

Effectiveness of Student-Centered Leadership Practices among Principals of National Religious Secondary Schools in Terengganu

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Abstract

Numerous studies, including Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani's (1998) research on the leadership of religious schools, have highlighted that teacher leadership often surpasses principal leadership. However, given that this study took place in the 1990s, significant advancements have undoubtedly occurred since then. This particular study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of student-centered leadership practices among religious school leaders in Terengganu. It specifically focusses on several key areas: Setting Targets for Student Achievement, Fostering High Expectations for Student Achievement, Strategic Allocation of School Resources, Leading High-Quality Teacher Instruction, Leading Teacher Competency Development Programs, and Leading a Conducive School Environment. A quantitative method using a survey approach was employed, with data collected from 140 teachers across six national religious secondary schools in Terengganu. The analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 29.0, utilising descriptive statistical methods such as frequency, mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that the effectiveness of leadership practices among religious school principals was generally moderate (mean = 3.14, SD = 0.21). The study's implications underscore the need for educational stakeholders to continuously strengthen and improve student-centered leadership practices among school leaders. Support from educational authorities, particularly the Malaysian Ministry of Education is crucial with an emphasis on providing funding, training materials and access for school leaders to promote a robust culture of student-centered leadership.

Keywords: Student-Centered Leadership, Principals, Religious Secondary Schools

Introduction

The role of leaders is pivotal in influencing the success of an educational institution. In acknowledgement of this significance, it is necessary for school leaders, especially principals, to cultivate an environment that fosters and enhances student learning. In practice, it is evidence that certain school leaders fail to uphold their responsibilities and disregard the rights of students. Prior research indicates that certain educational leaders encounter difficulties, including limitations in the effective management of student affairs within their leadership methodologies. A research study conducted by Bity Salwana Alias and Mohd Radzi Ishak (2022) identified deficiencies among school

leaders in effectively addressing and fulfilling the needs of disadvantaged students. The results indicate that it is imperative for school leaders to improve their ability to identify and address the distinct needs of students, especially those from underprivileged backgrounds in order to ensure that all students remain on track in their academic endeavours.

As a result, there is a growing interest and trend in a leadership model that prioritises student-centred leadership, focusing on the needs and well-being of students. Robinson (2011) posits that leadership strategies centred around students are crucial for facilitating exceptional academic performance and comprehensive student growth. Naz and Rashid (2021) identified that attributes of student-centred leadership, including explicit goal setting, effective teaching and curriculum management, and consistent teacher evaluation, are associated with improvements in student learning, highlighting the significance of student-centred leadership.

Furthermore, existing literature suggests that improvements in educational institutions led by leaders who emphasise student-centred leadership can positively influence student engagement and academic performance (Brown III, 2023; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). This clearly demonstrates that educational leaders who prioritise student interests in their decision-making processes can significantly improve students' motivation and academic outcomes. Moreover, research conducted by Kythreotis et al. (2010) and Botha and Aleme (2022) underscores the significance of student-centred leadership approaches and the role of organisational culture in shaping student achievement. This is further elucidated by Marzano et al. (2005), who discovered that leaders employing this approach consistently prioritised the interests of students in their decision-making processes and program planning within educational institutions. Their approach promotes active student engagement in the learning process and cultivates an environment conducive to student interaction and support. Research has demonstrated that student-centered leadership practices significantly enhance their development and achievement across multiple dimensions. Therefore, it is essential to adopt and extensively apply these practices within educational institutions to cultivate a generation of students who are both exceptional and well-rounded.

In Malaysian religious schools, the significance of leadership elements is critical and should not be overlooked. Religious educational institutions, which are responsible for delivering instruction in both religious and academic fields, necessitate educators who possess not only a profound understanding of religious content but also exceptional leadership skills. Still, studies by Karmila Zakaria et al. (2022) and Anuar Muhammad et al. (2022) show that the leadership styles of principals and the way religious schools are run in Malaysia are still not good enough, which makes teachers less effective. Concurrently, research conducted by Muhammad Arshad et al. (2019) highlighted deficiencies in management practices and a notable lack of knowledge among school leaders, which impeded the effective administration of religious schools in Malaysia. So, it's important to deal with these problems if we want to train religious school leaders who can run schools that help students not only do well in school but also live up to religious standards of morality and virtue.

A contemporary leadership paradigm known as student-centred leadership has emerged. Nevertheless, there exists a notable gap in empirical research specifically focusing on the effectiveness of student-centred leadership approaches within religious educational institutions. Research deficiencies raise questions about the authentic implementation and effectiveness of student-centred leadership strategies in religious educational contexts, taking into account their unique curriculum, religious values, and administrative structures. This research investigates the gap in existing literature by analysing student-centred leadership approaches within Malaysian religious schools, with a specific focus on the national religious secondary schools located in Terengganu. This research endeavours to make substantial contributions to the existing body of literature on educational leadership and the development of religious educational institutions.

This study addresses a significant gap in the literature and has the potential to enhance awareness and comprehension within religious school communities regarding the critical nature of student-centred leadership that is congruent with the local context. This is significant as student-centred leadership methodologies originating from Western countries may hold diminished applicability within the context of religious educational institutions in Malaysia. Moreover, the results of this research can be leveraged by all stakeholders to maximise their impact in advancing the teaching profession through enhancements in the quality of school administration.

The purpose of the Study

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of student-centered leadership practices among principals at national religious secondary schools.

Literature Review

This section of the literature review is divided into three parts: the definition of leadership, the definition of student-centred leadership and studies related to student-centred leadership.

Definition of Leadership

Leadership is defined differently across various disciplines. According to Angelle and Schmid (2007), the concept of leadership is subject to ongoing evolution, as it lacks a definitive and static definition. As a result, the concept of leadership proves to be complex and elusive when attempting to establish a universal definition, given its continuous evolution, temporal context, and varying interpretations (Adelekan & Erigbe, 2021). The definition of leadership encompasses several key elements, notably the recognition that it is a process, involves influence, transpires within a group context, and seeks to accomplish objectives that embody a collective vision (Cummings et al., 2008). Reed et al. (2019) elucidate that leadership frequently encompasses the motivation of individuals towards defined objectives and the facilitation of organisational transformation. While numerous definitions of leadership exist, it is widely recognised that this concept is intricate, incorporating diverse perspectives, frameworks, and theoretical constructs (Raffo & Clark, 2018).

Moreover, Vecchiotti (2018) characterises leadership as a dynamic construct that undergoes continuous evolution, shaped by elements such as social interactions, research advancements, and the shifting landscape of societal norms. Moffitt (1995) says that most theories of leadership focus on leadership as a personal trait or a response to environmental factors. However, he says that what makes leadership important is the powerful relationship between leaders and their team members, which is aimed at making big changes that are in line with shared goals. Vance and Larson (2002) contend that while it is challenging to establish a precise definition, leadership is acknowledged for its profound effect on individuals, groups, and organisations, highlighting its role in shaping outcomes across diverse contexts.

In summary, the concept of leadership is multifaceted, distinguished by its capacity for influence, its process-orientated characteristics, the context of group dynamics, and its emphasis on goal orientation. The definition of leadership can differ based on various contexts and perspectives; however, it is evident that leadership is crucial in facilitating change, inspiring individuals, and accomplishing collective goals.

Definition of Student-Centered Leadership

The definition of educational leadership has undergone significant evolution throughout history. A range of interpretations regarding student-centered leadership has been explored by numerous scholars. According to York-Barr and Duke (2004), student-centered leadership represents a transition from conventional teacher-centered approaches to an emphasis on student learning and comprehensive development, aimed at enhancing pedagogical practices within a collaborative and reflective educational context. Eich (2008) elucidated that this leadership style seeks to establish a

learning environment tailored to the specific needs and interests of students, thereby promoting their active engagement and participation in the educational process. Robinson et al. (2008) highlighted that the concept of student-centred leadership, which places importance on the development, growth, and empowerment of students.

Furthermore, student-centered leadership involves fostering an environment where students are motivated to take on leadership roles within educational settings, which encompasses their involvement in student leadership organisations and civic engagement initiatives (Aaron, 2019; Rosch & Collins, 2017). The previously discussed experiences serve to cultivate leadership skills, bolster self-efficacy, and play a significant role in the holistic development of leadership capabilities (Armstrong & McCain, 2021).

Katsiolouides and Cannonier (2019) contend that student-centered leadership prioritises the development of students' leadership capabilities while also promoting personal growth, self-awareness, and resilience in the face of challenges. Through reflective practice, practical learning opportunities, and exposure to diverse perspectives, students can significantly enhance their leadership skills and broaden their self-awareness as leaders (White & Guthrie, 2016).

In summary, student-centered leadership is characterised by the emphasis on fostering the holistic development of students across academic, leadership, personal and interpersonal domains through tailored and pertinent learning experiences. It is imperative for school leaders to critically analyse these domains to enhance the execution of student-centered leadership.

Previous Studies on Student-Centered Leadership

Within the field of student-centered leadership, prior research has examined various aspects of leadership that directly influence student outcomes and achievements. Robinson et al. (2008) conducted a meta-analysis using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to demonstrate the differential impacts of different leadership styles. Leaders who prioritize teaching and learning significantly improve student outcomes and achievements. This highlights the importance of leadership styles that emphasize student-centered approaches to foster positive and exemplary educational outcomes.

Furthermore, a study conducted by Beatty and Manning-Ouellette (2022) utilised qualitative methodologies to investigate the influence of student-centered pedagogical strategies on the leadership identity and competencies of 21 undergraduate participants. The results underscored the significance of employing evidence-based, student-centered leadership strategies in fostering the development of students' leadership identity and capacity. This approach posits that leadership programs ought to incorporate student-centered methodologies to facilitate the cultivation of effective leadership skills. This methodology provides students with opportunities for active engagement in the learning process, thereby enhancing their comprehension while simultaneously fostering self-confidence and critical skills development. Consequently, initiatives developed with this emphasis can yield informed, ethically grounded, and exceptionally competent future leaders.

Additionally, research conducted by Farnsworth et al. (2019) explored the correlation between learning-centered leadership exhibited by principals and the level of trust among faculty members. The study employed quantitative methods with a sample of teachers from 59 schools across the United States, demonstrating a significant positive correlation between learning-centered leadership and teacher trust in principals. The results underscored the significant impact of learning-centered leadership on establishing trust and nurturing positive relationships within educational institutions. Through the implementation of this leadership strategy, school principals have the potential to foster increased collaboration and confidence among educators, thereby facilitating a more effective and cohesive learning atmosphere. This underscores the notion that trust and constructive relationships are fundamental to achieving success within the educational sphere.

Furthermore, a study conducted by Li et al. (2023) investigated the influence of distributed leadership on the social and emotional competencies of adolescents, focusing on student-centered teaching practices and teacher self-efficacy, employing quantitative methodologies. This research employed survey data collected from 984 adolescents, derived from the OECD 2021 Social and Emotional Skills Survey (SSES). The findings underscored that the integration of effective leadership practices with student-centered teaching methodologies has the potential to significantly improve teaching quality and enhance teacher self-efficacy. The findings suggest that leadership styles characterised by support and empowerment for educators are instrumental in influencing student learning outcomes, especially concerning social and emotional dimensions. This study shows how important it is to combine leadership styles, teaching methods, and the quality of teachers in order to get complete and lasting educational outcomes.

The research conducted by Kiliñç (2014), entitled "Examining the Relationship Between Teacher Leadership and School Climate," employed quantitative methodologies with a sample size of 259 elementary school educators. The research indicates that leadership focused on learning significantly contributes to the professional development of teachers, bolsters trust among teaching staff, and improves student outcomes. The findings indicate that when principals engage in leadership practices centred on learning, it not only enhances teachers' skills, abilities, and knowledge but also strengthens trust-based working relationships. Consequently, students experience advantages in terms of enhanced academic performance. The findings underscored the beneficial influence of student-centred leadership on multiple stakeholders within the educational context, thereby establishing this approach as crucial for the comprehensive success of schools.

Furthermore, a quantitative analysis conducted by Donaldson (2019), which encompassed data from more than 400 schools across multiple districts, indicated that principals who engaged actively in student learning were more inclined to promote advancements in teaching and elevate student achievement. This research underscores the crucial importance of learning-centered leadership, wherein principals function not merely as school administrators but also as educational leaders who facilitate positive outcomes. Through active participation in the learning process, school principals can gain a deeper insight into the needs of both students and teachers, thereby enhancing their capacity to support initiatives aimed at improving the quality of instruction. This methodology has demonstrated efficacy in fostering a more productive and efficient educational setting, resulting in enhanced academic outcomes.

In summary, the literature review on student-centered leadership underscores the significance of leadership approaches that prioritize the needs of students, cultivate trust among stakeholders, and promote favorable educational outcomes. This approach demonstrates that by placing student needs at the forefront, educational leaders can build trust and foster strong relationships among teachers, students, and parents. As a result, this approach leads to enhanced outcomes and holistic development for students, ultimately creating a lasting positive influence on the school community

Methodology

This section discusses the following aspects:

Research Design

This research employs a quantitative survey methodology to evaluate the effectiveness of student-centred leadership strategies among principals of national Islamic secondary schools. Consequently, the research employs a series of questionnaires to assess the effectiveness of student-centered leadership in Islamic educational institutions. The survey approach was selected for its appropriateness for extensive sample volumes within a constrained timeframe (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019).

Population and Sampling

The study included 429 teachers who are currently working in Terengganu’s national Islamic secondary schools. The prevalence of Islamic schools in Terengganu can be attributed to the region’s deep-rooted Islamic heritage and cultural traditions, as well as its historical importance as the site of some of Malaysia’s earliest Islamic educational institutions (Asyraf Ab Rahman et al., 2015; Rahimin Affandi Abdul Rahim et al., 2010). Kothari (2004) posits that an adequate sample size typically falls between 10% and 20% of the overall population. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a sufficient sample size for survey research is estimated to be around 100 respondents. This study involved a sample size of 140 teachers, selected to closely represent the broader population, with an additional 10% incorporated to address potential data loss. We determined the distribution of samples for each school using a proportional ratio that matches the predetermined sample size.

Research Instrument

The measurement tool for this study uses a questionnaire consisting of three (3) sections: Section A, B, and C. Section A contains school information; Section B contains respondent background information, and Section C contains items related to the level of student-centered leadership. Robinson (2011) adapted the questionnaire. Therefore, we measure each item using a five-point scale: Never Happens (1), Rarely Happens (2), Sometimes Happens (3), Often Happens (4), and Always Happens (5). Table 1 displays the distribution of the items.

Table 1 Distribution of Items in the Questionnaire

Section	Item	Item Number	Total Items
Section A	• State of the school	1	1
	• School level	2	1
Section B	• Age	3	1
	• Gender	4	1
	• Position grade	5	1
	• Years of service	6	1
	• Current position	7	1
Section C	• Setting Targets For Student Achievement	8	5
	• Fostering High Expectations For Student Success	9	5
	• Strategic Allocation of School Resources	10	5
	• Leading High-Quality Teacher Instruction	11	5
	• Leading Teacher Competency Development Programs,	12	5
	• Leading a Conducive School Environment	13	5
Total			37

Validity and Reliability

According to Chua (2012) and Babbie (2020), content validity evaluates the extent to which the research instrument used truly measures what it is intended to measure. For this study, the researcher involved two experts, one in the field of leadership and another in language, to perform content and face validation on the modified questionnaire. Comments and suggestions from these experts were taken into account to ensure that each item and the use of the Malay language in the questionnaire were accurate and consistent with the original instrument. All of the items in the pilot study that were related to the variable of student-centered leadership practices had a very high reliability value of 0.96, according to the reliability analysis.

Data Analysis

The survey data was analysed using descriptive statistical methods, including frequency, mean, and standard deviation, utilising the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29.0, as shown in the table. The demographic data of the study respondents, involving percentage scores, were used to describe the study demographics, covering age, gender, grade, length of service and position held. Meanwhile, a descriptive analysis of the study data, involving mean and standard deviation values, was used to assess the principals' practices in student-centered leadership based on teachers' perspectives

Table 2 Demographic Information of Study Respondents

Category	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	25	17.9
Female	109	77.9
Age		
Under 30 years	19	13.6
31-40 years	43	30.7
41-50 years	39	27.9
51 years and above	39	27.9
Position Grade		
DG 41 and below	34	24.3
DG 44	44	31.4
DG 48	29	20.7
DG 52 and above	33	23.6
Length of Service		
Less than 5 years	16	11.4
5-10 years	31	22.1
11-20 years	44	31.4
More than 21 years	49	35.0
Position Held		
Senior Assistant Teacher	2	1.4
Head of Department	5	3.6
Academic Teachers	133	95.0

To describe the level of effectiveness of principals' practices in student-centered leadership, the average score obtained was interpreted using the mean score table by Nunally and Bernstein (1978), as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Mean Score Interpretation

Mean Score	Level of Effectiveness	Interpretation
1.00 to 2.49	Low	Less Satisfactory
2.50 to 3.79	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
3.80 to 5.00	High	Satisfactory

Note: Nunally and Bernstein (1978)

Research Findings

This section addresses the first research question as follows:

Level of Effectiveness

140 teachers provided the data. We then analysed the data using simple descriptive statistical methods, focussing on the mean and standard deviation values. Below are the general findings based on the domains of student-centred leadership practices by principals of national religious secondary schools in Terengganu.

Table 4 The Level of Effectiveness of Student-Centered Leadership Practices of National Religious High School Principals Based on Domains

Domain of Leadership	Student-Centered	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level	Interpretation
Setting Targets For Student Achievement		3.02	.356	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
Fostering High Expectations For Student Achievement		3.11	.313	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
Strategic Allocation of School Resources		3.18	.360	Moderate	Moderate Satisfactory
Leading High-Quality Teacher Instruction		3.08	.360	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
Leading Teacher Competency Development Programs		2.87	.386	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
Creating A Conducive School Environment		3.59	.289	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
Overall Mean		3.14	.205	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory

Based on the analysis results, the findings show that the level of effectiveness of student-centred leadership in national religious secondary schools in Terengganu is overall moderately satisfactory, with an overall mean value of 3.14. Meanwhile, the mean values for each domain of student-centred leadership are as follows: 3.02 for Setting Goals for Student Achievement, 3.11 for High School Expectations for Student Achievement, 3.18 for Strategic Allocation of School Resources, 3.08 for Leading High-Quality Teacher Instruction, 2.87 for Leading Teacher Competency Development

Programs, and 3.59 for Leading a Conducive School Environment. We present detailed findings based on each domain below.

Effectiveness of Student-Centered Leadership Practices of Principals in National Religious Secondary Schools in Terengganu.

a) Setting Targets For Student Achievement

Table 5 The Level of Effectiveness of Religious School Principals' Practices in Setting Goals for Student Achievement

Setting Targets For Student Achievement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level	Interpretation
A1 - My school leader sets the school goals based on various student achievement data (e.g; examinations and counseling).	2.98	.581	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
A2 - My school leader sets current school goals related to student achievement based on the achievement of previous year's goals.	2.82	.603	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
A3 - My school leader involves other teachers in the process of setting goals related to student learning.	3.19	.599	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
A4 - My school leader has personal goals that align with the school's clear goals to improve student learning.	2.86	.565	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
A5 - My school leader sets school goals in line with the National Education Philosophy to develop students who are balanced in physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social aspects.	3.25	.769	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
Overall Mean	3.02	.356	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory

Table 5 shows the descriptive analysis findings related to the level of effectiveness of student-centred leadership practices among principals of religious schools, focusing on the aspect of goal-setting for student achievement. Overall, the level of effectiveness of student-centred leadership practices among principals of religious schools is at a moderate level, with a mean score of 3.02 and a Standard Deviation of 0.356. Overall, the practice of Goal-Setting for Student Achievement is considered moderate when the mean score is less than 3.79.

b) Fostering High Expectations For Student Achievement

Table 6 The Level of Effectiveness of Religious School Principals' Practices in High Expectations for Student Achievement

Fostering High Expectations For Student Achievement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level	Interpretation
B6 - My school leader is able to develop students' knowledge (i.e; knowledge, skills and attitudes) during their learning at my school.	3.92	.898	High	Satisfactory
B7 - My school leader is able to shape student development through student learning at my school.	3.16	.513	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
B8 - My school leader is able to help students understand new knowledge through student learning at my school.	2.92	.537	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
B9 - My school leader is able to make students enjoy exploring knowledge through learning at my school.	2.89	.665	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
B10 - My school leader is able to produce students who meet the needs of the job market through their learning at my school.	2.66	.597	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
Overall Mean	3.11	.313	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory

Table 6 elaborates on the descriptive analysis findings for the level of effectiveness of student-centered leadership practices among principals of religious schools regarding the aspect of high expectations for student achievement. Overall, the level of effectiveness of principals' practices in religious schools concerning high expectations for student achievement is at a moderate level, with an overall mean score of 3.11 and a Standard Deviation of 0.313. Overall, the practice of High Expectations for Student Achievement is considered moderate when the mean score is less than 3.79.

c) Strategic Allocation of School Resources

Table 7 Level of Effectiveness of Religious School Principals’ Practices in Strategic Allocation of School Resources

Strategic Allocation of School Resources	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level	Interpretation
C11 - My school leader supports student learning by providing quality teachers according to their fields of expertise.	3.11	.510	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
C12 - My school leader analyzes the number of teachers needed by subject area for the next 5 years.	3.11	.510	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
C13 - My school leader plans the budget related to student learning based on the school’s per capita allocation.	3.86	.841	High	Satisfactory
C14 - My school leader identifies alternative financial resources to improve the school’s ICT facilities.	3.10	.723	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
C15 - My school leader assigns high-performing teachers to teach lower-performing student classes.	2.70	.631	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
Overall Mean	3.18	.360	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory

Table 7 describes the findings of the descriptive analysis regarding the level of effectiveness of student-centered leadership practices among principals of religious schools in the domain of resource allocation. Overall, the level of effectiveness of religious school principals’ practices in strategic resource allocation is at a moderate level, with an overall mean score of 3.18 and a Standard Deviation of 0.360. In summary, the practice of Strategic Allocation of School Resources is considered moderate when the mean score is less than 3.79.

d) Leading High-Quality Teacher Instruction

Table 8 Level of Effectiveness of Religious School Principals’ Practices in Leading High-Quality Teacher Instruction

Leading High-Quality Teacher Instruction	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level	Interpretation
D16 - My school leader supervises teachers before, during and after their teaching sessions.	2.78	.537	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
D17 - My school leader supervises teachers’ instruction to maximize students’ learning time.	2.70	.631	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
D18 - My school leader focuses on students’ physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and social achievements.	3.90	.842	High	Satisfactory
D19 - My school leader supervises the teachers’ lesson planning.	2.99	.635	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
D20 - My school leader supervises teachers’ teaching techniques based on students’ varying competencies.	3.05	.579	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
Overall Mean	3.08	.357	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory

Table 8 describes the findings of the descriptive analysis regarding the level of effectiveness of student-centered leadership practices among principals of religious schools in the domain of leading teacher instruction. Overall, the level of effectiveness of religious school principals’ practices in leading high-quality teacher instruction is at a moderate level, with an overall mean score of 3.08 and a Standard Deviation of 0.357. In summary, the practice of Leading High-Quality Teacher Instruction is considered moderate when the mean score is less than 3.79.

e) Leading Teacher Competency Development Programs

Table 9 Level of Effectiveness of Religious School Principals’ Practices in Leading Teacher Competency Development Programs

Leading Teacher Competency Development Programs	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level	Interpretation
E21 - My school leader analyzes the content needs of teacher professional development programs to align with teachers’ competency gaps.	3.04	.605	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
E22 - My school leader collaborates with external experts to contribute knowledge in teacher competency development programs.	2.67	.515	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
E23 - My school leader identifies various alternative financial resources for use in teacher competency development programs.	2.82	.660	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
E24 - My school leader supervises teachers’ performance before and after they attend teacher competency development programs.	2.91	.586	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
E25 - My school leader is attentive to feedback for improving teacher competency development programs.	2.91	.640	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
Overall Mean	2.87	.386	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory

Table 9 describes the findings of the descriptive analysis regarding the level of effectiveness of student-centered leadership practices among principals of religious schools in the domain of leading teacher competency development programs. Overall, the level of effectiveness of religious school principals’ practices in leading teacher competency development programs is at a moderate level, with an overall mean score of 2.87 and a Standard Deviation of 0.386. In summary, the practice of Leading Teacher Competency Development Programs is considered moderate when the mean score is less than 3.79.

f) Leading a Conducive School Environment

Table 10 Level of Effectiveness of Religious School Principals’ Practices in Leading a Conducive School Environment

Leading a Conducive School Environment	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level	Interpretation
F26 - My school leader has a harmonious relationship with the students.	3.86	.578	High	Satisfactory
F27 - My school leader is concerned about the physical facilities provided by the school for students, ensuring they are usable and sufficient.	2.94	.643	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
F28 - My school leader establishes school rules that prioritize student welfare.	3.66	.560	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
F29 - My school leader is fair in handling student behavior.	3.91	.662	High	Satisfactory
F30 - My school leader is attentive to student discipline to create a conducive school environment.	3.59	.550	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory
Overall Mean	3.59	.289	Moderate	Moderately Satisfactory

Table 10 presents the findings of the descriptive analysis regarding the level of effectiveness of student-centred leadership practices among principals of religious schools in the domain of leading a conducive school environment. Overall, the level of effectiveness of religious school principals’ practices in leading a conducive school environment is at a moderate level, with an overall mean score of 3.59 and a Standard Deviation of 0.289. In summary, the practice of Leading a Conducive School Environment is considered moderate when the mean score is less than 3.79.

Discussion

The study offers significant insights into the effectiveness of student-centred leadership practices implemented by principals in national religious secondary schools located in Terengganu. The descriptive analysis performed reveals that the effectiveness of principals’ leadership is assessed to be at a moderate level across the different domains of leadership practices examined. Consequently, these findings underscore the necessity of improving principals’ leadership competencies to attain greater levels of effectiveness in leadership practices. The study’s findings show that principals maintain a moderate proficiency in goal-setting for student achievement. The results of this study underscore the imperative for school principals to enhance their competencies in strategic planning and effective decision-making. This is essential for empowering principals to embrace a more visionary leadership style, aligning with the progressively intricate and dynamic challenges and

requirements within the educational landscape. This fits with what Huang et al. (2018) found: good principals set goals, explain the vision, and make sure that the curriculum and teaching are coordinated. By doing these things, they indirectly improve student achievement which leads to better outcomes for all students. The findings of Demiroz (2020) and O'Donnell and White (2005) further support this assertion, emphasising that effective principals are instrumental in enhancing student outcomes through their focus on improving the school learning climate and articulating the school mission.

Also, the results make it clear that there are areas where leadership needs to be improved, especially when it comes to setting higher standards for student achievement. The results suggest that effectiveness in this area is moderate, highlighting the necessity for principals to enhance their strategies for cultivating a school environment that prioritises elevated expectations for student achievement. The reason for this is that good principals play a big role in setting high academic standards, explaining a plan for success, and showing unwavering dedication to the school's mission and goals, all of which are necessary to improve academic performance. This aligns with the perspectives presented by Okoth and Getange (2019), who contend that it is the duty of school leaders to establish the tone, direction and expectations that shape the educational environment in pursuit of elevated academic standards. Effective principals not only articulate these standards but also ensure their consistent enforcement and integration into the school's culture and practices. These results are in line with those of Robinson et al. (2008), who found that principals can have a much bigger impact on student achievement when they align their leadership with high academic standards and a clear school mission.

The study's findings show that principals maintain a moderate level of efficacy in the strategic allocation of school resources. The findings underscore the necessity for enhancements in the management and allocation of school resources to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness for school principals. To make resource management and allocation work better, principals need to set up a strategic framework that makes sure that the way resources are distributed is in line with the overall goals of teaching and learning. Vuuren and Bank (2023) highlight the importance of effective principals in strategically organising resources, thereby ensuring that resources are utilised efficiently to enhance teaching practices and promote student achievement. Odide (2021) further substantiates this assertion, positing that it is imperative for principals to guarantee that students are provided with sufficient teaching and learning materials while also emphasising the necessity of prioritising efficient resource utilisation to enhance teaching practices and improve student outcomes.

Furthermore, the findings of the study suggest a necessity for enhancement in student-centred leadership practices specifically concerning the guidance of teacher instruction by principals within national religious secondary schools. The observed moderate effectiveness in this area suggests that there exists an opportunity for school principals to improve their skills in leading and supporting teachers, thereby further enhancing the teaching and learning processes within educational institutions. In line with what Yang and Jiang (2021) found, this shows how important it is for principals to lead by example when it comes to making sure teachers are doing their jobs well and helping students grow in all areas. Furthermore, Amirul Hidayat (2021) emphasises the critical role of principals in offering guidance, support and supervision to educators in order to maintain the quality of their teaching and learning services. This requires that principals take an active role in supervising and guiding teachers to enhance their performance.

Furthermore, the results show that principals of national religious secondary schools are only somewhat good at leading initiatives to improve teachers' skills. The overall effectiveness level is moderate. However, there exists considerable potential for principals to improve their leadership skills in fostering the development of teacher competencies within their schools. Yulanto et al. (2018) assert that it is imperative for principals to prioritise continuous professional development programs

in order to effectively spearhead initiatives that enhance teacher competencies and ultimately contribute to the overall quality of teaching. Consequently, it is imperative that enhancements in this area be prioritised to facilitate principals' taking on a more effective leadership role in the planning and support of teacher competency development.

Ultimately, the findings from the study regarding the domain of leading a conducive school environment indicate that principals attain a moderate level of effectiveness. Although they exhibited strengths in specific areas, particularly in cultivating harmonious relationships in the management of student behaviour, there remains a need for enhancements, especially regarding the physical facilities of the school and the enforcement of student discipline, which necessitate more focused attention. Appropriate physical facilities within educational institutions are crucial for fostering student success and establishing an optimal learning atmosphere. For instance, research conducted by Arshad et al. (2018, 2020) has underscored the beneficial impacts of school physical facilities on both student academic performance and the overall quality of teaching and learning experiences. This is consistent with the findings of Olowo (2023), which illustrate that proficient school leaders recognise the significance of maintaining classroom facilities in optimal conditions to facilitate teaching and learning activities.

The results of this study highlight the critical need for ongoing enhancement to strengthen principals' leadership capabilities across multiple domains. Although school principals endeavour to meet their objectives, it is crucial to enhance the processes involved in establishing student achievement goals, optimising school resource management and improving teacher instruction. This study shows how important it is for school principals to keep learning in order to deal with the changing problems in education and make sure that their schools are safe, supportive and have all the resources they need. It is possible for principals of national religious secondary schools to lead more effectively and bring about positive changes in their institutions by giving them ongoing training and support in leadership skills.

Conclusion and Implications

This study overall suggests that the principals of national religious secondary schools in Terengganu exhibit a moderate level of effectiveness in student-centred leadership. The findings presented herein elucidate the current landscape of leadership development among principals of national religious secondary schools in Terengganu, offering significant insights into their achievements as well as highlighting the necessity for enhancements in student-centred leadership practices within religious schools.

The implication makes it clear that principals need to improve their leadership skills in order to run schools more efficiently, especially in Terengganu's national religious secondary schools. This study shows how important it is to create leadership development programs that are more all-encompassing, connected and tailored to each situation. This is especially important since moderate leadership levels were found among principals. In order to reach this goal, a customised leadership model needs to be created just for principals of religious schools. This will help them become better leaders of these schools overall. These programs might make it easier for principals to get a more complete professional development package that includes training in strategic planning, good resource management, and pedagogical support to help students learn and teachers do their jobs better.

Furthermore, it is essential that principals possess the necessary skills to establish increased academic standards and foster a school environment that prioritises high achievement expectations for students. Familiarity with optimal strategies for the management of school physical facilities is essential for fostering an effective learning environment. The implementation of these measures has

the potential to enhance students' academic performance while simultaneously fostering renewal and innovation within the Malaysian education system.

This study shows how important it is for the Ministry of Education, especially policymakers and stakeholders, to take the initiative to provide the tools and support that are needed for leadership development. This encompasses the provision of financial and training resources and access to specialised knowledge in the field of educational leadership. Through the provision of extensive support, school principals will be more adequately prepared to lead their institutions with greater efficacy, consequently improving the overall quality of education within religious schools in Malaysia.

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