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TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND SCHOOL CULTURE IN PRIMARY CLUSTER SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Education is a key factor contributing to the success of a nation's human development to support the national vision and mission. The nation depends on schools to ensure the efficient and successful education process for human development. In fact, studies on educational progress have proven that leadership is important for school success and high performance. The vast literature has supported that transformational leadership of school principals is the proven leadership attribute in school success and achievement. Thus, this study aims at examining the relationships between principals' transformational leadership practices and school culture in primary cluster schools in the state of Selangor, Malaysia. A quantitative approach was used to achieve the aim. The study included 331 teachers in primary cluster schools in Selangor and data were analysed using SPSS v.22. The findings indicated that teachers in primary cluster schools in Selangor perceived their principals as having a high level of transformational leadership characteristics. Furthermore, a significantly positive and a strong correlation was found between principal transformational leadership practices and school culture. Multiple regression analysis showed that only four out of the eight dimensions of transformational leadership are statistically significant predictors of school culture. It is recommended that the education authorities and principals take note of the importance of transformational leadership in ensuring school success.

Keywords: Transformational leadership; school culture; cluster schools; Primary education, Malaysia



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

INTRODUCTION

Keeping up with the waves of globalisation, the education system is undergoing constant changes. These changes warrant rapid developments within the school education system (Abdul Ghani & Kuppan, 2012) in order to ensure balanced students in terms of knowledge and skills. In ensuring that balanced students thrive, greater efficiency and accountability are particularly important to cope with the ongoing challenges of global education (Chan & Sidhu, 2009). In view of this, the Ministry of Education had implemented the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013 – 2025, which highlighted the need to have “high-performing school leaders in every school” (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2013, p. 25) to maximise school efficiency.

However, enhancing school efficiency and productivity does not happen on its own or overnight. What it needs is a leader who understands change and is able to bring change into the school culture. This means the school leaders have a big role in determining the level of excellence and success of the school. Sharma, Sun, and Kannan (2012) noted that leadership, principal leadership in particular, is the most significant area of research in education. As Sharma (2010) noted, leadership can “effectively assist in the implementation of changes, right from the setting of goals to the accomplishment of goals” (p. 335).

Studies on educational leadership have proven that leadership is vital in the effort to make a school successful and achieve high performance (Nedelcu, 2013). Awang and Hasani (2016) stated that the evolution of the current education system has introduced a new educational leadership style, which is transformational leadership. In describing transformational leadership, Burns (1978) stated that it is a process in which “leaders and followers make each other advance to a higher level of morality and motivation” (p. 19). Venkat (2005) and Shadraonis (2013) defined transformational leadership as the leaders’ ability to motivate and direct their subordinates toward achieving organisational goals and performing beyond those goals. Further, Leithwood (1992) noted that transformational leadership facilitates the redefinition of a people’s mission and vision, a renewal of their commitment and the restructuring of their systems for goal accomplishment. It is “best suited to meet the needs of current school reform because such leaders seek to align personal and shared values and goals to bring about increased capacity and commitment” (Boberg, 2013, p.17).

Rijal (2016) noted that besides leadership, organisational culture also has a strong influence on school development. Schein (2010) described culture as a “pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p. 18).

School culture denotes the traditions and rituals that are created over time and inherited or acquired and practised by members (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Strong organisational culture serves as a compass to guide authorities and can compensate for the behaviour of organisation members. This supports the notion by Zulfikri, Yahya, Yaakob, and Raman (2015) that “commitment is shaped by the norms and symbols, values and beliefs and basic assumptions about the culture of the organization” (p. 411). A positive school culture has a positive effect on school performance. Conversely, negative school culture will give a negative image to school achievement (Ohlson, Swanson, Adams-Manning, & Byrd, 2016). According to Gruenert and Whitaker (2015), although culture has an immense influence on leadership, it is leadership that makes the difference. Nevertheless, it is noted that leadership and school culture go hand in hand, in developing and sustaining school reform (Valentine, 2006) as leaders work on creating, shaping and maintaining the culture (Schein, 1992).

Schools in Malaysia are similar in terms of curriculum, infrastructure and teacher qualifications. What distinguishes the schools are the culture in the school and this is what determines the school effectiveness (Bolman & Deal, 1991).



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

Each school is a formal organization that has its distinctive culture, shaped by the interaction between citizens, the school management, teachers, administration staff, parents, and students. The culture of a school also differs from one school to another, in the sense that it can be either a positive or negative school culture. It influences the way people think, feel, and act, and is built within a school over time (Peterson, 2002).

A study by Yaakob and Yahya (2012), conducted among school teachers in Kedah, concluded that teacher perceptions of their school culture varies, depending on the school types. They suggested that priority should be given to transformational leadership practice. Meanwhile, in Southwest Mississippi, Quin, Deris, Bischoff, and Johnson (2015) reported a strong correlation between transformational leadership and school culture. In contrast, Ali, Sharma, and Amir (2016) reported the absence of a significant relationship between school culture and school effectiveness in Pakistan. They concluded that lack of leadership was the reason for failure to develop the school culture.

As noted by Mohd Faiz and Jamal (2016), school culture must be created and shaped accordingly. This is to prevent any negative effects and irregularities (Kaplan & Owings, 2013). Past studies have shown mixed results, indicating that leadership and school culture play a role in school success or failure. Thus, this study aims at investigating the relationship between transformational leadership and school culture as perceived by the teachers. The following objectives have been formulated to achieve the aim:

- a) To identify the level of principal transformational leadership as perceived by teachers in primary cluster schools in Selangor.
- b) To examine the relationship between principal transformational leadership practices and school culture in the schools.
- c) To determine which of the principal transformational leadership practices dimensions would predict school culture as perceived by the teachers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Transformational Leadership

In referring to transformational leadership, Avolio and Bass (1988) termed it as value added as it provides the avenue for improvement (Leithwood & Poplin, 1992). This is echoed by Pont (2014), and Mohammed Sani and Jamalullail (2012) who stated that highly successful schools are led by leaders who have effective leadership qualities. According to Aydin, Sarier, and Uysal (2013), transformational leaders focus on maintaining a healthy relationship with employees, being fair, providing help, advising, and motivating employees on their professional development. Thus, transformational leaders become “highly successful in coping with educational challenges, implementing innovations” (Jamal, 2014, p. 1271) and predicting employee organizational behaviours (Ling & Mohammed Sani, 2013; Sabariah, Juninah, Khaziyati, & Salina, 2010; Teh, Wong, Lee, & Loh, 2014; Yunus, 2012).

Transformational leadership was developed by Burns (1978) which was an analysis of political leaders. It was then refined and expanded by Bass (1985), who composed it into three domains: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership seeks to “raise the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both the leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both” (p. 20).



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

Meanwhile, Bass and Avolio (1994) stated that transformational leadership motivates its followers by employing the four I's – *Idealised Influence, Individualized Consideration, Inspirational Motivation, and Intellectual Stimulation*.

Later on, Leithwood enhanced the transformational leadership model to suit school settings. Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins (1994) defined transformational leadership as the ability to empower others, by accomplishing a “major change in form, nature, and function of some phenomenon” (p. 7). Leithwood and Jantzi's (1995) transformational leadership model is asserted along eight dimensions, which are: (1) developing a widely shared vision; (2) building consensus about school goals and priorities; (3) providing intellectual stimulation; (4) providing individualized support; (5) modeling behavior; (6) demonstrating high-performance expectations; (7) strengthening school culture; (8) building collaborative structures.

Leithwood and Sun (2012, p. 400) defined the eight dimensions of transformational leadership. The first dimension *developing a widely shared vision* means identifying, developing and articulating a shared vision or broad purpose for their schools that is appealing and inspiring to staff. The second dimension *is building consensus* about school goals and priorities while the third one is to *provide individual support* by listening to staff member opinions and attending to their needs. The fourth dimension is to *exhibit modelling behaviour* by being ethical, putting respect and trust in the staff. The fifth dimension is to *demonstrate high-performance expectations* so that teachers hold high expectations for students and become effective innovators. The sixth dimension *strengthening school culture* means promoting an atmosphere of caring and trust by building a set of common values and thus bring forth the seventh dimension of *building a collaborative culture*. The last dimension is to provide *intellectual stimulation* by encouraging employee creativity and evaluating and refining practices.

Past few studies (Choi, Wan Mardhia, Tan & Low, 2014; Yeo, 2006) found excellent headmasters in Malaysia practice transformational leadership by exhibiting modelling behaviour to their followers. In another study, Mohd Izham, Fuziah, Norazah, and Saemah (2011) in examining the relationship between principals' transformational leadership and teacher activity toward the school transformation based on teacher perspectives found that the level of principal transformational leadership was high.

School Culture

In an educational setting, culture is developed and shaped through the constant interactions between the staff members, students, and the community. School culture gives the school a distinctive identity that represents the unwritten feeling toward the organization (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). School culture is more influential on life and learning (Barth, 2002) that “sharpens the focus of daily behaviour and increases attention to what is important and valued” (Peterson & Deal, 2011, p. 11). It is also noted that collaborative culture is an essential element in determining the overall success of the school (Bland, 2012; Dickerson, 2011). Successful schools usually have a set of norms and values focusing on teachings that support student learning, open dialogue, and strong collaboration among members. Some scholars (Gruenert & Valentine, 1998; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015) have identified six school cultural practices to enhance the learning quality which are collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, and professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support and learning partnership. The school cultural model of Gruenert and Valentine (1998) is defined as:

1. Collaborative leadership which is the “the degree to which school leaders establish, maintain and support collaborative relationship among staff, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership”;



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

2. Teacher collaboration refers to “the extent of teachers engage in constructive dialogue that furthers the school vision”;
3. Professional development is the “the extent of teachers enhance their personal development and school-wide improvement”;
4. Unity of purpose is defined as the “the extent of teachers work together towards a common mission for the school”;
5. Collegial support shows the extent of “teachers are willing to work with each other effectively”
6. Learning partnership refers to “the common expectations of teachers and parents on students’ achievement.”

Since school culture is important in schools, the school principals play an essential part in developing a positive culture (Lindahl, 2011). This shows that school culture depends on its leadership. Principals see themselves as collaborative leaders, as do the teachers. They foster cohesion and opportunities for collaborative work among teachers who are focused on the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Fiore (2000) noted that knowledge of the school culture is important for school leaders.

The Relationship between Principal Transformational Leadership Practices & School Culture

The school, as a formal organisation, has a culture of its own, shaped by the interaction between staff and students, school management, teachers, administration staff, parents, and students. Principals as effective leaders develop a school wide vision of commitment and get all others on board with it (Mendels, 2012). Thus, any leadership efforts to promote ongoing improvement should be focused on the culture, and not the school structure (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Bass (1985) demonstrated the relationships between leadership and culture by examining the effect of leadership styles on culture. He argued that transformational leaders often work toward changing the organisational culture in accordance with its vision. This is further confirmed in a study conducted by Lok and Crawford (2004) with 337 managers in Hong Kong and Australia. They concluded that “organizational culture and leadership styles are important organizational antecedents of job satisfaction and commitment” (p. 335). This proves that leadership styles have a consistent relationship with various organisational outcomes. Similarly, Brown (1992) found that good leaders have to develop the skills that enable them to make changes to the culture as a way to improve job performance.

In another study, Yaakob and Yahya (2012) reported significant differences between perceptions of teachers in high-performing schools and in low-performing schools toward their school culture. Their study was based on 657 teachers and 141 headmasters in Kedah. They concluded that more focus should be given on transformational leadership and positive school culture in order to achieve the school’s vision and mission. On the contrary, Valentine and Lucas (2002) reported a weaker relationship between principal leadership and school culture in their study on the relationship between principal transformational leadership, school team transformational leadership, and school culture in Missouri.

Although studies have been carried out on the relationship between transformational leadership and school culture, researchers have reported varying results. The differences in the outcome of the past studies could be because the perceptions of leadership may vary from culture to culture.



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Studies (Choi, Wan Mardhia, Tan & Low, 2014; Yeo, 2006) on transformational leadership practices in Malaysia found that excellent headmasters exhibit modelling behaviour and high engagement (Mohd Izham, Fuziah, Norazah, & Saemah, 2011) with a view to transforming their mission and vision towards their followers. Although transformational leadership style is a frequently studied leadership approach (Day & Antonakis, 2012), studies focusing on cluster schools are scarce. A study by Arokiasamy (2017) used school culture as a moderator variable on the relationships between transformational leadership and school health in secondary schools of Malaysia. Another study reported significant differences between perceptions of teachers in high-performing schools and in low-performing schools toward their school culture (Yaakob & Yahya, 2012). However, there have been no reports showing direct linking between transformational leadership practices and school culture in cluster primary schools in Malaysia. Hence, to fill the gap, this study examines the level of principals' transformational leadership practices and their relationships with school culture in primary cluster schools in Malaysia.

The conceptual framework of this study was developed based on the theory of transformational leadership practices by Leithwood and Jantzi (1995) and the model of school culture by Gruenert and Valentine (1998). The transformational leadership model (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1995) consisted of eight dimensions, namely: (1) developing a widely shared vision, (2) building consensus about school goals and priorities, (3) providing intellectual stimulation, (4) providing individualised support, (5) modelling behaviour, (6) demonstrating high-performance expectations, (7) strengthening school culture, and (8) building collaborative structures. The model of school culture by Gruenert and Valentine (1998) consists of six dimensions: (1) collaborative leadership, (2) teacher collaboration, (3) professional development, (4) unity of purpose, (5) collegial support, and (6) learning partnership.

Based on the past studies (Bass, 1985; Lok & Crawford 2004) and the literature discussed, it is found that principal transformational leadership practices do impact on school culture. Researchers argued that transformational leaders often work toward changing the organisational culture in accordance with the institutional vision. Accordingly, the conceptual framework of this study illustrates the main elements of transformational leadership practices and their dynamic relationships with collaborative, professional, united, collegial and partnership learning school culture. In order to promote ongoing improvement, a leader should focus on the culture, and not the school structure (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Therefore, this study framework (Figure 1) shows the outcomes of transformational leadership practices on promoting school culture.

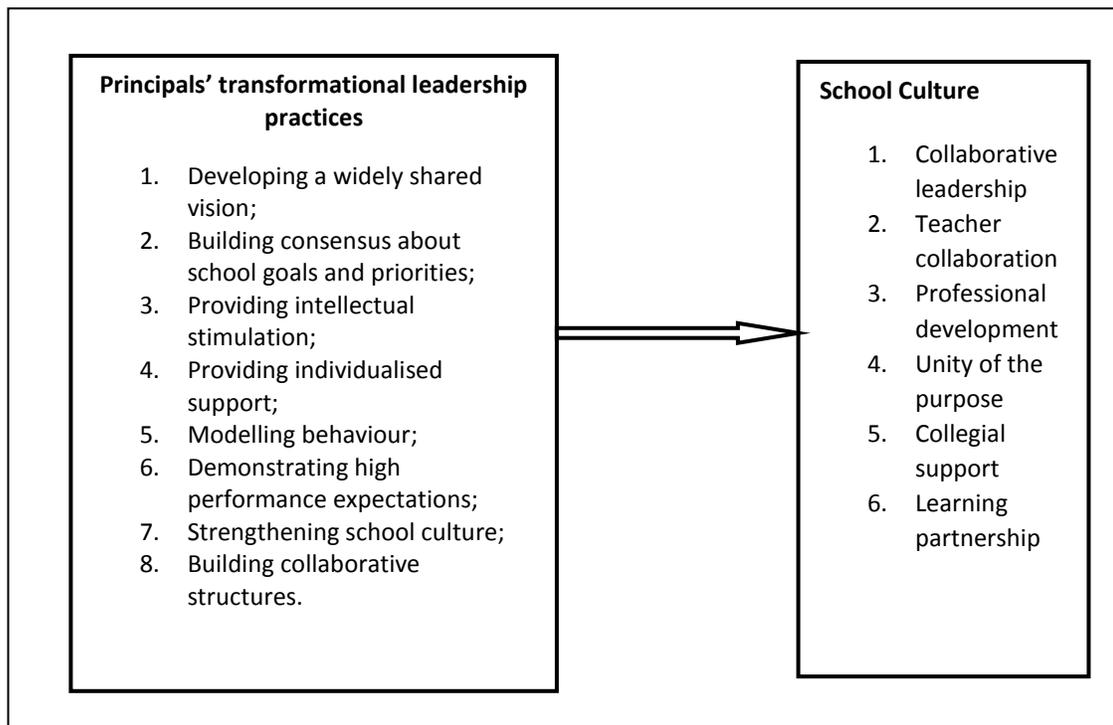


Figure 1. Conceptual framework (Sources: Leithwood & Jantzi, 1995; Gruenert & Valentine, 1998)

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This quantitative study employed a cross-sectional questionnaire to measure respondents' self-reported perceptions of principals' transformational leadership behaviour and its relationship with school culture. According to Babbie (2013) quantitative research can be carried out on a large number of cases in a short period and has a high degree of generalisability.

Population and Sampling

The respondents of the study were teachers in primary cluster schools in Selangor with a total teacher population of 2,348. In accordance to the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) determination table, 331 teachers were taken as the sample that is enough to represent the target population successfully.

Instrumentation

A self-administered survey was conducted based on a questionnaire divided into three sections. Section A focused on the respondents' demographic characteristics such as gender, age, working experience, ethnic group, and academic qualifications. Section B focused on the principals' transformational leadership practices adapted from Leithwood and Jantzi (1995) while Section C inquired school culture adapted from Gruenert and Valentine (1998).



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

Both the principals' transformational leadership practices and the school culture survey were based on an 11-point numerical rating scale, with anchored endpoints, where 1 represents strongly disagree and 11 represents strongly agree. According to Pearse (2011) using extended scale will produce more meaningful results. This was proven in a study by Chang (2010) that yielded significant results when he extended the scale from seven points to 11 points.

Reliability and Validity

The pilot study was conducted at a primary cluster school in Putrajaya. The reliability test revealed a high internal consistency for most of the variables. The findings showed a Cronbach alpha of between .729 and .878 for the principals' transformational leadership dimensions whereas, for the school culture dimensions, the Cronbach alpha was between .650 and .948.

As the questionnaire was in English, the back-to-back translation method was used to include the Bahasa Malaysia part. The face validation was done by teachers. The questionnaire was also validated by a panel of experts in the education field. Adjustments were made as suggested and recommended.

Data Collection Procedure

A total of 331 questionnaires were distributed to 30 primary cluster schools in Selangor upon obtaining permission from the Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD) and State Education Department. A copy of the letters was also sent out to the heads of the schools for their permission. Data for the study were obtained from the participants using the paper-pencil format. The respondents were briefed on the objectives of the study. Questionnaires were collected after two weeks.

Data Analysis

Data gathered were analysed using the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 22) software. Mean and standard deviation were used to determine the principals' level of transformational leadership. For interpretation of the 11-point scale, the composite mean for each dimension was collapsed into three levels, namely low, medium and high, whereby 1.00 – 4.33 is interpreted as low; 4.34 -7.67 (moderate) and 7.68 – 11.00 (high). Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis and Multiple Regression analysis were used to determine the relationship between these dimensions and the level of prediction.

FINDINGS

This section discusses the result of the findings. The findings were organised based on research objectives. The respondents' profile was also analysed (Table 1).

Table 1
Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Demographic	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	75	22.7
	Female	256	77.3
Age	Less than 30 years old	31	9.4
	30-39 years old	180	54.4



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

	40-49 years old	97	29.3
	50 and above	23	6.9
Race	Malay	269	81.3
	Chinese	30	9.1
	Indian	28	8.5
	Others	4	1.2
Years of experience in the current school	1-5 years	130	39.3
	6-10 years	110	33.2
	11-15 years	60	18.1
	16-19 years	14	4.2
	20 years and above	17	5.1

In line with the research objectives, descriptive statistics (Research objective 1) and inferential statistics such as Pearson product moment correlation (Research Objective 2) and stepwise multiple regressions (Research Objective 3) were used to analyse data.

Table 1 presents the distribution of the teachers in accordance with their background characteristics. As shown in the table, a total of 331 respondents, comprising of 256 female (77.3%) and 75 male (22.7%) teachers participated in the study. In terms of age, the majority of respondents (180 teachers) were from 30 to 39 years old (54.4%). A total of 97 teachers (29.3%) were in the age group of between 40 to 49 years. On the other hand, 31 teachers (9.4%) teachers were below the age of 30 years; only 23 (6.9%) teachers were aged 50 and above. In terms of ethnicity, 269 teachers were Malays (81.3%), followed by 30 Chinese teachers (9.1%), and 28 Indians (8.5%). The remaining 4 teachers (1.2%) belong to the Sabah and Sarawak ethnicity. The majority of the teachers have experience between one to five years in the current school, representing a total of 39.3%, followed by 33.2% being in the current school for between five and 10 years. A total of 18.1% of teachers has been teaching in the present school between 11 to 15 years, while another 5.1% for more than 20 years. Only a handful of them (4.2%) have been attached to the current school between 16 and 19 years.

Principal's Transformational Leadership Practices

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data collected from 331 teachers in primary cluster schools in Selangor. The analysis yielded results as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Level of principals' transformational leadership practices as perceived by teachers

Factors	Mean	SD	Level
Demonstrating high-performance expectations	8.89	1.42	High
Modeling behaviour	8.62	1.57	High
Building collaborative structures	8.61	1.67	High
Strengthening school culture	8.60	1.57	High
Building consensus about school goals and priorities	8.43	1.53	High



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

Providing individualised support	8.40	1.78	High
Providing intellectual stimulation	8.36	1.62	High
Developing a widely shared vision	8.34	1.45	High
Transformational Leadership Practices	8.51	1.44	High

As shown in Table 2, the overall mean for teachers' perception of principals' transformational leadership practices is 8.51 ($SD = 1.44$). This could be interpreted as the principals practising a high level of transformational leadership in cluster primary schools in Selangor. The results of the analysis for each principal transformational leadership practice dimension indicated that four out of the eight transformational leadership dimensions showed a higher mean than the overall mean value. These dimensions are *demonstrating high performance expectations* ($M = 8.89$, $SD = 1.42$), followed by *modelling behaviour* ($M = 8.62$, $SD = 1.57$), *building collaborative structure* ($M = 8.61$, $SD = 1.67$), and *strengthening school culture* ($M = 8.60$, $SD = 1.57$).

Meanwhile, the other four dimensions - *building consensus about school goals and priorities* ($M = 8.43$, $SD = 1.53$), *providing individualised support* ($M = 8.40$, $SD = 1.78$), *providing intellectual stimulation* ($M = 8.36$, $SD = 1.62$) and *developing a widely shared vision* ($M = 8.34$, $SD = 1.45$) showed lower mean than the overall mean of principals transformational leadership practices. However, all eight dimensions of transformational leadership dimensions have mean values (8.51) that are interpreted as high level. This shows that the teachers have rated their principals as highly practising transformational leadership practices in cluster primary schools in Selangor.

Principal's Transformational Leadership Practices and School Culture

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis reveals a significant relationship between the level of principal transformational leadership practices and school culture ($r = .853$, $p < .01$) as shown in Table 3. The correlation value indicates a positive and strong correlation coefficient. This means when principals practice transformational leadership style, the school culture increases positively.

Table 3
Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Analysis Between Principal Transformational Leadership Practices and School Culture

Variable		School Culture
Principal transformational leadership practices	Pearson Correlation	.853**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	331

** . Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Determining the Predictors of School Culture

The third research objective is about which dimensions of the principal transformational leadership practices are predictors of school culture. Multiple regression analysis was used to answer the research question. The output of the multiple regression analysis (stepwise) is as shown in the following Table 4.



Table 4
Multiple Regression (Stepwise) on Principal Transformational Leadership Practices on School Culture

Variable	B	β	t	Sig t	R ²	%
Strengthening school culture	.150	.186	2.023	0.004	.699	69.9
Demonstrating high performance expectations	.164	.184	4.207	0.000	.718	1.9
Building collaborative structures	.260	.341	4.726	0.000	.738	2.0
Providing intellectual stimulation	.172	.220	3.340	0.001	.747	0.9

**Dependent variable: School culture*

The findings (Table 4) revealed that from the eight dimensions of principal transformational leadership practices, only four, namely strengthening school culture, demonstrating high-performance expectations, building collaborative structures, and providing intellectual stimulation correlate and contribute significantly (74.7%) to the school culture in primary cluster schools in Selangor.

The dominant predictor of school culture is strengthening school culture ($\beta = 0.186$, $t = 2.023$, $p = 0.004$). The t -test results were significant $p < 0.05$ with the $R^2 = 0.699$. This indicates that the strengthening school culture dimension contributes 69.9% of the variance in school culture. From the standardised beta value, when the strengthening school culture dimension increases by one unit of standard deviation, school culture will increase by 1.86 unit of standard deviation.

Further, looking at Table 5, the F -test results revealed that there is a significant relationship between the four predictors with school culture [$F(4, 326) = 240.455$, $p < 0.05$] at the significant level of $p < 0.05$. This multiple regression analysis also showed that the combination of the four dimensions of principal transformational leadership practices accounted for 74.7% of the variance in school culture. This means that as much as 25.3% of the variance on school culture is unable to be predicted by principal transformational leadership practices as it might be due to other factors not examined in this present study.

Table 5
Multiple Regression Analysis (stepwise): ANOVA

	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	396.924	4	99.231	240.455	.000
Residual	134.534	326	.413		
Total	531.458	330			

Note: a) Dependent Variable: School culture

b) Predictors: (Constant), Strengthening school culture, demonstrating high-performance expectations, building collaborative structure, providing intellectual stimulation

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The outcome of the findings showed that teachers have a high perception of their principals practising transformational leadership in schools. This means that principals are very positive and forthcoming in demonstrating transformational behavior in leading their respective schools.



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

Results of this study revealed that teachers perceive their principal as someone who is able to demonstrate expectations for excellence, quality, and high performance; set consistent examples for teachers to follow; provide opportunity for teachers to be part of decision making, and work toward strengthening school culture. This is in line with the findings by Sun and Leithwood (2015) who said that some transformational practices make much larger contributions than the rest. The results also corroborate results of past studies reporting the positive practices of transformational leadership among principals in schools (Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Sabariah et al., 2010; Mohamad Johdi & Parvina, 2013). The findings, however, contradict the findings of a study by Arokiasamy, Abdul Ghani, Mohammad Zohir, and Aziah (2016) conducted in Kinta Selatan district of Perak. They reported that school principals were moderate in practising transformational leadership.

The findings further revealed a significant relationship between the level of principal transformational leadership practices and school culture. Furthermore, the strength of the correlation is strong. As Schein (2010) put it, “culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin in that leaders first start the process of culture creation when they create groups and organizations” (p. 22). In fact, a school leader is responsible for transforming the culture into one that is strong and supportive (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015).

Findings of this study correlate with that in Cemaloglu (2011), and Kythreotis, Pashiardis, and Kyriakides (2010). The present study proves that principals in primary cluster schools in Selangor have effectively used transformational leadership practices to create a positive school culture. This view is supported by Turan and Bektas (2013) who stated “through better representing the organizational culture, the school administrators can strengthen their symbolic leadership practices” (p. 162). Further, Tang (2011) who studied teachers in the Maldives, concluded that transformational leadership is important in developing a collaborative school culture.

Only four out of the eight transformational leadership dimensions are statistically significant predictors of school culture in primary cluster schools in Selangor. This finding implies that the level of teachers’ perception of the school culture will increase when their principals focus on “developing shared norms, values, beliefs and attitudes” (Yu, Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2002, p. 374) among them. In doing so, teachers have a better understanding of the importance of the school goals. The overall findings of this study support the conclusion by Hallinger (2011) and Sahin (2011) who stated that school leadership plays a significant role in developing a positive culture. Based on this, it is clear that school principals play a vital role in creating school culture.

A plethora of researchers had stated that transformational leadership has a great effect on teachers, educational environment and school achievement. This supports the conclusion by Amin, Shah, and Tatlah (2013) who said that transformational leadership practices help to bring the company closer to targeted goals. Findings of this research show that principals of primary cluster schools in Selangor highly demonstrate traits of transformational leadership in their respective schools.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the achievement of a school, particularly high performing school, can only be attained with the efforts by everyone in the school. However, the main element leading to achievement is the principal or head of school. It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Education give more attention to strengthening the position of principals with transformational characteristics.



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

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