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DISTRIBUTIVE LEADERSHIP AMONG LEADERS IN EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

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Distributive leadership practice among school leaders is an important element towards materializing Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013 – 2025 in increasing effective leadership practice. This study examines the level of distributive leadership practice and the differences based on respondents' demographic aspects. This study employs the quantitative approach of cross-sectional survey to collect the data. The population is secondary school leaders in the Northern zone of Malaysia. Stratified random sampling is used to select the respondents and 341 respondents were involved to complete the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) (Kouzes & Posner, 1995) questionnaire. The findings showed that effective school leaders practice a high level of distributive leadership in all dimensions. Besides that, there exists a significant difference in the distributive leadership practice based on demographic aspects. Thus, the elements in the distributive leadership practice should be inculcated in all school leaders because it could contribute to the success of Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013 – 2025.

Keywords: Distributive leadership, Effective leadership, Effective schools, School efficacy, Distributive leadership practice.

Introduction

The community of learning which is getting more and more challenging with added tasks, needs school organization that practice unity in values and responsibilities, inspiring school climate and strong cooperation (DeMatthews, 2014). According to Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004), it is vital that close inspection be done on leadership characteristics so as to cater for the needs of the millennium generation which has become more complex in the effort to increase effective schools. Duignan (2003) claimed emphasis on paradigm shift through distributive leadership is essential as an effort to encourage positive environment in school organizations. Therefore, thinking aspect and multi-frame actions among school leaders are imperative to ensure the success towards generating change in the nation educational system (Abdul Shukor Abdullah, 2007; Fullan, 2011; Izani Ibrahim, 2014). Distributive leadership practice is the best leadership approach which may develop the education system, and the implementation of this leadership concept is also agreed upon by schools (Alma Harris, 2013; Asyikin Zakaria & Suhaida Abdul Kadir, 2013; Coleman & Earley, 2005; Yukl 2002). The National Education Development Plan (NEDP) 2013 – 2025 was developed to form an education framework through the high level system of education transformation process (Muhyiddin Yassin, 2013). Ever since, the Ministry of Education has

focused on distributive leadership practice among school leaders towards increasing school leadership efficacy and quality as the main plan towards the success of Malaysian Education Plan.

Research Questions

i)   What is the level of distributive leadership practice among school leaders in Malaysia?
ii) What are the dimensions practiced in distributive leadership?
iii) Is there any difference in distributive leadership practice based on demographic factors such as gender, age, teaching experience, position and respondents' degree options.

Distributive Leadership and School Efficacy

Majority of the researches today discuss the practice of leadership efficacy through the role of the principals. MacBeath, Oduro, & Waterhouse (2004) presented a report on distributive leadership where they described distributive leadership as a model to maintain and develop leadership. Distributive leadership is an important leadership in the current education discourse (Eilis, 2010). Besides, Boardman (2001) has studied the distributive leadership process in Tasmanian schools and found that leaders are more motivated to practice the leadership model with selected teachers. There is evidence that suggests intensification of distributive leadership capacity in schools to be the main core to achieve success and strengthen the organization (Blase & Blase, 2000; Harris, 2008; Lumby, 2013).

In the US and Britain, many studies focused on the relationship between distributive leadership and schools' achievements and excellence (Harris, 2009; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004; Spillane & Shere, 2004) and the findings showed there exist a relationship between distributive leadership with schools' level of excellence (Harris, 2013). These findings supported the study by Hall and Wallence (1996) who found that there is a relationship between collaborative leadership practice among leaders and members of the organization and the increase of collaborative relationship. The study also proved that distributive leadership practice can increase performance of the organization (Blase & Blase, 2000; Harris, 2008). Thus, distributive leadership is seen as a guideline to school leaders to identify their daily job specification, think strategically, and cultivate teachers' expertise (Gronn, 2008; Spillane, 2006). Distributive leadership practice has become the best leadership approach which can develop the education system and the implementation of this leadership idea in schools is also approved (Coleman & Earley, 2005; Yukl 2002; Yusof & Yahzanon, 2013).

Research Methodology

This study is a correlational descriptive study which employs cross-sectional survey based on the questionnaire completed by the respondents. The population is 540 school leaders in effective schools in the northern zone of Malaysia. The sample involved 341 respondents consist of principals, senior heads for administration, students' welfare and co-curriculum; and six core subject heads of Malay language, English language, Science, Geography, History and Mathematics. A stratified random sampling was done where schools were categorized based on districts. From the list, 35 schools were selected at random and from each school 10 respondents were picked. This study utilized the current Leadership Practice Inventory (LPI) by Kouzes & Posner (1995) to gauge the level of distributive leadership practiced by the respondents. Reliability analysis showed a high alpha value α=.96. The data was analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science) version 19.0.

Findings

This section addresses the issue of schools leaders' distributive leadership and their differences based on respondents demographic aspects.

School Leaders' Level of Distributive Leadership

The level of distributive leadership practice of school leaders covers five dimensions namely modelling the way, inspiring shared visions, challenging the process, enabling others to act and encouraging the heart.

Table 1. School Leaders' Distributive Leadership Practice

Dimensions:	Min	SP
Modelling the way	**3.85**	**.48**
Becoming an example	3.99	.43
Adhering to standards	3.41	.33
Keeping promises and giving commitment	4.22	.46
Welcoming feedbacks	3.85	.48
Developing good moral values	4.09	.48
Clear about leadership philosophy	3.52	.71
Inspiring a shared vision	**3.81**	**.43**
Objectives and school aims	4.05	.56
Explaining future image	3.90	.57
Promotes sharing of school	4.12	.60
Long term significance	4.05	.49
Planning and strategizing actions	3.84	.38
Disseminating future directions	4.12	.56
Challenging the process	**3.80**	**.55**
Looking for opportunities	3.48	.50
Challenging change and innovations	3.87	.51
Searching for various outside innovations	3.67	.51
Asking about learning	3.50	.54
Creating bench marks	3.41	.43
Trying something new	3.98	.42
Enabling others to act	**4.14**	**.51**
Giving trust	4.15	.66
Listening actively	4.14	.61
Treating with respect	4.23	.55
Giving opportunities and motivation	3.99	.71
Giving freedom to determine working style	4.16	.36
Allowing gaining of new knowledge	3.88	.43
Encouraging the heart	**3.99**	**.59**
Praising teachers	4.12	.55
Measuring skills	3.50	.61
Creative contribution	3.78	.71
Acknowledgment	4.11	.67
Celebrating success	3.98	.59
Giving recognition	4.04	.57
Distributed leadership	**3.92**	**.51**

Referring to data in Table 1, the findings showed that as a whole, school leaders displayed a high level of distributive leadership *(M=3.92; SP=.51).* The dimension enabling others to act is found to be highly practiced *(M=4.14; SP=.51)* compared to other leadership dimensions. However, four other dimensions are also highly practiced with the mean scores such as; for dimension encouraging the heart *(M=3.99; SP=.59)*, modelling the way *(M=3.85; SP=3.48)*, inspiring a shared vision *(M=3.81; SP=.43)*, and challenging the process *(M=3.80; SP=.55).*

Differences in Distributive Leadership Practices based on Demographic Aspects

Following are the differences in distributive leadership practices among school leaders based on demographic factors studied.

Table 2. Differences in Distributive Leadership based on Gender

		N	Mean	SP	t	Sig.
Modelling the way	Male	117	3.623	.591		
	Female	224	3.734	.673		
	Total	**341**	**3.158**	**.1076**	**-81**	**.41**
Inspiring a shared vision	Male	117	3.782	.433		
	Female	224	3.889	.371		
	Total	**341**	**3.157**	**.1329**	**1.429**	**.000**
Challenging the process	Male	117	3.887	.415		
	Female	224	3.779	.402		
	Total	**341**	**3.169**	**.1187**	**2.735**	**.000**
Enabling others to act	Male	117	3.891	.375		
	Female	224	3.788	.401		
	Total	**341**	**3.224**	**.0999**	**2.297**	**.000**
Encouraging the heart	Male	117	3.812	.318		
	Female	224	3.854	.356		
	Total	**341**	**3.221**	**.1193**	**2.119**	**.000**
Distributed leadership	Male	117	3.799	.491		
	Female	224	3.809	.313		
	Total	**341**	**3.802**	**.0959**	**2.532**	**.000**

Table 2 shows male leaders practice distributive leadership in schools at mean score *(M=3.799; SP=.491)* while female leaders with a mean score *(M=3.809; SP=.313).* t-test analysis showed that there is significant difference between male leaders mean score and female leaders mean score (t=-2.532, p=0.000<0.005). for the other four distributive leadership dimensions that are inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart, there is significant difference in terms of gender but for the dimension modelling the way, there is no significant difference in distributive leadership in terms of gender (t=-81; p=0.41>0.005).

Table 3. Differences in Distributive Leadership based on Age

		N	Mean	SP	F	Sig.
Modelling the way	25-30	59	3.211	.0696		
	31-40	173	3.148	.1216		
	41-50	100	3.123	.0646		
	51-60	9	3.367	.0133		
	Total	**341**	**3.158**	**.1076**	**24.190**	**.000**
Inspiring a shared vision	25-30	59	3.229	.0297		
	31-40	173	3.143	.1394		
	41-50	100	3.117	.1259		
	51-60	9	3.401	.0101		
	Total	**341**	**3.157**	**.1329**	**23.575**	**.000**
Challenging the process	25-30	59	3.200	.0655		
	31-40	173	3.187	.1274		
	41-50	100	3.109	.1074		
	51-60	9	3.296	.1028		
	Total	**341**	**3.169**	**.1187**	**16.378**	**.000**
Enabling others to act	25-30	59	3.307	.0617		
	31-40	173	3.238	.1052		
	41-50	100	3.204	.0806		
	51-60	9	3.401	.0147		
	Total	**341**	**3.244**	**.0999**	**25.353**	**.000**
Encouraging the heart	25-30	59	3.241	.0429		
	31-40	173	3.219	.1428		
	41-50	100	3.196	.0925		
	51-60	9	3.401	.0166		
	Total	**341**	**3.221**	**.1193**	**9.570**	**.000**
Distributed leadership	25-30	59	4.849	.0363		
	31-40	173	4.799	.1068		
	41-50	100	4.762	.0714		
	51-60	9	4.984	.2104		
	Total	**341**	**4.802**	**.0959**	**25.870**	**.000**

Table 3 shows ANOVA result for differences in school leaders' distributive leadership based on age. The mean score for ages 25-30 is *(M=4.849; SP=.0362)*, 31-40 *(M=4.799; SP=.107)*, 41-50 *(M=4.762; SP=.071)*, and 51-60 *(M=4.983; SP=.21043)*. As a whole, the finding showed significant difference in school leaders' distributive leadership based on age (F=25.87, p=0.00<0.005).

Table 4. Differences in Distributive Leadership based on Teaching Experience

		N	Mean	SP	F	Sig.
Modelling the way	0-5	46	3.223	.0808		
	6-10	108	3.132	.1472		
	11-15	65	3.163	.0382		
	16-20	88	3.131	.0699		
	21 above	34	3.208	.1081		
	Total	**341**	**3.158**	**.1076**	**9.973**	**0.000**
Inspiring a shared vision	0-5	46	3.233	.0489		
	6-10	108	3.150	.1555		
	11-15	65	3.119	.1069		
	16-20	88	3.165	.0950		
	21 above	34	3.129	.2057		
	Total	**341**	**3.157**	**.1329**	**5.933**	**0.000**
Challenging the process	0-5	46	3.196	.0428		
	6-10	108	3.173	.1346		
	11-15	65	3.221	.1194		
	16-20	88	3.142	.0883		
	21 above	34	3.096	.1487		
	Total	**341**	**3.169**	**.1187**	**8.750**	**0.000**
Enabling others to act	0-5	46	3.293	.0627		
	6-10	108	3.249	.0993		
	11-15	65	3.214	.1155		
	16-20	88	3.235	.0848		
	21 above	34	3.242	.1234		
	Total	**341**	**3.244**	**.0999**	**4.696**	**0.001**
Encouraging the heart	0-5	46	3.257	.0568		
	6-10	108	3.238	.1121		
	11-15	65	3.159	.1617		
	16-20	88	3.210	.1053		
	21 above	34	3.261	.0968		
	Total	**341**	**3.221**	**.1193**	**7.631**	**0.000**
Distributed leadership	0-5	46	4.851	.0491		
	6-10	108	4.801	.1110		
	11-15	65	4.787	.0972		
	16-20	88	4.788	.0714		
	21 above	34	4.801	.1245		
	Total	**341**	**4.802**	**.0959**	**3.960**	**0.004**

Table 4 shows ANOVA result for the differences in distributive leadership based on teaching experience. The mean score for experience 0-5 years is *(M=4.851; SP=.491)*, between 6-10 years *(M=4.801; SP=.111)*, between 11-15 years *(M=4.787; SP=.9721)*, between 16-20 years *(M=4.788; SP=.714),* and 21 years and above is *(M=4.801; SP=.125)*. As a whole, the finding showed that there is significant difference in mean score for distributive leadership based on teaching experience (F=3.960, p=0.004< 0.005).

Table 5. Differences in Distributive Leadership based on Administrative Position

		N	Mean	SP	F	Sig.
Modelling the way	Department Heads	117	3.149	.0604		
	Subject Heads	179	3.168	.1270		
	Senior Assistants	45	3.139	.1166		
	Total	**341**	**3.158**	**.1076**	**1.811**	**.165**
Inspiring a shared vision	Department Heads	117	3.137	.1146		
	Subject Heads	179	3.186	.1236		
	Senior Assistants	45	3.095	.1778		
	Total	**341**	**3.157**	**.1329**	**11.124**	**.000**
Challenging the process	Department Heads	117	3.163	.1145		
	Subject Heads	179	3.192	.1069		
	Senior Assistants	45	3.096	.1427		
	Total	**341**	**3.169**	**.1187**	**12.934**	**.000**
Enabling others to act	Department Heads	117	3.229	.0746		
	Subject Heads	179	3.273	.0947		
	Senior Assistants	45	3.169	.1283		
	Total	**341**	**3.244**	**.0999**	**24.223**	**.000**
Encouraging the heart	Department Heads	117	3.218	.0729		
	Subject Heads	179	3.241	.1156		
	Senior Assistants	45	3.149	.1874		
	Total	**341**	**3.221**	**.1192**	**11.128**	**.000**
Distributed leadership	Department Heads	117	4.791	.0665		
	Subject Heads	179	4.824	.0933		
	Senior Assistants	45	4.742	.1351		
	Total	**341**	**4.802**	**.0959**	**15.532**	**.000**

Table 5 shows the difference in distributive leadership based on respondents' administrative position. Mean score for Department Heads is *(M=4.791; SP=.0665)*, Subject Heads *(M=4.824; SP=.093)*, and Senior Assistants *(M=4.742; SP=.135)*. The finding showed that there is significant difference in mean score for distributive leadership based on respondents' administrative position (F=15.532, p=0.00<0.005).

Table 6. Differences in Distributive Leadership based on Degree Options

		N	Mean	SP	F	Sig.
Modelling the way	Literature	151	3.170	.0957		
	Science	52	3.156	.0805		
	Religious Studies	40	3.025	.1125		
	Accounting	62	3.185	.1038		
	Technical/Vocational	36	3.205	.0807		
	Total	**341**	**3.158**	**.1076**	**23.247**	**.000**
Inspiring a shared vision	Literature	151	3.151	.1412		
	Science	52	3.146	.1305		

	Religious Studies	40	3.039	.0979	
	Accounting	62	3.217	.1071	
	Technical/Vocational	36	3.228	.0548	
	Total	**341**	**3.157**	**.1329**	**16.160**	**.000**
Challenging the process	Literature	151	3.164	.1322	
	Science	52	3.178	.0906	
	Religious Studies	40	3.072	.0922	
	Accounting	62	3.238	.0963	
	Technical/Vocational	36	3.169	.0714	
	Total	**341**	**3.169**	**.1187**	**13.833**	**.000**
Enabling others to act	Literature	151	3.232	.1138	
	Science	52	3.304	.0395	
	Religious Studies	40	3.163	.0615	
	Accounting	62	3.257	.0907	
	Technical/Vocational	36	3.275	.0766	
	Total	**341**	**3.244**	**.0999**	**15.225**	**.000**
Encouraging the heart	Literature	151	3.199	.1467	
	Science	52	3.271	.0485	
	Religious Studies	40	3.116	.0772	
	Accounting	62	3.289	.0582	
	Technical/Vocational	36	3.238	.0557	
	Total	**341**	**3.221**	**.1192**	**20.315**	**.000**
Distributed leadership	Literature	151	4.795	.1095	
	Science	52	4.825	.0473	
	Religious Studies	40	4.696	.0617	
	Accounting	62	4.849	.0702	
	Technical/Vocational	36	4.834	.0551	
	Total	**341**	**4.802**	**.0959**	**22.443**	**.000**

Table 6 shows the difference in distributive leadership based on degree options of respondents. The finding showed literature options obtained mean score *(M=4.795; SP=.109),* Science *(M=4.825; SP=.047)*, religious studies *(M=4.696; SP=.062)*, accounting *(M=4.849; SP=.070)* and technical/vocational *(M=4.834; SP=.096)*. The overall mean score for distributive leadership based on degree options of respondents is *(M=4.802; SP=.096).* The finding showed that there is significant difference in distributive leadership based on respondents' degree options (F=22.443, p=0.00<0.005).

Discussion

Distributive leadership among effective school leaders is highly practiced where the highest dimension is enabling others to act *(M=4.14; SP=.51).* For the dimension enabling others to act, the highest mean is *(M=4.23; SP=.55)* that is for the item 'treating teachers with respect'. The second highest item is 'giving freedom to determine working style' *(M=4.16; SP=.36)* followed by item 'giving trust' *(M=4.15; SP=.66)*, item 'listening actively' *(M=4.14; SP=.61)*, item 'giving opportunities and motivation' *(M=3.99; SP=.71),* and the last item 'allowing gaining of new knowledge' *(M=3.88; SP=.43).* This

finding showed that in distributive leadership practice, treating teachers with respect, giving trust to teachers and giving them the freedom to decide their working style are essential so as to increase the efficacy of school leaders' leadership practice. This is in line with the study by Asyikin Zakaria and Suhaida Abd Kadir (2013), who found that leaders, who enable teachers to act, bring about the success of the schools, nowadays. This is because, rigid and stern or by the book kind of management approach is no more suitable. Instead, leadership that comes with friendliness, openness, transparency and full of respect between leaders and member of the organization should be practiced towards developing a more effective organization.

Although the dimension 'enabling others to act' is practiced highly by school leaders, the finding showed that item 'keeping promises and giving commitments' scored the highest mean that is *(M=4.22; SP=.46)*. This correlates with opinions by Suzanne and Charles (2013) who claimed that leaders' commitment is the most important element that determine whether the organization is active. The least leadership practice by school leaders is the 'adhering to standards' *(M=3.41; SP=.33)* under the dimension modelling the way. Hamidi Hussain (2012) and Reynolds, Camp, Bygrave, Autio, and Hay (2001) opined that leaders should give emphasis on understanding and fulfilling the standards and procedures which have been set so that management of the organization can be coordinated.

Comparing the number of male and female leaders, the study found that the number of female leaders is more than male leaders. Through this study, the mean value obtained by female leaders is *(M=3.809; SP=.313)* that is higher than male leaders *(M=3.799; SP=.491)*. This finding is similar to the study by Park (2005) and Hulpia et al., (2009) who also found that female leaders are more committed to practice distributive leadership compared to males. Overall, distributive leadership practice has significant difference based on gender except in the dimension modelling the way (t=-0.81; p=0.41>0.005). Based on age factor, leaders between 51-60 years are found to practice high level of distributive leadership with the mean score *(M=4.984; SP=.21043)* followed by leaders aged 25-30 *(M=4.85; SP=.036),* 31-40 *(M=4.799; SP=.107)*, and 41-50 *(M=4.762; SP=.071)*. Distributive leadership is found to have significant difference based on age of the school leaders (F=25.870; p=0.000<0.005).

In addition, the finding also found that there exist significant difference in distributive leadership based on teaching experience (F=3.96; p=0.004<0.005). Leaders who have 0-5 years of experience are found to have the highest mean score *(M=4.851; SP=.049)*, followed by 6-10 years and 21 years and above *(M=4.801;SP=.111)* and *(M=4.801; SP=.125)* respectively, 16-20 years *(M=4.788; SP=.0714)*, and 11-15 years *(M=4.787; SP=.097)*. result finding also showed that distributive leadership has significant difference based on respondents' administrative position with the value of (F=15.532; p=0.000<0.005). All the distributive leadership dimensions are found to have significant difference based on respondents' administrative position except in the dimension modelling the way (F=1.811; p=0.165>0.005). Overall, subject heads displayed the highest distributive leadership practice with the score *(M=4.824; SP=.0933)*, followed by department heads *(M=4.791; SP=.0665)*, and senior assistants with the lowest mean score *(M=4.742; SP=.096)*. This finding supports the study by Asyikin Zakaria and Suhaida Abd Kadir (2013) who found that teachers who hold low level posts in schools practice a higher distributive leadership than those with higher level posts.

Based on degree options, distributive leadership is found to have significant difference with a value (F=22.443; p=0.000<0.005). The highest distributive leadership practice among leaders is leaders with accounting degree *(M=8,492; SP=.070)*, followed by technical/vocational *(M=4.834; SP=.055),* science *(M=4.825; SP=.047)*, literature *(M=4.795: SP=.109),* and religious studies *(M=4.696; SP= .062)*. However, leaders from all options practice distributive leadership at very high level *(M=4.802; SP=.096)*.

The concept of distributive leadership was fabricated through the writing and research by Spillane, (2006); Spillane & Harris, (2008); and Spillane, Camburn, Pustejovsky, Toh, & Lewis (2008), where they emphasized that distributive leadership is very much needed by organizations especially in schools to improve teaching and learning. In schools, principals who practice distributive leadership focus on management and exploit teachers' expertise fully (Harris, 2004). They always influence teachers to contribute their expertise and knowledge to develop the schools together following their own style and

approach (Oduro, 2006). Effective school leadership distributes tasks systematically without focusing on individual decision and/or action in terms of school management and welfare (Spillane, 2006).

In conclusion, this study proved that there is difference in distributive leadership of a leader based on demographic factor. Therefore, it is essential that all school leaders understand fully every aspect of distributive leadership in the effort to increase the standard of effective schools in Malaysia.

Summary

Overall, distributive leadership in effective schools is balanced in all the dimensions. The findings with regard to the level of distributive leadership practice and the differences based on respondents' demographic aspects have been discussed in detail and the tables have proven that the respondents' demographic factors can influence the level of distributive leadership practice among school leaders.

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