Principal's Leadership Style And Teachers' Commitment In A Secondary School

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between principals' leadership style and teachers' commitment in a secondary school. The subjects of the study consist of 65 teachers. Two instruments were used to obtain data, that is: - a modified version of the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ); and, an adapted version of the Organisation Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). The findings showed that the mean for the problem-solving function leadership style was higher than the mean for the social function dimension. The overall mean score for teacher's commitment was high. There were no significant differences between the leadership style of the principal and gender, age, and years of teaching experience for both the dimensions of problem solving and social function. There was a strong and significant relationship between the problem-solving leadership style of the principal and commitment of the teachers. However, there is a moderately strong and significant relationship between the social function leadership style of the principal and teacher's commitment.

Keywords: principal's leadership style problem solving and social function dimension

INTRODUCTION

The leadership style of a principal determines the extent to which he is able to motivate his subordinates to achieve the mission and vision of the school. Principals must have the appropriate knowledge and skills to manage the staff. The commitment of teachers is closely related to the leadership style of the principal (Cheng, 1999). Effective principals succeed in improving the level of commitment among the staff with minimum supervision. The commitment of teachers is high if the leadership of the principal is effective, efficient, and is able to communicate well (Hughes, 1993). The quality of a principal's leadership is a critical factor that helps to enhance school improvement (Abdul Shukur Abdullah, 1998). The commitment of principals is another factor that influences the commitment of teachers (Compasino, 1992). Principals need to understand the needs and welfare of teachers in order to improve the commitment of teachers. In most cases, the leadership style of the principal influences the level of commitment among teachers.

The leadership style of principals, based on the theory of leadership behaviour, consists of two functions: - the problem-solving function, and the social function.

The problem-solving function, that is, task structured refers to the leadership style involved in seeking a solution to a problem. It involves providing suggestions to improve the productivity of the staff and directing group work such as allocation of duties and responsibilities. The social function is humanistic in nature as it focuses on the social behaviour of the principal such as building collegiality, respect, trust, and friendship (Fleishman, 1973). Thus, this study seeks to examine the relationship between principals' leadership style and teachers' commitment in a secondary school.

Review Of Literature

The leadership style of a principal determines the quality and effectiveness of a school (Alimuddin Mohd Dom, 2006; Jemaah Nazir Sekolah, 2007). In a study on the relationship between high perfoming schools and principal's authority among 651 subjects that comprises 315 pupils, 315 teachers, and 21 principals of excellent schools, the researchers found that six types of school culture contributes to academic performance (Lilia Halim, Mohamed Sani Ibrahim, & Izani Ibrahim, 2006). It includes the professional leadership of principals, purposive teaching, teacher's expectations,positive reinforcement, and shared responsibility between the school and parents. The leadership of the principal is one of the important factors that detremine academic perfomance. It also determines the effectiveness of a school (Edmonds, 1979).

The findings of another study showed that the comitment of teachers is determined by the professional support provided by principals and the leadership style of the principal (Kusum & Billingsley, 1998). In addition, the social relationship among various groups in the school can enhance the level of comitment among teachers.On the other hand, the number of years involved in teaching has a negative relationship on work comitment (Fresko, Kfir & Nasser, 1997). This finding was different from the result of another study (Yusof Hussien, 2004).

Objective Of The Study

The objective of the study is to examine the relationship between the leadership style of a principal and the commitment of teachers in a secondary school. Specifically, the study seeks to investigate : - (a) the perception of teachers towards the leadership style of the principal; (b) the level of commitment among teachers; and, (c) the relationship between the leadership style of the principal and the level of commitment among the teachers.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:-

1. What is the perception of teachers towards the leadership style of the principal?
2. What is the level of commitment among the teachers?
3. Is there a difference in the perception of the leadership style of the principal according to the gender, age, and years of teaching experience of the subjects?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the leadership style of the principal and commitment of teachers?

Methodology

Design

The study employed the survey research method to obtain information about the subjects.

Sample

A total of 65 secondary school teachers participated in the study. It consists of 26 male teachers (40.0%) and 39 female teachers (60.0%). Four of the respondents were above 30 years old (6.2%), 33 were between 30- 40 years (50.8%), 22 were from 40- 50 (33.8%) and 6 were above 50 (9.2%). Nineteen of the teachers have taught for less than 10 years (29.2%), 21 teachers have taught between 10-15 years (32.3%) and 25 have more than 15 years of teaching experience (38.5%).

Instrument

The study involves the use of two instruments:- (a) a modified version of the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ); and, (b) an adapted version of the Organisation Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). Both instruments required the respondents to respond on a five point Likert scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The questionnaire comprises three parts. Part One consists of information related to the respondent's gender, age, and number of years involved in the teaching profession. Part Two consists of 32 items related to the teachers's perception of the leadership style of the principal. The LBDQ was modified to take into account local factors. The researcher divided the leadership construct into two dimensions, namely, the problem-solving function, and the social function. There were 16 items for the problem-soving function and 16 items for the social function. Part Three of the questionnaire consists of 15 items related to teacher's commitment. The Organisation

Commitment Questionnaire was modified and translated into the Malay language (Asliza Zubir-Salim, 1999).

Data collection

The researcher visited the school to collect the data after obtaining the approval from the Education Planning and Research Division, Ministry of Education, and the state education department. The researcher also obtained the approval from the school principal to administer the questionnaire. The questionnaire was adminsitered to the teachers after being informed about the purpose of the study. A total of 65 out of the 80 teachers returned the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 81%.

Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted to determine the validity and reliability of the items. Twenty teachers from another school in Terengganu participated in the pilot study. The results of the pilot study showed a high Alpha Cronbach value. Table 1 shows the Alpha Cronbach values for leadership style according to problem-solving function, and social function as well as the teacher commitment for both the pilot study and actual study.

Table 1: Alpha Cronbach value for each item

Item	Set	Study	n	Alpha Cronbach
LBDQ	Problem-solving function	Pilot	20	0.97
		Actual	65	0.95
	Social function	Pilot	20	0.97
		Actual	65	0.95
OCQ	Commitment	Pilot	20	0.91
		Actual	65	0.90

Results

Perception of teachers towards the leadership style of the principal

Table 2 shows that the mean for the problem-solving function (mean = 4.01) leadership style is higher than the mean for the social function (mean=3.74).

Table 2 Perception of teachers towards the leadership style of the principal

Leadership style of the principal	Mean	SD
Problem-solving function	4.01	.61
Social function	3.74	.68

Level of commitment among teachers

The overall mean score for teacher's commitment was high (mean=4.09). In terms of gender, Table 3 shows that the mean score for the male teachers (mean=4.10) was higher than the female teachers (mean=4.08).

Table 3   Level of commitment of teachers according to gender

Gender	n	Mean	SD
Male	26	4.10	.55
Female	39	4.08	.39
Total	65	4.09	.45

Table 4 shows that the above 50 years old age group has highest mean score for teacher's commitment according to age group (mean=4.42) whereas the lowest mean was among the less than 30 years age group (mean = 3.95).

Table 4 Level of commitment according to age group

Age group	n	Mean	SD
Below 30 years old	4	3.95	.28
30-40	33	3.98	.43
40-50	22	4.18	.49
Above 50	6	4.42	.35
Total	65	4.09	.45

Teachers with more than 15 years of teaching experience recorded the highest mean score (mean = 4.28). The lowest mean score was among the 10-15 years group (mean = 3.94).

Table 5 Level of teacher's comitment according to years of teaching experience

Years	n	Mean	SD
Less than 10 years	19	4.00	.40
10-15 years	21	3.94	.43
More than15 years	25	4.28	.46
Total	65	4.09	.45

Perception of the leadership style of the principal according to gender, age, and years of teaching experience of the subjects

The findings in Table 6 showed that there was no significant difference between the leadership style of the principal and gender ($Z = -1.33$, $p = .18$). The mean ranking for the female teachers (mean ranking=35.55) was higher than the male teachers (mean ranking = 29.17). This shows that the female teachers have a higher perception of the leadership style of the principal for the prolem-solving function.

Table 6 Differences in problem-solving leadership style of the principal according to gender

Gender	Mean Ranking	Z	Sig
Male	29.17	-1.33	.18
Female	35.55		

Level of significance $p < .05$

Table 7 shows that there is no significant difference between leadership style according to social function and gender ($Z = -1.34$, $p = .18$). The mean ranking for the female teachers (mean ranking=35.56) was higher than the male teachers (mean ranking= 29.15). It shows that the perception of the female teachers was higher for the social function leadership style of the principal.

Table 7 Differences in the social function leadership style of the principal according to gender

Gender	n	Mean Ranking	Z	Sig
Male	26	29.15	-1.34	.18
Female	39	35.56		

Overall, the perception of the female teachers for both the dimensions – problem-solving and social function leadership style was higher than the male teachers.

The Kruskal-Wallis H test in Table 8 shows that there is no significant differences in the problem-solving function leadership style according to the age of the teachers ($\div^2(3, N = 65) = 2.64$, p = .45). The mean ranking score for above 50 age group (mean ranking= 43.25) is higher than the other age group. The finding showed that the higher age group has a higher perception of the problem-solving leadership style of the principal.

Table 8. Differences in problem-solving leadership style according to age group

Age	n	Mean Ranking	Chi-Square	df	Sig
Below 30 years	4	26.38	2.64	3	.45
31-40 years	33	31.20			
41-50 years	22	34.11			
Above 50 years	6	43.25			

A similar result was obtained for the social function leadership style of the principal. Table 9 shows that there is no significant difference between the social function leadership style of the principal and age group ($\div 2$ (3, N = 65) = 3.60, p = .31). The mean ranking score for those above 50 years was the highest (mean ranking= 43.42). The finding showed that the higher age group has a higher perception of the problem-solving leadership style of the principal.

Table 9. Differences in social function leadership style according to age group

Age	n	Mean Ranking	Chi-Square	df	Sig
Below 30 years	4	20.50	3.60	3	.31
31-40 years	33	32.48			
41-50 years	22	33.20			
Above 50 years	6	43.42			

The results in Table 10 showed that there is no significant differences between the problem-solving leadership style of the principal and teacher's years of teaching experience $\div^2(2, N = 65) = 2.94$, p = .23). The mean ranking for teachers who have taught for more than 15 years (mean ranking =43.42) was the highest among the different categories of teaching experience.

Table 10. Differences in problem-solving leadership style according to years of teaching experience

Years of teaching experience	n	Mean ranking	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Less than 10 years	19	29.97	2.94	2	.23
10-15 years	21	29.69			
More than 15 years	25	38.08			

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test in Table 11 showed that there is no significant difference between social function leadership style and years of teaching experience ($\div^2$(2, N = 65) = 1.63, p = .44). The mean ranking score for teachers who have taught for more than 15 years was the highest (mean ranking-36.72). The results showed that the higher the years of teaching experience, the higher the perception of the teachers towards the social function leadership style of the principal.

Table 11. Differences in social function leadership style according to years of teaching experience

Years of teaching experience	n	Mean Ranking	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Less than 10 years	19	29.92	1.63	2	.44
10- 15 years	21	31.36			
More than 15 years	25	36.72			

Relationship between the leadership style of the principal and commitment of teachers

The analysis showed in Table 12 showed that there is a strong and significant relationship between the problem-solving leadership style of the principal and commitment of the teachers (r = .79, p <.05). The positive relationship showed that relatively, the problem-solving leadership style of the principal resulted in a positive commitment among teachers.

Table 12. Relationship between problem-solving leadership style and teacher's commitment

Correlation	Problem-solving Leadership Style	
	r	Sig.
Commitment	.79	.00**

The results of the Spearman correlation test in Table 13 showed that there is a moderately strong and significant relationship between the social function leadership style of the principal and teacher's commitment (r = .70, p <.05). The positive relationship showed that relatively, the social function leadership style of the principal leads to positive commitment among the teachers.

Table 13. Relationship between the social function leadership style of the principal and teacher's commitment

Correlation	Social Function Leadership Style	
	r	Sig.
Commitment	.70	.00**

DISCUSSION

The results showed that the mean for the problem-solving leadership style of the principal is higher than the mean for the social function leadership style. This appears to have led to a higher level of commitment among the teachers. However, the analysis of data showed that there are no significant differences between the two dimensions of leadership style with demographic factors.

The results also showed that there is a strong and significant relationship between the two dimensions of leadership style and commitment of teachers. Both dimensions have relatively provided a positive commitment among teachers. In terms of the problem-solving leadership dimension, the principal conducts courses to enhance the professionalism of teachers. The principal also has a clear vision for the school and shares with all the teachers and motivates teachers to perform their work effectively. The principal provides clear directions for the teachers to understand. For the social function leadership style, the principal attends the programs implemented in the school, treats the teachers well, and is confident that the teacher carries out the task well. The principal has a good working relationship with parents and is concerned about the welfare of the pupils. The principal appreciates the contribution of the teachers. The teachers are confident that the principal does not discriminate while delegating the tasks and responsibilities.

The results showed that the principal practiced both dimensions of leadership. Research has shown that both the dimensions have a positive effect on school climate (Scott, 1988; Tartar et. al., 1989; Garner, 1990; Haymon, 1990), the morale of teachers (Naji, 1987; Houseknecht, 1990; Burn, 1990), teacher satisfaction and teacher motivation (Ishak bin Sin, 1993).

The study showed a high level of commitment among the teachers. The items that have a high mean score include: teachers strive to do their best for the good of the school; the teacher is not satisfied when school performance declines; and, teachers felt being part of the school. The level of commitment is not influenced by gender and it was similar to the results of other studies (Mohd Othman Yusoft, 1996, Mohd Roodzi Aziz, 1997; Noraini Abdullah Sani, 2000). The study also showed that the

level of commitment increases with the age of the teachers. The results was similar to another earlier study (Norhannan Ramli & Jamaliah Abdul Hahid, 2006). The finding that there was no significant difference between level of commitment and the age of the teachers was supported by previous research (Mohd Othman Yusoff,1996; Mohd Roodzi Aziz,1997; Yahadi Yasili,1998). Teachers who have taught for less than 10 years have a higher level of commitment compared to teachers with more than 15 years of experience.

The results of the study showed that there were no significant differences between the leadership style of the principal and the two dimensions for the variables gender, age, and years of teaching experience.

There was a strong and significant relationship between the leadership style of the principal and teacher's commitment. The result was similar to three other studies, namely: -Taylor and John (2002) on the leadership approach, school climate and teacher commitment; Kusum and Billingsley (1998) on the effect of professional support on teachers' commitment; and, Cheng (1990) on the relationship of job attitudes and organizational commitment to different aspects of organizational environment.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The two dimensions of leadership style can improve the commitment of teachers.

However, if the principal only focuses on the problem-solving leadership style, teachers would become bored with the daily routine which, eventually would lead to burn-out. At the other extreme, principals who focus only on the social function leadership style would lead to low performance among teachers. It is vital for principals to provide similar emphasis on both dimensions of leadership style in order to further improve the commitment level of teachers. Professional development courses and seminars can be conducted to enable principals to understand and apply both dimensions of leadership style in an appropriate manner to achieve the vision and mission of the school.

A systematic and professional training of principals can strengthen the leadership qualities of principals. The professional leadership style of principals can contribute to a culture of high performance in school (Lilia Halim et al., 2006). Principals who encourage teachers to participate in decision-making are able to motivate and improve the level of teacher commitment. Principals who focus on the core business of teaching and learning in school are more effective (Ishak bin Sin, 2006).

SUGGESTIONS

The study was conducted in one secondary school in Terengganu. It is limited in scope as it examined only two dimensions of leadership style. A small group of subjects participated in the study. The researcher suggests that future research involve other dimensions of leadership style and a larger group of subjects in order to enhance the results of the study. The research was conducted in one public secondary school. It is suggested that future research be conducted in other types of school including residential, cluster, and high performing schools. The school was located in an urban area. A similar study can be conducted among rural schools to determine whether there is a relationship between the leadership style of the principal and teacher's level of commitment. The study used the quantitative research method and the subjects consist of teachers. The qualitative method can be used in future studies and involve pupils so that the data obtained would more appropriate.

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