Evidence of Relationships between Teachers' Leadership Style Practices for Learning and Students' Academic Press/Emphasis

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Abstract: The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between teachers' leadership styles practices for learning with students' academic press/emphasis (AP/AE) at selected secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur. The study employed a quantitative research design to address the research problems and two research hypotheses. A total of 328 students from three selected secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur was randomly selected to complete the survey questionnaires of the study. The data were statistically analysed using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. The results showed that the English subject teachers at the selected national secondary schools exhibited clearly the two leadership styles practices (COE and COA) as it supported the hypotheses that the two predictors were adequate to explain students' AP/AE, particularly COA which was the most influential predictor. This study therefore adds a new dimension to the body of knowledge that will help researchers' efforts to understand the relationship between English subject teachers' leadership styles practices and students' AP/AE. As this study takes place in the Malaysian context, it definitely contributes to the enriching of the indigenous body of knowledge.The implication would be in terms of the teacher training and enhancement of teacher professional development programmes.

Index Terms: Teachers' Leadership Styles, Academic Press, English, Quantitative

I. INTRODUCTION

We are all aware that the main factor to achieve students' academic excellence is through the school leadership particularly the principal and the teachers (Haymn, 1990; Mortimore, 1995; Reynols, 1992; Rumberger and Palardy, 2005; Sammons, 1999). In regards of school leadership, Ramsey (1999), supports that leadership styles do exist in a leader such as open style, closed style, flexible style and rigid style. Some leaders use a style that is manipulative while others use more participatory styles.

Another contributing factor to the student academic achievement (which is relatively new in Malaysia) is student "academic optimism" (AO). Kirby and DiPaola (2009) defined AO as a triadic set of interactions of where collective efficacy supports trust in clients, which in turn nurtures

academic emphasis (press). Subsequently this turns into a "single powerful force" that is able to explain the school performance (Hoy *et al.*, 2006; Hoy, 2010;2012). Even though the effect of teacher AO has been shown to be strongly related to student achievement (Bevel and Mitchell, 2012; Hoy *et al.*, 2006; Kirby and DiPaola, 2009), conversely, student AO has not been explored (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 2013) for at least in selected schools accounted for this study.

From the preceding studies, one major factor that contributed directly to the students' academic outcome is the leadership practices of the teachers (Creemers and Reezigt, 2005; Hallinger and Heck, 1996; Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Hallinger and Heck, 2010; Hopkis, 1995). Further, Marzano *et al.* (2005), mentioned that leadership has been studied for many years and researchers in general have agreed that leadership is extremely important for organization/s success and hence it is very imperative to find means to boost up students' academic achievement as it is believed that leadership style is one of the key elements that directly or indirectly affect the students' academic achievement and the success of many individuals (Codding and Marc, 2002; Hallinger and Heck, 1996; Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Hallinger and Heck, 2010; Heck and Hallinger, 2009; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008; Prestine and Nelson, 2005; Riehl, 2000; Witziers *et al.*, 2003). In another scenario, it is quite distressing that most teachers failed to observe the importance of leadership skills and being a role model in the classroom as it can influence learning (Hallinger and Heck, 1996; Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Hallinger and Heck, 2010; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008).

A review of the literature revealed that there is dearth of studies concerning teachers' leadership practices and students AO and students learning outcomes in Malaysia. Only Julie Abdullah (1997) and Krishna (1999) did a study on teachers' but they had focused on other issues. Internationally, there were similar studies conducted by researchers such as Peterkin (1996), Noland (2005), Ijaz *et al.* (2010), and Agba *et al.* (2010).

In this regard, although the studies of teachers and students AO are still at infancystage (Hoy *et al.*, 2006; Hoy, 2010;2012), the study of AO and its effect on students' learning outcomes and achievement are hastily enticing more promising researchers such as Tschannen-Moran *et al.* (2013), Mascall *et al.*

(2008), Gurol and Keirimigil (2010), MacKinnon (2012), MacPherson and Carter (2009), Van Hof (2012), Bevel (2010), to name a few. At this juncture, we suspect that there could be also a correlation between the teachers' leadership styles practices with one of the students AO particularly the aspect of academic press (AP) or academic emphasis (AE). Hence, the main purpose of this study is to seek and to clarify if there is a relationship between the teachers' leadership practices particularly the coercive (COE) and coaching (COA) with the students AP/AE (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 2013).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The Concepts of Universal Leadership Roles

The conception of leadership has been a subject of argument for years due to the discrepancy of leadership basic definitions (Adlam, 2003). One of the earliest definitions of leadership is, as an activity in influencing people to cooperate towards the same goal which they find desirable (Tead, 1935). Leadership is an interpersonal influence where the leaders use individuals or a group of people to achieve the same goal (Schermerhorn *et al.*, 2000). They further opined that leaders need to exert certain power over their followers in obtaining cooperation. According to Burns (1978), DePree (1989), Gardner (1990), Bolman and Deal (1994), leadership is needed to foster hope, inspire, motivate and be a pathway in order to lead and direct the followers to somewhere which is more desirable especially during decisive and crucial time. Kotter (1990), Jaques and Clement (1991), believe that leadership is a continuous process where the leader sets direction for the followers and supports them to move in that constant direction with sufficient means for one's needs, competence and full commitment. Sergiovanni(1990;1996;1999;2001) however, perceives that leadership can be categorized into four concepts known as 4B's; bartering, building, bonding and banking. He also says that leadership acts as one's heart, head and hand (Zaman *et al.*, 2011).

According to Covey *et al.* (1994) and Dubrin (1998), a leader with strong leadership must have strong personal quality in order to inspire confidence and have support among the followers to achieve the organizational goals. The quality of leadership will make a difference between ordinary and extraordinary performance of an organization (Sergiovanni, 1990;1996;1999;2001). Further, Bolman and Deal (1994) added that four frames of organization such as structure, human resources, politics and symbols varies among organizations. A leader who is able to identify and employ each of the frames effectively and efficiently is considered as an effective leader. In common understanding, thus it can be concluded that leadership is an interaction between the leader and the followers for the benefit of their organization (Slater, 1995).

B. Leadership Roles in Education

School improvements such as academic achievements, students' discipline, teaching and learning practices are some of the aspects influenced by the principal's leadership (Cunningham and Cordeiro, 2000; Tirozzi, 2001). Contemporarily, Senge (1990) views all types of leaders are responsible for learning while Soukamneuth (2004),Quinn (2002) and Waters *et al.* (2004) also agree that head teachers' effective leadership have great impacts on instruction and hence boosting students' achievement. Educational leadership has direct and indirect influence on the improvement and accomplishment of the success of the whole school including the attainment and improvement of students' learning (Leithwood and Levin, 2005). In short, educational leaders have great values as they are the ones who upholds the change and lead the schools and the students to have the most excellent and outstanding education. 'The High Performance Theory' by Sergiovanni and 'Model of Transactional and Transformational Theory' by Burns is some of the few which were widely used in schools. Leithwood and Levin(2005) and Leithwood and Jantzi(2000)employed Burns' theory as a guide to design six dimensions of transformational leadership that is applicable in schools. According to Leithwood, schools achieve the desired aim when goals are stated clearly and in detail where as individual(s) receive the necessary support to accomplish such endeavours. Hence, it is evident that the success and failure of an organization depends fully on the leader (Schermerhorn *et al.,* 2000).

C. Leadership Styles Practices for Learning of English Subject Teachers

Much current leadership research aims to demonstrate the impact of leaders on schools and students (Mascall *et al.,* 2008), but the direct effects of teachers' leadership on students' achievement are weak (Hallinger and Heck, 1996; Mascall *et al.*, 2008). This is however contrary to Goleman (2000) and Goleman *et al.* (2004)findings where leaders who employ various leadership styles on the situation of the organization will get the most desirable outcome.

Goleman (2000) and Goleman *et al.* (2004) suggests COE style demands immediate compliance with orders. It is also considered as the least flexible leadership style or practice because it emphasises 'Do what I say' approach. On the contrary, COA leadership pays particular attention on the development of people for the future through empathetic self-awareness and good rapport. "Coaches help people identify their unique strengths and weaknesses, trying those to their personal and career aspirations". In conclusion, the two leadership styles practices as described above were employed in this study (as the leadership styles practices of English subject teachers) and it is hypothesized as an exogenous variable which presumed to affect the students' AP/AE in the schools' understudy.

D. Students' Academic Press/Emphasis (AP/AE)

Generally, AO is referring to teachers' sense of academic optimism i.e. the individual teachers' beliefs that they can teach effectively, their students can learn, and parents will support them so the teacher can press hard for

learning. However, Tschannen-Moran *et al.* (2013) believe that AO can be also from students' perspective. Hoy *et al.* (2006) in addition, stress that at school level, collective academic optimism has been related to academic performance.

AP/AE is the third component of students' AO and it is "the high expectations" that are communicated by teachers to students in terms of their academic efforts. AP/AE is also associated with improving students' achievement even when controlling for socio-economic status (Hoy *et al.*, 2006; Hoy, 2010;2012), and it is evident when schools make academic achievement as their central purpose (McGuigan and Hoy, 2006), and when teachers believe that students are capable of academic success regardless of their learning styles and needs. Furthermore, AP/AE is apparent when high yet achievable goals are set for students; students work hard and the culture in the schools assist students to respect academic achievement (Hoy *et al.*, 2006; Hoy, 2010;2012). However, at this juncture, we do not have any knowledge of any studies that focused solely on students' AP/AE but according to Tschannen-Moran *et al.* (2013), previous research on teachers' perceptions of AP/AE have indicated the presence of a clear link between AP/AE of schools and students' achievement. Since AP/AE is a factor of its own (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 2013), we are going to seek the relationship between AP/AE and leadership styles practices of English subject teachers in the selected secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Based from the above discussions, the study proposed a general conceptual framework of study as exhibited by Fig. 1 below. The two leadership styles practices of English subject teachers are the exogenous variables while AP/AE is the endogenous variable. All variables are assumed to be significantly related.
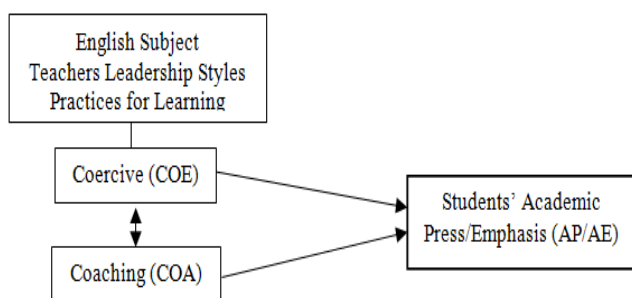

Fig 1 The General Conceptual Framework of the Study
Source: Adapted from Breen (2011), pg.2; Tschannen-Moran et al. (2013).

Based on the preceding discussions, and the general conceptual framework (Fig. 1), the study aims to address two research hypotheses, mainly:

H_1: Coercive (COE) and coaching (COA) leadership styles represent the leadership styles practices of the English subject teachers at the selected national secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

H_2: There is a significant relationship between English subject teachers' leadership styles practices with the students' AP/AE in selected national secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design, Population and Sample

We together with William (2006), Taylor *et al.* (2009), believe that quantitative survey design is the most suitable for this study. For the purpose of quantitative analysis, schools were purposefully selected to include students who will best answer the research questions and the hypotheses. The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases for study in depth (Gay and Airasian, 2003; Patton, 1990). Purposive and homogenous sampling can be very useful for situations where the researcher need to reach a targeted sample quickly. The study decided to select three different schools within the same area in Kuala Lumpur: KB National Secondary School (SMKKB) [a coeducational school], CS National Secondary School (SMKCS) [an all-girls school], and MS (M) National Secondary School (SMK (L) MS) [all-boys school]. The population of the study comprising 1,581 Forms One and Two students from the aforementioned three selected schools. Based on 95% confidence interval and ± 5% margin of error requirement, the study selected 330 students as samples of the study. A complete name list of the 330 students was obtained from the school and all survey questionnaires were administered among the respondents by the researcher.

B. Instrumentation, Validity and Reliability

The survey questionnaire for the teachers' leadership styles practices for learning of English subject teachers was developed based on the literature Goleman (2000) and Goleman *et al.* (2004), and it was designed to measure the variables that indicates the relationship between teachers' leadership styles practices and AP/AE. As for AP/AE construct, the items were adopted and adapted from Hoy *et al.* (2006). All items of the constructs needed to be validated to ensure it measures what supposed to measure (Lankshar and Knobel, 2004; Punch, 2003; Sekaran and Bougie, 2010). Views and comments from the content experts were sought to ensure it complied with the content validity particularly by paying particular importance of their relevancy to the subject matter and the entire topic of the study. As for face validity the study administered the survey questionnaires among 100 students from the listed school. This assisted the researcher in clarifying the inexactness and in ensuring that the questions/items posed measured what it is intended to measure. The researcher and the experts also then needed to decide if this study possessed face validity after looking at the instruments thoroughly.

Nunnally (1978), Bollen (1989), and Lankshar and Knobel (2004), stress the importance of reliable instruments for quantitative types of studies. Rosenthl and Rosnow (1991), and Punch (2003), stated that reliability of an instrument can be determined by whether or not the question(s) can be steadily and sincerely responded to. The Cronbach's alpha for the whole scale was 0.764 and considered adequate for this

study (Nunnally, 1978). A Likert scale of 1 to 5 was used for items in Section B and C of the study. Scale "5" indicates strongly agree, scale "4" indicates agree, scale "3" indicates slightly disagree, scale "2" indicates disagree and scale "1" indicates strongly disagree.

C. Data Analysis

Once the administered survey questionnaires were successfully collected, the data was prepared particularly by coding for easy identification and analysis. The researcher made the entries for each of the 330 returned questionnaires using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 25.0), cleaned for errors and checked for missing data. Cross-checking of the entries was carried out to ensure correct entries. Consequently, final data analysis to address the research hypotheses is conducted by running the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and full-fledged structural equation modeling (SEM).

IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A. Demographic Background of the Respondents

The total number of respondents whose returned surveys questionnaires were usable; a total of 205 (62.5%) of the respondents were female, while 123 (37.5%) were male. It was also revealed that more than half of the respondents, 52.4% were 14 years old of age, followed by 47% were 13 years old and the rest were 15 years old, 0.6%.

The largest proportion of the respondents were of Chinese origin, 56.7%, followed by Indians, 27.5%, Malays, 15.2% and others, 0.6%. The majority of respondents, 54.6% were from Form 2 classes and followed by 45.4% from Form 1 group of students. The data also revealed that almost half of the sampled respondents, 49.4% had been studying in their current schools for two years, followed by 47% studying less than one year, 2.7% studying for only one year and only 0.9% studying in their school for three years.

B. Adequacy of the Constructs

The data were analysed using a full-fledged SEM. First, we tested the two-predictor measurement model via confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Second, the hypothesized structural model was tested simultaneously to determine the overall fit, statistical significance and practical importance of the path coefficients. To evaluate the research hypotheses, the study also applied full-fledged SEM (AMOS version 24 model-fitting program). We evaluated the adequacy of the three measurement models of COE, COA and AP/AE using CFA and the interrelationships among these three constructs. All three measurement models showed good fit; $\chi2/df = 1.883$; CFI = 0.935; RMSEA = 0.052, CI: .043, .061, suggesting that the three factor measurement model was consistent with the data. The item loadings of COA was between .58 and .76 followed by COE construct where the item loadings were between .45 and point .68. Table 1 also gave an impression that item loadings for AP/AE was between .52 and .70. Further, all three main constructs had considerable high composite reliability.

Table 1 Factor loading, average variance extracted and composite reliability of the constructs

Construct	Items	Loading*	CR
	COA1	.60	
	COA2	.58	
Coaching Leadership	COA3	.72	
Style	COA4	.75	0.87
(COA)	COA5	.76	
	COA6	.71	
	COA7	.76	
	COE1	.60	
Coercive Leadership	COE2	.45	
Style	COE3	.68	0.72
(COE)	COE4	.61	
	COE5	.65	
	AE1	.70	
	AE2	.52	
Academic	AE3	.64	
Press/Emphasis	AE4	.59	0.83
(AE/EP)	AE5	.59	
	AE6	.66	
	AE7	.62	
	AE8	.57	

The adequacy of the constructs can be further illustrated by referring to Fig. 2 below. Latent variable of COA was measured by seven manifest variables such as COA1- COA7 as depicted in Table 1 and Fig. 2. Contrary to COA, the latent variable of COE was measured by only five manifest variables particularly COE1- COE5. Subsequently, the latent variable of AP/AE was manifested by eight manifest variables, AE1 – AE8. These latent variables are hypothesized to be significantly correlated whereby AP/AE was the dependent and COA and COE were the independents.
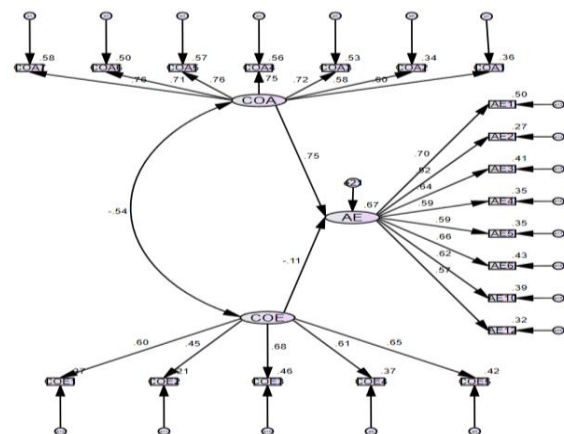

Fig 2 Adequacy of the constructs

By employing full-fledged SEM techniques, a graphical model was created as depicted by Fig. 2 above. It was observed that the specified hypothesized structural model seemed to fit the data reasonably well as proved by the following evidences. Firstly, the CMIN/DF

(χ^2/df=1.88) or the minimum discrepancy divided by its degrees of freedom or rather normed chi-square value was very much lower than the cut-off value of 5. Wheaton *et al.* (1977), suggests a ratio of approximately five or less 'as beginning to be reasonable.' Since the chi-square statistic ($\chi 2$) is sensitive to sample size it is necessary to look at others that also support goodness of fit. Secondly, the RMSEA value (.052) was smaller than 0.08. According to Arbuckle (2005), the RMSEA value of about 0.05 or less would indicate a close fit of the model in relation to the degrees of freedom. In addition, the value of about 0.08 or less for the RMSEA would indicate a reasonable error of approximation and would not want to employ a model with a RMSEA greater than 0.1(Browne and Cudeck, 1993). Thirdly, the incremental Comparative Fit Index or CFI (Bentler, 1990), for the above structural model was .935 which indicate very good fit. Therefore, based on these good-fit indices, the study concluded that the hypothesized structural model as above was reasonably fit to the data and thus accepted as a model of the study.

C. Testing of Hypotheses

The testing of hypotheses was entirely based on the accepted model of the study as depicted in Fig. 2 above.

H_1: Coercive (COE) and coaching (COA) leadership styles represent the leadership styles practices of the English subject teachers at the selected national secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

The findings revealed that COE and COA were measured by five and seven indicators respectively. These indicators loaded perfectly into their respective factors as depicted both by Table 1 andFig. 2 previously. In addition, the model above exhibits reasonably good fit and thus represented the model of study. Therefore, H_1 is indisputably accepted.

H_2: There is a significant relationship between English subject teachers' leadership styles practices with the students' AP/AE in selected national secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

The second findings revealed that COA had a very significant direct relationship (path coefficient β=.75) with AP/AE. Indeed, COA was proved to be most welcomed and effective in influencing the AP/AE. However, in contrary, there was a strong evidence that COE style of leadership of English teachers in that particular schools were not welcomed and thus failed to influence the AP/AE of students. This is depicted by the path coefficient β = - .11. Therefore, the study partially accepted H_2.

We suggest, firstly, future research need to enlarge the scope so that the study will be able to generalize the findings to all public schools (national primary and secondary schools) in Malaysia. Secondly, the potential researcher needs to consider other research design approaches such as qualitative or mixed method design. Despite the fact that the survey questionnaire used here has well established reliability and validity, psychometric properties of the questionnaire should be further evaluated when employed in a new context to ensure credibility of the results. Next, further study should include teachers' leadership outcomes

to examine to what extent the teachers' leadership styles practices influence the students' AP/AE and their academic achievement.

Theoretically, we cannot expect all English subject teachers here will practice a specific or all leadership style/s as there is no established and recognized formula in determining the most successful leadership style/s that will affect the students' AP/AE. The awareness and appropriateness of employing different leadership styles in different types of schools with different vision and goals will provide more focused perception of the students' needs. However, the findings from this study are expected to benefit all other subject teachers in all schools in Malaysia with regard to students AP/AE. Besides, the findings from this particular study also will enrich the existing indigenous body of knowledge in the area of educational management and leadership for learning at least in Malaysian context.

V. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, the SEM produced results which were in keeping with the expectation that academic press/emphasis is determined by leadership styles practices particularly COA and COE. Interestingly there is strong evidence that almost all English subject teachers from all three selected schools understudy did not exhibit COE leadership style. They might probably try to avoid in practicing COE leadership style as this would create reinforcement patterns among the students. For this reason, Bass and Riggio (2006), described COE leadership style as the absence of leadership.

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