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The Importance of Effective Educational Leadership: Evidence from Malaysian Higher Education Context

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Abstract

The performance of public universities will be greatly influenced by leaders' capacity to demonstrate the proper leadership styles under various conditions. This study has improved our comprehension of academics' preferred leadership philosophies. The information has been a valuable addition to the literature on leadership in Malaysian universities. In response, this study intends to evaluate academics' opinions of university leaders' leadership philosophies in the public higher education sector. It makes an effort to evaluate academics' preferences for transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles as well as to pinpoint the demographic traits of academics that are strongly associated with their preferred leadership philosophies. Using a judgmental sample technique, data were gathered from selected academic staff members employed by public universities in Malaysia. Selected public universities received 500 questionnaires. The poll received 247 responses from academic personnel, yielding a 49.4% response rate. The respondents are made up of academic staff members at various levels, including professors, associate professors, senior lecturers, lecturers, and tutors. The purpose of this study is to determine the preferred leadership style of academics in public higher education institutions in Malaysia.

Keywords: Leadership Styles, Transformational, Transactional, and Laissez-faire, Malaysian Higher Education

Introduction

There are now more governmental and private higher education institutions in Malaysia than there formerly were. In spite of specific challenges and continual environmental change, the leading colleges in the country are currently working to meet the need for human resources from a variety of enterprises. Universities have been encouraged to review their contributions to nation-building concurrently. Effective leadership is a crucial issue in this situation (Kumkale, 2022). Effective leadership is crucial since change in universities typically involves ambiguity, uncertainty, and risks. If there is poor leadership, staff members may be reluctant to change because they view it as a threat to their career rather than an opportunity. As a

result, effective resource management and strong leadership are required to facilitate transition. A few different types of educational leadership have been used in the field of education, including autocratic or hierarchical leadership, democratic or transformational leadership, and delegated leadership. However, the democratic leadership paradigm will be the main emphasis of this study. Sharing leadership, often referred to as distributed leadership, and leading with a purpose are key drivers of student accomplishment and the advancement of higher education institutions. As described by Spillane (2005), distributed leadership is the outcome of a relationship between leaders, followers, and circumstance. The main focus of this study is on the effects of competent educational leadership on the performance of higher education institutions. The investigation of the effects of excellent educational leadership among leaders is the main goal of this study. The improvement of higher education institutions depends on the use of good educational leadership (Laing, 2021). To address the needs of the new generation, societal challenges/issues, unexpected issues that each society may encounter and the need for globalisation, leaders should change from the traditional leadership style to a more effective leadership style. Therefore, through participating in decision-making, this leadership will also help develop future leaders. Effective educational leadership is the primary factor that contributes to successful educational environments, as it can meet societal needs and discover answers to unforeseen problems and obstacles in each community (Ponggohong et al., 2022).

Literature Reviews

Max Weber, a sociologist, initially introduced the theory of transactional leadership style in 1947, and Bernard Bass further explored it in 1981. Managerial leadership is another name for this style of leadership (Bass & Stogdill, 1981). The relationship between leaders and followers is founded on a contract, and the leaders will pay attention to the needs and wants of their followers. The leaders will concentrate on the functions of organisation, performance, and supervision. Transactional leaders put a strong emphasis on structure, strategy, and responsibilities to help their followers achieve the organization's objectives. Managers typically employ this leadership approach. It involves appealing to followers' self-interests in order to direct and motivate them. The relationship between leaders and followers is centred on exchanging each other's interests. This transactional leadership style is known to have been used by McCarthy and de Gaulle. The formal authority and responsibility that leaders have within the organisation is what gives them their power. The follower does effectively at their job and will follow the leader's orders. According to Bass (1985), followers who exhibit positive behaviour are rewarded, while those who do not are penalised. The manager will keep an eye on their team member to make sure the standards are being met. Giving the employee prizes and consequences will encourage them. Introducing reward and punishment in the workplace depending on the performance of the employee clarifies what the leaders are expecting. When there is a straightforward, well-defined problem within the firm, transactional leadership is more successful. Additionally, it can be used when an organisation is faced with a crisis and has to concentrate on completing a certain goal. The core element of the transformational leadership model is that transformational leaders inspire their subordinates to commit to and achieve performance results above and beyond their expectations. According to Bass (1985), three leadership processes are necessary to achieve these results: leaders increase followers' levels of consciousness about the significance and value of outcomes and the means to achieve them; leaders persuade followers to put the needs of the group or organisation ahead of their own self-interest; and leaders motivate

followers to address higher-level needs. Transactional leaders are different from transformational leaders in that they are not concerned with the particular requirements of followers or their personal growth. Compared to transactional leadership, transformational leadership has more positive results. Transformative leadership produces performance that goes far beyond what is anticipated, in contrast to transactional leadership, which produces the expected results. The collaborative, communal activity brought about by transformational leadership, which empowers people involved in the process, is related to this going above and beyond what is anticipated. Figure 1 provides an illustration of this cumulative effect. Conger and Kanungo (1988) assert that transformative leadership evinces a demonstrated tendency to empower followers. Additionally, transformational leadership style has been linked favourably to volunteer administrative proficiency, funding accomplishment, leadership skill competency, and job happiness .

Research Design

The goal of this study is to investigate preferred leadership style of academics in Malaysian public higher education institutions. Data was collected from targeted academic staff working in Malaysian public universities, using judgemental sampling method. 500 questionnaires were distributed to selected public universities. 247 academic staff responded to the survey, resulting in a 49.4 percent response rate. The respondents consist of different level of academic staff such as professor, associate professor, senior lecturer, lecturer and tutor. Table 4.3 concludes all of the demographic data from the respondents consisting of gender, age, marital status, level of education and working experiences. From 150 respondents, the result shows that female respondent (56%) is more than male respondent (44%).

Descriptive Analysis among All Variables

Table 1

Presents means and standard deviations for all the study variables.

Table 1

Descriptive Analysis

Factors	Mean	Standard Deviation
Effective Educational Leadership	4.4933	.43921
Transformational	4.3583	.52410
Transactional	4.4017	.48716
Laissez Faire	4.3827	.48931
Autocratic Or Hierarchal Leadership	4.2627	.52078
Strategic Leadership	4.1667	.63568

From table above, mean for all variables is between 4.1667 to 4.4933. Independent variables measures the mean and standard deviation which are transformational, transactional, laissez faire, autocratic or hierarchal leadership and strategic leadership and follow up were 0.52410,

0.48716, 0.48931, 0.52078 and 0.63568 respectively whereas for dependent variable, trust have a mean of 4.4933 and standard deviation 0.43921. Lastly for transactional has the highest mean 4.4017 and follow up have the higher standard deviation of 0.63568 (Strategic Leadership).

Factors Affecting Effective Educational Leadership

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the elements affecting effective educational leadership. The table 2 is give the results of regression analysis on interview session.

Table 2

Results of Regression Analysis on Interview Session

Variables	Beta	t-Ratio	Sig. t
Transformational	0.310	5.559	0.000
Transactional	0.116	1.995	0.048
Laissez Faire	0.210	3.653	0.000
Autocratic Or Hierarchal Leadership	0.152	3.257	0.001
Strategic Leadership	0.099	2.784	0.006
R square = 0.712			
Durbin-Watson = 1.769			
F = 71.240			
Sig. F = 0.000			

On the Transformational analysis, Transformational is relevant at significance level (sig. t = 0.00) with a positive beta (0.310) towards effective educational leadership. This finding is not against the awareness, that Transformational has a positive result that effect on effective educational leadership. This could be explained that people more likely to take care about their Transformational. The hypothesis H1 was stated that there is a relationship between Transformational and factor affecting effective educational leadership is substantiated.

The regression evaluation also shows that Transactional is relevant impact on effective educational leadership at significance level (sig. t = 0.048) with positive beta (0.116). This shows that interviewee agree that Transactional will affect the result of effective educational leadership. Therefore, hypothesis H2 which stated that there is a relationship between Transactional and effective educational leadership is substantiated.

Laissez Faire was found to have relevant effect at significance level (sig. t = 0.000) with positive beta (0.210). Laissez Faire play a role in influencing factors affecting effective educational

leadership. Therefore, hypothesis H3 Laissez Faire has an impact on effective educational leadership is supported.

Autocratic Or Hierarchal Leadership was observed to have a relevant impact on effective educational leadership and the significance level of (sig. $t = 0.001$) with a positive beta (0.152). This results shows that Autocratic Or Hierarchal Leadership have influence effective educational leadership. So, the hypothesis H4 shows that there is a relevant relationship between Autocratic Or Hierarchal Leadership and effective educational leadership.

Strategic Leadership affect relevant on effective educational leadership at (sig. $t = 0.006$) with a positive beta (0.099). Hypothesis H5 which shows there is a relevant relationship between Strategic Leadership and effective educational leadership.

Transformational, transactional, laissez faire, autocratic or hierarchal leadership and strategic leadership can explained ($R^2 = 0.712$) variation of effective educational leadership. The Durbin Watson get the acceptable range of 1.769 indicates there has been no problem with the data. Data used on this study is generally distributed to created histogram and F-value was large (71.240) so it can be determined to be relevant at 1% significance level (sig. $F = .000$). As a conclusion the regression model used on this study is sufficient.

Conclusion

All higher education institutions must make sure that the best model and leadership style are used in order to improve the performance of the higher education institutions. This is being done to ensure that higher education institutions are more productive and can better serve the community and their students. The enhancement of students' academic performance and the expansion of higher education institutions are crucial components of Malaysia's educational system. However, it is emphasized that educational leadership is essential to creating a skilled workforce for improved institutions (Samah et al., 2019). Additionally, for the educational leadership model, distributed and moral leadership needs to be adopted in Malaysian institutions for gradual change toward improved results. Effective educational leadership is the only thing that can improve the performance of Malaysia's higher education institutions overall. To ensure that the aims and mission for the advancement of higher education institutions can be met by educating a better generation and nation for Malaysia, there are numerous interventions that need to be put in place. The respondents' choices for transformational and transactional leadership styles exhibit strong positive and significant relationships, suggesting that university executives do not exclusively use one style of leadership while overseeing academics. In fact, they are more likely to combine aspects of transactional and transformational leadership to enthuse and motivate academics. In other words, the leadership philosophies of transformational and transactional are complementary. In order to keep people motivated, at least temporarily, rewards once activities are completed are required. Academics would be inspired to excel above their current capacities if we empowered them and pushed them to take on more difficult jobs (Rashid et al., 2016). Despite this, given the large negative correlation between respondents' positions and preference for a laissez-faire leadership style, they may still expect leaders to play supporting roles. Contradictory to this, however, is the conclusion that there is a strong positive correlation between tenure of employment and desire for a laissez-faire leadership style. This study would suggest that, while if academics in higher positions do expect leaders to play supporting roles,

they might also view leaders' actions as interfering with their work and hence prefer a more laissez-faire leadership style. Overall, the results of this study have demonstrated that leading academics at Malaysian public universities does not involve a single strategy. Academics have varying expectations of leaders depending on where they are in their careers. The performance of public universities will be greatly influenced by leaders' capacity to demonstrate the proper leadership styles under various conditions. This study has improved our comprehension of academics' preferred leadership philosophies. The information has been a valuable addition to the literature on leadership in Malaysian universities.

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