

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PRACTICES OF LEADERSHIP STYLE AND TEACHER EMPOWERMENT OF HEADMASTERS IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study was to identify the relationship between headmasters' leadership style and teacher empowerment in the primary schools in Sarawak. Five primary schools have been selected from four types of school namely Daily-Primary school, Residential Primary School, 'Sekolah Kurang Murid' SKM (under enrolment school) and Mission School. Data were collected solely using questionnaire techniques. The questionnaires were distributed to the teacher respondents in the five schools selected through cluster sampling. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings showed that transformational leadership style was the most practised leadership style followed by transactional leadership style and lastly laissez-faire leadership style. The findings also revealed that teacher empowerment of all dimensions have been practised at the moderate level. In addition, the findings also indicated that there was a significant relationship between transformational leadership style and transactional leadership style with the dimensions of teacher empowerment such as decision making, professional growth, status, self-efficacy and impact as observed by teachers in the selected primary schools. However there was no significant relationship between transformational leadership style and transactional leadership style with autonomy. Other than that, laissez-faire leadership style did not show any significant relationship with any of the empowerment dimensions. The findings have implications to enhance the role of leadership styles of head teachers and teacher empowerment for teachers in school.*

**Keywords :** Teacher Empowerment, Leadership Styles, Headmasters, Teachers, Primary Schools

2017 GBSE Journal

## Introduction

Effective leadership is more than building or handling a management, as principals today must be able to consult with, and include others effectively as stated by Sharp (2009). There is without a doubt that educational leadership in this century has become increasingly challenging compared to the last decade. It is the responsibilities of the school leaders to enhance the teachers' morale and motivation, increase the level of job satisfaction, and promote a sense of responsibility and commitment to organizational effectiveness and improvement (Sarafidou, 2012). However, there are various ways of theoretical approaches based on literature review to construe and illustrate the complexities of the process of

leadership. Northouse (2010) described leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal”. On the other hand, leadership is also often described as the ability to enlist, mobilize, and motivate others to apply their abilities and resources to a given cause (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Whilst, Bass & Bass (2008) explains that leadership is literally regarded as the single most important factor in the success or failure of institutions. Thus, leadership is similar to beauty – beauty is hard to define, but is only known when he or she sees it as reported by Bennis (1989).

To date, many scholars have noticed the importance of empowerment practices at the workplace. Tschohl (2011) defined ‘empowerment’ as the giving of power or authority to someone. Tschohl (2011) further stated that the empowerment put an employee in control of the performance and tasks of him or her with continuously improving and impressing on the job every day. Besides that, Short (1994) has defined teacher’s empowerment as “a process whereby respondents develop the competence to take charge of their own growth, resolve their own problems, and believe they have the skills and knowledge to act on a situation and improve it” (p. 488). Nevertheless, in a study by Hamid (1999) who studied the empowerment of teachers in Malaysia, has commented that it was a hard attempt for the principals to empower their subordinates, because it will challenge the power and authority that were traditionally held by them. Hamid (1999) also observed that the scarcity of principals wanted to exercise their discretionary power to lead and to delegate was attributed mainly to their lack of professionalism. In short, teachers are still rarely being given autonomy to manage any matters pertaining to the good and improvement of the organization and its social well-being in the school context.

The study has three research questions to guide the investigation on teachers’ perception of headmaster’s leadership style and teacher empowerment practices in school.

1. What are leadership styles of headmasters as perceived by teachers?
2. What is the level of teacher empowerment of headmasters as perceived by teachers?
3. Is there any significant relationship between headmasters’ leadership style and the practices of teacher empowerment in decision making, professional growth, status, self-efficacy, autonomy and impact as perceived by teachers?

## Literature Review

### *Types of Leadership Theories*

There are many types of leadership theories have been presented in relation to leadership development. There are traits, behavioural, situational and attribution theories, visionary, ethical, charismatic, transactional, transformational, *laissez-faire* and other so on that have been studied. Nevertheless, the most comprehensive reviews of leadership theory are Yulk’s review of managerial leadership (1989) and House & Aditya’s review of leadership theories (1997).

### *Transformational Leadership Style*

Current leadership styles indicate that leadership behaviour can be categorized into two main styles: transformational leadership and transactional leadership as stated by Bass & Avolio (1997). Bass then states that followers are inspired by transformational leaders and this will encourage and motivate them to accomplish more in their work. Nevertheless, the transformational leaders would instil inner confidence in their followers creating enormous room for self-comfort and ease to perform tremendously well in their duties and responsibilities.

Transformational leadership is deemed to be able to increase interest of the staff to achieve higher performance through developing the commitment and beliefs in the organization (Bass, 1985). It entails motivation of people to achieve common vision by building trust and empowerment (Carlson, 1996). Transformational leaders are success driven, prominent, and dedicated in their work. They optimize people's development and innovation and convince subordinates to strive for higher level of achievement (Avolio & Bass, 2004). According to Burns (1978), followers can transform to be leaders by mutual stimulation and elevation. Furthermore, Ozaralli (2002) described transformational leaders as being able to generate dynamic organizational vision that often necessitates a metamorphosis in cultural values to reflect greater innovation. Ozaralli (2002) also added that transformational behaviours of leaders promote empowering cultural norms. According to Bass (1985), transformational leaders are more likely to be proactive than reactive in their thinking and more creative, novel, and innovative in their ideas. In comparison to transactional leaders, they may be equally intelligent, but their focus is on how to manage the system for which they are responsible running-reacting to problem generated by observed deviances and looking to modify condition as needed.

Based on the literature review, it can be stated that this type of leadership style will expand and heighten the interests of the followers. Indirectly, it is able to provide awareness and motivation towards the achievement of the organizational goal. It is a theory of leadership which brings the group's purpose above individual needs for the attainment of a common goal as identified by Seltzer & Bass (1990) that the leader-follower liaison as a two-way connection that is connected by interaction and good communication.

### *Transactional Leadership Style*

On the other hand, transactional leadership is defined by Avolio & Bass (2004) as setting up and defining agreements or contracts to accomplish specific work purpose, determine the individual's potentials, and specifying the compensation and rewards that can be expected upon successful completion of the task. Transactional leaders target on the essential need of their staff, but they are not interested in providing high level of motivation, job satisfaction, or commitment (Bass & Avolio, 2004). Bass & Avolio (2004) then elaborated three forms of transactional leadership namely passive management by-exception, active management by exception, and contingent reward leadership or constructive transactional.

Transactional leaders recognize the actions their subordinates must take in order to achieve the outcomes (Bass, 1985). To most researchers, this approach acts well to strengthen the existing structures and culture within an organization. The leader's role is to make a clear target and aim as well as to select the relevant rewards to assure encouragement and trigger

desire towards the achievement of common goals within the organization. In schools, transactional leaders are required to give teachers confidence in their job related tasks. In line of this teachers are perceived as followers and in such a situation they should be clear of their stated directions and therefore, leaders should develop agreements with them which make a clear understanding on what they will receive if they do something right and what will happen if and when they do something wrong (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Obviously, transactional leadership allows transformation of actions through positive and active interactions between the leader and the followers.

### *Laissez-faire Leadership Style*

Most leaders and researchers believe that in an organization *laissez-faire* leadership style is not applicable and it acts as an unpopular leadership style in an organization. As *laissez-faire* is non-leadership, whereby the behaviours of the leaders are indifference towards both followers' actions and organizational outcomes. The leaders who practise *laissez-faire* demonstrate an attitude of abdicating responsibility while they need to make decisions, or address important issues to their followers (Bass, 1998). Hence, Bass stated that *laissez-faire* leadership demonstrates an absence of transactions with followers. Hence, *laissez-faire* leaders tend to avoid giving their views or taking action on relevant issues always fail to make or delay decisions, ignore responsibilities, provide no feedback, and allow its authority to remain dormant. The essentially is the avoidance or absence of leadership, and consequently it is the most passive and least effective leadership style in an organization, as *laissez-faire* means "leave it be". It is used to describe a leader with a hands-off style leaving his or her colleagues to get their work done. Most often, *laissez-faire* leadership only works for teams in which the individuals are very experienced and competent workers. Unfortunately, it can also refer to situations where managers are not exerting sufficient control (Bass, 1990).

### *Empowerment*

There are numerous definitions of empowerment. Basically, empowerment refers to delegating and distributing power to subordinates. In fact, empowerment is a new way of working together. It entails encouraging people to become more involved in making decisions and implementing activities that can affect their work. It provides individuals the opportunity to come up with good ideas. At the same time, it involves trusting that these individuals have the skills to put their ideas into practices. Harris (2012) postulates that empowerment is an act from the leaders to share leadership within and between schools. Nevertheless, Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy (2009) mentioned that empowerment is the capability of the leaders to delegate leadership and decision making down to the lowest level possible.

It is never one person that has to be in charge of the entire school. Instead, multiple individuals and groups should substitute or share the leadership responsibilities (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). There is no doubt that distributed leadership has been contributing towards schools' growth and success. School leaders who practise distributed leadership are proven to be more successful in leading their organization. A recent study conducted on transformation in a school in England has also shown that distributed leadership is a key component of success, and highlighted that this was associated with higher performance and gains in academic achievement (Harris, 2012). Obviously, it is the school leaders' role to support any move of innovation and change by delegating power to teachers. Since it is proven that

distributing powers will benefit the school, the school leaders must then choose the level and dimension of empowerment necessary for the school. Hence, having a clear understanding of the need of empowerment will make the implementation easier. It is important for the school leaders also to be aware of how empowerment may affect their role as school leaders and delegate work intelligently so that it becomes helpful not only to leaders but also to the teachers.

### *The Relationship between Leadership Style and Teacher Empowerment in School Organization*

Mowday, Steers & Porter (1979) have defined the relationship between teacher empowerment and the leadership style as “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and the involvement in a particular organization” (p. 226). Wu & Short (1996) who studied the relationship between teacher empowerment and teacher’s job commitment and job satisfaction also found that among the six subscales of the teacher empowerment scale (SPES), professional growth, self-efficacy and status have been identified as significant predictors of job commitment. In brief, the data of a similar study on this area will have important benefits for teachers and principals, and the entire school especially the Malaysian educational system.

### **Research Methodology**

The study used a quantitative research method which employed a descriptive correlation research design. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to analyse teachers’ perception on their headmaster’s leadership style and teacher empowerment. Meanwhile, correlation analysis was used to investigate the relationship between variables of leadership style and teacher empowerment of headmasters in the primary schools (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010). Thus, by employing the above mentioned research design, the study is expected to unveil a comprehensive finding of the two variables involved in this study.

Data from respondents was collected with a questionnaire which adopted a 5-Likert scale to allow respondents to indicate their feedback on all the speculated elements in the issue and domains of leadership styles and teacher empowerment. Section A focused on the level of teacher empowerment. The section was adapted from Short and Rinehart (1992) which was used to evaluate School Participant Empowerment Scale (SPES). Section A consists of 38 questions divided into six dimensions of Empowerment namely Decision Making, Professional Growth, Status, Self-efficacy, Autonomy and Impact. However, Section B focused on the dimensions of the leadership styles namely - Transformational, Transactional and *Laissez-Faire*. Overall, it consists of 18 questions. The items were adapted from Bass and Avolio (1992), of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ).

A pilot study was conducted at one of the schools in Kuching District, Sarawak in February 2014. The data from the pilot test were analyzed using internal consistency reliability of coefficient alpha or widely known as Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient reliability analysis (Mujis, 2004). The instrument is internally consistent and reliable if the test result is over 0.7. Since, the overall reliability test for MLQ was .813, and the overall reliability test for SPES was .922, hence the instrument is considered internally consistent and reliable (Mujis, 2004).

In this study, cluster sampling was used to choose teachers from five (5) primary schools in Kuching district. The sample consists of teachers and headmasters from five primary schools. The five schools are chosen based on the four types of school. The first and second schools represent Daily-Primary school, the third school represents residential primary school, the fourth school represents ‘Sekolah Kurang Murid’ SKM (less student school) while the fifth school represents Mission school in Sarawak. All teachers from the five schools were selected to answer the questionnaires. Sampling characteristic such as gender, school location and school categories were taken into consideration since these characteristics may have consequence to the study, thus it should be properly signified in the sample (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010).

The respondents were given an introduction before the administration of the questionnaires, and they were assured that the data collected were for research purposes only and will be kept confidential. Sincere and honest responses were highly appreciated to produce valid result that will be useful for data analysis. The researchers had distributed a total number of 120 questionnaires to teacher respondents from the five selected schools and 104 complete questionnaires have been returned.

The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistic. The data collected with questionnaires were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software. Statistical analysis techniques such as mean, standard deviation, Pearson Product Moment Correlation, t-test, and ANOVA were used to analyse the data according to research questions. Descriptive data analysis techniques such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation (SD) have been used to present the data of leadership style and teacher empowerment data descriptively (Parmjit, Puzziawat & Teoh, 2009). Besides that, standard deviation was used to identify the dispersion of data for the two research variables (Parmjit et al., 2009).

Furthermore, Pearson Product Moment Correlation has been used to identify the relationship of two variables. Leadership style was treated as the independent variable while empowerment was treated as the dependent variable. The correlation coefficient value was used to verify the strength and trend of the points that correlate between leadership style and teacher empowerment.

## **Findings**

### *Profile of Teacher Respondents*

The respondents of this study were teachers from the primary schools in the district of Kuching. The respondents were asked to specify their gender, age, highest level of education as well as their teaching experiences in Section C in the questionnaire. This section contained the descriptive data about the demographic data of the respondents. The findings indicated that the respondents consisted of 70 (68.3%) females while only 34 (32.7%) were males. In terms of age, 41 to 50 years of age made up most of the samples which was 40.4 percent, followed by 31-40 years old (26.9%), above 50 years old (21.2%), and only 11.5 percent of the respondents were teachers aged 30 and below.

Based on the respondents’ teaching experience, 36.9% or 38 of the respondents had 11 to 20 years of experience, while 24.0% or 25 respondents had 1 to 10 years of experience.

Moreover, 24 or 23.2% of the respondents had 21 to 30 years of experience, while 16.5% or 17 respondents had more than 30 years of experiences in teaching. Thus, it can be concluded that most of the respondents, that was 76.7% or 80 of them were experienced teachers who had been teaching for more than 10 years in school.

In relation to professional qualification, 51.9% or 54 respondents possessed Bachelor Degree, 32.7% or 34 respondents with Diploma, 14.4% or 15 respondents with Certificate in Education while 1% or 1 respondent with Masters Degree. The results clearly showed that majority of the teachers were well-qualified to teach as majority of them were with at least a Bachelor’s degree.

### *Headmasters’ Leadership Styles as Perceived by Teachers*

In responds to the first research question, respondents were asked to complete Section A of the questionnaire which was the MLQ questions to measure the leadership styles of headmasters in school. Leadership qualities of transformational, transactional and *laissez-faire* leadership styles of headmasters were being evaluated by their teachers in school. The mean score for transformational leadership style was rated at 3.60 while its standard deviation was 0.59. Meanwhile, the mean score for transactional leadership style was measured at 3.56 and the standard deviation was 0.52. Finally, for *laissez-faire* leadership style, 2.92 was scored for the mean, while 0.54 was scored for standard deviation. The mean score for all the three leadership styles revealed that teachers perceived their headmasters practised most of transformational leadership. It was followed by transactional leadership style and finally, *laissez-faire* was perceived as the least practiced by the headmaster (Table 1). However, all these three leadership styles were only practised at the moderate level.

Table 1  
*Leadership style of the Headmasters as Perceived by Teachers (n=104)*

Leadership Style	Mean	Std. Deviation
Transformational	3.60	.59
Transactional	3.56	.52
<i>Laissez-faire</i>	2.92	.54

Scale: 1 Strongly disagree    2 Disagree    3 Almost agree    4 Agree    5 Strongly agree

### *Teacher Empowerment of Headmasters as Perceived by Teachers*

In order to tackle the second research question which was to find the level of teacher empowerment practices of headmasters as perceived by teachers, School Participant Empowerment Scale (SPES) from Short and Rinehart (1992) which consists of six (6) dimensions namely decision making, professional growth, status, self-efficacy, autonomy and impact have been used in Section B in the questionnaire to collect the data from the respondents. Table 2 presented the mean scores for the six dimensions of teacher empowerment as observed by teachers.

All the dimensions of Teacher Empowerment namely decision making, professional growth, status, self-efficacy, autonomy and impact have been analysed based on its mean scores. The dimensions of decision making, autonomy and impact have been scored at 3.36, 3.76 and 3.76 respectively by the respondents indicated that these three dimensions of teacher empowerment were at the moderate level. However, the dimensions of professional growth, status and self-efficacy which scored at 4.00 indicated a high level of teacher empowerment practices in school. Overall, this finding indicated that headmasters have practised some domains of teacher empowerment at high level and some domains were still at the moderate level in school.

Table 2  
*Teacher Empowerment of Headmasters as Perceived by Teachers (n=104)*

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Decision Making	3.36	0.54
Professional Growth	4.00	0.40
Status	4.00	0.39
Self-efficacy	4.00	0.36
Autonomy	3.76	0.50
Impact	3.76	0.43

Scale: 1 Strongly disagree    2 Disagree    3 Almost agree    4 Agree    5 Strongly agree

*The Relationship between Decision Making, Professional Growth, Status, Self Efficacy, Autonomy and Impact with Transformational, Transactional and Laissez-Faire Leadership Style*

The third research question was “Is there any significant relationship between headmasters’ leadership style and the dimensions of teacher empowerment in decision making, professional growth, status, self-efficacy, autonomy and impact?” Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was conducted to identify any significant relationship between leadership styles and the dimensions of teacher empowerment, in order to respond to this research questions.

Table 3  
*Correlation of Leadership Style and Teacher Empowerment (n=104)*

Variables		Transformational	Transactional	Laissez-faire
Decision Making	Pearson Correlation	.397**	.428**	.035
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.725
Professional Growth	Pearson Correlation	.463**	.457**	-.018
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.852
Status	Pearson Correlation	.287**	.314**	.019
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.001	.848
Self-efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.283**	.338**	.077



	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.000	.436
Autonomy	Pearson Correlation	.164	.182	.072
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.097	.064	.465
Impact	Pearson Correlation	.248*	.219*	-.073
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	.026	.461

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

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

According to Salkind (2010), positive or negative correlations with values between 0.0 and 0.2 indicated a weak or no relationship, while positive or negative correlations which fall between 0.2 and 0.4 indicated a weak relationship. However, correlations with positive or negative values between 0.4 and 0.6 were considered moderately related. A strong relationship was indicated when the correlation was correlated, positively or negatively between 0.6 and 0.8, whereas a very strong relationship reflected by a correlation between 0.8 and 1.0.

Based the correlation analysis in Table 3, the finding indicated that there was a weak, positive and very significant relationship ( $r=.397$ ,  $p<.01$ ) between transformational leadership with teacher empowerment in the dimension of decision making. Since transformational leadership had a direct effect on decision making, teachers perceived that a transformational headmaster will empower teachers in terms of decision making. Similarly, transformational leadership also has a weak, positive but very significant relationship with professional growth ( $r=.463$ ,  $p<.01$ ), status ( $r=.287$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and self-efficacy ( $r=.283$ ,  $P<.01$ ), this result indicated that teachers believe that a transformational leader will empower teachers in terms of professional growth, status and self-efficacy. Other than that, there was also a weak, positive and significant relationship ( $r=.248$ ,  $P<.05$ ) between transformational leadership and empowerment dimension of impact. However, there was no significant relationship recorded between transformational leadership and autonomy.

Meanwhile, transactional leadership also showed a moderate, positive and very significant relationship with the two dimensions in empowerment namely, decision making ( $r=.428$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and professional growth ( $r=.457$ ,  $p<.01$ ). However, transactional leadership was found to have only a weak, positive and very significant relationship with the other two dimensions in empowerment namely, status ( $r=.314$ ,  $p<.01$ ), and self-efficacy ( $r=.338$ ,  $p<.01$ ), but a weak, positive and significant relationship with impact ( $r=.219$ ,  $p<.05$ ) in the dimensions of teacher empowerment.

The result indicated that teachers believed that transactional headmasters were practising empowerment in the domains of decision making, professional growth, status, self-efficacy and autonomy. However, both transformational and transactional leadership styles did not show any significant relationship with autonomy in teacher empowerment. Finally, the leadership style of *laissez-faire* did not show any significant relationship with any domain of teacher empowerment. This finding showed that headmasters who practised *laissez-faire* leadership did not practise any teacher empowerment in their school.

## Discussion

Based on the data collected from the primary schools in this study, it was found that most of the headmasters have practised transformational leadership in their school. This is followed by transactional and lastly, *laissez-faire* leadership styles. The findings indicated a healthy leadership style where majority of headmasters were practising Transformational leaders and able to optimize teachers' development and innovation, and able to convince teachers to strive for higher level of achievements in school (Avalio & Bass 2004). The results also indicated that the level of teacher empowerment among headmasters was at moderate to high level for the six (6) dimensions. It means that there are some aspects of empowerment have been practised but some aspects still can be further improved. Nevertheless, a number of the respondents described empowerment as "giving away work to the senior assistants" or "pushing the works to the subordinates". Perhaps this perspective should be changed where empowerment was not meant for individuals but rather "an act of building, developing, and increasing man power through cooperating, sharing, and working together" (Honold, 1997). In fact, teachers have been burdened with many different kinds of workloads such as co-curricular activities, community work, Parents-teacher association (PTA) activities and sometimes school administrators' work other than the classroom teaching. Thus, an additional workload is not a wise choice and headmasters should aware of this. However, if the work was fairly given to all the teachers and not to certain individuals, then the level of empowerment could be improved.

Furthermore, the leadership styles of transformational and transactional leaders both have showed a significant relationship with the five out of six dimensions of empowerment. It was found that both transactional and transformational leadership style have a low to moderate, positive and very significant relationship with decision making, professional growth, status, self-efficacy and impact in teacher empowerment dimensions. However, there was no relationship that has been identified between both transformational and transactional leadership style with autonomy. Besides that, *laissez-faire* leadership style also did not show any significant relationship with any domains in teacher empowerment. Hence, this finding showed that *laissez-faire* leaders did not practise any empowerment in school. According to Bass (1998), leaders who practise *Laissez-faire* leadership style demonstrated an attitude of abdicating responsibility in making decisions or addressing important issues to their followers. This statement has been proven in this study where *Laissez-faire* headmasters did not practise any of the empowerment dimensions as observed by teachers.

## Conclusion

Although the head master is essential in creating effective schools, there are studies that indicate that the head master should use a distributed form of leadership ((Brennikmeyer & Spillane, 2008; Graczewski et al., 2009; Hallinger, 2003; 2005). Without exception, the findings from this study also indicated the need for headmasters to practise transformational leadership, have the skills to practise more teacher empowerment in school, and ready to create an environment that fosters collaboration (Leech & Fulton, 2008). Undeniably, these findings will have important implications for school heads to improve their leadership styles and teacher empowerment in school.

## Acknowledgements

This paper is part of a research project funded by the Human Resource Development Department, Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA.

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