

The Relationship Between Principal Transformational Leadership Practices And Teacher Learning Organization Practices In Cluster Secondary Schools.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the research is to examine the relationship between principal transformational leadership practices and teacher learning organization practices in cluster secondary schools based on teachers' perspectives. The purpose of the research is also to a) identify the level of practices of principal transformational leadership based on four leadership dimensions, b) identify the level of teacher learning organization practices based on five principles of learning organization and c) determine the difference in principal transformational leadership practices and teacher learning organization practices based on teachers' subject specialization. A quantitative research employing a survey method was conducted using questionnaire as a research instrument. The research involved 285 teachers selected based on the stratified sampling method. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results have shown that the level of transformational leadership of principals and teacher learning organization practices are high. Meanwhile, the results of the statistical analysis reveal that there is a moderate positive significant relationship between the principal transformational leadership practices and teacher learning organization practices. There is also a significant difference in both practices of transformational leadership and learning organization in terms of the teachers' subject specialization. Based on the research, it is stressed that comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the two concepts studied and how they could contribute to school excellence is very crucial. The existing transformational leadership as well as learning organization practices should be continuously improved and further enhanced to ensure the sustainability of schools as learning organizations. This would enable schools to cope with educational change and lead them towards achieving their school excellence.

Keywords: cluster schools; transformational leadership; learning organization; school improvement; teacher learning

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, an organization should become more flexible, responsive and capable of adapting to change for its survival. The 21st century places a greater emphasis on every individual and organization to be engaged with continuous learning so that they are able to deal with the rapid change surrounding them. Globalization, technological change and uncertainty have been identified as challenging elements that an organization has to deal with and the success of the organization in surviving change is measured by its capacity in becoming a learning organization in which the learning of every individual is sustained (Marquardt 2002). Apart from globalization and change, the Malaysian education system is also faced with demands of the country's rapid development as well as education reforms which aim at improving the quality and standard of the education system through continuous improvement efforts. Therefore, there's definitely a very strong need for schools to change and adapt to their surroundings, develop the school capacity and the capacity of every individual in schools so that they are able to manage change and realize the development of the country.

According to Ishak and Nor Asikin (2003), it is the responsibility of school principals to form an organization in which all its members are able to learn new skills and knowledge continuously so that they are capable of dealing with change and realizing the ultimate goal of the country's education system. In line with the needs of education reforms in Malaysia, schools should become learning organizations, increase the leadership capacity and support the personal development of every individual particularly teachers in schools. As teachers have a very huge responsibility in playing their role as change agents, it is very crucial that they are

involved with continuous learning. This is to ensure the improvement of the quality of teaching which ultimately contributes to school excellence (Rahimah 2000). In transforming schools into learning organizations, there are several underlying principles which can be practised by teachers and they are a) personal mastery, b) mental models, c) shared vision, d) team learning and e) systems thinking (Senge 2006). These principles, if embraced and practised, are capable of transforming teachers into a group of highly knowledgeable, competent and skilled individuals through the continuous learning process taking place at all levels. This would eventually contribute to school improvements as a whole.

However, the concept of learning organization can only be embraced by teachers if school leaders particularly the principals are committed to transforming their schools into a learning organization. The role of the principals in a learning community is to promote learning to teachers and students alike in which they themselves become learners. The school principals should show a very strong commitment to the teachers' continuous learning by giving them opportunities to develop personally and professionally, building a collaborative learning culture, embracing a collective vision and forming a committed team in achieving school objectives (Hughes & Kritsonis 2006; Rahmad 2007; Thompson, Gregg & Niska 2004). Most education literature suggests that transformational leadership as the most relevant type of leadership in dealing with change. The leadership is said to be more sensitive to organizational learning, building collected vision and practising shared leadership. These are very important elements in ensuring an organizational excellence (Barnett et al. 2001; Sillins & Mulford 2002).

In conclusion, learning has indeed become a critical issue nowadays due to the rapid change in the era of globalization. It is imperative that school leadership plays a significant role in promoting learning amongst students as well as teachers in schools. School principal transformational leadership styles are seen as the most effective in sustaining schools as learning organizations. The practice of learning organization principles by every individual in schools specifically the teachers are crucial in meeting the goals; achieving school excellence and producing the type of human capitals required by the nation. The principal transformational leadership practices and teacher learning organization practices are the two identified determinants in ensuring continuous school improvements and excellence.

RATIONAL

As far as the Malaysian education context is concerned, studies on relationship between principal transformational leadership and learning organization have not been extensively done. However, these two concepts of leadership and learning organization have been quite extensively studied in the West and other countries (Abu-Tineh 2003; Fitriana & Siaahan 2007; Johnston & Caldwell 2001; Silins & Mulford 2002). These studies have managed to highlight the significant relationship between the two concepts and at the same time, contribute to the body of knowledge in educational leadership and teacher learning.

According to Suseela (2008), it is still vague to see how principals play their role in supporting the improvement of teachers' instructional practices with regards to providing support for the teachers' professional development as well as teacher learning. Despite the apparent value of the reform agenda, little attention has been paid by the educational management authorities and school administrators to issues of how teachers learn and implement new instructional practices. Most principals expect teachers to produce new innovative ideas but the former are not engaged with the learning process themselves. Likewise, teachers have high expectations on students getting excellent grades but these teachers hardly promote themselves as learners. Other than that, lack of time for interaction and collaboration, lack of focus on the core business of teaching and learning due to various school programs held and teacher isolation issues have directly affected the quality of teachers' instructional practices (Waters 2009). All these constraints have apparently become a hindrance to the transformation of schools into learning organizations which regard learning for every individual as crucial and indispensable. Therefore, a research of this kind should be done to gather information on the relationship between transformational leadership practices and teacher learning organization practices especially in reputable schools such as cluster schools.

RESEARCH SCOPE

The research was to examine the relationship between the principal transformational leadership practices and teacher learning organization practices in cluster secondary schools. Cluster Schools in the Malaysian education context, are a brand name given to schools which have been identified as being excellent within their cluster from the aspects of school management and student excellence. The establishment of Cluster Schools is aimed at propelling the excellence of educational institutions in the Malaysian education system and developing model schools that can be benchmarked against by other schools within the same cluster as well as others outside its cluster. The research was also carried out based on the underlying assumption that transformational leadership and learning organization practices in those schools among the principals and teachers respectively do exist to the extent that they are able to contribute to the continuous improvement of the schools in order to sustain their excellence.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the research are to:

- a. Determine the relationship between principal transformational leadership practices and teacher learning organization practices.
- b. Identify the level of transformational leadership practices based on the leadership dimensions such as fostering idealized influence, providing inspirational motivation, creating intellectual stimulation and showing individualized consideration based on teachers' perspectives.
- c. Identify the level of teacher learning organization practices based on the principles of personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking.
- d. Determine the differences in principal transformational leadership practices and teacher learning organization practices based on teachers' subject specialization.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between principal transformational leadership practices and teacher learning organization practices.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in principal transformational leadership practices based on teachers' subject specialization.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in teacher learning organization practices based on teachers' subject specialization.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this research is based on the theoretical framework of five principles of learning organization (Senge 2006) and model of transformational leadership by Slocum and Hellriegel (2007). The five principles of learning organization consists of personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking. Senge (2006) has outlined the five principles in order for an organization to become a learning organization and be able to adapt to change and achieve the goal of continuous improvement in the organization. The research also focuses on transformational leadership practices among school principals based on the four dimensions of transformational leadership which are fostering idealized influence, providing inspirational motivation, creating intellectual stimulation and showing individualized consideration (Slocum & Hellriegel 2007). Other than that, the research also looks at the influence of the selected demographic factor which is teachers' subject specialization on both practices studied. It is to note that there have not been many studies using the same demographic factor to describe the concept of transformational leadership and learning organization respectively. Thus, some of the findings explaining the influence of the teachers' subject specialization could be only relevant to the context of the research carried out.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The design of the research is quantitative survey. Since the research was based on the teachers' perspectives, the population of the study was teachers from six cluster secondary schools in the states of Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory and Selangor. The samples of the study consisted of 285 secondary school teachers. The research instrument used was a questionnaire which measured the teachers' perspectives on their principal

transformational leadership practices and the teachers' own learning organization practices. The reliability coefficients of the instrument varied from .70 to .96.

The data collected were analyzed using the SPSS Version 16.0. Descriptive analysis such as frequency, percentage and mean score were used to explain the respondents' background and the level of transformational leadership practices and learning organization practices. Meanwhile, inferential statistics such as Pearson Correlation and MANOVA were employed to answer the research hypothesis.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Respondents' Profiles

Table 1.1 Respondents' Profiles

	Background	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Teaching experience	5 years and below	88	30.9
	6-10 years	66	23.1
	11 years and above	131	46.0
	Total (N)	285	
Subject specialization	Language	81	28.4
	Humanities	63	22.1
	Science & Mathematics	84	29.5
	Technical & Vocational	57	20.0
	Total (N)	285	

A total of 285 teachers responded to the questionnaires distributed to all the six selected cluster secondary schools. Out of the figure, 88 teachers (30.9%) have taught for 5 years and less in schools, 66 (23.1%) have 6-10 years teaching experience and 131 (46.0%) have been teaching for 11 years and more. As for the teachers' subject specialization, 81 teachers are language teachers, 63 of them are from the humanities department and 84 teachers come from the science and mathematics department. The remaining 57 have been identified as technical and vocational teachers. The summary of demographic information is shown in Table 1.1.

B. The level of transformational leadership practices based on the four leadership dimensions

Table 1.2 Level of principal transformational leadership practices

Transformational Leadership Dimensions	Mean	Std dev	Interpretation
Fostering Idealized Influence	3.74	0.617	High
Providing Inspirational Motivation	3.83	0.639	High
Creating Intellectual Stimulation	3.67	0.609	High
Showing Individualized Consideration	3.63	0.643	Moderate
Overall level of leadership practices	3.72	0.597	High

Table 1.2 above illustrates that the level of principal transformational leadership practices, based on the teachers' perspectives, is high. The second dimension, providing inspirational motivation shows the highest mean score. Among the leadership practices highlighted by the teachers were that, the principals showed a very strong commitment to the school mission and vision and consistently involved the teachers in achieving those vision and mission of their schools. This is in line with the importance of leaders possessing a clear vision which is embraced by every individual in schools so that they can have a clear direction and be able to channel the energy towards achieving the vision (Edaris 2004; Mumtaz 2009; Rahmad 2007).

Meanwhile, the fourth dimension studied, showing individualized consideration has the lowest mean score. This has indicated that this particular leadership dimension has been practised the least by the principals. The moderate mean score for this leadership dimension has shown that the principals gave little focus on the humanity aspect of the leadership such as giving space for teachers to have different opinions and considering the teachers' individual needs, abilities and ambitions. School principals should pay attention to this leadership dimension because teachers need self achievement and growth. As school principals, they can coach, mentor, facilitate or council the teachers on how to handle their job and encourage them to be creative and innovative.

On the other hand, for the same dimension being discussed, the teachers perceived that their principals supervised the teachers' work so that they could always improve on their teaching and learning process. This has actually portrayed the practice of transformational leadership in which that the supervision carried out by the principals is able to benefit and motivate the teachers (Sidhu & Chan 2010). The teachers also agreed that principal supervision is a form of additional support given to them so that they are able to improve their instructional practices and have the opportunity to develop professionally.

C. The level of learning organization practices based on the five principles of learning organization

Table 1.3 Level of teacher learning organization practices

Learning organization principles	Mean	Std dev	Interpretation
Personal Mastery	3.88	0.462	High
Mental Models	4.12	0.412	High
Shared Vision	4.05	0.413	High
Team Learning	4.15	0.429	High
Systems Thinking	4.15	0.406	High
Overall learning organization practices	4.07	0.371	High

Based on the Table 1.3 above, the level of teacher learning organization practices is high for all the learning organization principles studied. This means that the five principles of learning organization were frequently practised by the teachers in cluster secondary schools. The results have also implied that the concept of learning organization which is more commonly related to the context of management and industry can also be applied in school settings. The findings are found to be consistent with the qualitative findings of Park and Rojewski (2006) and Retna and Ng (2004) which concluded that the concept of learning organization by Senge (2006) can be applied in the Asian cultural and educational context.

The practice of personal mastery by the teachers has shown that they were consistently involved with the learning process and improved their knowledge and skills. This is probably due to the fact that the teachers were aware of the importance of being learners themselves and looking for strategies to improve their instructional practices. According to Thompson et al. (2004), the personal mastery possessed by teachers can actually in turn help increase the student learning. The mental models practices show similarly high mean score. The teachers were willing to change their old teaching methods and carry out reflective sessions so that they were able to synthesize ideas for creating new learning (Glickman et al. 2003). In addition, the teachers also learned and changed through feedback from students in class and their colleagues respectively. The next learning organization practice studied is shared vision which also displays a high mean score. According to Senge (2006), shared vision is also capable of providing focus and energy for learning in an organization.

Likewise, the fourth principle which is team learning, also shows a high mean score. The findings have been able to support the many arguments in literature that team learning is crucial in creating a learning organization. Senge (2006), Goh (2003) and Coppieters (2005) have respectively outlined team learning or team work as one of the strategic building blocks in creating a learning organization. The teachers studied claimed that they were being open and honest about sharing their best practices and shared information about each other's evaluation on their students' performance. These practices have been stressed to be important in improving students' performance and teachers' teaching methodology (Crawford 2004; Hughes & Kritsonis 2006). The research has also highlighted the practices of collaboration, collegiality and how the teachers perceived their principals to be encouraging in creating a collaborative climate in schools. The last principle of learning organization which is systems thinking has also shown a high mean score. The teachers had a positive perception when they were able to perceive their schools as an organization with its own systems. The teachers were also capable of considering their every action and how it may affect their students and colleagues alike in schools.

D. Differences in principal transformational leadership practices according to four leadership dimensions based on teachers' subject specialization.

To determine the significant difference in teachers' perceptions of their principal transformational leadership practices based on the teachers' subject specialization, MANOVA analysis has been utilized. Table 1.4 reveals that there is a significant difference in principal transformational leadership practices based on all the four leadership dimensions studied. The post hoc turkey test has further demonstrated that the technical and

vocational teachers perceived their principals to be practising the transformational leadership the most in all the four leadership dimensions. This is probably due to the fact that these teachers were able to see the positive impact of their principal leadership on the teachers' personal and professional development. The principals' strong commitment to the school vision and mission and their capability of being a role model in promoting learning among the teachers and staff alike have apparently become a driving factor to the technical and vocational teachers in schools. Apart from that, support from the principals in terms of equipment and financial aid needed by these teachers to strengthen their instructional practices could also contribute to the teachers' positive perceptions on the principal transformational leadership practices.

Table 1.4 MANOVA for differences in teachers' perceptions of principal transformational leadership practices based on teachers' subject specialization.

Dimension	Teachers' Subject Specialization	Mean	SD	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Fostering idealized influence	Language	3.80	0.575	6.753	3	2.251	6.245	0.000
	Humanities	3.63	0.699					
	Science & Mathematics	3.59	0.599					
	Technical & Vocational	4.00	0.514					
Providing motivational inspiration	Language	3.91	0.586	7.138	3	2.379	6.144	0.000
	Humanities	3.71	0.751					
	Science & Mathematics	3.66	0.640					
	Technical & Vocational	4.07	0.471					
Creating intellectual stimulation	Language	3.75	0.627	6.491	3	2.164	6.142	0.000
	Humanities	3.54	0.680					
	Science & Mathematics	3.52	0.569					
	Technical & Vocational	3.90	0.464					
Showing individualized consideration	Language	3.71	0.596	7.719	3	2.573	6.598	0.000
	Humanities	3.52	0.728					
	Science & Mathematics	3.45	0.631					
	Technical & Vocational	3.89	0.522					

E. Differences in teacher learning organization practices according to five learning organization principles based on teachers' subject specialization.

Table 1.5 ANOVA for differences in teachers' perceptions of learning organization practices based on teachers' subject specialization.

Principles		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Personal Mastery	Between Groups	2.888	3	0.963	4.682	0.003
	Within Groups	57.779	281	0.206		
	Total	60.667	284			
Mental Models	Between Groups	2.006	3	0.669	4.074	0.007
	Within Groups	46.114	281	0.164		
	Total	48.120	284			
Shared Vision	Between Groups	3.903	3	1.301	8.198	0.000
	Within Groups	44.588	281	0.159		
	Total	48.491	284			

Team Learning	Between Groups	3.122	3	1.041	5.962	0.001
	Within Groups	49.057	281	0.175		
	Total	52.180	284			
Systems Thinking	Between Groups	2.463	3	0.821	5.212	0.002
	Within Groups	44.257	281	0.157		
	Total	46.720	284			

Based on Table 1.5 above, the ANOVA test has shown that there is a statistically significant difference in teacher learning organization practices based on their subject specialization. The hypotheses formulated was therefore rejected. The post hoc turkey test conducted has further demonstrated that technical and vocational teachers had the highest mean score for all the five learning organization principles studied. Justifications for such findings probably lie in the needs of these teachers to consistently improve on their knowledge and skills. They should be more sensitive to the effects of change in order to prepare students for the demands of the present workforce. Also, the learning organization practices of the technical and vocational teachers may be best explained by the adult learning theory. These teachers were engaged with continuous learning because of the professional needs as they were directly involved with more 'hands on' learning subjects. Keeping themselves updated with technological advancement and evolving knowledge around them seems to be a prerequisite for the technical and vocational teachers. This is to ensure that they are constantly in line with the present instructional practices and it also explains why the needs for these teachers to learn is more significant compared to other area of specialization.

F. Relationship between principal transformational leadership practices and teacher learning organization practices.

Table 1.6 Relationship between principal transformational leadership practices and teacher learning organization practices

		Transformational Leadership	Learning Organization
Transformational Leadership	Pearson Correlation	1	0.573**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	285	285
Learning Organization	Pearson Correlation	0.573**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	285	285

Significant level at 0.05

The table 1.6 above shows that there is a moderate positive significant relationship between the principal transformational leadership practices and teacher learning organization practices. Therefore, the null hypothesis has been rejected. This shows that when the teachers perceived their principals to be transformational leaders, they would practise the learning organization principles even more. When further analyzed according to the leadership dimensions, it was found that all the dimensions showed the same moderate positive significant relationship with teacher learning organization practices (see Table 1.7). The dimension of providing inspirational motivation had the highest correlation and fostering idealized influence showing the lowest. The findings clearly show that the principal transformational leadership is the most relevant type of leadership practised in the context of change and is able to contribute to the successful learning organization practices among the teachers.

Table 1.7 Correlation between principal transformational leadership practices and teacher learning organization practices

Dimensions of principal transformational leadership practices	Teacher Learning Organization Practices		
	r	Sig	Interpretation
Fostering Idealized Influence	0.525	0.000	Moderate
Providing Inspirational Motivation	0.560	0.000	Moderate
Creating Intellectual Stimulation	0.545	0.000	Moderate
Showing Individualized Consideration	0.552	0.000	Moderate

Significant level at 0.05

CONCLUSION

Learning organization is a management approach that is capable of transforming an organization into a more competitive and adaptive in response to change. In school contexts, the existence of teacher learning organization practices which are consistently supported by transformational principals would enable the schools to achieve continuous improvement and excellence in terms of teaching and learning aspects as well as student learning. The findings of the research have concluded that there is a significant relationship between the principal transformational leadership practices and teacher learning organization practices in cluster secondary schools. On top of that, the high level of transformational leadership and learning organization practices as perceived by the teachers has successfully portrayed and matched the level of excellence and recognition of the schools involved in the research. School leadership particularly principals play a very significant role in ensuring that the existing learning organization practices among teachers is further enhanced and sustained for achieving the school improvement goals. The least practised leadership dimension which is showing individualized consideration should be given more emphasis and the other leadership dimensions should be continually improved so that schools can be sustained as learning organizations. Thus, a certain amount of knowledge and comprehension from relevant stakeholders is required in order for them to understand the relationship between the two concepts studied. Aspects of teachers' professional development focusing on their continuous learning in terms of improving their instructional practices should be given priority by relevant parties. Similarly, school principals should be consistently exposed to the best theories and practice of school leadership through courses, workshops and seminars.

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