

Culturally Responsive Leadership Among School Leaders and School Instructional Climate

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Abstract

Malaysia is one of the most multiracial, multicultural and diverse countries in the world. This diversity is also evident in schools and demands a leadership that is not just aware and sensitive but responsive in dealing with the needs and abilities of different groups of people. Thus, the aims of this study were to identify the level of culturally responsive leadership (CRL) among school leaders and the school instructional climate in Gombak District, Selangor. The study sample comprised 394 teachers who were recruited using a random sampling technique. A survey research design using a questionnaire was employed. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, data were collected using the Google Forms platform. The findings indicated that the level of CRL was high ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.55$), while the level of school instructional climate was very high ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.53$). CRL was also significantly correlated with school instructional climate ($r = 0.873$, $p < 0.05$). These findings can be used by the Ministry of Education (MOE) Malaysia to enhance culturally responsive leadership practices in the syllabus of the National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders (NPQEL) which is designed specifically for future school leaders in Malaysia. It is anticipated that the research instrument developed and the findings will enrich the international literature on CRL in education, especially with the diverse backgrounds and cultures among the school community.

Keywords: school leader, culturally responsive leadership, diversity in education, school instructional climate.

1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a complex yet unique country with citizens who come from a diverse and mixed range of cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds (Kaboudarahangi et al., 2013; Kawangit & Don, 2016; Reddy & Selvanathan, 2020). According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), in the 3rd quarter of 2021 there were 32.7 million people in Malaysia. In terms of ethnic groupings, the majority are Bumiputera (69.8%); followed by Chinese (22.4%); Indian (6.8%); and others (1.0%). However, Bumiputera itself consists of several subethnic groups such as Malays; Orang Asli

(“Aboriginal People”) which consists of three subgroups; the indigenous people of Sabah with 32 tribes; and the indigenous people of Sarawak with 27 tribes (DOSM, 2022). In any country, education will always be one of the main instruments for improving quality of life and national integration, so school is where all the efforts begin (Nordin, Alias & Siraj, 2013; Samian & Awang, 2017).

In the context of the school as an organisation, school leaders are the main players in managing almost everything including administrative works, instructional issues, human resources, finance, and becoming the

role model for the school community (Bellibas & Liu, 2016). To provide quality education as outlined in the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG4), one of the functions of school leaders is to undertake planning and monitoring, as well as engage directly with stakeholders (UN, 2020). Recognising the important role of school leaders, the Fifth Shift of the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025 has stipulated that only high-performing leaders should be placed in schools. Furthermore, each candidate needs to complete and pass the National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders (NPQEL) (MOE Malaysia, 2013a).

Past studies around the world have demonstrated that excellent and effective leaders will successfully manage all administrative matters, create a positive environment, and improve students' achievement and outcomes (MOE Malaysia, 2013a). But what exactly is 'leadership', especially for school leaders? Any attempt to define 'leadership' holistically is challenging because of its ever-changing nature over time, context, country, and location (Silva, 2016; Ndlovu, 2017; Kellerman, 2014; McCleskey, 2014; Smith, Lewis & Tushman, 2016). However, for Hallinger (2016), Ahmed (2012) and Palus (2007), leadership is a combination of art and science. Leadership also involves an interactive process between the leader and the person being led, with each having their own functions in achieving the goals set (Silva, 2016; Smith, Lewis & Tushman, 2016; Gandolfi & Stone, 2016).

Effective school leadership exhibits its own characteristics and outcomes. The findings of previous studies have empirically demonstrated that effective leadership successfully improves the levels of achievement of both schools and students (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2019; Harris et al., 2017; Hallinger, 2016; Baharin et al., 2016). Competent school leaders continuously strive to make the school a learning community in line with the concept of lifelong learning (Hamid & Sharif, 2020; Ishak, Ghani & Siraj, 2014). According to Ndlovu (2017), effective school leaders will enhance student learning, become a point of liaison between educational policies and operations, and connect schools with the environment, including community and industry. Effective

leadership can also adapt to the situation and context of the school (Ndlovu, 2017; Smith, Lewis & Tushman, 2016; Silva, 2016; Hallinger, 2016).

Even in the face of limited resources, constraints, or ongoing environmental changes, creative leaders will find the best possible solutions (Smith, Lewis & Tushman, 2016; Bellibas & Liu, 2016). The ability to adapt is the most important factor for human beings to survive, and is essential if schools are to remain relevant in preparing future generations (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). To facilitate this, an excellent leader is always alert to external influences and implements changes based on current circumstances and needs (Mansor et al., 2021). According to Barkman (2015), there are seven characteristics of an effective school leader, among which are efforts to monitor the progress of the students and creating a positive school culture. In order to make changes and achieve goals, effective leadership will always be sensitive to the school community (Gandolfi & Stone 2018). In the context of Malaysia, which is known for its multi-racial and multi-religious society, a responsive leadership will always take account of and attend to the different needs of school members and stakeholders (Mitchell, 2015).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Quality Education

The Education for All (EFA) agenda is an international initiative that was launched by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1990 to provide quality education for every child (World Bank, 2014). In Malaysia, this initiative was supported by the Ministry of Education (MOE) Malaysia through the introduction of the Education for All policy which was based on the National Education Philosophy (MOE Malaysia, 2019). The diversity of cultures, talents, interests, and backgrounds of students in Malaysia is catered for by the existence of various types and streams of schools. These include the National School, National Type (Chinese), National Type (Tamil), Government Aided Religious School, Special Education School, Special Model School, Boarding School, Sport School, and Vision School. At various levels of schooling in Malaysia, the most

important educational phase for students in primary school as this provides them with initial exposure to social institutions and preparation for the real world (Abdul Hamid, et al., 2021). In addition, students and schools potentially become the solution to any conflict of unity and thus support integration between different races (Nordin et al., 2013; Perdana et al., 2018). As stated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025, all children have the chance to experience an excellent education system that is uniquely Malaysian yet on a par with the best the world has to offer (MOE Malaysia, 2013a).

2.2. Culturally Responsive Leadership

In embracing and managing the needs of a school community that is uniquely diverse, school leaders need to adopt an appropriate leadership style. In this regard, culturally responsive leadership (CRL) is the best leadership practice for school leaders to adopt as it enables them to understand and consider cultural diversity and past experiences as well as bridge existing gaps to create a sense of belonging among the school community (Hollowell 2019; Mitchell 2015). For Madhlangobe (2009), Horton (2017), and Graves (2019), CRL refers to the skills possessed by school leaders in influencing others to respond to the different needs of different groups. The element of social justice forms the basis of this leadership style and is aimed at providing an environment that celebrates diversity as well as the cultural complexities and backgrounds of the school community (Graves, 2019; Horton, 2017).

Several scholars have asserted that CRL developed following vigorous investigation of a culturally responsive pedagogy that focused on teachers' responsibility in managing student diversity in the classroom (Johnson, 2014; Vassallo, 2015; Williams, 2016). Among the ways in which CRL differs from other forms of leadership are that its practices are underpinned by the understanding, beliefs, and views of school leaders on seeing how the values, cultures, and backgrounds of the school community differ from their own (English & Ellison III, 2017). The importance of continuous engagement by schools with parents, community, and private sectors is emphasised in the Ninth Shift of Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013 – 2025 (MOE Malaysia, 2013a). This is implemented through several platforms

such as Parents-Teachers Committee; Parents, Initiative of Community and Private Sector Involvement; and Parents Support Group (PSG).

To understand the concept of culturally responsive leadership among school leaders, Vassallo (2015) proposed a cyclical model involves five steps: the process of reflection; teacher-student interaction; processing and restructuring; generation of new knowledge; and the emergence of culturally responsive pedagogy. For Campos-Moreira et al. (2020), the CRL framework focuses on improving fair outcomes through three components: 1) context, which involves considering various aspects of the environment; 2) the leadership style to be adopted by school leaders; and 3) cultural fluency to enhance responsiveness.

Khalifa et al. (2016) argue that culturally responsive leadership involves every different level and context; from administration at the district level to local leaders, from school leaders to teachers, and the connections between all these groups. Students, parents, and communities from various backgrounds, ethnicities, socioeconomic status, and minorities will always be welcomed and given attention. School leaders thus focus on the diverse abilities and capabilities of students, history, values, and community culture as well as striving to raise awareness among the school community. The four dimensions of the CRL model developed by Khalifa et al. (2016) are 1) critical self-awareness; 2) culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation; 3) a culturally responsive and inclusive school environment; and 4) engaging students and parents in community contexts.

2.3. School Instructional Climate

In the domain of education, the term 'instructional' has always been associated with schools or any educational institutions where the process of teaching and learning takes place (Holzberger & Schiepe-Tiska, 2021). Past studies have examined the different scope and environments of instructional sessions. Some scholars use the terms 'instructional', 'instructional climate' or 'instructional environment' solely to refer to what is happening in the classroom (Goddard et al., 2015; Kennedy, 2014; Holzberger & Schiepe-Tiska, 2021). Others define and situate the instructional climate in a larger context that

exists beyond the four walls of the classroom (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger, 2011; Landrum et al., 2017; Jacob et al., 2015). Wherever the physical limitations of instructional session are placed, school leaders play vital functions in creating a positive climate that enhances students' learning experience and wellbeing (Fraiser & Brooks, 2015; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013). Faced with diverse students from different backgrounds and with disparate needs, the school environment should be responsive and positive to support the learning experience and ensure it translates into success (English & Ellison III, 2017; MOE New Zealand, 2021). For Kennedy (2014), one of the characteristics of a positive school instructional climate is effective interaction among the school community, especially between teachers and students. Creating a positive school climate encompasses the instructional scope reflected by the school leader as the main player in building a good rapport with teachers and enhancing satisfaction with their job (Yahaya et al., 2021; Kutsyuruba et al., 2015).

Hallinger (2011) is among the scholars that have discussed the latest concept of school instructional climate. In his instructional leadership model, one of the three dimensions posited is to promote a school environment that enables the process of instruction to run smoothly. Although promoting the school instructional climate was the third dimension, the practices are implemented across the other two dimensions that are defining school goal and managing instructional programme (Hassan, Ahmad & Boon, 2018). The five functions that form part of this school instructional climate are: 1) protection of instructional time; 2) support for instructional activities; 3) development of teachers' professionalism; 4) provide incentives to enhance teachers' efforts; and 5) provide incentives to the students. In the Fifth Shift in Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013 – 2025, the emphasis is placed on the practices of instructional leadership among school leaders. The aim was to cultivate a supportive and stimulating learning environment in schools. An absence of this kind of environment has led to school absenteeism (MOE Malaysia, 2013a). To bolster this concept, MOE Malaysia produced the documents 'Guidelines in the Protection of Instructional Time', 'Action Plans in the Protection of Instructional Time,' and 'Best

Practices in the Protection of Instructional Time' (MOE Malaysia, 2013b). These efforts demonstrate the commitment of MOE Malaysia in ensuring the protection of instructional times was one of the touch points in 2012 (Sahaid, 2013).

2.4. Previous Studies

In a study by Nelson and Guerra (2014) in the states of Texas and Michigan, USA involving teachers and school administrators, only 4% were categorised as aware and responsive to cultural diversity in schools. This significant low percentage suggested that these school communities were not optimising their abilities to achieve their school's vision. In Malaysia, the Vision School was unable to achieve the objectives for which it had been established; however, this was not surprising. Among the factors that caused this situation to occur was the inability of school leaders to implement leadership that embraces and manages cultural diversity, even though the three different types of schools were located on the same premises (Malakolunthu, 2010). The opportunity was not optimally utilised in planning and managing programmes that could foster coexistence and cross-cultural activities.

However, in a multi-case study by Horton (2017) of three public elementary schools whose students came from a low socioeconomic background, all three principals successfully demonstrated a high awareness of social justice and were responsive to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. Similarly, a study by Williams (2016) in the district of Aotearoa, New Zealand found that the school leaders in secondary schools practice good culturally responsive leadership while simultaneously influencing other teachers in the development of a culturally responsive school culture. School leaders were aware of their important roles in creating an environment that took account of the school community through CRL (Adams & Velarde, 2020). The CRL practiced demonstrably made school management smoother as well as achieving school objectives (Kato, 2012; Madhlangeb & Gordon, 2012). Being an excellent school leader in practising CRL did not simply come naturally. Among those factors that shaped such leaders were how an individual was raised by his/her parents, how they were supported by the environment during their upbringing, and the

preparation programmes available for future school leaders (Mitchell, 2015; Williams, 2016).

As suggested by Johnson (2014) and Khalifa et al. (2016), to equip school leaders with relevant characteristics that are responsive to a diversity of cultures, preparation programmes and courses need to be undertaken by prospective school leaders. In addition, Johnson (2014) also suggested that related authorities responsible for appointing school leaders should increase the number of potential teachers so that only the best are appointed and then posted in accordance with the diversity of backgrounds in a particular school. For Horton (2017) and Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012), school leaders who practice CRL successfully adopt an attitude of adhering firmly to the spirit of educational philosophy, being positive, and implementing self-assessment. Even though creating an inclusive environment that considers the different needs of school members is quite complex, it is by no means impossible for school leaders to achieve (Madhlangobe, 2009; Kato, 2011). The main findings of a study by Hollowell (2019) were that the two successful practices of CRL among school leaders were an openness to any opinion by parents in decision making; and fostering positive relations with the local community. In addition, support from parents and the community, especially in terms of financial aid, demonstrates how effective school leaders are in managing and ensuring school activities are performed smoothly (Kato, 2011; Norman, Hashim & Abdullah, 2018; Horton, 2017).

Previous research also reveals the possible relationship between the practices of culturally responsive leadership and school instructional climate, one that could enhance the quality of education in schools. Even though Malaysia is known to be a diverse and multiracial country, very few studies on culturally responsive leadership have been conducted in the Malaysian context. Khalifa et al. (2016) thus argue that culturally responsive leadership is both under-researched and undertheorised. Similarly, Harris et al. (2017) suggested that studies on culture and leadership practices should be further explored within the Asian context.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework for this study. The independent variable was culturally responsive leadership,

which was adopted from Khalifa et al. (2016) and consists of four dimensions. However, while Khalifa and colleagues focused more on social justice and equity for students from disparate backgrounds, the current study also included diversity among teachers. The dependent variable was school instructional climate, which was adopted partially from the model of instructional leadership developed by Hallinger (2011). However, while Hallinger (2011) focuses on the practices of school leaders, in this study the school instructional climate encompassed the practices of school leaders, teachers, and the norms of schools. This conceptual framework was developed with the Malaysian context in mind.

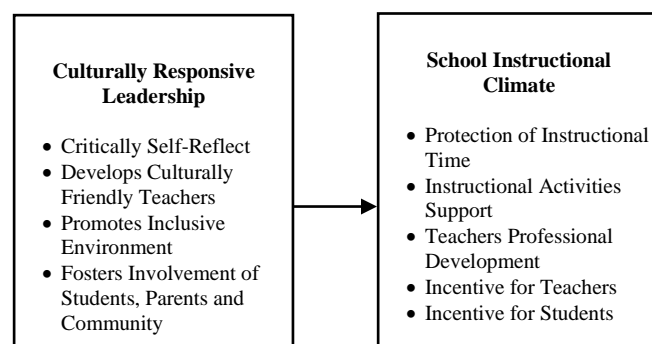


Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework*

The findings of this study provide an initial overview of the level of culturally responsive leadership practice among school leaders and the school instructional climate in Gombak District, Selangor. Based on these findings, appropriate recommendations will be proposed to the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE), State Education Department (SED), and District Education Office (DEO) as part of a joint effort to provide quality education. Thus, the objectives of this study were as follows:

- 1) To identify the level of culturally responsive leadership practices undertaken by school leaders in Gombak District, Selangor;
- 2) To identify the level of school instructional climate in Gombak District, Selangor; and
- 3) To identify the relationship between culturally responsive leadership practices among school leaders and the school instructional climate in Gombak District, Selangor.

3. Methods/Materials

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative approach comprising a survey research design. This design was selected as it can provide accurate measurements, enable generalisations to be made, and facilitates an evaluation of the perceptions of teachers (Babbie 2016; Ramli, 2016).

3.2. Population and Sampling

The population for this study comprised 4,441 teachers from both primary and secondary schools in Gombak District, Selangor (MOE Malaysia, 2021). Schools under the management of Gombak District Education Office (DEO) are both urban and suburban. Based on the recommendations of Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the sample size was set at a minimum of 354 respondents. However, during the data collection period, 394 respondents answered the questionnaire.

3.3. Research Instrument and Data Collection

This study used a questionnaire as the main research instrument. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: Part A focusing on demographic information; Part B on culturally responsive leadership practices; and Part C on school instructional climate. Part A consisted of six items: gender, years of teaching; highest education received; types of schools; location of schools; and students' enrolment in schools. For Part B, 40 items were devised based on the culturally responsive model developed by Khalifa et al. (2016). These covered four dimensions (10 items per dimension). This quantitative research instrument is among the first in the world to be developed to identify the level of culturally responsive leadership. For Part C, 25 items were adopted and partially adapted from the Principal Instructional Measurement Rating Scale (PIMRS) developed by Hallinger (2011). These covered five dimensions (five items per dimension). Items in Part B and Part C were responded to on a 5 point Likert scale to indicate the degree of agreement ('1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Disagree Less, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree'). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, data collection was conducted using the Google Forms platform. This enabled the questionnaire to be provided visually without any cost

implications (Mondal et al., 2018). Before any data were collected, approval for the research was obtained from the Ministry of Education (MOE) Malaysia, Selangor State Education Department (SED), and Gombak District Education Office (DEO).

3.4. Validity and Reliability

An effective research instrument needs to be tested for validity and reliability prior to use (Babbie, 2016; Mohajan, 2017). In quantitative research, validity refers to a situation where certain concepts are accurately measured using a specific measuring tool (Field, 2017; Heale & Twycross, 2015). To test for validity, the instrument was assessed by four experts in the research field and their recommendations were then used to improve the items, especially with respect to the Malaysian context. To test for reliability, Cronbach Alpha coefficients (α) ranging between 0.00 to 1.00 are commonly used by researchers to measure the internal consistency of items (Taherdoost, 2020). Taber (2018) states that a Cronbach Alpha coefficient above 0.7 indicates high internal consistency and reliability. Similarly, for Bond and Fox (2015), any value between 0.80 and 1.00 indicates that the items are very good, effective, and have a high level of consistency. Based on the pilot test, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the questionnaire was 0.97, indicating an extremely high level of consistency and confirming that the questionnaire could be implemented in the real study.

3.5. Data Analysis

The data were encoded using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 26 for both descriptive and inferential analysis. Descriptive analysis was performed to generate the frequency, percentage, mean score, and standard deviation of the responses. This served to answer the first and second research questions. The level of culturally responsive leadership practices among school leaders and school instructional climate were determined by the mean score interpretation suggested by Izani and Yahya (2014), and are presented in Table 1. To answer the third research question, the inferential analysis applied was a Pearson correlation to identify the relationship between culturally responsive leadership among school leaders and school instructional climate.

According to the ideal spectrum for interpreting a correlation coefficient by Senthilnathan (2019), any value between $-0.50 \geq r > -0.70$ or $+0.50 \leq r < +0.70$ is considered a strong correlation, while $-0.70 \geq r > -1.00$ or $+0.70 \leq r < +1.00$ is considered a very strong correlation.

Table 1. *Mean Score Interpretation*

Mean Score	Interpretation
1.00 – 1.89	Very Low
1.90 – 2.69	Low
2.70 – 3.49	Moderate
3.50 – 4.29	High
4.30 – 5.00	Very High

4. Results

4.1. Profile of Respondents

Table 2 presents the demographic profile of all 394 teachers in Gombak District, Selangor.

Table 2. *Profile of Respondents*

Demography	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Men	87	22.1
Women	307	77.9
Years of Teaching		
1 – 10	100	25.4
11 – 20	180	45.7
21 and above	114	28.9
Highest Education Received		
Certificate / Diploma	15	3.8
Bachelor's Degree	322	81.7
Master's Degree	54	13.7
Doctor of Philosophy	3	8.0
Types of School		

Primary National School	271	68.8
Primary National School Type (C)	24	6.1
Primary National School Type (T)	22	5.6
Secondary School	77	19.5
Location of School		
Urban School	303	76.9
Suburban School	91	23.1
School's Students Enrollment		
1 – 500	63	16.0
501 – 1000	140	35.5
1001 – 1500	91	23.1
1501 – 2000	82	20.8
2001 and above	18	4.6

4.2. Culturally Responsive Leadership

Table 3 shows that the overall mean for culturally responsive leadership practices among school leaders was 4.27 (SD = 0.55). Based on the mean score interpretation by Izani and Yahya (2014), the level of culturally responsive leadership practices was categorised as high. Among the dimensions, 'fosters involvement of students, parents, and community' yielded the highest mean of 4.31 (SD= 0.56) which was categorised as very high.

Table 3. *Overall Means for Culturally Responsive Leadership Among School Leaders*

Dimension	Mean	SD
Critically Self-Reflect	4.23	0.60
Develops Culturally Friendly Teachers	4.28	0.58

Promotes Inclusive Environment	4.25	0.59
Fosters Involvement of Students, Parents, and Community	4.31	0.56
Overall	4.27	0.55

4.3. School Instructional Climate

Table 4 shows that the overall mean for school instructional climate was 4.31 (SD = 0.53). Based on the mean score interpretation by Izani and Yahya (2014), the level of school instructional climate was categorised as very high. Among the dimensions, 'incentive for students' yielded the highest mean of 4.42 (SD = 0.56) which was categorised as very high

Table 4. *Overall Means for School Instructional Climate*

Dimension	Mean	SD
Protection of Instructional Time	4.10	0.60
Instructional Activities Support	4.33	0.59
Teachers Professional Development	4.36	0.59
Incentive for Teachers	4.30	0.65
Incentive for Students	4.42	0.56
Overall	4.31	0.53

4.3. Relationship Between Culturally Responsive Leadership and School Instructional Climate

Table 5 indicates a significant relationship between culturally responsive leadership among school leaders and school instructional climate. Based on Senthilnathan (2019), there is a very strong positive relationship between the two variables ($r = 0.873$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 5. *Pearson Correlation Between Culturally Responsive Leadership and School Instructional Climate*

	School Instructional Climate
Culturally Responsive Leadership	.873*

* $p < 0.05$

5. Discussion

School leaders play important roles in managing schools and ensuring all the policies by Ministry of Education (MOE) Malaysia are implemented smoothly and achieve the required objectives. In doing so, effective leadership is that which also improves the level of achievement of both schools and students to the requisite standards (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2019; Harris et al., 2017; Hallinger, 2016; Baharin et al., 2016). Given the diversity of people in the Malaysian context generally and in schools specifically, school leaders need to adopt a style of leadership that is responsive to all the diversity that exists. Thus, culturally responsive leadership involves the implementation of practices that take into account any planning and activities needed to make the school a place where everyone is treated equally regardless of their background (Hollowell, 2019; Mitchell, 2015).

The first objective of this study was to identify the level of culturally responsive leadership among school leaders in Gombak District, Selangor. The high level of culturally responsive leadership identified in this study aligns with the findings of Horton (2017), Williams (2016), and Donnie and Joseph (2016). Hence, the elements of equity and justice were practiced by school leaders when engaging with the school members, parents, and the local community. However, this finding was not in line with the studies by Nelson and Guerra (2014) and Malakolunthu (2010). There are a few factors that might explain this disparity. First, strong yet effective school leaders, especially those implementing culturally responsive leadership, do not simply appear overnight. They are shaped by factors such as their environmental experience during their upbringing or/and the effectiveness of

preparation programmes for future school leaders organised by MOE Malaysia (Mitchell, 2015; Williams, 2016).

Among the four dimensions of culturally responsive leadership, the fourth dimension ('fosters involvement of students, parents, and community') provided the highest mean score with an outstanding category of 'very high' compared with the other three which were categorised as 'high'. School leaders are not merely responsible for managing schools in terms of administrative tasks. They are role models in promoting an inclusive school environment and building a positive relationship with parents and community (Johnson, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016). It is almost impossible for such a positive relationship to be successfully established without such openness by school leaders, even if the local community and parents are keen to contribute. In addition, existing programmes of the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE), such as the Parents Support Group (PSG), provide a proper platform for parents and the community to work together with the schools (MOE Malaysia, 2013a). The practices of school leaders who were sensitive and responsive to diversity and took parental views into account when making decisions, strengthened these positive relationships, which was beneficial for all (Hollowell, 2019; Horton, 2017).

The second objective of this study was to identify the level of school instructional climate in Gombak District, Selangor. The overall finding indicated the level was very high. Among the five dimensions, the first dimension ('protection of instructional time') yielded the lowest mean score and was the only dimension categorised as 'high' as the other four were classified as 'very high'. The focus in this dimension is to ensure an instructional session with a supportive environment is conducted optimally. This result is quite surprising as MOE Malaysia produced several documents as references emphasising the protection of instructional time and these became the ministry's touch point (Sahaid, 2013). However, the fifth dimension ('incentive for students') yielded the highest mean of all dimensions on both variables. This indicated that both school leaders and teachers in Gombak District, Selangor appreciated their students by providing rewards and incentives. The appreciation given

acted to motivate the students while supporting the learning environment to increase levels of achievement (English & Ellison III, 2017).

Regarding the third objective, the findings revealed a positive and strong relationship between culturally responsive leadership among school leaders and school instructional climate. As mentioned by Hollowell (2019) and Mitchell (2015), because culturally responsive leadership is implemented when dealing with diversity in schools, a positive environment will be created. With such an environment, regardless of students' background, both school programmes and instructional sessions run effectively, enhancing school and student achievement (Graves, 2019; Horton, 2017). This is supported by Khalifa et al.'s (2016) research on how the culturally responsive practices of school leaders impacted directly on the levels of achievement of both schools and students.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that 1) the level of culturally responsive leadership practices among schools' leaders in Gombak District, Selangor is high; 2) the level of school instructional climate in Gombak District, Selangor is very high; and 3) there is a positive strong relationship between culturally responsive leadership and school instructional climate in Gombak District, Selangor. As one of the leadership styles that is considered quite new and under-researched in Malaysia, the findings gave a positive impression to the researchers who are eager to explore this issue further. However, although Malaysia is one of the countries known to be diverse and living in harmony since independence, this cannot be taken for granted forever. In fact, the world is now easily travelled or migrated and it is possible that the level of diversity will become even richer than before. The function of a school is not just to focus on instructional or academic achievement but to act as a social institution tasked with preparing our future generation. Thus, culturally responsive leadership is a must for school leaders wishing to ensure the spirit and philosophy of education is adhered to firmly with no child left behind. Moreover, the quantitative research instrument developed in this study is among the first, not

only in Malaysia but also the world, to determine the level of culturally responsive leadership. With these findings, we propose that the Ministry of Education (MOE) Malaysia should provide a special syllabus in preparation programmes for school leaders, such as a National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders (NPQEL) on culturally responsive leadership. For the State Education Office Department (SED) and District Education Office (DE), continuous or periodical assessment should be performed to identify the level of culturally responsive leadership and plan appropriate activities to enhance their practices while engaging with communities.

Limitations and Further Study

This study was conducted to identify the level of culturally responsive leadership among school leaders and school instructional climate based on teachers' perceptions in Gombak District, Selangor. However, the findings cannot be generalised to other districts or states in Malaysia. Furthermore, the link between culturally responsive leadership practices and the academic achievement of students or schools was not empirically studied. Further studies are therefore needed to identify the level of culturally responsive leadership in both low and high achieving schools. Furthermore, it would be useful to explore other, related dependent variables such as disciplinary issues among students.

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Authors' Contributions

This paper was a joint effort of all the authors that cooperated and conducted this research actively throughout the process.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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