

Transformational Leadership Practices of Principals: A Review in Private Primary Schools in the East Coast of Malaysia

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Abstract

Previous studies have shown varying findings regarding the level of transformational leadership practices among primary school principals. The factors causing these different levels also vary. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine the level of transformational leadership practices among principals in private primary schools in the East Coast of Malaysia based on teachers' perspectives. A survey design using a quantitative approach was employed to collect data from 104 teacher samples from a population of 140 teachers in private Islamic primary schools under the Musleh Integrated Education Berhad (MIEB) network. The research instrument was adapted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X), which measures four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Data were analyzed descriptively using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 29 (SPSS) to determine the level of transformational practices based on mean values. The findings showed that the principals' transformational leadership level was high, with the idealized influence dimension recording the highest score. This study contributes to the body of knowledge in the field of educational leadership, particularly in the context of private primary schools in East Malaysia, and provides practical implications for improving school leadership practices. This study also fills the knowledge gap that exists in the literature on private educational leadership in Malaysia.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Descriptive Analysis, Principals, Private Primary Schools, East Coast Malaysia

Introduction

In this era of globalization, education plays a vital role in human capital development and national progress in facing ever-changing challenges. Educational institutions such as schools function as the main pillar in shaping a generation that is knowledgeable, skilled, and of noble character. Transformational leadership has emerged as a critical leadership paradigm in the context of 21st-century education, particularly in facing the challenges of digital transformation and increasingly demanding educational quality requirements (Day et al., 2021; Leithwood & Sun, 2020). Transformational leadership is a leadership style in which leaders work together with their teams to identify necessary changes, create a vision to guide

those changes, and implement them together with committed group members. This is because transformational leaders not only manage daily routines but also inspire and motivate, encourage innovation, and build the emotional commitment of followers to achieve higher goals (Andersson & Nilsson, 2023).

The increasingly competitive educational environment in Malaysia shows that private primary schools require leadership capable of driving positive change and ensuring excellent teaching quality (Abdul Rahman & Ahmad, 2022; Nordin et al., 2023). The private education sector in Malaysia has grown rapidly, with more than 600 registered private schools in 2023, contributing to the diversity of quality educational choices and complementing the national education system (Department of Private Education, 2023). In addition, transformational leadership is becoming increasingly relevant in the context of implementing the Malaysia Education Blueprint (PPPM) 2013-2025, which emphasizes the importance of quality leadership as one of the five pillars of the education system strengthened to achieve student aspirations (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). The emphasis in PPPM also affirms that effective school leadership is the second most important factor after teacher quality in influencing student achievement, thus making the study of transformational leadership practices an important agenda in national education transformation.

Furthermore, the need to study transformational leadership in private schools is also aligned with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which emphasizes quality and inclusive education for all. SDG 4, specifically Target 4.c, emphasizes the need to increase the number of qualified teachers through international cooperation and effective leadership (United Nations, 2015). This is related to the role of transformational leadership in retaining and motivating quality teachers, especially in the context of private schools facing teacher retention challenges. Additionally, the Malaysian Education Quality Standard Wave 2 (SKPMG2) introduced by the Ministry of Education Malaysia also emphasizes the importance of transformational leadership of principals and headmasters in Standard 1: Leadership (Inspectorate and Quality Assurance, 2017). SKPMG2 stipulates that school leaders must demonstrate a clear vision, inspire school members, and create a culture of continuous learning, which are core elements of transformational leadership. Therefore, this study has high relevance in the context of existing national education policies.

Exploring from an academic perspective, research on transformational leadership in schools has received increasing attention among global education researchers (Kim & Park, 2023; Santos & Cruz, 2022). However, most previous research has focused on government schools or urban areas, and less attention has been given to private schools, especially in rural areas such as the East Coast of Malaysia (Thompson & Davies, 2022; Zhang & Liu, 2022). From a practical perspective, transformational leadership has been proven to have a positive impact on school performance through increased teacher motivation and commitment (Alzoiraki et al., 2023; Kilag et al., 2022), which is critical for private schools facing competition and teacher retention challenges.

Although various studies have been conducted on transformational leadership, there are several important gaps that need to be filled. According to Trong et al. (2023) and Okonkwo and Adebayo (2022), specific data on private primary schools in the East Coast of Malaysia is still limited, although various studies assert a positive relationship between transformational

leadership and school effectiveness. Hasan and Ismail (2023) also stated that the need for transformational leadership is becoming increasingly urgent, especially in the private education sector, which faces challenges in retaining quality teachers in a competitive environment. In addition, most previous studies have focused on Western or urban contexts, making those findings possibly not fully relevant to the socio-cultural context of East Malaysia, which has unique characteristics in terms of economy, culture, and educational infrastructure (Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2023).

Studies in Malaysia mostly focus on national schools or schools in urban areas such as the Klang Valley, while private schools receive less attention from researchers. In addition, the East Coast of Malaysia, which includes the states of Kelantan, Terengganu, and Pahang, rarely becomes the focus of research compared to metropolitan areas, although this zone has its own challenges and strengths in the educational context. Moreover, studies that specifically examine the level of transformational leadership practices in the context of private primary schools are still lacking, especially those using teachers' perspectives as parties who interact directly with school leaders. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by focusing on private primary schools in the East Coast of Malaysia, thereby contributing to educational leadership literature in a less-explored context.

This study also contributes to the knowledge base in several important aspects in filling the empirical gap related to transformational leadership in the context of private primary schools in the East Coast of Malaysia, which was previously less explored by local and international researchers. In addition, this study provides empirical evidence regarding the level of transformational leadership practices in a unique socio-cultural context, enabling comparison with studies in other areas and countries. The findings of this study can also contribute to the development of more effective leadership models adapted to the needs of Malaysia's private education sector, especially in planning professional development programs for school leaders. Furthermore, this study is in line with government efforts to realize PPPM 2013-2025, achieve SDG 4, and meet the standards set in SKPMG2 through a deeper understanding of transformational leadership practices in the private school context.

Based on the literature analysis conducted, this study aims to answer the research question "What is the level of transformational leadership practices of principals in private primary schools in the East Coast of Malaysia?" Therefore, the research objective is to identify the level of transformational leadership practices of principals in private primary schools in the East Coast based on four main dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. This study was conducted in private Islamic primary schools under the Musleh Integrated Education Berhad (MIEB) network in the East Coast of Malaysia, comprising the states of Kelantan, Terengganu, and Pahang. The sample for analysis is teachers serving in these schools, focusing on their perceptions of principals' transformational leadership practices.

Overall, this article provides a comprehensive overview of the level of transformational leadership practices in private primary schools in the East Coast of Malaysia. This article begins with a comprehensive global and local literature analysis, followed by a conceptual framework explaining the dimensions influencing transformational leadership practices, systematic research methodology, detailed empirical findings with in-depth interpretation,

and discussion. This article is hoped to contribute to a better understanding of leadership practices in the private education sector and provide practical implications for improving school leadership quality in Malaysia.

Literature Review

Global educational developments show that transformational leadership has become a major topic in organizational and leadership studies in recent decades. Recent international studies indicate that transformational leadership has a consistently positive impact on organizational performance in various sectors, including education. Chen and Wang (2023), in a meta-analysis study involving 156 studies from 28 countries, found that transformational leadership constitutes best practice for organizational effectiveness with moderate to large effect sizes. These findings demonstrate the consistency of the positive effects of transformational leadership across different cultures and contexts. Understanding the factors influencing the level of transformational leadership practices is important to ensure their effective implementation in educational organizations. Studies conducted in various countries show that there are various contextual, organizational, and individual factors that impact the level of transformational leadership practices in the education sector.

Cultural factors and local social values are important determinants of the level of transformational leadership practices in an educational organization. A study by Okonkwo and Adebayo (2022) in Nigeria involving 312 primary schools found that the idealized influence dimension was the strongest predictor in the African cultural context. These findings reflect that the high moral and ethical aspects in local culture influence the transformational leadership dimensions that are more prominent and easily practiced by school leaders. This shows that the cultural value system not only influences acceptance of transformational leadership but also shapes how transformational leadership is practiced in different contexts. Similarly, a study by Alzoiraki et al. (2023) in Jordan involving 278 teachers from 45 schools also supports the argument that cultural factors and social norms play a role in determining more effective transformational leadership dimensions. In the Middle Eastern context, aspects of respect for authority and collectivism values were found to facilitate the implementation of certain transformational leadership dimensions, particularly in encouraging teaching and learning innovation. These cultural differences show that the level of transformational leadership practices cannot be separated from the socio-cultural context in which they are implemented.

Organizational structure and school type are significant factors influencing the level of transformational leadership practices. A study by Santos and Cruz (2022) in the Philippines of 289 public and private school teachers found significant differences in the level of transformational leadership practices between the two types of schools. Teachers in private schools reported higher levels of transformational leadership compared to teachers in public schools. These findings show that the more flexible organizational structure in private schools, including higher autonomy in decision-making and freedom in policy implementation, enables more effective and comprehensive transformational leadership practices.

The flexibility of this organizational structure influences the level of transformational leadership practices because it provides space for school leaders to implement changes

without being bound by complex bureaucracy. Conversely, public schools bound by more rigid administrative hierarchies and strict standard procedures were found to face challenges in practicing transformational leadership at an optimal level. This suggests that the level of transformational leadership practices is closely related to the level of autonomy and flexibility possessed by school leaders in making decisions and implementing changes.

A longitudinal study by Andersson and Nilsson (2023) in Sweden involving 245 schools found that teacher retention rates in schools implementing transformational leadership were 23% higher than other schools. These findings show that organizational stability is not only a result of transformational leadership but also becomes a factor that enables transformational leadership to be practiced continuously and consistently at a high level. Schools experiencing high teacher turnover rates face challenges in maintaining transformational leadership practices because they must constantly restart the process of building relationships and socializing organizational values with new teachers. Conversely, staff stability enables school leaders to build long-term relationships with teachers, understand their individual needs more deeply, and implement individualized consideration and inspirational motivation dimensions at a higher level. Therefore, organizational stability is an important factor that needs to be considered in understanding variations in the level of transformational leadership practices between schools.

The educational level is a contextual factor that influences which transformational leadership dimensions are more prominent in school leaders' practices. A study by Kim and Park (2023) in South Korea involving 342 primary schools found that inspirational motivation and individualized consideration dimensions were significant elements for teacher effectiveness in the classroom. These findings show that in the primary school context, a high level of transformational leadership practices requires special emphasis on motivational aspects and attention to individual teacher needs, given the challenges of teaching at the early educational level that require high patience and emotional support.

Conversely, a study by Rosli et al. (2023) of 256 secondary school teachers in Selangor found that the intellectual stimulation dimension was the strongest predictor of teacher commitment in the secondary school context. This difference suggests that a high level of transformational leadership practices in secondary schools requires stronger emphasis on professional development, critical thinking, and innovation in teaching. Secondary school teachers who teach more complex subjects require continuous intellectual stimulation to maintain their commitment and effectiveness. Therefore, school leaders need to adjust the level of emphasis on different transformational leadership dimensions according to the educational level to achieve an optimal practice level.

In addition, geographical location and access to support resources are factors that influence the level of transformational leadership practices in the educational context. A study by Md Sariff and Aida Hanim (2024) involving 298 teachers from national schools in Putrajaya found that principals' transformational leadership practices were at a high level. Putrajaya, as the federal administrative center, has better access to infrastructure, leadership training programs, and system support that facilitates school leaders in practicing transformational leadership at a high level. These findings show that location factors, particularly access to

resources and professional development opportunities, play an important role in determining the level of transformational leadership practices.

Conversely, a study by Nurhairi and Mohamed Yusoff (2020) in Negeri Sembilan, which was limited to that state's context, does not provide a specific picture of the East Coast of Malaysia. This shows the need for more comprehensive research in different geographical contexts, especially to understand how location factors and access to resources influence the level of transformational leadership practices. Schools in rural or remote areas may face different challenges in practicing transformational leadership at a high level due to limited access to training, technology resources, and professional support networks. Therefore, geographical factors and access to resources need to be given serious attention in understanding variations in the level of transformational leadership practices.

In the Malaysian context, although there have been several important studies conducted in Putrajaya, Selangor, and Negeri Sembilan, there is still a knowledge gap, especially regarding differences in factors influencing the level of transformational leadership practices between different geographical zones. A deeper understanding of these factors is important for developing effective and context-specific intervention strategies to enhance the level of transformational leadership practices in educational organizations, particularly in areas that may face unique challenges such as the East Coast of Malaysia.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

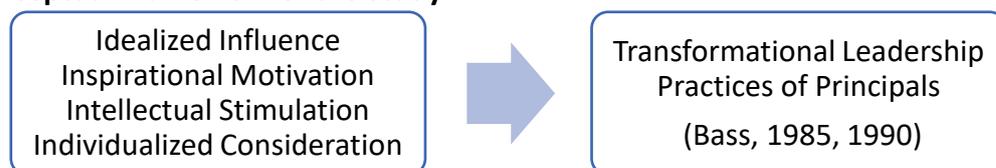


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is built based on transformational leadership theory founded by Burns (1978) and subsequently comprehensively developed by Bass (1985, 1990). This theory has become the main paradigm in organizational leadership studies for the past three decades and has proven relevant in various contexts, including the education sector. In the educational context, transformational leadership theory has been adapted by Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) and Hallinger (2003) to explain how school leaders can transform organizational culture and improve teacher and student performance.

Bass's (1985, 1990) transformational leadership model conceptualizes leadership as a process involving four main dimensions that are interrelated and function holistically to transform followers. These four dimensions do not function separately but mutually strengthen each other in forming effective leadership. In the context of private primary schools in the East Coast of Malaysia, this conceptual framework is adapted by taking into account unique contextual factors such as local culture, private school organizational structure, and socio-economic challenges faced.

The first dimension in the conceptual framework is idealized influence, which represents the aspect of charisma and moral integrity of the leader. In the context of this study, idealized influence refers to the behavior of principals that makes them role models who are respected,

trusted, and emulated by teachers. Principals who demonstrate idealized influence will display consistency between words and actions, have strong moral principles, and are willing to take risks for the benefit of the organization. In the context of private Islamic schools in the East Coast, the idealized influence dimension becomes very critical because it aligns with Islamic values that emphasize noble character and leaders as role models. Local communities that prioritize moral and ethical aspects make this dimension the basis of trust in principals' leadership.

Previous studies such as Abdullah and Rahman (2021) and Okonkwo and Adebayo (2022) have proven that idealized influence is the most important dimension in Eastern and developing country contexts where moral values are highly emphasized. This dimension is measured through teachers' perceptions of principals' ethical behavior, principals' roles as good models, the level of trust in principals' decisions, and principals' willingness to take risks for the school's benefit. This dimension reflects the affective component of leadership that builds emotional bonds and trust between leaders and followers.

Inspirational motivation as the second dimension involves the principal's ability to articulate a clear, attractive, and meaningful vision of the school's future. In the context of private schools facing intense competition and challenges in maintaining competitiveness, the principal's ability to aspire and motivate teachers becomes critical to ensuring continued commitment to the organization's mission. Inspirational motivation is not just conveying a vision but involves the ability to arouse spirit, optimism, and confidence among teachers that the set goals can be achieved. Principals who practice inspirational motivation will always provide encouragement and motivation to teachers, state the vision in a motivating way, build confidence to achieve high standards, and create a positive and spirited atmosphere at school. Studies by Kim and Park (2023) and Santos and Cruz (2022) show that inspirational motivation has a significant effect on teacher commitment and job satisfaction. The measurement level of this dimension is through the clarity of the future vision conveyed by the principal, the level of encouragement and motivation given to teachers, the spirit to work hard to achieve school goals, and the confidence built among teachers to achieve high standards. In the context of private schools in the East Coast that may have limited resources compared to schools in urban areas, inspirational motivation becomes an important factor in maintaining teacher morale and commitment despite facing challenges.

The third dimension is intellectual stimulation, which refers to principals' behavior that encourages teachers to think critically, question existing assumptions, and seek innovative solutions to faced problems by encouraging open discussions on educational issues. In the constantly changing and evolving educational context, the ability to innovate and adapt to change becomes a very important skill. Principals who practice intellectual stimulation will create a culture of learning and continuous improvement at school.

In the digital era and the need to integrate technology in teaching and learning, intellectual stimulation is becoming an increasingly relevant dimension. However, a study by Rashid et al. (2021) shows that private schools often face challenges in providing sufficient resources for innovation and professional development activities. The intellectual stimulation dimension is measured through encouragement to think critically and innovatively, challenges to find new solutions to problems, the level of open discussion on educational issues, and freedom to

voice new ideas. In the context of the East Coast, which may have limited access to technology and professional development programs compared to urban areas, this dimension becomes a challenge in itself but is important to ensure competitive educational quality.

Individualized consideration is the dimension that involves principals' attention to the unique needs of each teacher and providing the necessary support for their professional development. This fourth dimension acknowledges that each teacher has different strengths, weaknesses, aspirations, and needs, thus requiring an adapted and personal approach. Principals who practice individualized consideration will act as mentors, coaches, and guides to teachers. In the context of private schools that typically have smaller sizes compared to public schools, this dimension actually has the potential to be practiced more effectively because the lower ratio of principals to teachers enables more personal and frequent interaction. A study by Charoensukmongkol and Phungsoonthorn (2023) found that individualized consideration is a strong predictor of job satisfaction and intention to remain in the organization. The individualized consideration dimension is measured through attention to teachers' professional development needs, the role as a mentor or coach, provision of skill development opportunities, and fairness in treatment of all teachers.

The conceptual framework built provides a solid foundation for measuring and understanding transformational leadership practices in the context of private primary schools in the East Coast of Malaysia. The four dimensions described above form the holistic construct of Principals' Transformational Leadership Practices. The arrows in the conceptual framework indicate that these four dimensions collectively contribute to the formation of comprehensive transformational leadership practices, subsequently contributing to a deeper understanding of leadership in Malaysia's private education sector. This relationship is integrative in nature, where each dimension strengthens the others to produce effective and transformative leadership.

Transformational leadership practices are measured based on teachers' perceptions of their principals' leadership behavior and approaches in these four dimensions. The use of teacher perceptions as a data source is appropriate because teachers are the parties who interact directly and frequently with principals, thus having the opportunity to observe and assess leadership practices comprehensively. This approach is in line with previous studies such as Md Sariff and Aida Hanim (2024), Rosli et al. (2023), and Kim and Park (2023). This framework not only has academic value but also provides significant practical implications for improving leadership practices in schools.

In summary, the literature review shows that the level of transformational leadership practices is influenced by various factors that interact in a complex context. The main factors that impact the level of transformational leadership practices include cultural context and social values, school organizational structure and type, organizational stability and staff retention, educational level and contextual needs, geographical location and access to resources, and regional context and education system. Empirical studies conducted in Europe, East Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia show that transformational leadership needs to be adapted to these contextual factors to ensure practice at an optimal level.

Methodology

This study employs a survey-type research design with a descriptive quantitative approach aimed at analyzing the level of transformational leadership practices of principals in private primary schools in the East Coast of Malaysia. The survey design was chosen for its suitability in collecting data from a large number of respondents and enabling systematic and objective statistical analysis to answer research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

The study population consists of 140 teachers serving in private Islamic primary schools under the Musleh Integrated Education Berhad (MIEB) network in the states of Kelantan, Terengganu, and Pahang. The selection of this location was based on consideration that the East Coast has unique socioeconomic and cultural characteristics but has received less attention in educational leadership research. Schools under MIEB also have a uniform administrative system, and the private school context faces its own challenges in management aspects compared to government schools.

Stratified sampling technique was used to ensure that each school in the East Coast was fairly represented, with sample size determined based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, which recommends a minimum of 103 respondents for a population of 140, and this study successfully obtained responses from 104 respondents, exceeding the minimum requirement with an encouraging response rate of 74.3%.

The instrument used was a structured questionnaire divided into two parts: Part A containing respondents' demographic information such as gender, age, academic qualifications, and teaching experience, while Part B comprised the Transformational Leadership Practice Scale adapted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X), containing 16 items measuring four main dimensions based on Bass and Avolio's (2020) theory: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

The instrument's reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which recorded excellent values for the overall scale ($\alpha = 0.94$) and for each dimension: idealized influence ($\alpha = 0.89$), inspirational motivation ($\alpha = 0.91$), intellectual stimulation ($\alpha = 0.88$), and individualized consideration ($\alpha = 0.92$), with all values exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.70 recommended by Hair et al. (2019), thus confirming the instrument's high internal consistency.

The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29, beginning with data cleaning and examination to identify missing values and outliers, followed by descriptive statistical analysis such as mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage to describe respondents' demographic profile and the level of principals' transformational leadership practices, with level score interpretation according to Chua's (2014) scale.

Table 1

Mean Score Level Interpretation Scale

Mean Score Range	Level	Interpretation
1.00 - 2.33	Low	Insufficient transformational leadership practices
2.34 - 3.66	Moderate	Transformational leadership practices at an acceptable level
3.67 - 5.00	High	Effective and encouraging transformational leadership practices

Source: Chua (2014)

Research Findings*Respondent Demographic Profile*

Table 2

Respondent Demographic Profile (n = 104)

Demographic Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	29	27.9
	Female	75	72.1
Age (years)	20-30	23	22.1
	31-40	67	64.4
	41-50	10	9.6
	≥ 51	4	3.8
Academic Qualifications	Diploma	26	25.0
	Bachelor's Degree	74	71.2
	Master's Degree	4	3.8
Teaching Experience	< 5 years	28	26.9
	5-10 years	35	33.7
	11-15 years	27	26.0
	> 15 years	14	13.5

Table 2 shows the demographic analysis that the majority of respondents were female teachers, totaling 75 (72.1%), while male teachers numbered 29 (27.9%). In terms of age, the largest group was in the 31-40 years range with 67 people (64.4%), followed by the 20-30 years group with 23 people (22.1%).

Based on academic qualifications, the majority of respondents held a Bachelor's Degree, totaling 74 people (71.2%), followed by Diploma holders at 26 people (25.0%) and Master's Degree holders at 4 people (3.8%). For teaching experience, the largest group had 5-10 years of experience, totaling 35 people (33.7%), showing a mix of experienced teachers and those still in professional development.

Level of Transformational Leadership Practices

Table 3

Level of Transformational Leadership Practices by Dimension

Transformational Leadership Dimensions	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Level
Idealized Influence	4.308	0.752	High
Inspirational Motivation	4.264	0.759	High
Intellectual Stimulation	4.161	0.813	High
Individualized Consideration	4.156	0.865	High
Overall	4.222	0.801	High

Descriptive analysis from table 3 shows that the level of transformational leadership practices of principals in private primary schools in the East Coast is at a high level (mean=4.222) with a standard deviation (0.801). These findings indicate that teachers assess their principals as leaders who effectively and encouragingly practice transformational leadership.

Idealized influence (mean=4.308, sd=0.752) recorded the highest score among all transformational leadership dimensions. The inspirational motivation dimension also showed a high level (mean=4.264, sd=0.759), followed by the individualized consideration dimension (mean=4.156, sd=0.865), which also showed a high level with a relatively large standard deviation, indicating variation in teacher perceptions. Next, intellectual stimulation (mean=4.161, sd=0.813) remained at a high level, although it recorded a relatively lower score compared to other dimensions.

Discussion

The results of this study show that the level of transformational leadership practices of principals in private primary schools in the East Coast is at a high level. This proves that although located in areas that receive less attention in educational leadership research, private schools in the East Coast have successfully practiced effective transformational leadership. These findings are in line with research conducted by Chen and Wang (2023), which found that transformational leadership has a consistent effect across different cultural contexts.

The alignment with international studies shows that Bass and Avolio's (2020) transformational leadership model is relevant and can be applied in the context of Malaysian private primary schools. The high achievement in all aspects of leadership shows that the principals in this MIEB network consistently practice transformational leadership and are experienced in leading their schools.

The high achievement in the aspect of being a role model shows that teachers greatly trust their principals and have high confidence in their integrity and credibility to lead. This is important in the context of private schools that require the trust of various stakeholders to ensure operational continuity (Santos & Cruz, 2022).

In the context of private Islamic schools, idealized influence becomes more critical because it aligns with Islamic values that emphasize integrity and noble character, in line with previous studies showing that moral and ethical aspects are an important foundation of leadership in the Asian context (Hallinger & Chen, 2021). These findings are also consistent with Okonkwo and Adebayo's (2022) study, which found idealized influence as the strongest element in developing country contexts. The item "My principal demonstrates ethical behavior and high morals" recorded the highest frequency percentage (56.7%), showing a very positive perception of principals' moral integrity who often apply ethics in leadership. These findings are in line with Abdullah and Rahman's (2021) study, which found that moral and ethical aspects are an important foundation of leadership in the Islamic school context. In the Eastern cultural context that prioritizes moral values, high perception of this dimension reflects the suitability of leadership practices with local values.

The findings show that principals are very good at giving spirit and inspiration to teachers. More than half of the teachers (54.8%) agree that their principals have a clear and attractive future plan for the school. The item "My principal states a clear and attractive future vision for the school" recorded a frequency of (54.8%). These findings show that principals successfully convey an attractive and meaningful vision for the school. Kim and Park's (2023) study emphasizes that the ability to convey a clear vision is critical in the private school context that needs to maintain competitiveness.

Furthermore, principals still demonstrate good performance in stimulating creative thinking, although it is the lowest aspect compared to their other strengths. Teachers chose the item "My principal challenges teachers to find new solutions to problems" recording the lowest frequency (31.7%). These findings reflect challenges commonly faced by private schools in providing sufficient resources and time for innovation and professional development activities (Rashid et al., 2021). Thompson and Davies' (2022) study also reported similar challenges in the Australian private school context. Nevertheless, the level that is still high in this dimension shows principals' commitment to always encourage critical thinking and innovation among teachers. This is in line with the needs in the Industrial Revolution 4.0 era that demands educators to constantly innovate in teaching and learning methods (Kilag et al., 2022).

For the aspect of caring about each teacher's needs, there is a large difference of opinion among teachers - some feel principals care very much, some feel less so. The item "My principal gives attention to each teacher's professional development needs" recorded a frequency of (36.5%). The larger variation in this dimension may be due to differences in communication styles and principals' approaches to individual teachers. In the private school context that typically has smaller sizes, this variation may reflect differences in the level of personal interaction between principals and certain teachers. Charoensukmongkol and Phungsoonthorn's (2023) study found that individualized consideration is the most challenging dimension to implement consistently because it requires sufficient time and resources to give attention to each individual.

The findings of this study provide significant implications for transformational leadership practices in Malaysia's private education sector. From a theoretical perspective, this study confirms the validity of Bass and Avolio's (2020) transformational leadership model in the context of private primary schools in the East Coast of Malaysia, strengthening the argument that the transformational leadership framework is universal and can be applied across different cultures, and contributes to the empirical repository by filling the knowledge gap related to private schools in rural areas of Malaysia that were previously less explored. From a practical perspective, these findings provide guidance to education administrators, private school founders, and principals in planning more effective leadership development programs, especially in aspects of character building and school leaders' moral values. In terms of implications for national education policy, this study supports PPPM 2013-2025 initiatives and is aligned with SKPMG2, which sets the requirement for transformative leadership, proving that private schools in the East Coast of Malaysia are on the right track in practicing effective leadership, and also has implications for achieving SDG 4, specifically Target 4.c, which emphasizes the importance of effective leadership in retaining and motivating quality teachers. Overall, the implications of this study span multiple levels of the education

ecosystem, from leadership theory development to practical application in daily school management, making this study an important reference for improving leadership practices in Malaysia's private education sector.

Although this study makes a significant contribution to the field of educational leadership, there are several gaps that need to be considered in interpreting and applying the study findings. This study is limited to a specific geographical context, namely private Islamic primary schools under the MIEB network in the East Coast of Malaysia only; thus, the generalizability of findings to other private schools with different characteristics needs to be done carefully. There are other challenges that need to be examined, such as the population and sample size of the study, which can still be considered quite small for more complex statistical analysis, and the use of quantitative methods only without triangulation of data from qualitative methods causes this study to be unable to capture the more profound nuances, contexts, or subjective experiences related to transformational leadership practices in the real school environment. All these challenges need to be considered by future researchers in planning further studies that can overcome these weaknesses and provide a more comprehensive understanding of transformational leadership in Malaysia's private education context.

Based on this study, several recommendations are put forward for future research to further develop the knowledge base in the field of transformational educational leadership. First, future researchers are advised to conduct longitudinal studies that follow the development of transformational leadership practices over a period of three to five years to enable a deeper understanding of the dynamics of leadership change over time and to study the long-term effects of transformational leadership on school performance and student achievement. Second, future research needs to expand the scope of geography and study samples by involving private schools of various types, different locations across Malaysia, and comparative studies between public and private schools or between schools in urban and rural areas to understand how different organizational contexts and environments influence transformational leadership practices. Third, future researchers are advised to use mixed-method designs that systematically integrate quantitative and qualitative approaches with qualitative data from in-depth interviews, direct observation, and school document analysis to provide a more holistic and contextual understanding of leadership practices. Fourth, further studies need to examine causal relationships or the impact of transformational leadership on various outcome variables such as student academic performance, teacher job satisfaction and commitment, school organizational culture, and pedagogical innovation through the use of more sophisticated statistical analysis. Fifth, considering that the intellectual stimulation dimension recorded a relatively lower score in this study, future research needs to focus specifically on examining challenges and strategies to enhance intellectual stimulation practices in private schools, including studying principals' training needs, required resource support, and best practices to encourage innovation and critical thinking among teachers. The implementation of these recommendations is expected to further enrich understanding of transformational leadership in the Malaysian education context and contribute to the development of more comprehensive, contextual, and practical leadership models for the private education sector.

Conclusion

Overall, this study has successfully achieved the objective of identifying the level of transformational leadership practices of principals in private primary schools in the East Coast of Malaysia based on the four main dimensions of Bass and Avolio's (2020) transformational leadership. This study found that principals in these schools demonstrate excellent leadership. They are most prominent in being role models that can be followed by other teachers. In addition, they are also good at giving spirit and inspiration to school members, stimulating teachers' creative thinking, and caring about each individual's needs. Although MIEB private primary schools in the East Coast of Malaysia receive less attention in educational research and face various unique challenges, their principals have successfully led in an effective way and brought positive changes to schools. The findings of this study support the universal validity of Bass and Avolio's (2020) transformational leadership model across different cultural contexts, strengthening existing literature showing the importance of transformational leadership in enhancing educational organizational effectiveness, where the highest score in the idealized influence dimension reflects the priority given to leaders' moral integrity and credibility in the Islamic private school context, which aligns with Islamic values and Eastern culture that prioritize moral aspects in leadership. This study makes a significant contribution to the knowledge base by filling the empirical gap related to transformational leadership in the context of private primary schools in the East Coast of Malaysia, which was previously less explored, providing empirical evidence regarding the level of transformational leadership practices in a unique socio-cultural context, and contributing to the development of more effective leadership models adapted to the needs of Malaysia's private education sector. From a practical perspective, the findings of this study provide important implications for various stakeholders in the education ecosystem, including education administrators, private school founders and management, and principals themselves for improving their leadership practices, and also support government initiatives in realizing PPPM 2013-2025, achieving SDG 4, and meeting SKPMG2 standards that emphasize transformative leadership. Although this study has several limitations, including limited geographical scope, cross-sectional design, and dependence on teacher perception data only, the study findings still provide a valuable picture of transformational leadership practices in a less-explored context and open space for more comprehensive further research. In conclusion, this study has successfully proven that transformational leadership is practiced at a high level in private primary schools in the East Coast of Malaysia.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest related to this research.

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