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**CONTEXTUAL LEADERSHIP:  
LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL  
PRINCIPALS IN MALAYSIA**



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## Abstrak

Kajian terkini ke atas kaedah yang diaplikasikan oleh pengetua sekolah yang berjaya daripada dua puluh negara membuktikan bahawa kepimpinan adalah lebih rumit pada asalnya, dan sangat bergantung kepada konteks dan tiada istilah 'satu saiz sepadan dengan semua' bagi model kepimpinan. Sebaliknya, pengetua yang berjaya telah menggubal amalan kepimpinan mereka berdasarkan konteks pemikiran yang dirasakan unik bagi mereka. Oleh kerana masih kekurangan kajian sedemikian dilakukan di Malaysia, kajian kes secara kualitatif ini dijalankan di sebuah sekolah yang berada di bandar dan di sebuah lagi sekolah di luar bandar bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti konteks sekolah yang dipraktikkan oleh kedua-dua pengetua yang berjaya tersebut dan bagaimana mereka menggubal kaedah kepimpinan utama mereka mengikut konteks mereka yang tersendiri. Kajian ini melibatkan temu bual, pemerhatian kepada nota dan pengumpulan data berdasarkan penelitian dokumen sekolah. Pengetua kedua-dua sekolah, tiga orang guru, pelajar dan waris serta seorang pegawai tadbir daripada kedua-dua sekolah telah di temu bual dengan menggunakan protokol temu bual separa struktur. Kedua-dua sekolah juga telah dilawati beberapa kali bagi tujuan pemerhatian, penelitian maklumat dan pengumpulan data tambahan daripada para responden. Analisis kes individu kepada kedua-dua sekolah mendapati satu set tujuh amalan teras dikenalpasti digunakan oleh pengetua sekolah pertama manakala satu set lima amalan teras dikenalpasti digunakan oleh pengetua sekolah kedua. Hasil kajian juga mendapati kedua-dua pengetua mempraktikkan enakmen kajian terperinci berdasarkan konteks. Satu analisis berdasarkan kajian yang lebih mendalam mendapati praktis utama kedua-dua pengetua terdiri daripada lima dimensi yang disokong baik oleh kepimpinan dalam kesusasteraan pendidikan. Kelima-lima dimensi tersebut adalah (a) Strategi; (b) Pedagogi; (c) Pentadbiran; (d) Kemanusiaan; (e) Kolaborasi. Hasil dapatan kajian dibincang dari segi pentadbiran sekolah kini dan mempunyai kepentingan kepada pengetua, penggubal polisi dan institusi latihan kepimpinan sekolah. Limitasi kajian dan penambahbaikan untuk kajian lanjutan turut dimuatkan dalam kajian kes ini.

**Kata Kunci:** Kepimpinan Pendidikan, Kepimpinan Berkonteks, Pengetua Sekolah, Kajian Kes, Kajian Kualitatif.

## Abstract

Recent studies of the practices of successful school principals in more than twenty countries have revealed that leadership practices are more complex in nature, are heavily dependent upon the context and that there is no ‘one size fits all’ model for leadership. In the absence of similar studies conducted in Malaysia, this qualitative case study of one urban and one rural school attempts to identify the school contexts under which the two successful principals operate and how they enact their core leadership practices in response to their own contexts. The study utilizes interviews, observation notes and scanning of school documents for data collection. The principals of the two schools, three teachers, three students, three parents and one senior administrator from each of the two schools were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol. Both the schools were visited several times for observations, data scanning and collection of additional data from the respondents. Individual case analysis of the two schools revealed a set of seven core practices for the principal of the first school while a set of five core practices were identified for the principal of the second school. The findings also revealed specific context-based enactment of these core practices by the two principals. A subsequent in-depth cross-case analysis revealed that the core practices of the two principals fell within five distinct dimensions which are well supported by educational leadership literature. These five dimensions are (a) Strategic; (b) Pedagogic; (c) Administrative; (d) Humanistic; (e) Collaborative. While first three dimensions are well supported by the literature on the practices of successful school principals, the humanistic and collaborative dimensions have little reference and thus are new findings. The findings are discussed in the light of current school leadership literature and have significance for the principals, policymakers and school leadership training institutes. The limitations of the study and recommendations for further research are also included.

**Keywords:** Educational Leadership, Contextual Leadership, School Principal, Case Study, Qualitative study.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF STUDY

### 1.1 Introduction

*“Leadership is practiced not so much in words as in attitude and in actions.”-*  
*Harold S. Geneen*

Educational leadership is second only to teacher quality in important matters related to school quality, outstripping all other factors (Heck & Hallinger, 2014; Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi, 2010; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2011; Sun & Leithwood, 2015; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003; Zeinabadi, 2014). However, a large majority of the influence of leadership practices on school improvement is indirect; mediated by a range of school and classroom-related conditions which are, empirically, directly linked with enhanced student learning (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2013; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Leithwood & Louis, 2011; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Robinson, Lloyd & Lloyd, 2008). Teacher quality no doubt has the greatest effect on students’ performance and school’s success but the indirect effect of school leadership on students is also present through motivating teachers, thereby increasing their instructional quality (Fullan, 2001; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Sergiovanni, 2001; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2003), in their meta-analysis of 70 empirical studies carried in the past 30 years clearly demonstrate that there is a strong relationship between school leadership and student achievement. The finding is in line with the large body of qualitative research that demonstrates similar relationship (Hallinger, 2005). Almost all modern educational

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## APPENDIX A

### Permission Letter from EPRD to conduct the Study



BAHAGIAN PERANCANGAN DAN PENYELIDIKAN DASAR HUNDIKUAN  
KEMENTERIAN PENDIDIKAN MALAYSIA  
ARAS 1-4, BLOK E-8  
KOMPLEKS KERAJAAN PARCEL E  
PUSAT PENYADARAN KERAJAAN PERSEKUTUAN  
JASATI PUTRAJAYA.

Telefon : 03-88846591  
Faks : 03-88846579

Ruj. Kemil : KP(BPPDF)603/S/OLD.11 (169)  
Tarikh : 12 Disember 2014

Mohammad Noman  
107 Taman Teja  
Seri Teja 4  
06070 Changliah  
Kedah

Tuan/Puan,

**Kelulusan Untuk Menjalankan Kajian Di Sekolah, Institut Pendidikan Guru, Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Dan Bahagian-Bahagian Di Bawah Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia**

Adalah saya dengan hormatnya darah meniadakan bahawa permohonan tuan /puan untuk menjalankan kajian bertajuk:

" **Contextual Leadership Investigating The Practices Of Successful School Principals In Malaysian Context** " diluluskan.

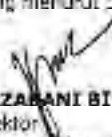
2. Kelulusan ini adalah berdasarkan kepada bidangan penyelidikan dan instrumen kajian yang Tuan/Puan kemukakan ke Bahagian ini. Kebenaran bagi menggunakan sampel kajian perlu diperolehi dari Ketua Bahagian/Pendarah Pendidikan Negeri yang berkenaan.

3. Sila Tuan/puan kemukakan ke Bahagian ini serentak laporan akhir kajian/laporan dalam bentuk elektronik dan format Pdf di dalam CD bersama naskah hardcopy setelah selesai kerja. Tuan/Puan juga diminta supaya mendapat kebenaran terlebih dahulu daripada Bahagian ini sekiranya sebahagian atau sepenuhnya dapatan kajian tersebut hendak dibentangkan di mana-mana forum atau seminar atau diumumkan kepada media massa.

Sekiranya maklumat dan tindakan Tuan/puan selanjutnya, Terima kasih.

**"BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA"**

Saya yang menurut perintah.

  
**(DR. HJ. ZANANI BIN DARUS)**  
Ketua Sektor  
Sektor Penyelidikan dan Pentaksiran  
ibu. Pengarah  
Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelidikan Dasar/Pendidikan  
Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Letter of Invitation – Principal**

#### **INVITATION**

Dear Principal,

My name is Mohammad Noman, a Ph.D. candidate from the School of Education, SEML, College of Arts and Sciences, UUM, Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia. I am writing this to request your participation in my research entitled “CONTEXTUAL LEADERSHIP: EXAMINING THE PRACTICES OF SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN MALAYSIAN CONTEXT”.

This study has three major focus areas:

1. investigate the core leadership practices of successful school Principals in Kedah, Malaysia
2. delve deeper into the understanding of how these principals enact the core leadership practices in Malaysian schools.
3. identify the context in which successful school principals work in Malaysia.

The research will be conducted through multi-site case study method. Data will be collected through a variety of methods which includes interviews of the participants, observation, and data scanning. The interviews might last from 30 minutes to one hour. A follow-up interview will be requested if more information is needed at a later stage.



Please bear in mind that the interviews will be recorded. The researcher promises to use the recording only for transcription purposes. I fully understand that confidentiality and anonymity are vital principle of this process. If for any reasons, you would not like your name to be revealed, please indicate so while giving your acceptance. I promise to abide by your wishes. If you accept this invitation, kindly sign your name and return it to me. Thank you very much, in advance, for accepting this invitation.

Regards,

Mohammad Noman

E-Mail: [mdnoman@yahoo.com](mailto:mdnoman@yahoo.com)

Phone: 016-4098794

Consent: I accept the invitation and I am glad to be a part of this research.

I ALLOW / DO NOT ALLOW my name to be included in the research.

Name:

Signature:

## APPENDIX C

### Letter of Invitation – Other Participants

#### INVITATION

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

My name is Mohammad Noman, a Ph.D. candidate from the School of Education, SEML, College of Arts and Sciences, UUM, Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia. I am writing this to request your participation in my research entitled “CONTEXTUAL LEADERSHIP: EXAMINING THE PRACTICES OF SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN MALAYSIAN CONTEXT”.

This study has three major focus areas:

1. investigate the core leadership practices of successful school Principals in Kedah, Malaysia
2. delve deeper into the understanding of how these principals enact the core leadership practices in Malaysian schools.
3. identify the context in which successful school principals work in Malaysia.

The research will be conducted through multi-site case study method. Data will be collected through a variety of methods which includes interviews of the participants, observation, and data scanning. The interviews might last from 30 minutes to one hour. A follow-up interview will be requested if more information is needed at a later stage.

Please bear in mind that the interviews will be recorded. The researcher promises to use the recording only for transcription purposes. I fully understand that confidentiality and anonymity are vital principle of this process. If for any reasons, you would not like your name to be revealed, please indicate so while giving your acceptance. I promise to abide by your wishes. If you accept this invitation, kindly sign your name and return it to me. Thank you very much, in advance, for accepting this invitation.

Regards,

Mohammad Noman

E-Mail: [mdnoman@yahoo.com](mailto:mdnoman@yahoo.com)

Phone: 016-4098794

Consent: I accept the invitation and I am glad to be a part of this research.

I ALLOW / DO NOT ALLOW my name to be included in the research.

Name:

Signature:

## APPENDIX D

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide

#### Principal

*Note: Begin with a brief introduction of the researcher and the study. These are just guiding questions; follow-up questions may be asked depending upon the replies.*

1. Begin with question about the background of the principal

- Educational attainment
- Prior experience before coming to this school
- General interest

2. Question about the initial impression of the current school

- In what condition was the school inherited
- Major challenges
- Internal and external school environment

3. Question about the contextual factors of the school

- The demography of the school
- Teachers' qualification, attitude and motivation
- Students achievement, both academic and co-curricular
- Discipline
- Support from the parents and the community

- Relationship with the governmental and non-governmental agencies

#### 4. Question about the action taken in response to the contextual factors

- How was the teamwork developed
- What steps were taken to improve achievement
- How were the parents involved and why
- How was the community involvement
- How was the relationship with governmental and non-governmental agencies improved

#### 5. Questions on the adaptability of the principal and logic behind each action

- What is the vision and goals for the school
- What determines success for the principal
- How does the principal define achievement
- What is the logic behind some of the principal's actions
- What are the new challenges ahead and how is the preparation to face it
- What is the decision making process and what philosophy guides it

#### 6. General

- Probe to find out any additional informal that the principal might like to volunteer.

## APPENDIX E

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide

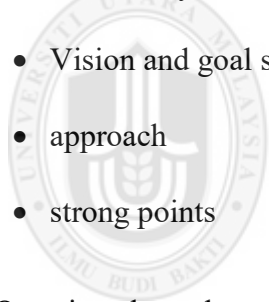
#### Teacher

1. Begin with question about the background of the teacher

- Educational attainment
- Teaching experience
- General interest

2. Question related to the current principal

- Personality
- Vision and goal setting
- approach
- strong points



3. Question about the contextual factors of the school

- The demography of the school
- Students achievement, both academic and co-curricular
- Discipline
- Support from the parents and the community
- Relationship with the governmental and non-governmental agencies

4. Question about the practices of the principal

- How is the teamwork
- What are the significant changes in the school

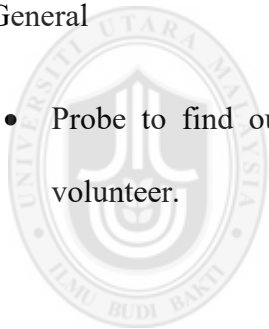
- What steps were taken to improve achievement
- How were the parents involved and why
- How does the principal react to situation
- How is the principal's relationship building

5. Questions related to success of the principal

- What determines success for the principal
- How does the principal arrive at decisions
- What is the logic behind some of the principal's actions
- What are the new challenges ahead and how is the preparation to face it

6. General

- Probe to find out any additional informal that the teachers might like to volunteer.



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Universiti Utara Malaysia

## APPENDIX F

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide

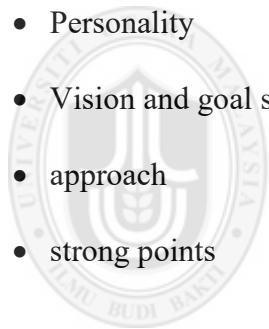
#### Member of the Leadership Team

1. Begin with question about the background of the teacher

- Educational attainment
- Role in the school
- General interest

2. Question related to the current principal

- Personality
- Vision and goal setting
- approach
- strong points



**UUM**  
Universiti Utara Malaysia

3. Question about the contextual factors of the school

- The demography of the school
- Students achievement, both academic and co-curricular
- Discipline
- Relationship with the parents, governmental and non-governmental agencies

4. Question about the practices of the principal

- How is the teamwork
- What are the significant changes in the school
- What steps were taken to improve achievement



- How does the principal react to situation
- How is the principal's relationship building

5. Questions related to success of the principal

- What determines success for the principal
- How does the principal arrive at decisions
- What is the logic behind some of the principal's actions
- What are the new challenges ahead and how is the preparation to face it

6. General

- Probe to find out any additional informal that the respondent might like to volunteer.



## APPENDIX G

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide

#### Parent

1. Begin with question about the background of the Parent

- How many children in the school, their age, grade level
- Since how long has the parent been in the school

2. Question related to the current principal

- Personality
- Vision and goalsetting
- approach
- strong points

3. Question about the contextual factors of the school

- Students achievement, both academic and co-curricular
- Discipline
- Support from the parents and the community

4. Question about the practices of the principal

- Role of parents in the school; how are they involved and how often
- What are the significant changes in the school
- What steps were taken to improve achievement
- How is the principal's relationship building and personal traits

5. Questions related to success of the principal

- What determines success for the principal
- What are the new challenges ahead and how is the preparation to face it

#### 6. General

- Probe to find out any additional informal that the parent might like to volunteer



**APPENDIX H**  
**Semi-Structured Interview Guide**  
Student

1. Begin with question about the background of the student

- Name, age, grade level
- Since how long has the student been in the school

2. Question related to the current principal

- personality
- approach
- strong points

3. Question about the contextual factors of the school

- Students achievement, both academic and co-curricular
- Discipline

4. Question about the practices of the principal

- What are the significant changes in the school
- What steps were taken to improve achievement

5. Questions related to success of the principal

- What determines success for the principal
- Vision and goals for the school

6. General

- Probe to find out any additional informal that the student might like to volunteer.