ELSEVIER

The Effect of Transformational Leadership on School Culture in Male' Primary Schools Maldives

Tang Keow Ngang [a] *

[a]*School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Minden and 11800, Penang, Malaysia*

Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the effect of transformational leadership on school culture. The educational sector of Maldives has been experiencing increasing change. Calls for school reform and restructuring in past few years have emphasized the importance of new, more collaborative forms of school management and leadership. The public expectation quality teaching school accountability and divergent input became more complex and demanding. A total sample of 217 teachers was selected from five primary schools. A quantitative survey design using questionnaire was conducted in 2008 to assess the perception of teachers on their principals' leadership behavior in Male', Maldives. The method of analysis used to mean score, standard deviation, Pearson correlation and multiple regression Stepwise. The findings revealed that the mean score of transformational leadership behavior of Male' primary school principals was average (mean = 2.90; SD = .66) but the level of school culture was quite high (mean = 3.09; SD = .47). In addition the result showed that there is strong, positive correlation relationship between the overall transformational leadership and school culture (r = .73, p< .01). All the six transformational leadership dimensions had moderate correlation relationship with school culture except the 'providing individualized support' dimension which had strong and positive relationship (r = .71, p< .01). Finally, findings showed that there are three significance predictors contributed 55.9 percent of the total variance of school culture. The three predictors are providing individualized support dimension, holding high performance expectations dimension and identifying and articulating vision dimension.

1. Introduction

The most significant challenge of leadership is to build and sustain a school culture that focuses on continual improvement of educational programs, teachers' capabilities and skills, and student learning (Alger, 2008). The school administrator as the primary instructional leader is insufficient to meet these challenges. As a result several experts advocate the dispersal of leadership authority within a school (Harris, 2003; Fullan, 2001; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2001). Such dispersal has the potential to motivate teachers, improve the quality of teaching in the classroom and positively impact student achievement (Alger, 2008). Effective school leaders help develop school cultures that embody shared values and beliefs and promote caring and trust among all members (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Transformational leadership is a process in which the leaders take actions to increase

* Tang Keow Ngang. Tel.: +6-04-6533764; fax: +6-04-6572907.
E-mail address: tang@usm.my.

the awareness of what is right and important as well as to raise motivational maturity and move beyond the persons' own self-interests for the good of the school (Cashim et al., 2000). Transformational leaders provide others with a sense of purpose that goes beyond simple exchange of rewards for effort provided.

Maldives had a traditional system of schooling for hundreds of years. These traditional schools are self-financing and mostly owned by the private sector or operated by the island communities. Since 1960 a western style of schooling was first introduced in Male' schools and was merged with the traditional system of schooling. In 1978, a unified national system of education with a common national curriculum was formed (Mohamed & Arza, 1999). Under the Education for All (EFA) program, Maldives has universalized primary education. Thus the Ministry of Education is responsible for the provision and supervision of education throughout the country. However the authority given to the school principals is limited. There is a need for the school leaders to contribute more academically and collaborate with the teachers. Maldivians have become increasingly demanding to raise standards and improve academic performance, public began criticizing the school leadership and calling for school reformation. The Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Section (ESQIS) launched a wide scale whole school supervision program in 2004, to monitor and measure the teaching and learning quality of schools in Maldives. School leadership is a crucial factor that affects the capacity to improve the quality of education.

Although researches done in other countries (Eppard, 2004; Lucas and Valentine, 2003) confirmed that transformational leadership is the style that can bring the desired changes to school, a research needs to carry out in order to investigate whether transformational leadership does actually encourage and facilitate the cultural changes under Maldivian context. Furthermore Maldivian principals do not have proper references or guideline to inspire and guide them on the appropriate role of leadership to adopt in the era of school reform. This study seeks to explore the effect of transformational leadership style of Maldivian primary school principals on school culture.

2. Objectives of study

This research aims to identify the level of the overall transformational leadership and each of its dimension as well as the level of school culture as perceived by teachers. In addition, this research also study the relationship between the overall transformational leadership and its dimension with the school culture. Finally, the research aims to explore the effect of transformational leadership on school culture.

3. Methodology

This is a descriptive correlation study on transformational leadership and school culture. This research utilizes quantitative research methodology involving a sample of primary school teachers. There are altogether six primary schools in Male'. Five primary schools were used as target schools. The other school was used for pilot study. The total population is 485 teachers by January 2006. This data was obtained from the Maldives Ministry of Education. A simple random sampling was used. A total of 217 teachers were selected from the population of permanent trained teachers who are working in the target schools. The researcher managed to collect all the questionnaires that were distributed, giving the response rate of 100 percent. The transformational leadership were assessed using a 24 items scale adapted from the Principal Leadership Questionnaire (PLQ) developed by Jantzi and Leithwood (1996). School culture was assessed using a 35 items scale adapted from Gruenert & Valentine (1998). All the 59 items were measured with a four point Likert scale (1 = disagree, 2 = slightly disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree). A structured self-administered mailed survey questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection.

A pilot study to validate and improve the instrument was conducted in one school. Improvement was made on the questionnaire regarding the accuracy in measurement, appropriate terminology used, and the structure of sentence used to avoid confusion. A total of 45 trained and experienced teachers were selected as subjects in the pilot test. These teachers had the same socio-demographic characteristics as the actual research sample but they did not

participate as respondents in the actual study. Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) was used to explore the data, followed by a reliability test. An alpha value of 0.804 for Section B was the score for transformational leadership items, whereas an alpha value of 0.816 for Section C was the score for items on school culture. In other words, the variables used in this instrument are found to have high reliability value and the instrument was therefore, acceptable. Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis were then employed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive measures such as mean and standard deviation were used to describe the variables in the levels of the six transformational leadership dimensions and also the level of school culture. The Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between the level of school culture and overall transformational leadership and its dimensions. A multiple regression analysis was used to identify the predictor of school culture.

4. Findings

Results based on Table 1 show respondents' perceptions on the level of transformational leadership and each dimension. The highest mean score is on the fostering the acceptance group goals dimension (mean = 3.01, SD = 0.683). This is followed by both the providing intellectual stimulation dimension and holding high performance expectations dimension (mean = 2.95). Next is the identifying and articulating vision dimension (mean = 2.87, SD = 0.778) and the providing an appropriate model dimension (mean = 2.83, SD = 0.817). The lowest mean score is on the providing individualized support dimension (mean = 2.79, SD = 0.741). Therefore, we can conclude that the six transformational leadership dimensions are at moderate level except fostering the acceptance of group goals dimension is at high level, The fostering the acceptance of group goals dimension is the most dominant among the six transformational leadership dimensions. Moreover, the overall transformational leadership achieved mean scores of 2.90, which can only be considered as moderate level in practicing transformational leadership. On top of that, Table 1 shows the overall school culture with a mean score of 3.09 (SD = 0.471) which is considered to be high level.

Table 1. Level of transformational leadership & its dimension and school culture

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Transformational Leadership	2.90	0.661
Identifying and articulating vision dimension	2.87	0.778
Providing an appropriate model	2.83	0.817
Fostering the acceptance group goals	3.01	0.683
Providing individualized support	2.79	0.741
Providing intellectual stimulation	2.95	0.717
Holding high performance expectations	2.95	0.645
School Culture	3.09	0.471

4.1 The relationship between the levels of transformational leadership and its dimensions with the school culture

The Pearson-Product Moment correlation analysis was used to explore the relationship between teachers' perceptions towards the level of school culture and the level of transformational leadership and its dimensions. Table 2 shows a summary of the correlations between the level of transformational leadership and its dimensions with school culture. All the dimensions were found to be significant and positive at a significant level of 0.01. Teachers' perceptions towards the level of school culture showed that there are moderate relationship with the all transformational leadership dimensions except the providing individualized support dimension which had strong relationship with school culture (r = 0.710, p<0.01). The relationship between the teachers' perception about the level of school culture with the overall transformational leadership is high and positive (r = 0.730, p<0.01).

Based on Table 2, the providing individualized support dimension has the strongest effect on the level of school culture (r = 0.710, p<0.01). The fostering the acceptance of group goals dimension has the second strongest effect

on the level of school culture (r = 0.678, p<0.01). This is followed by the providing intellectual stimulation dimension (r = 0.656, p<0.01), identifying and articulating vision dimension (r = 0.651, p<0.01) and holding high performance expectations dimension (r = 0.620, p<0.01). Among all the transformational leadership dimensions, the providing an appropriate model dimension was found to have the least correlation to the level of school culture (r = 0.608, p<0.01). In other words, the teachers perceived that the higher the transformational leadership dimensions practice, the higher would be the level of school culture.

Table 2. Correlation between transformational leadership and its dimension with school culture

Transformational Leadership	School Culture	p
Identifying and articulating vision	0.651**	0.000
Providing an appropriate model	0.698**	0.000
Fostering the acceptance group goals	0.678**	0.000
Providing individualized support	0.710**	0.000
Providing intellectual stimulation	0.656**	0.000
Holding high performance expectations	0.620**	0.000
Overall	0.730**	0.000

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

4.2 The contribution of the transformational leadership dimension towards the level of school culture

Multiple regression stepwise method was used to predict the influence of the transformational leadership dimension practice towards the level of school culture. With reference to Table 3, three out of six independent variables can fit the final model of school culture. When we use the stepwise method, each independent variable is put into the model, one by one in sequence as below: beginning with the level in providing individualized support dimension, the level of holding high performance expectations dimension and ending with the level in identifying and articulating vision dimension. As shown in Table 3, the adjusted R^2 value in final model was 0.553.

Table 3. Predictors of school culture

Variables	B	β	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Change of R^2	t	p
Constant	1.525					14.720	0.000
Providing individualized support	0.265	0.418	0.504	0.502		5.212	0.000
Holding high performance expectations	0.184	0.252	0.550	0.546	0.044	4.145	0.000
Identifying and articulating vision	0.099	0.047	0.559	0.553	0.007	2.100	0.037

*Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Coefficient for the final model based on stepwise method reported as below:

$\acute{Y}_1 = 1.525 + 0.265X_1 + 0.184X_2 + 0.099 X_3$

$\acute{Y}_1$ = Level of school culture

X_1 = Level in providing individualized support dimension

X_2 = Level in holding high performance expectations dimension

X_3 = Level in identifying and articulating vision dimension

The major predictor for the level of school culture was the dimension on providing individualized support variable with the standard coefficient of 0.418 contributing 50.2 percent of variance to the level of school culture. The second predictor was the dimension on holding high performance expectations variable ($\beta = 0.252$) contributing about 4.4 percent variance to the level of school culture. Finally, the dimension on identifying and articulating vision variable is the last predictor with standard coefficient as 0.047 contributed 0.7 percent variance to the level of school culture. Adjusted R^2 among all the variables indicated a total contribution of 55.3 percent to the level of school culture.

5. Discussion and implications

This section mitigates between findings and literature review and draws lesson learnt from the study. The study revealed that Male' primary schools are predominantly made up of female teachers who are between 20 to 30 years old. The majority of them trained at certificate and diploma qualification and was less than 10 years of teaching. According to transformational leadership findings showed that to some extent, transformational leadership was exercised by the entire Male' primary school principals. It is very likely, they made their vision clear to teachers. They facilitated collaborative development of a school wide vision and promoted this through communication to all the parties concerned. They worked with teachers to plan and carry out special events and expressed their enthusiasm for their work with the teachers. They felt the need to provide an appropriate role model for teachers. Besides the results from the school culture showed that Male' primary schools, teachers, parents and students worked to some degree together for the common good of the students. Parents and teachers sometimes shared common expectations and communicated moderately about student performance. Parents normally trusted teachers and students generally accepted responsibility for their schooling. Teachers trusted each other, valued each other's ideas and generally assisted each other as they worked to accomplish the tasks of the school. Teachers worked to some degree toward a common mission for the school. They had a moderate understanding of the mission and provided support to some extent to fulfilling the mission.

The principals have established and maintained a moderate degree collaborative relationships with school staff. Teachers' ideas and input were not highly sought. They were not frequently consulted when crucial decisions were made and their support for risk-taking, innovation and sharing of practices with principals was only moderate. This may be because principals still cling to their power. Furthermore, teachers did not engage in constructive dialogue that furthers the educational vision of the school, or did so only to a minimal extent. Teachers did not observe and discuss teaching practices, rarely evaluated programs and did not develop an awareness of the practices and programs of other teachers. It was not surprising to see that the majority of teachers trusted each other and valued each other's ideas since they were very much oriented to new ideas and innovations, by attending seminars and meetings initiated and conducted by their principals according to the mission of the school.

The significant correlation between transformational leadership and school culture results confirm the study by Jantzi and Leithwood (1996) who studied transformational school leaders are in constant pursuit of three fundamental goals. They are assisting staff in developing and maintaining a collaborative and professional school culture, fostering the development of staff skills and knowledge and helping staff solve problems together effectively. Considering the overall significant values shown in the findings, it can be concluded that the transformational leadership behavior had significant effect on the school culture. This effect was clearly perceived by Male' primary school teachers, who were aware of the qualities of principal leadership and its effect on the existing school culture.

6. Conclusion

This study sought to develop an understanding of the relationship between principal transformational leadership and school culture. The data analysis established the importance of principals' transformational leadership behavior to the development of a collaborative school culture. Further study that will more closely examine the mechanisms by which principals exercise transformational leadership and the various kind of impact such leadership behavior has upon school culture, is necessary. Hopefully, this study will make known pattern of leadership that are increasing effective as schools strive to improve in this era of change, reform and uncertainty.

References

Alger, G. (2008). Transformational leadership practice of teacher leader. *Online Journal Academic Leadership 6(2)*.

Cashim, J., Crewe, P., Desai, J., Desrosters, L., Prince, J., Shallow, G. & Slaney, S. (2000). *Transformational leadership: A brief overview & guidelines for implementation*. Education 4361.

Eppard, R.G. (2004). *Transformational and transactional styles as they predict constructive culture*. Retrieved July 15, 2008, from the World Wide Web: http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/theses/browse/by_author/e.html.

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Gruenert, S.W., & Valentine, J.W. (1998). *The school culture survey*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri-Columbia.

Harris, A. (2003). Improving school through teacher leadership. *Education Journal*, 59, 22-23.

Jantzi, D., & Leithwood, K. (1996). Toward an explanation of variation in teachers' perceptions of transformational school leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 32(4), 512-538

Leithwood, K. & Riehl, C. (2003). *What we know about successful school leadership*. Philadelphia PA: Laboratory for Student Success, Temple University.

Lucas, S.E., & Valentine, J.W. (2003). *Transformational leadership: Principals leadership teams and school culture*. Retrieved August 20, 2008, from the World Wide Web: http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDoc/data.ericdocs2scql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1a/62/2a.pdf.

Mohamed Abdul Muhsin & Azra Mariyam (1999). *Education policies curriculum design and implementation at the level of upper primary and general secondary education*. Retrieved August 25, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.ibe.unesco.org/curriculum/Asia%20Networkpdf/ndrepmv.pdf.

Sergiovanni, T. (2001). *Leadership: What's in it for schools?* London: Routledge Falmer Gunter.