

## Transformational Leadership, School Culture and Risk Management Practices at Elementary Schools in Malaysia

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**Abstract:** This study involves a quantitative investigation on risk management practices and its relationship with transformational leadership and school culture. A quantitative study will be conducted at selected primary schools in Malaysia. The selection of the schools will be on random basis covering both urban and rural. The survey will be conducted among school teachers. Basically two quantitative survey instruments will be used in order to collect data for the research: principal transformational leadership, school culture and risk management practices. Responses from individual teachers will be averaged based on each item and factor to create the school-wide data that's needed for this study. The findings from this study will contribute to the body of knowledge in risk management and practices at schools. It provides guidance on skills required by school leaders for effective risk management practices in schools.

**Key words:** Risk Management Practice • Transformational Leadership • School Culture

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### INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, every school has a legal responsibility to ensure the safety of pupils under the common law doctrine of in loco parentis. We failed to realize that school safety is one of the growing problems especially in primary school and in secondary school as well. The number and severity of accidents and incidents involving violence, gangsterism and theft, vandalism, general student discipline and misconduct problems are increasing gradually. Widespread media coverage escalates these incidents to higher magnitude and takes public attention [1]. Accidents, incidents, or transgressions are organizational and managerial problems, not always, as we tend to think, people problems [2].

Even it was proven in a study done by Sabu and other researcher like Berliner and Othman agree that the development of conducive and safe environment for students still not achieved in most of the school in Malaysia [3]. This statement can be supported by

several recent incidents that shocked our nation. A newspaper (The Star, 14 February 2011) reports Saiful Syazani Saiful Sopfidee, 7 years old, died after being beaten by teacher for 2 hours. He died due to internal bleeding in his brain and severe injuries as a result of being beaten by teacher for two hours continuously. This incident clearly shows that students are exposed to risks at schools.

In the past, we have read reports of students who were injured during sports activities, co-curriculums and other freak accidents. All these accidents indicate lack of risk management practices in schools. Only an effective leader will be able to implement it in school efficiently. The tragedy in Georgetown, where a teacher and five students died when their dragon boats capsized, raised questions about safety precautions and safety guidelines followed during school activities (The Star, 2010 January, 19). In a recent incident that took place on 11.11.11, whereby a secondary school student's annual excursion to Kuala Lumpur ended with a tragedy, when a teacher and two students died in the accident. It was

understood that all these students whom involved in this tragedy were after their recent PMR examination and in their course of visiting destinations ramble in the capital city Kuala Lumpur. Bus that they were travelling, lost control and skidded before turnover (Metro, 2011 November, 12). School authorities may face a legal suit if they are proven neglected risk mitigation measures in their planning and execution for this excursion to Kuala Lumpur.

The Minister of Education, Tan Sri Muhiyiddin Yassin noted that parents should be concern about the safety of their children and hope there will be an appropriate security measure taken and proper preparation made before activities are being carried out. The Ministry of Education also reminds the school authorities especially teachers to comply with the safety instructions (The Star, 2010 January 20).

Every school should make aware of Occupation, Safety and Health Act (OSHA) 1994 and its implications to the education sector. This act should be used as a guide at schools. According to Santrock every headmaster of the school is responsible in establishing the safe and conducive learning environment in schools [4]. It is more related to school and class size as well as home school partnership. Therefore classrooms, where teaching and learning process takes place, need to be managed effectively and efficiently. Headmaster as the manager of primary school is responsible to design the physical environment of the classroom for maximum learning. Problems need to be handled effectively to create a positive environment that suitable for learning. Headmaster is required to establish and maintaining rules and regulations by mean of effective communication. Headmaster also need to upkeep students' development progress from time to time.

An organization may be damaged by cumulative effects of many small incidents or by spectacular [5]. The Ministry of Education should take this into their consideration as this gives great impact on education development in Malaysia. Public or mainly parents will lose their trust in our education system and this will result decline in students and parent participation in school activities. The Ministry of Education is to ensure headmasters equipped with relevant leadership skills to enable them effectively implement risk management practices at their schools since its existence become misty in every school. Organizational leadership and culture will interact with each other. Leaders usually create and reinforce norms and behaviour within the culture.

A transformational leader wants to create a comfortable and accepting environment for the school. A transformational leader will foster strength to diminish the weaknesses. No school is perfect. An effective school leader will use transformational practices to gain support from their staffs and effort from their teachers to achieve the objectives and goals of the school system.

It was proven that every school that works closely with parents to develop and implementing school-based prevention programs are more successful [6]. These forms of partnerships help schools to develop common culture, models, language, definitions and procedures [7]. The effect of school leadership and organizational culture are variables associated with risk management in school. By deepening headmaster understanding of school culture, school manager will be better equipped to shape the values, beliefs and attitudes that necessary to promote a stable and nurturing learning environment. According to Schein, leadership and culture can be compared as "*two sides of the same coin*" [8]. He came out with this opinion because usually leaders who build or form a culture will take care of culture. Success and failure of an excellent company is because their leaders' fail to understand their organizational culture. If a leader fails to understand their organizational culture, then it is difficult for the organization to become successful.

**Literature Review:** In recent years school administrators and teachers are facing lots of challenges in managing risk. They need to be prepared in handling emergency situations or any risks that may occur at school. But it has become a tendency in many schools is to temporize and downplay the significance of legal problems, seeking answers to such problem at the operational level rather than at the organizational level and school often relies on legal counsel only after they got in trouble [9]. Every organizations including school should identify the factors related to the success of their organization, since failure may lead to the failure of the organization [10].

In order to promote a safe environment in schools, the Ministry of Education provides the guidelines and policies that are written in the form of circulars to schools as a reference and prevention measures to react when handling risk. With these guidelines and policies, the school should implement plans, rules and regulations of safety at school, including safety procedures and safety guidelines that need to be shared with all members at the school. Ministry of Education Concept and Manual

Safety School mentions that the feeling of joy and full of love in the school environment will increase student self-confidence and also taking full attention towards education [11]. School administrator and teachers also need to increase their awareness to create a safe and healthy environment for students and all members.

Student safety is part of the responsibility of teachers and the relationship between teachers and students by imposing obligations on the care of teachers. The teacher needs to provide a reasonable degree of supervision to students according to age whereby younger students need higher supervision. Teachers who fail to give special scrutiny are liable to risk if anything to happen to students according to common law. Elementary school students have a greater incidence of injury and need more supervision from their teacher.

Teachers need to ensure safety at classroom, lab, school field and any other localities involve school activities. There are rules and regulations that were written on the School Notice Board, Students Guide Book and School Manuals. In the science lab, there are rules and regulations that must be obeyed and informed clearly to the students [12]. Managerial awareness and proactive response to prevent any obstacles at earlier stage is vital for success [13].

Teachers need to understand their role and ensure that they are providing their duties by taking care of students in the school. The practice of risk management has become an important part to realize and practice among teachers, schools, students and all the administrators' members at the school. The school and each other should provide an institution secure environment for students, employees, teachers and others. Schools must be able to plan and carry out in response to the risk.

**Statement of the Problem:** The general problem was described in recent years in the mass media were often coverage about safe situation in school. Ministry of Education in September 2004 made an announcement that they planned to close 60 primary and secondary schools which were found not safe due to a variety of problems such as pillar cracked, old wiring system and so on [14]. According to NIOSH chairman, Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye, safe school concept is not only limited to discipline problems, threats to students and gangster attitude alone but also covers the safety aspects of building, equipment's and school facilities. Schools need to be aware of the existence and importance of the Occupational

Safety and Health Act of 1994 and its application to educational institutions in the interests of health and safety aspects [15].

Risk management is not being practiced in school. It only stands as a requirement in policies but not been stated as compulsory in school. This shows the seriousness or the lack of risk management practices which supposed to be implemented in schools just laid down as written documentation [16]. So far, it is not being implemented or being practiced in school especially in primary schools. Headmasters also do not emphasize their teachers to pay attention on risk management practices during school activities and excursion. They will take corrective action or rely on legal counsel after they got into in trouble. Most of the schools are not practicing risk management because they did not have the time, the knowledge, or budgetary resources to create a proper risk management plan [17].

It is observed that there is a lack of sense of urgency among school administrators in many schools. Even though the number of accidents and cases of negligence are increasing school administrators fail to understand the necessity of risk management practices in school [18]. They are willing to face legal suits rather than preparing with a solid risk management plan. Recent incidents like Nayati Shamelin Moodliar, who has been kidnapped in front of his school on 27 April 2012, Year 1 student who been found bullied by his friends in school on 7 March 2012 and Saiful Syazani Saiful Sopfidee, 7 years old who died due to internal bleeding after being beaten by his school teacher for continuously two hours which was highlighted in local media, raised a concern among parents on schools leadership, schools culture and risk management practices at schools in Malaysia. They believe there are some missing elements in Malaysia Education System which results in injury and fatality among school pupils [19]. School leader being policy executor expected to ensure risk management practices carried out as per guideline by applying positive culture in school [20]. Research persistently implies that leading style and risk management practices give impact on students, teacher and staff altogether. It also has proven that school culture and risk management practice also give impact on student, teacher and staff altogether [21].

An understanding of the specific influence of the various aspects of transformational leadership and school culture will provide deeper insight about the degree of impact these two broad concepts have on risk management practices at school.

**Transformational Leadership:** Currently there are numerous challenges to our school headmasters due to the changing education environment, the trends of education reforms and the pursuit of multiple school function in the new century. A clear shift can be seen from education quantity to education quality. Public are not satisfied only with the quantity of educational services provided in the new century. The pace of change confronting organizations today has resulted in calls for transformational leadership. These leaders work more effectively in rapidly changing environments by helping to make sense of the challenges confronted by both leaders and followers and then appropriately responding to those challenges [22].

Headmaster always encounters problem where need to transform low performing school to an acceptable performing level or from acceptable level to higher performing level. On the other hand, a headmaster also expected to move a school from crisis mode to high ground. To accomplish these needs, the transformational leader usually attempts to have a strong teacher's commitment towards the school. With the recent education reform and restructuring, for example Education Development Master Plan (PIPP 2006-2010) with its six core agendas, more emphasis would have to be placed on the commitment of the teaching workforce. This strategy and approaches are to fulfil need due to increase of external pressures on the work environment and to produce highly qualified and committed teacher in the education sector [23].

It was inspiring how 2004 excellent principal (JUSA C) Mary Yap Kain Ching transformed a wrecked school into a high performing and excellent school. However, did she manage to motivate the whole school range from the teachers to the students to follow her vision? Another important question was why the whole school is committed to transform themselves from an ordinary school into the first 30 schools nationally entitled for cluster schools? According to Abdul Ghani Abdullah this is the character of a transformational leader [24].

Bass labelled the type of adaptive leadership described above as transformational leadership [25]. Transformational leadership is one of the best in leadership style because it can change and transform individuals [26]. Transformational leadership occurs when one or more people engage with one another in a way that leaders and their followers will push each other in order to achieve higher levels of motivation and morality. The main objective of developing transformational leaders

is to make sure that they are able to go beyond their potential followers [27]. That is why, transformational leader tries to develop and meet the needs of their followers so that they will have and reach organizational commitment.

Transformational leader in education is a person who always looking for new ways of doing things to achieve the school's vision. The main purpose of a school, of course, is to educate young people and make them become productive members of society. Leadership is needed to address the problems and challenges that faced by students and teachers in school. Usually headmaster has to take care of and lead their teachers and follower towards the achievement of certain aspiration [28]. However, a recent incident at Air Hitam primary schools clearly shows lack of transformational leadership skills when a headmaster and a teacher get into "kung fu" action witnessed by pupils and teachers (Berita Harian, 28 February 2012).

Teachers and school administrators are the individuals who need to be held accountable for the achievement of their school vision and fulfil its mission. A school is viewed worthless and meaningless if exist without vision and mission. This situation needs to be avoided at all costs. Transformational leader in a school will be able to forecast risk that may give impact on the school. They are able to guide teachers on how to manage risk and be prepared for challenges at school. Followers able to handle risk effectively.

According to Sergiovanni, leadership is necessary to start and sustain school improvement. Leadership is not just about the quality of individual leaders but beyond that. It is also about the role of the leader plays, management style, and their relationship to the vision, values and aims of the school, and their approach in how to make changes. Transformational leadership has more to do with the charismatic visionary, culture and the concept of empowerment. This can actually lead to the success of the school organization, especially where future leaders are formed. An effective leader will be able to form an effective school. Sergiovanni also has cited that it is impossible to find an effective school without an effective principal [29].

These leaders have the talent to put in the line of their organization's values and standards. They are also able to build the culture of the organization plan and implement changes within and without [30]. Basically, transformational leadership can be seen by follower as a leadership that can bring them satisfaction and improvement. Furthermore, an organization under transformational leadership shows a high level of

performance. Even under transformational leadership, followers are known to carry out their duties more enthusiastic because they are proud of their leaders and organizations.

Generally, transformational leaders are leaders who accomplished with characteristics and behaviour of excellence. They can also be a role model to their followers, the ability to inspire subordinates, and the capabilities to boost intellectual members in the organization, and sympathetic Transformational leaders are able to build a strong working culture that exceed current levels by enhancing and strengthening the commitment and satisfaction of subordinates. In some experiments to test the results of transformational leadership, Bass found that the level of effort by subordinates under the leadership was high, ranging between 75% and 82% [31]. It is different in the organization led by transactional leaders where lower effort level can found which is between 58% and 60%. This indicates that transformational leadership is more effective and workers are more committed to their jobs.

**School Culture:** School cultures is made of values, common practice, behaviour, relationship and organization structure within a school that fuel the operation of a school and its behaviour [32]. It transforms over time as it creates synergy with problem solving, work together and confront challenges. School culture influences every member in school organization. It's the force driving all activities at school by unifying them by providing in-depth understanding, focused goal and team engagement.

#### **Forecast Findings**

**Legal Responsibility:** In elementary school, every school has a legal responsibility to ensure safety of students under the common law whereby teachers will undertake parental duties for children under their care or commonly known as in loco parentis. School administrators and teachers are responsible in providing a safe and conducive environment for students [33]. From this research; we can show the importance of risk management and emphasize on in loco parentis practice which should be practiced in every school.

**Proper Written Risk Management Plan:** According to Bezdicek reveal that about 56% of school headmaster in Minnesota did not have written risk management plan in school [34]. The reasons for not having a risk

management plan in school, as expressed by the school teacher in Minnesota were: lack of time, lack of expertise and no need for a plan. If schools do not have a proper risk management plan, then how their teachers going to react during an emergency take place? It shows that headmasters fail to provide safe and conducive environment for students in school as being required under common law. This situation needs to be corrected immediately by showing the importance of risk management in school.

#### **Proper Supervision, Instruction and Planning:**

Few researchers have emphasize that proper supervision, instruction and planning are required to ensure students' safety being taken care all the times. Elementary school students need a higher level of supervision when they are in school [35]. Teachers have a duty to instruct and warn pupils in his custody of any danger and methods how to protect them from these dangers. A failure to warn students of such danger is considered as negligence. From this research we can emphasize to headmaster that negligence need to be avoided in school. Proper action needs to be taken in order to ensure students' safety being taken care every time.

**Communication:** Communication is an important element of risk management so that it can be practised effectively. Most of the researchers have come out with this conclusion. Unfortunately through their finding after, they find out communication breakdown tends to happen in most of the school. Due to that, risk management cannot be practiced effectively and efficiently in school. Reason for communication breakdown to happen is because: i] school practicing top down communication style; ii] headmaster practicing autocratic style ; iii] headmaster lack of risk management so refuse to discuss further with teacher regarding it due to concern on self-pride; iv] headmaster and teacher lack of time to sit and discussed about risk management practice in details [36]. Most of the schools in Malaysia emphasize more on top down communication style [37]. Top down communication cause teacher have lacked information about risk management practice. When a teacher has lack information in risk management practice, they won't implement it in school. They feel scared and not confidence to implement it. They are scared they might make mistakes or cause some other problem by implementing risk management practice in wrong manner. We should understand that communication is part of a positive culture. Positive culture is an important

element in school culture. Many scholars have discussed this aspect in their research. Positive culture will enable risk management to be practiced effectively in schools [38].

**Lack of Expertise:** Lack of expertise in risk management practice can lead to so many problems. A headmaster who is implementing transformational leadership able to develop, implement and manage risk management plan in school effectively [39]. They can also help to improve expertise regarding risk management practices among teachers. Their studies also reveal that lack of expertise among teachers' in risk management can lead to school without a written risk management plan. Ministry of Education fails to realize that every headmaster who been newly appointed need to pursuing a risk management course at Institut Aminuddin Baki (IAB). Usually course that is being conducted at IAB only will expose our headmaster their duties and responsibilities that need to be carried out while they are in school. Malaysian National Education Policy and Philosophy 2013-2025 put forward 9 core values for competency requirements for school headmasters ("Kompetensi Kepengetahuan Sekolah Malaysia-KKSM). Nine cores that will be taught to headmaster during their course are: 1) Organization and leadership management skill; 2) Curriculum management skill; 3) Co-curriculum management skills; 4) Student Affairs management skill; 5) Financial management skill; 6) General Admin and office management skill; 7) Facility and surrounding management skill; 8) Human resource management skill and 9) External relation management skill.

Unfortunately risk management practice is not one of the core values for headmaster's competency requirements. Then how can headmasters are expected to have adequate knowledge about risk management practice and how they are going to implement it in school? From these studies, we are going to emphasize that risk management should be included as one of the key elements that headmasters need to be exposed. This is in order to ensure students' safety will be taken care at all times once they have been appointed in school. Usually a quality school leader is the main factor in excellent and safe schools [40].

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study can contribute to the knowledge regarding risk management and its practice at school. It will add to the literature on roles played by

transformational leadership and school culture at primary schools in Malaysia. This will provide a more in-depth understanding of skills required in shaping school management to mitigate risk at schools in Malaysia. Management of any organization especially in school requires accurate and fast decisions from the school authorities because delay can cause so many problems [41].

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