



RESEARCH PAPER

Leadership Evaluation Using Baldrige Quality Framework: A Case of M. Phil Special Education Programs

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ABSTRACT

The study intends to assess the leadership practices of MPhil special education programs' by applying Baldrige Quality, and to identify strengths and weaknesses as opined by HoDs, faculty and students. Leadership is pivotal for excellence and continuous improvement. The Baldrige Quality Framework has become a recognized approach for evaluating leadership practices. However, research examining leadership in Special Education Programs aligned using the Baldrige Quality Framework is lacking. A qualitative research approach using narrative study for program evaluation was employed. Purposive sampling technique was used to sample program leadership, faculty, and students. Data collection was through semi structured interviews and document analysis. The study found general moderate alignment between leadership practices and the Baldrige Quality Framework, with fair strengths in alignment with organizational goals, communication, continuous improvement, and inclusivity. Areas for improvement include refining success metrics, enhancing student support systems, and placing greater emphasis on benchmarking. The study recommends that leadership should focus on refining success metrics, enhancing student support systems, and placing greater emphasis on benchmarking.

KEYWORDS Baldrige Quality Framework, Continuous Improvement, Leadership Practices, Program Evaluation, Special Education

Introduction

Leadership plays a major role in ensuring the success of special education programs. A review of the Baldrige Quality Framework in the sphere of education provides an exhaustive tool for identifying important characteristics such as leadership and strategic planning that improve organizational prowess (NIST, 2023). The purpose of this study is to explore whether MPhil special education programs meet the quality framework criteria established by the Baldrige Quality Assurance Framework, taking into account the perceptions of both faculty and students (NIST, 2023). Although leadership is becoming more critical in educational programs and the Baldrige Quality Framework is increasingly used in organizational evaluations, more research needs to be conducted to examine leadership practices within Special Education Programs and their alignment with the Baldrige Quality Framework.

Yücel and Başkurt (2011) report valuable insights into the effectiveness of leadership practices in MPhil special education program and their alignment with the Baldrige Quality Framework. These insights can help inform educational policy and practice. Providing practical recommendations for improving leadership effectiveness and program performance

in special education programs is the purpose of this study. This study uses a rigorous and comprehensive evaluation approach based on the Baldrige Quality Framework to evaluate leadership practices in MPhil special education programs and contribute to ongoing efforts to improve special education.

An evaluation approach grounded in the Baldrige Framework helps inform educational policy and practice. As a result, the study contributes to developing knowledge about leadership in special education and provides practical suggestions for improving leadership effectiveness and program outcomes. This study aims to benefit policymakers, administrators, educators, and scholars (Hallinger, 2005). Research outcomes can alter policy, guide leadership development endeavors, illuminate faculty development domains, and increase scholastic achievement and student engagement (Amjad et al., 2023).

The Baldrige Quality Framework emphasizes perspicuous communication of an organization's vision, mission, and values. This requires not only formulating these elements, but also disseminating them throughout the institution. The organizational goals are to be better understood and committed to when everyone on the team is in sync. The Baldrige Framework also stipulates the importance of ethical governance, societal altruism, and unceasing progress as characteristics of organizational culture. Leaders have a responsibility to act in accordance with such ideals, both individually and institutionally. By examining stakeholder perspectives, this study provides a multilayered insight into leadership strengths and weaknesses. The implications are profound, presenting a strategy for improving educational outcomes and leadership efficacy. Essentially, the research fills an acknowledged knowledge gap, enhances methodological rigor, improves our understanding of leadership effectiveness, and provides actionable suggestions to enrich program operations. In this regard, the study provides a rich resource for stakeholders looking to enhance MPhil special education program quality and impact.

Literature Review

Studies have explored the key aspects of leadership effectiveness in emphasizing alignment with the Baldrige Quality Framework (NIST, 2023). In quality management, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) model emphasizes leadership (Anastasiadis et al., 2017). Empirical studies and theoretical discourse cover a range of leadership strategies such as transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership and their influence on Educational Programs (Amjad et al., 2022; Harris, 2013; Wang et al., 2018). Additionally, it evaluates how the Baldrige Quality Framework serves as a crucial tool in evaluating these diverse leadership strategies. Professional conduct and personal readiness can be evaluated using the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework (Stanley, 2021). Baldrige quality framework can help identify areas for improvement and determine the readiness for quality application (Mohammad & Oduoza, 2019). The study also flags areas set for future investigation, including which Baldrige elements are most relevant to special education and the role of alternative leadership styles.

One significant highlight of this review consists of pinpointing the existing research gaps. There is a need to explore the role of various contextual factors on leadership effectiveness, the Baldrige Framework can be used to match special education's unique needs, and the long-term impacts of leadership strategies on program outcomes. Using the Baldrige excellence framework criteria, performance measurement system can be built (Amjad et al., 2020; Matondang et al., 2018). To improve performance one of the important aspects is human resources. Leaders are responsible for achieving desired results by working within the strategic plan and evaluating and reorganizing their organizations around customers and staff (Roberts et al., 2020; Tabbasam et al., 2023). To establish new research avenues, the study

aims to gain a broader understanding of the role leadership plays in improving MPhil Special Education Programs, thereby enhancing policies and practices that support the educational progress of special education students.

As the Baldrige model indicates, leadership is the main driver of the quality system in any organization (Anastasiadou & Taraza, 2019). Effective leadership is crucial for providing high-quality services and driving continuous improvement in special education programs (Amjad et al., 2023a; Boscardin, 2007). The literature highlights several leadership strategies that have been found to be effective in improving the quality of special education programs. Transformational leadership has been shown to positively impact the performance of special education programs (Wang et al., 2018). Leaders who exhibit transformational leadership inspire and motivate their staff to achieve higher levels of performance and contribute to the overall improvement of the program. They foster a shared vision, provide individualized support, and encourage innovation and growth among their team members.

Distributed leadership involves delegating responsibilities and decision-making authority to various organization members (Amjad et al., 2022a; Harris, 2013). This approach effectively promotes a collaborative culture and shared responsibility for improving special education programs. By empowering staff members at all levels to take ownership of their roles and contribute to decision-making processes, distributed leadership enhances collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving capabilities within the program (Spillane, 2006).

Instructional leadership emphasizes the role of leaders in promoting high-quality instruction and student learning outcomes (Hallinger, 2005). Instructional leaders focus on supporting teachers and other staff in implementing evidence-based practices, providing professional development opportunities, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Institutional performance results are directly impacted by leadership in terms of strategic planning, information and analysis, stakeholders' focus, and student focus (Amjad et al., 2022b; Ah-Teck & Starr, 2013). They prioritize student achievement and ensure that instructional strategies are aligned with the unique needs of students in special education programs.

The Baldrige Quality Framework is used to evaluate the efficacy of leadership approaches in MPhil Special Education Programs. Leadership has a direct, positive influence on measurement, information and analysis, strategic planning, and customer satisfaction as part of the Baldrige quality framework (Mai et al., 2018). This review focuses on leadership criteria within the framework to understand their impact on educational outcomes. Leadership is a multifaceted construct characterized by opacity and contradiction; leadership style, behavior, and traits are often at odds with one another (Alsarrani et al., 2021). The first aspect in the Baldrige Framework emphasizes the importance of aligned vision, mission, and values in MPhil Special Education Programs. Effective leaders are committed to a compelling vision that addresses the unique needs of their students. The second aspect, according to NIST, highlights the need for a well-designed leadership system in achieving program goals. As per Baldrige Framework leadership drive the model, and this can be seen in other quality practices, including strategic quality management, information and analysis, process quality management, and human resources (Parast et al., 2023). Leaders need a strategic plan that resonates with the mission and vision. Moreover, performance indicators and tracking processes are essential for guiding effective leadership actions. The third NIST aspect highlights how effective leaders cultivate an environment that champions improvement, collaboration, and collective responsibility. This welcoming culture, driven by open communication and innovation, engages all stakeholders in elevating the program. Several factors, such as information management, knowledge management, process quality

management, and human resource development, are impacted by leadership (Parast & Safari, 2022; Qureshi et al., 2023).

Incorporating the Baldrige Quality Framework into the assessment of leadership strategies provides a systematic method for evaluating the effectiveness of leadership roles in MPhil Special Education Programs. It is the leadership that has a significant impact on the implementation of quality practices (Amjad et al., 2023b; Parast & Golmohammadi, 2019). Other than the focus on vision, mission, and values, this literature review also focuses on aspects of the framework such as leadership system and organizational culture. Quality management (QM) within the Baldrige excellence framework is influenced by leadership and information system-oriented constructs (Xie et al., 2022). By analysing these elements, the study seeks to furnish researchers and practitioners with a nuanced understanding of leadership practices and their impact on the performance of special education programs. Consequently, this review aspires to contribute to existing knowledge on special education leadership, setting a scholarly foundation for future research endeavours. It also accentuates the imperative nature of competent leadership in advancing the efficacy and ongoing improvement of MPhil Special Education Programs.

Empirical research supports the utility of the Baldrige Quality Framework for assessing leadership in special education programs. Key findings indicate that transformational, distributed, and instructional leadership types notably enhance program performance. Specifically, studies from various geographical settings and educational contexts have affirmed the positive influence of adept leadership practices like collaboration and communication on continuous program betterment. Senior management, governance, and societal contributions are important leadership factors, strategies must be designed and implemented properly (Alda, 2021; Amjad et al., 2021). This body of research furnishes strong evidence for the applicability of the Baldrige Quality Framework in evaluating leadership strategies for MPhil Special Education Programs. This review delves into how the Baldrige Quality Framework serves as a useful lens for scrutinizing leadership tactics in MPhil Special Education Programs. The current literature lauds the efficacy of transformational, distributed, and instructional leadership for perpetual advancements in such settings. Empirical research confirms the framework's applicability for this specific evaluation.

Material and Methods

For program evaluation, this study employs a Program Oriented, Objective Based evaluation approach using a qualitative research methodology to examine leadership practices in MPhil special education programs. Data were gathered primarily through interviews targeting key stakeholders: program leaders, faculty members, and students. Moreover, document analysis reviewed essential program materials, such as vision and mission statements, goals, and learning outcomes, both at the student and program levels.

The Program Oriented- Objective Based approach evaluates the program components concerning the program objectives. The methodology in this study was specifically designed to examine leadership practices in the MPhil special education programs. Various stakeholders were interviewed to understand how their experiences and perceptions align with the Program's overarching objectives. Document analysis supplemented the interviews.

A sample of 15 individuals associated with the MPhil special education programs (in a public and a private university) included the Program's leadership, faculty, and students. Purposive sampling was used to select participants, constrained by their availability and willingness to participate in the study. Despite its limited generalizability, the insights gained

from this study contribute significantly to our understanding of leadership practices in special education programs.

Three different sets of interview questions were developed, each targeting a different stakeholder group. A pilot test was conducted with special education experts to ensure content validity. The questionnaire was revised to fit the study's objectives better using their feedback. The validity and reliability of the instrument were strengthened through this iterative process.

Program-oriented- Objective-based approaches provide a robust methodological base for this study. Exploring the effectiveness, alignment, and impact of leadership practices facilitates a comprehensive assessment of program goals and leadership practices. Using qualitative methods, including triangulation of data sources and targeted interview questions, the study aims to contribute towards valuable findings and recommendations to the burgeoning field of special education leadership.

The most critical aspect of today's research ecosystem is gathering insightful and authentic data. A variety of methods can be used to collect such data within the context of educational programs. Semi-structured interviews stand out among these because of their flexibility and depth. This method targets key participants such as faculty and students, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the program's efficiency and areas that may need improvement. A data collection exercise can only succeed with the right participants. Individuals were selected according to their roles within the educational program for this study. Participants were interviewed, including program directors, educators, and students, who are the ultimate beneficiaries. The data reflected all stakeholders involved by carefully selecting interviewees, enhancing its credibility and depth.

These semi-structured interviews combine predetermined questions with organic, follow-up conversations. This dual approach to questioning maintained a stable foundation for each interview while allowing room to probe deeper into aspects that merited a closer look. Data collected from this equilibrium have a multidimensional quality.



Fig. 1, Source: Braun and Clark's (2006) Guide to Six-Phases of Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (using Spradely Semantic Relation taxonomy, 1998) was used to examine the extensive dataset, uncovering recurring patterns and viewpoints. These themes resulted from a focus on common perceptions, shared experiences, and constructive suggestions.

As a result, a comprehensive, authentic dataset was developed that provided a comprehensive view of how the educational program was performing. Insights gained from this method were insightful and actionable, whether used to assess its effectiveness or determine areas that need refinement.

Table 1
Participant's Demographics

S.No.	Pseudo Name	Role	Gender
1	Quality Leader	2 Senior Member of Quality Dept, of Universities	M-F
2	Program Leader	2 Heads of Special Education Programs	M-F
3	Faculty	4 Resource Persons of MPhil Special Education program	2M-2F
4	Students	MPhil Final Semester	4M-3F

Results and Discussion

In the context of assessing how effectively leadership practices align with the Baldrige Quality Framework for excellence and ongoing betterment in an MPhil program for special education, the data reveals a multi-faceted approach. The leadership underscores the pivotal role of alignment with the organization's broader goals. They focus on outcome-based education and establish objectives that concur with the mission statement of the institute. Such a practice evidently resonates with Baldrige's focus on vision and strategy-driven performance.

The importance of communication cannot be overstated. Leaders wield both formal and informal channels to disseminate program objectives. They employ presentations, prospectuses, social media, and admission office liaisons. This robust communication practice aligns with the Baldrige criteria for customer focus by ensuring that students, staff, and faculty remain conversant with the program's goals. Emphasizing constant improvement and innovation, leaders undertake regular updates, revisions, and involve a diverse panel of experts for feedback. Periodic minor and major updates are conducted every three years, indicating a systematic approach to improvement, adherent to Baldrige guidelines. The program accentuates inclusivity and accessibility. Leaders adhere to international norms and offer resources for students with special needs, including a Disability Resource Centre. This aligns well with Baldrige's focus on valuing people.

Another pillar is the strong support for research activities. Notably, students are not only encouraged but also facilitated through well-equipped labs and qualified mentors. Here, the alignment with the Baldrige framework is evident in the leadership's approach to encouraging knowledge management and process efficiency. Evaluation mechanisms such as post-graduation tracking, and corporate surveys also exist. Sustainability and adaptability receive attention through continuous benchmarking, which runs parallel to Baldrige's focus on measurement, analysis, and knowledge management. The program is committed to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion, with courses that refine students into responsible citizens, once more aligning with the Baldrige framework's community focus.

In short, the leadership's practices in this MPhil special education program showcase a strong alignment with multiple aspects of the Baldrige Quality Framework, effectively promoting excellence and continuous improvement.

While examining faculty perspectives on leadership practices within the MPhil special education program, the overarching sentiment appears positive, with specific points of feedback that align closely with the Baldrige Quality Framework. Faculty members are deeply entrenched in shaping the program's objectives, with a lucid understanding of its alignment with the university's overarching goals. They highlight the program's focus on preparing adept researchers in emerging fields like special education and inclusive education. Faculty also emphasize a robust implementation of universal design for learning, though they note a

dearth of students with special needs at the MPhil level in comparison to undergraduate courses. This observation reflects the program's responsiveness to a diverse range of student needs. Moreover, faculty express satisfaction with the program's preparation for self-reliant teaching roles. Many students in the program are already employed in the special education sector, and the program reportedly aids in honing their professional skills. Furthermore, the program champions inclusivity and accessibility, cited by faculty as refusing no one on the basis of disability. Various examples of successful graduates with different impairments lend credence to these claims. Faculty also applaud the program's promotion of research activities, with a concerted effort to integrate research into all courses. The curriculum, they say, adapts swiftly to changing demands, incorporating fresh technologies and methodologies as they become accessible. Communication channels within the program are also viewed favorably, creating an environment of transparent decision-making.

Despite these strengths, faculty did advocate for more departmental autonomy, identifying a certain lack of it as an impediment to achieving the program's core mission: promoting inclusive education. Overall, the faculty perceive the program as a conducive environment that largely meets the Baldrige Quality Framework criteria, albeit with room for targeted improvements, especially concerning departmental autonomy.

Given the extensive feedback from students enrolled in the MPhil Special Education program, a multifaceted picture emerges when analyzed through the Baldrige Quality Framework.

Strengths of the Program

A variety of enriching courses: Students find the curriculum robust, covering aspects from research methods to special education policies and comparative education. They lauded the program for moving beyond traditional paradigms.

Faculty Dedication: The staff's commitment to ensuring quality education stands out. Students perceive their instructors as supportive, cooperative, and empathetic.

Practical Orientation: Fieldwork is viewed as a strong component, aiding skill development and knowledge application.

Program Accessibility: Students appreciate the manageability of the curriculum and easy program access.

Areas for Improvement

Infrastructure: Unanimously, students call for architectural enhancements to accommodate individuals with physical disabilities, such as ramps and accessible washrooms.

Curriculum Modernization: Criticism surrounds the program's lack of practical implementations, specifically in areas like assistive technology. Students yearn for more hands-on experiences and resources.

Teaching Methods: Some students argue that the faculty could engage more directly in teaching intricate subjects rather than delegating all responsibilities to the students.

Specialization: The call for specialist teachers in particular fields of special education echoes in the feedback.

Impact on Program Performance

The program's strong curricular framework and faculty commitment contribute significantly to its overall efficacy. Nevertheless, shortcomings in infrastructure and curriculum modernization risk dampening the program's impact, particularly for students with physical disabilities or those desiring more practical experience. Some students express that these limitations have impeded their full academic and practical development. Students highlight the value of supportive structures like the Student Success Initiative and Disabled Resource Centre but suggest the need for more. Suggestions range from advanced technology integration to more opportunities for public awareness efforts through seminars and conferences.

The data thus suggests a well-regarded yet flawed program, requiring a balanced approach to reform that considers both its academic rigor and the diverse needs of its student body for true quality education. In summarizing the outcomes delineated in this section, the study undertook a methodical analysis of qualitative data, identifying and organizing various codes into salient themes. These themes fundamentally focus on the leadership mechanisms in place within the MPhil special education program.

By aligning these identified themes with the parameters set by the Baldrige Quality Framework, insights were gleaned about Management, faculty, and student perceptions, as well as strengths and areas requiring amelioration, according to Baldrige standards. This exploration thus lays the groundwork for an in-depth examination and interpretation of the collected data.

In this analytical examination, five overarching themes have emerged, delineating the leadership qualities of the MPhil special education program. The study highlights a robust alignment with organizational objectives

- Lauds the efficacy of goal and objective communication.
- Program leaders nurture an environment conducive to ceaseless improvement and ingenuity
- Showing unwavering support for research endeavors.
- On the diversity, equity, and inclusion, the program manifests noteworthy commitment, in alignment with the Baldrige Quality Framework.

Strengths encompass a broad range of leadership criteria within the Baldrige framework, including but not limited to, alignment with the university's vision, open lines of communication, promotion of improvement and ingenuity, robust research support, and the fostering of a diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture. However, it becomes clear that improvement opportunities also exist. Refinement in success metrics, escalated emphasis on benchmarking, and bolstered student support systems are areas cited for amelioration. Overall, the leadership practices of the MPhil special education program align well with the principles of the Baldrige Quality Framework. To elevate the program's effectiveness even further, attention to the designated improvement areas would be advantageous.

Conclusion

The findings corroborate that the leadership practices of the MPhil Special Education program predominantly conform to the tenets outlined by the Baldrige Quality Framework. Particularly impressive are the program's strategies concerning alignment with overarching institutional aims, clarity in goal articulation, commitment to continual betterment and innovation, staunch backing for scholarly activities, and an active agenda promoting

diversity, equity, and inclusion. Nonetheless, certain gaps emerge, signaling areas ripe for amelioration. Most notably, these involve the need to fine-tune success indicators, to accentuate benchmarking endeavors, and to amplify the existing student support infrastructure. By attending to these shortcomings, a palpable augmentation in the program's leadership efficacy could ensue, ultimately enhancing its capability to accomplish its core mission of grooming adept researchers and educators in the realms of special and inclusive education. Moreover, the research punctuates the imperative of unceasing introspection and stakeholder feedback as instrumental in honing leadership competencies and advocating programmatic excellence. Thus, the study posits that effective leadership within educational frameworks is inherently fluid, demanding unwavering diligence to stay aligned with validated best practices, such as those enshrined in the Baldrige Quality Framework. Conclusively, the research accentuates the necessity to tailor frameworks like Baldrige to the idiosyncratic context and prerequisites of each educational setting. Prospective studies should delve deeper into the mechanics of this customization process, scrutinizing the evolutionary arc of leadership methodologies in response to such adaptive strategies.

Recommendations

The study yields several key recommendations aimed at refining the leadership paradigms within the MPhil Special Education program. These suggestions, when heeded, stand to fortify the program's congruence with the Baldrige Quality Framework's tenets. Leaders should sharpen their focus on ensuring their program mirrors the institution's grander mission and objectives. Organizing regular training sessions can disseminate such alignment among all stakeholders effectively. While laudable strides have been made in the realm of transparent communication, furthering this initiative via frequent, in-depth updates on program strategy can be disseminated using digital platforms. For continual enhancement, the study recommends program benchmarking against global standards and injecting more innovative components like specialized courses and workshops. Moreover, leaders could benefit from intensifying their scrutiny of program inclusivity, introducing more resources catering to students with diverse needs, including those physically disabled. Support for research endeavors should be heightened through resource allocation, research collaborations, and curriculum-based research integration. Leaders to also consider crafting more nuanced metrics for assessing program effectiveness, veering away from merely enrolment figures to include facets like student contentment and post-graduation prospects. In terms of adaptability and endurance, more regular program audits to be ensured and alignment with shifting educational norms and student necessities. Amplifying the support infrastructure for students can further contribute to program excellence. The commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion remains paramount and to be continually bolstered, possibly by creating avenues for students hailing from diverse backgrounds. In essence, addressing these multifaceted recommendations could bring about considerable improvements in the program's leadership, better aligning it with the Baldrige Quality Framework and fostering an environment of unceasing advancement and quality.

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