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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HEADTEACHERS'  
TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND  
PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' STRESS  
IN IPOH

HOO WAI YEE



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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify the correlation between headteachers' transformational leadership, from teachers' perspective, and teachers' stress. The research design of this study is correlational research. The 358 respondents of this study were selected by stratified random sampling, from over 4300 primary school teachers in Kinta Utara, Ipoh, Perak. Data were collected using questionnaire, which consists of Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X) and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). The data obtained was analysed using descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation, and inferential statistics, such as Pearson's correlation. The results uncovered that the headteachers portrayed a good level of transformational leadership behaviour ( $M = 58.8$ ,  $SD = 12.08$ ), and the teachers' stress was moderate ( $M = 18.78$ ,  $SD = 9.21$ ). There was a significant negative correlation ( $r = -0.706$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) between headteachers' transformational leadership and teachers' stress. There was also a significant negative correlation ( $r = -0.709$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) between headteachers' transformational leadership and teachers' stress, based on gender, and significant negative correlation ( $r = -0.709$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) between headteachers' transformational leadership and teachers' stress, based on years of service. The findings implemented that transformational leadership behaviour could diminish stress. In conclusion, the headteachers needed to choose suitable leadership behaviour based on the setting, leading the teacher to deliver their role effectively.







## HUBUNGAN ANTARA KEPIMPINAN TRANSFORMASI GURU BESAR DENGAN STRES GURU SEKOLAH RENDAH IPOH

### ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti hubungan antara kepimpinan transformasi guru besar, dari perspektif guru, dan stres guru. Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk korelasi. Dengan persampelan rawak berstrata, 358 responden kajian telah dipilih dari lebih 4300 guru sekolah rendah di Kinta Utara, Ipoh, Perak. Data dikumpul menggunakan soal selidik, yang terdiri daripada Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X) dan Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). Data yang diperoleh dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif seperti min dan sisihan piawai, serta statistik inferensi seperti korelasi Pearson, dan dapatan kajian didapati bahawa guru besar mencapai tahap tingkah laku kepimpinan transformasi yang baik ( $M = 58.8$ ,  $SD = 12.08$ ), dan stres guru adalah sederhana ( $M = 18.78$ ,  $SD = 9.21$ ). Dapatan hasil juga menunjukkan hubungan yang kuat tetapi negatif ( $r = -0.706$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) antara kepimpinan transformasi guru besar dan stress guru. Dapatan kajian ini juga menunjukkan hubungan yang kuat tetapi negatif ( $r = -0.709$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) antara kepimpinan transformasi dan stress guru berdasarkan jantina, serta hubungan yang kuat tetapi negatif ( $r = -0.709$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ) antara kepimpinan transformasi dan stress guru berdasarkan pengalaman mengajar. Dapatan kajian ini memberi implementasi bahawa tingkah laku kepimpinan transformasi guru besar dapat mengurangkan stres. Kesimpulannya, guru besar harus memilih tingkah laku kepimpinan yang sesuai untuk memimpin guru dalam penyampaian tugas dengan berkesan.





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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APDM	Student Data Base Application
EPRD	Educational Planning and Research Division
KBSR	Integrated Primary School Curriculum
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
KSSR	Primary School Standard Curriculum
MLQ Form-5X	Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire – Form 5X
MOE	Ministry of Education
PBS	School-Based Assessment
PSS	Perceived Stress Scale
SAPS	School Examination Analysis System
SJK(C)	National-type School (Chinese)
SJK(T)	National-type School (Tamil)
SK	Malay-medium National Schools
SKPMg2	Malaysia Education Standard of Quality 2nd Phase
SPLG	Teachers Training Management System
SSDM	Student Behaviour System
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training





## APPENDIX LIST

- A Letter of Participation
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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION



Education is an ever-changing process. In Malaysia, the education system had been changing frequently to be in line with the requirements of globalisation, and to produce international standard manpower (Ministry of Education, 2013). During 2011, the Ministry of Education (MOE) of Malaysia launched the Primary School Standard Curriculum (KSSR) to replace the Integrated Primary School Curriculum (KBSR), which had been used for the past 29 years (Ministry of Education, 2010). When this curriculum was first introduced to the public, an evaluation system called school-based assessment (PBS) was also introduced. PBS, is an online system whereby the teachers were required to enter the students' assessment results online. However, in 2014, due to various factors, the operation of the system was altered, from online to offline (Ministry of Education, 2014). Subsequently, in 2019, examinations for year 1





to year 3 were abolished, by giving only half a months' prior notice (Ministry of Education, 2018c).

Furthermore, in 2017, the syllabus was being rechecked and a series of new textbooks were introduced, which meant the teachers needed more time to familiarise themselves with the curriculum and content (Ministry of Education, 2018b). However, in 2018, the English textbook was converted into a new reference as textbook "Supermind" which was introduced to the year 1 and year 2 students. In 2019, the textbook "Get Smart" was introduced to year 3 students, unfortunately the teachers were only given two months to prepare themselves before the new semester starts (Kinta Utara District Office, 2019).



On the other hand, the teachers are loaded with of paperwork which must be completed on time. They have Student Data Base Application (APDM), an online system to update student details; Student Behavior System (SSDM), an online system to key in students' disciplinary problem which, started in 2016; the Teachers Training Management System (SPLG), a system to record the hours teachers had spent on in-service training; School Examination Analysis System (SAPS), another system to key in students' marks. In January 2019, the education Ministry had decided to reduce the workload of the teachers, but still the load of paperwork have not been abolished or reduced (Erah Amran, 2018).

In view of the above statements, one can see that the workload of the teacher is increase tremendously, hence, causing the teachers to be highly stressed while working. According to Akhtar Malik (2018), teachers generally face more mental





complications when compared to other professions. This statement was supported with the findings of a national survey on K-12 teachers conducted by Richards (2012), which revealed that present-day teachers are highly stressed.

In order to deal with the stress and workload, the teachers need to maintain a good working relation their supervisor, who is also their headteacher. Therefore, the headteachers' main responsibility is to care for the teachers. The work of the headteachers as chief learning officer, who in charge in creating an environment that supports the teachers, begins with spending a lot of time with teachers in and out of the classroom and be engaged in conversations about the learning process (Ash & Persall, 2000). In this case, the headteachers, who is the leader, played a major role in handling the highly stressful life of teachers.



The study on leadership has now become the frontline of education with the leaders overseeing and improving the performance and inspiration of his followers. It is easy to say about leadership, but to carry out a successful leadership is complex. In Malaysia, the headteacher is the direct supervisor of the teachers in the school. The teachers seldom meet with the Education Ministry officer, state education officers or even the district education officers. The one person that they must report to daily is the headteacher. So, it is logical to think that if the teachers have a disagreement with the headteacher regarding the way of leading and managing a school, their relationship will become tensed, and this will bring mental stress to them.





There are a few evidences to prove that headteachers' leadership is correlated with teachers' stress. Harrison (1998) pointed out tension exists between teachers and headteachers on how they perceive leadership roles. The tension between the headteacher and teachers will affect their relationship, causing the teachers to have low working morale (Umar & Chua, 2018). Also, Beare, Caldwell and Millikan (2018) stated that a successful headteacher, not only generate resources but also required to provide an ideal school setting that supports and values the work of the teachers.

In this respect, Bass (1985) transactional leadership and transformational leadership are the ones of most renowned style of leadership. As stated by Hermosilla, Amutio, da Costa and Páez (2016), transformational leadership emerged as one of the most applicable leadership when an organisation is initiating change. Simply put, the stress level of teachers greatly depends on the leadership of the headteachers. This study attempts to examine the relationship of headteachers' leadership on teachers' stress.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Teachers globally are confronting education transformation. In Malaysia, primary school teachers have faced frequent changes since KSSR was introduced. From the teachers' point of view, these changes pose a challenge, causing stress among them. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education identified that 4.4% (n=2123) of teachers were suffering moderate stress levels based on the Malaysia Psychological Wellbeing Index survey as conducted in August 2018 (The Star Online, 2019).





Like any other career, the teaching profession values skilled personnel (Mafukata & Mudau, 2016). However, the Ministry of Education (2018a) reported that only 17.9% of teachers were highly experienced (aged 50 and above). Moreover, teachers who had opted for early retirement had soared from 2777 teachers to 3591 teachers in Malaysia, asserted Deputy Minister of Education, P. Kamalanathan (Zulkifli, 2017). These 3591 teachers made up 0.8% of the total number of teachers. Upon further inquiry, it was found that teachers had lost their enthusiasm in the teaching profession due to stress. As a result, the Ministry of Education faces employee recruitment challenges, as teachers are leaving their professions prematurely. To illustrate, schools in Johore were still lacking 2% of teachers (China Press, 2019). Deputy Minister of Education, Chong Sin Woon further asserted that 1020 teacher trainees were still needed in the education field (Lee, 2018). Deficiencies in the workforce have led other in-service teachers to strive in a more demanding working environment (Mafukata & Mudau, 2016). However, relatively little research has been conducted in Malaysia in relation to headteachers' leadership behaviours as a strong predictor of teachers' stress, which would lead to deficiencies in the education workforce.

In Malaysia, schools are usually organisations that which run according to bureaucracy, and it has been customary since the 1980's for headteachers in Malaysia to practise leadership from top to bottom. However, education had evolved, and nowadays favours a bottom-up approach. This approach only concerns the students and teachers, who are not involved in any policies, decisions or directions. To make this change, the teachers needed full support from the headteachers to initiate changes and perform their jobs (Umar & Chua, 2018). In relation to this, unless the headteachers portray behaviours of leadership and support the teachers, school reform





will fail. Considering the situation, examining the relationship between stress and leadership appears to be a meaningful task.

There is research paralleling the findings from the literature on leadership and teachers' mental wellbeing. However, in Malaysia, the findings have rarely specified gender and years of service of the teachers (Peltzer, Shisana, Zuma, Van Wyk, & Zungu-Dirwayi, 2009). Thus, identifying the controlling variable, which has been commonly ignored, was targeted by the researcher.

In Ipoh, a depressed female teacher who was only 36 years old fell to her death from a shopping mall after teaching in school in July 2018 (Tang, 2018). This unfortunate incident occurred in the research setting selected by the researcher. The stress levels of teachers in Ipoh, with regards to both gender and years of service, were unknown as there was limited research on this matter.

This study aimed to give light to the problems stated above, by means of measuring the stress levels of teachers and determining the leadership methods practised by the headteachers and their relationship with teachers' stress levels. It is significant for leaders to acknowledge that transformational leadership can exponentially minimise teachers' stress levels. To fulfil this intention, quantitative research was carried out to investigate the degree to which headteachers' practices of transformational leadership behaviour affect teachers' stress levels.





### 1.3 Objective of the Study

The overall objective was to investigate the relationship between the teacher's perception of headteachers' transformative leadership style and teachers' stress in order to provide valuable information to education administrators and researchers of education courses.

In particular, the specific objectives of this study are:

RO1 : To identify to what extent the headteachers practice transformational leadership in primary school Ipoh, Perak.

RO2 : To measure the degree of work stress among primary school teachers.

RO3 : To determine the correlation between headteachers' leadership style and work stress.

RO4 : To determine the correlation between headteachers' leadership style and work stress based on gender.

RO5 : To determine the correlation between headteachers' leadership style and work stress based on years of service.

### 1.4 Research Questions

In order to investigate the relationship between headteachers' practice of transformational leadership and the stress that teachers perceived, this study addressed the following questions:



RQ1 : To what extent the headteachers practiced transformational leadership style?

RQ2 : What is the current degree of stress among the primary teachers?

RQ3: Is headteachers' transformational leadership style significantly related to primary school teachers' work stress?

RQ4 : Is headteachers' transformational leadership style significantly related to primary school teachers' work stress based on gender?

RQ5 : Is headteachers' transformational leadership style significantly related to primary school teachers' work stress based on the number of years of service?

### 1.5 Research Hypothesis



Based on the above research questions, three hypotheses (H) were developed to guide the research. The hypotheses were as follow.

H<sub>1</sub>: The headteachers' transformational leadership is significantly related to teachers' work stress.

H<sub>2</sub>: The headteachers' transformational leadership is significantly related to teachers' work stress based on gender.

H<sub>3</sub>: The headteachers' transformational leadership is significantly related to teachers' work stress based on years of service.



## 1.6 Research Framework

The theoretical model presented by Sosik and Godshalk (2000), model of leadership style, mentoring function received, and job-related stress, was the root of this study. Research was conducted on the mentors' three leadership style, including transformational leadership, transactional leadership, laissez-faire leadership, which was mediated by mentoring function received by the protégés, and contribute to the outcome (job-related stress).

According to Sosik and Godshalk (2000), transformational leadership is one of the most effective forms of leadership. Thus, the researcher constructed the research framework, as shown in Figure 1.1, which was simplified using the Model of Leadership Style, Mentoring Function Received, and Job-Related Stress (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000).

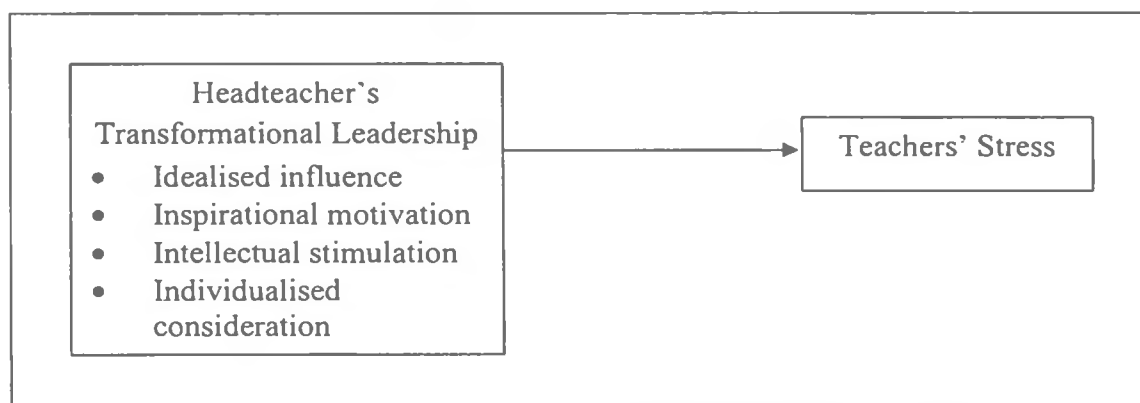


Figure 1.1. Research framework

According to the research framework above, the study examined the transformational leadership practised by headteachers and its relationship with teachers' stress. The transformational leadership was based on the model by Burns (1978), and Bass (1985), while stress was based on the Lazarus and Folkman (1984) transactional model of stress, as these theories and models were parallel to the situation that are undergoing in Malaysia nowadays.

The focus of this study is on transformational leadership, based on Bass (1985), measured by Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire – Form 5X (MLQ Form–5X) (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Besides, stress had already been researched in many fields. In this research, the focus on stress covered work stress, which was measured by the Perceived Stress Scale, by Cohen, Kamarck and Mermelstein (1983).

## 1.7 Significance of Research

First, the researcher hoped that the findings of this research would provide information to the headteachers in the Kinta Utara district, the Kinta Utara Education District Office and the Ministry of Education regarding the leadership that headteachers are currently practiced in Kinta Utara district. Secondly, although transformational leadership is a popular topic in educational research, the researcher still hopes to contribute to explore the relationship between transformational leadership and the stress level in Kinta Utara, Ipoh.



Furthermore, as highlighted in this research, stress had brought negative consequences to the stakeholders, including the headteachers, teachers and students. This research would be significant to all educators as the topic for this research is to provide a better understanding for the headteachers on the stress level among teachers, and to develop a guideline, such as Headteachers' Administration Guidelines or Administrator Leading Guidebook, with the intention to lessen the stress of the teachers, when managing, administrating and leading the school.

Lastly, the result of this research aimed to serve as reference for the Education District Office and the Ministry of Education. It is hoped that the findings of the research would be shared, debated, and implemented. Hence, giving opportunities to the headteachers adapt transformational leadership behaviour in school, improving their leading skills and amend their leadership behaviour, and consequently become a better leader in the field of education.

## 1.8 Study Limitation

The scope and limitation of this study were:

1. Sampling did not include nurseries, special schools, secondary schools, private schools, TVET schools and university.
2. The location of the respondents is only in Kinta Utara, Ipoh, Perak.





3. Data were limited by the use of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire – Form 5X (Avolio & Bass, 2004) and Perceive Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen et al., 1983).

## 1.9 Operational Definition

The following terms are defined, in the context of current study.

### (a) Teachers

In this study, reference was made to primary school teachers, not including nurseries, secondary school teachers, special school teachers, TVET school teachers and private school teachers. Similarly, it went for headteachers, as this study only focused on primary school headteachers.

### (b) Headteachers

In this study, headteachers were referring to primary school headteachers, not including nurseries, secondary school headteachers, special school headteachers, TVET school headteachers and private school headteachers.







(c) Stress

Stress, in this study, refers to a personal reaction that includes physical, psychological and behaviour response to stressors, which was surveyed using Perceive Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen et al., 1983).

(d) Stressor

Stressor means a trigger in the form of physical or psychological which happened abruptly, setting off personal alarm, giving an individual an impression that he has no control over his life, and setting off a stress reaction (Schneiderman, Ironson, & Siegel, 2005). In this study, the stressor would be the transformational leadership



(e) Transformational leadership

In the Malaysian school context, transformational leadership is a style of leadership that involved the inspiration and motivation of the teachers, influencing them to challenge themselves, to achieve higher aspirations, and putting the school benefit in front of their self-interest. A survey was conducted in this study using the 20 items from Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ – Form 5X) (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

