TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES

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DEDICATION

In Memory of Loved Ones

A Beloved Mother,
Mariyam Ahmed Didi

A Dear Wife,
Fathimath Abdulla Didi

And in heartfelt gratitude to the Supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Ts. Dr. Mohamad Hisyam bin Mohd Hashim and friends struggle together to give encouragement as well all UTHM residents who always give support.
"Thank you for the prayers and blessings that always accompany the struggle as well as this success"

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I sincerely hope that this research will be of some benefit to my country, the Maldives, and also others.

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ABSTRACT

The leadership of school principals in the Republic of Maldives is an important pillar in the use of the new generation in this small archipelago. School principals play an important role in ensuring that the development of school education is continuous, including the development of the school as a 21st century learning institution, outstanding student achievement and continuous improvement in positive values. Nowadays, the challenges in achieving high quality education cause an increase in demand for effective leaders in school institutions. To overcome this problem, the Maldives Ministry of Education has made an initiative to improve the effectiveness of leadership and also school development. However, this effort poses many challenges, especially in preparing a new generation of school leaders who are flexible and ready to face educational changes. The challenge in forming effective leaders requires a change in leadership behavior in education. School principals are asked to try to analyze their current leadership approach and assess the issues and challenges they must face when implementing the transformation. Therefore, this study aims to explore, understand, and explain the leadership transformation of selected school principals in the Republic of Maldives by using a qualitative research methodology through a case study strategy. Data was collected through 3 methods namely interviews, document analysis and observation. However, the main method of data collection is interviews. Document analysis and observation methods only support the interview data. Those involved in this study were 4 principals, 3 teachers and 5 students. The locations of the study involved are 3 selected schools that have certain characteristics in Male', the capital of the Republic of Maldives. All data obtained were managed using NVivo version 11.0 and analyzed using thematic concepts where categories were produced, and themes were arranged. The result of this study is a conceptual new comprehensive understanding framework that describes the transformation of school principal leadership in the Republic of Maldives. This framework contains five (5) main components which are the main role of school principals to change school leadership, the practices of school leaders in ensuring transformation, existing challenges, ways to overcome challenges and strategies for improvement. Each component has its own element that provides an in-depth explanation of the component. In conclusion, this research has provided valuable information about the leadership of school principals. The framework that was developed also acts as a guide for many parties to change the leadership of school principals. The recommendation to the results of this study is to continue the study in a larger context and involve many other schools in the Maldives using different data collection and analysis methods. The results of this study can also be used to generate hypotheses for quantitative research as a continuation of the research.

ABSTRAK

Kepemimpinan pengetua sekolah di republik Maldives menjadi tonggak penting dalam pembangunaan generasi baru di kepulauan yang kecil ini. Pengetua sekolah memainkan peranan penting dalam memastikan pembangunan pendidikan sekolah sentiasa berterusan termasuklah pembangunan sekolah sebagai institusi pembelajaran abad ke-21, pencapaian pelajar yang cemerlang dan berterusan dalam meningkatkan nilai-nilai positif. Pada masa kini, cabaran dalam mencapai kualiti pendidikan yang tinggi menyebabkan peningkatan permintaan terhadap pemimpin yang berkesan di institusi sekolah. Untuk mengatasi masalah ini, Kementerian Pendidikan Maldives telah membuat inisiatif untuk meningkatkan keberkesanan kepemimpinan dan juga pembangunan sekolah. Walau bagaimanapun, usaha ini menimbulkan banyak cabaran, terutama dalam mempersiapkan generasi baru pemimpin sekolah yang fleksibel dan bersedia menghadapi perubahan pendidikan. Cabaran dalam membentuk pemimpin yang berkesan memerlukan perubahan tingkah laku kepemimpinan dalam pendidikan. Pengetua sekolah diminta untuk berusaha keras menganalisis pendekatan kepemimpinan mereka sekarang dan menilai isu dan cabaran yang harus mereka hadapi ketika melaksanakan transformasi. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka, memahami, dan menjelaskan transformasi kepemimpinan pengetua sekolah yang terpilih di Republik Maldives dengan menggunakan metodologi penyelidikan kualitatif melalui strategi kajian kes. Data dikumpulkan melalui 3 kaedah iaitu temubual, analisis dokumen dan pemerhatian. Walau bagaimanapun, metod utama pengumpulan data adalah temubual. Metod analisis dokumen dan pemerhatian hanyalah menyokong data temubual. Mereka yang terlibat dalam kajian ini adalah 4 pengetua, 3 guru dan 5 pelajar. Lokasi kajian yang terlibat pula adalah 3 buah sekolah yang terpilih yang mempumyai ciri-ciri tertentu di Male' iaitu ibu negara Republik Maldives. Semua data yang diperolehi diuruskan menggunakan NVivo versi 11.0 dan dianalisis menggunakan konsep tematik dimana kategori dihasilkan dan tema diwujudkan. Hasil kajian ini adalah kerangka konseptual pemahaman komprehensif baru yang menggambarkan transformasi kepemimpinan pengetua sekolah di Republik Maldives. Kerangka ini mengandungi lima (5) komponen utama iaitu peranan utama pengetua sekolah untuk mengubah kepemimpinan sekolah, amalan pemimpin sekolah dalam memastikan transformasi, cabaran yang ada, cara mengatasi cabaran dan strategi untuk penambahbaikan. Setiap komponen mempunyai unsurnya tersendiri yang memberi penjelasan mendalam mengenai komponen tersebut. Kesimpulannya, penyelidikan ini telah memberi maklumat berharga mengenai kepemimpinan pengetua sekolah. Kerangka yang dibangunkan ini juga bertindak sebagai panduan kepada banyak pihak untuk mengubah kepemimpinan pengetua sekolah. Cadangan kepada hasil kajian ini adalah meneruskan kajian dalam kontek yang lebih besar dan melibatkan banyak sekolah dikepulauan Maldives yang lain menggunakan metod pengumpulan data dan kaedah analisis yang berbeza. Hasil kajian ini juga boleh digunakan untuk menjana hipotesis untuk penyelidikan kuantitatif sebagai kesinambungan penyelidikan.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCE	-	Centre for Continuing Education
ESQIS	-	Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Section
UNICEF	-	United Nations Children's Fund
UTHM	-	Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Effective leadership is crucial for the development of an organization at micro level as it is essential for the nation on a macro level. Good 'leadership' comes from a capable person who is called a 'leader'. Leaders play an important role in designing and implementing development plans for an organization. Great, charismatic and dedicated leaders transform the institutions and people they lead and bring about advancement and rapid growth. An effective leader is also capable of realizing the vision and mission of an organization. In the business field, an effective leader can bring great profits and good performance to a company. Conspicuously, a leader is responsible to ensure that an organization achieves its goals with the integration of all subordinates.

The meaning of leadership is complex, and the concept is hard to define. It is a multifaceted phenomenon in relation to which the context and the followers have a very important role to play (Silva, 2016). The definition of the term 'leadership' is given by Burns (2012) as leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations-the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations of both leaders and followers. Silva (2016) concluded that 'leadership' can be defined as the process of interactive influence that occurs when, in a given context, some people accept someone as their leader to achieve common goals. 'Leadership' can also be explained by stating that leaders who seek their personal good and not the good of the organization would be classified as "bad" leaders, whereas leaders who focus on the good of the employees and the good of the organization would be classified as "good" leaders (Winston & Patterson, 2006). Thus, leadership

includes how the leader convinces and influences his/her subordinates in achieving goals that have been set.

The definitions of the term 'leadership' suggest that the process involves a transition from a given and current state or condition of the followers to a future state desired by the leader that can be accomplished by achieving the targeted goal (Bentley, 2011). After reviewing some of the definitions of 'leadership', Silong & Hassan (2009) concluded that there are key elements of importance in the practice of leadership. They are: (1) leadership is a group phenomenon–it involves the leader and followers; (2) leadership occurs in a context–a community, organization or group; (3) leadership involves influence; and (4) leadership involves the accomplishment of goals. In addition, O'Shaughnessy (2009), in discussing the meaning of the term 'leadership', clarified that:

> "Leadership is about the organizational improvement: more specifically it is all about establishing widely agreed-upon and worthwhile directions for the organization and doing whatever it takes to prod and support people to move in those directions. Our generic definition of leadership…is very simple; then, it is about direction and influence" (p. 11).

In the context of a school setting, leadership is very important since it is what shapes the next generation of leaders both in the context of the school and the wider community. School leadership, headed by a 'principal', is responsible for achieving the vision and mission of the organization. The 'principal' is an individual who acts as a key player in the improvement of a school as an organization and as a learning institution. A principal has to ensure that he has the capability to handle his subordinates. He significantly influences student performances and academic results indirectly by facilitating instructional leadership and organizational management as well as internal and external relations (Poloncic, 2016). He must be available, accessible and approachable at all times and also be able to deliver information to subordinates by giving clear instructions. The responsibilities of a principal are bound to become more complex from time to time as the dynamics of the school system and education evolves. Notably, there are certain principals still involved in a former practice that related to the school teaching goals. A study by Marfan & Pascual (2018) in Chile revealed that principals in the country are more likely involved in the former

practice than concern in teacher's work in the classroom, in which that action affects more on teacher's attitude and professional practices rather than teaching improvement, which reduces a potential to promote teacher's performance.

Principals must be good managers and excellent instructional leaders. They are responsible for articulating the vision for a successful school and increased student achievement (Wilson, 2013). In addition, principals must be able to communicate well with the people working with and under them in the school organization. As mentioned by Ismail (2012), a principal's leadership style is seen is his behaviour in the process of leading the school, and in how he interrelates with teachers, students, parents and other school staff. The same author also added that an effective leadership style practiced by a principal would create a positive climate in the school. A study by Khanal, Perry, & Park (2019) in Nepal suggested a frame of principal leadership practices. The frame is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

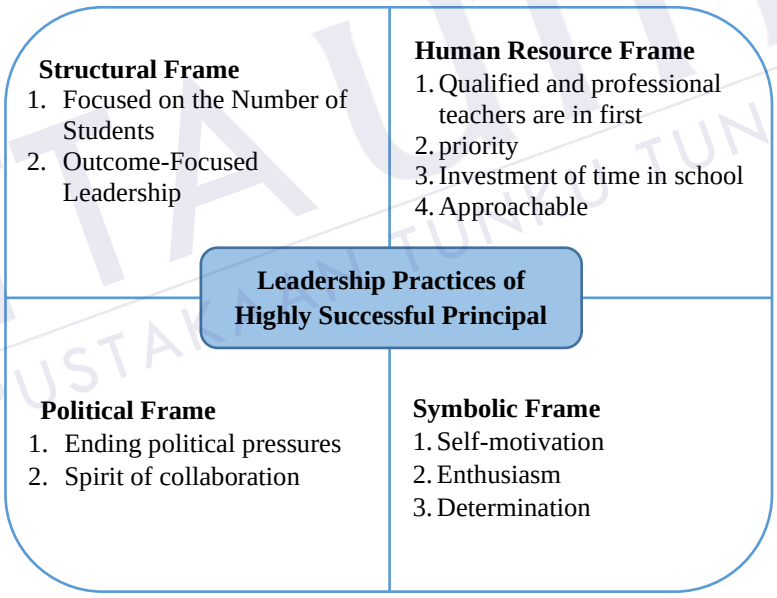

Figure 1.1: A frame of leadership practices of school principals (Khanal *et al.*, 2019)

Each frame explains the roles played by school principals to ensure successful leadership for the school. The explanation of each frame is seen in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Explanation of principal leadership practice frame

Frames	Explanation
Structural frame	The principal used energy and role to find ways to nourish and encourage parents to eliminate a context of mistrust in the quality of their schools which had resulted in low student enrollment
Human Resource Frame	The principal pursuit of judiciousness attempting to cope with the challenges of low-achievement, poor-quality education which has seriously undermined public confidence and caused low parental trust
Political Frame	Principal well demonstrated in their neutrality and actions to adopt the Schools as a Zone of Peace initiative, launched by UNICEF during the decade-long war in Nepal
Symbolic Frame	The principal worked to consistently encourage teachers to learn and apply the best pedagogical practices

The study shows that each frame has different roles and allows the school principal to work with flexibility and adaptability in multiple contexts (Khanal *et al.*, 2019).

Nowadays, the topic of school leadership is being debated extensively. In the Maldives, schools are struggling to ensure improvement of student achievement. Transformational leadership is one of the forms of leadership that can be adopted by school principals in responding to current challenges. As mentioned by Smith (2016), transformational leadership has been found to have a positive impact on the school and organizational conditions. Transformational leadership is a type or style of leadership that produces institutional leaders and purposefully stimulates changes and innovations by inspiring followers to achieve special results, improve themselves and take responsibilities for the institution (Navickaite & Janiunaite, 2012). Anderson (2017) has stated that most modern researchers see transformational leadership as the most appropriate leadership style for schools.

In the same way, transformational leadership has been found in the previous study in the field of the school principal and it is one of the most common theories in the educational leadership area (Poloncic, 2016). It also appears best suited to meet the needs of current school reform efforts because transformational leaders seek to align personal and shared values and goals to bring about increased capacity and commitment (Boberg, 2013). In addition, transformational leadership is also known as a type of shared or distributed leadership. The concept is more on organizational entity

rather than the property of a single individual, accounting for multiple sources of leadership (Hallinger, 2010). While educational environments such as schools pose many challenges, including schools and their educational leaders, transformational leadership is seen to be one of the most effective approaches for school principals to overcome those challenges. It should be advocated more widely to school principals and other educational leaders, and should feature much more prominently in the preparation experiences of those aspiring to formal school leadership positions (Leithwood, 1994).

Rapid changes in the educational environment have caused many countries to put initiatives to enhance their educational systems. This sector plays an important role in promoting sustainable development through an individual progression for the socio-economic improvement of society. In the Maldives, educational development is considered as of utmost importance, with the national Constitution declaring education as a fundamental human right and mandating the government to provide free education up to grade 10 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Education in the Maldives has its roots in a traditional system of schooling which has been in place for hundreds of years. Traditional schools, or teaching-and-learning centers, were self-financed and mostly owned and run by private individuals or by island communities (Ngang, 2011).

1.2 Research Background

The school is a starting point for future educational development of children. In developing the quality of education in schools, principals play a vital role. A principal takes up and, through his skills, dedication and personality, performs the job of ensuring that students finish schooling with excellent achievements. The principal must have leadership skills including the ability to delegate, manage, inspire, and communicate so that he can help boost school performance and achievements. The roles or functions of principals is pervasive in the context of the school and cover many different areas such as leadership of the school administration and academic processes, evaluation of teachers, student discipline, dealing with parents, and many others. Being an effective principal is about being able to balance all these roles and working hard to ensure that he is doing the best for all constituents involved.

Education in the Maldives has seen significant improvements for the past two decades. The Maldivian government offers free education, whereas the private or

community schools charge monthly fees. The Ministry of Education is primarily focusing on improving the quality of elementary and secondary education (Naseer, 2013).

Foundation Phase Foundation phase caters to the children between 4-6 years of age. The aim of the foundation phase is to ensure that young children have access to holistic, play-based learning experiences that support their development of coordination skills, psychomotor skills as well as their aptitudes. At this phase Learning should be fun for children and should motivate them to Engage in learning. The early years of learning should, especially, protect and promote children's wellbeing, and should provide a strong foundation for lifelong learning. The focus of learning at this phase is on experience and play and does not offer separate subjects. Instead, an integrated approach to learning and development is adopted. Most of the learning in this phase relates to skills rather than knowledge and learning activities should be planned in a way that children are engaged in experiencing all the key learning areas. For a smooth transition from this phase to the next, building students' confidence and self-esteem is a priority. Likewise, literacy and numeracy should be encouraged. In addition, teachers should observe and record student achievements in various forms. Overtime, a portfolio with annotated samples, teacher notes and photographs and the child's efforts need to be produced as evidence of learning.

Primary Phase The primary phase of school education begins at key stage 1 (grades 1 – 3) and ends at key stage 2 (grades 4 – 6). Six years of primary education are compulsory. The purpose of primary education is to create a love for learning and to provide a foundation of skills for lifelong learning. In primary school, opportunities will be provided for students to enjoy learning, explore and discover new knowledge, demonstrate different methods of presenting information and creating knowledge. Learning will be focused on students taking risks, learning 24 | PAGE National Institute of Education National Curriculum Framework from mistakes, and achievement. Students will be encouraged to become independent learners. Students will be exposed to a wide range of experiences and activities that develop essential knowledge, skills and values.

Lower Secondary Phase Lower secondary education is a four-year phase, divided into two key stages (key stage 3 and 4). During this phase, students continue to develop a

range of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that enable them to become enterprising, productive, creative and law-abiding members of the society who have a firm grounding in moral and Islamic values. This phase of schooling allows students to explore possible career pathways, and prepares students for higher education, for employment and for life. Key stage 3 acts as a bridging stage between the primary and secondary phases, with students being offered a balance of subjects from all key learning areas. When they progress to key stage 4, students have a range of electives to choose from, and it is expected that the foundation laid for the different key learning areas in previous key stages, will assist students to make the right choices and allow them to understand where their skills and interests lie.

Higher Secondary Phase The higher secondary phase is the two-year period students spend at key stage 5. These last two years of school education provide a platform for exploring an in-depth understanding of specialized areas that would prepare students for higher education and employment School education in the Maldives begins for a child when he/she reaches the age of five years and is completed when the child reaches the age of 18. It is compulsory for a child, male or female, to start school education if he/she is five years of age by the beginning of the school year. After a year in pre-primary, at the age of 6, they would move on to primary school, which comprises of grades 1-7. Upon completion of primary school, they would then be promoted to lower secondary school where they would complete grades 8-10, between the ages of 13 and 15. Higher secondary schooling would be completed by the time the child reaches the age of 17 years. The journey of a child in the Maldivian schooling process is illustrated in Figure 1.2.

PTTA UTHM PERPUSTAKAAN TUNKU TUN AMINAH

Age	Grade	Key stages	Phase
18,17	12	Key Stage 5	Higher Secondary
17,16	11		
16,15	10	Key Stage 4	Lower Secondary
15, 14	9		
14,13	8	Key Stage 3	
13,12	7		
12,11	6	Key Stage 2	Primary
11,10	5		
10,9	4		
9,8	3	Key Stage 1	
8,7	2		
7,6	1		
6,5	UKG	Foundation	Foundation
5	LKG		

Figure 1.2 School grades and stages in the Maldives

The quality and standard of education is a major challenge facing the educational sector in the Maldives. Aturupane & Shojo, (2012) stated that the standard of education in the Maldives was low and needed urgent improvement. It is, therefore, a huge responsibility of the Ministry of Education to take all measures to enhance the quality of education and raise standards in the country's schools. They must take responsibility for the provision and supervision of better education throughout the country. While that is the case, limited authority is given to school principals in the Maldives due to the policy considerations of the Ministry of Education at a time when there is a need for school principals to contribute more academically and collaborate with the teachers (Ngang, 2011).

In schools, effective leadership on the part of the principal is not only important for long-term achievement, but it ensures to maintain sustainability after they left the school. Good leadership by the principal would create a better school environment. Principal and the senior management team are seen as the key agents at the school level, initiating changes by raising the level of expectations from both teachers and students (Mohd Ali & Ali, 2015). In relation to principals in Maldivian schools,

leadership issues have become a vital factor that affects the capacity to improve the quality of education. One of the most challenging issues faced by schools and educational authorities is that of preserving 'quality leaders' and filling up the leadership positions with effective leaders (Eacott, 2010). Schools of the Maldives are facing a major issue as there is a persistent need to hire foreign experts every year to cater for the needs of at least 20 percent of the schools, as local principals regularly resign due to increasingly demanding responsibilities (Mohd Ali & Ali, 2015). This situation should be addressed wisely to enhance the quality of education in the country.

There are varieties of leadership styles that can be adopted and employed by a school principal in leading a school organization. A new leadership transformation should be evolved to create a better environment in school education. There is an introduction of new concerns of transformational leadership on principals from which they change their conventional leadership style into transformative one by experimenting in their day to day activities (Pokharel, 2014).

As aforementioned, Anderson (2017) stated that most modern researchers see transformational leadership as the most appropriate leadership style for schools, and this researcher strongly concurs with that proposition. It is a style of leadership which suits the school environment more compared to other styles, as it involves leadership practices and processes in which leaders and followers work together. As stated by Burns (2012), transformational leadership is a process in which leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation. It is more about how the leaders prudently influence the followers to work together beyond their self-interests only. Transformational leadership refers to the leader moving the follower beyond immediate self-interests through idealized influence (charisma), inspiration, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration (Bass, 1999). In addition, transformational leadership is an intrinsically based motivational process whereby leaders engage followers to create a connection that raises the level of effort and moral aspiration in both (Fry, 2003).

Furthermore, transformational leadership can meet the needs of current school reforms because transformational leaders seek to align personal and shared values and goals to bring about increased capacity and commitment (Boberg, 2013). For school principals, transformational leadership is the involvement in improvement efforts since it raises the level of workers' awareness, so that they come to value organizational goals and strategies to achieve the objectives (Alger, 2008). The efforts

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