

RESEARCH ARTICLE

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AMONG PRINCIPALS OF PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN JOHOR

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ABSTRACT

Transformational leadership is a leadership style in which charismatic, knowledgeable, skilled leaders express their vision through effective communication and ensure the organization's vision is achieved. They are always visionary, adapt to change and always motivate and inspire their subordinates. Apart from having extensive experience, appointed private school principals have attended various trainings and courses related to school leadership and management. Even with what they have been through, there are various issues related to the competence of private high school principals in Malaysia. This study aims to examine the transformational leadership practices of principal, analyze the challenges and implementation of strategies for the transformational leadership practices of private secondary school principals in Johor. The Follow-up Explanatory Combination Study Method uses a sequential explanatory study design. There are three instruments used which are questionnaires, interviews and observations. This study involved 255 people as respondents in the quantitative study, while for the qualitative study, 4 principals were involved as participants, while all administrators, teachers and students from four schools were involved in the observation process. The quantitative data analysis using IBM SPSS Statistic 23 and N-Vivo 12 for qualitative data. The findings of the study show that principals of private secondary schools in Johor have charisma, proactive and inspirational motivation. They practice the four dimensions of transformational leadership which are determining the direction, developing people, structuring the organization and managing the instructional program.

KEYWORDS

Transformational Leadership, School Principals, Private High Schools, Determining Direction, Developing People, Structuring Organizations, Managing Instructional Program

1. INTRODUCTION

National education is facing a new boom which is the phase of 21st century education and Industrial Revolution 4.0. Education plays the most important function in the development of human resources for the development of the country in the future. Effective educational leadership plays an important role in the school education system in Malaysia and leadership among school leaders in Malaysia should also change into a new model for better improvement (Azar et al., 2020). According to recent study, schools need to consider the rapid changes in today's world. One of the most effective leadership approaches for this era is transformational leadership and it is the most researched approach (Sagnak et al., 2015). Transformational leaders encourage employees to try new things and be bold in taking risks.

Transformational leadership became a major focus in education and researchers began to want to know more about this leadership. A literature review shows that the theory of transformational leadership is not only for reforms, but also for leaders to motivate their followers to generate reforms in the world of education (Kirven, 2021). Transformational leaders can create a positive and healthy culture that motivates staff and improves teacher performance (Quin et al., 2015). A school transformational leader is a leader who aspires to school citizens by giving importance to the development of followers, changes the awareness of followers about the issues that arise by helping them refine problems and is able to please and inspire his followers to work hard

towards achieving the direction together (Norharlinda, 2018). The principal's transformational leadership is particularly liked by teachers because the principal's ability to improve the school atmosphere becomes more supportive and develop an inspiring vision that all teachers can follow (Kirven, 2021).

School leaders indeed play an important role in producing successful and high-performing schools. Successful and effective leaders are responsible for the performance of themselves, all school members and the school organization. The relationship and collaboration between the principal, the school community and the society must be good and strong. Without good relationships, the school cannot achieve the school's vision (Fullan, 2016). The school leaders must also have the knowledge and expertise to manage the organization and structure the organization according to the needs and currents of change so that the organization's goals are achieved (Jamilah and Yusof, 2011). Transformational leadership helps school principals to shape attitudes and help to move the school go forward (O'Donnell, 2021). The success of a school depends heavily on the leader who is the school principal.

The development of private education has provided various alternative options for parents. Public schools and private schools can compete well in developing the education system in Malaysia. Academic achievement of students is always a priority for parents. Several studies have found that school academic achievement is one of the main criteria in guiding parents to choose the right school for their children (Yaacob et al., 2014). Every

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parent wants to provide the best educational environment for their children. The decision to select the type of school is usually based on factors such as the family's social, economic and cultural position. In recent decades, the private sector has emerged as an important resource in providing education in Malaysia for all levels. Private schools have improved their quality and promoted a conducive environment for students (Alyani et al., 2015).

In overcoming the educational challenges, the secondary school level education is one of the areas that should be given special attention. In the pursuit of excellence in secondary education, various issues and challenges faced by the schools including the leadership of private secondary school principals. The first issue is the principals' weakness in determining direction. There are weak principals leadership in some private schools in Malaysia, where some of them act as an administrator and not as an effective professional leader (Ghavifekr and Mohammad, 2020). The role of the principal is as the leader and the manager of the school who determines the school's mission, vision and direction and the principal's duties require different experience and knowledge than ordinary teachers.

The second issue is the problem of human development in schools. The results of the study on three types of Malaysian private schools show that the implementation of knowledge improvement programs in Malaysian private schools is still very lacking. The generation of teaching and learning effectiveness in private schools focuses more on the achievement of school goals, on the other hand, teacher involvement in professional development programs is not done much in private schools. The third issue is seen from the principal's lack of knowledge and skills in structuring the organization. There are a few principals who do not develop structures to foster teachers' participation in school decision-making and lack good relationships with parents and the community. Parental involvement in private schools is still passive. A study also found that the two-way relationship between the principal and the teachers does not exist because many teachers want to give their opinions in the meeting so that two-way communication takes place but often the meeting becomes a briefing (Helterbran, 2010).

The fourth issue is that the principal does not manage the instructional program effectively due to overlapping tasks and time constraints. The Ministry of Education's report (2013) found that principals are more skilled in being a manager who manages daily affairs such as administrative management and giving instructions and circulars, but weak in managing instructional programs or curriculum planning. A study also found that 75% of principals felt that their jobs had become too complex (Fullan's, 2016). It is also clear that the problem of principals in Malaysia is more focused on the external power process than the internal planning process because principals are heavily involved in tasks outside the school.

Transformational leadership style first appeared in organizational research by (Burns, 1978). The transformational leaders move beyond self-interest. Then the transformational leaders are charismatic, inspirational, intellectually stimulating and make individual judgments (Bass, 1985). A well-functioning transformational leadership has the potential to involve all stakeholders in the achievement of educational objectives. A researches argues that transactional leadership decisions are only able to change the behavior of followers for a short period of time, on the other hand, transformational leadership practices can change the needs of followers into hopes or aspirations to meet desired goals and values (Burns, 1978). Leadership and education are almost inseparable in increasing employee motivation. Following Burns' leadership theory, they defined transformational leadership practice as a leadership style that involves oneself as a change agent in motivating and empowering

followers (Bass, 1985). Bass uses transformational leadership practices in education and emphasizes that this leadership style plays an important role in the academic success of students and the unification of members in the school.

Some explained that the practice of transformational leadership is an excellent leadership style in the management of school transformation and change (Leithwood and Jantzi, 1994). Recent study also assert that transformational leadership practices are particularly suitable for school transformation environments because teachers are given the opportunity to develop professionally to respond to school change needs (Leithwood et al., 1999). The school transformational leadership model by plays an influential role in the development of school transformational leadership practices (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2006). This model was formed from his own qualitative and quantitative research (Leithwood et al., 2006). The model was later updated in 2014. According to this category includes leader behaviors that are common among successful school leaders. The transformational leaders are admired, respected, trusted and role models for their followers (Leithwood et al., 2014). Leaders are willing to bear risks together with followers and are consistent in behavior, values, ethics and principles in general. They see the practice of transformational leadership in four dimensions including setting direction, developing people, structuring organizations and managing instructional programs.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted on 255 respondents from nine private secondary schools in Johor for a quantitative study. For a qualitative study, four principals from four private secondary schools of different types, namely Academic Secondary Schools, Religious Secondary Schools, Private Secondary Schools Chinese and International Schools were involved as participants, while all administrators, teachers and students from the four schools were involved in the observation process. Quantitative data analysis using IBM SPSS Statistic software version 23 and N-Vivo 12 for qualitative data. The findings of the study will begin by looking at the demographics of the respondents followed by an analysis of the transformational leadership practices of private secondary school principals in practicing transformational leadership in private secondary schools in Johor. The main method chosen to answer the research question is the quantitative method. In order to answer quantitative questions, Kenneth Leithwood's Educational Leadership Survey for Teacher Respondents Transformational style of leadership Survey instrument set (2014) was distributed to be answered by 255 respondents who are teachers in nine private secondary schools in Johor. Then, qualitative data was obtained based on the results from the interviews and observations which was conducted among four Johor private high school principals by using the semi-structured interview method to answer the other questions. Quantitative data was processed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 23.0 software, while qualitative data was processed using Nvivo 12.

3. FINDINGS

The Principal's Transformational Leadership Practice level which has the highest mean value is the Direction Determining dimension which has a mean value of 3.92 (SD=0.78), the second highest is the Human Development Dimension which has a mean value of 3.68 (SD=0.86), the third highest is the Structuring Organization Dimension which is a mean value of 3.62 (SD=0.85), while the lowest Principal's Transformational Leadership Practice is the Dimension of Managing Instructional Programs which has a mean value of 3.61 (SD=0.82). Overall, the mean value for the Principal's Transformational Leadership Practice is at a moderately high level of 3.71 (SD=0.76) (Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents According to the Principal's Level of Transformational Leadership Practice

No	Transformational Leadership Practices of Principals	Low f (%)	Moderate f (%)	High f (%)	Mean	SD
1	Dimension Determines Direction	12	55	188	3.92	0.78
		4.7	21.6	73.7		
2	Dimensions of Human Development	21	90	144	3.68	0.86
		8.2	35.3	56.5		
3	Dimensions of Organizational Structuring	23	86	146	3.62	0.85
		9	33.7	57.3		
4	Dimensions of Managing Instructional Programs	26	91	138	3.61	0.82
		10.2	35.7	54.1		
Overall		13	95	147	3.71	0.76

The frequency analysis (Table 2) shows that the teacher's response to the level of Dimension Determining Direction among private high school principals is moderately high (Mean=3.92, SD=0.78). The comparative analysis between the items shows that the highest item is the first item that states *Provide information about the overall purpose to the staff* (Mean=4.03, SD=0.83), the second highest item is item 2 and 4 that states

Help explain the reasons for your school improvement initiative (mean=3.96, SD=0.85) and *Showing high expectations for your work with students* (mean=3.96, SD=0.93). Meanwhile, the lowest item is item 3 which states *Giving meaningful help to you in setting short-term teaching and learning goals* (mean=3.73, SD=0.94).

Table 2: Level Dimension Determining Direction

No	Items for Dimension Determining Direction	STS	TS	KS	S	SS	Mean	SD
		F	F	F	F	F		
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)		
1	Explain the overall purpose to staff.	2	12	35	133	73	4.03	0.83
		0.8	4.7	13.7	52.2	28.6		
2	Help explain the reasons for your school improvement initiative.	4	11	40	135	65	3.96	0.85
		1.6	4.3	15.7	52.9	25.5		
3	Provide meaningful assistance to you in setting short-term teaching and learning goals	4	23	62	114	52	3.73	0.94
		1.6	9	24.3	44.7	20.4		
4	Show high expectations for your work with students.	4	16	44	114	77	3.96	0.93
		1.6	6.3	17.3	44.7	30.2		
	Overall						3.92	0.78

Meanwhile, the findings from interviews found that the principals of private secondary schools in Johor have implemented the dimension of determining direction in transformational leadership. Based on the participants' answers, it is proven that the principal has involved the teachers in the formation of the school's vision. From the observation, there are three schools surveyed that display their school vision in a clear manner so that all school members can see it easily. Meanwhile, in the dimension of determining direction, private high school principals have also tried to ensure that school members understand the school's vision which aims to provide quality and excellent education based on the school's core values. The school has also uploaded the school vision to the school website so that everyone can understand it.

The principal has also shown initiative to improve the school by building a good culture of cooperation in the school. Principals discuss current issues with teachers, hold weekly meetings and hold workshops for school improvement. In addition, in order to achieve the organization's goals, the

principal has determined the school's vision, used the SWOT strategy, looked at the school's strengths and weaknesses, reviewed the school's vision and mission and made improvements together with the teachers. In addition, from the observations made while at the school, the principal is holding a meeting with the teacher administrators to discuss school management issues. Next, the results of the qualitative analysis found that private high school principals in Johor have provided meaningful assistance to teachers in setting short-term teaching and learning goals.

If the results of this interview analysis are compared with the quantitative results of the frequency analysis which shows the lowest mean for items that provide meaningful help to teachers, we can see that there is a factor or reason. In implementing this dimension, it was found that principals plan mentor and teaching assistant programs for teachers under the guidance of senior teachers instead of being implemented by the principal himself.

Table 3: Level of Human Development Dimension

No	Item: Human Development Dimension	STS	TS	KS	S	SS	Mean	SD
		F	F	F	F	F		
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)		
1	Gives you individual support to help you improve your teaching practice.	8	25	62	116	44	3.64	0.98
		3.1	9.8	24.3	45.5	17.3		
2	Encourages you to consider new ideas in your teaching.	6	20	56	121	52	3.76	0.95
		2.4	7.8	22	47.5	20.4		
3	Demonstrates a high level of professional practice models.	6	20	78	108	43	3.64	0.93
		2.4	7.8	30.6	42.4	16.9		
4	Develops a caring and trusting atmosphere.	7	26	65	106	51	3.66	1.00
		2.7	10.2	25.5	41.6	20		
5	Encourages leadership development among teachers.	6	21	65	113	50	3.71	0.95
		2.4	8.2	25.5	44.3	19.6		
	Overall						3.68	0.86

The frequency analysis (Table 3) shows that the level of the Human Development Dimension among private high school principals is moderately high (Mean=3.68, SD=0.86). The comparative analysis between the items shows that the highest item is item 2 which states *Encouraging you to consider new ideas in your teaching* (Mean=3.76, SD=0.95), the second highest item is item 5 which states *Encouraging leadership development among teachers* (mean= 3.71, SD=0.95) and the third highest item is item 4 which states *Developing a loving and trusting atmosphere* (mean=3.66, SD=1.00). Whereas, the lowest items are items 1 and 3 which state *Gives you individual support to help you improve your teaching practice* (mean=3.64, SD=0.98) and *Show a high level of professional practice model* (mean=3.64, SD=0.93).

Meanwhile, the research findings obtained from interviews with four participants found that the principals of private secondary schools in Johor have implemented the human development dimension in their leadership. First of all, the principals have provided moral support to the teachers to improve the teachers' teaching practices. They have offered individual support by thanking teachers and meeting teachers individually. They were concerned about the welfare of teachers by giving help to teachers who are in trouble, encouraging teaching and learning and instilling the value of love among the school community.

The principals provide individual support to teachers to help them improve teaching practices is less clear. This may be due to the results of

interviews with study participants that principals are more likely to give moral support to teachers rather than in efforts to improve the teaching and learning process. Meanwhile, the private high school principals have encouraged new ideas in the teaching of teachers. They encouraged teachers' involvement in the decision-making process. The principals have given a positive influence to the teachers in giving new ideas.

The principals demonstrate a high level of professional practice models. To improve the teaching and learning process, principals have tried to improve their professionalism and improve their school leadership style by attending seminars and principal leadership courses. Based on all the participants' answers, the results of the dimensional interview analysis

show that the principals of private secondary schools in Johor have tried to develop a caring and trusting atmosphere in their schools. The results of the observation also found that the schools have carried out community service in the area close to their school and recycling within the school area. Principals have tried to encourage leadership development among teachers. Principals improved leadership aspects in schools by carrying out teacher leadership development so that they have in-depth knowledge and have a good working environment. The principals have created a positive supportive culture where senior teachers serve as role models for new teachers. The work style of senior teachers are thorough and smart, becoming an example to junior teachers. The principals also support teachers to continue learning.

Table 4: Level of Organizational Structure Dimension

No	Item: Organizational Structure Dimension	STS	TS	KS	S	SS	Mean	SD
		F	F	F	F	F		
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)		
1	Encourage collaborative efforts among staff.	3	25	46	114	67	3.85	0.96
		1.2	9.8	18	44.7	26.3		
2	Ensure broad participation in decision making about school progress	14	24	75	93	49	3.55	1.07
		5.5	9.4	29.4	36.5	19.2		
3	Involve parents in school improvement efforts.	9	43	83	89	31	3.35	1.01
		3.5	16.9	32.5	34.9	12.2		
4	It is effective in getting community support in school improvement efforts	5	21	59	124	46	3.73	0.92
		2	8.2	23.1	48.6	18		
	Overall						3.62	0.85

The frequency analysis (Table 4) shows that the level of the Organizational Structuring Dimension among private high school principals is moderately high (Mean=3.62, SD=0.85). Comparative analysis between items shows that the highest item is the first item that states Encouraging collaborative efforts among staff (Min=3.85, SD=0.96), the second highest item is item 4 that states Is effective in getting community support in school improvement efforts (mean=3.73, SD=0.92). Whereas, the lowest item is item 3 which states Involving parents in school improvement efforts (mean=3.35, SD=1.01) and the second lowest item is item 2 which states Ensuring broad participation in making decisions about school progress (mean=3.55, SD =1.07).

The research findings from the interviews with four participants found that principals of private secondary schools in Johor implement the Organizational Structuring dimension in their leadership. They have changed the organizational structure while leading the school and emphasize cooperation among teachers. They strive to create cooperation among staff, especially in teaching and learning, including giving warnings

to teachers who are weak in instructional process. The observations were also made on the four schools and it was found that the teachers had discussions or meetings and shared ideas in their respective subjects. Meanwhile, the private high school principals have also involved discussions with teachers on the issue of school progress. They accept opinions from teachers through two-way communication where teachers are brought to discuss. The principals and the teachers always exchange views on school progress. The school principals have also worked to improve their schools by holding discussions on school improvement matters with teachers.

Based on the interviews shown, the principals involve teachers in discussions to make decisions. However, the results of the interview have shown that one of the principals does not interact directly with the teachers. Meanwhile, the results of the analysis also found that other principals also only hold discussions and get teachers' views but do not involve extensive and direct participation in decision making.

Table 5: Level of Managing Instructional Programs Dimension

No	Item: Managing Instructional Programs Dimension	STS	TS	KS	S	SS	Mean	SD
		F	F	F	F	F		
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)		
1	Provide or find resources to help staff improve their teaching.	4	19	58	118	56	3.80	0.92
		1.6	7.5	22.7	46.3	22		
2	Often observe classroom activities.	2	24	43	124	62	3.86	0.92
		0.8	9.4	16.9	48.6	24.3		
3	After observing classroom activities, work with teachers to improve their teaching.	9	30	75	99	42	3.53	1.01
		3.5	11.8	29.4	38.8	16.5		
4	Frequently discuss educational issues with you.	13	43	73	97	29	3.34	1.05
		5.1	16.9	28.6	38	11.4		
5	Protecting teachers from interference in their teaching.	7	29	63	110	46	3.62	1.00
		2.7	11.4	24.7	43.1	18		
6	Encourages you to use data in your work	5	21	85	104	40	3.60	0.92
		2	8.2	33.3	40.8	15.7		
7	Encourage the use of data in planning for individual student needs	7	32	78	99	39	3.51	0.99
		2.7	12.5	30.6	38.8	15.3		
	Overall						3.61	0.82

The principals have received community support in school improvement efforts. They received support from the social environment, which is help from parents and community support. They established a good relationship with the community and is supported in the management of the school. They also exchange information with other school principals and discuss school management strategies. The principals have received more support from the community such as the general public, State Education Departments, other schools, former students and higher education institutions in school improvement.

The frequency analysis from Table 5 shows that the level of the dimension of Managing Instructional Programs among private high school principals is moderately high (Mean=3.61, SD=0.82). The comparison analysis between the items shows that the highest item is the second item *Often observe classroom activities* (Mean=3.86, SD=0.92), the second highest item *Give or find resources to help staff improve their teaching* (mean=3.80, SD=0.92) and the third highest item is item 5 *Protecting teachers from interference in their teaching* (mean=3.62, SD=1.00). Item six which states *Encouraging you to use data in your work* shows a mean of 3.60 which is the fourth highest item. While, the lowest item is item four, *Frequently discuss educational issues with you* (mean=3.34, SD=1.05), the second lowest item is item seven, *Encouraging the use of data in planning for individual student needs* (mean=3.51, SD=0.99) and the third lowest item is the third item that states *After observing classroom activities, collaborate with teachers to improve their teaching* (mean=3.53, SD=1.01).

The findings obtained from the interviews with four research subjects found that the principals of private secondary schools in Johor have implemented the dimensions of managing instructional programs in their leadership. They have generated knowledge among teachers by providing resources that can help improve teachers' teaching. They have held a creative instructional process, plan competition, provided teaching equipment or resources and held an annual plan competition to improve teacher instructional process. From the interviews, the private secondary school principals have provided the teachers with the basic requirements for teaching and learning process. In addition, the teachers' plans were also given special attention. They have observed classroom activities for teacher performance evaluation. They also reviewed students work so that teachers can make improvements. The results of the observation also found that the school principals have observed the teacher's instructional process. After observing the classroom activities, they worked with the teachers to improve their teaching.

The results of the interview analysis are similar to the results of the comparative analysis between the items which show that the third lowest item is the third item, *after observing the classroom activities*, the principals worked with the teachers to improve their teaching. It was found that most school principals do not conduct personal interviews and collaborate with teachers to improve their teaching process. This work is more of a committee leader's task or a discussion among teachers rather than being done directly by the school principals. The results from the interview found that the principals do not discuss educational issues with teachers personally. The principals are also concerned about teachers' teaching and learning process by protecting teachers from interference in their teaching. The discussion of teaching and learning process issues is carried out after the lesson ended in the meetings. The results of the interview analysis found that the school principals tried to protect teachers from interference in their teaching.

In managing instructional programs, the use of data in student achievement management is important. The private high school principals encouraged teachers to use data to ensure the student learning outcomes. The use of data in the work has been carried out for measuring student performance, analyzing student exam results and students' exercise books records. They encouraged teachers in the use of data to measure student performance, especially in exam results. On the other hand, in the issue of encouraging the use of data in planning for individual student needs, the results of the interview analysis found that principals did not show their encouragement in the use of data in planning for individual student needs.

4. CONCLUSION

This study was conducted with the aim to investigate the transformational leadership practices of private secondary school principals in Johor. Overall, based on the quantitative analysis, the teacher's response to the principal's transformational leadership practices showed the mean at a moderately high level. The qualitative analysis also showed similar results. The transformational leadership practice of school principals is a form of leadership that can ensure the improvement of the quality of teacher teaching and student learning for the school excellence. It is hoped that the

findings of this study become part of the new knowledge related to school principal leadership that can provide benefits to national education policy makers, school leaders, middle leaders and also teachers who are interested in learning more about this leadership practice.

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