

11 ICLICE 2018 - 019 Hamidon Abdul Rahman

Gender Differences in Leadership Styles among Rural School Headmasters in Malaysia

Hamidon Abdul Rahman*, Lim Siew Hui
Institut Aminuddin Baki,
Ministry of Education Malaysia
*Corresponding Author: hamidon@iab.edu.my

Abstract

In Malaysia, gender stereotypes pertaining to characteristics of male and female headmasters' leadership style persist. Male headmasters are perceived as dominant but flexible while female counterparts are austere and strict. Nevertheless, these assumptions are not based on facts but personal experience. Based on this premise, this study investigated these gender differences among male and female headmasters. Using qualitative approach, twelve participants from a rural district in Malaysia are interviewed using open-ended questions over a period of six months. Interview protocols were verified by an expert. The interview transcriptions were coded and categorized. Two experts were chosen as the inter-rater for the themes generated. Based on the themes generated, it was discovered that there were no distinctions between male and female headmasters' leadership styles. Both genders showed efforts to build relation with teachers, students and the community. Nevertheless, male headmasters were more susceptible to informal settings in building relationship than female headmasters. It was also clear that previous training and experience as senior teacher determined the strict approach to leadership. What was apparent was that female headmasters placed tidiness of the school as important and have the 'motherly' approach towards the teachers and students.

Keywords: Leadership Styles, School Headmasters, Gender Differences

Introduction

The Malaysian education sector is filled with different types of leaders with different styles of leadership. Teachers have seen a fair share of headmasters who are very strict or too flexible. Strict headmasters use his or her authority to make sure everyone follows the rules and regulations of the school (Aziz et al., 2002, Moran, 1992). Some headmasters are more charismatic and motivate their teachers and students to strive for excellence (Reuben et al, 2010, Ponder and Coleman, 2002). While others are more laid-back and leave the managing to the senior teachers to handle (Sczesny et al. 2000). These perceptions of leadership styles are only based on individual cases and are always mentioned by teachers and administrators. In Malaysia, a significant number of women are selected to be headmasters and we see the importance of understanding the nature of leadership if compared to the male counterparts. This understanding will be beneficial in the selection of senior teachers for the post of headmasters. Thus, the research question is to list out the differences or similarities between the male and female headmasters' leadership styles. From this study's findings, conclusions are made on leadership styles of male and female headmasters in a rural district in Malaysia.

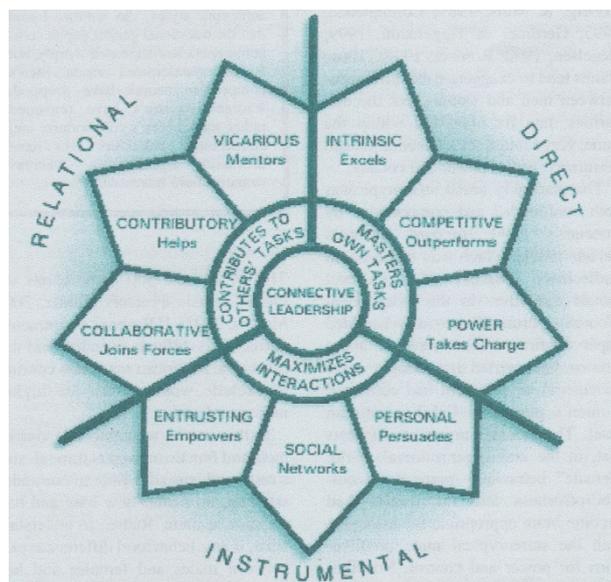
Theoretical Framework

One of the studies on gender differences as far as leadership styles are concerned was Eagly's social-role theory of sex differences which states that people are expected to engage in activities that are consistent with their culturally defined roles. (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 1978). Women will often faced with dilemma as people expectations are in conflict

with appropriate women behaviour. To alleviate this, women leaders would often utilised a strategy of adopting feminine values or ‘motherly’ characteristics to meet people’s expectations (Guihen,2017, Applebaum et al. 2002). Conversely, female leaders are seen as somewhat aggressive if she adopts masculine values. A study of 162 leaders by Eagly and Johnson (1990) compares leadership styles between men and women found out that women tended to show relatively interpersonal or democratically styles whereas men showed a more task-oriented and autocratic styles. Meanwhile, Fiedler’s Contingency Theory states directive, task-oriented managerial behaviour would be effective only in certain situations particularly with simply tasks in relatively structured situations when the leader has good relationship with subordinates as well as in especially difficult situations that lack all of these features (Eagly et al., 2003).

Many studies on the differences between male and female leaders consistently indicate that stereotypes of both gender exists. Mercant (2012) argues these stereotypes are engrained in our psyche at a very young age. These are facilitated through social settings like family, friends, workplace, school and mass media (Eddleston, Veiga and Powell, 2003, Fine, 2012). Schneider (2005) lists down the stereotypes of both the sexes: Common females stereotypes include affectionate, emotional, friendly, sympathetic, sensitive and sentimental; males stereotypes include dominant, forceful, aggressive, self-confident, rational and unemotional. Consequently, The Connective Leadership Model (Robinson and Lipman-Blumen, 2003) lists out three types of behaviour in leadership:

1. Direct Approach (Intrinsic, Competitive, Power)
2. Relational Approach (Collaborative, Contributory, Vicarious),
3. Instrumental Approach (Entrusting, Social, Personal).



The Connective Leadership Model (Robinson and Lipman-Blumen, 2003)

1. Direct Approach

This style of leadership is focusing on the executing task and mastering on one’s own capability. The first set is the Intrinsic Style which focusing on executing and mastering one’s own task based on previous performance with internal standard of excellence. One example is how a gymnast strives to perform and break his or her own record. The second set is the Competitive Style which uses an external standard of excellence to outperform others. One example is how a company rewards their staff if they outperformed their own colleagues. The third style is the Power Style which uses authority to control resources: staff, machines and

systems. We can see this especially in a crisis situation when a leader takes charge of everything and control the situation.

2. The Instrumental Approach

The Personal Style uses all aspects of the self: intelligence, physical capability, charisma, humour, age, race etc. to influence others. Examples of charismatic leader's best exemplify these styles. The second is the Social Style which focuses on completing tasks through creating and sharing networks of individuals with specific and relevant abilities or experiences. Examples can be seen in human resource officers who search and match competencies with perspectives departments. The third is the Entrusting Styles which consist of expectations of others to complete tasks. This is better exemplified with headmasters asking new staff to complete a job without significant support.

3. The Relational Approach

In this approach, the first style is the collaborative style with leaders who call others or subordinates to complete tasks. They should take responsibility of the success or failures. We can see this happening in schools and government agencies. The second is the Contributory Styles which means contributing to the role task of others and also deriving a sense of achievement from the other's success. One good example is when a headmaster helps a teacher to complete his or her task. This is similar to a mentor and mentee relationship. Finally, the Vicarious Style is when the leader contributing indirectly or passively to the success of others of whom the leader identifies. This style can be best exemplified by a fan who works very hard to promote his or her idol or even an elder family member who supports a younger family member to be a successful citizen.

The differences between genders among leaders have been mentioned by several psychologists (Collard, 2001, Powell, 1993; Burke and Collins, 2001, R). In addition to this Kelley (1992) argued that there is no difference in effectiveness but added that women leaders begin with an initial hurdle to attain legitimacy. This basically means that women have to work hard to show her subordinates that she is the best for the job. While Powell (1993) stated that there is no difference between the two genders as far as effectiveness as leaders is concerned but there exists situations where it favours male or female leaders.

Interview Questions:

1. Good morning, could you please tell about me your career history (i.e.: previous school, post, previous training attended)
2. What were the first things that you have done right after you were selected as a headmaster in this school?
3. How would you execute change in the school? Give examples of programs that you have done in this school.
4. How would you describe your relationship with your teachers, students and community? Give examples.
5. How do you solve problems in your schools? Give examples.
6. What are your hopes and aspirations for the school? Do you think they are achievable?

Interviews were recorded with reliable voice recorder and notes were taken during interviews. Recorded interviews were transferred as transcripts and emailed back to participants for corrections and agreements. Then, transcripts were coded for themes and categorized. The statistical software nVivo 10 was utilised for theme analysis. Transcripts with categories of themes are sent to two experts and agreed to be valid.

Study Findings

1. Previous training experience determines a strict leadership style.

One of the recurring themes that the participants mentioned several times was the effect that previous training has on their leadership styles. Especially for headmasters who have been through a qualification for headship program or National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders (NPQEL) which is organized by Institut Aminuddin Baki (IAB) in Malaysia. All school leaders will have to attend before being appointed as headmasters or principal in Malaysian schools. Graduates from this program are perceived as a strict leader regardless of their gender. We discovered that there were no differences between the genders to indicate that one is stricter than the other. It is apparent that both genders who have been trained will strive to uphold the rules just because they have been exposed to them and the consequences of breaking them. (F1, F2, F5, M2, M3, M4) This was not apparent for headmasters who did not go through the program and they are more laid back in their implementation of the rules and regulations. (M1, M2, M4)

2. Female headmasters are more meticulous in analysing the environment

Nevertheless, differences can be detected when the second question was asked concerning the first thing that they have done after they were appointed as the headmaster in that school. Female headmasters are more meticulous with analysis of the environment. One used questionnaires to collect data about the school. Based on these data, decision was made for remedial actions. (F1) While male headmasters are more relaxed and have the wait-and-see attitude. Which means, there would be no drastic action to change the organization culture. (M2, M4) In one situation, a female headmaster observed that several teachers are coming late to school and found out that the previous headmasters (who was a man) was not addressing the problem. Thus, she put in action several rules to avoid teachers coming late. What was also apparent in the conversation was that female headmasters prefer a more formal setting when dealing with the problem. Example of how a female headmaster would deal with this problems of teachers coming late to school is to call the aforementioned teacher to her room, ask him (most of the time it is a male teacher) the reason why he was late for several times while indicating the established rules and highlighting that he has broken the rules. If he goes on and continue with the said action, punishment would be meted out. (F1, F3, F4,) On the other hand, a male headmaster would confront the teacher in a more informal setting for example after a game of badminton or in a social gathering. (M3, M4)

3. Female headmasters have a ‘motherly’ approach to leadership.

Another concept that was apparent from the transcripts is the ‘motherly’ phenomenon. Most of the female headmasters indicate a ‘motherly’ characteristic. In one instance, a female headmaster would set an example by taking control of the movement of the students, and making sure the students recite their prayers. (F5) This ‘motherly’ action will be seen as positive leadership qualities and most teachers will consent with her style. (M5, F1, F4) On the other hand, male headmasters are more dominant and there are no apparent ‘motherly’ or ‘fatherly’ characteristics to show. While females are blessed with this characteristic, males are seen as formal and rigid. Male headmasters are not flexible when rules are concerned but sometimes would bend the rules whenever it suited them. This is similar with female headmasters when flexibility is apparent in both genders. (M1, M4, F3)

4. Female headmasters are more concerned with tidiness.

Another theme in the transcript is the focus on tidiness. The concern with environment tidiness is apparent in female headmasters. Her school must be clean and beautifully decorated with flowers and nicely painted. Again we see female headmaster treating the school as a house.

(F3, F4) Meanwhile, male headmasters are more practical and are not concerned whether the school is beautifully decorated. In one instance, male headmasters would recycled furniture or repaint old room to save money and use it for other important things. (M1, M2)

5. Female headmasters have a closer bond with female teachers

Female headmasters were shown in several instances to be close with the female teachers if compare with male headmaster. They would organized family day, gathering and feast to bond with the teachers. (F1, F2, F3) Their bond is intimate and one headmaster has a very close relationship with several female teachers. Nevertheless, is not the case with male headmaster as the bond is formal. Male headmasters also organized gatherings and feast but the gap between him and the teachers is apparent. In one instance, a male headmaster received a poison pen letter because he was seen as being too close with the female teacher and observers are not happy with that. Thus, we see the difference in the sense that female headmaster bonds with other female teachers but for male headmaster there exists a restriction whenever relationships with other teachers are concerned especially with female teachers. (M2, F1, F2, F5)

6. Age and origin determines the level of acceptance

As far as relationship with the community is concerned both gender has indicated the efforts to engage parents and the stake holders. Like before, female headmasters were shown to be close with the community whereas male headmasters are more formal with the stakeholders. (F2) What we can deduce was that a male headmaster who is from the area would fare better than someone who is not local. (M3, M4, M5) This is because they are familiar with the teachers and parents. One male headmaster stated his concern for not being respected by the teachers because he is young. (M3) In one instance, male headmasters are concerned with teachers accepting him as a leader. When he was a teacher in that school, other teachers treated him like a colleague and friend but when he was appointed as the headmaster, he wanted other teachers to treat him as a headmaster. This is not the case for another female headmaster as her focus is not to get respected but implementation of projects in the school. (F2)

7. Level of enthusiasm differs between the genders

Finally, female headmasters are more enthusiastic to organize fund raising events to improve the teachers and students performance.(F4) This is important for them and the school and will strive for excellence for the sake of the school, teachers and students. While, there were efforts by male headmasters but the level of enthusiasm was not as high as their female counterparts. Some male headmasters were frustrated because lack of funds for the school's academic development and will not think outside the box to find money for school's programs. Female headmasters were resilient and tough in their quest for the school's excellence.(M1, M2, M3, F4). Nevertheless, both genders were conscious of the reward and punishment in the sense that were aware that by giving teachers incentives, it would motivate teachers to perform their tasks. This is characteristic of instructional leaders who create a conducive environment where teachers are rewarded if they performed in their tasks.

Discussion

If we look back at the Connective Leadership Model by Lipmen-Blumen (2003), we can see that there are certain styles that male and female headmasters are showing. What is apparent is that both gender showed the Intrinsic Style in which they used what they learnt from previous training in their everyday tasks in school. Thus, like a gymnast who strives to break his or her own record, both male and female headmasters were using their own standards to perform in schools. Besides that, they were using the competitive style guided by external

standard (or rules) to perform. In addition, both genders were using the power style as they are appointed as the headmasters in that school. We can see that as far as the direct set is concerned, both genders were utilizing this style.

As far as the instrumental set is concerned, we can see that both gender used certain demographical element in this leadership styles. Two senior males headmaster were respected by teachers and students. They have no problems in controlling the teachers and students. Some have a level of charisma and motivated the teachers to work. Similarly, headmasters were using the social style to networks among the teachers and community. While using entrusting style to empower the teachers to perform tasks. Although we see females headmasters have a moderate amount of monitoring if compare with male headmasters.

In the relational set, we can see a degree of agreement with the collaborative style in the sense that both genders took the responsibility and joined the teachers and other stake holders to achieve the school's targets. It was apparent in all Malaysian schools that the headmaster is responsible for the success or failure of the school's achievements. Thus, the headmasters will set targets of the school and discuss the key performance indicators. Teachers were assigned with certain tasks or committee and the headmaster will monitor the performance. The headmaster was contributing towards the success of the school with the help of teachers and parents. A number of headmasters will mentor new teachers but most of the time will tap on experienced senior teachers for assistance.

No.	Male Headmasters	Female Headmasters
1.	Basic physical environment is important. Focus more on academic than decorations of the school.	Physical environment is important. Focus on cleanliness and decorations.
2.	Have the 'person in power' characteristic. Uses authority to exert power.	Have the 'motherly' characteristic. Concerned about students future and well-being. Manages the school like her house.
3.	Young male headmasters strive for respect from teachers because they are perceived as fresh and inexperienced.	Young female headmasters are not concerned with whether teachers respect them because they have authority to exert.
4.	Male headmasters deal with problematic staff within an informal setting like after badminton match or during a feast. Severe measures are for severe cases.	Female headmasters deal with problematic staff within formal setting. Discussion in her room. Asking the reasons and the punishments for breaking the rules.
5.	Male headmasters have limitations as far as their bonding with teachers is concerned. They cannot exert themselves on female teachers for examples.	Female headmasters are more connective types of bonding with female teacher. Male teacher are cooperative with female bosses.
6.	Male headmasters are more practical and will only do something if it fits the resources and purpose. They are not into thinking in a systematic way to solve problems.	Female headmasters are more strategically thinking and will analyse the environment for weakness and strength. They are more particular and in detail.

Figure 1: Differences of Leadership styles between Male and Female Headmasters

Limitations

This study has limitations in which it was conducted in the district of Kuala Selangor, a rural district in the state of Selangor, Malaysia. Twelve headmasters were selected purposively from this district: six male headmaster and six female headmasters. Thus, these finding cannot be generalized for the whole populations and acts as a preliminary data for other studies in different part of the world.

Recommendations

The study of gender differences has been sidelined from the mainstream because researcher assumed that gender has little or insignificant relevance to leadership especially in education. Nevertheless, it is clear that gender do play an important role in determining the types of leadership that we see in the schools. Several factors in this study were seen as mediator towards the efficiency of leadership for both of the genders. We would like to suggest for future studies to examine the mediating factors that control leaders as far as gender is concerned. Thus, we list down age, acceptance, previous training, origin and culture as the mediating factors in determining leadership according to gender.

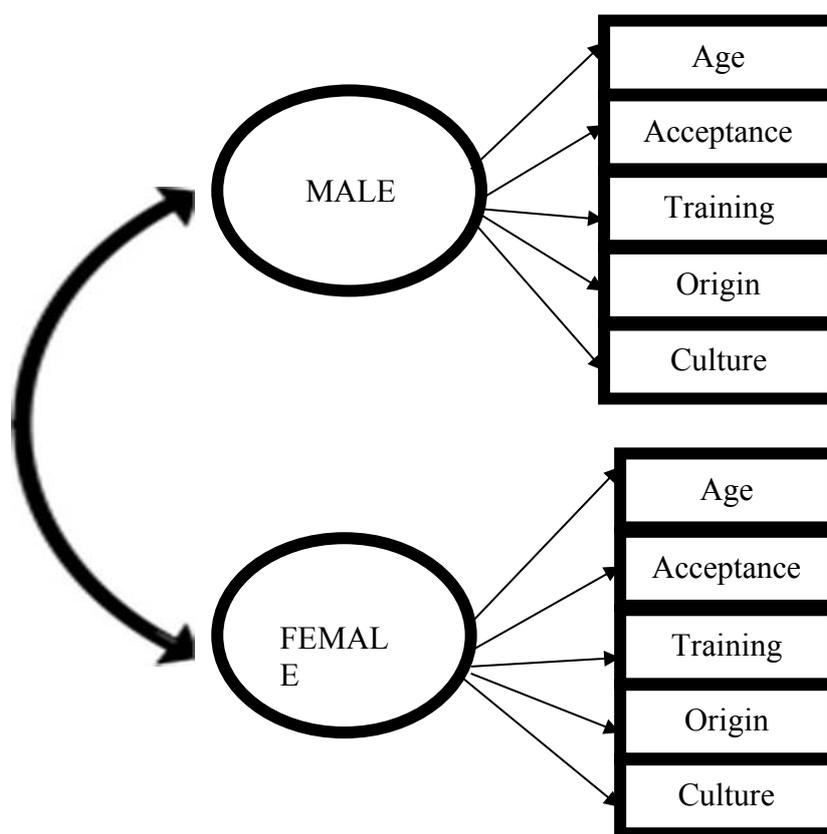


Figure 2. Leadership Construct According to Gender

Conclusion

The study of gender differences may have been numerous in the western world but it is still considered as taboo in this part of the world. Leadership achievement is looked upon as a general phenomenon that is the same to both the genders. Many studies on gender differences especially in education sector are mainly from a western point of view but lack the different

cultures elements. Thus, a comprehensive perspective on gender differences is needed to examine this topic.

References

- Applebaum, S. L., Audet, L. and Miller J.C. 2002. Gender and leadership? Leadership and Gender? A Journey through Landscape of Theories. *Leadership and Organizational Development Journal*. Vol. 24/1, 2003.
- Aziz, F., Kalsoom, Q, Quraishi, U. and Hasan, S., 2017. Perceptions on gender-based differences in educational leadership. *Management in Education*. Vol 31 (2) 75-81.
- Burke, S. and Collins, K.M. 2001. Gender Differences in Leadership Styles and Management Skills, *Women in Management Review*. Vol. 16, 5/6 pg 244.
- Collard, J. L. 2001. Leadership and Gender, an Australian Perspective. *Educational Management Administration Leadership* Vol. 29; pp. 343.
- Eagly, A. H. and Carli, L.L. 2003. The female Leadership Advantage. An evaluation of the evidence. *The Leadership Quarterly*. Vol. 14 (2003). Pp 807-834
- Eagly, A.H. and Johnson.B.T, 1990. Gender and Leadership Styles: A Meta Analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol 108, No 2, 223-256. University of Connecticut, USA.
- Eagly, A.H. and Johannesen-Schmidt, M.A. 2001. The Leadership Styles of Women and Men. *Journal of Social Issues*. Vol 57, No. 4, 2001, ppp 781-797
- Eagly, A.H., Karau, S.J. and Makhijani, M.G. 1978. Gender and the effectiveness of leaders: A Meta analysis. *Psychological Bulletin* 1995. Vol. 117, No.1,125-145.
- Fine.C., 2012. Delusions of gender. Allen and Unwin. Australia.
- Eddleston, K., Veiga, J.F. and Powell, G. 2006. "Expanding the traditional view of Managerial Career Satisfier: Beyond sex Differences." *Journal of Psychology* Vol 91,2, pp 437-44.
- Fuller, K., 2017. Women secondary head teachers in England: Where are they now? *Management in Education*. Vol 31(2) 54-68.
- Goshen, L., 2017. The two faces of secondary headship: Women deputy head teachers' perception of the secondary head teacher role. *Management in Education*. Vol 31 (2) 69-74.
- Kelley, M. J. 1997. Gender Differences and Leadership: A study. Research Report, Air University, Alabama, United States.
- Mercant, K., 2012. How men and women differ: Gender differences in communication styles, influences tactics and leadership styles. Thesis. Claremont Colleges, USA.
- Moran, B. 1992. Gender differences in Leadership. *Library trends*. Vol. 40. No. 3. Pp 475-91.
- Ponder, J.S. and Coleman, M. 2002, Women-Better Leaders than Men? *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*; 2002; 23, 3/4; ABI/INFORM Global, Pg 122, Lingnan University, Hong Kong dan University of Leicester, UK.
- Powell, G.N. 1993. One more time: Do female and male manager differ: *The Executive*. August 68-75.
- Reuben, E., Rey-Biel, P., Sapienza, P. and Zingales, L. 2010. The Emergence of Male Leadership in Competitive Environments. Discussion Paper No. 5300, Institute of Labor Economics, Bonn, Germany
- Robinson, J.L. and Blueman, J. L. 2003. Leadership Behaviors of Female and Male Managers. *Journal for Education of Business*. Washington, USA
- Schneider, D., 2005. Psychology of Stereotyping. New York: Guilford Press.
- Szesny, S., Bosak, J., Neff, D. and Schyns, B. 2000. Gender Stereotypes and the Attribution of Leadership Traits: A Cross-Cultural Comparison. University of Mannheim. Germany and University of Tilburg , the Netherlands