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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v8-i3/6422>

DOI: 10.6007/IJARPED/v8-i3/6422

Received: 29 July 2019, Revised: 11 August 2019, Accepted: 09 September 2019

Published Online: 12 September, 2019

In-Text Citation: (Jamli & Salim, 2019)

To Cite this Article: Jamli, N. F. B. A., & Salim, S. S. B. S. (2019). Emotional Intelligence: The Core Element of Leadership among Headmasters in Malaysia. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 8(3), 291–295.

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Vol. 8(3) 2019, Pg. 291 - 295

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT



Emotional Intelligence: The Core Element of Leadership among Headmasters in Malaysia

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Abstract

A headmaster is an individual who acts as the leader and will determine the direction of an educational institution towards excellence. This paper was written to highlight the importance of emotional intelligence in the leadership aspects of headmasters and its impact on the interactions with subordinates. The importance of emotional intelligence to individuals is seen as an important factor that has the potential to influence aspects of relationships and social interactions and is widely discussed in various areas of leadership. There has been an increase in the concerns of head teachers who are unable to regulate aspects of their personal emotions that may affect their interactions with teachers and support staff, leading to a decline in school performance. Through the light of previous studies, emotional intelligence is seen as an important element in the field of leadership for individuals in self-adaptation and conflict management. As a result of leadership research in western countries, successful leaders in management and leadership aspects are associated with emotional intelligence. In the aspect of school leadership research in Malaysia, emotional intelligence is still lacking.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Headmaster, Leadership.

Introduction

The Malaysian education system has begun the process of transformation through the implementation of the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013–2025 to incorporate a competitive education system to compete with developed countries (Ching, 2015). The current trend of global change and modernisation is the catalyst for many changes in the Malaysian education system that has long been part of the traditional education system (Hashimah & Shauki, 2013). Changes in the system of leader selection are seen as necessary steps to spark new thoughts and passion in educating educators to bring national education to the forefront (Rahmah, 2002). International studies showed that schools led by high-performing principals and teachers increase their student achievement by 50% (Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013–2025, 2013, pp. 100). In the study of leadership in western countries, successful leaders in management and leadership aspects are associated with emotional intelligence (Stokely, 2008).

Leaders with high emotional intelligence are able to adapt to the working environment that enables them to manage any conflict (Hopkins & Yonker, 2015).

Emotional Intelligence and Leadership

Klemp (2005) referred to emotional intelligence as a set of skills or abilities in identifying one's emotions, and understanding, assessing, and distinguishing the emotions involved as a tool to guide individuals in generating positive thoughts and acting effectively in interactions with others. Hopkins and Yonker's (2015) study found that emotional intelligence enables individuals to have the ability to control impulses, increase problem-solving skill, and become more socially responsible.

From the point of view of school leadership through Williams (2008b), it was argued that the factor that distinguishes outstanding school leaders from ordinary school leaders is that the combination of emotional intelligence and social cognition can indirectly influence student achievement (Muijs, 2011a). Wendorf-Heldt and Kay (2009) concluded that leaders with high emotional intelligence are found to be successful in leading organisations and that emotional intelligence was first applied in Singapore's school leadership system (Koh, Steers, & Terborg, 1995; Sagnak, 2010). Meanwhile, Stokely (2008) discovered that most failures in leadership aspects are attributed to deterioration in emotional competence.

A meta-analysis of 69 studies on emotional intelligence conducted by Rooy and Viswesvaran (2004) cited in Moore (2009) also supported the notion that emotional intelligence is an important element for organisational leadership. They concluded that emotional intelligence might be considered as a determinant of job performance. Likewise, there are studies that suggested leaders with high emotional intelligence are more skilled at influencing, inspiring, and stimulating intellectual development in staff development.

Emotional intelligence in school leadership has been shown to have many effects and differences in school and student performance (Muijs, 2011b). A study by Bumphus (2008); Ahmed, Majid, & Zin, (2016) also indicated that the school leaders surveyed had high emotional intelligence capacity and were strongly associated with leadership performance. School leaders need to recognise their emotions, control, empathy, and optimism in a critical work environment that enables them to lead the school more effectively. Consequently, this proposes high school leaders who are capable of managing cognitive, emotional, and physical pressures in ensuring success in schools.

Leadership Style in Malaysia

In terms of the study of school leadership in Malaysia, according to Mazalan (2002), the type of transformational leadership is still lacking. He found that scientific inquiries into transformational leadership are still new and that the importance of this style of leadership has yet to grab the full attention of researchers in local and international education systems. Although most head teachers have administrative experience of 15 to 25 years, skills in influencing staff and others remain a major issue. In a recent study concerning Educational

Leadership Management in Malaysia, Quah and Azmiza (2014) discovered that the same issue was raised by some respondents in management and leadership. It was found that head teachers suffered problems in influencing school staff and controlling the behaviour of subordinates, which are considered as major.

Furthermore, Amin (2012); Ahmed, Khalid, Ammar, & Shah, (2017) mentioned some of the critiques of school leadership models, whereby: (i) emphasis on affective domains of leadership is found to be less accentuated; (ii) school administrators are less likely to practise what they learned during training; and (iii) weaknesses in applying acquired leadership skills in real situations. Norlia and Jamil (2006) also agreed that factors of leadership behaviour focusing on personal qualities, such as positive attitude, effective communication, appreciation for contributions, and engagement of subordinates, were important factors in determining whether a school is effective, successful or outstanding. Additionally, Shariffah et al. (2012) looked at leadership qualities from the perspective of emotional intelligence. Several studies have shown that there is a positive and significant relation between emotional intelligence and effective leadership (Higgs & Aitken, 2003; Kay & Wendorf-Heldt, 2009; Batool, 2013).

Conclusion

Although many studies of emotional intelligence have been conducted in the field of education in Malaysia, they have only focused on the relationship between teacher emotional intelligence and task load. Meanwhile, from the leadership aspect of headmasters, the study focused more on leadership style through teachers' perceptions. Studies on the importance of emotional intelligence, its influence on teacher leadership style, and its relevance to school performance are currently lacking in the literature. The importance of emotional intelligence to individuals is seen as an important factor that can influence aspects of relationships and social interactions. Emotional intelligence gives individuals an advantage in effective conflict management. Through a study by Hopkins and Yonker (2015), it was found that there is some correlation between emotional intelligence and conflict management in terms of problem-solving, social responsibility, and impulse control related to conflict management in work situations.

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Jamli, N. F. B. A., & Salim, S. S. B. S. (2019). Emotional Intelligence: The Core Element of Leadership among Headmasters in Malaysia. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(3), 224–228.