PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP STYLES, STUDENTS' MOTIVATION AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Norlia Mat Norwani, Ibrahim Tamby Chek & Abdul Rahman Ahmad
Faculty of Management and Economics
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 35900 Tanjung Malim, Perak, Malaysia
E-mail: (norlia@fpe.upsi.edu.my)

Endrew Singai
(endrewsingai@yahoo.com)

Abstract

Principals' management and leadership were perceived as the main factors to ensure school effectiveness and had significant impact on students, not directly but indirectly. The purpose of this study was to assess relationship between leadership styles of principals' and students' motivation levels with academic achievements of students in secondary schools in the Serian district of Sarawak. A questionnaire that contained 41 items was used to collect data from 302 samples. The descriptive findings of the study showed that 48.4% of the samples lived in families consisting of six and more family members and 81.8% of the families had an average monthly income of less than RM1,000 which was within the national rural poverty level. Analyses conducted showed that the principals favored transactional and transformational leaderships with means of 17.93 and 17.82 respectively. The Pearson Correlation analyses showed there were significant relationships between principals' leadership styles and students' motivation, between principals' leadership styles and students' motivation, and between students' motivation and academic performance. The researchers suggested that the Ministry of Education and school principals should emphasize on strengthening leadership aspects. Selection of new principals must ensure that the criterias used in the process fulfill the needs of today's education systems. They must be exposed to trainings that emphasize on principals' leadership and school management.

Keywords Leadership, transformational, transactional, instructional, motivation.

Introduction

Ministry of Education (MOE) comes out with Educational Development Master Plan (*Pelan Induk Pembangunan Pendidikan*-PIPP) with the aim to produce Malaysian nation using our own mold in order to achieve developed status by the year 2020. This leads to the second core in PIPP, which is to develop human capital. MOE has done many changes to ensure education-base programmes are in line with the policy requirement. The necessary efforts are to be undertaken by education officers at federal, state, district, department, and finally school so that the policy is translated in line with the country's needs. According to Abdul Shukor (2004) a principal management and leadership is the main factor to ensure a school's effectiveness. A problematic leader will contribute towards the failure of the school to function as an effective organization (Rusmini, 2004).

Rules and good disciplinary control are necessary to produce students who are excellent in term of intellect, emotion and physical. On top of that, motivation drives students to have desires, as need and readiness to learn (Bomia e*t al.,* 1997). The principal is the most important person in making changes in schools (Abdul Razak, 2001) and as a leader who is able to influence or invite the organization's members to agree willingly to perform organizational activities efficiently and effectively (Juan, 2005). In today's globalization era, the school's ability in educating students to behave courteously is declining its' effectiveness (Abdullah Sani, 2005).

According to Ahmad Zabidi (2006), school with peaceful and fresh environment is suitable for teaching and learning process and is regarded to have effective school climate. This research will look into how a principal leadership style can influence students' behavior. As an education institution, a school functions not only to produce students with knowledge but also with excellent attitude. In school, students come from various social, economic and cultural backgrounds. The environment can influence in shaping the students' background. Hamidah (2004) wrote that there is a general agreement that a school's development is a direct function of leadership. Almost all development, effectiveness, change and quality models concluded that the main factor is the leadership in the organization.

As the school's manager, a principal needs an approach that can attract students to continue staying in the school compound during teaching and learning sessions or co-curriculum activities. The students spend almost half their time in school. This causes the parents' influence to be second in importance compare to the school's influence (Abdullah Sani, 2005). Most parents do not realize their children skip school until the teacher complains, after the students have missed school for a few days (Lim *et al.,* 2005). Family is a social institution that plays important roles in shaping students character and moral behavior. Parents shall be blamed for their children weakness in education and their deviant behavior in school (Gill, 2007). Novandri (2000) highlighted that this problem will continue and become more significant when the children are in school because they will constantly involve in disciplinary problem and are weak in their academic performance.

In education, school has been given attention and become the focus of many researchers and writers. A principal leadership pattern and practices should be able to gauge the inspiration of the school's stakeholders. Thus, leadership is a necessity in building organizational strength in order to achieve common goals (Nursuhaila, 2007).

This finding is supported by Alimudin (2006) who said that effective school is obtained through efficient and quality leadership.

Leadership is a process which involves influencing a group of people or an organization socially. A leader will use his or her influence towards others in implementing activities or responsibilities (Yukl, 2002). Jaafar (2007) stated that leadership means activities to influence individuals to work voluntarily in achieving group or organizational objectives. Leadership style refers to approach used by a leader to direct and influence other individuals to do certain functions or responsibilities (Ogawa & Scibner, 2002). In this research leadership style is how a principal as a leader influences teachers and students to implement given responsibilities in order to increase students academic achievement. Transformational leader is capable to actively stimulate subordinates intellectual, assist them to make decision using concrete evidence and convince them to work as a team in achieving organizational goals. Transformational leader builds subordinates commitment towards attainment of organizational ojectives by empowering them in the process (Yukl, 2002). This type of leader is equipped with current knowledge in three areas which are curriculum, rules and evaluation (Dufour, 2002) and the leader is the person who introduces changes during the learning process and creates opportunities for the students to enjoy success in education (Stein, 2006). Transactional leader, on the other hand, motivates his subordinates by fulfilling their desires, importance or personal needs through transactional process with rewards. The rewards are expected to motivate the subordinates to achieve the leader's goals and at the same time fulfill what they want. Transactional model focuses on transactions among leaders, friends and subordinates (Bass, 1997). The changes are subject to agreement between the leader and subordinates about what are needed, the conditions imposed and rewards that will be given if they succeed.

Motivation involves goals or objectives and actions and is known as encouragement. Motivation is the effort or actions undertaken consistently to increase a person's awareness and skills so he implements certain chores to achieve desired goals or objectives. In the context of this research, motivation is an encouragement that stimulates students to increase their academic performance especially in examination as a result of rewards given in the form of material and non-material as desired. Regardless of where the source of motivation comes from, everybody needs motivation to succeed (Brown, 2002). This is further elaborated by Abd Sukor and Yaakob (2006) who wrote that motivation is a drive from within one self in the form of hopes and desires which move the individual to take actions to achieve certain goals or success in life and at the same time avoid failure. The intrinsic and extrinsic theory model is the motivational factor that gives encouragement to individuals.

Intrinsic motivation is within the individual and exists as a result of the individual's interest and desire to know (Wolkfolk, 2004). It exists naturally, when the individual is pursuing his dream. He is willing to face challenges in the process and his true ability will be revealed (Reeve, 1996). Students with intrinsic motivation are able to complete their assignment and are excited with the challenges they have to face while pursuing their mission (Azlina, 2003).

Extrinsic motivation is outside the individual and not stabil and in the form of incentive and punishment. The individual acts due to the incentive received, such as promised promotion or to avoid punishment but not due to his interest to act. Hoy and Miskel (2004) explained that extrinsic model drives a person to do certain activities

because of benefits in the form of incentive and non incentive. Research by Azizi *et al.* (2006) on form four students in di Johor Baharu showed that students with intrinsic motivation scored higher achievement compare to students with extrinsic motivation.

In this research, what is meant by achievement is academic achievement which refers to scores or grades obtained by students in certain test or public examination (Norlia *et al.,* 2006). Academic achievement is the result the students received after learning process and refers to the mastery of knowledge and skills at certain level after taking the test or examination required (Abd Sukor & Yaakob, 2006). In this research academic achievement is measured from the students' scores for four basic subjects, which are Mathematics, Malay Language, English Language and Sciences. These four subjects are selected because of its importance in determining whether the students pass or fail in the final examination.

Waters *et al.* (2003) wrote that the principal has significant impact on students, not directly but indirectly through: a culture which inculcates sharing of trust among each other; inclusion of teachers in shaping and implementing policy and important decision; and monitoring the effectiveness of school management and its impact on students learning. The principal's function as instructional leader is important as the head of an effective school (*Effective Schools Product, Ltd,* 2001). Eldredge (2008) concluded that principals contribute towards students' achievement through their leadership in the practice of common belief, discipline management, source of teachers, knowledge in curriculum, teaching and evaluation. Research finding that states a leader or principal does not have a big impact on students achievement was reported by Ross and Gray (2006). They found out that there is no significant statistical impact between principals leadership and students achievement. However, a principal has a bigger impact on administrative process than students' achievement (Marks & Printy, 2003). Research by Ross and Gray (2006) supported that a leader who practices transformational style only has positive impact on the teachers whom he trusts. The principal gets collective commitment towards achieving desired organizational values. This sort of commitment eventually increases students' achievement significantly. According to Reinhartz and Beach (2004), implications of transformational leadership are: team work among staff; all members understanding the goals of the organization; leaders spending time to build relationship and give the staff opportunity to contribute towards the school and to increase students' performance; building school climate that encourages collaboration; and providing intrinsic motivation to achieve the organization's goals. This is elaborated by Ishak (2003) who discovers that transformational leadership in Malaysia has a bigger influence on teachers' commitment and satisfaction compared to other leadership styles. According to Aziah *et al.* (2003) transformational leadership style can stimulate teachers' spirits due to the leadership displayed by the principal and indirectly produces an effective organization or school. Penn (2002) stated that a school leader could increase motivation by building condusive environment to shape teachers behavior, students, parents, and surrounding community towards education. By managing this aspect effectively in building school culture, a principal can increase teachers and students motivation and indirectly increase the students' academic achievement.

Whitworth (2005) mentions that class teachers not only can motivate their students positively but also negatively. He believes class teachers' influence is very significant in influencing students. Class or subject teachers shoulder more responsibility in

motivating the students. The principal gives more impact towards the teachers, not the students. Teachers with high confidence level will be more successful in producing success students. Goddard *et al.* (2004) say that relationship exists between self-efficacy and students achievement. The lack of infrastructure, learning facilities, non-conducive and unsafe learning environment especially in the rural area are among factors that influence students achievement (Faridah *et al.,* 2005). Old buildings, leak roofs, damaged walls, unsuitable tables and chairs, lack of hostels, and lack of basic amenities or the amenities are not in satisfactory condition, for example, disruption in water supply will affect students learning. The practice of suitable and effective learning style can ensure students obtain high academic achievement. Norlia *et al*. (2006) survey form four students taking Additional Mathematics and discovers that the students' motivation and learning styles are positively correlated. Students with intrinsic motivation practices deep learning. There is also significant relationship between students' learning styles (surface, deep, structured and effort) and their academic achievement.

Thus, this research is conducted to assess whether there is a significant relationship between principals leadership styles and students motivation with the students' academic achievement. Specifically, the objectives are to:-

1. Identify dominant leadership styles among the principals at secondary schools in Serian District.
2. Identify whether there is a significant correlation between the principals' learning styles and motivations with the students' academic achievement.
3. Identify the principals' learning style factors and the students' motivation factors that influence the students' academic achievement.

Methodology

The research was conducted at four secondary schools in Serian District. The schools are Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Serian, Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Tarat, Sekolah Menengah Tebakang and Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Taee. The schools were selected base on criterias such as the students were from various socio-cultural background (villages, new settlement, housing area and urban area) and economy (parents' occupation). In term of location, two schools are in urban and the other two schools are in rural area. The population from all four schools was 1,413 form four students. From the population, sample size of 302 students was calculated using Cohen's (Cohen, 1969) and Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formulas. Selection of respondents was done using stratified random sampling. The form four students were stratified into excellence, moderate and weak subgroups. From the subgroups, 30% of samples were excellent students, 50% moderate students and 20% weak students (Gay & Airasian, 2000) in proportion with the subgroup number in the population.

The research's conceptual model was adapted from Bryant (1974). Independent variables were principals' leadership styles (Transformational Style, Instructional Style and Transactional Style) and motivation factors (Environment Factor, Teacher Factor and Learning Style Factor). The independent variables were expected to have positive correlation with dependent variable which was the students' academic achievement. Researchers believe that the leadership style adopted in either one or a combination of

styles in the highlighted styles could have an impact on the students' motivation through the highlighted motivational factors, and these two independent variables are related to students' academic performance in tests or examinations; either increasing or decreasing their performance. For this study, the dependent variable is the academic achievement of the students in their final year exam. Achievement meant here is the mark obtained in the end of year 2008 examination. The subjects considered are Malay Language, English Language, Mathematics and Science. Percentages will be used as a measure of students' achievement. The conceptual study framework is shown in Figure 1.
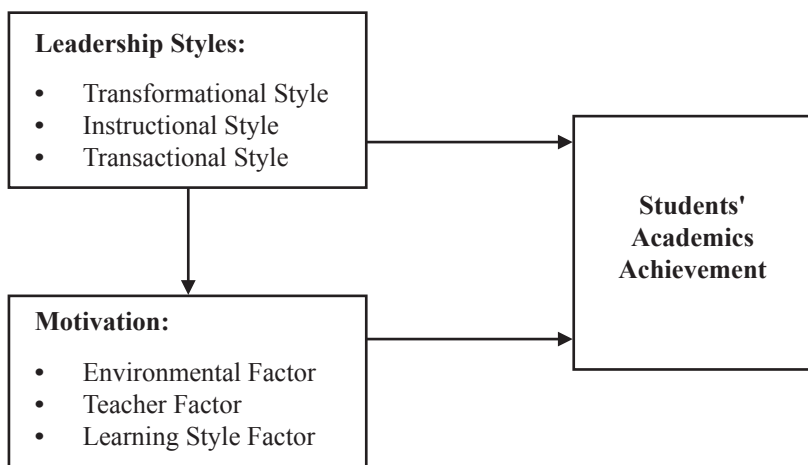

Figure 1 Conceptual Study Framework
Source: Bryant (1974)

Specifically, the hypotheses tested were:-

H_o1 There is no significant relationship between leadership style of principals and motivation of students.

H_o2 There is no significant relationship between leadership style of principals and academic achievement of students.

H_o3 There is no significant relationship between motivational factors and academic achievement.

     i) H_o3a There is no significant relationship between students' environment motivation factors with academic achievement of students.

     ii) H_o3b There is no significant relationship between teachers' motivational factors and academic achievement of students.

     iii) H_o3c There is no significant relationship between learning styles motivation factor and academic achievement of students.

The study was carried out using questionnaire form as the main instrument. The instrument is based on the questionnaires form from the *Leadership Behaviour Description Questionaire* (LBDQ) created by Halpin (1958) and has been adaptad by Cheng in 1994 (Shirley, 2000). The pilot study was carried out on 40 students.

The *Cronbach Alph*a coefficient value was 0.90 for Leadership Styles and 0.93 for Motivational Factor. The questionnaire forms were distributed after the end of the students' final examination and the respondents were the form four students. The responses relied on the sincerity of the respondents in answering the questionnaire given.

This study will hopefully be one of the studies that will help the parties concerned to understand the importance of leadership style on students' academic achievement. The ministry and the principals as managers can make the findings as a reference in their management, particularly in relation to students' performance. Understanding the relationship between leadership style and motivation toward academic achievement will enable the formulation of policies and programs that are more appropriate at the departmental level in general and school in particular to encourage the development of students.

Results and Discussion

The numbers of respondents by gender were 117 boys and 185 girls. The number of girls exceeded the number of boys, especially in classes with high-achieving students. The highest ethnic groups involved was the Bidayuh with 66.9%, followed by Chinese ethnic 15.9%, and other races 17.2%, comprising the Malays, Iban, Indian and Orang Ulu (Kenyah, Kayan, Kelabit and other tribes of the Ulu in Sarawak) ethnics.

Table 1 shows that the mean scores for Instructional Leadership style is 14.24 (standard deviation 3.20), Transformational Leadership style 17.83 (standard deviation 3.96) and Transactional Leadership Style 17.93 (standard deviation 3.74). Table 1 shows that the principals of the surveyed schools adopt combination of many of transactional and transformational styles in the management of their schools.

Table 1 Means and Standard Deviations of Leadership Style of Principals

Leadership Styles	N	Minimun	Maximun	Composite Score	Standard Deviation
Instructional	302	4.00	20.00	14.24	3.20
Transformational	302	5.00	25.00	17.82	3.96
Transactional	302	5.00	25.00	17.93	3.74
Total	302				

Table 2 shows the mean scores of the teachers' factor to be 35.15, learning style factor 34.59 and environmental factor 29.24. This finding indicated that in the aspects of student's motivation, the teachers' factor played the most important roles in improving the academic achievement of students in addition to learning and environmental factors with the mean scores not much different from the mean score of the teacher factor.

Table 2 Means and Standard Deviations of the Environmental, Teachers and
Learning Style Factors

Motivation Aspects	N	Minimum	Maximum	Composite Score	Standard Deviation
Environmental Factor	302	11.00	40.00	29.24	5.42
Teachers Factor	302	12.00	49.00	35.15	6.30
Learning Style Factor	302	12.00	45.00	34.59	6.45
Total	302				

Correlation test for H_o1 showed that there was a moderate relationship between principal leadership style and motivation of students. This is shown by a significant correlation of r = 0.605, (P <0.05) (Table 3). Thus, H_o1 was rejected.

Table 3 Correlation Analysis between Leadership Style of Principals
and Students Motivation

Variable	N	Pearson's Correlation 'r'	Significant (2-tails)
The relationship between leadership styles and students' motivation	302	0.605**	0 .000

Correlation test for H_o2 showed that there was weak relationship between leadership style of principals and academic achievement. This is shown by the correlation of r =0142, (P <0.05) (Table 4). Thus, H_o2 was rejected.

Table 4 Correlation Analysis between Leadership Style of
Principals and Academic Achievement

Variable	N	Pearson's Correlation 'r'	Significant (2-tails)
The relationship between leadership styles and students' achievement	302	0.199**	0 .000

The results showed that principals' leadership styles had significant relationship with the motivation and academic performance of students. Even though the relationships were weak, it showed that the role of principals as leaders and managers of educational institutions is yet to be proud of. The ministry has often launched various competitions between the schools such as 'School of Hope', 'School of Excellence', 'Principal of Excellence' and others in order to place the education system in Malaysia at a higher level. It goes the same with the relationship between leadership styles and students performance. The findings showed a relationship between principal leadership styles and students performance even though the correlation is weak as in the findings of

Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) and Waters *et al.* (2003). Principal plays a crucial role in making the teachers as a driving force to the students in terms of motivation and competitive culture in learning. Thus, building the self-efficacy of teachers are a challenge for principal in implementing this agenda.

As customers, the government, the Ministry of Education, parents and surrounding community would certainly want to see their children to be successful as students, that is, they were not only skilled but also with respectable personality. For the government, each student produced by schools is a human capital that will one day drive the nation's progress. These are all heavy challenges for all principals as the resistance and constrains come not only from the inside, but also from outside such as gangsterism, drug abuse, media influence and nonetheless family background that may influence the behavior of the students themselves.

For H_o3 three sub-hypotheses based on the environmental-motivation, teachers and learning style factors were tested. H_o3a showed that there was a significant relationship between students' environment-motivation factors and students' academic achievement. Correlation test showed a relationship between students' environment motivation factors with the academic performance of students but the relationship was very weak. This is shown by the correlation of r = 0.160 that is significant at (P <0.05) (Table 5). Thus, H_o3a was rejected.

This finding is consistent with the findings of Aziah *et al.* (2003) and Azizi *et al.* (2006) that shows that leadership style practiced successfully increases student motivation, not directly but through the management carried out such as: the formation of school culture, that is the school principals being responsible towards the schools in terms of coordinating and managing employee's discipline, explaining

Table 5 Correlation Analysis between Environment Motivation Factors and Academic Achievement

Variable	N	Pearson's Correlation 'r'	Significant (2-tails)
The relationship between environmental factors and academic achievement	302	0.160*	0.073

school rules, making any decisions, becoming a social and schools change, leading academics and non-academics assessment and creating a healthy and education-stimulating school climate and environment, and planning for staff needs. These cultural practices will not only increase the commitment of teachers, but through the dedication of teachers, the students culture that is their temperament at school and class culture can be established and will indirectly enhance students' motivation.

H_o3b showed that there was a significant relationship between teachers' motivational factor and students' academic achievement. The correlation showed a weak relationship between teacher-motivation factor and students' academic achievement. This is shown by the correlation of r = 0203 that is significant at (P <0.01) (Table 6). Thus, H_o3b was rejected.

Table 6 Correlation Analysis between Teachers Motivation Factor
and Academic Achievement

Variable	N	Pearson's Correlation 'r'	Significant (2-tails)
The relationship between teachers factor and students achievement	302	0.203**	0.006

The findings showed the most prominent factor in increasing the students' motivation is the teachers' factor. This is consistent with the findings of Kleine and Kracht (1993) in Shirley (2000) that state that by forming a school culture, it indirectly motivate teachers and teachers will in turn form a class culture that indirectly motivate students. Penn (2002) also stresses that the formation of school culture can increase the motivation of teachers and students. Aziah *et al.* (2003) writes that principals (with transformational style) can enhance students' motivation not directly but rather by influencing teachers to deepen their commitment to motivate students. This is explained futher by Yukl (2002) who conclude that transformational leader builds commitment of the followers (teachers) towards the achievement of the organizational objectives and empower to others to achieve organizational objectives and transactional style can enhance motivation, in particular the extrinsic motivation as stated by Bass (1997). Rewards are expected to motivate followers to achieve the goals required by the leaders, as well as the followers' self-interest. Thus researchers believe the combination of these two leadership styles can increase teachers' commitment and in turn will enhance students' motivation in accordance to the requirements of the school.

According to Adam and Nati (2006), self-efficacy is a person's confidence in his or her ability to perform certain tasks with success. High self-efficacy is the most influential factor in shaping a high quality teacher in terms of personality, devotion to work and level of motivation. According to Adam and Nati it is the responsibility of the transformational leadership style to enhance the self-efficacy among subordinates. In proportion with every successful teacher's effort in producing good results as shown in the public examinations such as SPM, they should be rewarded with recognitions such as 'outstanding teacher award', 'excellency in service', 'exemplary teachers' and so forth. In addition to increasing the value of self-efficacy it will also give a sense of endless satisfaction to the recipient. This provision should be transparent without the influence of seniority and quotas.

Of the three aspects that had been studied, teachers' factor was more dominant in increasing the motivation of students. According to Miller (2003) teachers have a great influence towards the performance of students. The role of teachers to motivate students especially classroom teacher that communicates the most with students in the classroom is further explained by Whitworth (2005) who says that classroom teacher can motivate students not only positively but also negatively. This findings support the findings of Azizi *et al.* (2006) who summarizes that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can have an impact on students' academic results. The high level of motivation had a positive effect on the academic achievement of students, especially the intrinsic motivation. As a leader, principals must have skills to involve teachers in all the school activities, to provide a complete communications network, and be concerned about the

needs and welfare of teachers and good at creating a condusive environment to teachers. These practices will stimulate teachers to work together successfully to achieve the vision and mission of the school and this is consistent with the findings of Yukl (2002) that is, leader must convince or influence his followers to cooperate in order to achieve organizational objectives.

For H_o3c there was a significant relationship between learning styles motivation factor and students' academic achievement. The correlation showed a weak relationship that exists between the learning style factor and academic achievement of students. This is shown by the correlation of r = 0225 that is significant at (P <0.01) (Table 7). Thus, H_o3c was rejected.

Table 7 Correlation Analysis between Learning Styles Motivation Factor
and Academic Achievement

Variable	N	Pearson's Correlation 'r'	Significant (2-tails)
The relationship between learning styles factors and academic achievement	302	0.225*	0.018

On the other hand, the relationship on motivational aspect in terms of learning styles aspects, although there is a significant relationship, is is not as strong as the teachers' factor. But that learning style is closely related to the teachers. Lifelong learning will shape a teacher to become more professional in dealing with students' problems, able to become central reference for students, able to provide guidance to students, being rational in taking actions and other values. This in turn will enhance students' motivation and affect their learning styles. This is consistent with the findings of Norlia *et al.* (2006) that states that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations have a relationship with learning styles and thus, has a relationship to academic achievement.

Conclusion

This study concluded that leadership styles of principals and motivation have a relationship with the academic performance of students. The findings showed a relationship between the variables of leadership styles and motivation towards the academic performance of students. Teacher factor plays an important role in improving students' academic performance. Principals need to create a culture in which teachers believe they have a great responsibility to improve the performance of students until it reaches the target of the school. Several recommendations are presented to the parties concerned to help enhancing students' motivation thus enabling the academic performance of students to be improved. For the policy makers, the selection criteria for principal should be seen in terms of the existing leadership styles, past experience, past performance, personality, and not relying solely on seniority. Transformational and transactional leadership styles separately or combined together can be one of the criteria for the selection of principal because it is not only related to academic performance but also the motivation of both students and teachers. Leadership styles should be in accordance with time and place so that the subordinates will become followers with

strong commitment that will in turn increase the motivation of teachers and students in achieving organizational goals. As an administrator, positive relationship should be practiced such as trusting the staff by giving space and opportunity for staff to develop themselves, by assigning work through the delegation of powers, that is by delegating power so that teachers will together be responsible and by giving recognition for their success. Further study can be conducted on how these leadership styles affect motivation and academic achievement of the boarding schools' students. Comparisons based on certain demographic characteristics may be carried out to take into account other characteristics that are likely to have influence on students' motivation and academic achievement. The time has come for the school to involve all stakeholders to improve the quality of education with the realization that success could not be achieved with the results of one group alone, but requires the cooperation of all parties.

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