

# The Influence of Headmasters' Transformational Leadership on Teachers' Career Development Through Workplace Learning in Malaysian Primary School Clusters

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## Abstract

This paper presents an insight on the influence of transformational leadership of headmasters on teachers' career development through workplace learning in Malaysian primary school clusters. The study is significant for school headmasters to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their leadership practice and make improvements accordingly to ensure effective school management. The study was conducted by using quantitative analytical approach through survey method on 260 respondents who were randomly selected among teachers from 20 primary school clusters in the state of Terengganu to gather their perception of the transformational leadership practice of the headmasters at their school, their individual and collective professional learning, and their professional competency in teaching career.

**Keywords:** Transformational Leadership, Workplace Learning, Career Development

## Introduction

In Malaysia, the national education system has been continuously evolved to cater the needs of the knowledge-based societies and the fast-changing world of the 21st century. In the face of such tremendous changes, school leaders play an important role to transform schools into autonomous, systems-thinking organizations, revolving around professional learning

communities that can embrace change and create a high performing learning environment for students and teachers (Moore, 2009a).

The challenges of educational reforms have brought rise to the importance of transformational leadership style which is believed to be more appropriate to sustain with a rapidly changing society compared to the traditional instructional leadership style (Leithwood, 1992; 1994). Transformational leaders provide a mission centred on set directions, a performance centred on professional development, and a culture centred on redesigning the organization (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Marks & Printy, 2003). Literature review has also proven the direct and indirect influence of school leaders' practice of transformational leadership on teachers and students to keep up with the challenges of unpredictable globalized world.

Although there are numerous positive impacts of transformational leadership on school administration, there are limited empirical evidence in literature that explains how such leadership practice can benefit teachers' professional growth, especially in the context of Malaysian schools. Therefore, this study was carried out to further explore the influence of transformational leadership of Malaysian school headmasters on teachers in order to better understand how it can help them to improve the quality of their workplace learning and consequently improve their professional competency.

### **Issues**

In line with the fast-changing world of the 21st century, school leaders are urged to practice leadership style that is more transformational so that they can embrace the changes and create a high performing learning environment for students and teachers (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Cheng, 2005; Del Favero, 2006; Moore, 2009a). This is because transformational leadership is believed to be more appropriate for organizations like schools that are constantly under conditions of complex and rapid change (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997).

Furthermore, it can help teachers build their capacity to deal with the constant changes and challenges in school management and national education system. Transformational leadership style is also more comprehensive and practical to enhance teachers' commitment and motivation to work toward shared goals and enhance their professional development through four main dimensions which are: Idealized Influence, Intellectual Stimulation, Inspirational Motivation and Individualized Consideration.

In line with the increasing awareness of the importance of transformational leadership in education, the Ministry of Education (MOE) Malaysia has been organizing numerous leadership training courses to encourage school leaders to adopt transformational leadership style for more effective school administration. In addition, the implementation of the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 requires placing strong transformational leaders in the most pivotal roles at every level in the national education system. For times, leadership has always been seen as a dynamic factor in organisational success ( Mamat, et al., 2019; Rami, et al., 2019; Aziz, et al., 2020; Rami, et al., 2020a; Rami, et al., 2020b). In educational settings, although the context of school leadership has been rapidly changing, administrators, specifically the principals, still play a decisive role in influencing the motivations of teachers, leading and managing the development of the school.

However, such effort has not yet proven to produce significant results in terms of teachers' professional learning and career development. This issue was also highlighted by Che Sulaiman and Wahab (2017) in their paper that some teachers in Malaysian schools still demonstrate lack of commitment, motivation and self-efficacy and are still reluctant to be

more flexible in the face of change in education reforms. This is probably because some school leaders are still not motivated to put more effort to lead the change process in education (Abdullah & Kassim, 2013). In a research conducted by Jahn (2008), it was also found that the adoption of transformation leadership in cluster schools in Malaysia was very weak. It was suggested that administrators in cluster schools to consider transformational leadership as a fundamental driver in developing positive school culture and to improve the level of self-efficacy among their teachers.

Ishak and Ghani (2013) revealed that there were some school leaders who still did not pay much attention to the holistic development aspect of their teachers. This indicates that most of them still practice traditional leadership style which is not much-ensuring teachers' satisfaction with their jobs. The lack of transformational leadership style among school leaders also results in many teachers still rely on traditional delivery methods and refuse to adopt new teaching practices that are more relevant to current development in education (Kang & Kim, 2016; Ghavifekr et al., 2014). Moreover, it was found that many teachers had low interest in collaborating with other educational institutions to improve the quality of their teaching and learning practices, and also in participating in conference, short courses, workshops etc. to enhance their knowledge in the field of education. This implies that most school leaders still fall short in motivating teachers to develop their teaching career professionally.

Other than that, there were a number of cases on school leadership had been reported in media for the past few years. In Ketereh for example, about 30 teachers had called for a strike demanding State Education Ministry to replace their school principal as they could no longer deal with the tremendous work pressure (*Kosmo*, 2018). The recent policy changes in education by the MOE in the past few years had also caused many teachers to opt for early retirement as they could not withstand the increasing challenges in national education system (Sofian & Nasir, 2010). According to Boon and Hassan (2011), the centralized leadership style which had been practiced by many school leaders might widen the gap between them and their teachers. It could also hamper the school efforts to inculcate knowledge and skill sharing among the members of the school community.

As a solution to the problems stated above, many academic researchers have suggested school leaders to embrace the practice of transformational leadership in order to increase the effectiveness of school management in educational reform efforts (Hallinger, 2003). Previous studies had also shown that transformational leadership can improve teachers' work attitude, teaching quality, job satisfaction, commitment, motivation, job performance and self-identification especially in the challenging era of globalization (Abdullah, 1997; Ashari, 1997; Bakar, 2000; Bolger, 2001; Loy, 2002; Marks & Printy, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Abdullah, 2005; Castiglia, 2006; Cheng, 2005; Chan et al., 2007; Cheah, 2008; Johan & Siow, 2008). In addition, transformational school leadership is said to have positive effects on school culture (Barnett & McCormick, 2004), organizational learning (Silins, Mulford, & Zarins, 2002), collective teacher efficacy (Ross, 2006), and student engagement (Leithwood et al., 2003).

Nevertheless, there is limited exploration of research on the influence of transformational leadership on teachers, particularly on their workplace learning and career development in the context of Malaysian schools. Most studies on transformational leadership by local researchers are more focused on the level of transformational leadership practices among school headmasters (Musa et al., 2014; Abdullah, 2009; Saad, 2008; Amin, 2010; Jaafar, 2008; Ghazali, 2007), the effects of transformational leadership on teachers' job

satisfaction (Majid, 2013; Tahir et al., 2018; Ismail & Ramli, 2012), the challenges in transformational leadership practices and demographic factors of transformational leaders (Mokhtar, 2002; 2004).

Therefore, this study was carried out to investigate the influence of transformational leadership of the headmasters on teachers' career development through workplace learning in Malaysian primary school clusters. Specifically, this study aimed:

- i. to determine the level of transformational leadership among the headmasters
- ii. to analyze the influence of transformational leadership on teachers' workplace learning based on Idealized Influence, Intellectual Stimulation, Inspirational Motivation and Individualized Consideration
- iii. to analyze the influence of transformational leadership on teachers' career development based on Idealized Influence, Intellectual Stimulation, Inspirational Motivation and Individualized Consideration
- iv. to analyze the influence of workplace learning as a mediator between transformational leadership and teachers' career development

The outcome of the study could be useful for school headmasters to understand the importance of transformational leadership for effective school management in the globalization era, and how it can be adopted to develop teachers' professional career through workplace learning. This will also help them to evaluate their current practice and improve their leadership style accordingly so that they are able to lead the change process in educational reforms, encourage the teachers to deliver quality education, increase the level of job satisfaction, motivation and self-efficacy among the teachers, and improve the effectiveness of school management, in line with the objective of Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 implementation.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The framework of this study was developed and adapted based on Transformational Leadership Model (Slocum & Hellriegel, 2007), Learning Organization Dimensions Model (Marsick & Watkin, 2003), and the Standard of Competency for Malaysian Teachers Framework (Siraj & Ibrahim, 2012).

Figure 1 illustrates the idea about the research framework which involves 'transformational leadership' as independent variable, 'workplace learning' as a mediating variable and 'career development' as dependent variable.

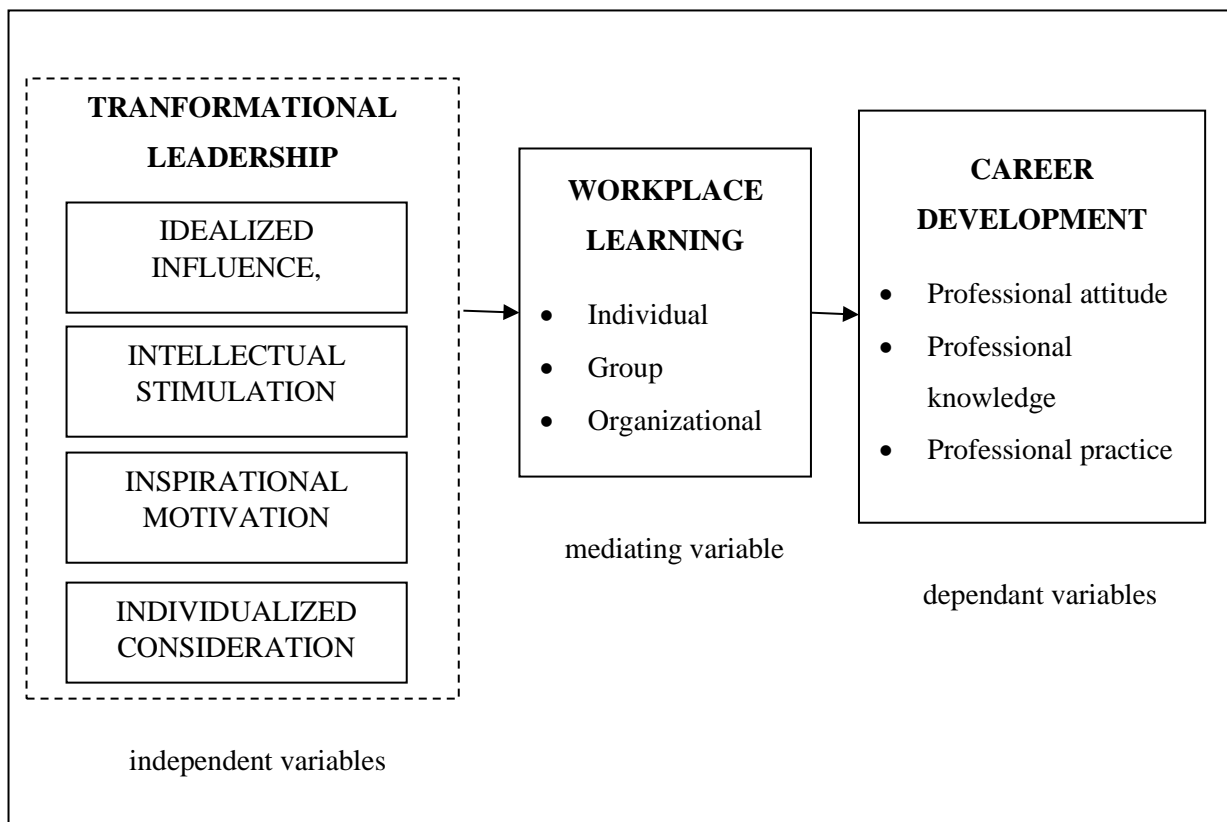


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

### Hypothesis

Several hypotheses were formulated to be used as a guideline to answer the research questions in this study.

- *Ho1: There is no significant and positive relationship between Transformational Leadership and Workplace Learning*
- *Ho2: There is no significant and positive relationship between Workplace Learning and Career Development*
- *Ho3: There is no significant and positive relationship between Transformational Leadership and Career Development*
- *Ho4: Workplace Learning has no significant mediating influence on the relationship between Transformational Leadership and Career Development*

### Methodology

#### Operational Definitions

Transformational leadership in this study refers to the teachers' perception of the ability of the school headmasters to display of conviction and emphasize on trust, commitment, purpose and resolution even in the face of difficult challenges (Bass, 1997); to motivate teachers by communicating high expectations and increasing team spirit and enthusiasm (Northouse, 2001); to empower teachers to be more innovative and propose new ideas (Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2003); and to always consider every teacher's individual needs, abilities and aspirations (Bass, 1997; Bass & Bass, 2008).

Workplace learning in this study refers to the teachers' perception of their motivation and determination to continuously upgrade their teaching skills and acquire the latest

knowledge on teaching practices (Phillips, 2003) through individual and collective professional learning such as collaborative learning activities, self-reflection on current teaching practices, research, participation in academic groups and the application of the current technologies (Ishak, 2012; Watkins & Marsick, 1993).

Meanwhile, career development in this study refers to the teachers' perception of the standards of their competency and professionalism in performing their teaching job from the aspects of professional attitude, professional knowledge and professional practice.

### **Research Design**

This study was conducted by using quantitative approach through survey method to gather the teachers' perception of the transformational leadership practice among the headmasters at their school, their professional learning practices and their professional competency in teaching career. Although the target population should consist of all teachers in Malaysian cluster schools, the study population was limited only to all teachers in cluster schools in the state of Terengganu due to time and budget restraint. Out of 805 teachers from 20 primary school clusters in Terengganu, a total of 260 teachers were selected by using cluster sampling to participate as survey respondents.

### **Research Instrument**

A survey was used as the research instrument in this study. The survey has 70 questions and is divided into four main sections, i.e. Section A (Demographic Profile), Section B (Transformational Leadership), C (workplace learning) and D (career development).

Section A consists five items related to the respondents' demographic profile such as gender, age, academic qualification, race and teaching experience.

Section B consists of 20 items related to four dimensions of transformational leadership which are Idealized Influence, Intellectual Stimulation, Inspirational Motivation and Individualized Consideration. The items were constructed based on Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) by Avolio and Bass (2004) and adapted from other studies such as Ismail and Ramli (2012); Majid (2013) and Slocum and Hellriegel (2007).

Section C consists of 30 items related to three dimensions of workplace learning which are Individual Learning, Group Learning and Organizational Learning based on Marsick and Watkin's (2003) Learning Organization Dimensions Model and adapted from several other studies like Ishak (2012); Ghani et al. (2014).

Section D consists of 15 items related to three dimensions of career development which are professional attitude, professional knowledge and professional practice based on the Standard of Competency for Malaysian Teachers Framework by Siraj and Ibrahim (2012).

Likert scale was used to measure the responses for all items in Section B-D from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

### **Pilot Study**

The survey procedure was pilot-tested with 100 volunteers in order to refine the data collection plan. The volunteers were selected randomly among teachers from several schools in Terengganu. The main purpose of this test is to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument so that modifications on the survey questions could be done before the actual research was carried out.

The data obtained from the pilot study were analyzed using Reliability Analysis to determine the internal consistency of each item in the survey instrument. This would allow



the researcher to determine the extent to which the items in the questionnaire are related to each other so that problem items can be identified and thus excluded from the scale. By using Cronbach's alpha model (Cronbach, 1951) in SPSS v25 software, all items in Section B-D were analyzed to the value of Cronbach's Alpha. The Cronbach's alpha is expressed as a correlation coefficient, and its value ranges from 0 to +1. According to Hair et al. (2006), it was estimated Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.70 or greater level for each item reflects the reliability of the items used or the level of internal consistency among items, thus acceptable for the study

### **Data Collection**

Once the pilot-testing was completed and the required modification was done, the survey was distributed in person to the selected respondents through emails or by hand. The respondents were given two weeks to complete the survey form and return back to the researcher to proceed with data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected from the survey were then analysed using SPSS v26.0 software utilizing descriptive, correlation and regression analysis.

In descriptive analysis, descriptive statistics (frequency) and aggregate data of mean and standard deviation were used to determine the mean and standard deviation of the respondent's answers in Section B-D in order to understand how the study's variables were perceived by the respondents.

Correlation analysis was carried out to determine the linearity and the strengths of the relationship between each dimension of transformational leadership and the two variables, i.e. workplace learning and career development.

Regression analysis was conducted to describe the relationships between: (1) transformational leadership – workplace learning; (2) transformational leadership – career development; and (3) transformational leadership – workplace learning – career development. This analysis was also conducted to examine whether each independent variable does a very good job in predicting the outcome variable and in what way it impacts the outcome variable, i.e. to test Hypotheses 1-4 in this study.

### **Conclusion**

This study was conducted to evaluate the influence of transformational leadership practice among the headmasters of primary school clusters in Terengganu on teachers' career development through the mediation effect of workplace learning. The evaluation of the practice was measured based on the four dimensions in the Transformational Leadership Model developed by Slocum and Hellriegel (2007) which are Idealized Influence, Intellectual Stimulation, Inspirational Motivation and Individualized Consideration. It was assumed in this study that the transformational leadership of the headmasters would positively influence the teachers' individual and collective professional learning and consequently would enhance their professional competency in teaching practice. However, the findings of the study are yet to be discovered as the data analysis is currently still progressing.

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