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Investigating the Relationships between Demographic Factors and School Principals' Emotional Intelligence in Managing Change

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Abstract

Substantial research has revealed that the emotional intelligence of school leaders is crucial for the development of effective school leadership. The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationships between demographic factors and Principal Change Leadership Emotional Intelligence (PCLEI) in the secondary schools of Malaysia. A total of 615 secondary school principals that were chosen using disproportionate stratified sampling method completed the on-line survey. The findings revealed that, i) PCLEI was reliably related to school type whereas school principals from different locations had no significant difference in their level of PCLEI; ii) PCLEI was not reliably related to both prior experience and on-the-job experience of school principals; and iii) instead of academic qualifications, PCLEI was reliably related to professional qualification. The study provides information and expands our understanding about the importance of the relationship between demographic factors and emotional engagement in enhancing school leaders' capacity for change.

Keywords: Principal Change Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, Demographic Factors, School Change, Managing Change, Organizational Culture

Introduction

Research on leadership and emotions has gained momentum since Goleman (1998) upheld that emotional intelligence or EI is a crucial determinant between leaders and non-leaders. In the field of education, EI has been recognized as one type of leadership strength that is critical for effective educational leadership development (Crawford, 2007b; Zembylas, 2010). As leadership is an intrinsically emotional process of managing one's own and others' emotions (Humphrey, 2002); Blackmore (2011) highlights that the emotional dimensions of leadership is crucial in the process of school development. Zorn and Boler (2007) point out that EI matters significantly especially in the educational leadership to bring about change in schools. As substantial research has revealed that school leadership is a significant factor in school improvement (Leithwood et al., 2020; Tai and Omar, 2020a), it would be myopic if educational

practitioners and researchers treat EI as an insignificant factor that drives organizational performance and achievement.

With the growing need for educational excellence and accountability, school principals have had to work within roles that are relatively complex and politically sensitive that engages emotional demands (Omar and Tai, 2019). Their daily work routines would likely be characterised by emotional stress, professional burnout, psychological distress, and role anxiety (Schmidt, 2010). It is unlikely that school principals deal with work-related problems with cognition alone; they are perpetually challenged to act as emotional anchors in the efficient running of the school (Evers and Katyal, 2007). Indeed, contemporary literature has found that instead of just a rational activity, recognizing leadership as an emotional activity is a new way of leading successful change in schools (Harris, 2007). If school leaders are capable of nurturing a positive emotional climate for teaching and learning in school, the likelihood of them driving organizational performance effectively is relatively high (Crawford, 2007a; Patti *et al*., 2015; Zorn and Boler, 2007). Therefore, being emotionally competent is critical in school leadership development.

The education system in Malaysia is moving into a heightened phase of change after the Malaysia Education Blueprint was set in motion in 2013 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). One of effective strategies to transform the Malaysian education system effectively and sustainably is to equip every school with a competent principal (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). To realize the change goals, it is imperative for school principals to develop the critical competence standards in cognition and emotion in order to lead the change process effectively. Notably, despite the abundance of available empirical literature on the importance of school leadership in school improvement locally and internationally, however, not much is known about the correlation between different demographic factors and school principals' EI in managing school change. To address this shortcoming, the major objective of the study was to examine the above relationship in the implementation process of the Blueprint. The findings have implications on school leadership development and school effectiveness on a practical level.

Literature Review

Emotional Intelligence

The concept of EI has received tremendous attention since its debut in the publication, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* by Goleman (1998). Distinct models of EI have been introduced by different scholars since then, even though there is continuing controversy over the models of EI (Seal *et al*., 2009). Basically there are two schools of thought regarding EI models: the mixed model and the ability model (Caruso *et al.*, 2002; Hedlund and Sternberg, 2000). Models that correlate highly with abilities, personality, traits, and behaviours are perceived as mixed models of EI whereas those that recognize EI as one type of intelligence to process and to generate emotional information with a focus on cognitive competence are termed as ability models (Day and Carroll, 2004; Mayer *et al*., 2000).

Theoretically, there are obvious differences between the mixed model and the ability model of EI. As the EI mixed model is correlated greatly with personality traits, EI is not much more than a measure of personality and thus is not amenable to change (Groves *et al*., 2008). However, advocators for the ability model regard EI as a form of ability that can be learnt and developed; therefore, EI is considered a guide for behaviours that can be measured before and after any intervention (Pachulia and Henderson, 2009). The most popular EI mixed model

is the competence-based model of Goleman (1995) and the trait-based model of Bar-On (1997) whereas the ability model is represented by (Mayer and Saloveys' EI model, 1997).

Different EI models delineate the definition of EI differently. Goleman (1995) defined EI as one type of competence in managing the emotions and the relationships with others through the expression of personal characteristics and social competences such as awareness, conscientiousness, adaptability, and empathy that have positive effects in terms of efficacy and job performance. Mayer and Salovey (1997) viewed EI as a set of competencies that combine emotions (feelings) and cognitions (thoughts); it is a series of capabilities about reasoning regarding emotions, and employing emotions to inform cognitive activities, for example, reasoning and making judgement. In short, the definition given by Goleman (1995) goes beyond the definition of Mayer and Salovey (1993) that highlights the relationship of intelligence in emotion as well as in cognition, with emphasis given to the latter, hence a concept that allows for the potential growth of the emotion as well as the intellect (Mayer *et al*., 2001).

Demographic Variables and Emotional Intelligence

Research on the relationship between demographic variables and EI has been studied across various job settings and is increasingly gaining attention (Marembo and Chinyamurindi, 2018; Öztimurlenk, 2019). This may be due to the globalization of various industries and thus organizational managements reflecting demographic diversities in their organizations (Maduramente, 2015; Shukla and Srivastava, 2016). However, to date the research findings in these areas are without uniform results or the findings are inconsistent (Tai and Omar, 2019).

For examples, there is inconsistency in the research findings about demographic location. Studies conducted by Punia and Sangwan (2011); Adsul (2013); Osman (2015); Singh *et al* (2015) reported that individuals from urban locations demonstrated better EI in comparison with those from rural areas. This may be because urban and rural areas are more likely to feature different characteristics and strengths in terms of human and social development (Singh *et al*., 2015). However, research carried out by Singravelu (2007) demonstrated that was no significant difference among teachers in terms of EI and school location. This finding is supported by Hosseini and Ananda Rao (2013) who found that there was insignificant difference between urban and rural individuals on their level of EI.

For work experiences, although it is reasonable to assume that individuals with longer years of work experience would demonstrate better EI, existing literature however did not give consistent results regarding the above relationship. Some studies reveal that individuals differ significantly on EI with respect to work experience. Jorfi *et al* (2011); Kumar and Muniandy (2014); Shukla and Srivastave (2016); Karani et al (2017) reported that EI varied with the experience of individuals. On the contrary, studies conducted by Das and Sahu (2014); Vanishree (2014); Sergio *et al* (2015) found that work experience had no strong correlation with EI.

Likewise, in examining academic qualification as a demographic factor in many surveys, there is no uniform result between qualification and EI in the existing literature. The study carried out by Jorfi *et al* (2011); Hosseini and Rao (2013); Kumar and Muniandy (2014); Hemalatha (2014); Shukla and Srivastave (2016); Karani *et al* (2017) found that EI varied with different academic qualification. However, Mishra and Mohapatra (2010); Vanishree (2014); Yamani *et al* (2014); Tajeddini *et al* (2014); Olugbemi and Bolaji (2016); Nagar (2017) found that EI did

not increase with higher academic qualifications; individuals with different levels of academic qualification did not vary in their competence in dealing with emotions.

In terms of professional qualification, the studies conducted by Murray (2009); Nelis *et al* (2009); Clarke (2010); Groves *et al* (2008); Jdaitawi *et al* (2011); Kirk *et al* (2011); Dolev and Leshem (2016); Weinberg and Pearson (2016) found that professional qualification was positively related to EI. Although the above studies support the notion that EI can be developed and enhanced through relevant training programmes, Ray (2011) argued that there was no significant difference on EI before and after the intervention. These different findings call for the need to evaluate the content of the training programmes, particularly if they promote the enhancement of EI.

In terms of types of organizations, existing literature has found that members from certain distinct organizations possess different variances in their capability to deal with emotions (Jorfi and Jorfi, 2012; Pizer and Hartel, 2005; Smollan and Sayers, 2009). These findings support the concept that emotions are socio-cultural because emotions are cherished and evaluated in the particular culture of the organization (Dewi *et al*., 2017). On this note, Kitayama and Markus (1994) highlight that as organizational culture shapes the way emotions are experienced and expressed, culture moulds and sustains emotions accordingly. Thus, leaders from different organizations and type would differ significantly on EI.

The Conceptual Framework of the Study

The Principal Change Leadership Emotional Intelligence Model (PCLEIM) designed and built by Omar and Tai (2018) was applied to guide the study. As EI is found embedded in cultural contexts (Berkovich and Eyal, 2015) and the PCLEIM was developed against the background of Malaysian secondary school setting, the model preference is thus appropriate and relevant. The PCLEIM is an ability-based model that focuses on cognitive aptitudes and considers EI as a guide for behaviours; EI is able to be trained and is possible to be evaluated before and after the interventions (Groves *et al*., 2008). PCLEI in the study is perceived as how school principals manage and regulate his own and others' emotions, specifically how the cognitive capabilities of school principals are influenced by emotions and to what extent emotions are regulated cognitively (Tai and Omar, 2018).

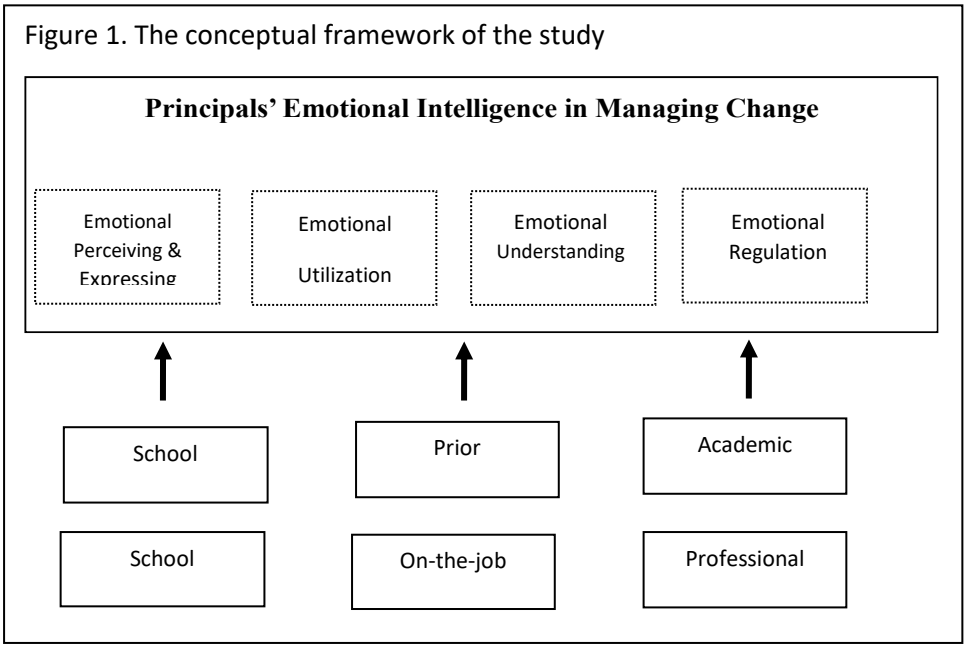
As shown in Figure 1, the PCLEIM consists of four dimensions: *Emotional Perceiving and Expressing*, *Emotional Utilization*, *Emotional Understanding* and *Emotional Regulation*. *Emotional Perceiving and Expressing* is the capacity of school principals to perceive, express and differentiate self and others' emotions. *Emotional Utilization* is the school principals' capability to control and make use of self and others' emotions that helps in facilitating cognitive behaviours, for example, thinking, making decision or judgement, and solving problem. *Emotional Understanding* refers to the capability of the school principals to comprehend the correlations among different types of emotions, the root causes and the outcomes as well as the transitions of one's own and others' complex emotions. *Emotional Regulation* is the competence of school principals to avoid, minimize or improve self and others' emotional response to realize the planned goals (Tai and Omar, 2018).

As mentioned earlier, as most of the research findings about the relationships between demographic variables and EI are inconsistent, there need to have further research to address these variations. To serve our purpose of raising the standard of Malaysian educators, the study seeks to investigate the relationships between three pairs demographic variables and PCLEI; with each pair consisting two related demographic factors. Instead of merely examining the relationship between any demographic factor and PCLEI, the related

demographic factors were designated in pairs based on their similarity so that better comparisons could be made explicitly and bring workable conclusions regarding the application of the concept of EI in schools.

As show in Figure 1, the first pair was about the characteristics of the school i.e. the school type and school location. Fully Residential Secondary School, Day Secondary School and Religious Secondary School were three major types of public secondary schools engaged in the study whereas schools located in urban or rural areas were two main locations being examined in the study. The second pair was about the experience of the school principals: the prior experience and on-the-job experience. The prior experience was the experience of an individual as a teacher or senior assistant before embarking on the career as a school principal whereas on-the-job experience was the experience that an individual encountered from day one as a school principal. The third pair was the qualification possessed by school principals, which included the academic and professional qualification. Academic qualification was the educational qualification such as Certificate/Diploma, Bachelor's Degree or Master's Degree whereas professional qualification was the qualification possessed by a school leader after attending the programme of National Principalship Qualification for Educational Leaders (NPQEL); a compulsory programme designed and conducted by the Institut Aminuddin Baki (IAB), Ministry of Education Malaysia for all novel school principals / head teachers in Malaysia (IAB, 2018).

Figure 1. The conceptual framework of the study



Method

Sample

An on-line survey was conducted to investigate the relationships between demographic factors and PCLEI in Malaysian public secondary schools. Malaysia consists of 16 states/federal territories with different sizes and different number of secondary schools. To ensure that the secondary schools in the 16 states/federal territories have the equal chance to be involved in the survey, disproportionate stratified sampling method was employed whereby 50 public secondary schools were chosen at random from each state from the list given by the state department of education of each state (Table 1). As a result, a total of 800 (16 x 50) public secondary schools were selected at random for the study. As the school

principal was the only respondent from each selected school, there were altogether 800 school principals selected for the study.

Table 1
Number of school principals engaged in the survey

Respondents	Number of Respondents identified in each school	Total number of Respondents identified for the on- line survey	Total number of Questionnaires returned (Response rate)	Total number of usable data
School principals	1	800	623 (76.88%)	615

Research Instrument

The Principals Change Leadership Emotional Intelligence Scale (PCLEIS) designed by Omar and Tai (2018) was used to examine PCLEI. The reliability and validity of PCLEIS were evaluated by using Structural Equation Modelling and Rasch Analysis. With CFI=.978, TLI=.971, normed chi-square=1.613 and RMSEA=.046, the PCLEIS demonstrated a good fit. PCLEIS consists of four key dimensions namely: (a) *Emotional Perceiving and Expressing*, *Emotional Utilization*, *Emotional Understanding* and *Emotional Regulation*. The composite reliability of PCLEIS for each dimension is .62, .64, .61 and .73, respectively. As all the Averaged Extracted Values are greater than 0.50 % (Fornell and Larker, 1981), the discriminant validity of the measure is adequate. Besides, the Composite Reliability Index is well above the threshold suggested by Awang (2012) i.e. 0.60. The PCLEIS applies a Likert scale of six.

Data Analysis

By employing an on-line survey method, the data were successfully collected within two months. As shown in Table 1, of all the 800 respondents, only 623 or a response rate of 76.88% returned the questionnaires. However, as eight sets of the questionnaire were with invalid responses, only 615 sets were kept for further analysis. For data interpretation, the analysis of descriptive statistic was adopted in the study to capture mean scores, percentages, and standard deviations. To examine whether the differences of the demographic factors on PCLEI were significant, the t-test as well as the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were established at the significance level of .05.

Demographic Characteristics

Of the total usable data for the study, 62.60% (N=385) were males and 37.40% (N=230) were females. Most of the school principals were between 51 to 60 years (N=494, 80.33%), followed by the group between 41 to 50 years (N=114, 18.54%); and the 31 to 40 years group was the smallest (N=7, 1.13%). In terms of academic qualification, a total of 60.49% (N=372) of the school principals had a Bachelor's Degree, 37.89% (N=233) with a Master's Degree, and only 1.62% (N=10) possessed a Certificate or Diploma. Among these, 38.37% (N=236) achieved National Principalship Qualification for Educational Leaders (NPQEL) and 61.63% (N=379) were without NPQEL. Regarding prior experience before as a school principal, 82.76% (N=509) of the school principals had one to five years' experience, 8.62% (N=53) six to 10 years, 3.74% (N=23) more than twenty years, 2.76% (N=17) 11 to 15 years and only 2.12% (N=13) had 16 to 20 years of experience. In terms of on-the-job experience, 39.51% (N=243) of the school principals were with one to five years' experience, 36.26% (N=223) more than

twenty years, 15.45% (N=95) six to 10 years, 5.04% (N=31) 11 to 15 years, and only 3.74% (N=23) had 16 to 20 years of on-the-job experience. Regarding school type, 90.41% (N=556) were in Day Secondary Schools, 5.04% (N=31) in Religious Secondary Schools and 4.55% (N=28) were in Fully Residential Schools. In terms of the urban-rural ratio, 38.37% (N=236) of the schools were urban whereas 61.63% (N=379) were rural.

Results

Three pairs of demographic variables with each pair of two related demographic factors were examined. For the first pair --- the school characteristics, school type and school location were investigated. As shown in Table 2, among three different types of schools, school principals of Fully Residential Secondary School obtained the highest mean of PCLEI (M=5.38, SD=.40), followed by school principals of Day Secondary School (M=5.30, SD=.42) and Religious Secondary school (M=5.06, SD=.41). Clearly, differences were found among the means of PCLEI and the differences were significant, F (2, 612) = 5.355, p<.05, MS=.950 (Table 3).

Table 2
Mean scores and standard deviations of PCLEI based on type of school

Type of school	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Day Secondary School	556	5.30	.42
Fully Residential School	28	5.38	.40
Religious Secondary school	31	5.06	.41
Total	615	5.29	.42

Table 3
One-way ANOVA - PCLEI in terms of types of school

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.901	2	.950	5.355	.005
Within Groups	108.602	612	.177		
Total	110.502	614			

As displayed in Table 4, in terms of school location, school principals in the urban areas obtained a higher mean score in PCLEI (M=5.33, SD=.43) than school principals in the rural areas (M=5.28, SD=.42). Although there was a difference of .05 between the mean scores, the difference was small and not significant, *t* (615) = 1.563, p>.05.

Table 4
Mean, standard deviations of PCLEI and t-test between urban and rural school principals in PCLEI

	Urban			Rural				
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	t	*p*
School Principals	236	5.33	.43	379	5.28	.42	1.563	.599

For the second pair of the demographic variable, prior experience and on-the-job experience as a school principal were evaluated. As presented in Table 5, principals with prior

experience greater than 20 years obtained the highest score of mean of PLCEI i.e. 5.46 (SD=.50), followed by the group of 1 to 5 years (M=5.30, SD=.41), 6 to 10 years (M=5.25, SD=.46), 11 to 15 years (M=5.18, SD=.45) and school principals with 16 to 20 years obtained the lowest score of mean (M=5.14, SD=.45). Though differences were found in the means among the groups, these differences were insignificant, F (4, 610) =1.819, p>.05, MS=.326 (Table 6).

Table 5
Mean scores and standard deviations - PCLEI based on prior experience of school principals

Prior experience (years)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1-5	509	5.30	.41
6-10	53	5.25	.46
11-15	17	5.18	.45
16-20	13	5.14	.45
>20	23	5.46	.50
Total	615	5.30	.42

Table 6
One-way ANOVA - PCLEI in terms of prior experience

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.302	4	.326	1.819	.124
Within Groups	109.200	610	.179		
Total	110.502	614			

To examine the on-the-job experience as a school principal, as delineated in Table 7, school principals with experience greater than 20 years obtained the highest score of mean of PLCEI i.e., 5.33 (SD=.43). This was followed by 16 to 20 years (M=5.32, SD=.52), 1 to 5 years (M=5.30, SD=.38), 11 to 15 years (M=5.27, SD=.52) and school principals with experience of 6 to 10 years obtained the lowest mean of PCLEI (M=5.19, SD=.47). Although differences of means were found among the groups, these differences were insignificant, F (4, 610=1.847, p>.05, MS=.331 (Table 8).

Table 7
Mean scores and standard deviations of PCLEI - on-the-job experience of school principals

Prior experience (years)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1-5	243	5.30	.38
6-10	95	5.19	.47
11-15	31	5.27	.52
16-20	23	5.32	.52
>20	223	5.33	.43
Total	615	5.30	.42

Table 8
One-way ANOVA of PCLEI - on-the-job experience of school principals

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.322	4	.331	1.847	.118
Within Groups	109.180	610	.179		
Total	110.502	614			

For the third pair of demographic variables, academic and professional qualifications of school principals were examined. As demonstrated in Table 9, school principals with a master's degree obtained the highest score of mean of 5.30 (SD=.39), followed by those with a bachelor's degree (M=5.29, SD=.44), whereas school principals with a Certificate/Diploma obtained the lowest score of mean of 5.06 (SD=.42). Even though differences were found in academic qualification among the mean scores of school principals, these differences were insignificant, F (2, 612) =.164, p>.05, MS=.849 (Table 10).

Table 9
Mean scores and standard deviations of PCLEI - academic qualification of school principals

Academic Qualification	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Certificate/Diploma	1	5.06	
Bachelor's degree	381	5.29	.44
Master's degree	233	5.30	.39
Total	615	5.30	.42

Table 10
One-way ANOVA of PCLEI - academic qualification of school principals

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.059	2	.030	.164	.849
Within Groups	110.443	612	.180		
Total	110.502				

To examine professional qualifications of school principals, as exhibited in Table 11, school principals with National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders (NPQEL) obtained a higher mean score of PCLEI (M=5.32, SD=.39) than school principals without NPQEL (M=5.28, SD=.44). A difference of .04 between the mean scores was found and it was significant. The result was stated in the *t*-test, t (615) = 1.244, p<.05.

Table 11
Mean, standard deviations of PCLEI and t-test between school principals with NPQEL and without NPQEL

	With NPQEL			Without NPQEL				
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	t	*p*
School Principals	236	5.32	.39	379	5.28	.44	1.244	.004

In summary, the study found that i) PCLEI was reliably related to school type whereas school principals from different locations had no significant difference in their level of PCLEI; ii) PCLEI was not reliably related to both prior experience and on-the-job experience

of school principals; and iii) instead of academic qualifications, PCLEI was reliably related to professional qualification i.e. school principals who possessed qualification of NPQEL demonstrated better PCLEI.

Discussion

The main purpose of the study was to measure whether different demographic factors were good predictor of PCLEI. Firstly, it was found that school type was one of the determinant factors of PCLEI; school principals from Day Secondary Schools, Fully Residential Secondary Schools and Religious Secondary Schools demonstrated different levels of PCLEI and the differences were significant. Looking closer at the mean scores of PCLEI, it was found that school principals of Fully Residential Schools obtained the highest mean score, followed by school principals of Day Secondary Schools and Religious Secondary Schools.

The above finding is parallel with the findings of Jorfi and Jorfi (2012); Pizer and Hartel (2005); Smollan and Sayers (2009); members from different organizations varied in their levels of EI. Most likely this variance may be linked closely to the fact that different organizations possess distinct organizational culture. According to Schein (2011); Maamari and Majdalani (2017), organizational culture is the collection of beliefs, values, norms as well as expectations that guide and inform the behaviours of the organizational members. As organizational values, beliefs, norms, and expectations can influence the individual's way of thinking and responding to stimuli, this can have substantial impact on the management of the organizational members' emotions (Berkovich and Eyal, 2015). Importantly, emotions are not merely embedded within the individual autonomous psychological states but located in the daily interaction among members in the organization, and thus are culturally specific (Blackmore, 2011). As different organizational cultures demonstrate different emotional meanings and responses (Tai and Omar, 2020b), not surprisingly, PCLEI differed by the types of school.

Although Day Secondary School, Fully Residential Secondary School and Religious Secondary School are public secondary schools in Malaysia, their organizational cultures are different. The Day Secondary School makes up 85% of the Malaysian secondary schools as student admission is not stringent. The Fully Residential Secondary Schools are those schools that provide opportunities for indigenous students for local and global success through preparing them for higher education to fulfil national needs. High quality teachers, better education resources as well as complete and updated facilities are available in the Fully Residential Secondary School. Besides, Fully Residential Secondary Schools are highly results-oriented, and the selection of students is much more stringent in comparison with Day Secondary Schools or Religious Secondary Schools (Tai and Omar, 2013). Meanwhile, Religious Secondary Schools employ a totally different culture as compared to Day Secondary Schools and Fully Residential Secondary Schools. Specifically, its curriculum is Islamic based with their daily practices and routines based on Islamic perspectives (Tai and Omar, 2013).

To a large extent, school principals from different types of secondary schools are more sensitive to culturally established standards and values in the organizations in which they function; they tend to respond to the culture and change their attitudes according to what is expected of them in that setting (Underwood, 2002). As a result, the anatomy of these different school cultures – the shared beliefs, values, norms, and relationships can impact PCLEI in different ways. Over time, school principals from different school types perceive and respond to their situations differently, hence differing in their competence to deal with emotions, and expressing different levels of PCLEI.

Secondly, the study found that school location was not a predictor of PCLEI; school principals of different secondary schools located in urban and rural areas had no significant differences in their level of PCLEI. The result parallels the findings of Hosseini and Ananda Rao (2013) and Singravelu (2007) who reached the conclusion that school location was not correlated to EI. However, the result did not agree with the findings of Punia and Sangwan (2011); Adsul (2013); Osman (2015); Singh et al (2015) who reported that individuals from urban locations demonstrated better EI in comparison with those from rural areas; they believe that rural and urban areas have their own distinctive features; moreover, modification of emotional displays largely depends on social circumstances (Matsumoto *et al.,* 2008).

Indeed, in comparison with organizational culture, it might seem simplistic to perceive geographical location as a predictor of PCLEI. It is difficult to deny that the peculiar features and characteristics of urban and rural areas can impact PCLEI differently. However, from the viewpoint of organizational management, school location is only an external factor that may affect the development and the operation of the schools indirectly (Tai and Omar, 2019). Although the local community and stakeholders of the urban or rural areas may exert influences on schools on different dimensions, the impact is relatively limited. Conversely, as a dynamic internal factor that influences the development and the management of the schools, organizational culture has direct impact on the behaviours of school principals, and this inherently affects their PCLEI due to their adherence to the cultural norms of the schools (Tai and Omar, 2020b). Hence, PCLEI was reliably related to school type but not to school location.

The third and the fourth findings revealed that PCLEI was not reliably related to the prior or on-the-job experience of a school principal; previous or on-the-job experience was not an important predictor of PCLEI. Although Karani *et al* (2017); Shukla and Srivastave (2016); Kumar and Muniandy (2014); Jorfi *et al* (2011) reported that EI increased as the individual's experience increased, however, the current result is congruent with the findings of the study implemented by Hosseini and Rao (2013); Das and Sahu (2014); Vanishree (2014); Sergio *et al* (2015) that work experience was not reliably related to EI.

The common belief is that the greater the time spent in the profession, the higher the opportunities for gaining skill and experience. As EI can be learned and developed in time (Groves *et al*., 2008), experience is believed to have significant impact on the level of EI; experienced individuals are much better and easier at developing adaptability and flexibility in their workplace and social lives especially in dealing with their own and others' emotions (Kumar and Muniandy, 2014; Shukla and Srivastav, 2016). This unexpected direction and inconsistency in the current findings about the impact of work experience on PCLEI has signalled the need for more inquiry into this aspect of EI.

Fifthly, the study found that school principals of different academic qualifications had no significant differences at their level of PCLEI. This finding is supported by Mishra and Mohapatra (2010); Tajeddini *et al* (2014); Vanishree (2014); Yamani *et al* (2014); Olugbemi and Bolaji (2016); Nagar (2017) that EI did not increase with higher academic qualification. However, this finding did not align with the findings of Jorfi *et al* (2011); Hosseini and Ananda Rao (2013); Hemalatha (2014); Kumar and Muniandy (2014); Shukla and Srivastave (2016); and Karani *et al* (2017), that highly educated individuals were able to deal with their emotions more effectively in comparison with less educated individuals.

Interestingly, the sixth finding revealed that PCLEI was reliably related to professional qualification or NPQEL; school principals who possessed qualification of NPQEL demonstrated better PCLEI in comparison with those who did not. The finding is congruent with the findings

of Murray (2009); Nelis *et al* (2009); Clarke (2010); Kirk *et al* (2011); Dolev and Leshem (2016); Weinberg and Pearson (2016), that EI can be developed and enhanced through regular and relevant training programmes. Ideally, professional development programmes that are closely associated with the enhancement of job-related competence, social adaptability and awareness can develop not only the individual's cognitive abilities that are affected by emotions, but their emotions are also managed cognitively (Groves *et al*., 2008).

To our knowledge, NPQEL has been a preparatory training programme for novel school principals / head teachers in Malaysia since July 2014 (IAB, 2018). The content of the course was developed and guided by the School Leadership Competency Model (SLCM) built by IAB (IAB, 2018). The SLCM consists of six key dimensions of effective school leaders: policy and direction, resources, and operation, instructional and achievement, change management and innovation, people and relationships, and personal effectiveness (IAB, 2018). The notion of the NPQEL emphasizes both the importance of management as well as leadership in school development. Specifically, looking closely at the leadership conceptualization in SLCM, personal development is one of the main emphases of the programme, EI being highlighted in developing school leaders' capacity for continuous school improvement. Not surprisingly, school leaders who had engaged with NPQEL were able to display better PCLEI than their counterparts who did not attend the training programme.

Implications

The study offers several insights into engaging EI in effective school leadership for both educational practitioners and policy makers. Firstly, from the viewpoint of human resource development, the study found that comparatively school principals who possessed qualification of NPQEL demonstrated better PCLEI. This indicates that professional development programmes that address the needs of job-related tasks, with the enhancement of EI as one of the main purposes of the training is more effective than academic qualifications in developing PCLEI of school principals. This provides credence that PCLEI can be learned and developed specifically through professional development programmes; even school leaders with low academic qualification can become better leaders in terms of PCLEI with the exposure to the customized PCLEI enhancement programmes. The result of the study remains relevant to the field of professional leadership development that NPQEL should be a good option to be considered to develop and enhance EI of the school leaders. In short, it serves as a policy guideline especially for school leadership preparation programme not just for Malaysia, but also other countries in the regions.

Secondly, as PCLEI was found significantly correlated with school type, there was a tendency that organisational culture is one of the possible variables that affect school leaders' emotions in enacting change in the schools. Indeed, research has revealed that organisational culture intertwines with leadership (Schein, 2011). On the one hand, organizational leaders are central in shaping a conducive organizational culture especially in capturing their beliefs and values to strengthen organizational effectiveness; on the other hand, as the organization develops, the emerging organisational culture influences and impacts the leaders. As a result, their feelings, behaviours, beliefs and leadership styles are moulded by the concerned culture (Tai and Omar, 2019). Therefore, the significance of the interplay between school leadership and culture as an antecedent for the formation of PCLEI cannot be under-estimated in the process of school development. In the light of the above, the impact of the relationship between these two variables should be taken into consideration in the design of professional

development programmes for school leaders so that PCLEI can be developed and enhanced efficiently and sustainably.

Limitations and Future Direction of the Study

This study was conducted within a few limitations. Firstly, PCLEI is exhibited as one type of ability and was evaluated by school principals using self-report questionnaires. Instead of actual performance reports, self-report approaches are probably to be influenced by egocentric or biases (Podsakoff *et al*., 2003). Hence, caution needs to be taken in interpreting the results of the study. Secondly, as PCLEI is context-specific, dynamic, and complex, conducting a cross-sectional study within a short time is insufficient to present a comprehensive picture about PCLEI. Investigating various phases of the school change i.e., before, during and after the change represents an interesting avenue for further research and is more likely to capture a better picture about the change situations. Besides, using a longitudinal design such as observations and interviews to cross-validate the findings would also be beneficial. A third limitation involves the presumption examined in the study about the relationships between demographic factors (e.g., school type and organizational culture) and PCLEI; this needs further investigation with relevant instruments to arrive at verifiable conclusions. Last but not least, as some of the findings of the study contrast with previous studies, the relationship between the concerned variables needs to be substantiated through future studies.

Conclusion

PCLEI is an important component of educational leadership and is central to school improvement and effectiveness. To best lead change in schools, PCLEI is a prerequisite for any effective school leader. The study contributes to the field of school leadership and emotional development in managing school change. It reinforces the existing literature about the possible significant relationships between demographic factors and PCLEI and seeks to fill the research void. Specifically, the study found that PCLEI was reliably related to NPQEL not only revealed that PCLEI can be learned and developed, but also that professional development programmes are effective in enhancing PCLEI of school leaders. Besides, as the study reported that school principals from different types of secondary schools display different levels of PCLEI, most probably organizational culture is a good predictor of PCLEI. The interplay between PCLEI and organisational culture can be seen as one type of leadership strength that expands the parameters of school leadership. This study is crucial step forward in the field of school leadership studies in exploring PCLEI, specifically in understanding the importance of the emotional engagement in enhancing the change capacity of school leaders.

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