

Chapter 9

Leadership Style and School Culture as Perceived by Teachers in Malaysian Northern State Schools

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the effective leadership style for positive school culture as perceived by some Malaysian Northern State school teachers. This chapter uses focus group and open-ended questions to have in-depth understanding and testing of the participants' ability of suggesting or predicting the best or most effective school leadership style for building school positive culture for best leadership practices. The participants were teachers from different schools in Northern States Malaysia undertaking master program in educational management at Universiti Utara Malaysia. The findings revealed that transformational leadership style was rated, predicted, and ranked as the best leadership style for school principals to apply in building positive school culture according to their context while distributed leadership and instructional leadership could be also considered as the second leadership styles for building positive school culture in the Northern schools of Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

School leadership is fundamental in accomplishing and sustaining of school success. School leaderships exerts considerable influence on teacher practices and instructional delivery in classroom, which makes it a contributory factor for student achievement in schools. Sustaining school success, however, rests in the ability of principals to establish clear directions for daily operations in their schools, to develop school values and to wield influence on the management of instructions in the classroom (Garza, Drysdale,

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Gurr, Jacobson, & Merchant, 2014). Thus, a principal is a central feature in achieving school success (Smith, 2007). For several decades, research evidence cutting across varieties of fields has emerged about leadership and leadership styles, including the education domain. Indeed, a plethora of studies on school leadership have been conducted and consensus has been reached that school leadership is a key factor influencing learning, student achievement and school success (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012).

Over the years, attention has been shifted to the study of educational leadership and school outcomes. Particularly, researchers in the field of educational management have attempted to identify the links between school leadership and school culture. Emerging research evidence has established the significant role that leadership plays in the initiation, development and sustaining of a high-quality school culture (Kythreotis, Pashiardis, & Kyriakides, 2010; Flores, 2004; Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Berry 1997; Grace, 1995; Deal and Peterson, 1994; Roberts, 1993; Leithwood and Jantzi, 1991; Sashkin & Sashkin, 1990; Schein, 1985). School principals are ultimately responsible for the success of their schools even though they are not directly involved in the classroom.

School leadership goes beyond teacher, student or instructional supervision and is a multifaceted concept involving several components (Bonnici, 2011). Every school possesses its own attributes that often reflect deep patterns of values, beliefs and custom that have been formed over the course of its history and can be perceived upon entering (Deal and Peterson, 1990). Identifying, learning and understanding values in the daily actions of individual members of the school is an essential element in the development of a high-quality culture that will bring about continuous improvement for proper administration and sustainable development in school (Roberts, 1993; Robinson, 1996).

Hence, developing a high-quality culture in school desirable for development and improvement of learning. Similarly, Langford and Cleary (1995) postulated that a school leader to understand his/her role in sustaining a school's vision for connectedness with respect to the complete system in which his/her school operates by setting quality objectives with clear operating procedures, a developing vision for future and modelling a culture of excellence. This can be attained through continuous improvement towards perceived standards of excellence and core ethical values (Berry, 1997).

Although the concept of culture can be difficult to define, it is conceived of as the product of actions connected with the patterns of behaviours, attached values, and shared attitudes of individual members of an organization (Berry, 1997). Hoy and Miskel (2008) and Bolman and Deal (2008) conceived of culture of as a system of collective orientations that give a distinct identity that binds, unites individual members and ties the components of an organization together in accomplishment of desirable goals.

Based on this, developing a high-quality culture that will manifest itself in the norms and values of an organization requires commitment and a quality management process through leadership. Culture is an important aspect of an organization, and Maehr and Midgley (1996) noted that the culture of a school is related to the level of student engagement and the quality of student achievement and development of life-long learners. Previous research studies have suggested that, schools that value trust and have a shared vision create a positive school culture, which, in turn, influence school outcomes, as a positive school culture is associated with student performance, teacher motivation, teacher commitment, teacher job satisfaction, and collaboration with community (Cheng, 1993; Price, 2003; Kythreotis, Pashiardis, & Kyriakides, 2010). Thus, aligning with previous research, this current study focuses mainly on school culture because it significantly affects the stability, unity, cohesiveness, adaptability and other aspect of the establishment.

A positive school culture has been regarded as the foundation and both a component and predictor of school success (Yahya, Yahya, Ramli, Hashim, & Zakariya, 2010; Creemers & Kyriakides, 2010). Substantial research evidence has also proven that the leadership style of principals significantly predicts school culture, student achievement and teacher effectiveness (Arbabi & Mehdinezhad, 2015; Sahin, 2011; Kowalski & Petersen, 2011; Scallion, 2010; Brennan & Mac Ruairc, 2011; Yahya et al., 2010). Hence, the opportunity to improve school success is a function of leadership and school culture (Wilhem, 2016). Even though several other factors affect school culture, the leadership behaviour of principals is a contributory factor to the enhancement of a goal-oriented climate, which is responsible for the functioning of the school. Indeed, Barrett and Breyer (2014) and Smith (2016) recommended that effective leadership must incorporate and demonstrate a wide range of leadership styles and skills to develop and retain effective teachers, sustain student passion to engage in learning, foster teacher professional growth and collaborative partnerships, and further direct school organization towards well-directed vision. Therefore, the style of a leader plays a vital role in developing the effectiveness of a school.

Leadership is not merely about personality according to Kouzes and Posner (2007); rather, it is about behaviour adopted by a leader (Cohen, 2015). Successful leaders according to Darling-Hammond (2007) persistently reflect on the educational values and beliefs that will foster a high-quality culture and support school success. In view of the importance of the role of a principals in the management of a school, his/her leadership style is one of the significant factors necessary for determining the climate of the school. Smith (2016) theorized that instructional, transformational, inspirational, transactional leadership styles are extant in most leaders. This four leadership styles, which form the foundation for an integrated leadership model, should, however, function collectively to have an impact on the fostering of a high- quality school culture. This study, therefore, explores what participants in a master's program in education feel about what are the most appropriate leadership styles in building a positive school culture to gain an in-depth perspective of the most preferable leadership style that is supportive of a positive and productive school culture in Kedah, Malaysia.

Leadership Styles and School Culture

A consensus seems to exist among previous research studies that leaders are the progenitors of their school's culture (Hoyle, 1986; Campbell & Southworth, 1992; Blasé & Anderson, 1995). Indeed, Voight, Austin, and Hanson (2013) stated that successful schools have a more positive culture and climate when positively influenced by school leadership. Principals who interact and maintain a positive relationship with all members of staff tend to promote a positive school culture (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas 2004). In this context, school culture is a stream of values, norms, traditions, customs and beliefs that have developed over a prolonged period of time as people confront challenges and solve problems while they work together in a school (Groseschl & Doherty, 2000). These set of values according to Peterson and Deal (1998) help shape the attitudes, behaviours and feelings of individual members and also bind together the school in which they operate together.

A positive and supportive culture ensures a positive focus on ensuring supportive and shared leadership, which helps school leaders and teachers to identify, redefine, maintain and implement a positive and helpful school culture. (Deal & Peterson, 2009; DuFour & Eaker, 1998). As a school head plays a vital role shaping school culture a leader communicates and reinforces the school core values in everyday work. The quality of leadership is reflective in the flexibility and suitability of the school structure or culture (Thomas, Walker, & Webb, 1998). Hord and Sommers (2008) opined that a school head should

be prepared for thorough leadership and management as enabling a strong culture requires him/her to address daily school operations with a long-term vision and plan. An effective school culture focuses more on the continuous improvement and empowerment of teachers and students as active participants in school improvement.

Operative transformational leaders build professional teams who become motivated in the continuous developmental cycle to problem solve in a collaborative culture, under the shared values of the school, to increase student achievement and impact their practice (Chapman & Harris, 2004). Creating a supportive, strong and positive school culture where there is mutual responsibility and accountability requires an “all hands-on deck” approach to meeting the school-community needs; hence, a school head should have strong and competent leadership skills to lead in a manner that encourage students, teachers and community members to be an essential part of school goal achievement (Kruse & Louis, 2009).

Looking at the leadership-culture interplay and substantiating the influence of leadership on the formation of school culture, research supports the idea that leadership style is correlated with school culture. Schein (1990) posited that, individual members in the school tend to internalise the identified values and assumptions which school leaders are modelling in the formation of a school's culture. In doing this, an administrator should have a better understanding of leadership styles that will enhance functioning together to create a good school culture. Research evidence (Arbabi & Mehdinezhad, 2015; Fusarelli, Kowalski, & Petersen, 2011; Ross & Gray, 2006; Sahin, 2011) support the notion that leadership styles such as distributive leadership, instructional leadership, collaborative leadership, and even transformational leadership all have statistically significant impacts in predicting school culture. Other researchers such as Smith (2016) have examined the idea of integrated leadership dividing it into four categories including instructional leadership, transformational leadership, inspirational leadership and transactional leadership styles.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

From the 19th-century the great man theory that described the ability of an extraordinary individual, the study of leadership traits has evolved (Glynn & DeJordy, 2010). The great man theory portrayed extraordinary leaders as heroic and mythic and being destined to rise to leadership when the need arose (Olulube, 2013). Today, the view of school leadership has evolved to focus on culture (Sullivan & Glanz, 2006; Zmuda, Kulis, & Kline, 2004). Effective schools are characterized by a culture with a shared purpose whereby, decisions are made collaboratively, responsibilities are distributed among teachers, and a leader capacity creates and sustains change through a process of decision making.

One theory of leadership that focuses on variables related to the environment for determining which leadership style is suitable for a situation is the contingency theory. This theory depends on situational features and qualities of followers; hence, contingency theory postulates that, no leadership style is effective as a stand-alone as an effective leadership style relies on factors such as quality, the situation of the followers or a number of other variables. Thus, no sole leadership style is suitable in all situations (Charry, 2012; Lamb, 2013). A contingency factor is thus any condition in any relevant environment to be considered when designing an organization or one of its elements (Naylor, 1999).

This present study explores a principal's leadership style through an examination of his/her practices and strategies to reshape or enhance a school's culture for school change and improvement through several leadership types. In educational leadership, several leadership theories have been thought to be

relevant. Among them are: (trait, behavioural, situational, contingency, transformational, transactional, moral, instructional, multicultural, servant, visionary, LMX, strategic, entrepreneur, innovative, primal, charismatic, distributed, shared, path goal and EQ theories. However, in this study, the theoretical framework focuses mainly on seven perceived leadership theories and styles: the transformational leadership style, the visionary leadership style, the distributed leadership style, the instructional leadership style, Member-Leader Exchange (MLX) theory, the situational leadership style and emotional intelligence.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership follows the scheme of contingency theory in explaining performance expectations to followers and in promoting a good culture. Change in a school setting is an inevitable cognitive content that an effective leader is capable of creating. For a principal to be a change agent, he/she should stimulate change within the school. According to Byrk and Schneider (2002), collaborative leadership promotes new ideas, and a sense of shared trust that allows for innovation to take place in school and that may serve as a positive influence on school culture and achievement with the presence of teacher collegiality, mutual respect and a shared responsibility.

Transformational leadership and instructional leadership have emerged as two of the most frequently studied models of school leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Transformational leadership is an essential approach in education particularly in terms of educational innovation and development that can foster a positive climate, which can increase the level of job satisfaction and commitment of teachers and motivate others (Aydin, Sarier, & Uysal, 2013). Transformational leadership transforms individual members of an organization based on the established values and long-term goals (Muijs, 2011). Burns and Yulk (1998) proposed transformational leadership as a process of establishing employee commitment to organizational objectives through empowering them to accomplish those objectives and enhancing their performance. Furthermore, Bass (1997) has stated that the aim of transformational leadership is to transform people and organizations to bring about changes that are self-perpetuating while Gill, Flaschner, and Shachar (2006) stressed that transformational leadership could be applied in organizations to reduce job stress and burn out among employees.

Transformational leadership is often linked with setting directions with a clear mission and a vision, realigning and restructuring the organization and participating with the external community (Day, Sammons, Leithwood, Hopkin, Haris, Gu, & Brown, 2010). Principals must aim for sustainable change that will bring about the improvement of their schools by being cognisant of trends in education both locally and globally (Bergeson, Shannon, & Ed, 2007; Fullan, 2002). Thus, a transformation leader is responsible for bringing together the community, parents and students to support a school's vision. A transformational leader needs to be proactive, forward thinking and continuously looking for means of improvement of the organization through collaborative efforts within and outside the establishment (educators, leaders, district, organization and other stakeholders). Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999) postulated, transformational leadership is an idyllic style for principals to enable considerable improvement in a school. It enables principals to recognize the need to develop a shared vision, commitment and support changes in development of teaching and learning by providing inspiration, support and supervision for teachers as they adapt to changes in their teaching practice (Kurland, Peretz, & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2010). To make a school's performance better, the transformational leadership behaviour of principals becomes more important as this are related to the dynamics of change in the society (Balyer, 2012).

Studies have long established the importance of the positive relationship between transformational leadership and several indicators at the individual and organizational levels in schools. For instance, Geijsel, Sleegers, Leithwood and Jantzi (2003), Yu (2002), and Ophuysen (2011) found that transformational leadership has a significant and positive correlation with teacher commitment to a school leading to teachers make additional efforts and commitment to change. Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) also reported the direct effect of principal transformational leadership on school goals, structure and conditions, which, in turn, affects classroom instructional plans, school policies and procedures. Geijsel et al. (2003) conducted a study on the effects of transformational leadership on teachers' commitment and efforts that teachers are willing to devote toward school reform in Canada and The Netherlands. They studied 2000 teachers drawn from 45 secondary schools using a survey and structural equation modelling to test the dimensions of transformational leadership that affected teacher's commitment. They found that the three dimensions of transformational leadership had a strong correlation with teacher's commitment and extra effort.

Similarly, Munir, Rahman, Malik, and Ma'amor (2012) said that the focus on transformational leadership in organizations was increased due to its better impacts in influencing the job and organizational performance of employees. They studied the relationship between transformational leadership and employee job satisfaction among academic staff of the Universiti Teknologi Mara, Malaysia using 412 respondents through the simple random sampling technique. Their findings revealed a strong and positive significance relationship between transformational leadership and employee job performance. The finding is in line with the earlier studies of Marnis (2012) and Hamidifar (2009) that determined that employees are satisfied more with transformational leadership in organizations. In the context of developing countries, transformational leadership has been found to have a strong mediating effect on teachers' job satisfaction and a direct effect on organizational behaviour and organizational commitment among primary school teachers in Tanzania (Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2007). From the above reviewed study, the conclusion can be drawn that enough evidence exists to prove that transformational leadership is required for a school to be effective.

Visionary Leadership

McLaughlin (2001) defines visionary leaders as those who can build a new dawn, work with intuition and imagination, total comprehension and boldness. These qualities involve leadership abilities, capabilities, and outstanding skills that enable a leader to anticipate possibilities and motivate followers to work. That is, a visionary leader can foresee opportunities and challenges while positioning an organization towards goal attainment. This is a type of leadership that aims at giving meaningful efforts to achieve work through an unclouded vision. In an educational context, a visionary leadership style requires a leader to have key competencies such as the ability of a principal to communicate with teachers and students to create guidance, encouragement and motivation; the ability to understand the school environment and to be able to relate with people outside the school; the ability to be creative and guide the school to the vision; and the ability to anticipate in future (Nanus, 1992). The conclusion, therefore, can be reached that a visionary leader needs to adapt to changes and be able to pursue school goals through policies and progressive actions.

Nwokedi (2015) posited that, a visionary leader is both a symbol and a mastermind who can elevate an organization from the mediocre or even obscurity to attain a desirable level and to accomplish a set of organizational goals. This style entails consistent leadership with a clear vision, creativity, broad com-

munication between the head and followers, and essential visionary leadership behaviours and personal attributes that are required of a leader to have a positive impact on an organization (Sashkin, 1996). In a study on the relationship between the visionary leadership elementary principals and the reading performance of students, Mora-Whitehurst (2013) explored visionary leadership behaviour, visionary leadership characteristics and visionary culture building using a 50-item questionnaire with 10 scales and 3 clusters among 75 elementary school principals in Florida. Using Pearson product-moment correlations to determine their relationships with student reading performance, the study found that the relationship between visionary leadership behaviour and the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test mean reading scale score for grade 5 was statistically significant.

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership according to Salahuddin (2012) is a relatively new perception of educational leadership that focuses on the leadership of the head of a school and on other individual followers and members of the school. Collaboration and collegiality are at the core of distributed leadership (Harris, 2004). Distributed leadership is concerned with the wholeness of individual members in an organization, specifically the academic staff teaching in the school. This style of leadership accords individual members of the school the ability to develop leadership potentials and give them equal opportunities for the realisation of school goals. Basically, the approach mobilises shared wisdom and common sense by creating a synergy among school teachers to enable them to maximize their competences and productivity needed in achieving goals (Goskey, 2015). Evidently, the concept of distributed leadership is explicitly like notions like collegiality and collaboration; it emerges through interaction with other people and the environment with a focus on how leadership practices are distributed among individual members of school (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). Meanwhile, Lieberman (2000) suggested that, where teachers share good practice and learn together, the possibility of securing better quality teaching is increased. Indeed, Mitchell and Sackney (2000) found that unambiguous evidence of a significant effect of distributed leadership exist for teachers' self-efficacy and levels of morale.

Instructional Leadership

Globally, as one of the most frequently studied models of school leadership for several years, instructional leadership has been determined to be critical factor in creating an effective teaching and learning environment and determining the success of a school (Pustejovsky, Spillane, Heaton, & Lewis, 2009; Hallinger & Walker, 2014). The research literature on school management has reported principals in TALIS countries (Denmark, Hungary, Iceland, Malta, Mexico and Portugal) scoring high when adopting or applying an instructional leadership style as the level of principals' use of an instructional leadership style in some cases is associated with school teachers' beliefs, practices and job-related attitudes. Evidently, in more than one quarter of TALIS countries, teachers whose principal adopted an instructional style of leadership were more likely to engage in collaborative activities with their colleagues and tended to have a more positive relationship with students irrespective of other school factors (OECD, 2009). In relating leadership and management to school, the function of a principal as an instructional leader is crucial to approaching any existing difficulty, to enhance teacher capabilities and school capacities, and in fostering a more conducive climate for teaching and learning. Effective principal leadership is seen as a way to improve his/her social relationship with the teachers and strengthen the role of the im-

mediate community in school improvement. In these areas, the role of principal as a mentor with his/her personal traits is found to assume a heightened importance (Niqab, Sharma, Wei, & Maulod, 2014).

The quality of leadership has great influence on improved teacher motivation for quality teaching and student inspiration to learn. (Muijs, 2011; Sergiovanni, 1999). In this regard, the principal plays a dominant role in the development of the school (Leithwood et al., 2004; Haven & Bourne, 2016). Although different facets have been emphasized in previous studies as identifiers of instructional leadership, the precise responsibility expected of an effective principal in building successful school should include classroom inspection, clear goal setting, and time management. As Sahin (2011) stated instructional leadership has a positive relationship with school culture. An instructional leader, therefore, is characterised as a strong and directive leader who clearly sets goals, nurtures high expectations and standards for individual members and successfully transforms a school in an effective way to reach stated goals (Hallinger, 2005). Hence, the instructional leadership role been characterized by defining a school's mission, managing instructions and fostering a positive climate.

A principal who assumes an instructional leadership role can direct a school effectively and often operate in a resolutely manner to make a school a safe and orderly place for learning by setting clear objectives for classroom instructions; he expects satisfactory performance from both teachers and students through instructional leadership, which could be referred to as an essential keystone between principal practices, student achievement and school outcome (Jacobson, 2010). Robinson, Llyod, and Rowe (2008) suggested that instructional leaders (principals) who focus their efforts on creating a conducive and suitable climate for teaching and learning most probably facilitate school improvement. Therefore, effective instructional leadership is reinforced in the dynamic role of school culture, and a positive school culture significantly influences the academic success of students within a school (Ohlson, 2009).

The thought that principals should regularly visit teachers during lessons in classrooms has been peculiarly identified with instructional leadership. For example, Eisner (2002) recommended that principals should spend one-third of their time in the classroom. By so doing, principals of higher performing schools show higher involvement in classroom observations and feedback (Heck, 1992; Robinson et al., 2008). In the same vein, providing an efficient teaching and learning environment through instructional leadership would improve the quality of pedagogy delivery in a school and increase the educational attainment of students and the collective efficacy of teachers (Marks & Printy, 2013; Ozdemir & Sezgin, 2012; Celik, 2000; Calik, Sezgin, Kavgaci, & Kilinc, 2012). Similarly, demonstrating instructional leadership behaviour helps teachers in growing a stronger sense of self and collective efficacy.

This is evident in a study of relationships between instructional leadership of school principals and the self and the collective-efficacy of teachers by Calik et al. (2012). They found significant relationships among the three variables, as instructional leadership appears as an effective antecedent while building efficacy. However, it also had a positive effect on collective and self-efficacy and an indirect effect of collective efficacy through self-efficacy. That is, collective efficacy increases as self-efficacy grows.

Similarly, Arbabi and Mehdinezhad (2015) and Leithwood and Beatty (2008) emphasized that collaborative leadership had a positive relationship with teacher efficacy; whereas positive teacher efficacy was a function of the leadership role of administrators in creating a positive school culture. The element of collaborative leadership should thus reveal the extent to which school leader is able to establish and maintain collaborative relationships with and among the school staff.

Blase and Blase (1999) described instructional leadership as being focused on four broad aspects, which include: integrating assistance directly towards the development of teachers, groups and curriculum; transformational and developmental activity directed towards equality and growth; the encouragement

of teacher voice; and observing classroom interactions for social justice. Likewise, Niqab et al. (2014) highlighted three key elements of instructional leadership that perhaps play a vital role in improving performance of a principal in their study on instructional leadership potential among school principals in Pakistan. These traits were: 1) personal traits - mentor, guide, and attitude; 2) professional development - knowledge and skill; and 3) principal-teacher relationships - showing appreciation and team work.

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory

Educational leadership scholars (Gilley, McMillan & Gilley, 2009; Hinduan, Wilson-Evered, Moss, & Scannell, 2009; Neves & Caetano, 2009; Van Dam et al., 2008; Carr, 2007; Groves, 2006; Bommer, Rich, & Rubin, 2005) have explored the attributes, roles and responsibilities of leaders with respect to change. Oakland and Tanner (2007) asserted that, through setting a clear direction with inspiration and influencing followers, leadership plays a key role in the context of organizational change. However, in the LMX approach effective leadership is not merely dependent on either the situations or the attributes of leadership and followership but is more concerned with the quality of exchange of relational characteristics between the leaders and followers; thus, a leader must increase interactions enhancing the collective effort in supporting the achievement of organizational goals (Hackman & Wageman, 2005; Yukl, 2008).

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) is an approach that hypothesizes leadership from a relational perspective and examines the quality of a social exchange relationship and interactions on the levels of influence on the development of the quality of the relationship. That is, the strength of this approach is on its emphasis on relationship qualities such as respect and obligation and on how these qualities determine whether followers are part of the group in their relationship with the leader (Graen & Wakabashi, 1994; Graen & Uh-Bien, 1995). LMX is a measure of the quality of the relationship between a leader and a subordinate, but relationship quality can be impacted by several factors including the duration of the relationship, the intensity of the relationship, or the possibly cognitive style (Mosley, Broyles, & Kaufman, 2014). LMX theory posits that subordinates who have a high-quality connection with their leader are enthusiastic and willing to do more than is required of them (Northouse, 2007). While many leadership theories have been empirically applied to educational settings in the school context, LMX could be applied in the classroom when a teacher, as a classroom leader, could foster high-quality relationships with their students, then, students as subordinates will be willing to work harder in the classroom, which might, in turn, influence total student achievement and increase learning outcomes. It could also be applied to the relationship between a principal and a teacher.

Situational Leadership

Situational leadership theory evolved from a task and people-oriented leadership continuum. Burns (1978) described situational leadership as the commonest form of relationship found between a superior and subordinates. Transactional leadership is perceived from different viewpoints depending on whether the emphasis lies in leadership quality and process, followers' growth, goal achievement or combination of the three. This type of leader thus takes full advantage of the personal needs of employees and organizational roles as the situation demands (Sichoeun, 2015). Situational leaders stimulate the interest of followers by appealing to them based on either exchanging compliance with or the attainment of certain performance level for reward; typically, they motivate and reward employees with status, money and authority for their success without given due consideration to individual characteristics. This style of

leadership is advantageous in managing the system within the framework of the organizational values, vision and mission (Avci, 2015; Nguni, Slegers, & Denessen, 2007; Waldman, Bass, & Yammarino, 1990).

Silins (1994) and Jung (2010) agreed that situational leadership style focus on basic needs and extrinsic rewards as motivation and the basis for management. This type of leader recognises the need and desire of the followers and develops a clear roles and tasks required to meet their desires in exchange for enactment of follower's work role. Basically, the leader develops approaches like productivity, effort, loyalty with compliance and in exchange for monetary reward, political reward or psychological reward. In contrast to transformational leadership, situational or transactional leadership focuses on the interactions between leaders and their followers. This can be observed at any levels and different facets of life. For instance, transactional leadership is demonstrated in an organization when a manager offers promotion to employees who can meet the demands and expectations of the organization. This type of leadership is demonstrated among politicians who can win votes of citizens due to various promises they have made. Similarly, it is demonstrated in a school setting when teacher give students a grade for completion of their classwork (Akar, 2010). Situational leaders therefore, do not individualise or focus on needs and development of subordinates but rather exchange things of value to advance their agenda and those of the subordinates.

Unlike transformational leaders, Zaleznik (1967) posited that situational oriented leaders are more concerned with efficiency in a process than substantive ideas. They specify the requirements, conditions and rewards for fulfilling those requirements. They focus more on what will work than what is best by displaying strategies that are often flexible and suitably use their power to reward, maintain, improve or punish what they perceived as satisfactory process in the arrangement of the organization (Hoy & Miskel, 2010). Hence, the effect of the reward and penalization can have both positive or negative effects on the organization. In a study on relationship between transformational and transactional leadership style of a school principal in relationship to school culture, Sahin (2004), sampled 50 principals and 950 teachers using an irregular layer sampling method in 50 primary schools in Izmir, Turkey. Although the participants (principals and teachers) perceived that principals exhibit less situational leadership style in school (Sahin, 2004 & Jung, 2010), a positive relationship existed between transactional leadership and the educational development dimension of school culture. In another study of transactional and transformational leadership styles of school principals in terms of educational administration Avci (2015) used a sample of 1,117 teachers drawn from both public and private schools in Istanbul. There was no variance in their perceptions towards transactional and transformational leadership styles.

Amabile (1998) argued that a situational leadership style may hold creativity at a minimal level as followers are extrinsically driven or inspired to perform their job. The process can only work when employee performance diverges from the anticipated standard. In the school context, stakeholders maintain a high expectation over the quality of the teachers. Okcu (2014) found that the contingent reward dimension of transactional leadership had a positive and significant relationship with school administrative practices and Aydin et al. (2013) found that the contingent reward dimension had a positive and significant relationship with teachers' job satisfaction and organizational commitment, School leaders with situational leadership styles take advantage of the contingent reward approach to reinforce teachers who make achievement (Aydin et al., 2013). In other words, situational leadership style tends to give consideration to the needs and interests of teachers so as to improve their job motivation, satisfaction and performance; it, thus, had a significant and positive influence on the job performance of the teachers at private senior high schools in Surabaya, Malaysia (Wahyni, Christiananta, & Elivana, 2014).

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is the foundation of every decision or judgement made by an individual. A leader's emotional intelligence skills are vital to collaborative efforts required in ensuring the well-being of subordinates and the organization as a whole (Gray, 2009). Emotional intelligence is the ability and capability of a leader to manage his own emotions while being sensitive to the needs of the subordinates. This intelligence thus includes not only emotions, but the moods and feelings demonstrated by a leader during personal interactions with subordinates. Emotional intelligence according to Mayer and Salovey (1997) has been described as a leader's ability to perceive, access, generate and understand emotional knowledge and being able to reflectively regulate the emotions to foster intellectual and promote emotional growth.

Many studies on emotional intelligence are fascinated to know how our moods and feelings can help a student to learn to perform better and able to cope with demanding and complex academic experience. Low and Nelson (2006) claimed that emotional intelligence is crucial to a student's personal health and academic success. It is fast becoming evident that employers presently are no longer looking for personnel with good academic grades alone especially as the profession requires an emotionally intelligent employee. They are more attracted to applicants who can adapt to the forever changing climate of their organizations and meet the demands of a working world (Mozhan, Hassan & Halil, 2013). Apparently, emotional intelligence gives an added advantage to individuals in pursuing educational and career development, and emotional intelligence has been established as a determinant of academic achievement among students.

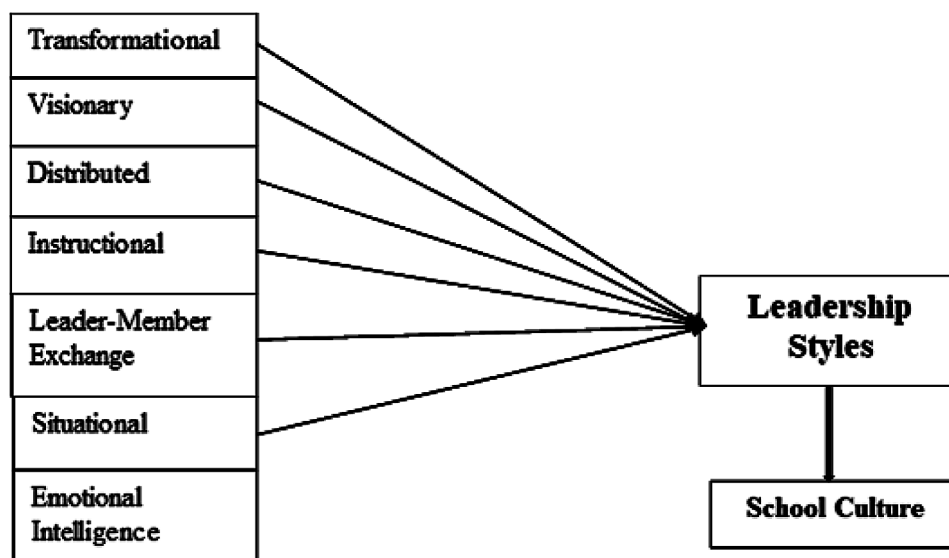
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual and empirical framework for this present research seeks to explore school leadership styles and school culture in the context of secondary schools in northern Malaysia according to the perceptions of teacher. This present study explores how leadership styles are related to school culture, and thus, offers a general framework and thematic presentation and analysis of the broad themes of leadership styles and school culture. Below is a detailed description of the analytical framework which encompasses seven elements of leadership styles in relationship to school culture. See Figure 1.

Methods

This study is a qualitative study in nature. The participants of this study comprise teachers from different schools and districts in Kedah and Penang, which are the Northern States of Malaysia, who are undertaking leadership in education class (SDU 5024) and are enrolled the master's program in educational management at Universiti Utara Malaysia. The 16 participants have work experience ranging from 11 years to 22 years in primary and secondary schools and religious schools and non-religious schools. Focus groups and open-ended questions asked of individuals were used to gain an in-depth understanding from their perspectives of the best leadership style for school principals to apply in building a positive school culture in their school contexts. Each student was given open-ended questions. The first part of the question requires demographic information, while the second consists of two questions: 1) what is the best leadership theory to build a positive school culture, according to your own opinion? and 2) name the theory and explain why you think the theory or style is the best for positive school culture?

Figure 1. Conceptual framework



The students were given an informed consent form to sign and were asked to read more about school leadership style and theory to have a basic understanding about the application of the theory. The participants were given 45 minutes to answer the open-ended questions and were then divided into 4 groups for a focus group discussion on the best leadership style as perceived by group for a positive school culture. Each group was given 30 minutes to present their ideas. The discussion was properly managed, and the ideas presented were noted and recorded for each group.

Results

Table 1 presents the participants' information. The participants were representative of the various schools in Kedah and Penang, from different districts and with teaching experience ranging from 6 to 23 years. See Table 1.

Theme 1: Best Leadership theory/style for positive school culture in your context and perception.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Participants were asked based on what they learned in educational leadership class to predict what could be the best or the preferable leadership style for positive school culture. Participants 1, 4, 6 and 7 said that the transformation leadership style was the best leadership style for developing a positive school culture. Following are their responses and reasons.

P1 noted the ability of a transformation leader to motivate teachers to work harder as a team, saying:

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Table 1. Participant's data

Participant	School	Region	Working Experience
1	SJKT Ladang Alma	Tengah, Penang	23
2	Kolej Vokasional Alor Setar	Kota Setar	20
3	SMTeknik	Kota Setar	17
4	SJKT MAK Mandin	Utara Spu, Penang	16
5	SMA Islahiah	Kulim	13
6	SJKT Ladang Alma	Tengah, Penang	22
7	SMK Tunku Abdul Rahman	Kota Setar	10
8	SK Saujana Indah	Seberang Perai Selatan, Penang	12
9	SMK Convent Father Barre	Kuala Mudah, Sungai Petani	15
10	SJK(C) Mah Hua, KG. Selamat	Tasek Gelugor, Penang	6
11	Sekolah Menengah Sains Pokok Sena	Kota Setar	14
12	SK Taman Mahsuri	Kulim	11
13	SJKT Ladang Alma	Tengah, Penang	22
14	SK Pagar Museh	Kulim	11
15	SK Permatang Tok Dik	Kulim	11
16	Kolej Vokasional Alor Setar	Kota Setar	14

Transformational leadership style is best to meet the expectations of each school as transformational leaders use their abilities to influence and motivate their followers to achieve the goals of the organisation. These leaders are focused on the performance of group members. These leaders can motivate them to work harder as a team who are committed to the success.

In relationship to this, another participant supported the ability of transformational leadership to turn school culture from negative to positive. P4 said:

In my opinion, transformational leadership is the most suitable to build positive school culture. In this situation transformational leadership has been found to have positive effects on school and organisational conditions. ... A leader who practices transformation leadership includes the ideas of members, considers their motives and satisfies organizational members' needs and values. I strongly agree that transformational leadership is the best for positive change and culture in school because a leader who uses a transformational leadership style takes risks for positive change and innovation, manages and motivates followers to go beyond the original plans, provides for the needs for others, empowers followers and inspires them. I also believe that a transformational leadership style can lead to positive educational outcomes and create a positive school culture.

P6 agreed that a transformational leadership style can play a crucial role in building positive school culture, saying:

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Based on my experience in several schools, I have that the best leadership theory for school culture is transformational leadership. In recent years most of the headmasters have not followed the era of globalization development. They lack the latest information and have low technology skills and fail to handle their staff. So, their leadership styles have left the Tamil Medium School behind the Malay and Chinese medium schools. Of all the leadership styles, they should follow transformational leadership because its four elements would help them to achieve their goals. Individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspiration motivation and idealized influence are best things to act upon and leading in a manner that enables students, teachers, parents and community truly feel that they are an essential part of a great school culture in order to achieve goals.

P7 agreed that the transformational leadership style was the best style for building a positive school culture, saying:

In my opinion, the best style to use for positive school culture is transformational leadership. This is because, this leadership style creates and provides the energy and passion for followers to succeed. This type of leader is people-oriented and will have a good relationship with followers. So, from this, they will have a very high level of satisfaction. This type of leader will inspire his followers and challenge followers with high standards. So, the follower will have high motivation and will try their best to perform in all their tasks. This type of leadership can build a positive school culture because all the staff is less stressed and burned out. The follower will always feel encouraged, optimistic and believe in their capability to succeed. When the staff is happy, the school culture will be positive. The staff will have a good relationship with their leader, their colleague and with their students.

These four participants supported the transformational leadership style as the best and most effective leadership style to apply in schools for positive school culture and change.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Some of the participants said instructional leadership would be the best style in building a positive school culture. For example, P12 said:

... the school leadership will strive to ensure that teachers and students under the bench are always in the best position with the things they do so that they can work hard and take pride in their efforts. Through this leadership style, the improvement of the performance of the examination results is not obtained through direct instructional leadership practices, but performance improvements occur as a result of the good relationship among the school leadership and the teachers and their students. Among the efforts that can be done through this type of leadership style is that school leaders will spend time together with their students and teachers either at school or outside the school area. Additionally, school leaders will also ensure that there is coordination between curriculum, learning objectives and criteria reference tests with predetermined standards. In addition, they will always monitor the teaching results through test data.

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P14 supporting instructional leadership style as the best to applied in creating a good environment and culture:

In my opinion, I think the best leadership theory to build positive school culture is the instructional leadership theory. Instructional leadership has long been regarded as one of the principal responsibilities of a school leader. As we know, the instructional leadership practices of a school leader include expressing high expectations for the performance of teachers and students, supervising the teaching process, monitoring the student evaluation and progress process, coordinating the school curriculum, and creating a good teaching climate and working environment in schools. Therefore, I do believe that, the instructional leadership style could lead to positive school culture.

P15 shared this view, saying:

In my own opinion, instructional leadership is the most effective style to improve schools through teaching and learning. It is the best because, since school is about teaching and learning and learners are the top priority, instructional leadership will play a big role in a school principal supervising teaching and learning, curriculum and teacher professional development which all lead to organizational and professionalism.

Thus, P12, P14, and P15 believed that instructional leadership was the best style for developing a positive school culture.

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

Several students sported visionary leadership as the most suitable style for developing a positive school culture. Said P9:

I support visionary leadership to be the best style for developing a positive school culture because visionary leadership helps to establish a good relationship among the participants in an organization. All those friends will be able to enjoy success together (brought about) by visionary leadership Leaders can devise strategies and stamina in managing emotions. Job satisfaction will also occur in visionary leadership as all employees will be involved with all the steps taken by the employer.

P10 believed that visionary leadership was able to connect with a sense of mission, saying:

...from my point of view and based on leadership theories that I learned in leadership in educational class, I do believe that a visionary leadership style should be used by school principals to improve school performance due to its connection to mission. Achieving a school's mission and vision is very important for school growth. A school principal can grow together with teachers and students when the principal is a visionary leader.

P13, who had had experience teaching in five Tamil schools with fifteen different leaders, said:

Among all of the (leadership theories) the most appropriate leadership theory that I prefer for this century and to my school is visionary leadership. It is because my school's achievement in curriculum is getting worst. We need an immediate change to change the school culture, and, thus, visionary leadership can help us to flourish in fundamental ways.

Distributed Leadership

Several students believed that distributed leadership was the best approach. Said P5:

... based on the knowledge gained in leadership in education class, I strongly believe in distributed leadership for positive change and culture. Many ... studies have identified the importance of distributed leadership as a potential contributor to positive change and school improvement. Therefore, I believe distributed leadership can play a big role in building positive school culture through empowerment and relationships.

P11 agreed with this viewpoint, and stressed that distributed leadership might also lead to more contributions by groups of people, saying:

In my opinion, I believe that distributed leadership is the best to create a positive school culture. Distributed leadership incorporates the activities and efforts of multiple groups in a school who work at guiding staff in the instructional process. This is an important basic in this theory where, every member of the organization are trained and mobilized in achieving the goals of the organization. So, a positive school culture can be created if the manager in school situation, the principal, manages to make all staff understand about creating a positive school culture, which later will promote the achievement of a common goal of the school. When we talk about school culture, it is something that is huge whereby it involves many aspects of the school. I truly believe that distributed leadership can help to achieve and create positive school culture.

LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE (LMX)

Two participants discussed LMX theories. P2 said:

in my humble opinion, supported with the leadership theories learned in leadership in education class plus my long teaching experience, LMX is a good leadership style to build relationships and increase performance. It is because a LMX style can minimize worker turnover, provides positive evaluation and staff performance, increase commitment, motivation to work, positive attitude, support from the leader and enthusiasm in the decision participation.

This idea was supported by P16, who said:

looking at the school culture today and the role of the school principal, I think that LMX leadership style could be used to solve problems in school especially in building relationships in school and commitment. LMX style can be used as a motivational tool to inspire teachers to work.

SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

One participant said that the best leadership theory to build a positive school culture was that of a situational leader. P8 said:

I think the best leadership theory to build my school culture is situational leadership whereby at least my principal knows the situation among her teachers and staffs at school. She must know the problem identified and faced by teachers and adapt as the situation occurs. This can make a positive relationship, and my principal can adapt to the situation. For example, some teacher have constraints in attending school activities due to sickness ... The principal must accept this as a reasonable situation The principal must teachers can cope with situations My principal ... cooperates with teacher in terms of energy and money. The relationship is also good, and she also good listener. She also fosters school commitment in academics and extracurricular activities, which make us tired but we got satisfaction when joining many competitions and getting prizes after training our pupils.

Emotional Intelligence

Lastly, P3 commented on the need for emotional intelligence. Said P3:

To me, a school leader must have high EQ and IQ to create collegiality, collective efficacy, personal efficacy and job satisfaction among employees. If these are provided, it leads to positive environment, change and culture.

Table 2 presents preferred leadership style of respondents for developing a positive school culture. It presents the frequency for endorsing each leadership style and the per cent. Of the participants, 25% (n=4) preferred transformation leadership as best for developing a positive school culture, 18% (n=3) preferred instructional and visionary leadership as the best for developing a positive school culture followed by the distributed and Leader-Member-Exchange (MLX) 12% (n=2) while only 1 participant preferred situational and emotional intelligence.

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of the respondents' leadership style ranking for positive school culture

Leadership Theory and Style	Frequency	Percent
Transformational Leadership Style	4	25.0
Instructional Leadership Style	3	18.8
Visionary Leadership Style	3	18.8
Distributed Leadership Style	2	12.5
Leader-Member-Exchange	2	12.5
Situational Leadership Style	1	6.3
Emotional Intelligence	1	6.3
Total	16	100.0

Figure 2. Preferable leadership style among teachers for school positive culture

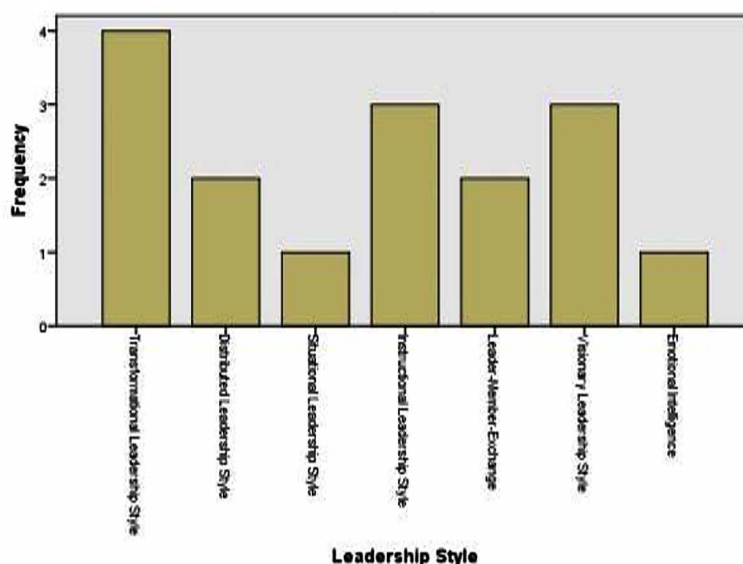


Figure 1 presents the chart of the respondents' responses to the question of the best leadership style in building a positive school culture according to their perceptions and contexts. From this figure and the table, a transformational leadership style is the most preferable style for developing a positive school culture followed by visionary leadership and instructional leadership while situational and emotional intelligence are less preferable for developing a positive school culture.

Focus Groups Report

Focus groups were conducted to gain a better and deeper understanding of what the respondents felt was the appropriate leadership style to develop a positive school culture. To achieve this, 17 students in leadership in education were divided into 4 groups (A, B, C, and D). Each group was tasked with having a discussion about which leadership style would be best to develop a positive school culture. In doing so, each group was given 40 minutes to deliberate about what might be the most effective leadership theory or style to develop a positive school culture. Eventually, each group was asked to present their discussion and preferences.

Group A and D

The participants of Groups A and D unanimously, after long deliberation and discussion among their group members, said that the transformational leadership style would be the best style for building a positive school culture. Among the reasons was that transformational leaders are role models for transforming people in the organization. They also reasoned that transformational leaders provide moral value to organizational members and inspire them to achieve organizational missions with full motivation for organizational change. They also chose style because they believed that transformational school leaders create a conducive environment in which everyone is happy to work. They transform peoples' attitudes and create strong relationships among principals, teachers and students.

Group B

Members of Group B preferred distributed leadership reasoning that distributed leadership promotes sharing, collaboration, democracy and participation of members. They argued that an organization in which leadership is distributed and activities are distributed fairly provides a chance to work together to achieve organizational goals. Distributed leadership is a people-oriented style that seeks for accountable and for the improvement of instruction and communication. This group gave strong credibility to both distributed and transformational leadership, which they found to be similar in being people-oriented styles, ability to build leadership capacity and in empowered people. Therefore, Group B members supported both distributed and transformational leadership for developing a positive school culture.

Group C

The members of the Group C chose Leader-Member-Exchange (LMX) as the best leadership style for developing a positive school culture. They said that LMX leadership provides positive evaluation and performance. Thus, a leader who practices a LMX style supports his or her in group members, these in group members are committed and motivated to work diligently in helping their leaders achieve organizational goals.

INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From individual perspectives, transformational leadership was preferred as the best leadership style by four respondents for developing a school positive culture due to the role of the style in motivating staff and providing inspiration. Respondents reasoned that the style would serve as an impetus for organizational change and innovation. Both the visionary leadership style and the distributed style were preferred by three respondents each. The visionary style was selected due to the importance of mission and vision in the organization and the sense of working together to achieve the mission. Distributed leadership was chosen due its power and the sense of sharing leadership among members and was seen as empowering members, providing motivation and developing autonomy accompanied with accountability. Leader-Member-Exchange was chosen for it ability to create relationships between in group members and commitment. One participant chose situational leadership due to the awareness of the leader about his or her followers' situation, problems and development, and one participant chosen emotional intelligence due to EQ being an important skill to manage relationships in an organization and in dealing with the emotions of people.

From the group perspectives, transformational leadership continued to be seen as the best leadership style for developing a positive school culture with the two groups of the four recommending transformational leadership as the best style for creating a positive school culture. This finding aligns with Day, Sammons, Leithwood, Hopkin, Haris, Gu, and Brown (2010) that transformational leadership is often linked with setting directions with a clear mission and vision; realigning and restructuring an organization and participation with the external community. Christensen (2010) said that transformational leadership practices were helpful in fostering organizational learning, vision building, individual support, intellectual stimulation, modelling, culture building and holding high performance expectations. Furthermore,

in complementing teaching and learning, instructional leadership is required to complement the tenets of transformational leadership as it was found that, when both styles coexist, the influence on school performance becomes substantial.

Recommendations for Best Leadership Practices

Based on the open-ended interviews and the reports of focus groups, this study has the following recommendations:

1. Leadership training and professional development is highly needed for school principals to achieve the mission and expectations of a 21st century school;
2. School principals should enrol in a school leadership course or a master's program in educational leadership or administration to improve their the supervision and administration of their schools. Enrolling in a master's program in educational leadership and management will expose principals to the new, relevant leadership theories and models that have been found to be effective in an 21st century school environment;
3. School principals during their leadership programs should be sent on a practicum where they could put all the leadership theories learned in the class into practice. This will test their practical knowledge and ability to use or apply appropriate leadership and management styles in different situations;
4. The Malaysian Ministry of Education should conduct rigorous training and problem or project-based activities that will prepare school principals generally in Malaysia and specifically in Northern regions for the 21st-century challenges while improving teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION

School leadership matters to elevate school standards and performance; but it works best with the application of an appropriate leadership model or style that suits the school situation and context. Principals should possess the ability to lead, influence and motivate teachers to perform better. The role of school principals as critical factor for influencing learning and determining student achievement, for leading a school successfully in the 21st century and for achieving all the expectations requires outstanding leadership performance and the 21st century school's use of an appropriate leadership style.

With 16 teachers from different schools and Northern Districts of Malaysia in leadership in education in a master's program, this study investigated what would be the best leadership style for building a positive school culture from the perspective of each student-teacher using open-ended questions. The researchers also conducted focus groups for further exploration and confirmation by grouping participants into four groups while discussing their preferred leadership styles with the other group members. Hence, focus groups were used to finalize their preferences and to see which styles were highly recommended and preferred by groups for best leadership practices in building a positive school culture.

From the results of open-ended questions and focus groups, the transformational leadership style was ranked as the best leadership style for school principals to apply in building a positive school culture according to their context while distributed leadership and instructional leadership were the second most preferred leadership styles for building a positive school culture in the Northern schools of Malaysia.

This result was not a surprise. The literature and findings worldwide have reported transformational leadership as one of, if not the best leadership theory, model and style for school development, effectiveness, change and performance.

Considering this, the findings of this research contribute to the existing literature on the importance and power of transformational leadership theory. Thus, Malaysian school principals facing a negative school culture, especially in the Northern part of Malaysia, should highly consider the transformational leadership theory and model in transforming schools and in creating a better learning environment. School principals seeking change and good practices among teachers and students should explore new or innovative ways of instilling good values, relationships and attitudes. These findings of this study could be transferable to other contexts that have similar problems.

As a caution, this study suffers from a sample size limitation, which calls for further studies with a larger sample size to determine the generalizability of its findings. Further interviews with high performing current and past school principals should be conducted in Malaysia to hear their stories about how they have led their schools successfully. Perhaps, their leadership stories could shed light on the best leadership style(s) that have been applied in their schools or the best leadership models that have adopted in maintaining the status of high performing schools.

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