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## **Relationship between Strategic Thinking Skills and Motivation to Lead among School Teachers in Malaysia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Efforts to capitalize on educational excellence demand the commitment of teachers as leaders in schools to develop continuous improvement strategies. Teachers are even encouraged to develop strategic thinking skills as a prerequisite for improving school leadership capabilities. In general this study aimed to identify the level of strategic thinking skills and the level of leadership motivation among school teachers. In addition, the relationship between strategic thinking and leadership motivation among school teachers was also explored. The cross-sectional survey method was applied in the quantitative data collection process involving 456 respondents selected using a stratified random sampling method. The instrument used consisted of three sections: respondent demographic information, Strategic Thinking skills questionnaire, and Leadership Motivation questionnaire. The results showed that strategic thinking skills were at a high level while school teacher leadership motivation was at a moderate level. Pearson correlation test results showed that strategic thinking skills had a statistically significant positive relationship with school teacher leadership motivation. As such, it is hoped that the school administrators will be able to provide appropriate focus on the aspects of strategic thinking skills and leadership motivation towards enhancing school leadership capabilities.

**Keywords:** Motivation to lead, School teachers, Teacher leadership.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The implementation of the Malaysian Education Development Plan (2013-2025) sets the goals and aspirations for upholding the quality education system in Malaysia. It is hoped that an effective united effort will be made through the cooperation of all parties, especially the commitment of educators in schools (Mohd Najib Abdul Razak, 2012). In this regard, to improve the quality of the education system in general and the excellence of the school in particular, the national education system has focused on leadership at every level (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Usually at school level, leadership is often given to school principals. However, there is another dimension of school leadership that can help to improve school excellence, namely teacher leadership (Norashikin Abu Bakar, Ramli Basri & Foo Say Fooi, 2015).

In this decade the principal is no longer considered the 'only leader' who makes the decision for continuous improvement for students' academic achievement (Greenwood, 2011). Besides principal leadership, teacher leadership has also been a topic of discussion in efforts to improve teaching professionalism and school reform (Billingsley, 2007). In addition, based on the previous study, scholars have found that strategic teacher leadership can impact student academic achievement in schools (Hairudin, 2012). In fact, Kowalski (2010) also emphasized that effective leadership strategies must exist at all levels in the school. In this regard, school teachers are required to develop strong leadership skills and to be able to master strategic skills to formulate effective school improvement strategies. (Davies, 2004; Davies & Davies, 2004; Eacott, 2008; Fullan, 2007).

Looking from a macro perspective, the fifth shift in the implementation agenda of PPPM (2013-2025) sets out a desire to bring together a group of leadership talent capable of embracing the values of wisdom, strategic thinking and leadership mindset (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2012). In fact, efforts to incorporate school leadership skills are a key step in improving the quality of the education system and developing teacher professionalism (Hairuddin, 2012). However, Kho, Hamidah Yusof and Syed Ismail Syed Mohamad (2016) stated that there is still a misunderstanding about the importance of developing leadership skills in the school improvement agenda. Even Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) found that there are groups of teachers who do not recognize themselves as school leaders. This has

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raised concerns over the successful implementation of PPPM (2013 - 2025) (Akma et al., 2013). In this regard, the school needs to be proactive in establishing a learning community in order to provide a platform for teachers to work and to find new ways to improve the development of teacher professionalism and teacher self-motivation.

## RESEARCH METHOD

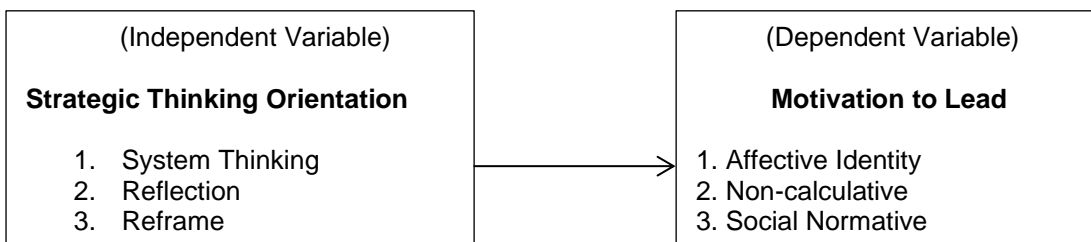
Specifically, the objectives of this study were to:

- a. Identify the level of strategic thinking skills and leadership motivation among school teachers.
- b. Identify the significant relationship of strategic thinking skills and leadership motivation among school teachers.

The Ministry of Education Malaysia (2012) is seriously focusing on the direction of national education through the implementation of the Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM 2013 - 2025). PPPM (2013 - 2025) is designed in detail to ensure that educational progress is constantly improved by incorporating strategic thinking elements in developing leadership talent. According to Haycock, Cheadle and Bluestone (2012), if every member of the organization has a good level of strategic thinking, they will be able to benefit through actions that lead to the achievement of organizational goals and objectives. In fact, Ghorbani and Kiani (2012) also found that individuals who are able to think strategically, are always ready for change and are able to act towards realizing organizational goals.

The strategic thinking skills in this research refer to the skills of individuals who practice thinking activities to benefit the organization. The goal is to find detailed competitive strategies towards achieving organizational goals. These thinking activities are also able to contribute to the broader concept and focus on the future direction of the organization in order to continue operations in line with current situation. (Haycock et al., 2012).

Chan and Drasgow (2001) stated that the construction of various non-cognitive capabilities such as personality and values are related to leader behavior. Leadership motivation in individuals affects the individual's participation in leadership activities and the role of leadership. Therefore, Chan and Drasgow (2001) stated that motivation for leadership is a precursor of leadership behavior that also acts as a mediator in the relationship of other characteristics and leadership behaviors such as personality, cognitive ability and values.



*Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework: The influence of Strategic thinking on motivation to lead.*

In addition, strategic thinking skills are an important component of identifying effective levels of leadership and leadership within an organization (Pisapia, 2009; Pisapia et al., 2011; Yukl, 2013). In fact, Davies (2004), Davies and Davies (2004), and Eacott (2006) have also suggested strategic thinking and ability to take action as elements that enable them to effectively develop their intrinsic motivation, ability and leadership ability. Based on the research conceptual framework shown in Figure 1 above, strategic thinking skills have a direct influence on the motivation to lead. Therefore, the main focus of this research was conducted based on the research framework discussed earlier.

In general, this study was conducted using a cross-sectional survey approach whereby the process of collecting quantitative data was through respondents' questionnaires.. The population of this study was teachers who teach at the primary (SK) and secondary (SMK) schools in the northern part of the peninsula. A total of 456 respondents were selected from 40 schools using the stratified random sampling method based on the recommendations of Cohen, Manion and Marrison (2011) and Chua (2006).

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The instruments used in the study were the Strategic Thinking Questionnaire (Pisapia et al., 2011), and the Motivation to Lead questionnaire (Chan & Drasgow, 2001). The strategic thinking skills questionnaire was divided into three categories namely reframing, reflection and thinking systems, whereas the motivational questionnaire was divided into three main dimensions namely affective, social normative and non-calculative. The descriptive analysis of the study used (SPSS) version 25 while Pearson correlation test was used to test the relationship between the two variables.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Strategic Thinking Skills.

Overall, the school teachers' strategic thinking skills level was relatively high ( $M = 4.57$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ). However, the level of strategic thinking skills in the SMK category schools ( $M = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 0.57$ ) was higher than the level of strategic thinking skills in the SK category schools ( $M = 4.56$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ). An analysis of the strategic thinking skills dimensions found that the dimensions of the thinking system ( $M = 4.81$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ) were found to be higher than the means of the reflection dimensions ( $M = 4.63$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ) and the dimensions of re-framing ( $M = 4.13$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ).

### Motivation to Lead

In summary, the results of the descriptive analysis showed that primary-school teachers overall showed a moderate level of motivation to lead ( $M = 4.22$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ). When examined in more detail in the descriptive analysis of motivation to lead dimensions, both categories of schools showed a relatively higher mean for social normative dimensions than the other dimensions. However the social normative dimension of the SK category ( $M = 4.51$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ) was higher than the social normative dimension of the SMK category ( $M = 4.48$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ).

### Relationship

Pearson correlation test results showed that strategic thinking skills had a statistically significant positive relationship ( $r = .32$ ,  $p < .01$ ) with motivation to lead among school teachers. This significantly positive relationship indicated that teachers with high levels of strategic thinking skills exhibited high levels of motivation to lead, while low levels of strategic thinking skills exhibited low levels of motivation to lead.

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study were in line with Jelenc and Pisapia (2015), and Pang and Pisapia (2012) who stated that the key aspects identified in driving leadership effectiveness were the factors of strategic approach. Pisapia (2009) and Pisapia et al. (2011) strongly advocated the development of direct strategic thinking skills in the early stages of establishing a leadership profile towards the organization's highest management team. Thus, the findings of this analysis would enable the management to accept without prejudice that the transformation of leadership in organizational management and readiness into leadership skills development depends directly on the style and approach of strategic management thinking of organizational management. Therefore, it is hoped that the school administrators would be able to give proper focus on the aspects of strategic thinking skills and leadership motivation among school teachers. School management should practice the strategic approach to develop strategic skills among school members. It is hoped that this study would serve as a source of reference and information for those who would continue their struggle as researchers in the field of education management and training in the future.

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