson, 2025).

Within this context, SIP provides a structured mechanism for translating strategic priorities into school-level action. SIP involves assessing current conditions, identifying needs, setting priorities, organising resources, implementing interventions, and evaluating progress (Hakouz & Zumpe, 2026; Meyers & VanGronigen, 2025). Its effectiveness, however, depends not merely on the existence of a formal plan but on how planning is connected to professional practice, evidence use, collaboration, and organisational learning. Leadership is central to this process because principals shape direction, coordinate resources, build teacher capacity, and create conditions for sustained improvement (Leithwood et al., 2020; Heenan, Lafferty, & McNamara, 2024; Meyer et al., 2023). Teachers are equally important because their participation can strengthen ownership, collaboration, and the practical relevance of improvement strategies (Carvalho, Cabral, Verdasca, & Alves, 2023; Mohd Zabidi, Abdullah, & Sumintono, 2023). However, workload pressures may constrain meaningful engagement in improvement activities (Abdullah & Md Hassan, 2024).

Data-informed decision-making represents another critical dimension of SIP. Educational evidence enables schools to identify priorities, monitor progress, and evaluate interventions, but effective use requires adequate data-related capabilities among school leaders and teachers (Shamsuddin & Abdul Razak, 2023; Pastore, 2026). Thus, SIP is most effective when leadership, teacher participation, and data use operate as interconnected organisational capabilities rather than isolated activities.

The relevance of SIP is particularly evident in the Malaysian educational context, where recent policy developments place greater emphasis on differentiated school development and school-level responsiveness. Under the School Reform agenda, KPM has identified three broad development categories Focus School, Aspiration School and Inspirational School which reflecting recognition that schools differ in their developmental circumstances and improvement needs (KPM, 2026). This policy direction strengthens the rationale for school-level planning mechanisms that can help schools identify specific priorities and organise improvement actions according to their respective contexts.

The policy environment has also evolved through the RPM 2026–2035, which provides the strategic direction for the national education system for the coming decade. The plan places greater emphasis on strengthening educational governance and institutional capacity, including the development of guided autonomy within KPM educational institutions (KPM, 2026). This development is significant because greater decision-making space also requires schools to determine priorities, mobilise resources, use evidence, engage stakeholders, and

evaluate outcomes effectively. Guided autonomy, therefore, does not reduce the importance of strategic planning; rather, it increases the need for planning processes that support coherent, accountable, and context-sensitive school-level decisions.

These developments make it timely to revisit SIP not simply as a planning procedure, but as a mechanism through which schools translate strategic priorities into locally relevant improvement action. Greater flexibility in decision-making does not automatically produce better outcomes. Schools require organisational capacity to diagnose problems, establish priorities, design appropriate interventions, and monitor their effects. Research on school improvement capacity highlights the importance of leadership, collaboration, bottom-up capacity, and context-sensitive improvement processes (Kalman & Lundberg, 2026), while research on school-based management similarly suggests that effective school-level decision-making depends on the organisational structures and capabilities available to schools (Nor, Mansor, & Suliman, 2018).

This issue also connects SIP to broader debates concerning system-level direction and school-level responsiveness, accountability and professional participation, and organisational control and local decision-making. Centralised systems can provide coherence and consistency, but schools operate within diverse organisational and educational circumstances; context therefore matters in understanding how leadership and improvement strategies are enacted (Hallinger, 2018). Within this process, principals and teachers provide complementary perspectives. Principals are responsible for strategic direction, resource coordination, policy interpretation, and monitoring, whereas teachers contribute professional knowledge derived from direct engagement with students, curriculum, pedagogy, and classroom realities. Carvalho et al. (2023) examine teachers' perspectives on SIP, while Hakouz and Zumpe (2026) examine principals' perspectives on SIP implementation. Comparing these perspectives can therefore provide a more comprehensive understanding of how SIP is interpreted and enacted across the school organisation.

Despite growing research on SIP, an important gap remains in understanding these perspectives together. Existing studies provide valuable but partial insights when principals and teachers are examined separately. Less is known about where their perspectives converge or diverge and how strategic leadership and teacher participation complement one another in SIP implementation. This gap is particularly relevant in Malaysia, where differentiated school development and greater emphasis on guided autonomy increase the importance of effective school-level planning capacity.

Accordingly, this article adopts a comparative review approach to examine principals' and teachers' perspectives on School Improvement Planning as a strategic school improvement mechanism. Specifically, the review examines how the two groups interpret and participate in SIP, compares areas of convergence and divergence, analyses factors that facilitate or constrain implementation, and discusses the implications of SIP for strategic school improvement and educational management in Malaysia. By bringing these perspectives together, the review seeks to provide a more integrated understanding of SIP as a mechanism connecting strategic direction, professional participation, evidence-informed decision-making, and school-level improvement.

*Objectives of the Comparative Review*

This article aims to:

1. Examine principals' and teachers' perspectives on the implementation of SIP.
2. Compare the similarities and differences between principals' and teachers' perspectives on SIP.
3. Analyse the factors that support and hinder SIP implementation.
4. Discuss the implications of SIP for strategic school improvement and the Malaysian education system.

*School Improvement Planning (SIP) Model*

Strategic planning is an organisational management approach that enables institutions to establish priorities, allocate resources, and implement actions to achieve intended goals. Within educational settings, these principles are translated into practice through SIP, which serves as a structured framework for guiding school improvement efforts (Hakouz & Zumpe, 2026).

SIP is designed to turn strategic intentions into practical action by linking organisational goals, improvement priorities, and implementation processes. Rather than functioning as a stand-alone initiative, SIP operationalises strategic planning at the school level through a continuous cycle of planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. This cycle helps schools identify challenges, develop targeted interventions, and assess the effectiveness of improvement efforts over time (Bryk, 2020; Viano et al., 2024).

The SIP model adopted in this article rests on three enabling elements: principal leadership, teacher involvement, and data utilisation. Principal leadership provides strategic direction, organisational coordination, and oversight of school improvement efforts. Teacher involvement ensures that improvement strategies are translated into classroom practice and fosters collective ownership of school initiatives. Data utilisation underpins evidence-based decision-making by enabling schools to diagnose needs, monitor progress, and evaluate intervention outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2020; Carvalho et al., 2023).

SIP implementation occurs through a cyclical process of five interconnected stages. It begins with needs analysis, where schools identify organisational strengths, weaknesses, and improvement priorities using relevant evidence and data. This is followed by goal setting, during which measurable and realistic improvement targets are established. Schools then move to strategic planning and intervention design, developing action plans and allocating resources to achieve the desired outcomes. The fourth stage, collaborative implementation, involves active participation from principals, teachers, and other stakeholders in carrying out the planned interventions. Finally, monitoring and evaluation assess progress, identify areas requiring adjustment, and inform the next planning cycle.

In the Malaysian context, SIP carries particular weight because schools operate within a centralised governance structure in which strategic priorities are largely determined by the Ministry of Education. While national strategic plans provide direction and accountability, SIP gives schools room to contextualise these priorities to local needs and challenges. In this sense, SIP can be viewed as a specialised implementation mechanism that helps schools

translate national goals into targeted, school-level improvement initiatives while cultivating a culture of problem-solving and continuous improvement.

Based on the literature reviewed, the SIP model was selected as the conceptual framework for this article because it explains, in a systematic way, how strategic planning is translated into school improvement action through principal leadership, teacher involvement, and data utilisation. The interaction among these components is illustrated in Figure 1.

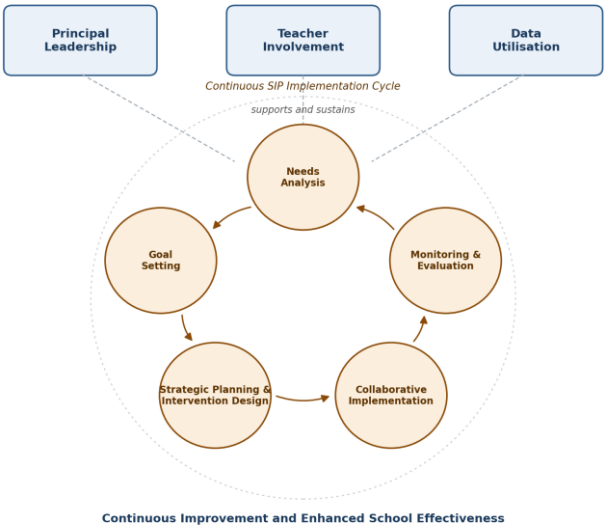


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of School Improvement Planning (SIP)

Having established the conceptual foundation of SIP, the discussion now turns to the literature on principal leadership, teacher involvement, and data utilisation as the key factors shaping SIP implementation and school improvement effectiveness.

## Methodology

This article adopts a comparative review approach to analyse and compare principals' and teachers' perspectives on the implementation of SIP as a strategic school improvement mechanism. A review of this kind is well suited to examining similarities, differences, challenges, and implications across studies that address the same phenomenon from different vantage points, treating the literature itself as the primary source of evidence (Snyder, 2019). This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how different stakeholders interpret and implement SIP within school organisations.

The review focuses on two empirical studies selected for their direct relevance to the purpose of this article. The first, by Carvalho et al. (2023), explores teachers' perspectives on SIP; the second, by Hakouz and Zumpe (2026), examines principals' perspectives on SIP implementation. These studies were chosen because they investigate the same phenomenon from two key stakeholder groups involved in school improvement.

The analysis proceeded through a systematic comparison of the two studies across several dimensions, including research focus, planning processes, stakeholder involvement, strategic implementation, monitoring practices, challenges, and factors contributing to successful SIP implementation. Findings were then organised into major themes using the principles of

thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which helped surface recurring patterns, similarities, and differences between principals' and teachers' perspectives.
The comparative findings were interpreted in relation to strategic planning theory, the school improvement literature, and the Malaysian educational context. This process supported a broader understanding of SIP as a mechanism for translating strategic plans into school-level action and for fostering continuous improvement, and it informed the discussion of current issues, practical implications, and recommendations for strengthening strategic school planning in Malaysian schools.

Table 1
*Summary of the Comparative Review Methodology*

| **Aspect** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| Research Design | Comparative review |
| Focus of Review | SIP as a strategic school improvement mechanism |
| Sources of Evidence | Empirical journal articles |
| Main Studies Reviewed | Carvalho et al. (2023); Hakouz & Zumpe (2026) |
| Unit of Comparison | Principals' and teachers' perspectives |
| Analytical Approach | Comparative thematic analysis and literature synthesis |
| Key Areas Examined | SIP processes, stakeholder involvement, challenges, success factors, and implications |
| Expected Outcome | Identification of similarities, differences, issues, and implications of SIP implementation |

This methodological approach provides a structured basis for comparing stakeholder perspectives and for understanding the role SIP plays in supporting strategic school improvement.

*Comparative Analysis of Principals' and Teachers' Perspectives on School Improvement Planning (SIP)*
The comparative analysis of Carvalho et al. (2023) and Hakouz and Zumpe (2026) shows that principals and teachers share a common goal of strengthening school effectiveness through SIP, even though the two groups approach it from different professional vantage points that reflect their distinct roles within the school organisation.

From the principals' perspective, SIP is primarily a strategic leadership mechanism that supports organisational planning, resource allocation, decision-making, and accountability. Hakouz and Zumpe (2026) found that principals see SIP as an essential tool for translating policy requirements into practical school improvement initiatives. Principals are responsible for setting improvement priorities, coordinating stakeholders, monitoring implementation, and ensuring that school activities align with district or system-level expectations - responsibilities broadly consistent with evidence on transformational leadership among

primary and system-level school leaders (Heenan, Lafferty, & McNamara, 2024). SIP, from this vantage point, functions as a management instrument that promotes organisational coherence and continuous improvement.

Teachers, by contrast, tend to view SIP through the lens of classroom practice and professional learning. Carvalho et al. (2023) found that teachers emphasise participation in planning processes, collaborative practices, and professional development opportunities, and that they consider SIP most effective when they are actively involved in identifying school needs, contributing ideas, and implementing improvement strategies. Their perspective foregrounds ownership, engagement, and professional commitment as conditions for achieving school improvement goals.

The comparison also reveals areas of genuine convergence. Both principals and teachers recognise the value of data-informed decision-making for identifying priorities and evaluating initiatives, and both studies stress that collaboration among stakeholders is critical to successful implementation. Both groups, too, point to similar constraints: limited time, insufficient resources, and mounting organisational demands.

Significant differences remain, however. Principals focus primarily on organisational leadership, accountability, monitoring, and strategic alignment, while teachers place greater weight on professional learning, pedagogical improvement, and meaningful participation in decision-making. These differences are less a matter of disagreement than a reflection of the different responsibilities each group carries within the school improvement process.

Stakeholder engagement is another instructive point of comparison. Hakouz and Zumpe (2026) found that principals actively try to involve teachers, parents, and community members in planning activities in order to bridge external mandates with internal school needs. Carvalho et al. (2023), on the other hand, found that teacher participation is often limited in practice, with planning responsibilities tending to concentrate among a small group of individuals. This discrepancy points to a gap between the collaborative intent of SIP and how it is actually carried out in schools, echoing broader evidence that school improvement capacity tends to strengthen when it is built from the ground up rather than imposed solely from above (Kalman & Lundberg, 2026).

A similar pattern appears in monitoring and evaluation practices. Principals tend to approach monitoring from an organisational standpoint, focusing on performance indicators and accountability requirements, whereas teachers often experience evaluation as constrained by time pressure, administrative demands, and limited technical expertise. This suggests that SIP's effectiveness depends not only on the quality of the plan itself but also on a school's capacity to sustain systematic monitoring over time.

Taken together, the comparative analysis suggests that SIP works best when strategic leadership and active teacher participation are held in balance. Principals provide direction, organisational support, and resource management; teachers translate strategic initiatives into classroom practice. Successful SIP implementation, in other words, depends on bringing these two complementary perspectives together within a shared school improvement framework.

**Discussion**

The findings of this comparative review indicate that SIP functions as a strategic mechanism for translating school improvement goals into coordinated action. Principals and teachers view SIP from different vantage points, but both groups contribute elements that are essential to effective school improvement.

The similarities identified across the two studies can largely be explained by SIP's shared organisational purpose. Whatever their role, both principals and teachers are ultimately working towards better student outcomes, stronger organisational effectiveness, and higher educational quality, which is why both groups converge on the importance of leadership, collaboration, and data utilisation. These shared priorities reflect the underlying principles of continuous improvement and evidence-based decision-making that run through the SIP process.

The differences between principals' and teachers' perspectives, meanwhile, can be traced to their distinct professional responsibilities. Principals answer for organisational leadership, strategic alignment, resource management, and accountability to external stakeholders, so they tend to focus on policy implementation and system-level outcomes. Teachers, who engage directly with teaching and learning, place more weight on instructional practice, professional growth, and participation in decision-making. These are not competing priorities so much as complementary dimensions of the same improvement effort. This complementarity, however, does not arise automatically - a systematic review of systemic school leadership found that collaborative leadership and sustained professional development are what actually translate leadership intent into shared organisational practice, rather than any single leader's vision on its own (White, Lowery, & Johnson, 2025). This points to a further practical implication: principals themselves need continuing, structured support to lead this kind of collaborative improvement work, not only training delivered at the point of appointment (Kenayathulla, Ghani, & Radzi, 2024).

The findings also suggest that SIP is more than a planning framework - it functions as a mechanism for building a problem-solving culture within schools. Through needs analysis, goal setting, intervention planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, SIP encourages schools to identify challenges systematically and develop evidence-based solutions, supporting organisational learning rather than merely satisfying administrative requirements.

Data utilisation emerges as a particularly central theme. Both studies treat data as the foundation for identifying priorities, tracking progress, and informing decisions, yet schools often struggle to sustain systematic monitoring and evaluation because of limited time, resources, and technical expertise. This suggests that effective SIP implementation depends not just on access to data but on building the organisational capacity to interpret and use it meaningfully. A Malaysian model of data-driven decision-making for school leaders similarly identifies this capacity, rather than access to data alone, as the critical competency school leaders need to develop (Shamsuddin & Ahmad Zabidi Abdul Razak, 2023). Emerging tools such as AI-assisted analytics may eventually ease part of this burden by helping school leaders process and interpret data more efficiently, though evidence on their use in instructional leadership is still at an early stage (Berkovich, 2025).

Collaboration is the other recurring theme. School improvement is unlikely to succeed through leadership initiatives or classroom-level effort alone; it requires genuine partnership among principals, teachers, and other stakeholders. Principals create the conditions that make improvement possible, while teachers carry out the strategies that directly shape student learning - making school improvement a collective responsibility rather than the task of any single group. A longitudinal multiple case study of school improvement initiatives reached a similar conclusion: specific principal leadership practices - rather than leadership in the abstract - were what predicted whether teacher collaboration and organisational change actually took hold over time (Meyer, Hartung-Beck, Gronostaj, Krüger, & Richter, 2023).

In the Malaysian context, these dynamics carry particular weight, since schools operate within a centralised and hierarchical governance structure in which strategic priorities are largely set by the Ministry of Education. SIP can function there as a specialised mechanism that lets schools contextualise national priorities to local needs, rather than replacing the strategic planning framework set centrally. The specific issues this raises for Malaysian schools are examined more closely in the next section.

Overall, this review suggests that SIP's effectiveness rests on integrating principal leadership, teacher involvement, and data utilisation within a continuous improvement cycle. Rather than treating principals' and teachers' perspectives as separate or competing, school improvement efforts should recognise them as mutually reinforcing parts of a single strategic planning process - one that builds sustainable improvement, strengthens organisational capacity, and enhances educational outcomes.

*Issues Related to Strategic School Improvement Planning (SIP) in Malaysia*

Strategic planning is an essential component of educational management in Malaysia because it provides a framework for aligning school initiatives with national priorities, organisational goals, and local improvement needs. However, the effectiveness of school-level strategic planning is shaped by the broader governance environment, including the degree of school autonomy, accountability requirements, data-use capacity, professional capability, and organisational culture. These issues have become increasingly significant as Malaysia moves towards more differentiated approaches to school development and greater emphasis on school-level responsiveness. Under the Ministry of Education's School Reform agenda, schools are differentiated as Focus Schools, Aspirational Schools, and Inspirational Schools, while the RPM 2026–2035 places greater emphasis on strengthening guided autonomy within educational institutions (KPM, 2026). These developments increase the importance of strategic planning mechanisms that enable schools to interpret their circumstances, establish appropriate priorities, mobilise resources, and implement evidence-informed improvement actions while remaining aligned with national educational directions.

*School Autonomy and Strategic Planning in a Changing Governance Context*

One of the more persistent issues affecting strategic planning in Malaysia is the limited autonomy schools have in formulating and implementing strategic priorities. The Malaysian education system continues to operate within a highly centralised and hierarchical governance structure in which strategic directions, performance indicators, and policy priorities are set by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE). Schools are, as a result, generally required to align their planning with national and district-level expectations.

While this ensures consistency in policy implementation, it can also limit schools' ability to develop context-specific strategies that address local needs and challenges. A comparison of Malaysian cluster schools with autonomous schools in the United Kingdom illustrates the point: schools granted greater decision-making latitude were better able to tailor strategic and curricular choices to their own context, whereas Malaysian schools operating under tighter central oversight had comparatively little room to do so (Nor, Mansor, & Suliman, 2018). Schools often end up functioning primarily as policy implementers rather than as autonomous organisations capable of setting their own strategic priorities, which raises a fair question about how much school-level planning genuinely reflects local realities. Under the Ministry of Education's School Reform agenda, schools are categorised as Focus Schools, Aspirational Schools, and Inspirational Schools, reflecting differences in their developmental conditions and improvement needs (KPM, 2026). This differentiated approach suggests that school improvement cannot always be based on a uniform set of strategies or interventions. Schools may require different priorities, resources, forms of support, and improvement pathways depending on their particular circumstances. Consequently, strategic planning at school level needs to be sufficiently flexible to recognise and respond to these differences while remaining aligned with national educational priorities.

*Strategic Planning as a Compliance-Oriented Activity*

A related issue concerns the tendency for strategic planning to become a compliance-driven exercise. In many cases, schools focus on preparing planning documents to satisfy administrative requirements and accountability measures rather than treating strategic planning as a tool for organisational learning and improvement.

This review suggests that external mandates, rigid timelines, and reporting requirements can push schools towards procedural compliance rather than meaningful improvement effort. Strategic planning may then be experienced as an administrative obligation rather than a mechanism for identifying problems, implementing interventions, and improving school effectiveness - a shift that can weaken its intended impact and dampen stakeholder commitment. This concern is reinforced by a systematic review of teacher workload, which found that the growing volume of administrative and documentation duties tied to planning and reporting requirements leaves teachers with less time and energy for the reflective, improvement-oriented work that strategic planning is meant to encourage (Abdullah & Md Hassan, 2024).

*SIP as a Specialised School Improvement Mechanism*

Given the limited autonomy schools have, SIP can serve as a specialised mechanism that lets schools contextualise strategic priorities to local needs. Rather than replacing the strategic planning framework set by the MOE, SIP complements it by allowing schools to identify specific challenges, analyse relevant data, design targeted interventions, and evaluate outcomes systematically.

This role becomes particularly relevant within the context of differentiated school development and guided autonomy. Where schools differ in their improvement needs, a uniform strategy may not always provide an equally appropriate response. SIP offers a structured process through which schools can identify specific challenges, examine relevant evidence, establish priorities, design targeted interventions, and monitor outcomes. Such

processes can help schools connect national educational expectations with local organisational realities.

Through needs analysis, goal setting, implementation, and monitoring, SIP offers a practical way of translating broad strategic objectives into school-level action. This helps schools become more responsive to local circumstances while staying aligned with national educational priorities, strengthening the effectiveness of strategic planning overall by bridging the gap between policy expectations and school realities.

*Data Utilisation and Data Literacy*

The effectiveness of strategic planning depends heavily on the quality of decision-making within schools. Although data-driven decision-making is widely promoted in educational management, its use remains inconsistent across schools, with some institutions still relying more on assumptions, experience, or intuition than on the systematic analysis of evidence.

This points to the importance of strengthening data literacy among school leaders and teachers. Effective SIP implementation requires stakeholders to collect, interpret, and apply data meaningfully in planning and decision-making. Without adequate data literacy, schools may struggle to identify the root causes of problems and design effective interventions - a challenge that is not unique to Malaysia. A recent scoping review of teacher data literacy research found much the same pattern internationally: translating data into instructional or planning decisions remains difficult for teachers even where data systems themselves are well established (Pastore, 2026). Within Malaysia specifically, an expert-validated competency model for data-driven decision-making found that school leaders themselves recognise data literacy - not merely access to data - as the critical skill that needs to be developed if data is to meaningfully inform school planning (Shamsuddin & Ahmad Zabidi Abdul Razak, 2023).

*Professional Capacity and Collaborative Culture*

The success of strategic planning and SIP also depends on the professional capacity of school leaders and teachers. Principals are expected to demonstrate competencies in leadership, change management, programme evaluation, and strategic decision-making, while teachers need knowledge and skills in planning, collaboration, and data analysis.

Equally important is a collaborative school culture. Effective school improvement requires shared ownership, collective responsibility, and active participation from all stakeholders. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), instructional coaching, and collaborative decision-making can all contribute to a supportive environment for implementing SIP. A qualitative study of Malaysian mathematics teachers found that PLCs served as the vehicle through which a genuine culture of disciplined collaboration took hold, with reflective dialogue among teachers eventually translating into changed classroom practice (Mohd Zabidi, Abdullah, & Sumintono, 2023) - a dynamic that mirrors the kind of teacher engagement SIP is intended to cultivate. In Malaysia, capacity-building efforts such as the School Improvement Specialist Coaches Plus (SISC+) programme illustrate how targeted coaching support can strengthen teacher competencies and, by extension, a school's readiness to carry out structured improvement planning (Yan, Na, Alam, Masukujjaman, & Lu, 2022).

*Promoting a Problem-Solving Culture through SIP*

Perhaps SIP's most significant contribution is its potential to build a problem-solving culture within schools. Rather than focusing solely on activities and compliance requirements, SIP encourages schools to identify problems systematically, analyse their underlying causes, design evidence-based interventions, and evaluate outcomes on an ongoing basis.

This supports organisational learning and continuous improvement by encouraging schools to reflect on their practices and make informed adjustments when necessary. In that sense, SIP can serve as a valuable mechanism for fostering innovation, adaptability, and sustainable school improvement within the Malaysian education system.

**Conclusion**

This comparative review examined principals' and teachers' perspectives on School Improvement Planning (SIP) as a strategic school improvement mechanism. The analysis indicates that SIP provides a structured framework for translating strategic priorities into systematic school improvement through needs analysis, goal setting, intervention planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Its effectiveness, however, depends on the organisational conditions in which planning is undertaken, particularly the interaction between leadership, teacher involvement, collaboration, and data-informed decision-making.

The review shows that principals and teachers share a common commitment to improving school effectiveness, although they emphasise different dimensions of SIP implementation. Principals tend to focus on strategic leadership, organisational management, accountability, resource coordination, and monitoring, while teachers place greater emphasis on participation, professional learning, collaboration, and the practical translation of improvement initiatives into teaching and learning. These perspectives should not be viewed as competing positions. Rather, they represent complementary dimensions of school improvement, with principals providing strategic direction and organisational support while teachers contribute professional knowledge and translate improvement priorities into practice.

The review further highlights that effective SIP depends on the integration of leadership, teacher participation, and data utilisation within a continuous improvement process. Leadership without meaningful professional participation may encourage compliance rather than ownership, while teacher involvement without strategic coordination may result in fragmented initiatives. Similarly, access to data alone does not guarantee evidence-informed decision-making; schools require the professional and organisational capacity to interpret and use evidence meaningfully. SIP is therefore most effective when these elements operate collectively as part of an organisational learning process.

The Malaysian context gives these findings additional significance. Historically, school-level strategic planning has operated within a relatively centralised and hierarchical governance structure. However, recent policy developments, including the School Reform agenda RPM 2026–2035, signal greater attention to differentiated school development and guided autonomy. The recognition of Focus Schools, Aspirational Schools, and Inspirational Schools highlights differences in schools' developmental needs, while greater emphasis on guided

autonomy increases the importance of school-level capacity to make informed and accountable decisions (KPM, 2026). Within this evolving context, SIP can function as a complementary mechanism that helps schools translate national priorities into contextually relevant improvement actions without disconnecting school-level decision-making from broader system expectations.

The significance of SIP therefore extends beyond the preparation of planning documents. It lies in its potential to strengthen a school's capacity to identify meaningful problems, use evidence, engage professional stakeholders, coordinate improvement actions, and learn from implementation. When approached in this way, SIP can contribute to a culture of continuous improvement, collaborative problem-solving, and organisational learning. Such an approach is particularly important as Malaysian schools navigate the balance between national coherence and local responsiveness. In conclusion, this review suggests that the effectiveness of SIP depends on bringing principals' strategic responsibilities and teachers' professional perspectives into a shared improvement process. Strengthening collaborative leadership, meaningful teacher involvement, data-informed decision-making, and organisational capacity can enable schools to use SIP more effectively as a strategic mechanism for sustained and context-responsive school improvement.

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