

School Principal Holistic Leadership: A Study in High Performance Schools in the Central Zone, Malaysia

Khalip Musa^{1*}, Mohd Asri Mohd Noor²

^{1*,2} Faculty of Management and Economics, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris,
35900 Tanjung Malim, Perak, Malaysia

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Abstract

This paper aims to study the leadership behaviors of principals from high performance schools located in the central zone of Peninsular Malaysia. Target sample included a total of 442 teachers from 19 secondary schools. The sample was selected by simple random sampling technique. The instrument of 35 items holistic leadership was used for data collection. Five styles of leadership were assessed. The results show that the instructional style had the highest levels (Mean=4.801), followed by a structuring style (Mean = 4.738), a personnel development (Mean=4.714), a participative style (Mean= 4.623), and an entrepreneurial style (Mean=4.461). The overall holistic leadership of principals is high with Mean=4.667. These finding suggested that the holistic leadership among high performance school principals is at a high level. This is in line with the status of the schools as high performing schools. The goal of the Education Ministry to produce high performance leadership among school leaders is on the right track in these particular schools.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial, Holistic, Leadership, Instructional, Participative

Introduction

Development of school leaders is an important agenda in the national education transformation plan. The matter has been stated clearly in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 in the fifth agenda as an aspiration to produce high-performance leadership amongst school leaders (KPM 2012). The shift has generated new interests amongst school leaders to acquire new competencies in leadership skills while supporting the ideas of change. This can be achieved via competent principals with mature leadership qualities. This shift clearly emphasized on ensuring the empowerment of high performance leadership in each schools (KPM 2012). The School leadership factor is responsible to help each student in fulfilling their potentials by creating opportunities, working in teams and practicing leadership skills.

In current changing environment, school leadership has been identified by many researchers as the most significant factor to the effectiveness of school (Brauckmann and Pashiardis 2011; Heck and Moriyama 2010). The study of educational leadership has proved that leadership plays an important role in the effort to produce a successful, high performance school.

In the national education context, High Performing Schools (HPS) has been introduced in order to boost the country's educational excellence. HPS has been defined as schools with

ethos, character with unique identity of its own, as well as, in all aspects of education and remain competitive on the world stage. Malaysian Education Ministry has a main target to set all HPS as the benchmark of excellence and become a model to all schools in the country. With the high expectations and challenges faced by schools, principals with high leadership qualities become a requirement in order to demonstrate excellent leadership in schools (Jamilah and Yusof 2011).

Problem Statement

School leadership has been proposed through various leadership theories that have come separately across time and environments ranging from theory of trait, behavioral, contingency, teamwork, instructional, transformational, authentic and distributive for the latest (Brauckmann and Pashiardis 2011). The effect is seen where school leaders have been trained and they in turn applied the theories of leadership separately.

Pashiardis (2014) has proposed a theoretical framework of holistic leadership to examine the possibility of identifying practices and leadership behaviors that are crucial in improving student achievement directly or indirectly. The holistic leadership model was proposed as the result of the differences of leadership roles in the literature such as the effect on students' achievements, unconformity of leadership definition among researchers, lack of universal theory in assessing leadership in organization, methodological and design issues of the various studies that have an impact on the findings (Pashiardis 2014).

Holistic Leadership

Holistic educational leadership model was proposed by Baruckmann and Pashiardis (2011) through large-scale studies in several European countries. The study was funded by the European Union under the Leadership Improvement for Student Achievement (LISA) project. The purpose of the study was to assess on how school leadership affect student achievement. It tried to explain on how the school leadership theories implemented in diverse systems could affect student achievement. The lacks of consistency in leadership practices using different leadership models have generated this holistic leadership model. It is an attempt to construct a common framework of holistic leadership model that can be used as a reference in the future.

Leadership has been viewed as a multi-level constructs that affect students and schools. In this study, holistic leadership has been defined as "the nexus of all those behaviors and practices that school principals use in order to influence the behavior of others" (Psahiardis 2014, p. 209). Therefore, the elements of leadership have been summarized into five different styles i.e. instructional, participative, structuring, entrepreneurial, and personnel development. Each leadership style has specific behaviors and practices that has been demonstrated by school principals (Brauckmann and Pashiardis 2011).

The Purpose of Study

The main purpose of the study was to assess the leadership styles of school principals based on the holistic leadership model which consists of five styles i.e. instructional, participative, structuring, entrepreneurial, and personnel development from teachers' perspective. The study involved teachers from high performing schools as sample.

Methodology

This study used quantitative methods where survey has been utilized in data collection. The study population was teachers from 19 high performing schools in the central zone comprising four states, namely Selangor, Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya and Negeri Sembilan. The total population was 1,145 teachers. Referring to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the proposed sample size was 285 teachers. Sample selection was done through a simple random sampling method.

This study adopted an instrument of holistic leadership model developed by Baruckmann and Pashiardis (2011). Section A of instrument comprised demographic information such as respondents' gender, age, level of education, teaching experience, and teaching duration under the current principals. While section B comprised 35 questions related to holistic leadership which has been divided into five styles of leadership. The questionnaires in part B were measured using a five-point likert scale.

Statistical Analysis

Data was analyzed using descriptive statistic to describe the demographic characteristics and to assess the holistic leadership of principals. Table 1 describes the characteristics of the respondent demographics such as gender, age, level of education, teaching experience and teaching duration under the current principals. While Table 2 shows the holistic leadership level in a particular style and overall as well.

Table 1
Demographics

Demographics	Category	Total	Percentage	Cumulative
Sex	Man	146	33.0	33.0
	Woman	296	67.0	100.0
	Total	442	100.0	
Age (Years)	Under 30s'	37	8.4	8.4
	30s' - 40s'	195	44.1	52.5
	41s' - 50s'	181	41.0	93.4
	Above 50s'	29	6.6	100.0
	Total	442	100.0	
Education Level	First degree	414	93.7	93.7
	Second degree	28	6.3	100.0
	Total	442	100.0	
Teaching Experience (Years)	Below 10	118	26.7	26.7
	11 - 20	188	42.5	69.2
	21 - 30	130	29.4	98.6
	Above 30	6	1.4	100.0
	Total	442	100.0	
Teaching Duration (Years)	1 - 3	188	42.5	42.5
	4 - 6	217	49.1	91.6
	7 - 9	37	8.4	100.0
	Total	442	100.0	

Table 2
Holistic Leadership

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Instructional style	442	4.17	5.00	4.800	.164
Participative style	442	4.00	5.00	4.623	.144
Personnel development style	442	4.14	5.00	4.714	.168
Entrepreneurial style	442	3.88	5.00	4.4610	.273
Structuring style	442	4.00	5.00	4.738	.327
Holistic leadership	442	4.39	5.00	4.667	.099

Results

Based on Table 2 above, the instructional style scored the highest mean (Mean = 4.800), followed by the structuring style as the second highest (Mean = 4,738), followed by the personnel development style with Mean = 4,714 , followed by the Participative style with Mean = 4.623, and finally the entrepreneurial style (Mean = 4,461). The overall holistic leadership was high with Mean=4.667.

Discussion and conclusion

The findings show that the instructional style is at the highest level among the five. Instructional leadership has been confirmed by many researchers as an important factor in the development of effective schools (Hallinger 2011). This finding confirms to what was asserted by Hallinger (2005) that effective school leaders always focused on the mission to create a teaching and learning process that occurs with clear objectives. Hallinger also stressed that instructional leadership builds a positive climate that set high expectations from teaching and learning. It is also important in facing changes and improving school achievement (Carrier 2011).

The structuring style is the second highest. This finding confirms what was asserted by Kruger et al. (2007) where visionary principals will have an impact on teaching and their actions. Barnett and McCormick (2004) concluded that the visionary principals have a better focus on tasks and actions in addition of emphasizing on excellence in teaching. They emphasize the continuity of performing duties under the current rules. This view is also supported by Dinham (2005) which concluded that effective principals always emphasized the importance of creating comfortable physical environments of school. Dinham's study concluded that effective principals consistently implemented policies, regulations and building organizational structure with clear defined responsibilities.

The personnel development style is also at high level. This finding is consistent with the view of Harris et al. (2003) that effective school leaders develop and improved school with the help of others. Many studies support this view, Printy (2008) in the study on the effect of school principal towards learning science and mathematics among teachers found that the opportunity given by the principal to the teachers pursuing courses in training, provide related journal to subjects and discuss innovations in teaching have managed to build a close relationship between teachers and principals who in turn help promote their schools. Youngs and King (2002) also found that the creating of professional development programs through expertise sharing helps teachers do internal changes.

The participative style is also at a high level. This finding is supported by Mulford and Silinç (2011) which concluded that effective school principal strives to build an environmental leadership that provides opportunities for teachers to involve effectively in decision making process. They believe success will result when members of the organization are entrusted to make decisions, respected and supported. Transformational leadership theory is able explain the relationship between leaders and followers. The positive relationship is capable in developing potential followers while performing their duties. The encouragement and freedom that is given to followers eventually led to success in achieving organizational goals (Price in Saybani et al. 2015).

The entrepreneurial style has also been identified as an important factor in meeting the students' needs and demands in the changing school environment (Zaidatol et al. 2014). Berglund and Holmgren (2006) pointed out that the entrepreneurial style adopted by principals allow them to see the progress of school in wider context and attempt to explore new opportunities for school improvement. On a similar note Mohd Sahandri et al. (2009) stated that principals with entrepreneurial leadership will improve the school effectiveness and provide suitable environments for teaching and learning.

For comparison, the findings of this study could be compared to the Improvement Leadership for Student Achievement (LISA) project that involved 1,287 teachers from seven countries in Europe (Pashiardis 2014). The study in England which involved 264 teachers as respondents found that the instructional style was high (M=3.81), followed by the entrepreneurial style (M=3.76), and the personnel development style at moderate (M=3.64). While in Norway where the study involved 112 respondents found that the participative style was high (M=3.66), while the structuring and entrepreneurial styles were moderate with M=3.56 and M=3.50 respectively. Meanwhile the same study in Germany involving 203 respondents found that the entrepreneurial style was high with the M=3.73, followed by the personnel development and structuring styles at moderate with M=3.45 and M=3.38 respectively.

Pashiardis (2014) explains that the instructional style scored highest in England as there is clear accountability policy on principals to make student perform better, hence made them emphasized the style strongly. Meanwhile participative and structuring styles were high in Norway could be explained by the fact that the country's education policy which is moving towards a democratic leadership has clear focus on policies and regulations at schools level (Moller et al. 2007). Findings in Norway which also show the personnel development style at moderate level as the country has abundant resources and complete infrastructures that allows principals to focus on personnel teacher development. Whereas the study in Germany shows that the entrepreneurial style is at the highest level as to support the role of school principals in gaining support from parents and local communities in school improvement projects (Pashiardis 2014).

In summary, this study confirmed that the holistic leadership styles of school principals in particular high performance schools was at a high level in line with the literature and findings from previous studies carried out locally and internationally.

Corresponding Author

Khalip Musa

Faculty of Management and Economics

Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris,

35900 Tanjung Malim, Perak,

Malaysia

Email: khalip@fpe.upsi.edu.my

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