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**A Qualitative Inquiry into Women Principals' Leadership  
in Malaysia**

**by**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of Warwick

Centre for Education Studies

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*Sakinah Ahmad*

April 2017

## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and no material from this thesis has been used or published previously. I confirm that the thesis has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

## **Abstract**

The study explores the issue of women principals' leadership in secondary schools in Malaysia. From 2005-2013, the statistics provided by the Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD), Ministry of Education (MoE), Malaysia, show that the number of women teachers in Malaysia is more than men. However, when it comes to the principalship of schools, the number of women principals is less as compared to that of men. To understand the way women principals enact leadership in the secondary schools in Malaysia, an interpretivist qualitative research approach was employed in this study. The study examined key priorities that determine the leadership of women principals, the interaction of women principals with the stakeholders, and what values they uphold in practising leadership. It further examined the challenges that women principals face when practising leadership, how they deal with the challenges, as well as the supports that exist for women principals' success and attainment of their priorities. The study attempts to understand these issues from women principals' own experiences and perspectives, as well as from the experiences, perceptions and attitudes of those they work with inside and outside the schools.

A multiple case study research was designed to understand how four women principals practise leadership in the secondary schools in Malaysia. The inquiry was accomplished through semi structured interviews with women principals and the stakeholders both inside and outside the schools, as well as the observations of the meetings and other schools' events that involved the participation of the women principals. In addition, the inquiry was also carried out through the analysis of key

documents such as minutes of meetings, school progress planner, school magazines, and planning for management and educational administration books.

The findings of this study show that there are three main factors that shape and influence the leadership of women principals in secondary schools in Malaysia. These are; excellence (academic and non-academic), spirituality, and togetherness/*kebersamaan*. Excellent performance of students is a key priority for the leadership of these women principals. To attain and maintain this excellence, women principals are driven by their spiritual nature and culture that involve values of caring and sharing to lead in ways that are collective, reciprocal, and inclusive. The function of togetherness/*kebersamaan* symbolizes the commitment to achieving success/excellence as a collective rather than as individuals. The study concludes by highlighting context and culture as key factors shaping and influencing women principals' leadership practice.

## Abbreviations

DEO	District Education Office
EPRD	Educational Planning and Research Division
EPU	Economic Planning Unit
EPDP	Experienced Principals Development Programme
GTP	Government Transformation Programme
HPS	High Performance Schools
IAB	<i>Institute Aminuddin Baki</i>
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
MoE	Ministry of Education, Malaysia
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia
MPs	Member of Parliaments
NAPs	Newly Appointed Principals
NEP	National Education Philosophy
NKRA	National Key Result Areas
NPAs	Newly Appointed Principals
PTAs	Parents Teachers Associations
SED	State Education Department
SES	Socio-economic Status
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SQEMS	Standard for Quality of Education in Malaysian Schools
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Funds

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Reflecting on my personal journey throughout secondary school education, none of the principals were women, not even the deputy principals. As a woman academic, it has always been my passion to know more about issues concerning women, their leadership, and factors affecting gender equity. My first statistical analysis of women's participation in education in Malaysia based on the data provided by the Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD), Malaysia showed encouraging progress, where statistically, women were in the majority (see Table 1.1). However, it was disheartening to look at the participation of women in leadership positions to realise that only a few women occupied the top administrative levels. Considering the disproportionate number of women in educational leadership in Malaysia, I was convinced that there were issues that will need to be examined and addressed if the situation is to improve. This study is therefore an undertaking to investigate issues that affect women who are already in leadership positions, so that the ways in which the unequal situation of women in leadership positions in Malaysia can be understood and addressed. My belief is that unless we understand the existing situation, it will be difficult to provide solutions.

This chapter presents the background to the study, the definition and conceptualisation of leadership, a statement of the problems, and the research questions as well as comments on the significance of the study.

## **1.2 Background to the Study**

Malaysia attained independence in 1957, following which it embarked on the improvement of the education system and on creating more employment opportunities for all citizens. Malaysian women were not left behind; they progressed and participated in many key sectors such as education, business and politics (Aminah, 1998). As evidence of the acknowledgment of women's capabilities and competencies by the Malaysian government, in 1983 Malaysia appointed two women ministers, four deputy ministers, four senators, six Members of Parliament (MPs), and a federal court judge (Ministry of Women and Family Development, 2003). This encouraging scenario continued and in 2000 there were three women ministers, one deputy minister, 11 senators and 19 MPs who were all women. In 2001, another woman minister was appointed to the newly-created Ministry of Women and Family Development (Ministry of Women and Family Development, 2003).

Meanwhile, in showing its commitment to supporting women's development at the international level, the Malaysian government became a signatory to several international conventions such as the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. In addition, the Malaysian government collaborated with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Funds (UNFPA) and undertook a study that evaluated the progress of women in Malaysia from 1957-2000 (Ministry of Women and Family Development, 2003). The overall results of the evaluation showed a positive impact in the number of women representations except in politics and economics. It was found that a gender gap still exists in terms of access to high level decision making positions (Ministry of Education, 2012). In order to address this matter, on August 2004 the Malaysian government took an initiative to

adopt a policy which stipulated that there should be at least 30 per cent participation of women at all levels of decision making positions in government. The effort seemed to bear fruitful results as there was a positive advancement of women, who made up 30.5% of the top management positions in the public sector by 2009 (Permanent Mission of Malaysia to the United Nations, 2012).

With regards to education, the Federal Constitution of Malaysia guaranteed all Malaysians, regardless of gender, the right to education. After 1995, female students outnumbered male students in local institutions of higher learning; in 2000 the enrolment of female students had increased to 51.3 percent of the total enrolment at universities (Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, 2012). Meanwhile, in the teaching workforce from 2005 to 2013, women were significantly represented with the percentage of women teachers being consistently higher (and growing) than that of male teachers in secondary schools, as illustrated in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1: Percentage of Teachers at Secondary School Level by Gender (2005-2013)**

Year	Men	Women	Total
2005	35.6	64.4	100
2006	35.2	64.8	100
2007	34.5	65.5	100
2008	33.2	66.8	100
2009	32.4	67.6	100
2010	31.9	68.1	100
2011	31.4	68.6	100
2012	31.3	68.7	100
2013	31.2	68.8	100

Source: Educational Planning and Research Division, Malaysia. Data as at 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013.

However, at the administrative level, the number of women principals has been remarkably low in comparison with the number of male principals, particularly in secondary schools as illustrated in Table 1.2 below.

**Table 1.2: Number of Secondary School Principals in Malaysia by State and Gender**

States	Men	Women	Vacancy	Total
Perlis	16	10	1	27
Kedah	106	63	12	181
Penang	66	56	3	125
Perak	133	104	6	243
Selangor	77	184	8	269
Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur	25	68	4	97
Federal Territory of Putrajaya	47	29	1	77
Federal Territory of Labuan	7	2	-	9
Negeri Sembilan	44	70	3	117
Malacca	47	29	1	77
Johore	125	109	16	250
Pahang	66	56	3	125
Kelantan	115	51	5	171
Terengganu	82	50	9	141
Sabah	127	83	4	214
Sarawak	126	48	10	184

Source: Educational Planning and Research Division, Malaysia. Data as at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2012.

Whilst Table 1.1 shows an increase in the participation of women teachers at secondary schools from 2005 to 2013, it also demonstrates that the participation of women teachers was almost double the participation of male teachers. However, in Table 1.2, it is shown that women principals outnumbered male principals in only four

of the 13 states and the 3 federal territories in Malaysia. This suggests that there remains a hidden preference for male principals in secondary schools.

### **1.2.1 School Principals, Leadership and Excellence**

Recognising the importance of education for the nation, the government of Malaysia not only ensured the right to education for every man and woman, but also took proactive steps to ensure that the schools are led by the best principals – both men and women. To motivate the principals towards better performance, the government introduced several awards recognising exemplary leadership among school principals, as well as recognising schools that showed good performance for a sustained period of time.

#### **1.2.1.1 Excellent Principal Title**

The excellent principal title was introduced in 1995. It is a title awarded by the Ministry of Education (MoE) Malaysia, to those principals who exhibit excellent leadership qualities (Utusan Online, 2006). The process of being recognised as an excellent principal involves separate observations from the MoE, the Federal School Inspectorate Division, the Schools Division, and the National Institute of Educational Management and Leadership or known as the *Institut Aminuddin Baki (IAB)*. In addition to the observation, interviews are carried out with all stakeholders in the school including teachers, students, parents and representatives from the community. The final stage of the selection is based on an interview between the principals and the selected panel of officers from the MoE, chaired by the Director General of Education Malaysia (MoE, 2012). This rigorous process is meant for both men and women principals of secondary schools.

Despite the criteria mentioned, to the researcher's knowledge, there was no clear quota of selection for men and women to be appointed as excellent principals. Moreover, in the overall number of principals in the country, the number of male principals already exceeded that of female principals. It is arguable that the selection process could become a "homosocial reproduction of the normalised principal identity" (Blackmore, Thomson & Barty, 2006, p. 315) which means, working in favour of men, disadvantaging women who were already under-represented in secondary principalship. Hence, if a clear quota is provided it would ensure an equitable consideration of men and women principals.

The school principals who are selected as excellent principals are described as owning outstanding abilities in educational leadership, educational management and relationships with parents or community (Fook & Sidhu, 2009). The selection criteria also included the ability of the leader to accomplish the school's vision and mission. This consists of aspects such as teaching and learning excellence, academic achievement, co-curricular performance, interpersonal relationships, and the documentation of the school's activities. According to the National Excellent Principal Council, as of 1998 a total of 23 secondary school principals were awarded excellent principals, while in 2004, there was an increase of 24 secondary school principals. In 2009 there was a remarkable increase which brought the total number of excellent principals to 162, out of more than 2000 secondary principals in Malaysia (Fook & Sidhu, 2009). Although the number of excellent principals demonstrates an encouraging number of principals performing excellently, a gender breakdown was not available to assess whether women were equitably represented. Thus, the extent to which the system promotes gender equity in leadership excellence is arguable and remains to be seen.

### **1.2.1.2 The Cluster School of Excellence**

Other than the efforts taken by the government with regards to principals, schools were also given special attention. Recognising schools by giving them brand names was one of the initiatives implemented to promote a culture of excellence in school environments and school performance. One of these brand names given to schools was the Cluster School of Excellence.

The Cluster School of Excellence is a moniker given to the distinguished exemplary schools within a set cluster. This award recognises excellence in all aspects of school management, as well as students' achievement. The purpose of the Cluster School of Excellence scheme was to foster excellence in school performance in the Malaysian education system, so that these schools could be examples to the other schools in the same cluster as well as to schools outside the cluster (<http://jpnterengganu.moe.gov.my>). Among the examples of the school clusters as determined by the MoE were primary schools comprising national schools, Chinese national-type schools, Tamil national-type schools, and indigenous schools. For secondary schools, the cluster categories comprise fully residential schools, technical secondary schools, and religious national secondary schools. Information on the details of schools that have received this award was not available.

### **1.2.1.3 High Performance Schools**

High Performance Schools (HPS) is another title granted to excellent schools, awarded by the MoE to those schools with their own ethos, character and unique identity in all aspects of education. This recognition for High Performance Schools was announced by the former Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister who was also the former Minister of Education, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

The schools awarded this title possess the tradition of high performance work culture which develops national human capital in a holistic and sustainable manner, and are competitive in the international arena. Of all the types of school in Malaysia, the HPS are among the public's preferred choice of school. Schools selected as High Performance Schools are given special provision and incentives as well as training for the leaders, teachers and the administrative staff. The schools are also given autonomy in curriculum management, financial management, and human resource as well as selection of students (MoE, n.d.). Thus, Cluster Schools of Excellence and High Performance Schools seem to open more opportunities for existing principals to excel in their administrative responsibilities. However, there is no clear evidence of efforts by the government to place women on a par with men at these levels of excellence. It could be argued that while there is no evidence that women educational leaders are *not* being considered for excellent status accolades, equally there is no evidence that the current system promotes recognition of gender equity in excellence.

#### **1.2.1.4 The Achievement Contract (*Bai'ah*)**

In July 2009, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Sri Mohammad Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak, presented the National Key Result Area (NKRA) of Malaysia. NKRA 'is one of the elements under the Government Transformation Programme (GTP)' (<http://www.mot.gov.my/en/lands/NKRA/nkra-improve%20public-transport-in-city>) and one of its components was to expand the access to a good quality education. One of the sub-NKRA (National Key Result Areas) initiatives introduced was the New Deals to the principals, in which a Performance Based Assessment was undertaken and executed through *Bai'ah* by the MoE in 2011 (Ministry of Education, 2014). *Bai'ah* is also known in English as Achievement Contract.

The *Bai'ah* is another reward initiative offered by the government to school principals based on their performance appraisals (MoE New Deals Circular, 2014). It is an agreement between the principals and the government of Malaysia to improving school performance. *Bai'ah* was introduced with the purpose of ensuring that the principals play effective roles in improving their schools' performance as a place of producing human capital. As a performance contract, the *Bai'ah* is renewed annually by the principals so that they know exactly the targets that they must achieve and can put in the necessary effort towards achieving those targets (MoE New Deals Circular, 2014). The Malaysian government had three main purposes in introducing *Bai'ah*: firstly, to increase the number of excellent principals in line with the aspiration of sub-NKRA (National Key Result Area) with regard to education; secondly, to build school excellence based on the Malaysian Standard for Quality of Education in Malaysian Schools (SQEMS); and thirdly, to develop a healthy competitive environment amongst principals in leading the schools towards excellence performance.

Principals who show good performance, based on the criteria determined by the ministry, would be granted monetary and non-monetary rewards. Schools which received *Bai'ah* were granted MYR7500 for the principals, MYR1800 for the excellent teachers, and MYR900 was given to each of the rest of the teachers (The Star Online, 2015). In contrast, for those principals who were not able to demonstrate good performance, a punitive action would be taken. The role of school principals at schools which are awarded *Bai'ah* is not only to function as the person at the top of their school's hierarchy, but their leadership qualities are considered the determinant of the outstanding quality level of the school. The principals in these schools are no longer simply leaders whose task is to lead the schools, but they are also leaders who are able to develop human resource in their own schools. In this regard, the teachers and

students are the main assets of the school that should to be developed (Utusan Online, 2011).

Excellent principals, Cluster School of Excellence, and High Performing Schools as well as *Bai'ah* are just a few awards to name regarding the efforts taken by the Malaysian government to ensure the development of schools' performance. In addition to these there are further efforts planned to be initiated in the future by the government. As a result of these existing and planned initiatives, the responsibility of principals appears to become more challenging, demanding that more should be accomplished. While the increased accountability pressures and demands are in line with international trends, understanding the factors affecting women principals' leadership is an important starting point in addressing gender inequality. The understanding is that, in terms of the participation of men and women principals, if there are no equal opportunities promoted by the ministry, it is likely that the initiatives of the ministry will continue to benefit men who already dominate the systems' leadership and disadvantage women.

### **1.2.2 The Global Status of Women Principals**

While most places in the world such as in the United States of America (Shakeshaft, 1987; Grogan, 2010), England (Coleman, 2002; Fuller, 2009), Australia (Blackmore, 1999) Europe (Wilson, 1997), China (Law, 2013), Jordan (Abu-Tineh, 2012), and Pakistan (Shah, 2010) have been facing and addressing the problem of the underrepresentation of female principals for some time, Malaysia has been lagging behind. More recent global literature suggests that these other countries have begun to focus on the benefits of leadership brought by female principals. For instance, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) show that women leaders' practice is shifting away

from the heroic models of leadership, while Fuller (2013) acknowledges that women lead in socially just ways. Although some women principals have managed to attain the title of excellent principal in Malaysia, lead Cluster Schools of Excellence or High Performing Schools as well being awarded *Bai'ah* as a result of their competency, the key issues and factors influencing the leadership practices of those who are already in principalship are still not known.

Regardless of the efforts taken regarding gender equality in education by the government of Malaysia since independence, the statistics provided in Table 1.2 clearly demonstrate that women are not on a par with their male counterparts. The statistics provide a helpful starting point, but this study attempts to understand the depth of issues that affect the leadership of women in school principalship in secondary schools in Malaysia.

### **1.3 Definition and Conceptualisation of Leadership**

Leadership is an abstract concept and thus can be defined in many ways (Northouse, 2009). One of many ways leadership is defined is interpreted as different meanings by different people. Northouse conceptualises leadership from a personality perspective, which suggests that leadership is a combination of special traits or characteristics that individuals possess and which enable them to encourage others to accomplish tasks. According to Bass (1990, p. 11-20), the definition of leadership is the 'focus of group processes' which means 'the leader is at the centre of group change'. Other definitions conceptualised from a 'personality perspective' mean, the combination of special traits and characteristics that an individual possessed determine the leadership of a leader, while the other definition defines it as 'an act or behaviour' meaning changes in groups are enabled by the things that leaders do (Bass, 2008).

Northouse (2009) further adds that leadership is a combination of the roles, actions, and skills exhibited by leaders toward goal attainment in a particular school environment, which may have a negative or positive effect on subordinates. Despite the many varied ways of defining leadership, there are four core components in leadership: i) leadership is a process; ii) leadership involves influence; iii) leadership occurs in a group context; and iv) leadership involves goals and attainment of goals. This is the concept of leadership which is used in this study. The definitions provided show various ways of defining and conceptualising leadership. Most of the definitions are related to personality traits, skills, roles and actions, all of which are subjectively assessed within each individual regardless of whether they are male or female. As Northouse (2009:4) notes that “the meaning of leadership is complex, and it includes many dimensions”, it is expected that a more developed understanding of leadership will be reached at the end of this study.

#### **1.4 Statement of the Problem**

In Malaysia, it is shown that female teachers outnumbered male teachers from 2005 to 2013. In contrast, a high number of female teachers was not reflected at the administrative level of secondary schools. Numerous studies have been conducted on principals' leadership in Malaysia specifically on training, staff development, and time management (Juahir, 1998; Hasnah, 1998; Sim, 1998; Mohd., 2000; Ros, 2000; Farawahida, 2005). Bing (2005) conducted a study on women principals, focusing on the leadership process and decision-making of excellent and successful women principals. Although it was a step in the right direction towards addressing gender issues in educational leadership, Bing's (2005) was a small-scale study that served to highlight the significance of examining issues that concern the leadership of women in schools. To the best of the researcher's knowledge it remains one of few studies in

this area in the Malaysian context. Most of the aforementioned studies did not focus specifically on women principals and did not fully cover the issues pertaining to gender inequality in leadership either. Thus, the knowledge regarding women principals' leadership practices and experiences is still limited.

As a result of this identified problem and the lack of knowledge on how women practise or enact leadership, school principalship in Malaysia remains largely hidden as a viable career option for women teachers. In reality, given the dominance of women in teaching, it is important for the MoE and for schools, as well as for society, to understand the situation of women in educational leadership so that they can provide the necessary and relevant support to advance women and the quality of leadership in schools. This study therefore tries to understand how women principals practise leadership by examining issues that are priorities for them, and how these priorities influence their leadership styles and their interaction with stakeholders. The study attempts to understand these issues from women principals' own experiences and practices (actions) and from the experiences, perceptions and attitudes of those who work with them. By putting women principals at the centre of the investigation, it is hoped that their experiences will be appropriately represented (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011), and that the situation of women principals in Malaysia will be brought to the fore.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

The overarching research question of the study is, *'What factors shape and influence the leadership of women in secondary school principalship in Malaysia?'* The enquiry addresses four specific research questions as follows:

Sub-questions:

1. What key priorities determine the leadership of women principals?
2. In pursuing these priorities, how do the women principals interact with stakeholders, and what values guide them?
3. What kind of support exists towards women principals' success and attainment of their priorities and what support do women principals provide?
4. What challenges do women principals face when practising leadership and how do they deal with these challenges?

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Firstly, this study contributes towards the dearth of studies on gender and educational leadership in Malaysia. Specifically, it addresses the gap in the knowledge and understanding of women principals' leadership and how it is shaped. Secondly, it attempts to fill the theoretical gap by contributing towards the understanding of women's leadership from the experiences on the ground and by looking at how women interact with their social realities. The shortage of women in school leadership must be understood within the broader context of their work and lives. Although the study is based in Malaysia, it is hoped that the theoretical contribution will be relevant to other contexts. Finally, the study is hoped to contribute towards different bodies in educational settings, such as interest groups and stakeholders, teachers, policy makers as well as women leaders in other fields in the public sectors as well as the private sector.

## **1.7 The Structure of the Thesis**

The exploration of the topic being studied is explained through six chapters as follows:

**Chapter one** has introduced the background of the topic being researched and provided some definitions and concepts of leadership. Chapter one has also justified the need to conduct this study as explained in the statement of the problem. Attention to the specific focus of the study has been given through the research questions that guide this study. The chapter ends with an explanation of the importance of conducting this study.

**Chapter two** provides an overview of the literature focusing specifically on gender and educational leadership and various other related aspects. The intention is to provide and acknowledge previous research while situating and further providing justification for the current study through highlighting gaps in existing literature.

**Chapter three** presents an overview of the research methodology employed in this study. The chapter is broken down into several parts including the research paradigm, research design, case study approach which illustrates processes such as site and participant selection, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures. A reflection pertaining to ethical considerations is also made regarding issues of authenticity and trustworthiness.

**Chapter four** is the presentation of findings through detailed case study reports - Case Studies A, B, C and D. More specific details pertaining to the methodological considerations of each particular case are provided before a detailed presentation of the emergent findings.

**Chapter five** provides cross-case analysis and discussion on the significant themes as they emerge from all case studies and compares them with the literature. Only a few predominant themes are selected and discussed leading towards theory building on women principals' leadership in Malaysia.

**Chapter six** is the final chapter, providing a direct attempt to answer the research questions and draws conclusions. It discusses the significance of the research empirically and theoretically, provides recommendations for future research, and considers the research limitations, as well as personal reflection of the researcher on the topic along the completion process of this study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the literature on gender and educational leadership. Previous studies have illustrated the relative invisibility of women in leadership compared with their male counterparts, as indicated through some untold stories. While gender in leadership has been the subject of research for several decades, there are no extensive and exploratory studies that identify underlying issues that are strictly specific to women principals in secondary schools in Malaysia. As a result, this literature review draws from a variety of contexts. The chapter is organised into several themes covering women in secondary schools principalship, building understanding of traditional challenges faced by women leaders and the overall challenges and support experienced by women principals.

#### **2.2 Gender and Leadership Styles**

Many studies have attempted to reach an understanding of the situation of women and educational leadership in different contexts, including Jordan (Abu-Tineh, 2012) and Pakistan (Shah, 2010) in the developing world. Most of this research is concentrated in western countries such as the United States of America (Shakeshaft, 1987; Chin, 2004; Grogan, 2010), England (Coleman, 2002; Fuller, 2009), Australia (Blackmore, 1999) and Europe (Wilson, 1997). However, little is known about women principals in other parts of the world (Grogan, 2010), including Malaysia. As such, it

becomes imperative to take account of previous studies identifying gaps in order to situate new research within and against the existing body of literature.

According to Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), the history of research on gender and administration started with a social change agenda in which the focus was on the number of women and men in administrative positions. In this sense, an attempt was made to understand the underrepresentation of women compared to men in administrative positions. While on the one hand, the history of gender issues in school administration focused mostly on women, on the other hand, the leadership theories had been studied primarily in masculinised contexts. Thus, the women's traits have not been included or studied with regards to their effectiveness in leadership (Chin, 2004).

In addition to these contextual limitations it is important to note that, according to the theory of socialisation, women are socialised into using less effective coping strategies than men (Rosario *et al.*, 1988). This idea leads to the assumptions such as "women teach, and men manage" and such an idea, if it remains unchallenged and unquestioned, can become a 'universal truth' that denies women access to leadership roles (Brinia, 2012, p. 179).

Another oft-used explanation for the situation of women in leadership is the metaphor of the glass ceiling. The term 'glass ceiling' was coined in 1984 as a metaphor to explain the gender bias-related obstacles to promotion that women faced in institutional contexts. Since then, there has been great progression of women in terms of leadership equality as compared to men in the workplace (da Costa Barreto, Barreto, Ryan, & Schmitt, 2009), which has led to the criticism of the glass ceiling metaphor as inadequate in explaining why some women go on to progress in

leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007). To this end, Eagly and Carli have offered the 'labyrinth' metaphor as a better representation of the experiences of women in leadership.

However, other researchers have continued to use the glass ceiling metaphor, insisting that it is helpful in explaining the various barriers preventing the majority of women from accessing leadership. For example in Malaysia, a study conducted by Subramaniam and Khadri (2016) on women's career progression found that the glass ceilings were largely formed by three demographic factors: family commitment, organisational culture and career advancement opportunities. Meanwhile in China, Law (2013) warned against the danger of perceiving leadership roles to be more congruent to men. According to Law, this mindset would contribute towards the perpetuation of the glass ceiling as it naturally leads to prejudice - no matter how well women performed leadership, men would still be considered more competent as leaders. A study by Gutierrez (2016) in Spain related the glass ceiling to contextual barriers including failing to comply with the traditional maternal, care-giving role, as well as challenges in achieving a work-life balance.

If the reality of the glass ceiling and the factors that maintain it remain the same over time, no matter how good an organisation's policy towards women in leadership is, these factors will cause women leaders to be negatively stereotyped as incompetent and pre-judged as failures (Subramaniam & Khadri, 2016). The situation could become worse, if there is a likelihood in human resources management practice which works against women in the selection process, performance appraisal, and training and development (Law, 2013). Despite the fact that the previous studies were conducted with women in administrative and business hubs – in Malaysia, and in

China and Spain - it is not much of a stretch to expect that women in educational leadership in secondary schools in Malaysia would also be affected by the glass ceiling in a similar manner, as the context is not that dissimilar.

Despite the prohibitive conditions mentioned in the previous studies, there were women who were able to attain top leadership positions. This shows that these women managed to overcome those obstacles such as male-dominant socialisation and the glass ceiling. Considering those who have not managed to attain those positions, it is arguably essential to better understand how women in senior leadership managed to face and overcome obstacles and reach the top, as well as to consider how suitable help could be offered according to women leaders' own needs. One way of understanding how women manage to be at the top positions is by understanding the way they exercise leadership. The following section will be an explanation of the selected leadership styles addressed in this study: transformational leadership, collaborative leadership, and instructional leadership.

### **2.2.1 Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership is perceived as a process in which the situation of one or more person connects with others and the parties assist one another to achieve a better level of motivation and morality (Burns, 1978). In other words, transformational leadership is a process whereby leaders transform the organisation that they lead by increasing the achievement and motivation of the people that they lead. Hallinger (2003) suggested that the purpose of transformational leadership was to develop an organisation's capacity to innovate. He viewed transformational leadership as focused on developing a shared vision and shared commitment towards school change. On a similar note, Litz and Scott (2017) also found that transformational leadership was

related to change as it promotes better relationship between leaders and followers. This relationship then leads to positive action, regardless of culture differences.

Rosener (1990) stated that when it comes to leadership style, women leaders tend to describe themselves as transformational leaders. Rosener referred to transformational leadership as 'interactive leadership' due to the observation that the women participants in her study worked actively to make each interaction with subordinates a positive one and prioritised involving everyone. Participants in Rosener's study encouraged participation, shared power and information, enhanced other people's self-worth and made others excited about their work. This interactive leadership style allowed employees to contribute and to feel powerful and important which led to a win-win situation; a situation which is good for the employees as well as the organisation. This is supported by Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and Engen (2003) who found that women in their study were also transformational leaders, scoring higher in transformational leadership as compared to men. However, the findings of that study are arguably not inclusive enough to conclude that women across the board are transformational leaders; more insight from people who work with women leaders should be explored to corroborate such findings.

Numerous studies on educational leadership have revealed different styles of principals' leadership. In Malaysia for instance, a study conducted by Jogulu and Ferkins (2012) revealed that regardless of gender, Malaysian managers show a preference for transformational leadership. The mixture of culture or multicultural society and diversity of religions in the multi-racial society such as Malaysia creates a continuous evolving need towards the study of leadership. Multicultural 'implies an approach or system that takes more than one culture into the system' (Northouse,

2010, p. 336), while 'diversity refers to the existence of different cultures or ethnicities within a group or organisations'. According to Jogulu and Ferkin (2012, p. 544), being in a collectivist society with a 'high-power distance', managers related more to the condition of transformational leadership. As a similar characteristic of transformational leadership, Jones, Adams, Joo, Muniandy, Perera and Harris (2015) stated that the principals in their study were responsible for empowering subordinates. In fact, the study suggested that to 'enable others to act' is considered the most common factor among other principals leadership practices towards securing better schools and students' outcome (Jones *et al.*, 2015, p. 362).

Meanwhile, in a study based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Litz and Scott (2017) asserted that no matter how practical transformational leadership is in one culture, it will not necessarily fit other cultures. Having implemented the study in an Islamic country such as the UAE, Litz and Scott found that there could be a great deal of flexibility, both contemporary and contextualised models of transformational leadership, and that the model needs to be altered according to the Islamic nation in question. It is arguably dangerous to adopt other leadership approaches without an attempt to fit it to one's own culture, especially when it is related to a serious matter such as religious practice. While previous studies show that transformational leadership brings a lot of benefits to and facilitates change in organisations, its universal applicability is doubtful since the concept has separately evolved in totally different contexts. Given the understanding that leadership is affected by factors such as context and culture, it is arguable that more studies should be conducted to fully address the issue based on each nation's own context and culture. However, the study of Litz and Scott attempts a helpful contribution towards women in leadership in similar situations.

Chin (2004) found that the women participants tend to use nurturance more often in order to engage, communicate and lead. Chin concluded that women tend to use consensus building as a way to set direction; this has been labelled by some theorists in leadership as “shared leadership” or collegial leadership (Chin, 2004, p. 4). Other than the study conducted by Chin, the collegial model of leadership presented in Bush (2011) also includes the element of ‘sharing’. According to Bush (2011, p. 72), the ‘collegial model includes all those theories which emphasise that power and decision-making should be shared among some or all members of the organisations’. Collegial approaches have some key features and one of them is that the size of the decision-making group has to be small enough to ensure everyone can be heard. Because of this small decision-making group, Bush suggested that the collegiality approach is more practical to be exercised at primary schools or sub-units as compared to secondary schools. However, if the secondary schools are just involving a small group of decision-makers, the practicality of the collegial approach still attains its purpose. Even though shared leadership and collegiality are different terms, it could be claimed that both share some similar features and concepts with transformational leadership.

Based on previous studies, transformational leadership of women’s leaders has proved to have a positive influence on their staff and as such, creates a positive working environment (Rosener, 1990; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Engen, 2003). This positive influence can be seen in a number of areas; for example, one of the aspects of a leader’s role is that of concern for people (Murray & Simmons, 2006). According to Murray and Simmons, women leaders’ work and behaviours in schools tend to focus on relationships, teaching and learning, and a more democratic participatory style that encourages inclusiveness. This view indicates the presence of female leaders and supports the advantage female leaders could have in any

leadership position. It also implies that the way women work in leadership broadly across different contexts likely bears similarity to the way in which effective women school leaders work. Previous studies by Rosener (1990) and Eagly *et al.* (2003) as well as Murray and Simmons (2006) indicated more positive effects enacted by the transformational leadership style adopted by women in leadership.

The literature clearly shows that transformational leadership enables change and brings about many positive effects in organisations (Chin, 2004; Bush, 2011; Litz & Scott, 2017). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of transformational leadership which is claimed to be culturally bounded is still being debated, and therefore an in-depth understanding about transformational leadership as practised in a particular culture is crucial in order to determine the overall efficacy of that leadership approach in school leadership.

### **2.2.2 Collaborative Leadership**

While transformational leadership in general is about leaders transforming followers to bring about positive better change in an organisation, it could be argued that involving more people in leadership could make it more effective. DeWitt (2017), for instance, attested that it is difficult for school principals to be confident in all areas of leadership. To help principals meet the challenging demands of their role, DeWitt strongly suggested that there is a need for a collaborative leadership. Rather than putting the responsibilities more on the principals alone as leaders, the collaborative leadership suggested by DeWitt involves a collaboration of several people or groups. Meanwhile, Lawrence (2017) connected collaborative leadership with the responsibility of sharing leadership amongst others rather than it belonging to an individual. In his view, the collaborative leadership process aids members in the organisation by promoting certain characteristics such as social justice, shared vision

and values, shared responsibility, mutual respect and empathy. He further mentioned that collaborative leadership is deeply rooted in the collectivist cultures. Lawrence believes that in collaborative leadership, everyone has the potential of becoming leaders and followers due to different levels of expertise that require different people to emerge as leaders. Collaborative leadership is therefore not only the territory of a few experts but opens an opportunity for more leaders through shared leadership (Kennedy, 2002). When leadership is shared it creates a more democratic and just society. It is arguable that the characteristic of collaborative leadership is crucial as a platform for teachers to become leaders, as power is co-owned and not the sole property of the principals.

In a study that identified the important values among participants in an organisation in Malaysia, Kennedy (2002) found values such as the 'humane orientation' which he took to demonstrate a tendency towards collective rather than personal satisfaction. Hofstede (2001) in his work, *"Cultures and Organisations: Software of the Mind"* mentioned that everyone carries in themselves patterns of thinking, feeling and potential acting which are learnt through a lifetime experience and result in a person's leadership styles. One of the cultural dimensions found in Hofstede's study is individualism which is similar to the study of Kennedy (2002). Individualism, according to Hofstede's study, is the degree to which a person is assimilated in a group. Individualism manifests in members of a group or society having loose ties between one another, while collectivism would typically see individuals integrated into a strong group and protecting them loyally. In another study, Hofstede (1998) postulated that the success of a nation is determined by understanding cultural differences, as well as the variation among attitudes and the leadership styles. According to Hofstede, cultural attitudes, belief systems and values imply not only the leaders' behaviour but also the

behaviour of those they lead. As such, it can be argued that leaders' characteristics are crucial in shaping the characters of those they lead.

Strachan (2012) clarified that differences of leadership between the women participants in her study depended upon two factors: their personal value systems, and the school context. The personal value system according to Strachan, includes the commitment towards being student-focused, providing a safe learning environment, involving care-givers, and consensus on decision-making. To manage the school context, leadership should also involve managing the benefits to the organisation and realising its purpose. To manage the organisations and to fulfil its purpose, Chin (2004) said, it is important to look at the contexts of leadership across organisational cultures. Abu-Tineh (2012) supported the idea of the importance of studying one's own contexts and organisations. In the case of a study based in Jordan for instance, Abu-Tineh suggested that there is a need for an in-depth understanding towards cultural issues regarding more women holding positions in management and senior leadership. As most of the existing writings about women and leadership paid little attention to the contextual consideration, Abu-Tineh suggested more studies need to be conducted in order to fill the gap regarding the influence of societal culture and context on women and leadership. The literature such as that of Fullan (1992) and Fullan (2001) showed that the culture and ethos of leadership vary across nations. Shah (2010), when speaking of cultures and contexts, asserts that since societies living in different cultures interpret leadership differently, the need to explore the influence of culture and context on leadership becomes more important in multi-ethnic societies. What is evidenced from the previous studies is that understanding the contexts in which women lead is imperative in understanding the way women enact

leadership. Therefore, how societies perceive and construct educational leadership should be understood and debated in their own contexts (Shah, 2006b).

Another example of understanding the contexts of leadership which is explained in the study of Wang, Gurr and Drysdale (2016, p. 274), is by having “collaborative visioning”. Collaborative visioning or shared vision enables people to make sense of their work and helps them find a sense of identity within their work context. In the primary school in which the study of Wang *et al.* (2016) was conducted, the staff members articulated their targets toward achieving excellence for their school. Tying in with collaborative visioning, Gentilucci and Muto (2007) suggested that knowing the students’ perceptions is also important to inform what works for the school. Like collaborative visioning, relational leadership suggested by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011, p. 6) is about leaders ‘being in relationship with others in a horizontal rather than a hierarchical sense’, the women in the study talked about accomplishing tasks with and through others. Numerous studies have examined leadership effectiveness across cultures (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007; Munley, 2011; Manning, 2013). However, the extent to which leadership is culturally contingent could only be understood by studying one’s own contexts. Even though collaborative leadership is not the focal point of the aforementioned studies, the idea behind *this* study is arguably close to the concept of collaborative leadership and its relation to culture and context. As such, it is believed that drawing from studies such as those of Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) and Gentilucci and Muto (2007) and others, could contribute towards understanding the current study of women and leadership in Malaysia.

In Thailand, a study conducted by Samriangjit, Tesaputa and Samarach (2016) found that the level of collaborative leadership of primary school administrators is higher than it was before the implementation of specific training. During the training the

participants, who were all primary school administrators, were given a test regarding their understanding of collaborative leadership. The results of the training were recorded and compared with the result of the actual implementation of the collaborative leadership approach which took around eight weeks in the administrators' respective schools. Although the findings from the training yield useful guidelines for leadership development strategies, the nature of the training arguably tended to pressure the administrators to perform as collaborative leaders.

DeWitt (2017) found that collaborative leadership is highly valuable as sometimes the idea of how to implement specific work comes when the leaders collaborate with others. It is similar when someone witnesses others doing the work, in that they learn from others' ways of working. Therefore, the outcomes of working alone and working together with others are claimed to be different both in the implementation aspects as well as in outcome. DeWitt further encouraged leaders to exercise collaborative leadership as it can strengthen relationships with stakeholders. He added that leaders should surround themselves with followers that are able to assist them in facing challenges without feeling that they should do things alone and know all the answers just because they are leaders. Regardless of individual differences, Lawrence (2017) affirmed that, when collaborative leadership is practised, the contribution of everyone is more valued and diversity is strengthened. In collaborative leadership, everyone is open to more opportunities of becoming leaders and followers, as different levels of expertise will call for different people to emerge in those roles. Demonstrably some principals perceived that as leaders, they must perform their job alone. This perception limits the participation of others, such as teachers, in their road to becoming future principals. It is therefore suggested by DeWitt (2017) that there is a need to have

principals that not only work in collaboration with others but who believe that working with others will lead to better solutions and results.

### **2.2.3 Instructional Leadership**

Bush (2013) considers instructional leadership as one of the nine models of leadership. Instructional leadership is also termed 'pedagogic leadership' and 'curriculum leadership'. Bush finds the importance of instructional leadership to lie in the fact that its main concern is the central activities of the school, namely teaching and learning.

In instructional leadership, principals are the main instructional leaders (Abdollahi, Ghoorehjili & Karimi, 2013) due to their direct effect on school climate and school culture (Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2017). Even though principals are known to have busy schedules, they hold huge responsibilities as instructional leaders. One of the many facets of instructional leaders' roles is regarding classroom conditions (Merwe & Schenck, 2016). Merwe and Schenck posit that the responsibility of the principals is to perform through clear communication of teaching goals. According to Hallinger (2011) instructional leadership relies very much on principals' knowledge, values and belief in working together with others. This working together with others includes (but is not limited to) guidance, supervision and support towards teachers to cultivate healthy interpersonal relationships. Previous studies show the significant influence of principals within instructional leadership, but it could be claimed that the instructional leadership approach could cause principals to be perceived as the sole centre of expertise, power and authority in schools. In reality, others such as senior management teams and teachers could also become holders of expertise as well as holding the power and authority whenever deemed necessary. Putting too much

emphasis on the influence of the principals as instructional leaders is likely to reduce the efficiency of the empowerment they are exercising.

The reality of today's school culture and the demands on schools show that it is too challenging for the principals to single-handedly improve the schools. As a result, exercising instructional leadership should not be considered the sole responsibility of the principals, but also of the teachers (Bush, 2013). In describing instructional leadership as one of the most important activities for principals, Bush reiterates that it should also become the activity of other school leaders. While Bush encourages school leaders and teachers to play their roles in instructional leadership activities, more support could be attained from others; the ministries, parents and the communities could contribute towards the success of instructional leadership according to their expertise.

A great deal of writing and research tends to portray instructional leadership as being solely concerned with teaching and learning (Elmore, 2000; Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Bush, 2013; Abdollahi *et al.*, 2013). However, the way Abdollahi *et al.*, viewed the priority of teaching and learning is a little exceptional. While others did not rank either teaching and learning higher but treated them equally within the concept of instructional leadership, Abdollahi *et al.* suggested that instructional leadership focuses on learning rather than teaching. Although there is a difference of emphasis in the studies conducted by Abdollahi *et al.*, when the emphasis is placed only on one aspect of learning without the emphasis on teaching the effectiveness of instructional leadership may be impacted, as both aspects are intrinsically inter-related. Therefore, Bush and Glover (2003) assert, the concern of the instructional leadership is not only

on teaching *or* learning, or both teaching *and* learning, but it also covers the behaviour of teachers while engaging with students.

A study conducted by Al-Mahdy, Emam and Hallinger (2018) in Oman on the instructional leadership of principals at primary schools discovered a broader definition of instructional leadership as compared to Elmore, (2000), Blasé & Blasé (2004), Bush (2013) and Abdollahi *et al.* (2013). According to Al-Mahdy *et al.* (2018) instructional leadership is associated with commitment of teachers as well as with the collective efficacy within schools. As such, instead of focusing on expanding children's access to schooling as was the case in the 1970's and 1980's, the guidelines of the Ministry of Education in Oman in 2015 are more towards appreciating others. One of these efforts in appreciating others is that the principals are encouraged to communicate their vision for learning and to support everyone at schools. To communicate the vision and build the support are arguably vital as both are positively associated with teachers' efficacy and commitment.

Merwe and Schenck (2016) believed that instructional leadership emphasises learner achievement, hence, one way of optimising learner achievement is through collective effort. What is meant by 'through collective effort' is when principals acknowledge the good work of teachers and at the same time become part of the teaching process to create a mutual sense of belonging. The findings of studies by Hallinger (2003) and Bush (2013) also suggested that factors such as collaborative effort based on shared leadership, and healthy interpersonal relationships, are crucial to optimising students' learning. In a more recent study of Pietsch and Tulowitzki (2017), the findings suggested that instructional leadership is determined by the quality of teaching in the classroom. Further elaborating on the quality of teaching, Pietsch and Tulowitzki stated that it is the responsibility of the principals to possess succinct understanding

of instruction and curriculum so that they will be able to judge teaching as well as to provide feedback. While on one hand the literature depicts the principals as the most influential factor in instructional leadership, on the other hand, there is ample evidence that the principals have limited chances due to their busy schedule which also can limit their influence.

With regard to women in educational leadership, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) highlight that women often prioritise students' learning. While they acknowledge that the schools have to be well-managed, women principals' passions inclined more towards the development of students. Court (2005), in her study of principals in New Zealand, two women principals went against the authorities' instructions by focusing on the progress of teaching and learning of the students, rather than on the maintenance of the top-down hierarchical approach. On a related note to the prioritising learning highlighted by Court, Bush (2011) said that instructional leadership placed the priority on managing teaching and learning as the main activity of educational institutions. As such, it could be claimed that women in educational leadership whose passion was inclined more towards students' learning are instructional leaders. Geoff (2004), in explaining instructional leaders' influence, mentions three main strategies which are: modeling, in which instructional leaders are role models; monitoring, including visiting classroom and monitoring teachers; and dialogue, which is about giving teachers opportunities to communicate with colleagues on teaching and learning.

Given the complexity of factors affecting leadership, there is a strong need for deeper research-based understanding of how leadership is being exercised, including instructional leadership. Hallinger (2003) argues that understanding the context of the schools reveals the opportunities and constraints influencing the instructional

leadership at those schools. In this sense, context as mentioned by Hallinger includes pupils' background, teachers' experience and background, as well as the school culture. Hallinger (2011) asserted that more research is needed to understand not only what is applicable for a particular setting but also, most importantly, what is applicable in different settings. Although it is apparent from previous studies that instructional leadership affects learning outcomes and student' performance, other factors through school processes and environments will also influence learning outcome and student performance (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Considering the many factors influencing instructional leadership and student performance, a better understanding of specific contexts is crucial as the findings contribute towards discovering important features of instructional leadership for more successful teaching and learning.

The various review undertaken in the literature of transformational, collaborative and instructional leadership approaches has contributed towards a better understanding of school leadership and its process. The review of the literature creates a strong argument that, instead of considering a certain kind of leadership as superior to other kinds, an approach which combines various features of leadership tends to bring more success (Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2017). Although scholars continue to debate the strengths and weaknesses of different leadership approaches, it is apparent that different practices of leadership all contribute towards excellence in schools; it is always said by scholars that leadership is not something that is 'one size fits all'. Besides, different approaches to leadership arguably complement each other in ensuring the leadership efficacy of the principals. Even though different terms used in explaining leadership in the previous studies connote different meanings, at the very least all styles of leadership have one thing in common: to lead towards excellence.

It is apparent that leading for excellence is one of the main aspirations of school principals in exercising school leadership.

### **2.3 Leading for Excellence**

Excellence is something difficult to define, very subjective, multidimensional and holistic, as such, according to Sergiovanni (1984), to consider whether a school is excellent, a person needs to observe for themselves the condition of the school. Regarding the meaning of excellence, Sergiovanni explained that different people perceive excellence differently. Parents for instance, would see excellence in a more holistic way including critical thinking and problem solving, passion in seeking knowledge, as well as interpersonal competence. In brief, excellence in the parents' view is not limited to the academic but also includes non-academic aspects of their children's development. As time goes by, the meaning of excellence expands. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century for instance, school excellence is determined by three factors which are students' character, social emotional skills, and academic competency (Bencivenga & Elias, 2003). Bencivenga and Elias further added that, for visionary educational leaders, the way excellence is assessed is even broader - through both school and - success in achieving their goals in life outside of school. Goddard, Skrla & Salloum (2017) supported the idea of Bencivenga and Elias (2003) that leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century emphasise not only test scores but also character building. This is argued that modern leaders view academic performance and good manners as having the same importance in developing students' potential.

Manning (2013) emphasised that leaders must adapt their behaviour according to the situation, as improper behaviour leads towards ineffectiveness of leadership in organisations. This is supported by Harris and Manning (2014) who said, in creating improvement the principals should identify what works best and adapt within their

contexts. However, with the growing demands of educational excellence as a target, the responsibility towards improving school performance should not lie with the principals alone (Jones & Harris, 2014), even though it is admitted by principals that they are responsible for empowering others to change (Jones *et al.*, 2015). Harris and Manning (2014), who described high performance as not a matter of accident, fate or luck but instead depending on focus, persistence and resilience, also agreed that even in the most difficult and challenging circumstances, the success of the school lies on its people. In a recent study by Wang *et al.* (2016) involving women principals in a primary school in Singapore, one of the participants emphasised that the school does not belong to her alone, but it is co-owned by the school community. As such, the notion of leading for excellence does not only evolve around adapting proper behaviours, but also emphasises the shared responsibilities between leaders or principals and the staff.

In the above-mentioned study by Wang *et al.* (2016), the way the principals led was determined by the needs of their staff. In enhancing the development of staff, the principal at the same time should build a good partnership with the stakeholders. Wang *et al.* clearly show that the way women principals lead their schools is not only determined by the principals' internal qualities and personalities, but also by external qualities or efforts, particularly the effort to build relationship with the stakeholders. Based on the needs of the staff, there is a necessity for the principals to continue the legacy of previous principals as long as they find it beneficial, to modify it where necessary, or to introduce new practices to improve academic results and students' non-academic achievements (Wang *et al.*, 2016). Team leadership is claimed to provide the answer to knowing the needs of the staff as Wang *et al.* suggest. Team leadership, according to Northouse (2010), is about engaging leaders in a process of

deciding whether monitoring or taking action is the most suitable course for the team. It can be argued that these studies by Northouse (2010) and Wang *et al.* (2016) show that various leadership approaches are required at various times based on need and purpose.

While most of the extant research emphasised the perception of principals, middle leaders, and teachers as well as other staff in the school, the perspectives of the students are sometimes neglected (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Gentilucci and Muto, who described students as 'consumers of education', propose that if we want to understand the leadership behaviour and academic achievement of the students, it is crucial to understand the students' perspectives. In the study conducted by Gentilucci and Muto, the students perceived a clear distinction between principals' visibility and their approachability in the schools. Principals who are consistently around schools will easily be approached by their students who can always engage with them. With the presence of the principals in the classroom, apart from encouraging students to be focused on their work, the students also opined that classroom behaviour often improved. According to the students in the study, the interactive principals, or those described as teacher-principals, have more powerful influence on the students' learning as compared to administrator-principals - the passive principals who just sit at the back of the classroom (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). If the presence of the principals around the school leads towards good academic performance, improvement in classroom behaviour and better engagement, it is clear that leading for excellence require high levels of commitment from principals. Gentilucci and Muto's study raises the question of what would be the best way for the principals to manage their busy schedules so that they are able to make themselves visible to the students. However,

since the participants in the study consist of men and women principals, the extent to which the gender of principals has an influence on students' learning is arguable.

In Pakistan, a study investigating the effect of leadership behaviour of secondary school principals on students' academic achievement shows that there were differences between what the observer or the teachers perceived and what the school principals themselves perceived (Tatlah, Iqbal, Amin & Quraishi, 2014). The results of the study showed that according to the principals themselves, the leadership behaviour of principals had an effect on students' academic achievement. Nevertheless, the observer and the senior secondary school teachers found that there was no direct attributable effect of the principals' leadership behaviour on students' academic achievement. This difference in perception could be rooted in the national context pertaining to the job style and commitments of public sector school principals. When the principals have to perform a broad array of duties in addition to the academic commitment within their official hours, this could probably be the reason for a lesser focus on the academic activities of the principals found by the observers to have less effect on students' academic achievement than the principals perceived (Tatlah *et al.*, 2014). The study by Tatlah *et al.* clearly shows that even in the same context, the observer and the principals themselves perceived differently.

The literature on this subtopic, 'Leading for Excellence', indicates that a complex range of factors shape and influence the way a principal should lead a school towards excellence. Whilst it is known that many factors determining school excellence are subjective, it can be argued that leading towards excellence mainly centres on the principals' activities and behaviours. With the constant intrinsic changes of the school environment, it is contended that school leadership requires principals who are strong, effective and responsive in order to inspire and enhance the ability of the teachers,

staff and students to perform excellently. Given the concept of leadership as being in a relationship with others (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011), perhaps two other important aspects to consider when speaking about leading for excellence are social justice and spirituality, both of which address injustice in education. The following section will look at leadership in relation to social justice and spirituality.

## **2.4 Leadership, Social Justice and Spirituality**

In discussing leadership and social justice, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011, p. 11) stated that the participation of women in education is more focused on their intention to 'change' the present situation. Various studies on the approach to social justice taken by women in leadership have been conducted around the world (Strachan, 2012; Hall, 2002; Sanders *et al.*, 2006). Strachan (2012) and Hall (2002), who conducted studies on women principals and head teachers in New Zealand and the United Kingdom respectively, observed the attempt to create a fairer learning environment for the students. The study of Sanders *et al.* (2006) on black women leaders in the United States not only confirmed the emphasis of those leaders on social justice, but the participants also perceived making a difference to be a collective responsibility of family, neighbourhood and wider society. In sum, what most women in the study meant by social justice was their passion for performing work that enabled them to make a difference in the lives of their students (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). In Islam, everyone is considered as God's vicegerent or someone appointed to exercise delegated power of God (Hamzah, Hamzah, Othman & Devi, 2016). Based on the principle of justice and equality, both men and women are considered equal regarding their spiritual, intellectual and physical potential (Hamzah *et al.*, 2016). As such, everyone is considered a leader and all leaders are also followers at the same time. In this understanding, one of the responsibilities of being a leader is to give back

to the community. Further elaborating on Muslim leaders, Hamzah *et al.* said that their leadership should be within the boundary of the teaching of Islam and acceptable to the community.

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) mentioned that spirituality is a significant theme in women's leadership. In understanding spirituality, some women leaders related spirituality with their religious beliefs. However, for some people, spirituality looks more towards raising consciousness (Ngunjiri, 2010a). Hamzah *et al.* (2016) state that, in Islam, leadership attributes should be derived from the internalisation of Islamic spiritual values, wherein a Muslim leader, for example, accepts leadership as a position of trust which comes with responsibilities that should be carried without any privileges. In addition, a leader should exemplify among all good moral character, effective communication skills, self-sufficiency, and self-reliance, as well as respect for different viewpoints (Hamzah *et al.*, 2016).

Reave (2005) proved that spiritual values and practices could bring about success in leadership. According to Reave, other than practising spiritual teaching such as treating others with love and compassion, showing respect, and demonstrating fairness, spiritual teaching also stresses that individuals should focus on reflective practice such as prayer, contemplation and meditation. Other than building relationship with others, spiritual teaching is aimed at building a relationship with God. A study by Neal *et al.* (1999) revealed that the cause of transformation in the participant organisations was described in spiritual terms as "grace", "magic", or "miracle". These words implied that the participants believed the actual transformation to be beyond the control of the practitioner. In other words, what triggers the transformation cannot be explained through logic.

Reave (2005) supported this view by adding that, leaders are the people who lead towards change, but the ultimate source of actual transformation is the Higher Power. According to Neal *et al.* (1999), once the transformation is triggered, the person will assimilate the transformation into their life. This will later affect the person in two ways; firstly, the effect will bring new meaning to their work, inspiring them to perform and value more highly the relationships in their workplace. Secondly, the condition will create a conflict between a person's need for spiritual development and the culture of the organisation. Unfortunately, as the result of the latter, there is a possibility the person will leave the organisation either emotionally or physically, and those who leave, may find more freedom to practise their spiritual principles.

Educating children could be challenging for those who have not assimilated transformation in their lives. Newcomb and Niemeyer (2015), in their attempt to understand how African American women principals made sense of their leadership roles, shared a similar idea on transformation. A principal in their study emphasised that doing a morning walk around the school was important for her as meeting the teachers while walking, the principal would get to know whether the teachers were doing well or not. In other words, the principal in the study wanted to make sure the teachers were fine, as she claimed that a teacher cannot be a good teacher or a nurturer if he or she cannot find themselves. Newcomb and Niemeyer's study shows that it is important for the principal themselves to assimilate the transformation which later enables them to inspire others as well as to value relationships in the workplace.

Speaking of the effect of spirituality, Reave (2005) mentioned that other than affecting leaders in the way they choose to lead and conduct themselves, spirituality also acts as a great source of motivation for the followers. Leaders who emphasise spirituality in their leadership would be able to foster the motivation of their followers which in turn

strengthened their satisfaction and productivity at work. Spiritual values such as integrity, honesty and humility tend to cause leaders to be judged as more effective, and lead to enhanced performance by their peers and subordinates. Reave further added that these values and practices will also lead toward the staff's satisfaction and motivation, more productivity, and better sustainability, as well as enhancing corporation reputation.

Meanwhile, Neal (2000) warned that lack of spirituality is not good for the soul as the study found that doing repetitive and routine jobs reduces quality of life. While Neal's study was conducted on participants in corporate companies, it is not a stretch to say that women in educational leadership positions are also performing repetitive and routine jobs within their roles, be that teaching or management related tasks. As such, studying women leaders in settings other than education is important to help us understand in depth about how effective spirituality affects women leaders' own motivation as well as that of their subordinates, and finally promote better sustainability.

In Kenya, a study on women leaders by Ngunjiri (2010b) found that incorporating spiritual identity in leadership enabled women leaders to become more authentic leaders as they lead from within. To illustrate the findings, Ngunjiri identified four spiritual values found in the study. These values, which are beneficence, hope, courage and *ubuntu*/humanness, contributed towards more authentic women leaders by building and sustaining the community. In a more recent study by Newcomb and Niemeyer (2015) it was observed that, between principals who engage with spirituality and those who do not, the principals who were more spiritual were calmer as they put their faith and trust in God. Furthermore, it was found that women leaders who pay

attention to spirituality lead with patience, care and rejected the traditional notions of a 'one-size-fits-all' leadership (Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015, p. 797). Due to the scarcity of studies on spirituality in leadership, Mehdinezhad and Nouri (2016) proposed that more studies on spiritual leaders and the construction of transformational leadership behaviours should be conducted.

Ngunjiri (2010a) found that as the value of *ubuntu*/humanness with its African roots is applicable worldwide. Some of *ubuntu*'s tenets like solidarity, mutuality, generosity and commitment to community, are practical beyond African borders. Ngunjiri strongly recommended that more studies on leadership and gender be conducted outside of non-Western theories and outside of non-white (Caucasian) populations to expand knowledge and improve human relationships across differences of approach and mindset. Meanwhile, Stead and Elliot (2009) believed that taking gender as a systematic study will help to overcome the challenges women encounter in leadership as well as understanding the support they need. Since leadership is a complex process and unique in its own context, for the current study to be conducted is crucial. Understanding women in leadership in their own context has the potential to provide more accurate picture of women and leadership as well as add an interesting dimension to women and leadership worldwide, and the current study goes some of the way toward filling this gap regarding women's leadership in Malaysia.

In discussing the impact of culture and leadership theory and practice, Walker and Dimmock (2002) stated that the idea of educational leadership is based on values and patterns of behaviours as well as the ideologies of a community. For instance, in Muslim societies, education and leadership is based on the teachings embedded in the Holy Quran, while the Chinese societies' teaching is largely derived from Confucianism. A study conducted by Hamzah *et al.* (2016) on the impact of Islamic

values on the leadership styles of Muslim women academics in Malaysia shows that women academics had exemplary moral character, strong convictions, were strong at multi-tasking and were tolerant of criticism, all with the aim of helping others to excel. The study proved that the way those women academics enacted leadership was influenced by Islamic teaching. While the study by Hamzah *et al.* (2016) was conducted with women academics, it is probable that the same impact of Islamic values would be applicable to the leadership of Muslim women principals as well. It is possible that the background of both women academics and women principals as educators would yield the same impact as shown in the study of Hamzah *et al.*

To evaluate the leadership style of assistant principals in classroom instruction, a study was conducted by Keesor (2005) on a junior high school campus. This study found that the assistant principal's visibility had an effect on classroom behaviour, in that it helped to decrease the number of disciplinary referrals. In fact, the effect of assistant principals' visibility was not limited to the students but also included:

- 'Improving communication with staff members, students and parents.
- Opportunities for praising and showcasing student successes and work product.
- Identification of academic and behavioural support needs for individual students and for overall classroom instruction.
- Increase knowledge of and total immersion in the curriculum.
- Opportunities to work collaboratively with staff members to improve instruction outside the formal evaluation process. Enhanced teacher performance because of visibility' (Keesor, 2005, p. 71).

Although the study by Keesor was not a gender study or limited to women principals, the study contributed towards understanding the effects of the way a leader - the assistant principals in this case - performed the leadership function. The findings of the study not only showed the positivity of leader visibility in many aspects of leading the school, but it proved that the time spent addressing disciplinary problems could also be reduced by this means. The decreased amount of time spent on disciplinary problems resulted in a reduced level of job dissatisfaction. Moreover, the time saved in addressing disciplinary problem could be spent by the assistant principals in performing other roles, especially those which afforded greater job satisfaction.

## **2.5 Challenges of Women in Educational Leadership**

The evidence from the literature on gender and management posits that gender has a big impact on women in their efforts to attain the top management positions in schools (Coleman, 2005; Blackmore *et al.*, 2006). The challenges experienced along the career route stages of women principalship are identified by Moorosi (2010) as anticipation, acquisition and performance. These three stages form the career path to education management, wherein at every stage women experience more obstacles as compared to men. The first stage, the anticipation stage, is the stage in which women prepare for management. The second stage, acquisition, is about access and entry into management; and the third stage or the performance stage is when the actual management function is being performed. In accessing senior management positions for instance, women face direct and indirect forms of discrimination during the selection process (Austin, 2008; Kaparou & Bush, 2007). Fuller (2009) identified that women head teachers in Birmingham had different experiences in balancing their professional and private life. For instance, women head teachers tended to take

responsibility for childcare and domestic arrangements (Coleman, 2002). There was no evidence of legislation, employment policy or social practice that influenced younger men and women to divide the domestic responsibilities equally (Fuller, 2009).

In comparing men and women's career progression in educational leadership, Coleman's (2007) survey showed that between 1994 and 2004, women had made significant improvements in attaining headship positions in England. However, while more women managed to hold positions of headship in that period, the obstacles they faced in combining career and family remained the same. Women who were also parents still struggled with holding the dual positions of headship and motherhood. In Coleman's survey, more women were found to remain single and/or childless as well as being divorced. In contrast, the survey revealed that the majority of the men principals were married or had a partner and a child or children. As evidence clearly shows women having more roles to play than men, the presence of legislation and employment policy protecting the rights of women is arguably crucial.

Amongst factors that affected women's progression in leadership in England was the issue of career breaks, which women had to take for maternity and childcare reasons (Coleman, 2007). However, the studies conducted by Kaparou and Bush (2007) and Austin (2008) contradicted Coleman's findings (2007) about career breaks, as both studies found that a career break was not a significant factor in Greece. As mentioned by a respondent in the study of Kaparou and Bush (2007), career breaks were not an obstacle as women could still become principals, albeit a bit later in life than men tended to attain the role. As a way of improving the system, Coleman (2007) suggested the need for local education authorities to review equal opportunity policies. Although Coleman (2007) is supported by Moorosi (2010) in advocating for policy, Moorosi argues that policy alone is not sufficient in eradicating the embedded gendered socio-

cultural traditions, but change would need to start with the mindsets and attitudes of the community members in which the school operates.

It is striking that the issue of career breaks is not viewed as a challenge by all women across the globe. Another issue receiving different perspectives is that of the duality of headship and motherhood responsibilities. In general, even though this duality is accepted as a challenge, the participants in a study in South Africa surprisingly found their dual positions to be an advantage (Lumby & Azaola, 2014). According to the participants, being mothers gave them the opportunity to deal with the difficulties at work, where they used their mothering skills in emphasising the nurture and caring aspects of the work while at the same time exercising their role as women principals. Furthermore, the participants with dual positions were also proud that they could provide leadership emotionally; showing characteristics such as love and care, as well as practically; by providing food, clothes and healthcare. Even though this involved emotions, the participants did not intend to replace the role of being mothers to their students as they perceived it as a compliment of what could not be provided at home for some children. What is significant about these views of women principals in South Africa, is the way they view their dual positions as not restrictive to them at all in dealing with the difficulties of principalship at work, but instead as being advantageous to them.

In a similar study by Newcomb and Niemeyer (2015), one of the women principals said that in order to help students and parents make changes, she needed to wear the hat of “othermother” on a regular basis. This was also the experience of another participant who said, being “othermother” was not only limited to the students and families but also extended to the teachers. For some of the participants who did not

have children of their own, the principalship was perceived as a chance to provide them with the skills and attitudes of motherhood. Even though most motherhood skills and attitudes are acquired through having one's own children, some of the skills are not even practised at home as the care of children is assigned to others. As such, some of the participants in Newcomb and Niemeyer's (2015) study believed that mothering is essential in leadership while others found it as a complimentary skill to leadership (Lumby & Azaola, 2014). This clearly leads to an interesting debate about the issue of duality of role for women in leadership positions.

## **2.6 Culture and Context**

According to Mohamad and Mustafa (2012), in Islamic teaching women can be leaders in situations where they can freely contribute their ideas and express their feelings, values, and religious beliefs without being influenced or oppressed by others. In Turkish society for instance, the discrimination against women in top management positions results from clear prescribed gender roles and highly patriarchal family institutions (Sakalli-Ugurlu & Beydogan, 2002). Men are accepted as the rulers of the family while on the other hand, women are responsible for taking care of the family and depend on their husbands to protect the family structure. Due to this understanding, Turkish society gives priority to men for holding school principal positions, as according to Turkish society the proper place for a woman is at home, while the husband is the breadwinner (Celikten, 2005). This case is similar to the Malaysian context wherein men traditionally make little or no contribution to child-raising (Zarinah Mahari, 2011). Unlike Turkish people, Malaysians' beliefs and norms that the proper place for women is at home have slowly diminished within Malaysian society. There has been an increase in the number of women in the workforce such as in teaching (EPRD, 2012). Nowadays, in Malaysia, most career women would hire

help to take care of their children as well as to manage housework. Although career women in Malaysia spend most of their time in the workplace, this does not affect the roles that they need to perform at home such as childcare and doing house chores. This scenario shows that despite the similar religious beliefs shared by both Turkey and Malaysia, there are dissimilarities in the practices of both societies. It is impossible for the exact nature of those similarities and dissimilarities to be known, unless there are proper studies conducted to understand the conditions.

Gender stereotypes, which are also one of the challenges for women in accessing senior management position (Inandi, 2009; Gaus, 2011), are generally prominent in the culture as is the idea that women are not suitable to be principals (Murray & Simmons, 2006). As the traditional role expectation requires that women have to behave in a feminine way, this expectation resulted in conflicts in women leaders as to whether they should behave according to society's expectation or according to masculine leadership behaviours. On top of that, according to Coleman (2003), most women in her study had to demonstrate their ability in management positions even during the interview, as they experienced direct discrimination in being questioned about family and managing childcare. In sum, these studies highlighted the issue specific to particular contexts while at the same time leaving room for other settings including women principals at secondary schools in Malaysia.

The theory of socialisation along with stereotyping suggest that women in leadership need to be trained to the level of men, rather than being valued on what they might bring to the field (Austin, 2008). It is for this reason that this theory of socialisation is found inadequate to be generalised as inability is not dependent on the gender of the individuals (Coleman, 2003). Thus, understanding women principals, their leadership context as well as the unique ways in which they lead is important. Coleman further

warned that it is dangerous to stereotype women as leaders; everyday observation tells that both women and men lead and manage using a range of styles. Rather than attempting to teach women how to cope more appropriately with the discrimination and challenges they face, the stressors and constraints of women in exercising leadership should be altered or removed (Rosario *et al.*, 1988). Abu-Tineh (2012) shared similar ideas about the effects of stereotyping on women and their leadership. According to Abu-Tineh, when women internalise the negative perceptions and stereotypes to which they are subjected, this results in low self-confidence regarding their leadership effectiveness. This will cause women to view themselves as less deserving of promotion than their male counterparts. Even though there is less evidence that women are more responsible for nurturing as well as holding supportive roles in leadership as compared to men, the aforementioned idea according to Abu-Tineh may lead women to underrate their own leadership.

A study at challenging workplaces (i.e. business, medicine, media, politics and government) in Korea showed that women in leadership often face challenges due to the culture (Cho *et al.*, 2015). In addition to possessing traditional masculine leadership styles such as decisiveness, women were also expected to have conventional feminine qualities and style such as caring. Although some of these Korean traditional views have changed or softened over time, there are still some that remain in the family structures and interactions such as roles as wives and mothers being considered as the most fundamental roles for women (Cho *et al.*, 2015). Korean mothers for instance, have a bigger responsibility for the upbringing of the children in family, and Korean career women are expected to work the same hours as men do. Not only that, South Korean women also have extra hours' work when they are also expected to do most of the duties at home. The findings of the study conducted by

Cho *et al.* showed that all participants (age ranged from 33 to 63 years old) struggled between work and family. Junior participants (those in their 30s and 40s) shared that their struggle was not only to perform but also to balance their responsibilities between work and home.

One of the unique social contexts of South Korean society is that people believe the only way to achieve professional success is through high academic performance as well as access to prestigious universities. In this regard, South Korean women bear a huge responsibility as their support determines the success of their children's entrance into prestigious universities. Interestingly, of all the responsibilities at home, the most frequently mentioned responsibilities by the participants are the role as a mother, not as a wife (Cho *et al.*, 2015). According to Cho *et al.*, despite the struggle between work and home, most of the participants in the study had their own way of embracing the challenge in which they would prioritise quality over quantity in performing their responsibilities as mothers.

Conducting a study in Pakistan, Nadia (2010, p. 209) asserted that it is not easy for women to cope with a "quasi-maternal" role as well as entering the "masculine" world of leading. According to Nadia, women in educational institutions and communities in Pakistan not only face challenges in being among the best in senior leadership positions but also in placing themselves in those positions. It is evident from these studies that no uniform glass ceiling and glass wall appeared, meaning the challenges were not consistent across societies and cultures. The challenges are only traceable when the researcher looks thoroughly at the relationship between all factors in the study.

In Saudi Arabia, Al-Ahmadi (2011) found that cultural challenges appeared to be less important as compared to other challenges due to changing perception towards women in society. Apart from these changing societal perceptions, Al-Ahmadi also mentioned that it was due to the reflection of the policy of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah, who called for the inclusion of women in the decision-making levels of organisations. Of all the challenges, personal challenges were ranked as the least challenge faced by women leaders in Saudi Arabia. Al-Ahmadi emphasised that this reflected an increase of self-confidence among women leaders in the Saudi Arabian context and their readiness to take up the responsibility to achieve balance between their career and family obligations. However, the different degree qualifications of the participants were found to indicate that leaders with higher qualifications normally worked in environments that led to a greater burden in relation to balancing home responsibilities. Likewise, the marital status of the participants showed that leaders who were widows carried a greater burden as compared to their married and divorced counterparts. Although the study conducted by Al-Ahmadi did not explain the reason behind the difference in marital status and related burden faced by widowed leaders, the researcher speculated that widowed leaders might be older in age and rank and may observe organisational limitations, such as limited authority and power, but at the same time, their age and status might lessen social and cultural pressures on them.

Challenges in leadership can be in many different forms. According to Fisher and Carlyon (2014), teaching in a low-socio economic area, for instance, could be undesirable to many teachers. This is due to the likelihood of challenging issues such as a high number of students with behaviour problems or a lot of educational needs as well as lack of family and community support. Based on a broad array of challenges

that a principal faces, judgment towards the effectiveness of a principal's leadership should not only be based on limited aspects. According to Lumby (2003), it is unrealistic to claim that schools can use internal resources like the expertise and dedication of principals to manage external relations. Lumby also said the success of the school does not solely depend on the skill of the principal but also on historical, political and social factors.

It is evident from several studies that there is wide range of challenges faced by women principals (Coleman, 2003; Lumby, 2003; Nadia, 2010; Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Fisher & Carlyon, 2014). For example, a study was conducted on the self-perceptions of female and male secondary school principals regarding their own leadership and management styles (Coleman, 2003). The findings showed that over two-thirds of women principals observed sexism associated with promotion and appointment. Due to the perception that women generally were not expected to become principals, women principals in Coleman's study (2003) always felt isolated. Additionally, to become principals, they also had to prove that as leaders they could be better than men. According to Ahumada *et al.* (2016), the role and the degree to which people get involved in the community as well as the feeling as part of the organisation have a very close relation to the cultural context. Thus, the more connected a person is to the organisation, the more actively the person will exercise his/her role. Additionally, internal policy, democratic governance and a sense of agency are among the determinants of the individual's level of participation.

Listening to others' expectations, such as those of parents and the community around the schools, is one way of determining the effectiveness of leadership of women principals. Some may be based on sex-role expectations. In some cases, people tend to exaggerate the ability of a leader to perform leadership. Consequently, sex-related

differences become gender-role expectations which cause leaders to perform leadership differently (Kruger, 2008). For some women principals, even when they believe in their ability to lead, the perception of the society that a leader should be a man rather than women affects their level of confidence. Coleman (2003) stated that this expectation of society that a leader should be a man is felt differently by women and men, and that this expectation will then affect the professional identity of both men and women leaders.

Even though some of the studies related to socio-cultural perspectives towards gender and leadership cannot be seen as representative of all or even a wide range of cultures or scenarios, the studies would at least contribute towards understanding the various socio-cultural perspective with regards to gender and leadership (Lumby, 2007). Despite the perceptions of society regarding the way women principals enact their leadership, the voice of society must also be heard if improvement to the situation of women and women leaders is desired. The voice of parents, for instance, is based on what they perceive as good and bad provided by the school towards their children. In other words, parents' perceptions should be taken into account by the policy makers, professionals and researchers (Lumby, 2007). By listening to parents' voices, the chances for the principals to improve their leadership are more holistic in issues related to teaching, students and the school.

## **2.7 Support Provided for Women Principals**

The role of the principal always becomes the focal point of the debate around effective strategic leadership in schools. With a high volume of administrative work as well as teaching and learning, principals are arguably in need of consistent support in order to implement their tasks.

### **2.7.1 Leadership Development**

According to Westhuizen and Vuuren (2007), one way of supporting principals is through leadership development. Westhuizen and Vuuren further suggests that there are two areas that newly appointed senior school leaders need in their professional development and these are, strategic goal setting, and the management of change processes. Even though Westhuizen and Vuuren's study clearly specifies this need of Newly Appointed Principals (NAPs), the study did not make a gendered analysis. Due to this, it is arguable that women would need more support, given their underrepresentation and lack of exposure in leadership or management roles. It is claimed that gender-specific needs assessment is crucial if both men and women are to be given equal opportunities in school leadership.

Meanwhile, a study conducted by Ng and Szeto (2016) in Hong Kong found that the need for leadership development programme as perceived by the NAPs could be divided into two areas: administrative skills, and human resource management. However, the study - which employs interviews to gain in depth understanding regarding role of principals and their needs and expectation on the school leadership development programme - is perhaps questionable in terms of its generalizability pertaining to factors such as differences of gender, school contexts, types of school and duration of service of principals.

Westhuizen and Vuuren's study (2007) suggested that its participants needed leadership development in the area of strategic goal setting, particularly related to teaching and learning. The findings of the study listed five crucial sub-areas, including two aspects related to teaching and learning - the approaches in teaching and learning as well as assessment practices. Similarly, the Hong Kong study of Ng and Szeto (2016) found that the NAPs also highlighted their need in leadership development with

regards to teaching and learning. The findings of the study were even more surprising when it shows that some of the participants regard the need of support in teaching and learning as an area of pressure amongst NAPs. The NAPs in Hong Kong further expressed their concern regarding the challenges of a new secondary curriculum especially when the school-based assessment system would be implemented later. The concern pertaining to curriculum arguably indicates different aspects of support needed in the leadership development of NAPs in Hong Kong. Having a noticeable difference in the number of years of previous experience as vice principals, it is concerning that if support is being provided, it may not be in line with what the NAPs need.

With regards to operational knowledge, respondents in Westhuizen and Vuuren's (2007) study highlighted that it would be beneficial if the participants were given specific training as well as re-training before embarking on their leadership positions. Whilst previous experiences as vice principals or heads of department might be found to be helpful, the respondents felt that both positions have significant difference. Apart from support in the development of teaching and learning, Ng and Szeto's study (2016) was a little exceptional in that both Ng and Szeto found that there is a need for support of NAPs with regards to knowledge of crisis management and also public relations particularly in answering questions from reporters. Hence, the respondents suggest that the support they should be offered in leadership development should include training on legal matters of school education, presented by lawyers. That the NAPs in the study said there is a serious need for them to cope well with the rapid change of their context, shows that they are interested in striving to gain a better knowledge of educational leadership.

The study also showed that due to some parents' constant complaints, it had become a concern of the NAPs that to attend parents' complaints of teachers' performance and school policies had become one of the priorities in school leadership. Issues related to parents seemed to be a serious matter; some of the NAPs highlighted that there are parents in Hong Kong that are called 'Monster Parents' due to their constant dissatisfaction towards schools (Ng & Szeto, 2016). Therefore, it could be claimed that prioritising relationships between schools and parents is crucial to the NAPs due to the nature of Hong Kong society which highly values relationships with others. If building relationship and positive networking between schools and parents is one of the priorities in the schools, an emphasis on the human relations skills of the principals is arguably at the same level of importance as the need to support them in managerial related tasks. Although the respondents of the study comprised both men and women NAPs, the findings did not reveal any discrepancy between the support needed with regards to the relationship between men and women NAPs with the students' parents.

In New Zealand, there was a programme called the Experienced Principals Development Programme (EPDP) which was conducted involving 300 primary and secondary school principals (Youngs & Cardno, 2015). A study which focused on the provider of the programme found that leadership effectiveness could be achieved through small collegial groups within which the mentors maintain regular contact with principals. Given the evidence of the study that leadership development is manifested through mentoring experienced principals in the EPDP programme, it could also be helpful to aspiring principals and NAPs in the same context. Conducting a similar programme is therefore deemed crucial in supporting leadership development of aspiring and newly appointed principals. However, the programme's effectiveness was

only attested by its providers and its success should most likely be also considered from the perceptions of the principals who took part.

While previous studies clearly explored the existing support for the development of principals which was provided and designed regardless of their gender, perhaps it is the right time for support for women to be highlighted specifically. Owing to the position of women principals as the minority gender in school leadership, it is argued that more specific support is needed if equal positions are to be provided for them in the upper echelon of principalship. Al-Ahmadi (2011) emphasised the flexibility and autonomy in decision-making in sectors which involved women. Apart from the flexibility and autonomy in improving performance strategies, according to Al-Ahmadi it is also important to emphasise the empowerment of women as such efforts would enhance their ability to achieve their objectives and to meet the expectations of the public. Al-Ahmadi also stressed that training should be integrated into the strategic planning efforts of schools and educational boards. More importantly, the training provided should focus on helping women to identify their own personal style and leadership qualities and also the sources of power and influence related to their role. In this case, policy makers and government should play an important role as they have the right to form the social policies, development strategies and legislation that enable the shaping of opportunities for women. Apart from that, Al-Ahmadi also encourages human resources functions in organisations adopt approaches that positively transform work culture through changes in management, team building, sensitivity training, and cross-gender communication. Looking at the changing roles of women leaders in Saudi Arabia, Al-Ahmadi further suggested that it is also crucial to organise forums, workshops, and conferences as well as to discuss challenges faced by women leaders and ways to overcome them. In sum, Al-Ahmadi asserted that any attempt to introduce

social change in that context should be in line with the cultural norms and values pertaining to women and Islam.

Providing support in leadership should not be one directional. In other words, apart from accepting support from others, the school principals should also provide support towards those who work with them such as teachers and students, as well as administrative staff, in order to build capacity for leadership. Fisher and Carlyon (2014) asserted that in producing future leaders, for instance, the role of school principals is to build and maintain positive relationships within the school culture as well as providing and supporting teachers. Apart from the administrative and management tasks pertaining to learning, school principals are also responsible for producing future leaders from within their schools. The ability to hold the multifaceted roles of a principal relies on the establishment and maintenance of relationships built towards a positive school culture. For teachers to grow professionally and personally, the role of maintaining the relationship should be collective rather than isolated. According to Fisher and Carlyon (2014), leaders should know their staff well and always be willing to engage in both formal and informal dialogue.

According to Grogan and Shakeshaft, 'the idea that leadership in organisations resides in the work groups and teams is not new' (2011, p. 65). Another role that principals can play is to provide opportunities for teachers to experience leadership in some different contexts, such as taking responsibility for an event, activity, or curriculum area. This is a good chance for the teachers to engage in dialogue and collaborate with others. Being supportive school leaders could also be seen in the school principals' recognition of teachers' development. Thus, the school leaders need to ensure that sufficient support is provided for teachers before they embark on leadership roles. In addition to providing support, it is important for the school

principals to pair the support with ongoing observations and discussions, which can be done formally and informally.

Due to increased pressure for accountability and demand for educational excellence, Jones and Harris (2014) asserted that improving school performance should not be the responsibility of the principal alone. This was further supported by Jones *et al.* (2015) who noted that the burden of administrative work, as well as the requirements for meetings at various levels such as district, state and national, resulted in little time for the principal to undertake classroom observation as well as less time for the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning. In this situation, providing support for the principals is deemed essential.

### **2.7.2 Mentoring and Networking**

Mentoring and networking are both considered as part of the support required by principals. According to Kram and Isabella (1985), there are two categories that could be linked to the role of mentors; career development roles, and psycho-social roles. While career development roles are more related to growth and development of protégés within the organisation, psycho-social roles are more directed towards interpersonal aspects including protégés' competency and self-image. In the previous section on leadership development, while studies such as those of Youngs and Cardno (2015) and Westhuizen and Vuuren (2007) emphasised the importance of support in leadership development, Ng and Szeto (2016) on the other hand highlighted the role of peer networking and school visits in relation to leadership development. It is apparent from their study that the emphasis is not on leadership development per se, but the findings show that leadership development has a close connection to networking. Arguably, mentoring is another term which is close to the explanation of

networking as networking creates opportunities for mentoring to take place. Due to this claim, it is worth mentioning that in the following parts of the explanation, the terms mentoring and networking will be used interchangeably as and when appropriate.

Participants in the Ng and Szeto study (2016) opined that the best way to learn about school leadership is through peer networking and school visits. Networking is viewed by the participant NAPs in the study as providing them with an opportunity to learn and share things related to leadership along with practical experiences. Ng and Szeto further elaborate that participants in the study always look forward to their mentors' support as mentors are able to provide advice regarding school management. Given the evidence that networking is helpful for the principals, some NAPs even suggested including 'shadowing' learning activities such as school meetings, meeting with parents and students, as well as delivery of speech during assembly as part of mentor-mentee support.

In order to motivate principals in building networking into their practice, Westhuizen and Vuuren (2007) in his study emphasises the importance of broadening the support not only within the school area but also with the community outside the school. The findings of the study suggest that building positive relationships, i.e. networking, with parents could be in the form of providing guidance on educational matters. Even though leading the community is not the main role of principals, networking between principals and parents is important as it is one way of harnessing the involvement of the community. To value the involvement of the community is arguably more important in a highly collectivist society, as collectivist culture emphasises the needs of a group or a community rather than those of the individual. As such, it is valuable for the principals to identify what their school climate is like and whose involvement works better for their school.

Lumby (2011) discussed networking a different way, emphasised the role of educational leaders in giving special attention to managing external relations. According to Lumby, managing relations is considered as part of marketing in education. Lumby further added that marketing in education is a strategic process towards understanding the wants and needs of learners and wider stakeholder groups, as well as building relationships and resources to meet such requirements. Hence, developing external relations may involve working with parents to improve learning. To improve students' achievement, Lumby said it is crucial for the principals to work with parents. The relationship between school and parents would bring about the sense of ownership that could be a deterrent on the part of students for acts such as vandalism, theft and violence. Since there is no clear explanation of whether the participants in Lumby's study consist of men and/or women principals, whether women principals play a better role as compared to men principals in building the relationship of their school with others is not considered. Besides, it is also argued that it is essential for principals to know the interests of parents so that they would feel more interested in joining in with the school's activities.

From the Islamic perspective on leadership, Hamzah *et al.* (2016) asserted that making important decisions should not be assigned to a single person. According to Hamzah *et al.*, it should include getting feedback from the team members through respectful and friendly interaction. Making decision is one of the roles for principals to play in exercising leadership. Even though the Hamzah *et al.* study is not conceptualised as a study on networking, it could be argued that decision making by considering feedback from team members could be claimed as a significant aspect of building networking. The Hamzah *et al.* study fits therefore within the literature review of this study as to make decisions based on others' feedback will not happen without

the presence of networking. In other words, for the principals to make decisions which are based on others' opinions and feedback, it is arguable that building networking should be one of the criteria in the leadership of principals.

On a similar note to Hamzah *et al.*, there is a basic attribute suggested by Mir (2010) which is called mutual consultation. With reference to Islamic leadership, Mir states that when leaders need to make decisions, they should not make decisions alone, but rather consult others to get others' opinion. Decisions will only be made after taking into consideration advice from others as well as critically examining all viewpoints and evidence. This condition is called '*syura*' or council; the word is taken from the Arabic language and means to show consent or approval. To consider collective wisdom in making decisions clearly shows that leadership according to Islam should not depend on leaders alone; instead, others' involvement and support is highly considered. Mir emphasised that the practice of '*syura*' prevents leaders from over using their positional authority when making decisions. Instead, Mir attests that the mutual consultation of making decisions strengthens the spirit of collectivism, shared responsibility, and a team building spirit. In this case therefore it is claimed that networking serves as a basis of strengthening these attributes. Furthermore, it could be argued that, if leadership to be exercised according to the Islamic teaching in Islamic countries like Malaysia, there is no way out for principals from building networking as a way of practicing '*syura*' as well as to adhere to the Islamic leadership.

As claimed earlier on, when networking takes place there could be mentoring happening at the same time. It is possible for networking to happen without individuals acting as superior to others, and it could be claimed that leading a school is sometimes more effective when having someone as a mentor. Mentors as found in the study conducted by Moorosi (2012) in South Africa could include former principals, district

officials, retired principals or retired district officials, and neighbouring principals as well as mentors-as-lecturers. Moorosi's reason for conducting the study is due to the prevalent unclear understanding of effective mentoring and the significance of similarity and diversity in mentoring relationship. According to Moorosi, even though mentoring is not yet considered as part of formal school leadership induction programme or leadership development, the South African government classified mentoring as a distinguished pilot leadership development programme for school principals. Given the assumption that the relationship in mentoring is influenced by a variety of factors, the study focuses on diversity of gender and race in mentoring. Other than that, the study also found that mentoring occurs both formal and informally, in which informal mentoring is found to impact more on the relationship between mentor and mentee. The context of the South African society that contributes towards the effectiveness of informal mentoring as the society could be regarded as collectivist in nature.

In another study conducted in South Africa, the respondents who held managerial role prior to their appointment into senior leadership roles admit that they are better at coping with leading people as compared to those without the prior experience in other leadership roles (Westhuizen & Vuuren, 2007). The study shows that the school's activity is always linked to the community, and due to this the principals are expected to play a role in interacting with the community in which the school is situated. One of the findings of the study is that at a certain point, the community show better acceptance to the principals once they know them well. Due to this perception, the respondents in Westhuizen and Vuuren study proposed that out of the many facets of building networking, to communicate with the wider society and community is one the most important aspects need to be developed. Hence, it could also be argued that

building networking in school leadership signifies the notion that principals should not only connect people but connecting with them in a closer sense such as through a nurturing relationship, sharing information and pooling resources. It is justifiable to suggest that achieving the real meaning of connecting with people through networking could pave the way to other school achievements. Bush (2008) suggests that networking is important in all facets of leadership development, and he regards networking as having great power toward learning and performance. This is supported by Kiggundu and Moorosi (2012) who opined that networking positively affected pupils' learning.

In sum, the leadership of principals in highly collectivist societies arguably requires more mentoring and networking as acting out of relationship is more valued than doing things alone.

From an in-depth review of the previous studies, it could be concluded that to lead the schools is a complex task for principals. However, complexity does not mean that the tasks are impossible to execute. There are times when what is required is a shift in the role of the principals.

## **2.8 Summary of the Chapter**

The main issue discussed in this chapter was the connection of gender and leadership. The literature review shed light on different leadership styles such as transformational, collaborative and instructional leadership. The chapter also discussed key areas with regards to gender and leadership such as leading for excellence, leadership, social justice and spirituality. The discussion then proceeded to consider challenges and support provided for women principals. The following chapter will be on methodology.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter explains the methodology and methods used in this study. The study employed qualitative research design in order to understand the leadership practices of women principals in Malaysia. Semi-structured interviews were the predominant method of data collection, supplemented with document analysis and observations. The approach to thematic coding in the data analysis was influenced by Strauss and Corbin's (1990) work. The chapter is organised into: research paradigm, research design, data collection procedure, piloting, and data analysis. This chapter then expounds on ethical considerations, authenticity, trustworthiness and triangulation, before concluding with a summary.

#### **3.2 Research Approach**

A qualitative approach is taken when the study leads to understanding (Silverman, 2010) with the involvement of exploration, discovery and description (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). This is in line with the purpose of this study which is, to understand the leadership of women principals in secondary schools in Malaysia. The six steps in undertaking qualitative research as highlighted by Creswell (2008, p. 8) are 1) Identifying the research problem, 2) reviewing the literature, 3) specifying the purpose of the research, 4) collecting data, 5) analysing and interpreting data, as well as 6) reporting and evaluating the research in this study concur with the qualitative research paradigm.

A qualitative approach was adopted in this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, the study is about exploration, in which feedback is needed from the women principals with regards to their leadership as well as from the people who work with them. This is in line with the suggestion of Bogdan and Biklen (2007) that qualitative research is conducted with the purpose of broadening knowledge, towards more understanding of people's behaviours as well as their experiences. This particular study was conducted with the purpose of broadening the existing knowledge regarding the leadership of women principals in Malaysia.

This qualitative study is within an interpretive research paradigm, in which the researcher enters the social world of the participants in order to understand and interpret how women principals in Malaysian secondary schools perform leadership. Within the interpretive paradigm, systematic design as established by Strauss and Corbin (1990) was found to be appropriate for this study as it allows the researcher to utilise research questions and conduct a literature review. The researcher needed to understand the broader issues within the field of gender and educational leadership and to construct a clearer focus by use of directed research questions. It is for this reason that the study was influenced by Strauss and Corbin's (1990) design, the advantages of which are explained as follows.

Firstly, Strauss and Corbin's design enables an understanding of the leadership of women principals as "grounded" in the data itself, rather than starting with an existing theory. The literature directed the researcher to the key issues in the field and helped refine the research questions and develop interview schedules (Dimmock & Lam, 2012). However, theory was developed based on the existing phenomena which is the leadership of women principals in Malaysia. According to Strauss and Corbin

(1990), theory which is truly grounded in the data is important as it is connected to the reality that the theory is developed to explain. The development of theory was enabled by the inductive qualitative methodology which allows themes to emerge from the participants' accounts. This was important for this study as it resulted in the description of the researcher's view of the actual events and involved searching out the right concepts based on the actual events and practices of the participants.

Secondly, this study is related to the development of theory. The use of a case study approach seemed to be advantageous in this matter. As the fieldwork moved from one case to another, the difference in the leadership styles of the women principals, the challenges they encountered and the support they received or did not receive forced a re-evaluation of the assumptions as well as ongoing development of the theory. Data collection, which involves theoretical sampling is based on theoretically relevant constructs, enabled the researcher to select the subjects that can manage the potential to discover as many dimensions and conditions related to the leadership of women principals as possible.

Thirdly, the work of Strauss and Corbin (1990) is helpful to apply if there is no available theory to explain or understand a particular situation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Dimmock & Lam, 2012; Creswell, 2013). This was an advantage to this study as it intended to go beyond the description of leadership of women principals from their own self-reports only. Instead, the self-reports from the participant women leaders were triangulated with the views and perceptions of staff, parents, and students, enabling the researcher to gain sufficient understanding of women principals' leadership in Malaysia. In addition, the work of Strauss and Corbin (1990) also provided the researcher absolute freedom to experience the real-life nature of knowledge acquired in fieldwork. By observing closely and living in the social world

of the women principals in this study the researcher was enabled to immerse themselves in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which was useful in providing rigorous insight into areas that were hitherto relatively unknown by the researcher.

According to Giske & Artinian (2007), theorising the study gives the opportunity to enhancing the originality of the study as it requires hard work and creativity. To not only to tell the participants' stories but rather to elucidate the pattern of behaviour in which people engaged, requires the researcher's creativity to raise the perspectives of the researcher to the conceptual level (Breckenridge, *et al.*, 2012). Creativity also helps the researcher during constant comparison and theoretical sampling, specifically in the process of choosing different sources and types of data, such as interview, observation and document analysis (Glaser, 2002).

Last but not least, the final benefit is more related to the process that the researcher underwent in completing the analysis of this thesis. After the completion of the literature review chapter, the research focus and questions underwent a refinement process, befitting the iterative nature of a study with an attempt of theory building. Although there were similarities and dissimilarities found in the literature as compared to what is found in the current study, the researcher concludes that there is a need in this study for a theorising process. While numerous studies have been conducted in the West, over-reliance on the Western-rooted explanations is a danger, as different contexts offer different understandings and challenges in the leadership of women principals in secondary schools.

It is within the remit of an academic piece of writing to consider the disadvantages of a study with a theory building exercise, despite its usefulness for this study. Among these disadvantages is that theoretical codes are difficult to understand because

they involve huge volumes of data which required highly developed skills to handle. Additionally, one may never fully feel free of preconceptions that may influence the data collection and the analysis of the data, an issue which is suggested by Glaser and Strauss (Saven-Baden & Major, 2013). The criticism of theory building also centres on whether the product truly rises to the level of theory development. An attempt is made to theorise in this study, but it is argued that although grounded in context and limited to emerging findings, the theorisation is not free of influence from existing work, especially in view of the detailed literature review conducted.

Nonetheless, these concerns were outweighed by the applicability of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) design to the situation wherein, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there was no theory existing to fully explain and understand the phenomenon of women principals' leadership in the secondary schools in Malaysia. This study therefore, and particularly with the use of theory as influenced by Strauss and Corbin's (1990) work, offers a new insight into women's leadership in an under-researched context.

The following section explained the selection of case study design.

### **3.3 Case Study**

This study adopted case study design in order to understand the leadership of women principals in secondary schools in Malaysia. A 'case' is generally a bounded entity (a person, organisation, behavioural condition, event, or other social phenomenon), but the boundary between the case and its contextual conditions in both spatial and temporal dimensions may be blurred (Yin, 2012, p. 6). Therefore, in this study the case is the leadership of women principals in secondary schools. Each of the research sites was headed by a woman principal who was selected to be part of a sample for this

study illustrating how women principals in secondary schools in Malaysia enact or perform their leadership. According to Yin (2014, p. 16), a case study gave the opportunity of more 'in-depth understanding of a real-world case and assumed that such an understanding was likely to involve important contextual conditions'. In relation to this study, the real-world case is how women principals lead; their priorities in leadership, the interactions, support provided and received, as well as challenges they faced. The contextual conditions were the secondary schools in Malaysia.

There are two types of case study according to Stake (2006) – intrinsic or instrumental, depending on its purpose. Whilst the former is about understanding a particular case with absolutely no intention of theorising, the latter is more focused on gaining perspective on an issue or phenomenon. This study is clearly an instrumental case study in which the focus is on specific phenomenon – the leadership of women principals. The cases are the leadership of four women principals heading four secondary schools in Malaysia which will render in-depth and descriptive accounts of the experiences that the women principals have undergone in exercising leadership.

Among the features of the case study as listed by Yin (2013, p. 98) that fit into this study are: "(1) research begins with the identification of a specific case, (2) the importance of intent, (3) the presentation of in-depth understanding of the case and finally, (4) the themes or issues are organised into a chronology". In relation to this study, the identification of a specific case is concerned with the leadership of women principals', whilst the intent is to understand specific issues related to women principals such their priorities in leadership, interactions, support and challenges. To accomplish an in-depth understanding, many forms of qualitative data were collected including from the interviews, observation and document analysis. The themes or

issues were then presented into a chronology and the analysis was made across cases to find similarities and differences. The findings were then presented and a discussion led to a proposed theory of women principals' leadership in Malaysia. The following section explains the rationales for adopting a multiple case study format.

### **3.4 Rationales for Adopting a Multiple Case Study**

Multiple case studies are when one issue or concern is selected and the researcher selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). According to Bengsston (1999), multiple case study is one which investigates multiple person instead of just one. For the issue to be well-represented, the insight should come from various sources. This current study is a multiple case study as it explores the issues by incorporating more than one woman principal; this can increase the validity of the research as well as help the researcher to achieve better triangulation (Merriam, 1998). The current study attempts to understand the leadership of women principals in four secondary schools in two states in Malaysia; two case studies are in two religious secondary schools, and two case studies are in non-religious secondary schools. Saven-Baden and Major (2013, p. 168) proposed that, "a detailed case study can enable the fleshing out or expansion of existing theory". As the current study's attempt was to build theory, the selection of multiple case studies was the best means in providing a detailed account from which theory could be built.

The reason for adopting multiple case studies was to inquire into the variations of experience and perceptions of participants; namely the women principals and their role set. A multiple case study approach was chosen because the current study fits well into the case study criteria identified by Merriam (2009, p. 43): "particularistic, descriptive and heuristic". This study is particularist in that it looks at a particular

situation of women principals' leadership in Malaysia. Also, according to Merriam (2009, p. 43) case study pieces together various experiences of participants in the "thick description" of the final report. To achieve the "thick description" as proposed by Merriam, various experiences were looked at in the leadership of the four women principals. The themes emerging from the findings give a better insight into the phenomenon and, with multiple case studies, the phenomenon is considered from many angles which in turn makes the findings better triangulated and adds value to the study (Merriam, 2009). This process was achieved in the current study through the triangulation of data from various sources such as interviews, observation and document analysis which will be explained later in the following sections of this chapter.

### **3.5 Selection of Participants**

The primary participants of the current study are four women principals in secondary schools. The other participants are the senior management teams of the schools, teachers, students, administrative staff, parents, and officers from the MoE. The women principals had each served for more than three years as principals of secondary schools, a similar length of experience as used in previous studies of this kind in Malaysia (Kathiravelu, 1980; Asmah, 1990; Awang, 1998), and each had been in the teaching vocation for more than 30 years. It was envisaged that being in the posts for a significant time will mean the participants had a better prospect of making an impact in leading as compared to those who were newly appointed (Barallon, 2011).

For a qualitative research, a small number of participants was deemed sufficient as a large number would result in the reduction of details materialising from each individual

(Creswell & Plano, 2007). Additionally, the sampling relied primarily on the quality of the information obtained from the sampling and not on the quantity (Sandelowski, 1995). Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), Creswell (2012), and Silverman (2010) support that employing qualitative research requires only a small number of participants who can really provide a detailed understanding of the phenomenon under consideration. This requirement for only small numbers does not only apply to the number of persons being interviewed, but it may also refer to the numbers of interviews, observations conducted and events sampled: the approach is depicted as 'small is beautiful' (Sandelowski, 1995). The study was therefore limited to four case studies involving a limited number of participants, namely the four women principals, together with their role set consisting of the senior leadership teams, the representatives of teachers, the representative of students, administrative staff, parents, and (in each case) an officer either from the State Education Department (SED), Malaysia or the District Education Office (DEO), Malaysia. Detailed information and brief biographies of the women principals will be presented in Chapter Four.

As this study is influenced by Strauss and Corbin's (1990) work, an attempt was made to theoretically select participants to help towards theory formation and development (Creswell, 2013). Theoretical sampling 'is sampling on the basis of concepts that have proven theoretical relevance to the evolving theory' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 173) However, a few reasons did not allow the participants' selection in this study to fully adhere to the cumulative requirement of theoretical sampling. Firstly, as the study was funded by the MoE, permission had to be obtained from different agencies under the MoE and this process proved to be quite time consuming. The researcher was only given a limited time for the data collection in each school to be completed, as well as for completing the whole study. To fully adhere to the requirement of cumulative

theoretical sampling proved therefore to be impossible. Secondly, the data was collected during term time when participants had limited time available, and this did not allow the researcher to bring the participants together to be considered as cumulative theoretical sampling as proposed by Strauss and Corbin. Participant selection was therefore purposive and targeted information-rich participants who had interactions with the women principals. However, the selection of the participants other than the women principals was made through the recommendation of the women principals themselves. Nevertheless, saturation of data was still reached as the last set of interviews did not necessarily open any new data leads.

Once the main participants were identified, the applications to get permission to conduct this research were sent out, firstly to the Educational Planning Unit (EPU) at the Ministry of the Prime Minister Department, Malaysia. It is compulsory for all researchers from outside Malaysia, whether Malaysians or non-Malaysians, to send their applications to the EPU before proceeding with the applications to other related agencies. Secondly, after approval was obtained from the EPU, the applications then were sent out to the SED. Since this research took part in two different states in Malaysia, applications were sent to two State Education Departments; in Kedah, and in Negeri Sembilan. It was found that Kedah had a lower number of women principals in the time period in which this research was taking place, while Negeri Sembilan had a greater number of women principals. However, to select the women principal participants from two states with different numbers of women principals was not the initial intention of the researcher. The original intention was to identify female principals from states that had a higher number of female principals. During the application to get permission to conduct this research, several names of schools were sent out to the related agencies. However, the selection of women principals ended up being

taken from two states that gave approval for the study, which happened to be the two states with different numbers of women principals.

Once approval was obtained from both State Education Departments, the researcher made telephone calls from the United Kingdom to Malaysia to get informal permission to conduct the research from the respective women principals of the four schools involved in this research. Detailed information of the contexts of the four schools in which this study was conducted are presented in the following section.

### **3.6 Research Setting**

Choosing the research setting is important in conducting a qualitative study as most such studies will require the researcher to be at the research site. According to Jorgensen (1989), the selection of the research setting should be taken into account to avoid any limitation to conducting the study. This was supported by Marshall and Rossman (2006) who stated that the research setting should be selected based on the broadest opportunity for collecting the data, the interest of the participants, as well as ideally there being no restriction in conducting the research. Similarly to Marshall and Rossman (2006), Burgess (1989) listed that among the criteria were accessibility, no restriction to conduct research, that it be free to carry out the research, and that it should be easy for the researchers to participate. Spardley (1980, p. 45) opined that “each investigator will have different reasons for selecting a particular setting for research”, a perspective that was supported by Creswell (1998) who mentioned that the selection of setting should be based on the researcher’s own reasons.

Selecting the research settings of this study was based on the following criteria; the purpose of conducting research, the accessibility, the opportunity to collect the data. It was also determined by the permission granted by the women principals and the

ministry (Spardley, 1980; Creswell, 1998; Burgess, 1989; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The following sub-section will provide an explanation of the settings of this study.

### **3.6.1 School A**

School A is a religious coeducational secondary school which was established in the 1980s. When the cluster schools merit system was introduced by the MoE, School A was among the earliest to receive the Cluster School of Excellence award. The school is located in the northern part of Malaysia and is just a few miles from a city centre, where it is surrounded by a few more secondary non-religious schools and the District Education Office (DEO) in the same area. During its early establishment, the school consisted of only five teachers as well as five administrative staff, and around 114 students. Approaching the 1990s, there was an increase in the number of students, following which the classrooms and other school facilities were improved. At the time of the study, not only had the physical facilities of the school been improved, but the students' academic achievement had also shown a lot of improvement. Rather than accepting any and all students for enrolment, only students with good examination results are selected at this school as a way of maintaining its academic excellence. This makes the school very competitive and exclusive.

With regards to the socio-economic status (SES), the students of School A mostly came from a middle-class family in which most parents work for the government or are self-employed as paddy planters. In terms of the school's performance in co-curricular activities, the school is famous for producing students that are excellent in Malay language debates as well as in English and Arabic. The details of the school, which consists of only Muslim teachers, and administrative staff as well as students, is shown in the Table 3.1:

**Table 3.1: Number of teachers, administrative staff and students of School A**

<b>Positions</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Senior Leadership Team	4	6	10
Teachers	42	64	106
Administrative staff	8	10	18
Students	354	590	944

### **3.6.2 School B**

School B is a secondary High Performance Girls' only school. It was established in 1920s and located in the northern part of Malaysia on the outskirts of the town. Initially, the idea behind its establishment was to give an education to the daughters of the royalties and government higher officers. Only in 1940s, the education was opened to the society from all walks of lives and races. In 1990s, this school was recognised as a Premier School by the State Education Department (SED) and has been upgraded to an elite school since 2000. The school continued to excel, and in late 2000, it was awarded a Cluster School of Excellence title by the Ministry of Education (MoE), Malaysia and was recognised as one of the 20 High Performance Schools in late 2000. Apart from being conferred as a High Performance School, School B also was awarded with *Bai'ah* or New Deals by the MoE, Malaysia.

Other than academic excellence, the school is also known for its co-curricular activities. In line with the school's vision to 'Uphold the school's excellence to the world-class' the school is famous for its co-curricular activities not only among schools in that particular state, but also nationally and internationally. Some of the students participating in the co-curricular activities as well as their teacher advisors were awarded medals by the King of their state due to their excellent performance. The students participating in the co-curricular activities not only presented at the

competition or at big events outside the school, they also contributed to the school performance at school related events.

With regards to population, the overall SES of the students could be considered as moderate and the school consists of multiracial teachers and students such as Malay, Chinese, Indian and Thai. More detailed information on the number of teachers, administrative staff and students is shown in Table 3.2:

**Table 3.2: Number of teachers, administrative staff and students of School B**

Positions	Male	Female	Total
Senior Leadership Team	3	9	12
Teachers	11	57	68
Administrative staff	3	14	17
Students	-	751	751

Previously, the students in School B consisted of Form One till Form Six students. However, in the beginning of 2015 just before collecting the data for this study, all Form Six students were transferred to another location where they were no longer under the management of School B. Currently, the students in School B only comprise students from Form One till Form Five.

### **3.6.3 School C**

School C is a federal religious coeducational secondary school which was established in the 1950s. The school is situated around 4 miles from the town centre, in a hilly location, and is surrounded by few other secondary schools. Due to the location of the school which is on the outskirts of the town, the overall SES of the students in School C could be considered as moderate. Most of the parents work in the government sector, private sector, or run their own businesses. The school, which was the first

religious school in its state, started at an old castle and the first enrolment was of male students only. At the beginning, the school was under the patronage of the local government. In the 1960s, the school had its first intake of female students. In the late 1970s, the school management was handed back to the MoE which resulted in a change of name for the school. In the 1980s, in conjunction with the Silver Jubilee of its establishment, the name of the school was changed again to its current name, which was named after a distinguished Islamic religious figure.

In terms of its achievement, the school was awarded the Cluster School of Excellence title by the MoE in 2008 and is now on its way to achieving High Performance School status. School C is categorised under the Religious National Secondary School cluster. Since its establishment, the school has achieved numerous excellence awards both in academic and non-academic aspects. The achievement of the cluster school award illustrated that School C is excellent in academic as well as co-curricular activities, as both these criteria are included in the conditions for cluster schools.

In terms of population, the school consists of mostly Malay teachers and administrative staff, except for two Indian teachers. Meanwhile, all the students are Malay Muslims. More detailed information about the number of teachers, administrative staff and students is given in Table 3.3:

**Table 3.3: Number of teachers, administrative staff and students of School C**

<b>Positions</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Senior Leadership Team	2	9	11
Teachers	18	51	69
Administrative staff	4	12	16
Students	317	479	793

### 3.6.4 School D

School D is a co-educational national secondary school. It was established in 1990 and used a different name from the one it has today. Since its establishment, School D has been led by ten principals. Out of ten principals, five were male, and five were female including the principal involved in this study. When School D was first established there were only two double-storey buildings, a hall, and a canteen. Today, two decades since its establishment, the school has expanded with more buildings and facilities provided for better teaching and learning as well as other school activities. School D is located less than 5 miles from the city centre and is neighboured by several other secondary schools. The school is surrounded by residential areas and consists of multi-racial communities; Malay, Chinese, and Indian. In terms of SES, as compared to the rest of the schools in this study, most students in School D come from lower class families. Most of the parents are self-employed, some run small businesses for a living. In terms of population, both teachers and students in this school were of Malay, Chinese and Indian origin. The Malay were the majority, followed by Chinese and Indian. More detailed information about the number of teachers, administrative staff and students are given in Table 3.4:

**Table 3.4: Number of teachers, administrative staff and students of School D**

<b>Positions</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Senior Leadership Team	4	7	11
Teachers	14	71	85
Administrative staff	4	10	14
Students	554	424	978

In this section the research approach has been highlighted. The adoption of qualitative inquiry, case study and multiple case study, selection of participants as well as

research setting were explained in detail. The following section will be on the data collection procedure.

### **3.7 Research Methods**

This section explains the research methods used to gather data in this study. To explore why the phenomenon occurs, it is crucial to conduct a detailed investigation. In relation to this study, three methods were used for the purpose of collecting data and providing an in-depth understanding of the topic under study. In addition to contributing towards the richness of the data, the use of multiple methods was also for the purposes of data triangulation. Triangulation is a cross validation of a qualitative research study as it shows whether or not the data collected from various sources is sufficient (Wiersma, 1991). Interviews were the main data-gathering method used in this study, whilst observation and document analysis were also used to support or supplement the data collected through interviews.

#### **3.7.1 Interviews**

In qualitative research, interview is the most familiar method used (Saven-Baden & Major, 2013). In relation to this study, the interviews were conducted as the primary means for data collection to encourage the participants in sharing their understanding of the leadership of women principals (see Appendix A for Interview Guide). Semi-structured interviews were chosen because 'the structure of the interview is flexible and the restrictions minimal, in most cases taking the forms of guides rather than rules' (Sarantakos, 2013, p. 278). Besides, it allowed the researcher more freedom in formulating research questions and employ natural probing. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the women principals, the people who work with the women principals such as the senior leadership teams, administrative staffs, and

ministry officers as well as parents. Semi-structured interviews were a good approach for this study as the researcher only had one opportunity to interview the participants in each school (Minichiello *et al.*, 1990), apart from the case of the women principals who were each interviewed twice. As the women principals were the main participants, this was important in ensuring the researcher understand their ideas and views clearly.

One means of getting a clear view of the participants' thoughts was through probing. Probing became an important feature in the interviews as it allows the interviewer to ask the participants to give more details (Merriam, 2009). Patton (1997) divided probing as a mechanism into two; elaboration probing, which is to get more information/detail, and clarification probing, which is to verify a statement or idea. In this study, the purpose of carrying out the second round of interviews with the women principals was more to engage in elaboration probing. However, there were also occasions when clarification probing was needed, for instance when information from other participants such as teachers or students needed clarification. Interview questions were used to facilitate the first round of the interview sessions; for the second round, the questions asked were based on the clarification needed.

Face to face interviews were conducted with the majority of participants in this study. Almost all face to face interviews took place in the school premises or at the workplaces of the participants. Interviews with women principals, the senior leadership teams and the administrative staff were conducted at the school, while the interviews with parents or the representatives from the MoE were conducted at their workplaces. Although the interview questions were prepared in the English language, face to face interviews were conducted fully in Malay language as it was the preferred language of the participants.

Apart from face to face interviews, telephone interviews were also conducted between the researchers and the officers from the SED, DEO, and the representatives of Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs). Face to face interviews were conducted due to the participants' time constraints as well as at the request of the participants themselves. Some of the telephone interviews were conducted during the data collection process whilst the remainder took place after the completion of data collection, at which point the telephone calls were made from the United Kingdom to participants in Malaysia.

Several precautions were taken care of to ensure the smooth running of the telephone interviews. The times for the telephone interviews, for instance, were determined according to the participants' preferences. The conversations were tape recorded and notes taken by the researcher in the case the tape recorder was not functioning well. The rapport-building and introduction did comprise the same characteristics and techniques as face to face interviews (Sarantakos, 2013). However, the way in which explanations were made to the participants were more brief as compared to face to face interviews, both due to the cost of making the calls, and to minimise the likelihood of technology disruptions by ensuring the calls did not take too long. There were occasions on which the telephone coverage was not very clear, but the researcher would ensure the whole meaning of the conversations could still be attainable by taking notes.

Overall, the telephone interviews were found to serve their purpose and in fact, they were found to give an advantage in terms of reducing potential bias, for example relating to ethnicity and appearance. That the interviewer and the interviewees were unable to see one another naturally eliminated first impression bias. Despite some

disturbances, such as the technology disruptions that happened occasionally throughout the interviews sessions, the telephone interview was deemed a valuable technique in data collection.

### **3.7.2 Focus Group Interviews**

Focus group interviews were conducted for teachers and students at all the schools involved in this study. The focus group approach, which is one of the qualitative data collection methods, was largely adapted from the interview technique. As opposed to one to one interview, focus group interview is done in a group setting (Matthews & Ross, 2010). The purpose of a focus group is to provide information on how the participants in the group think about the topic being studied, to gather the variety of what the group thinks, as well as to reveal if there are any inconsistencies in the opinions shared by the group (Creswell, 1998). In relation to this study, focus group were conducted to understand how teachers and students perceived the leadership of the women principals in their schools. From the information shared, any inconsistencies in the ideas among the participants in the groups were assessed and clarification was requested if it was deemed necessary.

Focus group interviews in this study consisted of teachers with at least 3 years of service in the schools. This duration was based on the suggestion of Clark, Martorell and Rockoff (2009) that teachers become more effective with experience especially during their first three years. Care was taken to involve staff who knows their principal quite well, for example through holding such positions as counsellor, head of department, or disciplinary teachers. It is assumed that, by holding these positions, the participants have more opportunities to deal with the principal, meaning they know them better. In selecting the participants, the researcher received help from the school

counsellors who knew the participants quite well. These participants were chosen as the researcher is interested in people's experiences, ideas and understandings (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

Other than teachers, students were another group of participants involved in the focus group interviews. Students were included in focus group interviews based on the idea that, as compared to a solo interviewee, this format would "provide views of several people at the same time", providing more in-depth data (Coleman *et al.*, 2012, p. 255). In a focus group, participants draw energy from the group leading even the most reluctant speakers to be more prepared to express themselves (Yin, 2011). The focus group format generates discussion and different interactions between participants, which puts them at ease and able to challenge the information shared amongst them (Matthews & Ross, 2010). As students were the youngest group of participants in this study, the researcher anticipated that some of them would probably be shy and would not speak much, which might lead to a lack of clarity in the ideas and expressions gathered. To avoid these problems, conducting focus group were the best idea for the students. However, the format was subject to potential weaknesses such as domination of the discussion by more vocal parties, no participation by some parties, difficulties in keeping the discussion on track, and challenges to recording the data (Sarantakos, 2013). These potential weaknesses were mitigated by the researcher's careful facilitation skills.

The selection of the participants for the student focus groups was determined between the researcher and the school counsellors before the data collection took place. This was done to ensure the smooth running of the data collection and to minimise the interruptions to the students' teaching and learning process at each school during the

data collection process. With the consideration that students with positions of responsibility spent more time with their principals and had the possibility of knowing their principals better, most of the participants selected for the students' focus groups were students who held important positions such as prefects, as well as students from the students' representative councils.

Regardless of whether interviews were face to face or via telephone, all sessions began by building rapport and showing appreciation for the participants to make them comfortable. The interview sessions began by discussing how the women principals started their day. The participants were asked other questions related to the leadership of women principals such as their priorities, interactions, supports, and challenges in leading the schools. The interviews were tape-recorded, with the participants' consent, to convey the live quality of the narrative, aiding analysis and interpretation (Gillham, 2005). In addition to the tape-recording, notes were also taken as a back-up. To ensure the anonymity of all participants in this study, codes were used to replace the participants' real names (see Appendix B).

### **3.7.3 Observations**

Observations were conducted in this study to replace the shadowing which had been initially planned to take place with all women principals. When the women principals were informed of the intention toward shadowing, all of them showed uncertainty regarding being shadowed. They felt that being shadowed will place all of their actions under significant scrutiny, which they were really uncomfortable with. Principal D for instance said that, apart from feeling uncomfortable, she preferred to focus on the accomplishment of tasks as she was just a month away from her retirement.

Although the women principals did not give their consent to shadowing, they agreed to the researcher spending time in the schools for general observation that did not entail following all the movements of the principal. As this current study attempts at theory building, there were no specific elements of observation determined in advance. This is because the emergence of themes would be identified from the data. According to Bush (2007), observation of meetings is important for the study of issues related to leadership and management. As such, these general observations included monitoring the schools' management meetings and staff meetings as well as PTA meetings which were conducted by the women principals.

Shadowing, as explained to the women principals in this study 'is a research technique which involves a researcher closely following a member of an organization over an extended period of time' (McDonald, 2005, p. 456). In relation to the current study, an extended period of time would have been a whole day including the time spent by the women principals at their respective schools as well as where they had duties to perform outside of the school. As the participants declined to be shadowed, they were given the option to be observed during specific activities (such as meetings) instead. All the women principals agreed to observation as from their understanding, observations are less formal and meant their actions and interactions would be less closely scrutinised. Observation was not only employed to fulfill the women principals' request, but in line with suggestion of McCall *et al.* (cited in Luthans *et al.*, 1985, p. 256) that observation did not 'interrupt the normal work activities of managers and take up their time'.

Even though observation was carried out as a replacement to shadowing, it was found to contribute well towards the richness of the data and the objectives of triangulating

the data. Furthermore, the observations were found to contribute towards the smooth running of the data collection process both for the principals and the researcher. For the former, they felt more comfortable and were happy to cooperate throughout the data collection process as their requests for observation over shadowing had been granted. For the latter, the researcher had opportunities to focus on specific events than if she had undertaken shadowing which would have entailed observing all events of the day. Amongst the disadvantages of shadowing was that the attention of participants as well as the researcher might have been less focused as shadowing requires a longer time to be carried out. McDonald (2005, p. 458) characterised shadowing as being physically demanding. As compared to observation, focus would be required throughout the day for shadowing, meaning a possibility of limited attention span.

Whilst it is possible that under a whole day of intensive shadowing the women principals might not have acted naturally, the selected events of the observations were found to allow more 'natural' actions and interactions of the women principals. When the researcher was invited to observe any activities at the schools, the researcher would not confirm her presence to the women principals as surely if the presence is confirmed, the women principals know when to expect the researcher. In this way, the women principals could not easily predict when the researcher would be present and when they would not. For instance, there were times that the researcher arrived for the events before the principals and sat in the corner of the meeting room with other teachers without the principals realising it.

Whilst shadowing 'can be done over consecutive or non-consecutive days for anything from a single day or shift up to a whole month' (McDonald, 2005, p. 456), observation would require shorter periods of time. The observation that happened intermittently

gave the opportunity for the researcher to establish rapport, and eventually gain the trust of the principals as participants of the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Lichtman, 2010). Building rapport was largely achieved in this study through informal conversation outside of the observation periods. In this regard, if shadowing had been implemented, the researcher would not have had this opportunity; the shadowing period would not allow informal conversation, and the researcher would have needed to focus solely on shadowing the principal for the whole school day. As such, the observation was found to better contribute towards the richness of the data.

To comply with the requirement of this study with regards to theory building, the observation at all schools in this study was not planned to be conducted at any specific time or at specific events. As such, there are no lists of the particular observations made except for observations in the usual manner such as the things that the researcher noticed while in the schools. Notes on any events that occurred at any of the schools which were related to the research questions were jotted down at the time by the researcher - for instance, various aspects of school life being observed such as the principals welcoming students in the morning, principals doing daily rounds, school assemblies, and the principals conducting staff meeting. The observation was done based on the availability of the researcher and the participants, aside from the time utilised for conducting interviews and the document analysis. Observation also took place in some parts of the school surroundings, such as looking at the walls and notice boards which displayed photos and information about school achievements, as a way of triangulating the data.

Among the examples of observations carried out in this study were, at **School A** the researcher managed to observe the daily interactions between **Principal A** and the

staff at the school offices. Observations were also made of the interactions of **Principal A** with outsiders such as the students' parents and the school's general workers who happened to be in the schools' general offices when the data were being collected. Events such as the PTAs Committee's preparation meeting for the PTA Annual General Meeting were also part of the observation, as well as a farewell party organised for a staff member who was about to retire. In **School B**, the observations were carried out at the school administrative office in which **Principal B** spent most of her time apart from when she was in her own office. The researcher was able to observe the way **Principal B** interacted, giving out information and discussing things related to students' development with the administrative staff.

In **School C**, observations took place of the interactions between **Principal C** and the school counsellor regarding the decision regarding students' admission to **School C**. Another example in an interactional setting was between **Principal C** and the Deputy Principal for Students' Affairs regarding permission for a sick student to go home instead of staying at the school hostel. In **School D**, observations were carried out of the discussion between **Principal D** and a teacher regarding fights that had happened amongst the students. The researcher also managed to observe how **Principal D** approached a male student in front of the school office, and the way in which the principal communicated with a student regarding dress code, as well as the communication between **Principal D** and the teachers during an ad hoc meeting.

Despite the strengths and weaknesses of observations as opposed to shadowing, the participants' preferences were crucial aspects to prioritise. According to Powney and Watts (1989) and Arskey and Knight (1999), it is important to encourage active participation of the participants and establish trust between the researcher and

participants. Throughout the data collection process, it was found that all four women principals in this study gave their full cooperation. In this matter, the researcher believed that to prioritise the participants' preference was very important as it will encourage the participants to open up to the researcher, and it also contributed towards the smoothness of the data collection process.

#### **3.7.4 Document Analysis**

Spradley (1980) and Yin (1994a) suggested that information in document analysis is an important area of evidence in qualitative research. Using document analysis, the researcher was able to strengthen, compare, and complete the data collected through interviews and observations (Spradley, 1980; Yin, 1994b). With regards to this current study, the data from interviews conducted with women principals and other participants that the women principals work with was supported by the data collected through the observation and document analysis.

According to Yin (2011) to enable an opportunity for clarification, the document analysis would be better carried out prior to the interviews and observations. In this study, part of the document analysis was done before the interviews took place. This was done to give the researcher basic information including information on each school, its administration, and on students' performance. Conducting the document analysis prior to the interviews helped the researcher greatly when conducting the interviews as the researcher already had some basic information when the participants explained something. Most of the documents reviewed were prepared by the school counsellors. In fact, before the researcher came for the data collection at the schools, the school counsellors were already informed about the documents needed.

Apart from selecting the documents based on the required information of the research, there were some documents that were suggested by the principals and the school counsellor. Among the documents reviewed during the data collection were minutes of previous meetings, a School Progress Planner, school magazines, and a Planning for Management and Educational Administration Book (see Appendix C). From these documents the researcher found information on the planning of school events, how the planning was executed, how decisions were made, and how the performance or success of previous plans was reviewed. This procedure allowed the researcher to interpret the documents on her own and find the connections between the data in the document analysis and the data from interviews and observations. Some of the documents were reviewed at the schools in between the time when the interviews were conducted and the observations, whilst there were also documents that were given to the researcher which they did not have to return back to the schools. Most of the document analysis took place at the schools, where the researcher was given a workspace throughout the data collection process. Table 3.5 shows the timeline of the data collection process in each school.

**Table 3.5: Timeline of Data Collection in Each School**

Name of School	Dates of Data Collection (Interviews, Observations and Document Analysis)	Duration
School A	21-22 <sup>nd</sup> January 2015	7 Days
	26 <sup>th</sup> -29 <sup>th</sup> January 2015	
	8 <sup>th</sup> February 2015	
School B	2 <sup>nd</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> February 2015	4 Days
School C	24 <sup>th</sup> February 2015	2 Days
	27 <sup>th</sup> February 2015	
School D	25 <sup>th</sup> February 2015	2 Days
	26 <sup>th</sup> February 2015	

The following section will be an explanation on piloting.

### **3.8 Piloting**

Piloting data collection tools is 'trying them out on willing volunteers' (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013, p. 112). According to Yin (1994), a pilot study is conducted for the following reasons: 1) to test the interview guide, and 2) to improve interviewing techniques. The interviews were conducted in the Malay language. School A was treated as a pilot test for this study as the arrangement for data collection at this school was secured first.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the researcher was supplied with the names of the participants by the school counsellor. A few names were selected in order to conduct the interview as a way of pilot testing the instrument. The participants involved in the pilot test were the women administrative staff of the school, female students (in a focus group), and male teachers (also a focus group). All interview sessions went on smoothly, except for a few questions which were not very clear to the female students. However, after the researcher altered the way of asking questions their level of understanding improved.

It was identified through the pilot test that the participants were fully engaged and supportive, thus contributing towards the richness of the data collected. The researcher did not make any modifications to the instrument and as a result of the smooth implementation of the pilot test, the researcher then decided to roll out the study and treated School A as the first case study. As it was illustrated in Table 3.5, seven days were spent in School A and fewer days in other schools as the researcher was not yet familiar with the data collection process.

### **3.9 Data Analysis**

Data analysis in qualitative research is implemented as soon as the data collection process begins and throughout the writing of the report (Saven-Baden & Major, 2013, Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009). This is due to the plethora of information in a qualitative research. In relation to this study, an ongoing analysis started on day one of data collection. After the first participant - Principal A - had been interviewed, the researcher started to listen to the recorded interviews repeatedly. The same steps were taken for the observation and the analysis of the document that were able to be done on the first day of the data collection. Both of the data from the observation and document analysis were written down to support the emerging themes from the interviews. This was done to guide the researcher on what improvements should be made in the following interviews as well as to steer the focus of the study. However, a thorough and in-depth analysis happened only after the data were all collected.

To ensure that data was transcribed and organised efficiently, the researcher used NVivo software to transcribe all the data collected from the interviews. The NVivo software was used only for transcribing and not for analysis, as the researcher believed that manual analysis would give more opportunity to immerse in the data. In a study with an attempt for theorisation, the researcher doing their own coding works better as it can 'constantly stimulate conceptual ideas' (Holton, 2007, p. 275). NVivo was however also used to make sure that the data were organised systematically and was easily accessible for further action.

The data for this study was collected in the Malay language according to the participants' preferences, and the fact that this language was shared by participants and the researcher. In terms of handling and reporting the data, the researcher

followed the approaches suggested by Bazeley (2013). To preserve the depth and richness of the data, Bazeley recommended the data should be transcribed and interpreted in the original language. Thus, the data transcription and coding processes were also done in Malay. Translation into the English language was done during the selective coding stage which was the final stage of data analysis and involved use of direct quotations. For the purpose of clarification, some excerpts from the interviews were translated into English language in order to show how coding was done (see Appendix D).

The process of analysing data in qualitative research is usually inductive, which means moving from small parts in order to discover the larger picture of the topic being studied (Saven-Baden & Major, 2013). This approach was chosen to meet the requirement of inductive orientation and the concept building of the current study. The thematic coding approach used in the data analysis was influenced by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The following section explains the process of coding involved in this study: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

### **Open Coding**

The first coding stage in this research is the open coding. Open coding is when the data is broken down, examined, compared, conceptualised and categorised (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this stage, the transcribed data from the interviews was read and re-read in order for the researcher to immerse themselves in the data. From the first day of the data collection process, the researcher started to listen to the recorded interviews to uncover categories and their interrelationships to each other through a comparative and inductive process.

There are various ways of doing coding according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), such as line-by-line analysis, code by sentence or paragraph, or taking into consideration the entire document, observation or interview. At the beginning, the researcher employed the line-by-line approach as at this stage the researcher was not yet familiar with the process. After becoming more familiar, the researcher started to utilise code by sentence and paragraph. At some point, the needs for coding by paragraph was required when coding line by line did not render a clear meaning. Coding by paragraph was mostly used in the interviews with students as some of them did not speak clearly and tended to use shorter sentences. Due to the abundance of data, coding by paragraph was found to be among the most appropriate methods for this study. The process continues until the point of saturation of data is reached. 'In broad terms, saturation is used in qualitative research as a criterion for discontinuing data collection and/or analysis' (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). The process to achieve the saturation of data is called constant comparison which means, 'a point at which no new themes are being uncovered' (Saven-Baden & Major, 2013).

While coding for interviews was mostly done by paragraph, the data from the observation and document analysis were coded by throughout entire process of observation and document. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, as this study attempted theory building and no pre-determined items were listed, related interactions of the participants that occurred during the observation, as well as the related issues found in the document analysis, were jotted down based on the themes that emerged in the interviews. In this manner, a coding process for both observation and document analysis was carried out to triangulate the coding in the interviews. As such there were no specific guidelines or observation checklist prepared.

## **Axial Coding**

Axial coding is when the researcher can increase the theoretical sensitivity by making connections between categories and sub-categories. However, in this study, the axial coding process has only been partly engaged due to a number of reasons. First, the themes had already been identified through repeatedly listening to the recorded interviews. Second, as this study involved large amounts of data, relating all codes to each other and making connections between them would realistically take a lot more time than the researcher had. However, the researcher had developed a central idea of the phenomenon through listening in the first place and the coding in the second. But axial coding in its detailed sense was therefore skipped in this analysis as it was deemed too time-consuming. Saven-Baden & Major (2013) observed that even though axial coding is part of the coding process as first conceptualised by Glaser and Strauss (1967), who initially established the coding approaches in the grounded theory approach, many researchers doing qualitative research only adopt two forms of coding, open coding and selective coding. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), axial coding and selective coding are not that much different to one another; the major difference is simply that selective coding is at a higher abstract and more challenging.

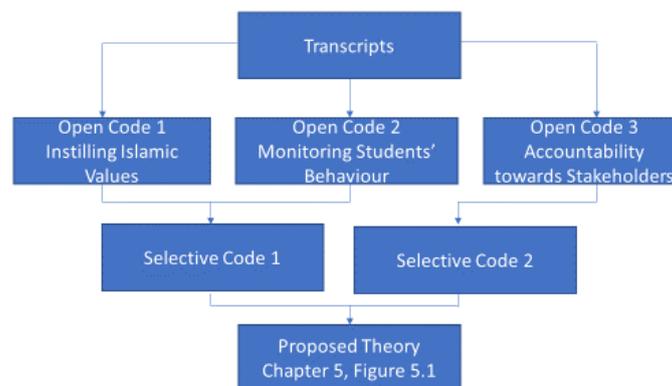
## **Selective Coding**

Selective coding is 'the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The aim of selective coding is 'to integrate the categories along the dimensional level to form a theory, validate the integrative statements of relationship, and fill in any categories that need further development' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 187).

Selective coding begins after the researcher identified a potential core variable. At this stage, new data collection and coding is limited to that which is relevant to the emerging conceptual framework. By only focusing on the core and other related categories, new data collection can be done very quickly. In this way the researcher can saturate the selected categories that form the basis of the emerging theory without collecting a lot of additional material that has no relevance to the development of theory. This selective data collection and analysis continues until the researcher has sufficiently elaborated and integrated the core variable, its properties, and its theoretical connections to other relevant categories.

The whole coding process applied in this study is explained in the following Figure 3.1. The steps were created by the researcher to illustrate a clearer picture of how the coding process was carried out.

**Figure 3.1: Coding Process Applied in the Study**



### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

Two stages of ethical principles are involved; 1) the application for conducting data collection from Malaysia, and 2) ethical approval from the University of Warwick (see Appendix E). The application for conducting the data collection in Malaysia involved a few stages. Firstly, the application was sent to the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) at the Ministry of the Prime Minister's Department, Malaysia (see Appendix F). Once the approval was granted, the application was sent to the Ministry of Education (MoE) Malaysia (see Appendix G). The final stage was to gain permission from the State Education Departments of two different states in Malaysia; Kedah and Negeri Sembilan (see Appendices H and I). It was not necessary to make applications directly to the schools.

Besides securing access and permission to conduct the study, consent was also secured from every participant involved in this study: the principals, state education officers, district education officers, senior leadership teams, teachers, administrative staff, students, and parents. The study and its objectives were explained to the participants for them to fully understand and give their consent. The researcher gave assurance that the data would be treated as confidential and would be presented anonymously. They were also assured that the researcher would be as honest as possible prioritising the safety of the respondents (Saven-Baden & Major, 2013).

### **3.11 Authenticity, Trustworthiness and Triangulation**

There are two key criteria in assessing a qualitative study; authenticity, and trustworthiness. According to Bush (2012), authenticity of educational and social research can be assessed by the procedures used to address reliability, validity and

triangulation. However, the terms are complex as their meaning and salience may vary according to the researcher's stance.

### **3.11.1 Authenticity**

According to Bryman (2012, p. 393), the criteria which raise a 'wider set of issues concerning the wider political impact of research' are; fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity. According to Rodwell (1998, p. 108) the aim of ontological authenticity is to 'increase the awareness of the complexity of the construction of the phenomenon under investigation'.

Based on ontological authenticity, the opinions of the main participants, the women principals, and those of other participants in this study were taken into consideration regarding their understanding of the way women principals practice leadership. The researcher then attempted to understand in depth how the participants perceived the way women principals practice leadership in Malaysia and attempted further theorisation of the experiences.

### **3.11.2 Trustworthiness**

One of the criteria accessed within trustworthiness, according to Bryman (2012), is transferability. Bryman (2012, p. 392) considers that transferability, because of the characteristics of qualitative research i.e. its breadth and depth, 'qualitative findings tend to be oriented to the contextual uniqueness and significance to the aspect of the social world being studied'.

With regards to the trustworthiness of the current study, the study included four multiple case studies of women principals in secondary schools in Malaysia. As the study attempted theorising the way women principals practice leadership, only a small number of multiple case studies could be included to necessitate the intensive study

of the individual sharing certain characteristics, namely in this study the women principals.

### **3.11.3 Triangulation**

Triangulation means to compare the sources of evidence to determine whether the phenomenon or information is accurate (Bush, 2012). Triangulation in a study is 'using more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomena' (Bryman, 2012, p. 392). This is supported by Saven-Baden and Major (2013, p. 477) who say of triangulation 'that the researcher has multiple data points that can broaden their understanding of the subjects of their research'. Saven-Baden and Major further added that triangulation consists of many categories, among them; data (time, space and persons), investigators (multiple researchers), and theory (more than one scheme applied). Meanwhile, according to Scott (2007, p. 11-13), there are four types of triangulation:

*'data triangulation means that different data sets are collected at different times, investigator triangulations; where more than one data collector/analyst is used to confirm the findings of the research, theoretical triangulation; where more than one theoretical position is used in interpreting the data and methodological triangulation; where strategies or methods are mixed to corroborate one against the other'* (Scott, 2007, p. 11-13).

With regards to this study, three types of triangulation were employed. For data triangulation, two interviews were conducted with each of the women principals; for methodological triangulation, different research instruments were used such as interviews, observation, and documentary analysis to corroborate the data. Triangulation also was ensured through the whole reciprocal nature of the current

study. The study, which investigated the understanding of the leadership of women principals, consisted of participants including the women principals themselves, senior leadership teams, teachers, students, administrative staff, and parents. Interviews were conducted with all participants and the data were then triangulated to cross-check the findings. The data collected were then compared between each instrument and methodology used, and the similar findings or themes were then placed together.

### **3.12 Summary of the Chapter**

To summarise, this study employed qualitative research design with an attempt of theory building to understand the topic being studied, as guided by the research questions. The study employed semi-structured interview, document analysis, and observation. The used of thematic analysis through a constant comparative method was influenced by the work of Strauss and Corbin (1990). The issues of authenticity and trustworthiness were taken into account, complemented through the process of triangulation. The study offered construction of theory on women principals' leadership in Malaysia.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **CASE STUDY REPORT FOR SCHOOLS A, B, C AND D**

##### **4.1 Introduction**

This section presents the findings of case studies in Schools A, B, C and D. The data presented was collected using three methods: interviews, observations, and document analysis. The findings are explained with the aim of answering the four research questions (which are given as sub-headings in the latter part of the chapter). This chapter consists of the background of research participants – the women principals - the findings which are presented according to the themes and subthemes, and the summary of the chapter.

##### **4.2 Background of the Participants – the Women Principals**

This section on the participants' background includes relevant details on the four women principals involved in this study and their brief biographies - their ages, level of education, experience as teachers, courses attended related to teaching and learning, and courses attended related to principalship. Table 4.1 displays the information regarding Principals A, B, C and D:

**Table 4.1: Background of Principals A, B, C and D**

Participants	Age	Educational Background/Level of Education	Years Spent in Service	Years Spent as Principal	Excellent Principal (Yes/No)	Type of School Led
Principal A	58	Diploma (Islamic Education)	34	14	Yes	Cluster School (Co-ed School)
		Bachelor (Islamic Education)				
		Master of Education (Educational Psychology)				
Principal B	57	Bachelor (Technical Education)	32	8	Yes	High Performance School (Girls Only)
		Master of Education (Educational Counselling)				
Principal C	57	Bachelor (Islamic Studies and Malay Studies)	33	11	Yes	Cluster School (Co-ed School)
Principal D	56	Bachelor (Geography Education)	32	8	Yes	Daily School (Co-ed School)

A brief biography is given below for each of the women principals who participated in this study.

#### 4.2.1 Principal A

**Principal A** is the principal of School A, aged 58 years old and married with four children. She was born in the same state as School A. **Principal A** was described by teachers and staff as religious and committed. She was also mentioned as being very devoted in performing Islamic teachings as in following the teachings of Islam. She was characterised as a leader who leads by example; with regard to performing prayers congregationally, she was not only motivating teachers, staff and students, but she herself consistently performed the prayers together with the students.

Pertaining to performing administrative responsibilities, **Principal A** was described as very committed to the duties she held both inside and outside of the school.

**Principal A** had been a teacher for the past 34 years with 14 years in the position of principal, the last five of which were as the principal of School A. **Principal A** received her secondary education from a famous religious school in her hometown in the Northern part of Malaysia, and later pursued her study in Form Four at one of the excellent boarding schools in Peninsular Malaysia. **Principal A's** tertiary education started with a Diploma in Education and she later pursued a Bachelor Degree in Islamic Education and became a teacher for a few years. **Principal A** then pursued her study at Masters level by specialising in Educational Psychology. **Principal A** is the eighth principal of School A and the third woman principal since its establishment. In terms of her career, **Principal A** was awarded the title of Excellent Principal by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MoE) a few years before she became the principal of School A. At the time this study was conducted, **Principal A** was in her second principalship and had already headed a Cluster School of Excellence before moving to School A.

For the purpose of professional development, from time to time **Principal A** attended courses organised by the Ministry as well as related agencies, such as the National Institute of Educational Management and Leadership or known as Institut Aminuddin Baki (IAB). The IAB is Malaysia's main leadership training and development centre, equivalent to the National College for Teaching and Leadership in England (Ng, 2017). The training that **Principal A** attended including aspects such as financial management as well as counseling; according to **Principal A**, these two aspects were crucial to her school's needs and her own self-improvement.

#### 4.2.2 Principal B

**Principal B** is 57 years old and was born in the same state as the school at which she was principal at the time this study was being conducted. **Principal B**, who is married with children and a grandchild, was characterised by the staff, teachers and students as firm yet kind-hearted as well as elegant and fashionable. **Principal B** is always being praised for her kind-hearted manner to all staff regardless of their positions, from clerks to higher management. She was described as always looking presentable and classy both at school and at events outside the school. Other than her positive attitudes and behaviour towards staff and students, **Principal B** was mentioned by some of her staff as always being strict with time management, especially when dealing with outsiders like parents and visitors. This was noticeable to the researcher when **Principal B** always wanted things to be done quickly as she said time is precious.

After completing primary and secondary school at her hometown, **Principal B** continued her tertiary education in the technical field. **Principal B** was posted to several schools within the same state and interestingly, she served School B twice – once as a teacher and later as principal. Being a former teacher in School B, **Principal B** described her comeback as a golden opportunity in terms of being able to get to know the teachers, administrative staff and school itself well in a relatively short space of time. Her previous experience enabled her to quickly acquaint herself with the school culture, which helped her in performing her leadership duties. Just like Principal A, due to **Principal B**'s excellent service she was awarded Excellent Principal status by the MoE. **Principal B**, who was appointed as the 29<sup>th</sup> principal of School B, was very close to an early retirement in 2016. She had been leading the school for eight years and had served 32 years in the MoE.

As someone who relished the opportunity to improve her characteristics as a leader, **Principal B** readily accepted a place to go to London to attend leadership and English courses, as part of a programme for school principals established by the MoE. **Principal B** spent a few months in London learning the English language as well as other aspects related to school leadership. Other than the courses offered by the Ministry, **Principal B** will also usually attend related professional development courses organized by the IAB from time to time for the improvement of her leadership skills.

#### 4.2.3 Principal C

**Principal C** is a 57 years old woman who was born in the same state where School C is located. Like Principal B, **Principal C** is married with children and a grandchild. The principal, who is soft spoken, friendly yet firm in giving out instructions, was affectionately called '*Bonda*' (an archaic Malay word meaning a 'Mother') by students in School C. Being a soft-spoken leader makes **Principal C** easily approachable not only to the students, staff and teachers but also those who did not know her before, including the researcher herself. The principal was also friendly to the point that some of her colleagues feel like the relationship is more that of a peer to a peer than a relationship between followers and a leader. Working with some principals, teachers have to adhere to certain protocols, but as highlighted by the teachers and administrative staff, this was not the case when working with **Principal C**. The characteristics that **Principal C** possessed were an advantage to her leadership as both teachers and administrative staff felt there was less of a barrier when they needed to meet with her, and the students felt the same. Although **Principal C** was characterised as soft spoken and friendly, she is always respected and no one took advantage by overstepping the natural set by her leadership position - when communicating with her.

In terms of educational background, **Principal C** completed Forms 4 and 5 at one of the famous fully residential secondary religious schools in Peninsular Malaysia. After completing her secondary education, **Principal C** continued her tertiary education at one of the oldest and most esteemed public universities in Malaysia, specialising in Islamic Studies and Malay Studies. Sharing her early days of teaching experience, **Principal C** said she was assigned to teach History and Malay Language. The subjects contradicted with her passion as she was more interested in teaching Islamic Education. Only after obtaining an additional qualification was she assigned to teach Islamic Education.

Prior to being appointed as a principal, **Principal C** was a Deputy Principal of Student Affairs at a school in Peninsular Malaysia. The principal was first appointed to a leadership position in 2004; the first school where she became a principal was a secondary coeducational school in East Malaysia. In 2008, she was transferred to Peninsular Malaysia to continue her service as a principal at a secondary girls' only cluster school where she headed the school until 2010. **Principal C** started her third principalship, at School C, in 2011 where she was the 12<sup>th</sup> principal and the 4<sup>th</sup> woman principal. She had 33 years of teaching experience with five years in School C and was awarded an Excellent Principal title by the Ministry.

With regards to courses related to school leadership, as with Principal B, **Principal C** was among the fortunate principals in Malaysia selected to attend an English Language course organised by the MoE in London. Other than the language courses, during her few months stay in London **Principal C** also had the opportunity to learn other related courses such as financial management and information technology. Although the principal admitted the benefits of attending the courses organised by the

Ministry and other agencies, **Principal C** preferred to learn from her fellow principal friends rather than to learn in a more formal situation. As a result, **Principal C** admitted, she was not amongst those who were passionate in attending courses, unless attendance was made compulsory by the Ministry.

#### 4.2.4 Principal D

**Principal D** is a 56 year old woman principal. As with the other principals in this study, **Principal D** was born in the same state where the school she was principal of during this study is located. The principal is a single woman and lives alone in her own home. Due to her close relationship with her family, the principal chose to buy a house very close to her sister's so that she can spend her leisure time with her sister's family, especially with her nieces and nephews. She is simple and straightforward in the way she dresses and in the way she communicates with others.

In terms of her educational background, **Principal D** received her tertiary education at one of the public universities in the Northern part of Malaysia, specialising in Geography Education. She was appointed as a principal for the first time in 2007 at the age of 48 and was awarded the title of Excellent Principal in the first school at which she held the position. School D is the second school at which **Principal D** has been principal. The first school led by **Principal D** was a co-educational daily school where she served for about six and a half years. **Principal D** was transferred to School D in 2013 to continue her service as an Excellent Principal until her retirement in 2015, so in total she spent nearly two years in School D. Her career in Malaysian schools started in 1983, thus by the time this study was implemented, she had already spent 32 years in education. Once she had embarked on a journey of leading schools, she

often attended courses related to principalship such as financial management, human resources, and counseling, for the purposes of professional development.

#### 4.2.5 Concluding Remarks

The previous section presents the backgrounds of Principal A, B, C and D. Their personal backgrounds, their school locations and the people with whom they work(ed) present a distinctive and varied context within which to explore their experiences. The following section will provide an explanation of the study's findings.

### 4.3 Findings

As a basis for understanding the findings better, the research questions are stated below in Table 4.2. As previously mentioned, the findings are explored in an attempt to answer the four research questions, which are used as sub-headings in the latter part of the chapter.

**Table 4.2: Research Questions**

No.	Main Research Question
	'What factors shape and influence the leadership of women in secondary school principalship in Malaysia?'
<b>Sub- Research Questions</b>	
1.	What key priorities determine the leadership of women principals?
2.	In pursuing these priorities, how do the women principals interact with stakeholders, and what values guide them?
3.	What kind of support exists towards women principals' success and attainment of their priorities and what support do women principals provide?
4.	What challenges do women principals face when practicing leadership and how do they deal with the challenges?

This section will discuss the findings from the interviews as the main data source, as well as the observation and document analysis as a source of data triangulation. The analysis of the data consists of the themes and subthemes which are explained both descriptively and interpretively. The identified themes are used as sub-headings in presenting the findings. A detailed discussion of the findings follows in the discussion chapter.

#### **4.3.1 Priorities Influencing the Leadership of Women Principals**

From the data analysis, the findings show that among the priorities identified in the leadership of women principals were both academic and non-academic excellence. With regard to academic excellence, there are two aspects which determined this as a priority which are: accountability towards superiors, and recognition – *Bai'ah*, and the Excellent Principal title. With regard to non-academic excellence, performing prayers congregationally, cultivating future leaders, team building, sharing leadership and promoting teamwork, soft skills, time management, rewarding motivation, and student discipline are found to be prioritised in the leadership of women principals. All the women principals demonstrated that they understood the importance of pursuing their established priorities above all in leading the schools. The way the women principals ordered the priorities according to their school's needs are shared during the interviews with all participants. The findings are explained in the following sections.

##### **4.3.1.1 Academic Excellence**

Throughout the interviews with the principals, academic excellence was understandably found to be a significant focus. Regardless of the types of schools that the principals were leading – High Performance School, Cluster School of Excellence

or daily co-educational secondary school - academic excellence emerged as a top priority for all the principals.

When **Principal A** was asked her main priority in leading the school, she answered without hesitation,

*‘Of course, academic. Everyone nowadays looks at academic as everything... Everything that determined their children’s future.’ (PA/1)*

When the male teachers were asked during the focus group about the emphasis of **Principal A’s** priorities in leadership, one of them said,

*“She always does a daily round [of the school] in the morning. You know what she does; she will monitor the teaching and learning. She will monitor other things as well such as the students who were still outside the classroom but first, she will see (check) the teaching and learning; that is what I can see.”*  
(1TM4)

Although this statement does not mention the word ‘academic’, **Principal A’s** commitment to matters concerning teaching and learning suggest that academic achievement was important to her.

Another teacher in the focus group supported their colleague’s statement much more directly using the word academic:

*“Because I came to this school long before the principal, I can see since her early days that she would do anything when it comes to academic [achievement]. Even like during the assembly, she will keep mentioning academic... academic... academic..., so that the students keep on listening to the same things and hopefully it will remain in their mind.” (1TM1)*

A female teacher on the senior leadership team said,

*“When the principal first arrived at this school she was not at all strict in all aspects, including the academic achievement. But when it was the second year of her administration, she already has a programme especially with regard to the academic achievement. So, we [the teachers] just follow. But her programme succeeded; from the school that never had a student achieve all A’s, once she came she was very strict and asked us to follow her instruction, in which we finally managed to make around 10 students achieve all A’s. Even the students and some of us [teachers] feel under pressure but there are outcomes that everyone is always looking for [success]. So, when the examination results were released, everyone was so happy and that what makes us work even harder.” (1SLTF1)*

Further explaining about **Principal A**’s strictness with regard to academic work, a female senior teacher said,

*“She is very strict in terms of the time for teaching and learning. If say we [the whole school] have to make up teaching and learning that we cancelled due to other school programmes, we will do the replacement class on Saturday.” (1SLTF2)*

Leading a school itself is challenging, not to mention leading a religious Cluster School of Excellence. This is because the principal is responsible towards more stakeholders as compared to those principals leading non-religious schools. For **Principal A**, she expressed her views by saying that it was not easy to maintain the standards set by the Islamic Education Division. This shows that the priority of academic excellence

was not necessarily the principal's choice but was likely due to the principal's accountability towards superiors.

**Principal A** said,

*"I always remind my subordinates... Our responsibilities as educators are big, and we at the religious school, we have stakeholders and our stakeholders are not one... And now the Islamic Education Division wants 10% A's. I said I can't but whatever it is, I have to... because their expectation of us is high."* (PA/1)

Accountability to maintain good academic achievement was perhaps also due to the principal's title of Excellent Principal. This not only put pressure on **Principal A** for the school to achieve high academic results, but also on her as an individual to perform excellently. It is arguable though that the two were intertwined, whereby the principal's excellence was measured through her students' academic performance. This can be illustrated by some of the responses from the officials.

An officer from the State Education Department (SED) said,

*"This principal who is an Excellent Principal is very committed to academic achievement. Most probably because she came from a Cluster School of Excellence before, she knows how to do things correctly to bring this school towards success. She is proactive when it comes to academic [achievement], that is what I can say. If she gets any instruction from us regarding the academics, she will make sure the teachers also will get the correct information. Sometimes when the teacher did not perform the instruction properly she will call them asking why and why... give the reasons so on... That is how she emphasises academics..."* (1SEOM1)

A male teacher in the senior leadership team reported,

*“We can understand that, when a principal leads a cluster school, if the school does not perform the principal will be blamed by the Ministry. For instance, a principal of a religious school, she will be blamed by the officers at the Islamic Education Division. So, we should understand and not blame the principal... She used to be Excellent Principal in a cluster school; if she comes here and then suddenly the results go down, we understand, don't we? Even we ourselves will feel ashamed that we could not perform in line with our status as an excellent Principal.” (1SLTM3)*

An officer from the State Education Department (SED) supported the idea of the accountability of **Principal A** to maintain good academic achievement. School A, which already showed great achievement, managed to achieve better after the departure of **Principal A**.

The officer said,

*“She is a great principal; when she left the previous school (and come to School A), School A managed to achieve a lot of achievements. So, when she comes here to this school (School A), what we can see she did not take a very long time to bring success to the school. Even though what this school (School A) achieved is not yet as good as her previous school but from the current performance, we know she can do it and we put our high expectation that one day she will bring more success to this school (School A).” (1SEOM1)*

As a leader whose academic excellence was proven under her leadership, an officer from the SED said regarding **Principal A**,

*“What is evidenced when this principal has taken over from the previous male principal is the academic. Academic achievement is better as compared with in the past. Within a short period of time she managed to create obvious progress in our school academic achievement. I guess because she had already led a good school or the cluster school before, that gives her advantages to bring success for this school in a short period of time.” (1SEOM2)*

When the officer was further asked regarding the Ministry’s expectations that he had mentioned before, he said,

*“We are very positive that the school can achieve more under her because of her approach. Follow up... she always puts emphasis on follow up. Most of the tasks she distributed to the teachers she will usually do the follow up especially when it is about academics. As we know follow up is very important, or else you would not know how much you have achieved, so I think she has a good strategy which can ensure more success for the school.” (1SEOM2)*

The ‘follow up’ process mentioned by the officer from the SED was supported by a female teacher in the focus group, who said:

*“Like our principal, one of her ways to make sure efforts towards progressing the academic is by doing follow up. So, once you get the tasks from her, be prepared for the follow up that can happen any time. It is stressful, but I know there is no principal that does these things if not for the sake of the school’s success.” (1TF4)*

The emphasis of **Principal A** on academic excellence was not only for the sake of the school’s success and fulfilling the aim of education, but **Principal A** also encourages teachers by connecting the efforts to achieve success with sincerity.

Another female teacher said,

*“When she talks about academic achievement she also relates it to sincerity. The efforts to achieve should be in line with sincerity, so that we will not feel the burden or feel that the effort we put for academic achievement is hard work.”*  
(1TF5)

This shows that as a leader, **Principal A** tried to educate the teachers to be sincere, so that the teachers will perform their tasks happily and contentedly without feeling pressure at work.

The priority given by **Principal A** to academic excellence was not only mentioned by the teachers. The principal’s aim and efforts towards academic excellence seemed to be widely known amongst everyone in the school, as the administrative staff could also explain well their principal’s emphasis on the academic.

A female administrative staff member mentioned,

*“I do not know much about what the teachers and principals always discuss about academic achievement of the school, as I am responsible for the administrative work, but one thing that I know for sure is the principal’s priority. Academic [achievement] is very much prioritised by the principal. When I started my career here as compared to what we achieve now, the school has developed a lot especially in academics as we can see [the number of] students that achieve good results increased from year to year.”* (1AS2)

A female student in the focus group said,

*“Speaking of how to do good towards the principal, we want to make sure that we will get good results in the examination. We know that is what our principal wants.”* (1SF4)

According to a male student in the focus group,

*“This principal prioritises [the] academic as well as non-academic. But I could say she places more emphasis on the academic if we compare the two.”* (1SM1)

Another male student in the focus group supported the idea that,

*“When the examinations are just around the corner, we can see that the principal likes to do more of the daily round to monitor our preparation classes [for students staying in the hostel] that we have in the evening or at night. We can also see there are a lot of extra classes done at school; the dawn classes which are done as soon as we finish the dawn prayers especially for students that do not perform well in academics.”* (1SM3)

From the observation, there were a few times whilst doing the data collection that the researcher unexpectedly met **Principal A** doing her daily round to monitor the teaching and learning. There was a day that the researcher was even invited by **Principal A** to join her in this daily round to the students’ hostel to make sure that there were no students escaping from the teaching and learning by staying in their dormitories.

From the document analysis, it is found that in every volume of School A’s school magazine from 2011 to 2013, analysis of the examination results was included in order

to make readers - especially teachers, students and parents - more aware of the academic performance of the school. Additionally, in the Minute of Meeting for Administration, Meeting 2/2014, it was emphasised by **Principal A** that School A needed to strive harder to improve the academic excellence of the school to compete with the High Performance Schools in their area.

Just like Principal A, the priority in leading the school for **Principal B** was to uphold and maintain academic excellence in School B. Whilst Principal A showed a great demand of her accountability towards superiors, for **Principal B**, leading a High Performance School became one of her greatest priorities. It was a challenge as **Principal B** had to strive hard to maintain her students' excellence in all areas, including the *Bai'ah* that had been awarded by the Ministry. **Principal B** asserted that on some occasions, more effort was needed in order to maintain academic excellence as compared with achieving it in the first place. Even though the students were well known for their so-called great study culture, plus the good academic performance of a High Performance School, maintaining that academic excellence seemed to be very hard.

**Principal B** said,

*"To maintain it [Bai'ah] is so scary."* (PB)

This was agreed by a male teacher in the focus group who said,

*"What is obvious [in the leadership] of this principal is more of the outcome, the academic outcome."* (2TM3)

This was supported by another male teacher who said,

*"This principal is more [focused] towards performance."* (2TM1)

Another male teacher further explained,

*“Like the motto of our school... it is stated in the motto... to uphold the excellence to the world class.” (2TM2)*

Portraying the high aspiration that **Principal B** should have, one of the male teachers in the focus group said,

*“The principals of this school should have a ‘good taste’... ‘Good taste’ is, those who become the principals of the school should always aim for the best academic achievement.” (2TM3)*

This opinion was shared by another male teacher in the focus group who connected the achievement with the way **Principal B** performed her role:

*“They have to have their own style, as for the current principal’s style is, she has a big heart. She wants everything the best; all things are best.” (2TM1)*

The teacher further added,

*“When she said she wants the students’ co-curricular activity to achieve world class performance, do whatever you can. That is her style. That means she wants something [to be the] best and at the same time she gives power and freedom to the person. Do whatever you can, provided it can bring success. The same goes for the students’ academic performance. Teachers can do whatever they like, provided the students get A.” (2TM1)*

The aspiration of **Principal B** towards academic excellence was clearly understood by the teachers, as evidenced in the above quotes. This is important as teachers play a vital role in teaching the students. Without their having a clear understanding of their

principals' aspirations, it is likely that it will be more challenging for the principals to move teachers to work together with them in achieving academic excellence.

The parent representative also supported **Principal B's** emphasis on academic excellence when he said that,

*"... That is the special thing about this school... We already started the extra classes for PT3 [examination]. The school sessions start early... This shows that there are a lot of differences that we did as compared to other schools."*

(2PM1)

In the School Progress Planner (Curriculum) 2015, it clearly shows that the vision of the school is to 'Uphold [the] school's excellence to the World Class'. Beyond that, the first item of the Client Charter of School B asserts that students must be provided with excellent academic teaching. Meanwhile, the Management Manual of School B shows that **Principal B**, on behalf of other teachers, signed an oath regarding the efforts of School B towards achieving the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) set by the Ministry. This shows that improving the academic excellence of School B was a priority for **Principal B** and the teachers.

Having the same opinion as Principal B, **Principal C** agreed that the *Bai'ah* award was one of the priorities to maintain academic excellence. School C was awarded *Bai'ah* twice, in 2013 and 2014, whilst the school was under the administration of **Principal C**. Apart from the *Bai'ah* award, **Principal C** also aimed for more prestigious awards for the school such as the High Performance School status. Hence, titles and accolades are found to be among the motivators for the school to perform well academically.

**Principal C** said,

*“To me, Bai’ah is more [based] on the academic performance. If the academic is good, it is easy to get the Bai’ah award... In 2013, our school’s score was 88.47... In order to fill up the form to be eligible for high performing school status, the score should be 90.” (3P)*

When asked about the priority in **Principal C**’s leadership, an officer from the SED said,

*“When we talk about excellence of the school... We will look at its history of excellence, won’t we? That school (School C) was awarded Cluster School of Excellence (after the arrival of **Principal C**) and now on its way to being nominated as a high performing school.” (3SEOM2)*

These awards were the indicators of the academic excellence achieved by School C after the arrival of **Principal C**. This idea was supported by the representatives of the Parents Teachers Association (PTA).

According to the male representative from the PTA,

*“It is obvious that she (the principal) gives priority to academic excellence.”*  
(3PM1)

The female representative said:

*“I can see that this school stressed the academic... As a cluster school, now its aim is to educate the students towards academic excellence... The school performance should be maintained, due to the fact that they really emphasise students’ performance.” (3PF2)*

When the male students were asked during the focus group interview about the extent to which academic achievement was given priority in their school, one of them shared his personal view:

*“This school really stresses academic achievement. Our Bonda will challenge us to break the previous records. That is her only wish that I personally want to achieve.”* (3SM2)

It was noted that the student referred to **Principal C** as “our *Bonda*” (a Malay archaic word for Mother), suggesting a possible extension of the principal’s role to that of a maternal figure.

Another male student in the focus group further elaborated on the efforts made by **Principal C** to achieve academic excellence,

*“For instance, when we received our marks for the test at the beginning of the year, the principal will then ask the whole batch of Form Five students to gather. If there are students who got unsatisfactory results, the principal will personally meet those particular students.”* (3SM4)

In the Minute of Meeting for Administration Volume 5/2014, it is stated that **Principal C** mentioned that the financial allocation provided by the Religious Educational Institution should be spent only on the students’ academic development programme. The principal further asserted that a total of 16,020 Malaysian Ringgit (MYR) should be spent only on academic programmes involving all students. The emphasis placed on these requirements and the specification of the amount that should be spent show **Principal C**’s priority in academic performance. The observation found that in one of the assemblies attended during the data collection, **Principal C** mentioned firmly that

more preparation and effort should be put into preparation for the end of year examinations as well as the important examinations at the national level.

Similar to Principals A, B and C, **Principal D** had the same opinion on prioritising academic excellence. But although **Principal D** agreed on the importance of academics, she also wanted to be more realistic about her school's condition - students' good conduct should also be considered important. Hence, students' good conduct was another priority in the leadership of **Principal D**, and she saw achievement and conduct as working hand in hand. As the principal was near to her early retirement, she opined that to effect changes in students' good conduct was probably easier and faster than effecting changes in academic achievement.

According to **Principal D**,

*“As long as I am still in the service, that (academic and character building – students' good conduct) will never be put aside from my aspiration... For the students' good conduct, we will see immediate change but for the academic, even though our education system does not really place stress on it (per se), the perception of societies that the students have to excel academically still cannot be removed.” (PD/1)*

According to **Principal D**, society had a significance influence on the leadership of the principals with regard to emphasis on academic achievement. As such, taking into account society's perceptions regarding schools was claimed to be important in leading the schools.

Further elaborating on academic achievement as a priority, **Principal D** said,

*“For teachers, when they started their service, we already placed emphasis on the students’ academic achievement... Why? Because on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March the results will be announced, so those (the schools) who that did not perform well will receive visits from the superiors. Indirectly this shows that we need to do something about academics.”* (PD/1)

As a principal passionate about educating younger generations, it was observed that, while acknowledging different abilities of the students, **Principal D** had realistic expectations of the students’ achievement.

*“As long as I teach, I want my students to achieve academically based on their capabilities... It is impossible for my students to get all As. So, for you... You [the students] excel according to your capabilities and at the same time your good conduct. I believed that good conduct will determine where my students are heading to, later on.”* (PD/2)

**Principal D** further commented on the education system in relation to students’ achievement as well as the pressure for the school to perform well. Her explanation indicated that she felt as though she was ‘trapped’ between the two situations - the pressure to achieve the objective of education, and the way in which the achievements were evaluated.

**Principal D** said,

*“Even though they [the Ministry] said that the focus is towards a holistic development, but it is not yet achieved. Because, it is undeniable that our education system is interrelated... On one side, we want... we already have the aims, holistic objectives. But, on the other side, if we cannot achieve, there will*

*be those who will ask how many percentages, so on and so forth... That is, it, sometimes we feel trapped..." (PD/2)*

This was agreed with by a male teacher in the focus group, who said,

*"Our school might not be an excellent school like others, but I can see that every school cannot put aside the effort to strive towards good academic excellence. As for our principal, I can see that she is working hard towards achieving academic excellence. However, since our students' good conduct also needs to be taken care of, the principal prioritises both. But the most difficult one to achieve is the academic as that is what the society always looks to." (4TM1)*

This perspective was supported by a female teacher in the focus group who said that,

*"Academic excellence needs no elaboration as one of the principal's priority, but for this school, the principal also always reminds the students about their good conduct... to become great in academics as well as in good conduct." (4TF3)*

It was found that, **Principal D's** aspirations for her students in both academic and non-academic attainment were well understood by the students.

A student in the focus group said,

*"I can see that our principal wanted us to achieve academic excellence, but she also always reminds us that the academic alone is not sufficient without good conduct." (4SM1).*

Meanwhile, a female student in the focus group responded,

*"She [the principal] will talk about academics every Monday (assembly). That means she will not forget to talk about that [academics] to the students." (4SF5)*

Another female student in the focus group added,

*“I agree with that. But I also think that the principal is also concerned about the students’ good conduct especially when there are always cases regarding students’ moral behaviour at school. Maybe that is why the principal is also always emphasising good academic [performance] and good conduct.” (4SF4)*

In sum, the analysis of the data evidenced that the academic excellence of the school was the top priority of all the women principals in this study. Whilst **Principals A, B and C** demonstrated a high priority focus on academics, it was shown that **Principal D** also preferred to leave some room for focus on the students’ good conduct due to her students’ limited ability in academics and the reality of students’ moral attitudes at School D. For **Principal D** academic excellence and good conduct were intertwined, arguably due to the socio-economic status of most of her students, coming from middle-class families. This situation means most parents of students in School D are busy at work and spent less time with their children, including providing basic education at home. School D’s demographic consist of largely multiracial students and this also contributed towards more disciplinary problems as some fights were caused by racist incidents or behaviour. It was notable that, whilst academic and non-academic issues seemed to be the top priorities in the leadership of all four principals, all of them established the priorities of their school realistically according to the schools’ needs and conditions.

#### **4.3.1.2 Non-academic Excellence**

Another significant priority in the leadership of the women principals in this study is non-academic excellence. Whilst academic excellence was shared by all four women principals as a priority in leadership, non-academic excellence was not. Among the

aspects of non-academic excellence prioritised by the women principals in this study were instilling Islamic values such as performing prayers congregationally, shaping future leaders, team building, sharing leadership and promoting teamwork, soft skills, time management, rewarding for motivation, strictness and students' discipline. The specific priorities pertaining to non-academic excellence will be explained case by case in the following sections.

#### **i. Instilling Islamic Values**

From the interview with **Principal A**, it was evident that one of her main priorities was to make sure that the attitudes of her students were shaped in line with the Philosophy of Islamic Education in Malaysia. Among the aims of the Philosophy of Islamic Education is the internalisation of Islam based on the Al-Quran as well as the sayings and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in building up one's attitudes. Due to this, **Principal A** found that performing prayers congregationally and consistently with her students was important in improving her students' attitudes and building their good moral character. This was evidenced when she explained that,

*"... thus, I meant I start (my routine) at the prayer hall and I end up my day also at the prayer hall because I pray night prayer with the students." (PA/1)*

This is supported by the Deputy Principal of Students Affairs. He stated that,

*"Because this school is a boarding school, she [the principal] will start with the morning prayer with the students. Thus, from there, she started her daily routine." (1SLTM2)*

**Principal A** then related her role as a principal of religious school by saying that,

*“Speaking of instilling moral character, being a principal in a religious school is more challenging. We want to see that the development of students’ moral character is shaped in line with the Philosophy of Islamic Education. Hence I can say that the internal shapes the external character of a person.” (PA/1)*

**Principal A** further explained that:

*“The inculcation of good moral character by praying congregationally determines the overall character of a person. It is understood from the Quran itself, which mentions that prayer itself forbids evils and all that... Another thing that I can see [is that] praying congregationally plays important roles in shaping the moral character of the students... Starting from there [prayer], from obeying God...” (PA/2)*

**Principal A** added,

*“... When we pray congregationally, we have the chance to correct our students, the chance is greater... From what I can see, the students at the religious school are easy [to shape their behaviours], easy... But the thing is we [teachers] have to be smart to grab the chances to correct them. Thus, using the time before and after the prayers is one of the times to correct them.” (PA/1)*

**Principal A** further elaborated on the effects of praying congregationally:

*“I always believe that prayer enables us to create changes from within an individual and what is more important in those changes is, they come from within and last longer... I always believe that when you achieve the internalisation of prayer it will not only make you feel obliged to perform it, but you will feel more motivated. This is because I believe, if you have a good*

*relationship with your God, your relationships with others are also good which finally makes you feel good about yourselves and you easily find the motivation in yourselves.” (PA/2)*

The priority given by **Principal A** towards congregational prayers in instilling good moral characters was agreed by other participants.

A female teacher in the focus group interview mentioned,

*“She [the principal] stays in the area of the school and her house is quite near to the prayer hall. So, she will start her day performing dawn congregational prayer with the students and she will end her day also with congregational prayer with the students. In between that time, during the school time, she will also perform it with students if she is not busy with meetings or classes.” (1TF3)*

Another female teacher in the focus group added,

*“The times that the principal performs congregational prayers are the times she will correct the students’ misconduct or remind them towards doing good deeds or anything about moral character. Then, if she feels not satisfied with anything, she will let them know right away. The time that the students and the principal have while waiting from one prayer to perform another prayer at the prayer hall will be utilised for this kind of thing; the principal will advise and remind [the students] of the do’s and don’ts.” (1TF2)*

This account is supported by another female teacher in the focus group who said,

*“She starts during the dawn prayer as she prays congregationally with the students. Hence, she starts from there; for instance, she will monitor how many students pray, and what time they start praying...” (1TF5)*

Another teacher in the same focus group supported,

*“The feeling of not being satisfied towards what happened at the students’ prayer hall will be communicated to the Islamic Education teachers” (1TF4).*

Meanwhile, a student in the focus group reported,

*“The principal normally gives us reminders and advice about moral character; if she finds there are things that the students did that she does not like, she will quickly remind us at the prayer hall.” (1SF4)*

An administrative staff member at the school stated that,

*“She [the principal] lives inside the school area. Hence, during the dusk and dawn congregational prayers she will always be with the students. Thus, she will take that chance to correct anything (whilst meeting students at the prayer hall).” (1AS1)*

According to another female student in the focus group,

*“This principal, she always prays congregationally, and she always ask the students to perform the prayer together with her.” (1SF2)*

One of the male students in the focus group said,

*“She lives in the school. Everyday... Every day she will perform congregational prayers with us. It is not only every day, but to be exact every time of prayers even for the dawn prayer.” (1SF5)*

According to a female member of administrative staff,

*“Since I came to this school, I can see she is very consistent in performing congregational prayers together with the students. No matter what time it is, she will make sure it is time for her to be with the students when the call for prayer is being performed.” (1AS2)*

Similar accounts of the principal's behavior in this area were given by the female parent representative:

*“What I can see is, when I involve in the school programmes, if there are religious programmes for instance, the principal will usually pray with the students and the principal herself always mention that she normally prays with the students, even for the dawn prayer, she will still come to perform the prayer congregationally.” (1PF)*

This is supported by the male parent representative:

*“She places a lot of emphasis on congregational prayers for her students. Starting from the day I first held the position in the Parents Teacher Association, when we have school programmes I will stay longer at the school and I can see she will ask the students to go to the prayer hall. Not only asking the students, she will later make her way to the prayer hall too. When it is the time to perform prayer she sometimes will invite me and others in the Parents Teacher Association meeting to perform congregational prayer first, and only then continue with our tasks.” (1PM)*

In Volume 29/2013 of the school magazine, it was clearly mentioned that one of School A's objectives is to inculcate good attitudes amongst the students and enable them to

be role models for others. In the Minutes of Meeting 4/2014, apart from congratulating the teacher advisors for school debate team on their success at district level, **Principal A** reminded all members in the meeting to make an effort to pray congregationally with the students at the school prayer hall.

From the researcher's own observation during a visit to one of the prayer rooms at the school, it could be seen that the prayers were performed congregationally by some female teachers. Even though the teachers did not perform prayers congregationally with students at the students' prayer hall, the fact that they performed it amongst themselves was evidence that **Principal A's** instruction was taken seriously.

Although the participants' statements appear to emphasise congregational prayers alone, according to the previous explanation from **Principal A**, emphasising congregational prayers was a way of instilling good moral character in the students. As a religious school with a great deal of expectation on it from both the Islamic Education Division and wider society, it was important that religious observances within the school were prioritised. However, this was not seen as an end in itself, but as a means for instilling goodness of character amongst Islamic students in an Islamic school.

## ii. **Shaping Future Leaders**

Unlike Principal A whose emphasis was more on spirituality, **Principal B's** significant priority was her determination to instill leadership characteristics amongst teachers and students. Speaking of the teachers at her school, **Principal B** hoped that her teachers would be able to acquire the characteristics of a leader and a good decision maker. One way of instilling these leadership characteristics in teachers was through empowerment.

**Principal B** said,

*“I always hand down the empowerment to my deputies as well as other teachers to go somewhere, to meetings and such.” (PB)*

**Principal B** then clarified,

*“I like when I am able to shape my teachers to become a leader, not a deputy but a principal... I do not want [them] only as an administrator. Be a leader, you [the teachers] can be a leader... I want to create them to become a leader so that we can train a new generation of leaders. Only then I will feel that I had succeeded in shaping those people.” (PB)*

There were times when **Principal B** was not able to attend some of the programmes held outside the school. In this situation, the principal would assign the deputies or any senior teachers to represent her. **Principal B** said she always hoped that those who represented her would be able to make their own decisions when there was a need to do so.

**Principal B** reported,

*“I want my teachers to be able to make their own decisions without relying on me. I do not want my teachers who represent me to any of the programmes outside the school coming back asking my opinion in order to decide. If she or he does not know how to make decision, I just know that he or she cannot be a leader. You make the decision - right or wrong that is another issue, but what I want is they have to have the trust in themselves to decide.” (PB)*

A male teacher in the focus group agreed on the empowerment they had in their school, stating that,

*“Teachers with Grade 48 and above were given the accountability to monitor all activities held at this school from morning until evening. In the evening, there will be training for co-curricular activities. This means that throughout the day, the assigned teachers will be monitoring at school... This shows that at this school there is a lot empowerment being exercised. And this empowerment is so effective in terms of its implementation. That is my opinion.” (2TM2)*

One of the female teachers in the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) of the school mentioned,

*“Whenever the principal is not available to attend meetings that are held outside the school, I am usually one of the teachers that she will ask to replace her.” (2SLTF2)*

Developing teachers for future leadership was clearly a priority for **Principal B**. However, it was noticed that there was no focus on developing women teachers specifically. However, since the SLT of School B consists of women teachers, giving them more roles in replacing their principal’s duties would enable women teachers to have more experience toward becoming leaders or principals in the future. Helping women teachers to develop themselves into future leaders could be an idea to be implemented at all school levels, especially if more women principals are to be considered in the future.

### **iii. Team Building**

Team building was another aspect prioritised with regard to non-academic achievement. According to **Principal B**, team building was crucial in her leadership as she opined,

*“What is important in my leadership is team building. That means not doing things alone; they should be performed together.” (PB)*

This shows that in leading the school, **Principal B** did not work alone; her attempt to instill team building was a good foundation for involving everyone in every aspect of school success. In explaining the importance of team building at School B, **Principal B** kept repeating to the researcher that it was important not to confuse the need for team building with team work, as what was more important for School B at that particular moment was team building.

The emphasis on team building in **Principal B**'s leadership was confirmed by a male teacher during the focus group interview:

*“She [Principal B] instilled a work culture long ago in which the senior teachers will become facilitators to the new teachers. The underlying reason that the principal is doing this is because it causes the teachers to work together as a team. I think it is a good idea as by promoting team building, not only do we work together effectively as a team, but it also increases motivation and promotes cooperation among teachers.” (2TM2)*

To emphasise the importance of team building, **Principal B** constantly associated it with the concept of worship according to Islamic teaching.

A male teacher in the focus group said,

*“Another approach in doing work is to perform work as an act of responsibility and worship. That means, or the concept is, that when we work we will get something in this world as well as in the Hereafter. This is more important than just working for the sake of this world.” (2TM1)*

A female teacher in the focus group interview also agreed regarding team building among teachers:

*” I do not feel that teachers here have problems in performing tasks, even though the task may be one that we have to perform as a group. This is because, other than that we know that the job is our responsibility, the way the principal keeps motivating us to emphasise team building seems to be noted by most of us.” (2TF5)*

Another female teacher supported this view:

*“I think when the foundation of team building is good, I mean what is shown by the senior teachers, it is easy for the new ones (teachers) to carry on (team building).” (2TF2)*

From the interview with **Principal B**, it was evident that team building was not only emphasised amongst teachers but also students.

According to **Principal B**,

*“The students were encouraged not to mingle only with students at the same performance level. Rather, I would always want my students to mix around with other students regardless of their level of academic or non-academic performance.” (PB)*

In order to educate the students to help each other through their friendship, **Principal B** formed groups of students which she named ‘Young Teachers’. The students with different academic and non-academic abilities, were asked to sit in a group of three or four. The aim was to enable them to help each other to improve their performance, especially academic. This initiative only involved students in the examination classes.

**Principal B** said,

*“We divided these students in groups which we call ‘formula one’, ‘highway’, and ‘village way’. Those considered ‘highway’ (excellent) in Biology might not be ‘highway’ in History... So, we grade them (the students).” (PB)*

To promote team building, **Principal B** kept reminding and motivating the students and staff, but it was also shown through examples. According to the Deputy Principal for Administration, during the school assembly **Principal B** would read a story with moral values. Sometimes, along with the students, the teachers were also influenced by these stories. The Deputy Principal for Administration further added that the students enjoyed listening to the principal’s stories and in fact, this particular session during the school assembly became the most anticipated session for the students.

According to the Deputy Principal for Administration,

*“On Sunday, the principal will prepare a story of a sacrificed mother for instance, to be read at the school assembly. I can see that there are students who cry when listening to the story. In other words, the impact was that when the students listening to that kind of story it will make them respect each other more as well as become more appreciative.” (2SLTF1)*

This information was supported by a female representative of the PTA.

The mother of a student said that according to her daughter,

*“Lately the principal finds out something like... I do not know how to explain, Words... hmmm... Like a paragraph of a story to motivate them, motivation in having team building for instance. In every school assembly...” (2PF1)*

It was understood that, to instill the spirit of team building, the concept of performing a job as a form of worship became significant to the teachers under the leadership of **Principal B**. By promoting the idea, the teachers were trained to be more sincere and to avoid thinking of a job as a source of burden and pressure. Unlike *Principal A* whose approach was more on the internal factors – emphasising spirituality by performing congregational prayers - **Principal B's** approach was more on the external factor which was motivating teachers towards team building. Nevertheless, elements of spirituality indirectly underpinned **Principal B's** approach towards team building among teachers in School B through positioning jobs as a form of worship.

From the document analysis, it was found in the School Progress Planner (Curriculum) 2015 of School B that the Arabic word '*Ubudiyyah*', which means 'being a true slave', is embedded clearly in the Principles and Work Practice section. The term connotes the idea of working sincerely as a means of getting rewards in this world as well as in the Hereafter. Team work and being a team player, which are meant to be parts of team building, are stated clearly in the same document. In the Management Manual 2015 of School B, it is stated that one of the foundations of successful management is through the presence of team building. This shows that the emphasis of **Principal B** was in line with the values embedded in the Management Manual which serves as the guideline for **Principal B** and the Senior Leadership Team of School B.

In sum, promoting team building was one of the **Principal B's** priorities with regards to non-academic excellence. The approach, which was emphasised to both teachers and students, was not only in promoting team building per se, but serves as a foundation for other important values such as engaging more people in leading the school.

#### iv. **Sharing leadership and promoting teamwork**

Another aspect of non-academic excellence prioritised by the four women principals is sharing leadership and promoting teamwork. While Principal B emphasised team building, **Principal C**'s priorities were sharing leadership and promoting teamwork. In managing students' disciplinary problems, **Principal C** believed that it was crucial to discuss the related matters with others such as the deputy principals and the disciplinary teachers, as well as parents, rather than simply making her own decision. Believing that two heads are better than one, **Principal C** said it would be good to work with more people in making decisions as the impact is more pronounced. Beyond that, for any decision made **Principal C** would prefer to see a great impact, and to achieve a great impact she believed that it should be done collectively. While this non-academic excellence related priority of **Principal C** was not similar to that of Principal B, both sets of priorities in their leadership involved others rather than them working alone.

**Principal C** said,

*“If the students’ problems involve issues at the students’ hostel, my teachers and I will take an approach to also involve parents in this matter.” (PC/1)*

The inspiration of **Principal C** towards creating good teamwork among teachers was clearly shown in the effort made from her earliest days at School C. According to **Principal C**,

*“When I first came to the school, I found that the teachers were not placed in one teachers’ room but placed at rooms according to their expertise. I then discussed the matter with the chief clerk... We used some school budget to*

*open a big teachers' room and all teachers were then managed to be put in the same place.” (PC/1)*

**Principal C**'s view was that working in isolation does not promote teamwork and collegiality amongst staff, so she introduced a shared teaching staff room where teachers can meet with each other and discuss things together.

**Principal C** also mentioned another action she took in promoting good teamwork among teachers. Previously, when the students were going to have examinations, some of the teachers would print the examination booklets for their respective classes only.

According to **Principal C**,

*“I told the teachers, I do not want that to happen. When they wanted to print the examinations booklets, I wanted to see all students in the same forms also got them. If I have 5 classes for Form Five, I want all the five classes to get the examinations booklets... So, I controlled the printing forms [which the teachers need to fill in before printing]; if the teachers would like to print, I would be able to know how many booklets they were supposed to make” (PC/2)*

While the above could also be seen as examples of overbearing control, the teachers confirmed **Principal C**'s effort to promote teamwork. This was confirmed by a male teacher when he was asked about teamwork among teachers:

*“At this school, in terms of teamwork... There is no problem. If there are problems, the principal will quickly remind us.” (3TM5)*

When the female teachers were asked about the values stressed in **Principal C's** leadership, all the female teachers in the focus group interview agreed on the value of teamwork, simultaneously stating,

*“Absolutely teamwork...”* (3TF1, 3TF2, 3TF3, 3TF4, 3TF5)

This agreement was endorsed by a female teacher who said that,

*“If the principal finds it difficult to get co-operation from teachers, she will stress teamwork.”* (3TF5)

When a female representative of the PTA was asked to clarify about teamwork promoted by **Principal C**, she said,

*“I can see that the principal was able to inculcate the spirit of teamwork among her teachers... I give an example; we had a dinner last time to collect donations for the Parents Teachers Association. What I could see was, the teachers voluntarily tried to achieve the principal's aim and aspiration (which is to collect donations and doing things contributed to the smoothness of the programme).”*  
(3PF1)

Thus, teamwork appeared to be a value that influenced **Principal C's** leadership. However, this also demonstrated how **Principal C** led, showing collaboration on the one hand but control on the other. This issue will be further elaborated in the discussion chapter.

Similar to the findings regarding the leadership of **Principal C**, teamwork was one of the priorities found in the leadership of **Principal D** with regard to non-academic excellence. According to **Principal D**, there was a presence of teamwork among teachers and students at her school; however, she admitted there was still room for

improvement. To instill a sense of team working amongst those in the school, **Principal D** not only encouraged others to take action, but she walked her talk by proving herself a role model. For instance, in issues related to students' discipline, **Principal D** never worked alone but she would make sure that there was involvement from the deputy principals and teachers.

According to **Principal D**,

*“Until today, in any students’ disciplinary cases, my teachers, my Deputy for Students’ Affairs will find the information... [about] what actually happened... So, I trust whatever information my teachers give because they also have their own interests towards students. So, I rely on their investigation, their findings too.” (PD/1)*

In order to explain the existence of teamwork amongst within the SLT of School D, **Principal D** related it with her admiration towards some teachers. For instance, the Deputy Principal for Students’ Affairs was characterised by **Principal D** as a hardworking teacher in carrying out the daily rounds.

**Principal D** proudly shared her point of view about the Deputy Principal for Students’ Affairs:

*“My HEM (Deputy Principal for Students’ Affairs) is OK. He is very hardworking doing the daily rounds... I praised him for doing that... He will do the daily rounds in the morning.” (PD/1)*

The above excerpts clearly indicated the existence of teamwork amongst the SLT of the school. Apparently, the presence of teamwork did not only come through empowerment but also of the trust **Principal D** placed in her subordinates.

During the interview, a female senior teacher was asked about the teamwork amongst teachers in their school. She said,

*“To find out teamwork is not that difficult in our school because ... from what I can see, there is the presence of teamwork as teachers in this school understand well how to perform their tasks.” (4SLTF4)*

Regarding the encouragement of teamwork among students, it was evident that the students had an idea of how their principal wanted teamwork to be practised among them. When they were asked to elaborate further on teamwork, the students explained that in order to build teamwork, **Principal D** always asked the students to see each other as equal in terms of academic and non-academic performance. As such, when they looked at other students as equal they did not feel that they were better than others, or proud of their strengths and neglecting those who were weak; instead, thinking of everyone as equal made it easier to practise teamwork.

One of the female students during the focus group interview said,

*“Equality means that even though a person is smart, she/he cannot be arrogant to those who are less smart. We are all equal...That means what the principal said: we the people who seek knowledge... We are all equal in terms of our intelligence; as such, teamwork is important, always help each other to success.” (4SF2)*

Another student in the same focus group supported this view:

*“I remember **Principal D** once said, we as human beings having different abilities, but why our Creator made us differently, because we are unique. Different ability means we have to complete the incomplete.” (4SF5)*

As the term suggests, teamwork would require a team and cannot be practiced alone. As the previous excerpts show, to instill teamwork, other values such as trustworthiness and equality are also crucial. As such, **Principal D**'s emphasis on teamwork in leadership indirectly led to value-building.

#### v. **Cultivating Soft Skills**

The findings show that another priority with regard to non-academic achievement was soft skills. In her interview, **Principal C** shared her aspiration for leading the school by saying that,

*“I want my students to be excellent in academics, co-curricular, character building as well as soft skills. I want them to be brave to come forward... to talk with good manners.”* (PC/1)

In explaining how she provided an opportunity for the students to polish their soft skills, **Principal C** said that she often asked the students to lend a hand in the community,

*“There were also requests from the villagers for male students to recite ‘Tahlil’. In this case, we will send our students that we have already selected.”* (3P/2)

‘*Tahlil*’ is a verbal noun from an Arabic word which means to praise or to acclaim. ‘*Tahlil*’ is a ritual in remembering the deceased. While attending ‘*Tahlil*’, male students would recite some verses together with the villagers.

According to **Principal C**, students’ involvement in the community service programmes would be beneficial for the students themselves as a supplement to the teaching and learning processes in the classrooms. The Minutes of Meeting for Administration, Volume 4/2014, showed that the involvement of students in the community service programmes is one of the priorities of School C.

Other than that, in School C students also had the opportunity of organising the daily morning assembly which helped in polishing the students' language, communication and event management skills. The medium of instruction for the assembly on Wednesdays was English and on Thursdays it was Arabic, while for the rest of the week it was in the Malay Language.

During the focus group interview, a female student who is also a school prefect said,

*'On Wednesdays we as school prefects have to conduct the assembly in the English Language. At first, I was nervous, not confident, but after some time I enjoyed doing it. We should be thankful to 'Bonda' for seeing the talent in us before we could see it on our own.'* (3SF3)

Inculcating soft skills among students was also reflected in organising different types of assemblies. One of the assemblies was called 'Focused Assembly' which was run by the students once a month. During the assembly, the students in charge had to do a presentation in either English or Arabic.

It was highlighted by a student in the focus group interview that,

*"When I first heard about 'Focused Assembly' I really hated the idea. This is because I am not good at public speaking; I am a very reserved kind of person. But when I was selected to present in Arabic at the assembly, I had no choice but to do it. I never thought that I could manage to do it well. I received a big applause after finish presenting. After the assembly, I also received words of encouragement from friends and teachers, and even the principal."* (3SF1)

'Focused Assembly' not only gave a chance to the students to polish their communication and presentation skills, but it also aimed to give an opportunity to the

less gifted students, particularly in academics, to stand out and do something remarkable. **Principal C** asserted that:

*“The ‘Focused Assembly’ will be conducted by the students who do not hold any important positions such as school prefect or a student leader... I want my students to be brave to come forward, conduct events and speak in public without hesitation.” (PC/1)*

For students staying at the school hostel, there were more opportunities for them to get involved in school programmes as compared to those staying at home. According to **Principal C**,

*“Before the students have their dinner, they will have a programme called ‘Faculty of Islamic Education’. This programme involved Form One and Form Two students, and they will be guided by senior students from Form 3, Form 4 and Form 5. We have our own modules for the programme.” (PC/1)*

Based on her experience as a teacher, **Principal C** strongly agreed with the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning style seating arrangement which suggested students sit in groups. **Principal C** believed that this seating arrangement would be more helpful to the students in the teaching and learning process as well as a good medium of improving the soft skills of the students.

**Principal C** said,

*“My students are smart, brilliant students. Thus, if they work in a group it will be so simple. We divide the topics and we also give them papers and marker pens... [we] ask them to complete the task and then do the presentation. That is how I teach... They will finish it, and then either they present it, or I ask them*

*to do a 'gallery walk' in which they will move from one group to another and look at others' work one by one." (PC/1)*

Considering that School C is a secondary religious school, apart from focusing on students' soft skills, the programmes held at the school also emphasised a combination of building soft skills and spirituality. Every Monday for instance, it was compulsory for the students to attend a programme called '*Usrah Badar*'. *Usrah* is an Arabic word which means a family. In this case, it was a gathering of a small group of students (around 7 students) which was led by a male student leader called '*Naqib*' and a female student leader called '*Naqibah*'. On top of that, the students had to be monitored by a teacher called a '*Murabbi*'. In this *Usrah Badar*, the students would discuss a religious topic according to the module compiled by the school. This programme was held for an hour's duration from 3.30 until 4.30 in the afternoon.

According to **Principal C**,

*"Usrah Badar not only focused on discussion about religious matters but at the same time allowed the students to have more opportunity to sharpen their soft skills such as communication, critical thinking and problem solving." (PC/1)*

In the 32<sup>nd</sup> Edition of the School Magazine/2014, it was clearly mentioned that among the objectives of *Usrah Badar* were, to train the students to become leaders, and at the same time to ensure the promotion of students' character building as well as reducing disciplinary problems among the students.

When **Principal C** was further asked about the integration of soft skills and spiritual approach at School C, she mentioned the Friday prayer which was held at the school prayer hall. During Friday prayer, a selected and eligible male student would read the

prayer sermon. According to the normal practice, the sermon for Friday prayer should be read only by the *'Imaam'*. *'Imaam'* is the name/title given to the leader at mosques or in a community. Usually the *Imaam* is also known as a person who leads the prayer during Islamic gatherings. However, in this school, **Principal C** insisted that the sermon be read by her male students and not the *Imaam*. **Principal C** took this approach because she believed that to produce the next generation of Islamic leaders, preparation should begin at an early stage. **Principal C** was very firm in deciding on this matter as she clearly asserted that those who did not like her approach could perform Friday prayer at mosques outside the school where they could find an appointed *Imaam* reading the sermon.

To explain her feeling and the reason behind asking male students to read the sermon for Friday prayer, **Principal C** said,

*"I am very grateful if the Friday prayer sermon will be read by my students. I want to train my students to become sermon readers. And we actually had started it.... I insisted that my students will be allowed to read the sermon in order to train them, so that they will not be afraid to talk in public."* (PC/1)

The effort of **Principal C** in inculcating soft skills such as public speaking among students was recognised by the students as well.

One of the female students in the focus group said,

*"... When becoming a master of ceremony for example, the principal will always say, look at him/her (referring to a student who is good at public speaking), he/she is good at being a master of ceremony. All of you also can be like him/her."* (3SF1)

Another male student in the focus group reported,

*“I am one of the students who experienced reading the Friday prayer sermon. I was so scared and not confident at first, but I could not believe I finally managed to do it quite well. Now I do not feel scared anymore to talk in front of others; in fact, I would love to do it again if I will be given a chance again in the future.”*

(3SM4)

The idea was also supported by the Deputy Principal for Co-curricular who shared that **Principal C** herself is a good public speaker. The Deputy Principal for Co-curricular said,

*“She (**Principal C**) is good at giving a speech; every time she speaks at the assemblies everyone will pay their attention and listen carefully, as if there is something in it that is pleasing to the ears to listen to. I am not sure... maybe she is a ‘language’ person [referring to the principal’s field of study].”* (3SLTF3)

Being considered a good public speaker was an advantage to **Principal C** as it enabled her to become an exemplary leader in that she does not have to say much but her actions speak for themselves.

In the Minutes of the Meeting for Administration Volume 5/2014, the report from the Deputy Principal for Form 6 Students showed that the effort in inculcating soft skills among students was demonstrably fruitful when the students represented School C in debate at district level and won first place.

## vi. Time Management

Throughout the interview with **Principal C**, it was found that there was an element of time management influencing her leadership. **Principal C** indicated that she would not tolerate tardiness on the part of her teachers.

**Principal C** said,

*“Every Thursday my teachers and I will come at 7.15. At that time, we must be at that room, the ‘Hikmah Room’, my meeting room. So far, they [the teachers] were able to be there on time. If I found those who cannot come on time I will warn them by making a joke that I also wear a cheap watch, but my watch shows a correct time. By only saying that, they already understand what I mean [is, for them to be on time].” (PC/1)*

When female students in the focus group were asked about the skills that **Principal C** instilled among students, one of them answered without hesitation,

*“It is time management.” (3SF7)*

Another female student in the same focus group elaborated:

*“Yes, yes... There was one day that (students in) my class got their turn to be in charge of the assembly... When we asked ‘Bonda’ whether she would like to give her speech or not, her answer was like, I do not mind, if we have got time... It means that she gives priority towards our [students’] time... She stressed [the value of] time. She did not want to end our assembly after 8.40 (which is the time that teaching and learning should start).” (3SF9)*

Similarly to the female students, the male students in the focus group also agreed that **Principal C** always emphasises time management.

A male student said,

*“She is the one who emphasised time management. For example, when we invite her to a programme at which she will be officiating, when we tell her the time she needs to arrive, she will be there on time or before the time.”* (3MS2)

Principal C was asked to verify this assertion from one of her students about her being ‘on time’ or arriving ‘before the time’.

According to **Principal C**,

*“A successful leader, he or she will always be on time or before the time. They would never be after the time. If it is after the time, I think you cannot succeed.”*  
(PC/2)

What **Principal C** was trying to explain was that she considered it necessary to come early, whilst ‘after the time’ was to come late.

In the Minutes of the Meeting for Administration, Volume 3/2014, **Principal C**’s focus on time management is yet again evident. **Principal C** warned those teachers who arrived late, that is after 7.25 am. She asserted that the assembly should not take too long in order to ensure that the teaching and learning was not disrupted. If these rules were not followed, the deputy principals were given the authority to remind the teachers. In the same minutes, elaborating on a different issue which was also related to time management, **Principal C** suggested that if there were too many meetings, some of them should be combined in order to save time. Thus, time was a priority for **Principal C** to ensure the efficiency of the teaching and learning process.

## vii. Rewarding for Motivation

Another priority influencing the leadership of **Principal C** was rewarding motivation. It was found during the interviews that most of the participants agreed that **Principal C** was concerned about rewarding staff and students. When the female students were asked about this during the interview about **Principal C**, one female student in the focus group gave an example pertaining to classroom cleanliness.

*“If the classroom is really clean **Principal C** will mention about that particular classroom during the assembly. If a particular class got one hundred percent on attendance, she will also mention that.”* (3SF5)

Another female student in the focus group further elaborated on the same issue,

*“She did not do that to make the particular class show off, but her intention was to motivate other classes, and create good competition amongst each other. So, when everyone competes with each other, the whole school will become clean.”* (3SF4)

These excerpts suggest an element of praise and reward for good performance which is often associated with transactional leadership. Another element associated with extrinsic motivation was identified when **Principal C** volunteered to fund the awards for those students who were excellent in academics.

One of the female students in the focus group shared her opinion:

*“Like last year, after the end of year examination, there was an award from the principal. The principal sponsored the prizes for students from all classes”*  
(3SF1)

A male student in the focus group agreed with this, saying that,

*“She will give out prizes and she will also give certificates. When she reads the speech, she will mention the success of those people.” (3SM1)*

In motivating the students, **Principal C** sometimes read a story which had moral values during the assembly. One male student during the focus group interview said,

*“The book she read she will share with us... So, when she read it, we will be like... Guessing the motivation behind the stories.” (3SM2)*

This approach taken by **Principal C** was similar to the approach taken by **Principal B** but with different purpose – **Principal B** read out stories at assemblies as a way of promoting team building, whereas **Principal C** did it to motivate the students. While the principals had different purposes in telling the stories, their similarity was that they influenced people by engaging them through stories with values communicated within them.

#### **viii. Strictness**

The element of strictness in **Principal C**'s leadership was not only noticeable to the principal's subordinates in the school, but it was also apparent to parents. The idea of being strict in leadership implied not only ensuring everything is in complete control but also to get the best out of each aspect of the school.

When trying to explain the priorities that influenced the **Principal C** leadership, the Deputy Principal for Form Six students said,

*“I can see that she is special in the sense that she is strict. Even though she is strict, she is also friendly with teachers. Of course, she would be like that, as a leader... Not in all things we should be strict. She is strict only in certain things.” (3SLTM1)*

A female representative of the Parents Teachers Association said,

*“I would say she is strict. Strict in a sense that she will not compromise in things such as misconduct; she will not compromise. That is to say, if she wants something good for the school she will do it. I can see that she is strict and yet gentle.”* (3PF1)

This opinion was supported by a male representative of the PTA,

*“She stressed a strict leadership. Which means, if something is good for the school, she will defend it... She also always become the advisor to the parents when there is a need to explain about rules from the Ministry. She will not allow the parents to do everything without limits and according to their preferences.”* (3PM1)

When a group of female teachers were asked about the priorities that influenced **Principal C**'s leadership, a teacher who is also the school counsellor said,

*“She is friendly, outside [of the school] meeting [her] she is just like a friend. She is also strict; she needs to be strict as she is our leader. However, we are the ones who feel shy because we respect her.”* (3TF4)

Looking at the same matter from the students' perspectives, a female student in the focus group pointed out that,

*“Our Bonda is strict according to its necessity. If there are things she does not like, for example there are students with disciplinary problems, whatever she said she will do it. Normally other teachers will only warn, but our Bonda, she is different - if she says it she will do it.”* (3SF10)

Giving another example of a similar situation, another female student in the same focus group said,

*“For example, if the principal said she will suspend a student due to a disciplinary problem, she will definitely make it happen.”* (3SF6)

There was another emergence of the reference to **Principal C** as a mother and as a friend, which in some ways contradicted her strict approach to discipline. Thus, even though most of the participants agreed that the principal’s leadership was influenced by her strict leadership approach, there was a senior teacher who voiced a slightly different view about being strict. This senior teacher admitted and that she was quite close to **Principal C** and this was confirmed by some of her colleagues. According to the senior teacher, her close relationship with **Principal C** was to the extent that she could advise the principal like a friend. To some extent, she could also become a representative of other teachers to speak on certain issues with **Principal C**. This close relationship allowed the senior teacher to see in more detail what **Principal C** should improve from a perspective of a friend and not from a perspective of a leader and a follower.

The senior teacher argued that,

*“To me this principal is open-minded; she can accept advice from anyone provided it is given appropriately. She does not always use her right. There are times when she needs to be strict. There were times when I talked to her and she was just letting things go as they were... She said she is tired of talking about the same thing, but people did not obey.”* (3SLTF3)

In explaining the friendly aspect of **Principal C**’s leadership, a representative of the SED also mentioned that the principal preferred to be called ‘*Bonda*’ by her students.

According to him, the nickname signified 'a mother-child relationship'. Perhaps this is where the strictness also comes in, where as a mother she had to show tough love.

The officer said,

*"From the monitoring that we conducted, her approach is more traditional, more a motherly approach, she persuades the students...The students called her 'Bonda'... Perhaps due to that, the students feel like they are being taken care of by their own mothers and perhaps due to that they feel motivated to learn."*

(3SEOM2)

The two male students in the focus group shared the same opinion. Both said that,

*"She looks motherly. We call her 'Bonda'."* (3SM2 and 3SM4)

On the contrary, some participants tend to look at **Principal C**'s quality of being strict like as a mother as her being emotional and easily angry.

A male student briefly said that,

*"I think, she is emotional, that cannot be denied."* (3SM2)

A female teacher in the SLT agreed that sometimes **Principal C** expressed her anger without valid reasons.

She explained the consequences of this anger for the senior teachers and the students by saying that,

*"She should be careful of the words she speaks... When she gets angry, she will easily show it... Sometimes we need to think about the senior teachers, those who are already about to retire... Before this, she has easily said bad words to the students during the assembly. Then I took an action to advise her."*

*Perhaps she did not intend to say that. But thank God that she is now able to control it.” (3SLTF3)*

During the first round of the interview, **Principal C** confessed that she was aware that most of the teachers, administrative staff and students considered her a fierce leader. In an attempt to show her concern about the staff’s interpretations about her, she clarified that there was a difference between being fierce and strict. **Principal C** herself opined that her leadership was influenced more by her strictness rather than fierceness. However, according to **Principal C**, it was undeniable that on some occasions, she was driven by her anger and this brought out her fierce side as a leader.

**Principal C** said,

*“I will become fierce if things happen repetitively. I will not be angry if it happens for the first time... But sometimes my subordinates do not notice that; they always say I am emotional. I always remind myself to give a reminder first to my subordinates. But after I reminded them, and they still did not take action, that makes me angry.” (PC/1)*

This observation clearly shows that **Principal C** was strict in making decisions and in maintaining discipline, but when the strictness emerged strongly it was attributed to the principal’s lack of self-control. This was a little contradictory to the way she spoke, as she was observed to be soft spoken. However, there was clearly a mixture of styles and personalities that shaped the way **Principal C** performed her role as a leader. There were traces of transactional leadership that could be seen from the praise and rewards she gave for good performance. Perhaps her strictness could also be associated with her transactional approach. She was strict about time keeping and did

not tolerate tardiness. While punctuality is a good attribute to have and instill, perhaps the way it was enforced in School C was more telling of **Principal C's** own leadership style. There is also a strong element of **Principal C** fulfilling a maternal role, as the students are very close to her and called her '*Bonda*'.

#### **ix. Students' Discipline**

From the findings of the interviews and documents analysis, it appeared that **Principals A, B, C** and **D** cared a lot about students' discipline. One way in which they all ensured their students' discipline was through a daily round of the school. All principals in this study clearly mentioned that most of the time they started their day with daily rounds. In fact, in some schools, daily rounds happened at any time convenient to the principals, not only in the morning. This shows how committed the women principals were with regards to student discipline.

**Principal A**, who was well known for spending time performing religious obligations with students, mentioned that the time spent praying congregationally was also time for her to monitor students' discipline. This means that, as early as the routine to perform the first prayer began, the obligation to monitor the discipline of her students also began for **Principal A**.

According to **Principal A**,

*"As early as the Subh (dawn) prayer I started monitoring my students at the prayer hall. I will monitor whether they already woke up or not, prepared to come to the prayer hall or not, if they arrived at the prayer hall, whether they are ready to perform the prayer, whether they make noise or not, things like that... It is the same when I am there at the prayer hall for the Isyak (the fifth of the five times daily prayer) prayer."* (PA/1)

**Principal A** added,

*“Sometimes when I do my daily rounds, I am not only checking on the students; I also manage to find out which teachers are late for teaching and learning. So, if I bump into them I will ask the reasons why they are late.” (PA/2)*

The Deputy Principal for Administration said,

*“As early as 7.20 in the morning, the principal will do daily rounds to make sure that teachers who have classes at that time are already in their respective classes, or if they are late, what makes them late. During daily rounds also, the principal will monitor the students, are they still outside classes or already in their classroom.” (1SLT1)*

According to a female student in the focus group,

*“The principal starts her day at the prayer hall; she goes there not only to perform prayer, but she also looks at the students. How many students turn up for congregational prayers; how many did not. Then when they have finished praying, on her way to the school... because she walks from her place, she will switch off the lights at school building as it is already daytime.” (1TF1)*

Another female teacher added,

*“I agree that she started her day at the prayer hall. On her way to the school she will also make sure things like littering does not happened. If she finds that there is rubbish, she will ask the students to pick it up immediately.” (1TF3)*

The efforts taken by **Principal A** regarding students' discipline was corroborated by the students themselves. A female student in the focus group mentioned,

*“The principal’s routine is to perform prayers at the prayer hall. So, when she comes to pray, she will ask the students [to pray] as well. I can say that is how our principal teaches us how to be disciplined.” (1SF4)*

When they were asked whether **Principal A**’s practice positively impacted student discipline, a female student during the focus group interview said,

*“From my observation, if we are always being asked to do something we will do it even if we feel that we are forced to. However, after some time it will become our routine. That is what happened to us in this school.” (1SF2)*

Another female student in the same focus group supported this:

*“Yes, we do [follow instructions] whenever people ask. That is why when the principal keeps on asking us to perform prayer congregationally, for instance, or checks on us while doing the daily rounds, eventually it become something that we will do without anyone having to ask us to do it anymore.” (1SF5)*

Meanwhile, from the focus group interview, male students showed their agreement that the presence of **Principal A** during prayer times and daily rounds had a significant impact on a lot in students’ discipline. A male student said,

*“If the principal did not come to observe, either at the prayer hall or during the daily rounds, students will make noise and do not adhere to the rules and regulations for instance. So, if the principal comes, she will always remind us.” (1SF3)*

Another male student added,

*“So now, whenever the principal cannot present for instance, to pray with the students or at the daily rounds, the students already know what they need and do not need to do.” (1SM5)*

From the findings, it is evidenced in order to improve the students’ discipline, **Principal A** applied more religious approaches.

This could be due to **Principal A**’s own belief towards her religion that she once shared during the interview,

*“When someone obeys God’s instructions, to make them follow man-made instructions become much easier.” (PA/1)*

Meanwhile, in School B the approach towards students’ discipline was a little different as compared to School A. Even though in general the daily rounds were exercised to monitor student discipline, **Principal B** did not emphasise it much in comparison with Principal A. When **Principal B** mentioned about daily rounds she said,

*“At this school it is the same if I do daily rounds or I do not do them. Because the students already know what they need to do. It is not that we do not have disciplinary problem, but it is under control.” (PB)*

To confirm this opinion from **Principal B**, the Deputy Principal for Students Affairs was asked regarding the implementation of daily rounds and its importance in School B. According to her,

*“The principal will usually do the daily rounds if there are no urgent matters in her office. But she will only focus on the area for example at the back of the school. Because I did not see that we have a lot of disciplinary problems and*

*because we already have a group of teachers which we named 'Guru Penyayang' (Loving Teachers) that are on duty at the school gate."* (2SLTF2)

According to a male teacher during the focus group interview,

*"Daily rounds are the first thing that the principal will do in the morning. She will check whether the teachers do their duty or not, especially those who were assigned to do daily rounds or monitor the school entrance in the morning."*

(1TM1)

When the students during the focus group were asked about **Principal B's** routine, one of the female students in the focus group said,

*"Usually when the principal does daily rounds, she will warn [about] things like no littering. If she found rubbish on the floor she will ask us to pick it up immediately."* (2SF2)

According to a female administrative staff member,

*"The principal will come early to the school; when we arrive, she is already here in the office. She will then go for daily rounds, walk around the school compound, sometimes to the fourth floor of the school building, yes... that is her routine."* (2AS2)

These findings show that, even though student discipline was not really a major concern to **Principal B**, daily rounds was still being implemented in order to make sure that students' discipline is always under control. Teachers on duty in implementing daily rounds shows that empowerment and collegiality are part of the practice in the administration of **Principal B**.

Similar to Principals A and B, **Principal C's** approach regarding students' discipline was also through the implementation of daily rounds. Doing daily rounds became **Principal C's** routine, and it was clear that most of the principal participants shared the same opinions in this matter.

According to **Principal C**,

*"If I do not have urgent matters in the office I will walk around the school to see what is happening to the students... and the staff too. I always believe, as human beings, we always have to be reminded from time to time as we tend to forget. That is why for me, daily rounds are an effective way of reminding my students and staff."* (PC/1)

This is supported by the Deputy Principal for Students Affairs, who said that,

*"What I can see is that, in the morning the principal will go to the office first, then to the school compound where we have school assembly. Sometimes, she will not monitor the classes but will straight away go around the school."* (3SLTF3)

According to a female student in the focus group,

*"I always see the principal doing daily rounds. She will check the classrooms - which classrooms have teachers inside, which classrooms did not. Even during the assembly, the principal will not sit at the place provided for her as the first thing she will do is to go around checking the students are lined up. When she finds everything is fine, only then she moves to the place provided for her."* (3SF3)

A male teacher in the senior leadership team who had a similar view to the female student said,

*“The principal’s routine in the morning is to go to the school compound, the area where we have our school assembly. Then she will start observing the students. She will not be delivering a speech until she finds that everything is fine. The same goes for when she finds any problems like late comers at the school entrance; she will go there, then when everything is fine she will come back to the assembly delivering her speech, but if the problem still cannot be solved at the gate, she will ask teachers on duty to handle the problems.”* (3SLTF6)

A male student added a similar observation whilst being interviewed in the focus group,

*“This principal, she likes to see the condition of her students in the morning, so she will do daily rounds, walk around the school... for instance, the students are not allowed to go upstairs to their classrooms before the assembly begins, so the principal will check this kind of thing.”* (3SM2)

A female teacher in the focus group showed her agreement:

*“The location for the daily rounds is not the same; there is a day that the principal will go the school compound, there is a day that she will go the classrooms, and there is a day that she will even go to the students’ hostel. But the important thing is, she will do the daily rounds.”* (3TF3)

When the teachers were asked how **Principal C** utilised the time to remind students regarding discipline while doing daily rounds, another female teacher added,

*“She will normally remind them immediately. If she found rubbish for instance, so those nearer to her at that particular time will be asked to take the rubbish and throw it straight away, or, if the student does not wear the school uniform properly, she will ask them to wear it properly.” (3TF4)*

Even though the administrative staff spend most of their time inside the school administration office, the daily rounds done by **Principal C** were even noticed by them.

A male administrative staff member at School C said,

*“Usually the principal will do daily rounds; sometimes she will be at the school compound, the assembly area to monitor students’ attendance, do they come early or late. If they are late, she will remind them immediately.” (2AS1)*

While others would relate daily rounds as a way of addressing students’ discipline at School C, a representative from the PTA said,

*“I believe all schools have disciplinary problems, even at School C. The principal is very open to the PTA, I mean she will not hide anything. When the school has problems like students’ discipline, the issue is always opened for discussion in the PTA meeting.” (3PF1)*

While **Principal D** also relied on daily rounds to ensure that the students’ discipline was under control, her approach was a little different. Whilst the rest of the principals would prefer to do daily rounds early in the morning or once the students started to arrive at the school, Principal D preferred to do it after the students got into their classrooms as for her, that time is more convenient. **Principal D** said,

*“When the students are already in their classrooms, I will start walking around the school to check for those students who did not go their classes and those who are still wandering around the school area.” (PD/1)*

According to a teacher in the SLT,

*“The principal emphasises more on students’ discipline. In the morning, she will go to the assembly point or to the school hall to make sure that the students get into their classes smoothly.”* (4SLT5)

When the female students in the focus group were asked about their principal’s priorities, a student mentioned,

*“About discipline. Students’ discipline... If [I could name] the disciplinary problems in this school, there are truancy, fights... The principal always reminds us during the assembly on Monday. She will never forget to remind [the students].”* (4SF3)

A similar idea was shared by a male student in the focus group interview:

*“The principal would normally be on daily rounds especially during the teaching and learning sessions.”* (4SF2)

When male students were asked further what could be the importance of doing daily rounds for **Principal D**, one of the students said,

*“She will see things such as, when during the teaching and learning sessions there are students who go in and out without wearing a pass, she will warn [them].”* (4SM3)

This was supported by a female student,

*“This principal, she will be on daily rounds in the morning. When we [the school prefects] monitor the students to get to their classes, the principal will inspect*

*the students, the way the students dress... She will look at the students' attire; do they dress accordingly."* (4SF2)

This shows that **Principal D's** concern on students' discipline was not only limited within their good conduct but also extended to their personal appearances.

During the interview with one of the teachers in the SLT, a female teacher also agreed that discipline was among the factors informing **Principal D's** leadership. When the teacher was asked about the positive changes that occurred as a result of daily rounds practiced by **Principal D**, the teacher explained that,

*When the principal does the daily rounds, there are obvious changes towards students' discipline. Especially the low-performing classes... They will stay more in their classroom as compared to when there are no daily rounds. Daily rounds will make students more alert."* (4SLT5)

Speaking of changes brought by **Principal D's** leadership, the idea shared by the teacher was also supported by the female students. During the interview, the female students were asked whether there were any changes in the students' conducts as influenced by **Principal D's** leadership. Two said that,

*"There is a little change" (4SF1) -*

*"As compared to before" (4SF2),* added another student.

Even though there was only 'a little change' 'as compared to before', considering that **Principal D** was near to her retirement, it could signify a good change for the school as within a limited time, **Principal D** had still managed to lead effectively with regards to students' discipline.

In contrast to the senior teacher's and the students' opinions, **Principal D** seemed to disagree that there were any changes in the students' character resulting from her daily rounds of the school.

**Principal D** said,

*"I would say there are no changes yet. But if I did this (daily rounds) in other schools, perhaps we could already see the changes, but not at this school."*

(PD/2)

The previous statements from the participants at School D illustrated that the changes were perceived differently by **Principal D** and her subordinates. This could possibly be due to higher expectations associated with **Principal D** as a leader while there may be lesser expectations associated with the subordinates.

Apart from **Principal D** herself taking action, the school assembly was conducted in such a way that would reduce the students' disciplinary problems. Besides the formal assembly on Monday, the daily assembly also served the purpose of facilitating interaction between the principal, teachers and the students.

According to the Deputy Principal for Co-curricular,

*"The official assembly is on Monday... But every day we have assembly, just for a while... The assembly that we have on an everyday basis is for us to identify the disciplinary problems so that the students will come on time, and sometimes we have the latest information to be disseminated during the assembly."* (4SLT2)

Thus, through the daily assembly, priority was given towards the development of good character of the students, and all teachers were given their own related tasks to

perform. This way, everyone took responsibility for the students' character building and discipline collectively, and efforts pertaining to maintaining discipline were not only the responsibility of the senior leadership team or the disciplinary teacher.

While explaining teachers' duties as well as those of the senior leadership team during the daily assembly, the Deputy Principal for Co-curricular further added,

*"We have teachers on duty. Sometimes, we, the leadership teams also will join if we have something to announce." (4SLT2)*

A female teacher in the focus group said,

*"She [**Principal D**] is special... from what I can see, she helped a lot in school discipline. That is the most special, for me... Ask Mr. S, Mr. S is the students' affairs teacher... When the principal comes to this school, she gives a lot of ideas about discipline. Ideas that sometimes, we ourselves did not do, but she will do..." (4TF4)*

The Minutes of the Teachers' Meeting, Volume 1, 2014 which was the first meeting attended at School D by **Principal D** showed that the principal emphasised the promotion of good culture practised by previous principals in relation to students' character building. **Principal D** reminded all teachers in the meeting that if the good culture had a positive effect on students' character building, it should be continued and promoted. Besides, the Planning for Management and Educational Administration Book, 2014 showed that the formation of several units at school - such the Discipline Unit as well as an Absenteeism Squad - were among the efforts taken by the school to ensure good attitude and discipline amongst the students. Even though the ideas were initiated by previous principals, when Principal D took over the school

administration, she still carried on these initiatives because they were found to be beneficial for the students.

In sum, it was apparent from the excerpts that student discipline was among the priorities in all women principals' leadership in this study. In fact, most of the participants agreed that daily rounds were desired as one of the effective ways in combating students' discipline, along with the issuing of reminders and advice at school assembly.

#### **4.3.1.3 Concluding Remarks**

As much as academic excellence is prioritised in the leadership of the women principals in this study, non-academic excellence was equally important to them. The greater number of subthemes of non-academic excellence as compared to academic excellence do not signify any differences in terms of priority. However, the findings show that non-academic excellence is broader as compared to academic excellence and varies as it depends on factors such as the principals' aims, the schools' needs, and the students' ability to achieve. It could also be found that the women principals in this study shared some similarities and differences in prioritising academic and non-academic excellence.

#### **4.3.2 Interactions and Supports**

The women principals in this study are found to interact with people who work with them internally, those inside the schools, and externally, those outside the schools. Those inside the schools include the SLTs, teachers, and students as well as the administrative staff, while those outside the schools includes the officers at the Ministry, parents, student alumni, the women principals' own families, and the communities around the schools. The findings show that the women principals

received support from those inside and outside of their schools, whilst at the same time the principals also provided support for those inside and outside the schools. More detail explanations follow in the sub-sections below.

#### **4.3.2.1 Interactions Internally and Externally**

The findings show that in general, the women principals in this study have cordial relationships with others. The principals were found to have good interactions with people who work with them inside the schools as well as outside the schools.

For instance, **Principal A** said,

*“In general, I could say our relationship in this school is good. As a principal I realised having good relationships is important; as such I would always try to have good relationships with the staff as well as everyone at school. Building relationship by all means...” (PA/1)*

When **Principal A** was further asked how she maintained good interactions with those people she worked with, as well as with the students at School A, she stated,

*“Now it is very easy to show our thought to others. For instance, just by using our mobile phone we can send happy birthday messages, we can ask about work progress, or just anything we want. Other than that, if I meet my staff or students in person around the school, I would wish them happy birthday or related wishes if I can remember. When I got to know anybody who is unwell, I will try to find time to visit them at home.” (PA/2)*

A woman teacher in the focus group highlighted that,

*“The principal is friendly compared to some women principals who have a lot of do’s and don’ts to deal with. Even with regards to eating during any events, she*

*needs no protocols, the events do not need to be grand... That one I am very comfortable with her; she can eat together with us at the school canteen, what we eat she will also eat (the same food sold for the teachers).” (1SF1)*

According to a male administrative staff member,

*“I am in charge more of the students’ hostel. I can even talk or discuss things when I meet the principal walking around the school. I do not have to make an appointment to discuss [with her]; anytime and anywhere, she will normally entertain [discussion]. When I explain about problems at the students’ hostel for instance, she will advise accordingly, and she will also support if she finds my idea is good.” (1AS1)*

A male teacher during the focus group interview shared a similar opinion regarding **Principal A**. He said,

*“She always concerns [herself] about her staff and students.” (1TM2)*

Another male teacher in the focus group added,

*“She always takes care of staff and students’ welfare. When someone invited her to an event, she will fulfill their invitation.” (1TM3)*

During a focus group interview, a male student shared his opinion:

*“The principal never forgets to congratulate [us] if we achieve something.”*  
(1SM2)

Whilst the staff mentioned that **Principal A** had a close relationship with others, a group of female students indicated that they still can feel a gap between **Principal A** and the students.

According to a female student in the focus group,

*“The principal can become close to the students, but it is limited to students who got the chance to know her closely. Those who got to know her well, they are close like a mother and a daughter relationship.”* (1SF3)

Although the female students felt that there was a gap between **Principal A** and some students, they did not deny that their principal is an easy-going and approachable person. As such, the opinion shared by the female students could be subjected to isolated cases that they had personally experienced.

Interactions, caring and support consisting of praise, encouragement, and condolence messages where called for were among the relationship approaches in the leadership of **Principal A** that were highlighted during the interviews. In sum, the findings showed that Principal A demonstrated some characteristics/behaviours of a transformational leader in order to maintain good interactions and supports with those people she worked with at School A.

As regards **Principal B**, the findings show that there was a subtle difference in her leadership approach to maintaining good interactions and support as compared to Principal A. Apart from praise, encouragement and messages of condolences, **Principal B** also gave out presents to those people that she worked with at School B.

**Principal B** said,

*“The way I show my thoughts to my staff is by giving out presents during their birthdays or the birth of their newborns. Normally we do that at the school assembly, where the students will sing a happy birthday song to the respective teachers. Before that, the students will put up a banner wishing a happy birthday to the teachers at the school compound. And also, for those who are unwell, I will find time to visit and sometimes not only the staff but also when [a member of] staff has lost their close family member.”* (PB)

The teachers reported the same ideas. A female teacher during the focus group interview said,

*“Every month the principal will give simple presents to the teachers celebrating their birthdays. Then, when there are any of the staff [members] who are losing their family members or facing difficulties, the principal will ask us to give charity.”* (2TF1)

Another female teacher in the focus group added,

*“The principal also will attend wedding ceremonies of the staff.”* (2TF2)

A male teacher in the focus group added,

*“If any staff received awards for instance, the principal would never forget to announce their achievement at the assembly. Sometimes she even asked us to organise a party celebrating staff’s success.”* (2TM2)

Due to the birthday parties and handing out of presents to the students and staff happening very often, some of the teachers found that it was not something that was

anticipated or special anymore since it was being practiced so often. A male teacher in the focus group said,

*“Since this is a high performing school, to see achievements made by the teachers and students is something ordinary, but for the purpose of [showing] appreciation, the principal still carries on the same practice. So, sometimes we do not feel excited anymore about getting presents and having birthday parties like when the principal first introduced it.” (2TM1)*

According to a female administrative staff member,

*“If we the administrative staff are absent, the principal will call us to her room to ask about our condition. Apart from that, when we celebrate birthdays she will give us presents. It has been two years since I moved to this school; I got presents for my birthday.” (2AS2)*

Meanwhile, the Deputy Principal for Administration reported,

*“The school usually sets up a donation fund to help staff in need, for instance students who have lost their parents. We also coordinated funding for flood victims in Kelantan that happened lately.” (2SLTF1)*

According to the female officer from the District Education Office (DEO),

*“We support the schools in many forms. We do a lot of programmes; the simplest example I could give is, we brief the school regarding any information so that they can get a clear picture. Besides, there is also coaching and mentoring... we also go to the school to have a chat if the schools have problems or anything.” (2AS2)*

The findings show that, in building relationship with those people inside the school, **Principal B's** approach was not only limited to any specific group of staff or students, but all are being treated the same. There were signs of both transactional and transformational leadership in the way **Principal B** interacted with others at school, in comparison with the transformational approach alone as in the case of Principal A.

Similar to Principal A, one of **Principal C's** preferred methods to convey congratulatory messages or condolences to the staff was through social media, in particular *Whatsapp* messages. **Principal C** reported,

*“We have two Whatsapp groups for the school’s purposes; one is for wishing happy birthday, conveying our condolences or even asking about the situations amongst us, [whether someone is] sick or not... One more is the Whatsapp [group] for a more formal purpose which is the administrative related stuff.”*  
(PC/1)

The Deputy Principal for Students Affairs mentioned,

*“If [there are] things related to the students, the principal will announce [them] at the assembly. For teachers, other than the assembly, she will announce at the meetings. If she wants to tell us she is angry she will do it there (at the meeting), and if she wants to congratulate also she will do it there (at the meeting).”* (3SLTF3)

A female student in the focus group reported,

*“If the classroom is clean for instance, the principal will mention that classroom at the assembly. If the class got one hundred percent for attendance she will also mention it at the assembly.”* (3SF2)

A male student in the focus group shared a similar idea,

*“Like last year, after the final examination, there were awards given to the students. The principal sponsored the awards to the students from all forms. She is like that; which students are good she will award.”* (3SM2)

Another male student said,

*“She will buy us presents; she will give certificates. When she delivers the speech, she will mention about students who have succeeded.”* (3SM3)

Another male student added,

*“Then, whilst she hands over the present, she will say words of motivation at the same time.”* (3SM5)

According to one of the female students, **Principal C** was very supportive. The female student said,

*“Sometimes at the end of the year we will have an annual dinner which the principal would also attend. It is just a simple event, but it seems like the principal does not mind attending a simple programme.”* (3SF7)

Sharing a similar opinion, another female student said,

*“Last year we had a party for students in our form. We determined the theme for the party. To our surprise, the principal dressed according to the theme.”* (3SF6)

According to a female administrative assistant,

*“If the principal goes for a holiday, she will bring back something (presents). If speaking of treating us with food, I could say we never feel hungry whenever she is around.” (3AS2)*

The findings show that most of the participants thought that the interactions and supports worked well when they were praised, received words of motivation and presents from **Principal C**. Similar to that of Principal B, the approach taken by **Principal C** showed some signs of both transactional and transformational leadership as parts of the interactions and support towards others.

Sharing a subtle similarity with Principals A and B in conveying messages to her subordinates, **Principal D** preferred to use social media such as *Whatsapp*. **Principal D** reported,

*“I always say it [convey condolence messages] verbally when I meet the staff, like those who lost their family members. Or, if the distance of their home is not that far I will normally pay a visit. If it is too far I will not go. If those who have passed away or are sick is the staff’s son or mother, I will try to go.” (PD/1)*

With regards to staff’s significant dates like birthdays or achievements, **Principal D** said,

*“We combine the groups, if let say... Like the other day, we had a teacher who was going to retire, so we combine the farewell party with a birthday celebration for other teachers in that particular month.” (PD/1)*

According to a male administrative staff member,

*“If staff or their family members passed away, the principal will visit if the location is nearby.” (4SA1)*

He then added to the conversation that,

*“The principal will call the related staff member if he or she did any wrongdoing, but she never said harsh words, never. She also never put us under pressure; she is diplomatic.” (4AS1)*

A male teacher from the SLT said,

*“If someone has passed away, or someone is unwell, she is very concerned. Sometimes she will visit, but usually she will just express condolences in the meeting.” (4SLTM2)*

The idea that **Principal D** was considerate in her manner of communication was supported by a male teacher who said during the focus group interview that,

*“In any meeting, she will never put us under pressure; her speech is never in a form that pressurises us... Sometimes, there are leaders that take the opportunity of having meetings to put the staff under pressure.” (4TM1)*

On a different note, another male teacher said,

*“The principal always reminds us about meetings, especially those being held outside the school... she always reminds [us] of that.” (4TM3)*

Additionally, according to another female teacher in the focus group,

*“She also is always involved in co-curricular activities; she will go to the field wearing attire for the uniform accordingly.” (4TF3)*

According to a female student in the focus group,

*“She will say hi to anyone she bumped into and she will ask where you are going to, things like that.” (4SF4)*

Meanwhile, according to a representative from Parents Teachers Association,

*“The principal is professional in her communication, interaction... She always respects others without having to raise her voice.” (4PM1).*

Being a minority in School D, a female teacher who is Indian said,

*“With the principal I do not see race.” (4TF5)*

Even though the above teacher responded to the questions in a very brief manner, the way she answered without hesitating showed that she felt supported and appreciated as a minority in School D.

Throughout the interview, it was evident that **Principal D** showed her support not only through words but also with her energy and time. In fact, at some points the energy and time of a leader were most appreciated by the subordinates. According to a female teacher in the focus group,

*“If we have games, competitions (at school) she will attend. She will come. For instance, lately we had a bowling tournament, cross country... She was there. Suddenly she was there... Like last year, silat (a traditional Malay self-defense martial arts). The school became the host. I was the secretary. She came from morning and until 7 o'clock she did not go home. She was with us, carrying the desks; I really praised her... Then she came to carry things to the car. In terms of energy, no doubt...” (4TF4)*

Even though **Principal D** was still new in the school, most of the teachers were happy with the support she provided.

The above female teacher further explained during the focus group interview,

*“Because of that, the teachers feel comfortable to work with her. For example, a school holiday does not seem like a school holiday. Most of the teachers come to the school... She also comes. Sometimes there is a lot of work... Because we feel comfortable having this principal, we come to the school even on Saturday. During the school holiday, we come to do school work. We do not feel stressed.”* (4TF4)

The teacher further anticipated that once **Principal D** was retired, she would be missed by all in the school as they always saw her supporting and motivating in most of the programmes organised in school. As for supporting the principal, a teacher who worked closely with the principal in the senior leadership team said,

*“Support from all teachers. If there is no good support, the principal cannot do her work. I think, the total support [is there] ...”* (4SLTF4)

An interview was conducted with a parent who was also a representative of the PTA. Apart from serving the PTA, the parent, who was also a motivational speaker and owned his own company, would sometimes be invited to some students' programmes at the school. Even though he was happy to help the school as long as he could, he came out with a brilliant suggestion.

According to the representative of PTA, apart from inviting motivators from outside the school whom the school would have to pay, it was better for the principal to act as a motivator for her students. Perhaps if the principals felt it was not suitable to motivate their own students, they could be the motivator for students at other schools and they

could also invite principals from other schools. This way, according to this parent, the school could save a lot of costs as the most important reason was that the principal knows best about the school and students, even though the settings were different.

According to the parent,

*“Actually, the principals, they have the calibre... For me... Those principals... Give talk at other schools. Not to call motivators from outside to talk.”* (4PM1)

When both male and female students were asked about the support they would like to give to their principal, they mentioned support relating to co-curricular, academic and attitude aspects. A male student in the focus group said,

*“If for him, (pointing at his friend), he wanted to give medals, he plays football.”* (4SM4)

Meanwhile, a female student in the focus group said,

*“Usually, in academics... And attitude too.”* (4SF6)

As for a male teacher in the focus group, his response showed that most of the teachers were comfortable working under the leadership of **Principal D**. They did not suggest any support that they thought could be given to the principal; as a male teacher said,

*“That is if we are not satisfied with the principal. But so far, we are very satisfied. If we are not satisfied, then perhaps we have got suggestions [support] to be given.”* (4TM2)

Similar to Principals A, B and C, **Principal D** was also found to be interacting with everyone at School D rather than focusing on one particular group. Students as well as subordinates were found to receive equal treatment from **Principal D**. Despite the

equal treatment given by the principal, the way in which she interacted was also being assessed by some students through her emotion – not smiling was considered by the students to be unfriendly. As such, it is clear that managing emotions is crucial in a leadership position. However, it is worthy of mention that different people and situations required interactions and support in different forms as what one might need would not be suitable or needed by another in a particular school context.

#### **4.3.2.2 Concluding remarks**

The way women principals in this study strengthen their interactions and relationships was not only confined within their own schools but involved those outside the schools. The relationship with the community around the school, for instance, and with people at the Ministry as well as parents are among those that need special attention from the principals.

#### **4.3.2.3 Support Received and Provided**

To **Principal A**, getting support from School A's former students for the school and the junior students was crucial. **Principal A** said,

*“I like the support from the former students. If they come to the school, they can always do programmes with their juniors. I would always look forward to their visits.” (PA/1)*

The senior leadership teacher who was also the Deputy Principal for Students Affairs said,

*“This principal likes her former students to come to the school and do programmes with their junior students. Some of the last cohorts of students were very close to her; they even stay overnight at her house when they come*

*to visit the students. That is how the principal likes the relationship between her and the [former] students.” (1SLT3)*

According to one of the female students in the focus group;

*“I can see that the principal always looks forward to former students coming to the school, especially for them to come and do the programmes. Like yesterday I could see some of the seniors who came, they even slept over at Ustazah’s [referring to the principal].” (1SF5)*

The opinion shared by a senior leadership team teacher suggests that the school could do better with more support. She said,

*“I think the school needs more support from the student alumni to organise some programmes which could benefit the current students. I can see that the principal also likes it when the former students come to visit school once in a while, especially those who come and organise programme for the junior students.” (1SLT5)*

In order to ensure the excellent performance of the school, **Principal A** insisted that support from Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) was very crucial. **Principal A** said,

*“For the excellence of our kids [the students], we really need support from other organisations to help us out. And another one, the alumni really help, really support the school.” (PA/1)*

**Principal A** further added that the support from the Ministry was sufficient and supportive to her school.

*“I think the support we have received from the Ministry so far is very encouraging, but the only thing is, we have to understand that the Ministry also has limited budget to be disseminated amongst schools. As such we should not only depend on the Ministry alone...” (PA/2)*

The ideas shared by **Principal A** are in line with the opinion of an officer from the SED who said,

*“I think we at the Ministry level, we always support the principals. It is not in the sense that we initiate the programme but we always support every time the school organises a programme. Apart from financial support, we will make sure that we also support them by attending the school programmes.” (1SEO2)*

Meanwhile, from the observation at a Committees of PTA meeting, it was found that the chairperson mentioned that there were different types of support that School A received from the Ministry. For instance, the Ministry provided the school with a bus so that it would be easier for the students to attend those programmes held outside of the school. The chairperson also mentioned that some of the programmes organised by the school were attended by the ministers. This indicates a sign of good relationship and complete support from the Ministry.

As for the interactions with parents, **Principal A** will pay them a visit when it is necessary. **Principal A** said,

*“If there is a student whose parent has passed away, I will try to attend [the funeral] if it is nearby. I will also invite other staff to come along with me.” (PA/1)*

This statement was supported by a female administrative staff member who reported,

*“Usually the principal will visit [the family of] those who have passed away, like our students’ parents. Staff at the administrative office will usually be invited to go along with the principal.” (2AS2)*

According to the Deputy Principal for Students Affairs,

*“When we get to know there is students’ parents that passed away, the principal will ask me to select some male students to represent the school to pay the school’s last respects.” (1SLT3)*

**Principal A** also was said to have good relationships with the former students of School A. A female representative from the PTA said,

*“I can see that the principal is very close to the former students. I could see that when the school organised a programme, there were many [former] students that turned up to the programme. Perhaps the principal only invited a few, but because of their close relationship, [the number of] those who turned up were more than those who were invited.” (1PF)*

Whilst the first interview was being conducted with **Principal A**, there was a group of former students who came into **Principal A**’s office to meet the principal. From the observation of both conversations between the principal and alumni, it was clear that they had a close relationship even though it has been a while since the students left the school.

Similar to Principal A, **Principal B** felt that her relationship with subordinates and stakeholders was good overall. According to the principal, they always followed the rules, regulations and instructions set by the Ministry. The principal further said that as a high-performance school, even though the school was given the autonomy to make

changes to the timetable, everything was done within the boundaries set by the Ministry.

**Principal B** said,

*“The support from the Ministry... I think we have no problem because what we do is according to the instruction from the Ministry. And we never go beyond the limit like when we change the timetable, we change it accordingly.”* (PB)

As for relationship with the community, **Principal B** said it was very important for the school to establish good relationships with the community especially since the school was located in very close proximity to the mosque. Usually, at the time when the students were being trained in playing musical instruments for their marching band, the men from the local community would be performing their congregational prayers at the mosque. During this time, it was important for the students to stop the training and remain silent in order to show respect for the prayer time.

**Principal B** said,

*“Since our school is in front of the mosque, when it is time to pray, the students will automatically go to pray and only then continue their training. Because... we really have to take care of the relationship between this school and the people coming to the mosque, as well as the local communities.”* (PB)

An initiative was taken by School B to build and maintain the relationship between students in School B and students from other schools around the area.

**Principal B** explained:

*“We have a programme in which the students from selected nearby schools will come to our school and spend a week here. The selected Form Three and Five*

*students involved in the programme are the students with good academic potential. As the students in School B did when they became the students here, the visiting students who come here also will recite the students' oath as if to symbolize that they are the students of School B for a week. Those students who are staying far from School B will be provided with hostels and they will be taken care of by their own teachers.” (PB)*

As for the relationship between the school and PTA, School B can be characterised as having a good relationship with parents. According to the interview with the Deputy Principal for Administration, every time the students participated in School B's famous co-curricular activities the school would receive help from parents in different forms.

The Deputy Principal for Administration said,

*“There are parents who help to sew the uniforms for the competition, painting the wall, making trolleys so that it is easy to carry the big instruments. Amongst the parents there are engineers, carpenters, so they will use their expertise. There are doctors; for example, if let's say the students are going for a competition in China, the parents who are doctors will also go by spending their own money. We cannot afford to sponsor them, but they will go with an open heart, [and] use their own pocket money as well as their own medicines to help the students.” (2SLTF1)*

The representative of the PTA confirmed this account from the Deputy Principal for Administration.

According to her,

*“Like my first daughter, she started her schooling here in 2007. Since then, I was involved in helping with the co-curricular activities. I always make sure whether they need anything, like making flags. After that we formed a parents’ group. We are involved... Like last time we participated even [going] to Nanchang (China).” (2PF1)*

As regard the support given and provided between **Principal C** and the Ministry, according to the officer at the SED,

*“It was easy to liaise with the principal because she treated officers like her own colleagues; no one was superior to the other. Besides, it makes people feel comfortable and less formal. If with me, she even addresses herself as ‘sister’. So, I feel comfortable. Even if we would like to have meeting, I can just call her and tell her to prepare the hall because we would like to have meeting... This means that her management is so simple, easy yet systematic.” (3SEO2)*

When the students were asked how they could repay **Principal C** for all her support, a student quickly mentioned achieving the High Performance School status or *Sekolah Berprestasi Tinggi (SBT)*.

The student said,

*“SBT...” (3SF6)*

This answer was confirmed by all students during the interview,

*“Yes, SBT...” (3SF7; 3SF8; 3SF8; 3SF9; 3SF10)*

These responses indicate that the students were aware that achieving High Performance School status was an aspiration of their principal. To achieve High Performance School status meant that the students should excel academically and non-academically.

From the researcher's own observation and experience in dealing with **Principal C**, it is worth mentioning that **Principal C** still keeps in touch with the researcher even after the completion of the data collection for this study, especially in sharing good news about her students' achievements in the national examinations. The friendliness of the principal was apparent starting from the first meeting as well as throughout the process of the data collection.

From the document analysis of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Edition School Magazine/2014 at School C, it is clear that the school also tried to maintain a good relationship with local society through a community service programme called '*Program Ziarah Mahabbah*'. In this programme, a group of 36 students were selected to pay visits to the nearby hospitals. Among the objectives of the programme were building a closer relationship between the school and the hospitals, attracting students towards participating in community service programmes with patients, and to educate students to be more sensitive towards needy and less fortunate people.

**Principal C** also believed that there were numerous programmes provided by the MoE as well as the *Institut Aminuddin Baki (IAB)* for the school principals, regardless of their gender.

Taking into consideration the programmes provided by the agencies involving school leadership, **Principal C** said,

*“I think so far there is a lot of support provided. There is a programme in which the new principals will be guided by a senior principal, for example... I think that is very useful. The IAB plays an important role. All these ideas are the guidance; as a new principal that is very good. I think that should be carried on... During my time, back in 2004, we went for that programme for a month, and there was a test too, but now I think they have shortened the course...” (PC/1)*

Even though **Principal C** admitted the benefits of attending the programmes provided by the Ministry, she also mentioned her preference to be at the school rather than attending programmes. According to **Principal C**, the importance of attending those programmes was undeniable in that it was crucial for the principals to have knowledge about leading the schools. However, rather than attending the programmes, **Principal C** found that there were many more important things that required her to be at school. For this reason, **Principal C** normally selected only a few relevant courses to attend. **Principal C** added that there was a group formed by the principals from other schools in the same state to discuss leadership-related matters. In fact, **Principal C** felt that sharing and asking opinions from other principals was more practical and applicable to the situation of her school.

**Principal C** said,

*“At my age, I would prefer to apply what I have known and for me, when I am going to make decision, it will depend on the situation, the situation of the school.” (PC/1)*

When a group of female teachers were asked about the support that the school received, different teachers had slightly different views and experiences to share.

A female teacher who considered that the overall support to the school is good said,

*“So far our school has not had a problem in terms of support. In fact, if there are outsiders or teachers who have just joined this school, like our Deputy Principal One (Administration), she mentioned that our school is among the schools which receive good support.” (3TF3)*

However, another female teacher, who was also the school counsellor, further clarified the types of support received and the degree of parents’ support, and her clarification contradicted the previous teacher’s views.

The school counsellor said,

*“I think there is less support now... If we organise parenting programmes, the attendance [parents’ attendance] is to our satisfaction. But I think for Form 5 students there were fewer [parents] who came for the Parents Teachers Association because they already attended the Parental Programme for Form 5 students. However, if it is about cooperation of parents, that can be considered good.” (3TF4)*

The teacher further added during the focus group interview that in her opinion, the cooperation from parents varied depending on the types of programmes organised by the school. The teacher found from the ‘*Solat Hajat*’ programme that she had previously organised that the parents were very supportive. ‘*Solat Hajat*’ or ‘*Hajat Prayer*’ is a prayer offered for the accomplishment of a particular purpose or need. At school, before the students sit for their examinations, this prayer will usually be performed congregationally by teachers, parents and students to ask for success and the smooth running of the examinations.

The school counsellor added,

*“Last year when I organised a ‘Solat Hajat’ programme I managed to gather more than 3,000 attendees. There were also those parents who gave donations for us to buy prayer mats to use at the hall... I think when it comes to donations they are very generous. But in terms of other programmes like meetings, there is less participation... And in terms of their cooperation when their children face disciplinary action, their cooperation is good; they obey the instruction from the school.” (3TF4)*

In maintaining a good relationship with other schools locally, it was mentioned in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Edition of the School Magazine/2014 that School C organised a programme for Form 4 and 5 students called ‘*Program Jaringan Kecemerlangan Akademik*’. This programme aimed at building a closer relationship and inculcating cooperation among students, improving students’ academic achievement, training students in managing time, and increasing the motivation of students. The programme involved three fully residential schools, five to ten students from School C and was conducted in four to five days at those schools.

In the Minutes of the Meeting for Administration Volume 3/2014, there was a suggestion from a female teacher regarding the establishment of a unit with regards to a student exchange programme between School C and the selected fully residential schools. The purpose of establishing this proposed unit was to ensure the smooth running of the programme. The teacher’s suggestion in the meeting minutes not only indicated the effort of **Principal C** and the school in improving interaction with other local schools but also their desire to ensure the smooth running of the programme. In fact, in the same meeting minutes it was mentioned by the Deputy Principal for

Academic that there was a programme which would be organised between School C and School X involving 10 students from School C.

Apart from the local programmes organised, the school also developed networking at an international level. As mentioned in 32<sup>nd</sup> Edition School Magazine/2014, in September 2014, School C organised a programme with a school and a university in Indonesia. During the programme, the students and teachers were given the opportunity to get to know the Indonesian culture as well as introducing their Malaysian culture through their actual performance at the programme. For students specifically, their networking with students in Indonesia did not end with the visit; rather, it was a beginning of a more collaborative online network in the future. Although the findings show some similarities in the way Principals A, B and C in maintaining relationship with those outside the schools, they clearly show that **Principal C** was a little more outstanding in the efforts made, taking into account the involvement of not only staff in the school and other schools but also the students.

As compared to the interviews conducted with Principals A, B and C, not much information was shared by **Principal D** pertaining to the support she received and provided. This could be due to two reasons – first, **Principal D** was close to her retirement, and the limited time she had spent at School D did not allow her to say much about the support provided for her as a principal. Secondly, it could be due to the kind of person **Principal D** is – specifically, that she considered herself as unambitious. According to **Principal D**, the starting point for her becoming an excellent principal was the encouragement of the Director of the State Education Department who was also a woman. At first **Principal D** was not interested at all in applying for the Excellent Principal award as she said she was not ambitious in her career. With this view of herself, the principal probably considered the support she was given by

superiors and subordinates to be good enough, as opposed to those principals who are more ambitious and feel that they need more support. Whatever the reason, not much information was shared by **Principal D**, but the findings from the other three participants contributed towards the richness of the data.

Despite assuming herself to be unambitious, the title of Excellent Principal itself sometimes become a motivation for **Principal D**. This title caused her superiors and subordinates to place high expectations on her. As such, the title indirectly motivated her to perform better.

According to **Principal D**,

*“When people keep mentioning excellent principal, excellent principal... The word excellent as if had been included in ourselves in which we need to show it. Otherwise, what is the point?” (PD/2)*

In fact, **Principal D** shared that she had been happier in her previous school when people did not append the Excellent Principal title to her name when they were supposed to list it during the official programmes. In contrast, when she came to School D, every time her name would be mentioned, she would be addressed with the Excellent Principal title. In this regard, the researcher would personally say that in Malaysian culture, the mentioning of a person’s title is a rule of etiquette especially in official events. Some people became accustomed to this culture and are particular about mentioning the title of others, and they themselves would want others to mention their titles if they had them. Hence, the way **Principal D** thought about her title showed that she did not care much about status and perhaps by observing less protocol, she could be classified as a simple, humble and easy-going leader.

Further sharing her opinion on the title given and the feelings of motivated and supported from the title itself, **Principal D** said,

*“But if you did not get excellent [title], but you are a principal, for me... We need to perform as much as we can. Not to mention, if you are an excellent principal, we need to show it according to our level. Sometimes it [the title] does motivate [me].”* (PD/2)

Fewer explanations given by the principal did not mean that less support existed within and outside of the school. Perhaps the downplaying of that support by **Principal D** could be due to her general approach, in that she preferred to work more on her own rather than depending on others.

To understand the support extended by the Ministry for the principals, especially women principals, an officer from the District Education Office was asked whether there were different programmes available for female principals.

According to the officer,

*“No, we don’t. All programmes are the same...”* (4SEOM1)

The officer further added that,

*“The principals should get support from their subordinates. That means, they should have a team.”* (4SEOM1)

In building the relationship with others, the participants in School D mentioned that **Principal D** was friendly, proactive, and led without placing much pressure on the subordinates.

According to a female teacher in the focus group,

*“She is very caring towards teachers, students as well as workers...If she walks, I never saw that she did not walk along with other teachers. I mean, she will never walk alone. If she walks passed the teachers’ room and bumps into someone, she will call and start chatting with some teachers at a corner. So, her relationship with teachers is very close; she knows the teachers’ problems. Otherwise, how can she share those particular problems with others?” (4TF4)*

Even though **Principal D** spent less than two years in School D, the way she reacted to any issues in the school was very meaningful to the teachers. It was apparent that the teachers appreciated the proactive actions taken by **Principal D**.

According to a male teacher during the focus group interview,

*“I have worked with two principals and so far, both were female principals. This principal is much more proactive. For example, I am at the prayer hall, the roof is leaking... When we lodged a report, she did the follow up on her own. She put in effort to find the sponsor and the resources that are able to help. This means she is much more proactive. When there are problems, she will act quickly.” (4TM3)*

The idea that **Principal D** is a proactive leader was also supported by another male teacher,

*“Pertaining to what Ustaz (title for a religious teacher) said just now, our school had an experience of leaking sewerage. I am here this year for the third year. From the first day I was here until the second year, the leaking problem remained. It had never been fixed. When the principal came over, perhaps within one or two weeks, that problem was solved. That means, this principal, she went to check on her own and from there she took an action.” (4TM4)*

A male teacher in the focus group said,

*“Because in the meeting, in any meeting she will never pressure us with her words. Her speech will never be in a form that stresses teachers. However, indirectly we know what is meant by her speech... We understand our tasks.”*

(4TM3)

In short, this showed that **Principal D**'s actions spoke louder than words.

A male administrative staff member, also a chief clerk at the school, supported the idea that **Principal D** never used words that made the staff feel pressurised.

According to the male administrative staff,

*“What is good about her is she never uses harsh words or speaks harshly with the staff... With the staff, she never speaks harshly in a sense that it will pressure them. She is more wise in her approach.”* (4AS1)

Two other male teachers agreed that they did not feel pressured being under the leadership of **Principal D**.

Both responded respectively,

*“To me in terms of stress, there is no stress”* (4TM2); *“No stress”* (4TM4).

The example given by the administrative staff and the two male teachers could lead to the assumption that, probably due to the short period of time spent by **Principal D** with the staff, the pressure in her leadership was not noticeable; or, it could be that she followed a style of leadership that did not pressurise the subordinates.

Another female teacher in the focus group said that, if their actions were not right, **Principal D** would correct them. The way she corrected the actions was in the form of a reminder, and that she never made teachers feel bad about it.

The female teacher said,

*“Sometimes when we were late to the class, or when sometimes the teachers were chatting in the teachers’ room, she will come and remind them, you [teacher] have class. But the way she reminds is we do not feel bad as she speaks with a good manner.” (4TF4)*

Another example was given by the same female teacher demonstrating that **Principal D** always gave freedom to the teachers to share their ideas. For example,

*“She never restricts us. And she does not want to follow only her ideas... For instance, when we will be having refreshments, we said we do not want the school caterer to cater us, we want an outside caterer... As you wish, you do it... What is important, [is that] you [teachers] are comfortable, satisfied. Aha, those are her principles; comfortable and satisfying.” (4TF4)*

An Indian female teacher, who had more than 30 years of teaching experience and had worked under different principals, said,

*“Principal D did not only give teachers freedom, but she would also simplify things for us. In doing paperwork for instance, we can discuss with her, so we know what she wants. Then we can come out with our paperwork... we discuss with her and then she can agree, disagree.. Give us an idea then we come out with paperwork which is less work for us... So we like that. Sometimes we also*

*tell her that... OK, can I come back and do it later, something like that. She agrees. She is very humane... So I think that one I really appreciate.” (4TF5)*

One of the female students in focus group elaborated,

*“Even if we sit like this [referring to the way we were having the interview session], she will come and ask why.” (4SF4)*

Another female student supported by saying that,

*“She will greet any one she meets, she will pass by and greet them, asking where are you heading to...” (4SF6)*

Illustrating the way **Principal D** led the school, one of the senior teachers shared her opinion by saying that **Principal D** was someone who preferred to perform her tasks on her own. While **Principal D** appeared to promote teamwork on the one hand, she was reluctant to delegate tasks on the other.

The senior female teacher who had started her service at the school long before the principal said,

*“Until now, I think more or less it is like that; she likes to do her own work. It is like, she does not ask others for help... It is like she will not give the work to others... She will not say ‘you go there, you do this.’ But, if she is not able to do it, only then she will come and see the particular teacher. But if she can do it, I think she will go [do it on her own].” (4SLTF5)*

During the interview with a male administrative staff member, it was evident that he also agreed that **Principal D** was a friendly leader. He even related her friendliness with **Principal D**'s single status.

According to the male administrative staff,

*“Even though she is still single, she is just like those who already have family [married]. She is caring if the children [students] are sick... Even though she is still single, but she has a motherly sense.”* (4AS1)

Although this might imply some stereotypical thinking on the part of the staff member about single and married women, it does illustrate **Principal D**'s caring nature. Another example showing that **Principal D** was a caring and considerate leader was shared by an Indian female teacher whose brother-in-law had recently passed away.

The teacher said,

*“I called her, and I asked her... I said, can I apply for CRK (special leave). She said ‘OK. Because where is it’... ‘I have to go to Johore’... And then I said ‘I have not filled in the CRK form...’ I came back and filled in the form.”*  
(4TF5)

The way **Principal D** cared about her staff was also evident from the researcher's own observation. During the fieldwork, while the interview with **Principal D** was underway, the principal's office was visited by a woman teacher who needed the principal's permission to leave the school early. According to the teacher, she needed to rest as she did not have enough sleep during the night due to her sick child whom she had to look after. After asking a few questions about her child, the principal asked the teacher to write her name in the record book and allowed her to go home. From the way **Principal D** responded to the teacher, it shows that apart from being a caring and understanding leader, **Principal D** also simplified the procedure without compromising the important requirements.

#### **4.3.2.4 Concluding Remarks**

Apart from the leadership characteristics demonstrating the leadership abilities of the women principals, the findings show that incorporation of a humane approach is important in conducting interactions and both providing and receiving support.

#### **4.3.3 Gender and Career**

Issues related to gender and career emerged strongly when the researcher tried to establish findings regarding challenges that women principals faced specific to their gender.

##### **4.3.3.1 Home Related Challenges**

When the women principals in this study were asked about the challenges they faced, most of them related their gender roles with the challenges they identified. For instance, three out of four women principals – *Principals A, B* and *C* - hold the domestic responsibility as wives and mothers, whilst *Principals B* and *C* were also grandmothers. *Principal D* was the only single woman in this study; she also related her role at home whilst discussing the challenges she faced as a principal. Even though roles at home were not highlighted as being very challenging in the context of their principalship, but the way the roles were mentioned showed that performing roles at home was still a commitment that the women principals have to attend to in juggling their career as principals.

*Principal A* for instance said that, as compared with in her early years as a principal, performing her role as a mother was not as demanding as before, because her children were now grown up and had their own careers.

Elaborating on the commitment towards family, *Principal A* said,

*“I am fine with commitment at home; my children are all grown up, they already can mind their own business, whilst my husband, already retired, is always supportive towards me and my career. And he in fact, always became my chauffeur, assisting me most of the time in getting here and there for my official tasks as a principal.” (PA/1)*

**Principal A**'s situation with regard to home related challenges was commented upon by the officer from the SED,

*“I do not think she faces a lot of challenges at home and at her personal level as far I can see. Even though she does not drive on her own, in order to get to the meeting or any programmes outside the school, she will still manage to do it by using public transports or being driven by her husband.” (1SEO1)*

According to a female teacher in the focus group,

*“I think this principal is very lucky as the children are all grown up and need less attention. The only commitment that she has is only to her husband. That is what we can observe; the reality, only she knows. However, what I could see, perhaps others also could see the same thing; the husband is very supportive, he will even take the principal to locations where she will have activities or meetings.” (1TF2)*

When **Principal B** was asked regarding challenges, she stated that she would never mix up her role as a school principal with her role in the family. **Principal B** reported,

*“For me, at home and at school are different. I do not want to mix at all between these two. In fact, my kids are all grown up and I never feel they interfere with my job.” (PB)*

This was supported by a female teacher in the focus group:

*“The principal already has two granddaughters. I never feel that she has problems like being interfered with by her role in the family.” (2TF2)*

Another female teacher added,

*“Yes, she looks very cool performing her role as a principal. She said work is work.” (2TF3)*

The Deputy Principal for Administration said,

*“She is very professional. Since I worked in one team with her, I never heard her mention things at home that interfere with her focus at school. Moreover, her kids are all grown up already; they can do things on their own without having to disturb their mum.” (2SLTF1)*

According to **Principal B**, with regards to school administration, she did not face a lot of challenges. According to the principal, when she first came to School B, she did not face any difficulties in leading the school as she was a former teacher at School B. Having known some of the teachers, administrative staff and parents already made her job less challenging.

During the interview, **Principal B** mentioned that,

*“Because I had experience at this school, I knew... So that I can quickly run the school. For those who are doing for the first time probably it is difficult for them.”*  
(PB)

According to the Deputy Principal for Administration, being appointed as a school principal at the age of 42 was exceptional for someone at the administrative level. The

Deputy Principal for Administration characterised Principal B as having special qualities as well as experience in administration, since she was also a senior teacher in Technical and Vocational subject at School B.

The Deputy Principal for Administration mentioned,

*“So, her leadership culture is already matured. When she first arrived at this school, she already had her own vibes as a principal. Because she had already been a principal for the past few years and this is of course different from those who are newly appointed as principals.” (2SLTF1)*

For **Principal C**, in terms of gender role and career, she did not exhibit any concern. Having grown-up and married children with their own careers, **Principal C** did not face a lot of challenges at home. In addition, **Principal C** felt that having a supportive husband contributed towards her being a better woman principal in leading the school:

*“For me to go to the meeting, seminar, or workshops or anywhere else, I do not face problems as I have less challenges at home to be worried about. My kids are all grown-ups... Other than that, my husband is always supportive even though he comes from a different field, but he knows how much my passion is in teaching and school.” (PC/1)*

When the female teachers were asked regarding the challenges from **Principal C** in leading the school, one of them said,

*“I think she can manage her role at home. Perhaps that was due to her kids being all grown-up. In fact, she has granddaughters already. And her husband is so supportive. Last time I saw her husband, he drove her to work.” (3TF2)*

A female administrative staff member who was quite close to **Principal C** admitted that,

*“I am sure as a career woman we have problems at home. But for the principal, I never saw she mixed up both career and problems at home when she leads the school. Because I am quite close to her, she must have told me if she had problems. I think she also enjoys her family life and that makes it easy to manage the school.” (3AS2)*

However, a female senior teacher in the SLT thought that the challenges of the leadership of **Principal C** was in her relationship with male teachers.

The teacher stated that,

*“Even though male teachers look like laid back individuals, in fact they wanted respect. In appointing leaders, I would prefer male leader because for me, women at some point could not control their emotions which finally will hurt others’ feelings.” (3STF3)*

To explain her perception further, the senior female teacher correlated **Principal C’s** leadership with the pride of male teachers. The teacher said,

*“That is why the words used should be watched; the instructions given should not be in a form that can humiliate male teachers as a male. That is the challenge that determines their cooperation. Cooperation from male teachers is far more difficult to get as compared to cooperation from female teachers... Thus, if male teachers’ cooperation can be tackled, I think it is easier to get support from male teachers.” (3STF3)*

A slightly similar opinion was shared by an officer from the SED. The officer said,

*“Sometimes women principals tend to follow their emotion... Uncontrollable not only in terms of actions but also their mouths. Because I also received a few complaints from teachers as well as parents about words uttered which are uncontrollable by the principal.” (3SEOM1)*

Whether the emotion could limit **Principal C**'s leadership, the officer elaborated that,

*“The emotion does not persist continuously. It depends on the situation. It will not limit her from being a principal. But in certain situations only, not all the time.” (3SEOM1)*

The officer further added that the challenge for the leadership of **Principal C** was more obvious in the principal's gender roles in some of the programmes organised at school. For example, at a secondary religious school there is a practice of praying congregationally that is followed by both male and female students staying at the school hostel. According to Islamic teaching, a woman can only become an *Imaam* (the person who leads the prayer) to the other women but not to men. Referring to this situation, the officer said,

*“When the congregational prayer involved both male and female students, that is where we can see a bit of limitation for the principal to move forward. But if it is only amongst female students there will be no problem... What I can see is if the leadership involves the religious matters, the programmes involving both male and female students, it will allow more chances for her male deputy. In other conditions, I think there will be no issues...” (3SEOM1)*

Although **Principal C** herself did not perceive any challenges regarding gender as work related challenges, it was obvious that some members of staff had certain

expectations towards a woman principal as compared to a man principal. Her lack of self-control alluded to earlier surfaces again where other participants associate this with her gender and an inability to control her emotions. Hence, to know how the subordinates perceive the way a woman principal practises leadership is crucial so that any weaknesses can be addressed accordingly.

For **Principal D** the case was slightly different compared to other women principals in this study. **Principal D** is single while the others were married, having their own families and children and grandchildren. **Principal D** opined that being single was in fact an advantage to her career, as she needed less time at home and had more time to spend at school. But this did not mean that she has no commitments at all at home, as she would sometimes spend time with her extended family who live close to her home.

According to **Principal D**,

*“I am close to my sister’s family whose home is not far from mine. Spending time with my sister’s family was the only family commitment I had at that moment. It did not mean that I had no family commitment at all, but it is less as compared to my married colleagues.”* (PD)

Pertaining to challenges at home, most of the teachers and staff assumed that being single was an advantage to **Principal D**. Even though these opinions were corroborated by the thoughts shared by **Principal D** herself, the way the status of a woman is perceived in this respect should arguably be changed. There are a lot more contributing factors affecting the challenges facing women principals. Relationship or family status can be a part of those challenges for women principals but not as the

main contributing challenges; such perceptions would lead towards the misconception that single women principals should perform better due to fewer commitments.

A female teacher in the focus group said,

*“To be honest we do not know much, or we are not that close to her as she was quite new in this school. But I would say being single is an advantage to her as we could see her at school early in the morning and able to be at the school event anytime of the day. Unless she has meetings; then it is difficult to find her.” (4TF1)*

In a similar vein, a male teacher in the focus group said,

*“She is so hardworking... Hardworking in a sense that she can be around the school anytime she wants, checks on students, teachers and the school surroundings and facilities. I guess because she is single then it is easy for her to perform her duty.” (4TM2)*

#### **4.3.3.2 Concluding Remarks**

It was apparent from the findings that nothing much was shared by the participants pertaining to home related challenges that they faced, arguably, because of their age. The women principals were close to retirement and actually appear to have received more support from their spouses since their children were grown. The teachers could only speculate on the women principals' commitment at home. However, it is noteworthy that commitments at home still emerged among the prominent themes in this study due to the frequent occasions on which they were highlighted by the women principals themselves every time questions about challenges were asked. Significantly, an expectation that women would carry more domestic commitments still

exists together with more stereotypical views about women's emotions. The minimal information shared by the principals on the subject did not mean that the challenges should be ignored. The uniqueness about the challenges at home faced by the participating principals was that **Principals A, B, and C** had already passed the phase of life as wives and mothers which was pressured with young children, whilst the single status of **Principal D** leaves more time for her to spend managing the school. The findings show that this element was an exception as a challenge to the principals in this study, but at the beginning of their principalship it could have been different.

#### **4.3.3.3 Work Related Challenges**

Challenges were reported mostly with regard to work. **Principal A** highlighted that the most challenging part of leading the school was to achieve the KPI set by the Islamic Education Division at the Ministry of Education (MoE), Malaysia. As a religious school, School A was directly accountable to the Islamic Education Division, which had high expectations.

**Principal A** said,

*“For me, the most challenging part is to achieve the KPI set by the Islamic Education Division, the KPI is very high.” (PA/1)*

She further added,

*“Being a recipient of Bai’ah as well as our efforts towards achieving High Performance School status are the two challenges that make us really have to work hard... All the time... School Z [referring to another school in the same area with School A] already received Bai’ah four times. This school?... Only once; in fact, we should have received a few times already. I really have to work hard for this, together with everyone else in this school.” (PA/2)*

The challenge of *Bai'ah* and the High Performance School status is also admitted by the teachers. One of the female teachers in the focus group said,

*"I can see that the principal is stressed about getting Bai'ah every year. The way she always reminds us and the students, I can see she really aims for Bai'ah every year. Furthermore, now we are heading towards High Performance School status, she always compares our school performance and School Z which already received Bai'ah four times."* (1TF3)

Another teacher in the same focus group supported this view:

*"Yes, before I came to this school I already heard how ambitious the principal is, towards Bai'ah and High Performance School status. But I do not think we should blame her and in fact other principals too who are ambitious. They are pressured by those in the higher positions."* (1TF4)

A female student in the focus group said,

*"Our principal's responsibility is very big. She wants to achieve High Performance School status for this school. And now to maintain Bai'ah is not an easy thing. As students, we also feel the pressure. We need to support the principal by getting good grades."* (1SF3)

A representative of the parents said,

*"This principal, I can say that she is very committed towards maintaining the Bai'ah. A lot of efforts were made for Bai'ah. Now the school is heading towards achieving High Performance School status. There are a lot of extra classes organised, so we as parents have to support and make sure our children attend the classes provided. Whilst some have to pay for the extra classes with private*

*teachers, here the school provides it, so we have to grab the chances and support the school at the same time.” (1PF)*

Meanwhile, at School B, **Principal B** said,

*“This school is among the best school in this state. I always want to compete with the Chinese; we want to put our school on a par with other fully residential schools. I want this school to be always at the top. Even though others are fully residential schools and this school is not, so how this school can do better than them? That is my main challenge.” (PB)*

According to a student in the focus group,

*“I can see the principal wants us to succeed in academics. We have Chinese schools around this school; thus, we have to compete with them as they are famous for good achievements.” (2SM2)*

Leading a school which was rated as one of the best schools in the state of Kedah, **Principal B** always hoped to see her school at the top along with other boarding schools even though her school was not a boarding school.

This aspiration of **Principal B** was confirmed by one of the male teachers who said that,

*“This school is a daily-type school, a high performing school but it competes with the boarding schools. That is why it is very challenging.” (2TM2)*

Being one of the recipients of *Bai’ah* from the Ministry, it was a challenge to maintain this status. As *Bai’ah* required academic and non-academic quality, a lot of effort was needed to maintain it.

The pressure to maintain *Bai'ah* was highlighted when **Principal B** said,

*“That [Bai’ah] is really a big challenge... That Bai’ah we already got four times, while out of five fully residential schools in this state, only one of them has received Bai’ah four times in a row... We do have experience, but...”* (PB)

According to one of the male teachers, since *Bai'ah* comprised all aspects of excellence in the school, it was a challenge for **Principal B** to familiarise new teachers with the work culture.

A male teacher in the focus group said,

*“In this school, the excellent work culture was practiced since long ago and the principal is also aware about this as she was a teacher at this school before. Unlike in the past, only a well experienced teacher who had served for 10 years for example will be sent to this school. However, nowadays, due to the increased number of teachers in the teaching profession, the school has to accept new teachers such as fresh graduates... This shows that, in order to maintain the school performance, the principal has to make sure that new and senior teachers are able to work hand in hand.”* (2TM2)

This was confirmed by a new male teacher during the focus group who said that,

*” At the beginning I was quite shocked when I first arrived in this school. In terms of work culture... But when I have been explained to during the course, I can understand the way the teachers here work. One more thing; I can see that teachers here, they seem to know how to do their work without it being explained. That is very different from my previous school. Here, all teachers work - no need to be told again and again in the meeting.”* (2TM5)

Explaining the non-academic excellence at School B, one male teacher said,

*“We have to be ever ready because our school always becomes the benchmark. I can say every month... When people from the Ministry come for the observation, so we have to always ready.”* (2TM1)

When **Principal C** was asked about the challenges in practicing leadership at School C, her response was pertaining to the stakeholders. From her experience of leading two religious schools in West Malaysia, she said that parents in West Malaysia preferred to send their children to those religious schools which had a good reputation in academic achievement. **Principal C** reported,

*“Parents who sent their children to this school are professionals. They know their children’s future direction; they want something. So, when they sent their children to this school, they want their children to excel. In line with that, I want my students to be excellent in academics and personality development, as well as excellent in co-curricular and, one more, soft skills... I know the students in secondary religious schools produced Islamic technocrats, Islamic professionals who later will work as doctors, lawyers. So, I want the students to excel in those four areas I mentioned.”* (PC/1)

According to a female senior teacher,

*“Her challenge is to triumph the school excellence to a better level... When she took over the school leadership, there was something about achievement that the previous principals had already set. So, her challenge is to do better... Our school has been awarded cluster school during the previous principal’s leadership, so the next one is towards a high performing school.”* (3SLTF5)

A similar opinion was voiced by another female teacher in the focus group:

*“We became a cluster school [of excellence] in 2008. This year also it has been announced that this school was awarded cluster school again. So, this achievement shows that our focus now is towards high performing school... One more, the outsiders’ expectation is too high towards our school. Our school in fact is being compared with fully residential schools; nevertheless, there are students in our school who only got 4 As.” (3TF3)*

Another female teacher supported the idea shared by her colleague:

*“It’s the pressure about being recognised.” (3TF4)*

Regarding work related challenges, **Principal D** showed a lot of concern, especially regarding her students. According to **Principal D**, preparing the students according to the aim of education was the most difficult part in leading a school, especially when there are stakeholders they must consider. **Principal D** considered the importance of fulfilling stakeholders’ aims as one of the challenges of leading the school. As **Principal D** was near to her retirement, she was asked what the challenges among the teachers or administrative staff could be, that needed to be addressed, to which she replied that it was largely regarding the unfriendly relationship among the administrative staff.

**Principal D** said,

*“Because in my office there is a bit of strain... How many more days to go (?) [Referring to her retirement] ... I am not sure, it seems like it could not be done... Because if I compare it to my previous office, we were very close... You*

*could talk to each and everyone in the office. But here, it is a bit different.”*

(PD/1)

**Principal D** further added that the relationship she meant was not between the administrative staff and herself, but amongst the administrative staff themselves. The reasons behind **Principal D's** prioritising of a better, closer relationship among the administrative staff could be many. Firstly, owing to the principal's position as a leader, a cordial relationship among her staff members was important for her as it would lead to a better working environment and improved school management. As a result, she had high expectations that all the administrative staff would be close to each other. Secondly, it could also be due to the principal's own preferences to make sure that everyone worked in a comfortable environment. Nonetheless, even though the relationship issue between the administrative staff was of concern to the principal, it did not seem to be a serious matter to others in the school, especially the administrative staff, as none of the staff participants mentioned the relationship issue during the interviews.

Despite the fact that **Principal D** considered shaping the students' attitude as the most difficult challenge, the interview with other participants suggested that most of them were optimistic about the principal's leadership in embracing the challenges in the school. Even though **Principal D** had spent less than two years in School D at the time this study was conducted, most of the participants exhibited positivity while speaking about the way the principal dealt with challenges. Different schools face different challenges; however, being a school with multiracial students and staff, School D might have faced more challenges and issues pertaining to racism.

This was confirmed by **Principal D** as she said,

*“Perhaps the current generation, they cannot be negotiable. If they walk... If among Malay students, they can be friends. But, if they make jokes too much, they cannot stand it, it can lead to fights. That’s Malay. If Chinese, they pass by the stairs and accidentally hit [others]... That will be the cause of their fighting.”*

(PD/1)

**Principal D** further described the races of the students other than Malay, and her personal views towards them,

*“There are Indian, Chinese... The Indian students here are a bit different. They are not many but their naughtiness...”* (PD/2)

A District Education Officer who was also a former teacher at School D, agreed on the fact that the school faced challenges pertaining to racism. According to the officer, the racism in the school was not confined to the students alone; the parents were also involved. The officer said,

*“In School D, there is a culture... The parents like to come to school... Even though for small matters... But they, especially the mothers and the fathers... The Indian and the Chinese.”* (4SEOM1)

The racism issue was observed by the researcher on the day she did her fieldwork at the school. She witnessed some racism among students which became a serious problem, as mentioned by the participants. The day the researcher was supposed to have an interview with the Deputy Principal for Students’ Affairs, she had to keep checking for him at his office because he was not there at the time agreed. When the interview finally took place, the researcher was informed by the deputy principal that earlier on he had had to deal with parents, students and policemen due to a student

fight that had happened at the school. According to the deputy principal, it was the norm to have police cars in the school compound as there were frequent fights among students from different races.

Despite the challenges in involving outsiders such as parents and the community, it was clear that some of the teachers were convinced of **Principal D's** leadership skills. In responding to the question of whether the principal, as a female principal, had any limitations in exercising her leadership, a female teacher in the senior leadership team responded without hesitation saying that,

*“I think she can go [far] even though sometimes there are challenges from male staff...She is still able... To be with them, even though there are males.”*

(4SLTF5)

There was another female teacher who said that the principal's openness in working amongst males was not only shown in her instructions; the way she worked, as well as her appearance during the school assembly for example, strongly exhibited that she was a versatile leader.

A female teacher in the focus group said,

*“She will stand in the middle of males. Because all the deputies are males... During the school assembly... The National anthem, she will be in the middle, left and right are the deputies. If she gives a speech, her speech is enough to represent the deputies. She walks with the disciplinary teacher... If at the sports' room, she is also there. She wears sports attire. She will be at the field. She is an all-rounder.”* (4TF4)

These comments were made in view of some aspects of the Malaysian culture and religion where some female leaders may not be comfortable to work with male leaders. Probably this was due to their own perceptions about teaching of the religion. In Islam for instance, there are some guidelines that a person must adhere to when it comes to the relationship between males and females. And as such, those who misinterpret the guidelines will act inappropriately such as not being willing to work with male-only colleagues, but this was not the case with **Principal D**.

As it was shared by an Indian female teacher,

*“Because of our culture you know... Because of the society, OK I, I am Indian, to me whether male principal, female principal, I do not have a problem... Because I have seen a female principal who is uncomfortable with men, who does not want to handle men. This happened in my... She was a principal... So that is some of them have this thing. But then the instruction from up there said, no, you still have to lead the post as a principal.” (4TF5)*

Whatever thoughts other female principals had about working with males, it seemed like it was not of much concern to **Principal D** and the majority of the school community. Based on what was shared by the participants, it was clear that she was able to work with everyone regardless of their gender.

Throughout the focus group interview with male teachers, the teachers were asked whether gender played any role in the principalship of **Principal D**. One of the male teachers felt that regardless of gender, a principal should be able to control their emotions. A principal cannot be emotional in making decision or in solving any issues happening at the school, as emotions may lead to a wrong decision and make innocent

people guilty. He further added that a principal who was able to control his/her emotions would be a good leader.

When the teacher was asked whether they regarded **Principal D** as emotional, the teacher said,

*“So far it [the principal’s emotion] is controllable.”* (4TM3)

To confirm that gender did not play any roles in principalship, another male teacher said,

*“We are comfortable with the current principal, not because of her gender I guess, but because of her leadership.”* (4TM4)

Throughout the interview with female students, it was clear that the students admired **Principal D’s** leadership which they presumed was quite indistinguishable from a male principal’s leadership. When they were asked to clarify the barriers their principal faced in leading the school, one of the female students said,

*“Naughty students... Looking at a [particular] student we never thought he/she will change. I mean, she [the principal] advises... [They] changed towards good... I mean she [the principal] is strict; she advises the student, the student will follow her advice.”* (4SF2)

#### **4.3.3.4 Concluding Remarks**

It was evident that some of the subthemes pertaining to challenges overlapped with the subthemes of priorities in the leadership of **Principals A, B, C** and **D**. The findings clearly show that there is a close relationship between the challenges and the priorities, in which the aspects that become challenges would also become the

priorities that the participating principals felt needed to be attended to in their leadership.

#### **4.4 Summary of the Chapter**

In summary, the data from all women principals and their role set successfully answered the research questions. In general, all themes highlighted were found to be evident in the leadership of the women principals in this study and in the schools they lead. However, it is noteworthy that the similarities and differences vary in the degree of experience faced by the principals. The following chapter will be on the discussion of findings.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion of the findings in relation to the reviewed literature pertaining to gender and educational leadership. The discussion is presented with the use of the themes that emerged from the findings in which only prominent selected themes are discussed in this chapter. From the discussion of findings, this chapter presents a proposed theory explaining women principals' leadership. The chapter ends with an overview.

#### 5.2 The Pursuit of Excellence

All four women principals were found to have achieved the excellent principal status. Given this finding, it was not surprising therefore, that both academic and non-academic excellence emerged as one of the prominent themes influencing the way the four women principals practised leadership in the secondary schools in Malaysia. History shows that education plays an important role in developing a society. Through its role where education is disseminated, schools are places where tangible difference in achievement could be attained. However, in today's global and competitive world, achievement in education alone is not sufficient in developing outstanding societies. Education should be associated with excellence. According to the National Education Philosophy (NEP), *'Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God'* (Ministry of

Education, n.d.). The NEP clearly shows that today's world requires a holistic approach; intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically, to produce balanced individuals. In this chapter, the first theme emerged from the findings is discussed pertaining to the twofold excellence; academically and non-academically.

### **5.2.1 The Pursuit of Excellence through Academic Approaches**

The findings show that academic excellence was strongly associated with the overall excellence of the schools' achievements. Giving high priority to academic excellence was admitted by all women principals, as well as other participants. The priority towards academic excellence in women principals' leadership was manifested in all aspects of school leadership with very particular attention placed on the teaching and learning processes. Bush (2011) mentioned that instructional leaders prioritise teaching and learning in their educational institutions. In the current study, the priority towards academic excellence was well understood not only by the teachers and management teams, but the importance to attain excellence was instilled in students as well. These findings suggest a strong focus on instructional leadership by the women principals. The findings resonated those from the study of Gentilucci and Mutto which was conducted on men and women principals. Gentilucci and Mutto (2007) emphasised the importance of interactive principals towards the smooth progress of teaching and learning.

All women principals show that the priority towards academic excellence was mainly due to the pressure from the ministry. However, Principal A's personal view pertaining to the Prophetic sayings, *'seeking knowledge is from cradle to the grave'* strongly influenced her role as a woman principal in emphasising academic excellence in School A. This linked the push for excellence to spiritual guidance and prophetic teachings, which amounts to the pursuit of academic excellence for eternity. These

findings are in congruence with the study conducted by Shah (2016), which established that according to the Islamic teaching, seeking knowledge is among the most important responsibilities of a servant (a believer). Principal A's instructional leadership and pursuit of academic excellence was driven by her own intention to always seek knowledge even after she reached her retirement. While the priority of academic excellence in Principal A's leadership was driven by the accountability she had towards the ministry, this was also her own personal drive, seen through the fact that she also achieved the status of excellent principal in her own right. However, while the push for excellence was due to the accountability to the status, it could also be that the status was a motivating factor to the women principals towards a certain kind of leadership. It was apparent that priority was given towards academic excellence in the leadership of women principals in all case studies.

Principal D was some kind of an exception with regards to the accountability and its relation to the school status. Unlike School A, B, and C, School D was the only one that did not have a status of high performance or a Cluster School of Excellence. Even though Principal D admitted that it was challenging for her students to achieve academic excellence based on the students' current performance, academic excellence was still being emphasised in her leadership, as it was also an expectation from society. A norm is established in the society that when school excellence is mentioned, the society tend to relate it with academic excellence. The same level of academic excellence was expected from the excellent principals – excellent principals should aim towards academic excellence. The findings from this study show that, three from four schools; School A, B, and C were awarded with New Deals or *Bai'ah*. In most of the schools in this study, other than the teachers, the same concern was highlighted by most of the students, as well as parents. Court (2005) mentioned that

the two women principal participants in New Zealand went against their ministry's instructions as they focused on the progress of teaching and learning of the students. However, the current study contradicts Court's as none of the women principals were reported to go against the ministry. In fact, some of the subordinates complained that the women principals were very obliging of the superiors i.e. the ministry. This was in view of the workload given to teachers by the principals in compliance with the instructions from the superiors. To conform to the superiors' instructions, the women principals were observed to have less compromise with the subordinates' feelings.

Another status granted by the ministry that led women principals towards prioritising academic excellence was the High Performance School status. Whether the schools were already high-performance or underway to achieve, the status strongly influenced the leadership of women principals in prioritising academic excellence. Most of the participants including the representatives of parents in most of the schools showed their awareness that their principals emphasised academic excellence in order to achieve the High Performance School status. It is shown that, School B - the only school with High Performance School status in this study - practiced a culture pertaining to academic excellence in School B that was in line with the aim included in the Administrative Manual of the school, which is to provide sound knowledge to the students. Awards and status were not the only factors for prioritising academic excellence in the leadership of women principals. However, it could be claimed that both awards and status influenced the women principals' leadership in a way that strengthened the efforts made towards achieving academic excellence.

Throughout the interview with Principal A, she strongly emphasised that the achievement of students in the examinations was determined by the Islamic Education Division at the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, and that it greatly affected the way

Principal A led the school. Even though the aim of the ministry pertaining to students' academic achievement was described by Principal A as very challenging and impossible for the students to achieve, on the positive side the aim strongly contributed towards Principal A's emphasis on academic excellence amongst her students. As compared to non-religious schools, School A was accountable directly to the Islamic Education Division rather than to the State Education Department (SED). However, the pressure should become a positive drive for the school where the school should be more prepared to achieve higher academic excellence. Similar findings were seen in School B that is well known for its students' excellence academically and non-academically. Throughout the interview, a male teacher in School B admitted that being an excellent school, teachers, especially in the management teams, have to constantly be prepared for visits from SED. The current study supported the study of Bencivenga and Elias (2003), which found that excellence was partly assessed through test scores, and in this case the scores were determined by the superior; the Islamic Education Division and the State Education Department.

The findings of the interview with Principal A clearly indicate that the more responsibility placed by the ministry towards the school, the more challenging it became for the women principals to achieve academic excellence. However, despite more challenges that the school had to face, the supports shown by the ministry helped School A to cope with the situation. The current study concurred with the study conducted by Moorosi (2010) that women principals were more comfortable with their principalship when there was more support from the stakeholders.

In sum, the priority of women principals in this study towards academic excellence was strongly influenced by their own perception towards the importance of knowledge and the aim of the education; which was more inclined towards the targets set by the

superiors. Other than that, awards and statuses were also found to be strongly affecting the priorities in women principals' leadership.

### **5.2.2 The Pursuit of Excellence through Non-academic Approaches**

With regards to non-academic excellence, the findings show that there were a few approaches emphasised by the women principals in their leadership such as instilling Islamic values, shaping future leaders, sharing leadership, and promoting teamwork, as well as inculcating soft skills. The women principals in this study realised that for students to be ideally equipped with good academic skills and good manners, to excel in academics alone was not sufficient without excellence in non-academic skills. As such, women principals were completely certain that the process would require both academic and non-academic excellence for the students to excel holistically, in line with the aim of National Education Philosophy (NEP). As there was quite a number of themes emerged from the findings, as well as some of the themes emerged only by case, the discussion on themes in the following section will only cover selected prominent themes, which were shared by all four or most of the women principals in this study.

Non-academic excellence was another priority in all women principals' leadership in this study. Instilling Islamic values, inculcating soft skills, and emphasis on good conduct were among the prominent themes pertaining to non-academic excellence that will be discussed in this section in its relation to the status – excellent principal, high performance, and Cluster School of Excellence, received by the women principals and/or the schools in this current study.

To instill Islamic values, women principals were found to exemplify themselves as role models for students and subordinates. As such, to instill Islamic values amongst

students was not the only effort made with regards to non-academic excellence through words of encouragement, but it was exemplified by the women principals themselves, such as in performing prayers congregationally. A study conducted by Shah (2006a) mentioned that leadership in Islam is about leading towards knowledge, doing good deeds, as well as being the role models. Thus, the findings of this study were in agreement with the study conducted by Shah. This study found that the women principals did not only show their own passion towards any encouragement to the subordinates, but they also acted as role models just so, the actions could inspire others to follow, help the followers to transform their characters, as well as motivate them to enact new behaviours.

Owing to the fact that all women principals in this study were excellent principals, emphasising on good conduct was influenced by their title of excellent principals. It was highlighted by the women principals that the community perceived excellent principals as someone who were able to achieve excellence in every aspect of their leadership. Even though the burden of carrying the communities' pressure could sometimes become a reinforcement for the women principals in their efforts towards achieving non-academic excellence, the misconception of the community should also be corrected since such a perception influenced the way women principals placed priorities in their leadership. The way the community perceived the leadership of women principals contributed towards more challenges in their leadership practices.

Being a woman principal in a school with multiracial students led the women principals to prioritise the disciplinary aspects of the students. Since fights amongst students happened mostly at school, to ensure that the school was a safe place to learn was crucial. Sanders-Lawson *et al.* (2006), found that black women leaders did not only focus on social justice but also took collective responsibility towards making a

difference. The findings of the current study of women principals were similar to Sanders-Lawson *et al.*'s study. In School D for instance, Principal D always involved others, such as parents, or even authorities and the community, such as the policemen, in addressing the disciplinary issues amongst students. However, it is arguable that a more pro-active involvement of the community might help address some of the racist issues that the school and the Principal D were faced with.

Meanwhile, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) said, most women in their study related social justice with their passion to make a difference in students' life. In this current study, it was the same intention desired by Principal D when she prioritised non-academic excellence amongst students as she tried to be fair to those students who did not perform well academically. According to Islamic teachings, everyone is considered as God's vicegerent (Hamzah *et al.*, 2016). Based on the principle of justice and equality, both men and women are considered equal regarding their spiritual, intellectual, and physical potential (Hamzah *et al.*, 2016). This was confirmed in the leadership of Principal D in which the findings show that an understanding towards social justice was understood clearly by the students as it was reiterated by their principal that no one among them was better than the other.

The findings from the document analysis of School Magazine/2014 also highlighted the religious programmes held at School C as one way of training the students to acquire soft skills. Throughout the interviews, it emerged that the principals, as part of their leadership qualities, inculcate the Islamic values in students. The adherence to this inculcation is also due to society's perception. The religious school students are usually assumed by the society as less capable in acquiring soft skills even though they are excellent in academics. Although knowing the perceptions of the society could be realistic measures to understand better what skills and abilities are expected of

young generations, to some extent the society's perceptions are deeply skeptical. Consequently, the society's perceptions could exert more pressure on the leadership of women principals in the religious schools.

Implementing daily rounds during school time was among other priorities of all women principals with regards to non-academic excellence in this study. It was admitted by the women principals, as well as most of the teachers and senior teachers that daily rounds were the best way to ensure students' discipline through a quick reminder or advise as a kind of admonishment on the students' discipline. As such, daily rounds served a crucial purpose in the leadership of women principals as it opened a chance for the women principals to lead interactively while at the same time building good character among the students. These findings are aligned with the study conducted by Gentilucci and Muto (2007) that the principals who interacted more in their leadership had greater influence as compared to those principals who simply stayed in the classrooms. Whilst the study conducted by Gentilucci and Muto focused on the principals' influence on academic achievement, the findings from the interviews of the current study showed the influence on the students' character building through the implementation of women principals' daily rounds. Even though both studies showed the effect of principals' influence in different aspects, most of the participants in both studies confirmed the impacts of the principals being interactive on students. Therefore, apart from influencing academic achievement, as highlighted in the study of Gentilucci and Mutto, the current study contributed towards identifying an additional influence of instructional leadership on students' discipline.

While most of the participants other than the women principals were satisfied with the influence of daily rounds on students' discipline, most of the women principals

expressed their desire for seeing better changes in their students. Principal D who was leading a school with multi-racial students expressed utmost disappointment at the influence of daily rounds towards students' discipline as compared to other women principals. As School D was the only school that was not granted any status, it could be claimed that the lack of status affected the disappointment of Principal D's leadership. Additionally, the excellent principal status of Principal D and her role to lead a school without any status was the most important reason for Principal D trying to achieve non-academic excellence.

The findings show that implementing daily rounds created opportunities for the women principals to exercise more empowerment. Wang *et al.* (2016), who problematised the approach of women principals with regards to empowering staff in a primary school in Singapore, mentioned that the responsibility at school does not belong to the principal alone, but it is shared among the school community. The findings of the current study support the study conducted by Wang *et al.* implying that the absence of leaders should not be a reason for the absence of daily rounds. The findings of the current study show that the role played by women principals to perform daily rounds could still be carried out without them as the responsibility was shared amongst everyone in the schools. As such, the effort to ensure students' discipline through the implementation of daily rounds did not come to a stop in the absence of the women principals. Instead, it appeared to be a shared responsibility within the schools. The current study clearly supported and at the same time extended the study of Wang *et al.* that empowerment was not only a need for primary schools, but also for secondary schools. The act to empower the subordinates was shared by most of the participants in the current study and even the parents.

### 5.3 Leading with Spirituality

There was a strong emphasis on the inculcation of spirituality in the leadership of women principals in this study. The women principals clearly exhibited their beliefs towards the role of spirituality in shaping moral character of the students. Spirituality was not restricted to religious practices only as it was practised by Principal A, but was also included in raising awareness (Ngunjiri, 2010b). The leadership of women principals such as Principal B, C, and D also demonstrated their priority towards spirituality, such as looking at others as equal rather than looking at one as superior to the other, to perform work as an act of worship, as well as promoting teamwork.

According to a study by Hamzah *et al.* (2016), leadership is entrusted in the responsibility of principals and one way to carry out the responsibility is by exemplifying good character. A study by Ahmad (2010) found that the role of an educator is not only confined to teaching good things to the students, but the educators themselves should first portray good characters. The findings of the leadership of women principals in the religious schools are in line with the findings of the studies by Hamzah *et al.* (2016) and Ahmad (2010). In fact, the findings of this study show that when the women principals tried to become role models, it was more than just exemplifying good character physically, but more importantly, exemplifying in a sense of performing spiritual activities as spiritual activities are believed to cause lasting effects.

There were two ways in which women principals in this study communicated their priority towards spirituality amongst subordinates and students. Firstly, by motivating the staff and students using spirituality approach and secondly; by inculcating the spirituality in themselves or in other words by becoming role models. The current study

supported a previous study by Geoff (2004), which mentioned that leaders' influence in practicing leadership covers three main stages, including being a role model. Additionally, the current study not only supported but also extended Geoff's study that for leaders to act as role models, the duty was not only limited to primary schools but also to the students at the secondary schools. Other than that, the current study also supports the study by Hamzah *et al.* (2016), that Muslim leaders practise good moral character themselves. When Hofstede (1998) attested that good moral character was crucial to the followers, as such leaders' characteristics were then crucial in shaping followers' characters. Additionally, women principals who played a dual role of a mother and an educator were more likely to influence the character of students with their own good moral character.

With regards to the influence of the spirituality approach, there was a startling contrast of opinion between Principal B - the only woman principal leading a High Performance School in this study, with the rest of the women principals. Principal B displayed high level of satisfaction about spiritual practice in her school. Whereas, in other schools; School A, C, and D, the women principals were not satisfied with the spiritual practices of their students as yet. The case was more surprising in the religious School A in which Principal A showed high level of commitment towards inculcation of spiritual approach amongst students and subordinates yet did not satisfy with the effects. Moreover, principal D whose school was the only school without any excellence status, exhibited her strong disappointment towards spirituality of her students. There were studies conducted by Fullan (1992) and Shah (2006b) mentioning the relationship of leadership with the culture and context, respectively. Fullan said that leadership differs across nations, while Shah found that the culture and context of leadership were more crucial in multi-ethnic society. Meanwhile, Strachan (2012) found that the leadership

of women principals in her study depended on two factors, which were personal value system and school context. Referring to the previous study of Strachan (2012), Shah (2010) and Fullan (1992), the current study extended the findings that a failure to influence the students was most probably due to the failure of the principals to understand the culture and context of where the leadership was exercised in this study.

Neal *et al.* (1999) relate spirituality with transformation and asserted that transformation is uncontrollable by the practitioner and unreachable through logic. This is supported by Reave (2005), who argued that leaders could set changes but the actual transformation is determined by God. Findings of the current study concurred with the findings of Neal *et al.* (1999)'s and Reave's (2005) studies, that even though most of the women principals in this study displayed high level of commitment towards inculcating spirituality amongst students, the influence was not yet visible. Since spirituality and transformation are uncontrollable (Neal *et al.*, 1999) and determined by God (Reave, 2005), the inculcation of spirituality was arguably challenging and was an arduous process, especially for women principals whose roles were very demanding.

Other than inculcating spirituality among the students, high priority was also given to the spirituality of the subordinates in the leadership of women principals in this study. Given that the teachers' influence was strong in shaping students' moral character, the priority towards spirituality among the subordinates was treated as a means towards influencing the students' moral character. Hamzah *et al.* (2016) stated that according to Islamic teaching, everyone is a leader and all leaders are considered followers to others. The current study, thus, supported the study of Hamzah *et al.* (2016), as teachers who were followers to the women principals, were at the same

time considered as leaders for their students. Therefore, the responsibility of inculcating spirituality among each other was not only the sole responsibility of the women principals; rather it was a shared responsibility. Bush's (2011) notion of collegial leadership, which is similar to shared leadership, emphasised that power and decision making should be shared with other members in the organisations. The current study clearly supported Bush's notion and additionally extended the understanding that sharing was not about power and decision-making only but included the practical aspects in which in this case, the women principals had to exemplify acts related to spirituality.

In sum, the findings pertaining to priority given to spirituality in the leadership of women principals in this study show some features of commonalities between religious and non-religious schools. The notion of spirituality in leadership was not only acknowledged by the women principals, but also by other participants in this study. Other than that, the religious education background and the religious school ethos could be seen as underpinning the priorities of women principals' leadership in most religious schools.

#### **5.4 Unity through Togetherness/*Kebersamaan***

*Kebersamaan* is a Malay word that means togetherness. Throughout the interviews and observation, it was apparent that togetherness/*kebersamaan* was prioritised by all women principals in this study. Togetherness/*kebersamaan* as explained by the participants, is the state of being together both in the schools as well as outside, spiritually; praying for the wellness of others, and physically; through helping each other. Togetherness/*kebersamaan* was manifested within and outside the schools. Inside the school, togetherness/*kebersamaan* was strengthened through the relationship of the women principals with the staff and students. Meanwhile, outside

the school, togetherness/*kebersamaan* was strengthened through the relationship of those inside the schools with the superiors and local community. Additionally, togetherness/*kebersamaan* was not only about helping each other during difficult times but also during good times. Togetherness/*kebersamaan* was not only evidenced by its manifestation in the women principals but it was well-accepted by the staff, students, and parents. For instance, students showed their understanding about togetherness/*kebersamaan* through helping each other in achieving academic and non-academic excellence.

In the Malaysian culture, togetherness/*kebersamaan* is the foundation of unity and strength, which depict a sense of caring for each other towards the achievement of goals. When unity, strength, and caring are present, the feeling of one's superiority over others is diminished and what prevails is working together towards the smooth running of the school. In this sense, the success of the schools is not the responsibility of the principals alone, but rather a collective responsibility of everyone inside and outside the schools. As such, it was important for everyone working with the women principals in this study, to be willing to work together towards their achievement of school goals. The findings from the interviews with the women principals in this study indicate that the previous successes achieved in their schools were mainly due to the spirit of togetherness/*kebersamaan* shown by parents.

The way women principals in this study performed leadership supported the study conducted by Ngunjiri (2010a) particularly with regards to the concept of humanness/*ubuntu* that concerns human relationships. The concept of *ubuntu* brings similar orientation to the leadership of women principals in this study when acts such as wishing for birthdays, as well as visiting the ill and deceased became a significant practice of all women principals in their leadership. However, the

togetherness/*kebersamaan* that is similar to humanness in the *ubuntu* concept has much deeper in meaning. The togetherness/*kebersamaan* intended in the leadership of women principals in this study embodies the concept that everyone could be united through their similarities and differences. Through the togetherness/*kebersamaan*, religions became the source of uniting the subordinates, which is manifested through most of the religious obligations. For instance, in religious schools, students are united through performing congregationally prayers. Whereas, through the *ubuntu* togetherness/*kebersamaan* means to unite by appreciating differences identified in each other. For instance, in non-religious schools, even though the students came from different backgrounds, religions and social status, their rights towards education was treated equally. In School D for instance, to ensure a healthy academic competition among students, Principal D reminded them that they were all equal and none were superior to the others. Strachan (2012) and Hall (2002) in their study on women principals and head teachers in New Zealand and the United Kingdom, respectively, attempted to create a fairer learning environment for the students. The current study conformed to the study of Strachan and Hall that there was gender influence on the priority towards education and social justice among the women principals. The current study is also similar to the study by Hamzah *et al.* (2016) that since everyone is God's vicegerent, and based on the principles of justice and equality, both men and women are considered equal regarding their spiritual, intellectual, and physical potential (Hamzah *et al.*, 2016).

Togetherness/*kebersamaan* thus appeared to be important in the attainment of academic excellence in all women principals' leadership in this study especially those leading High Performance School and the Cluster School of Excellence. The efforts made by all women principals show that the attainment of academic excellence was

not the sole responsibility of the principal but indeed it should be borne together. As suggested by Chin (2004, p. 4), the desire towards prioritising togetherness/*kebersamaan* and to be less individualistic was in building collegiality and “shared leadership” amongst subordinates and not the leaders alone. According to Bush (2011), the collegial model emphasises that power and decision-making should be shared among some or all members of the organisations. As such, this current study has proven that women principals prioritised collegiality and shared leadership in order to attain school excellence through togetherness/*kebersamaan*. In addition to this, the current study has extended the idea of collegiality introduced by Bush that togetherness/*kebersamaan* was not only built by those inside the organisation but was also fostered by parents’ involvement in most of the school programmes. In relation to this study, the togetherness/*kebersamaan* was confirmed by parents themselves through their involvement in school programmes.

The religious aspects in the spirit of *kebersamaan*/togetherness in the leadership of all women principals involved in this study were found to be prevalent. Tajaddini and Mujtaba (2009) found in their study that Malaysian culture is shaped by the most practiced religions in Malaysia; Buddhism and Islam, as well as the concepts within these religions. The findings from the religious schools in this study show that the strong Islamic ethos was a significant factor in relation to togetherness/*kebersamaan* in the leadership of Principals A and C. Rather than emphasising the concept of togetherness/*kebersamaan* physically, the findings indicate that the emphasis in two of the religious schools in this study; Schools A and C were more on spiritual approaches, such as instilling Islamic values through congregational prayers, Quranic recitations, and religious programmes held in the schools. It is shown from the interviews that most of the participants believed that values embedded in the spiritual

approaches would be able to shape the attitudes of students towards togetherness/*kebersamaan*.

The way all women principals in this study inculcated the sense of togetherness/*kebersamaan* started with a simple gesture was a common theme found throughout this study. Women principals' simple gestures could be seen from their birthday wishes to the staff and students, and home visits for those who were ill and deceased including the staff's and students' families, as well as some members of the local communities. These actions concurred with the study conducted by Kennedy (2002), which found that the tendency of humane orientation such as concern towards others, tolerant when making mistakes, as well as friendly and being sensitive towards others lead to collective rather than personal satisfaction. The findings of this study concurred with Kennedy's that the togetherness/*kebersamaan* through thoughtfulness as explained earlier was to inculcate a sense of caring towards each other.

Other than motivating subordinates towards togetherness/*kebersamaan*, the women principals in this study had their own way of positioning themselves in creating togetherness. Subordinates in all schools agreed that all women principals had high levels of commitment to be together in school-related programmes. It was admitted by most of the participants, including the principals themselves, that to position themselves as role models in practising togetherness/*kebersamaan* was not a barrier in exercising leadership. Hofstede (2001), in his study, found Individualism as the degree to which a person assimilates in a group. Individualism is when people in the society have loose ties with each other, while collectivism is when people integrate into a strong group and protect themselves with loyalty. The findings regarding togetherness/*kebersamaan* displayed in the leadership of the women principals supported the study of Hofstede that gender influenced the idea of collectivism. It could

be seen that women principals in this study interacted with others by positioning themselves more towards collectivism.

All in all, togetherness/*kebersamaan* appeared to be among the priorities in the leadership of women principals in this study. Togetherness/*kebersamaan* was the priority given to the relationship between the women principals with those inside and outside the school in which at the same time to ensure equality between each other regardless of their diversity.

## **5.5 Interaction and Support Available for Attainment of Excellence**

The findings show that various factors affected the attainment of excellence in the leadership of women principals in this study, including the interactions of women principals with people who they work with, and the support they received and provided. Based on the findings, the interaction and support available for attaining excellence in the leadership of all women principals could be found at two different levels; personal and professional.

### **5.5.1 Interaction and Support at Personal Level**

With regards to personal aspects, supports from the family and people close to the principals, such as the circle of friends, were important to the women principals in this study. Principal D highlighted that the presence of supports from the circle of friends and family were always needed. The supports from the circle of friends from the previous schools for instance, became more important when the principal was relatively new in the current school, such as in the case of Principal D. Among the important sources of support are the ones from the people who the principals work with, especially when the principals were undergoing school transfers and change of roles. The finding reaffirmed the study of Al-Ahmadi (2011) with regards to changing

roles of women principals in Saudi Arabia that understanding and support from others are crucial to help women principals perform their leadership.

Meanwhile, the absence of family-related barriers, highlighted by the women principals throughout the interviews, allowed more time for them to be dedicated for school leadership related matters. In addition, it was important to deal professionally in differentiating roles at home and school as focusing only on one role or juggling between both may interfere with the role of the women principals at schools. Due to this, to receive full support and understanding from spouses and family members was deemed crucial. The findings of this study show that the support available at personal level was an advantage for women principals to nourish their professional levels or to be exact, their leadership practices.

### **5.5.2 Interaction and Support at Professional Level**

One of the prominent commonalities in this current study is that all women principals, regardless of those leading religious or non-religious schools, were found to have good interaction and received sufficient support from people who they worked with. Having good interaction was one of the factors enabled the women principals to easily receive supports from the subordinates. Good relationship between schools and parents for instance, was among the themes that run through the study and affected the attainment of academic excellence. The findings of the interviews show that good relationship between schools and parents enabled more supports received from parents for schools to run both academic and non-academic programmes. One of the most noticeable supports from parents is shown in the leadership of Principal B where most participants see the supports as overwhelming whenever academic or non-academic programmes were run locally or internationally. The findings show an

agreement between the current study and the study conducted by Ng and Szeto (2016). The study of Ng and Szeto that looked at the relationships between Newly Appointed Principals' (NAPs) and parents clearly show that the Hong Kong society valued highly the relationship among each other. In relation to the current study, a similar situation was found under the lead of Principal B where parents came to support as volunteers in most programmes organised by the school.

A study conducted by Wang *et al.* (2016) indicated that the success of principals leading a primary school is determined by two factors; internal and external qualities, in which the external qualities include the support from the stakeholders. With regards to the support shown in the current study, the findings indicate that the supports from the superior, the ministry, was satisfactory. Whilst there was hardly a disclosure on financial support received from the ministry shared by the participants, most of the support highlighted was in the form of involvement of the officers from the ministry in the programmes organised by the schools. The finding of the current study is similar to the study by Young and Cardno (2015) conducted in New Zealand, which found the importance of maintaining regular contacts between mentors and principals. However, the support provided by the stakeholders for the primary schools and secondary schools could still be debatable as different levels of schooling might require different types of support.

Leading a school with students from different backgrounds has its own challenges. Students' disciplinary problems were among the challenges as there were sometimes fights occurred among students resulted from their different racial backgrounds. In this regard, Principal D for instance, made monitoring students' discipline as a collective responsibility by every teacher in the school. The effort taken by the principal

corresponded with the study conducted by Jones and Harris (2014) that to improve school performance should not be the responsibility of the principals alone. The actions taken by Principal D in welcoming students' diversity were in line with the suggestions proposed by Shah (2016). According to Shah, fights should always be addressed fairly without taking any sides but by collaborating with parents, disciplinary teachers, and the authorities. Rather than focusing on solving the students' disciplinary problem alone, diversity among students was always acknowledged by Principal D. This is in line with the findings of Shah's study, which stated that according to Islamic teaching, diversity should be acknowledged and differences should not be a reason for segregation.

The findings also show that the women principals, along with the school management team, put a lot of effort to solve disciplinary problems. This included inviting parents to work together with the school, implementing daily rounds, as well getting help from the police officers to deal with more serious disciplinary cases. The actions taken by the women principals confirmed the study conducted by Jones and Harris (2014) in which the more the challenges are in educational excellence, the more that the responsibility in schools should be shared, even though the principals admitted themselves that it was their responsibility alone to bring changes in others (Jones *et al.*, 2015). The women principals' emphasis on disciplinary problems also aligns with the aim of Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013-2025. The blueprint clearly states that a strong sense of inclusiveness could be achieved by understanding and embracing diversity.

In sum, achieving non-academic excellence became one of the priorities in the leadership of women principals in this study. Most of the findings show that the attainment of non-academic excellence was synonymous with leading by examples.

Good leaders must lead by example. When leaders walk their talk, they make others want to follow them. Unlike the individualist society, the collectivist society in Malaysia emphasises the construction of skills as the purpose of education (Hofstede, 2001). This situation is deemed crucial since today's students are the future leaders of a more challenging world. Students must be equipped with non-academic excellence as academic excellence alone is not sufficient.

## **5.6 Proposed Theory of Women Principals' Leadership**

The overarching question on the issues and factors affecting the leadership of women principals in secondary school principalship in Malaysia is answered through the researcher's attempt to theorise the leadership practice of women principals in the study.

The proposed theory reflects the research themes emerging from the four case studies of women principals in the secondary schools in Malaysia and highlights the interaction between issues and factors shaping the women principals' leadership. To date, hardly any studies have been conducted to understand female school leadership in Malaysia. As such, theorising women principals' own way of practising leadership in secondary schools in Malaysia is deemed crucial in this study. The proposed theory for this study comprises three important components in the leadership of all women principals, which were excellence, spirituality, and togetherness/*kebersamaan*.

Excellence was found to be the top most priority for women principals and influenced the way the principals practise leadership in this study. Two forms of excellence were prioritised in the leadership, namely academic and non-academic excellence (Ministry of Education, 2015). Excellence in academics included the academic attainment of students in schools and most importantly in the national examinations. On the other

hand, non-academic excellence comprised inculcating Islamic values, soft skills, and good conduct. Prioritising both academic and non-academic excellence was a deliberate attempt to shape the students in line with the National Education Philosophy in Malaysia, which emphasises the holistic development of individuals.

Other than the previously mentioned reasons for achieving excellence, women principals in this study are also influenced by their personal achievement as principals, as well as external pressures. Internal pressure dealt with the achievement of the principals and could be categorised into 1) the attainment of excellent principal status, 2) leading High Performance School, 3) leading Cluster Schools of Excellence, as well as 4) securing the New Deal or *Bai'ah*. Meanwhile the external pressures are shaped by the perceptions of the society about the schools and towards the way women principals practise leadership.

In terms of personal achievement, all women principals in this study were the recipients of excellent principals' status from the ministry. It is perhaps important to recap that the study initially did not set out to study women principals with an excellent status award. Of the four women principals, one was leading a High Performance School status, two were leading Cluster Schools of Excellence, while the last one was leading a school without any status. Other than that, three out of four women principals received a prestigious *Bai'ah* award from the ministry.

Given these awards and statuses, it was not surprising that excellence was a key priority for the women principals. Looking at the priority given by all of them towards academic excellence, there is a possibility that the aim towards excellence is attributable to the status they hold, as principals, as well as the status of the schools. The status not only serves as a catalyst towards achieving and improving excellence

for the schools, but at the same time as an obligatory burden for holding the position. For the excellent principals leading excellent schools, such as the High Performance Schools and the Cluster Schools of Excellence, the pressure of maintaining the status may not be very intense. However, for excellent principals leading non-excellent schools, it could probably be very challenging as the students are not the same as those who are selected for High Performance Schools and Cluster Schools of Excellence. Therefore, for women principals with the excellent principals' status, performing leadership could be more challenging especially when the school they lead is not an excellent school. In this regard, it is arguable whether the performance of the excellent principals should be judged using the same criteria for those leading High Performance School, Cluster School of Excellence, or schools which received *Bai'ah*.

It was evident from the findings of this study that the external pressures that women principals encountered were sometimes more challenging than their personal challenges. Education has become very competitive and as a result, students are always expected to perform well in academics. As such, the schools must prepare for assessments, visits, and instructions from the superiors. Being consistently monitored by the superiors regarding the teaching and learning process, as well as the monitoring after the announcement of the national examinations for instance, adds up to the challenges that women principals have to face.

Moreover, women principals' leadership is also affected by external pressures, such as the way the society perceives school excellence. Nowadays, academic excellence has become the focal point of the society rather than non-academic excellence. Even though the women principals have their own 'ways of doing things' or perform their role, they sometimes could not avoid conforming to the society's perceptions and

succumbing to the ministry's pressure, which finally becomes burden to the way they practise leadership because what the society perceives may not necessarily be correct or good for the schools and what the ministry desires is experienced differently on the ground.

Since academic excellence alone is not sufficient to face the challenging world, non-academic excellence becomes a second priority in the women principals' leadership. In particular, the inculcation of Islamic values, the instilment of soft skills, and the maintenance of student discipline emerge as significant. Other than non-academic excellence complementing academic excellence, non-academic excellence is important in its own right as it is a way of providing opportunity to students who do not perform well in academics, thus ensuring students' holistic development. As such, even when they fail to succeed academically, students would still have an opportunity to be successful and stand out in non-academic ways.

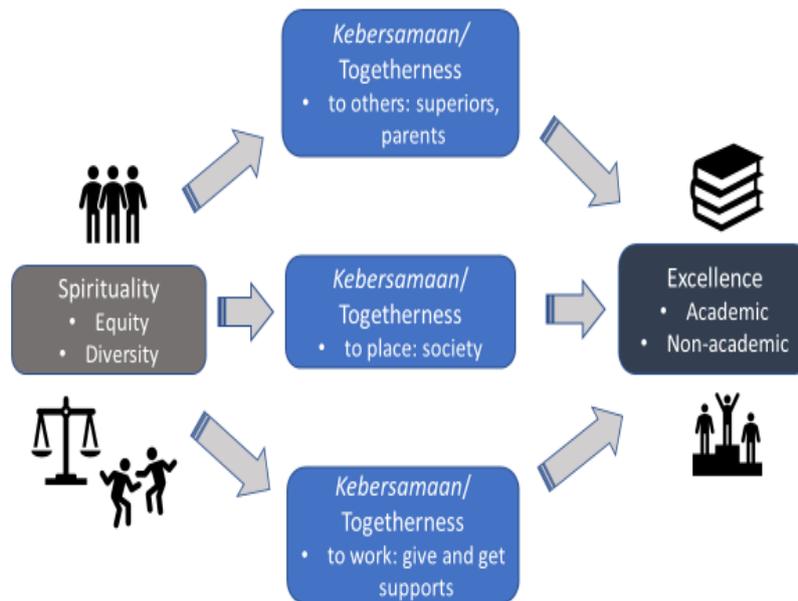
The emphasis on inculcating leadership characteristics by women principals is traceable to both teachers and students. While inculcating leadership qualities among teachers, empowerment and sharing are found to be practised a great deal as they provide an opportunity for the teachers to perform their leadership roles. The teachers, for instance, are empowered by attending meetings with the superiors in place of their women principals. Having these opportunities allows the teachers to exercise the leadership skills without being reliant on the women principals. This becomes both an act of building leadership capacity and distributing leadership.

One way to ensure students' discipline is through performing school daily rounds. All women principals in this study were found to exercise daily rounds almost every day as and when they found it necessary. Daily rounds according to the women principals

is among the best ways to mitigate bad behaviour, monitor students' activities, and the quickest way to correct their misbehaviour. This means that for women principals, daily rounds did not only serve as a way of correcting the students' behaviour but also as a way of preventing the misbehaviour from happening.

This discussion above shows that the key priority for women principals was attaining and maintaining excellence, both academically and non-academically. Since the process of attaining excellence involves the whole school system, people from inside and outside the school are also affected by the way women principals practice leadership in this study. To further explain how women principals practise leadership, the following section will discuss the priorities of women principals in relation to factors affecting the attainment of excellence and how they achieve excellence. The values incorporated throughout the process will also be highlighted. Therefore, the explanation below will attempt to theorise the leadership of women principals in secondary schools in Malaysia.

**Figure 5.1: Proposed Theory of Women Principals' Leadership in Malaysia**



Following the previous discussion on the key priorities given to excellence by the women principals, this section will explain how the attainment of excellence takes place in the leadership of women principals in this study. Figure 5.1 shows three key priorities that determine the leadership of women principals, which are excellence, togetherness/*kebersamaan*, and spirituality. Other than the three key priorities, there are values associated with every key priority. Spirituality is associated with the equity and diversity, togetherness/*kebersamaan* is associated with the three levels of how women principals perform their interaction, namely; togetherness with others (i.e. how women principals interact with others such as superiors and parents), togetherness with place (i.e. how women principals interact with the society) and togetherness with work (i.e. how women principals provide and receive support).

Of the three priorities, excellence is the ultimate priority that women principals have to attain in their leadership in this study due to the factors affecting attainment of excellence, such as those explained in the previous section. For excellence to be attained, the presence of the other two key priorities, which is spirituality and togetherness, are a must so that the process of leadership could be performed accordingly.

Spirituality is found to affect the attainment of excellence in the leadership of women principals in this study in a significant way. Spirituality emphasises the practice of good values. Taking the analogy of constructing a house, spirituality serves the role of the pillars. Pillars are the foundation of a house and the source of strength for the whole house. Similarly, spirituality serves as a foundation for the presence of togetherness and the attainment of excellence. At the same time, spirituality is also the source of strength for these two other values; togetherness and excellence. If spirituality is strongly established, it will lead towards a strong togetherness/*kebersamaan* and finally determine the attainment of excellence. Spirituality in the leadership of women principals in this study serves as the strength (Koney *et al.*, 2008) and the ability to change towards good and to push forward especially during difficult times. For women principals in religious schools for instance, the priority on the inculcation of spirituality is performed through religious obligations, such as congregational prayers. Whereas, in non-religious schools the priority is more on the inculcation of moral values such as sharing and helping each other. Principal A placed her key priority on spirituality in her school through the inculcation of Islamic values - congregational prayers with the students - as she believes, by spending time in spiritual activities with students, she will have more opportunity to correct her students' behaviour, as well as getting to know them closer.

Koney *et al.* (2008) mentions that spirituality is a way to stay connected with others, and when the concept of spirituality is achieved, it will create a sense of responsibility towards each other. In the leadership of women principals in this study, spirituality is not only about building relationships. It leads to the process of unity among students of multiracial backgrounds. In one of the case studies where students from different backgrounds always got into fights with each other, the role of spirituality is to create an awareness among students that everyone is equal and therefore every student deserves to be treated equally and with respect (equity).

Other than that, spirituality in this study is a source of motivation. Students in School B, for instance, were always advised by Principal B that there is no difference between students who perform well and those who do not, since those who did not perform well in one subject, might perform better in another. As such, when students feel that they are equal, they feel more motivated towards helping each other. Reave (2005) explained that spirituality is a good source of motivation that strengthens the satisfaction and productivity at work. Owing to the excessive workload of teachers nowadays, it is imperative for the principals to strengthen their spiritual approach so that the subordinates feel motivated as this increases their job satisfaction.

Despite its importance and influence, spirituality is not easily measured especially when it is linked to religious obligations. Similar case is evident from the leadership of Principal A when full commitments towards inculcating spirituality are given to school but their effect is not yet seen according to the principal. However, since spirituality can be nourished, consistent inculcation will show a better impact. Regardless of its impact, in terms of its role, spirituality is a good starting point to drive towards the

foundation of the second priority of women principal in this study, which is togetherness/*kebersamaan*.

Togetherness/*kebersamaan* as experienced by the participants, is about being with others in performing school related tasks, aimed towards the attainment of excellence. In other words, leadership does not work one way, but it is a reciprocal process that requires everyone to get involved in the school system to stay together and work together towards achieving the goal of excellence. As such, togetherness represents a clear importance of reciprocal relationship between women principals and those they work with. In sum, the concept of togetherness is significant and exists in the leadership of women principals in this study at three levels which are; 1) the togetherness between women principals and others such as the ministry. 2) the togetherness between women principals and the place where they work; which means how the women principals benefit from and give back to the society, and 3) the togetherness of women principals at work; which represents the collectiveness of women principals in providing and getting support in practising leadership.

In terms of togetherness/*kebersamaan* between women principals and others; the ministry and parents, it is evident that there is a good interaction between both parties. Support and interaction were always available as acknowledged by the women principals themselves and the ministry officers. The ministry provide supports by sending their representatives to attend the programmes organised by school. As such, the relationship is strengthened whenever a programme is held. Meanwhile, in terms of togetherness/*kebersamaan* with parents, the women principals in this study involved the parents to participate in school programmes. In this study, School B had an exemplary togetherness/*kebersamaan* with parents.

In terms of togetherness/*kebersamaan* between women principals and the place or the society, all women principals were found to have good interactions with the society and the local community around the school. Sending students to join communal events was one way to instill into the students the concept of togetherness/*kebersamaan*, in order to maintain a good relationship with the society. In return, it was found that the society also required the participation from the students in religious programmes involving the local community around the school. Chin (2004, p. 4) concluded that women tend to use consensus building to set direction and this has been labelled by some theorists in leadership as “shared leadership”. What is evident from women principals’ leadership in this regard is that, the responsibility is shared not only within the school but also with those outside the school.

Hofstede (1998) said, a collectivist society is where people are integrated into a strong group and they protect each other with loyalty. The findings of this study clearly showed that the women principals’ leadership was highly collectivist due to strong ties between all the three components of togetherness/*kebersamaan* manifested in their relationship with others, with work, and place. As Hofstede further adds, understanding cultural differences, variations among attitudes and leadership styles are important to achieve the success of nations. This means, to maintain togetherness/*kebersamaan* with the people they work with, it is important for the women principals to know every single component, such as culture, attitudes, and personal interests that are related to their leadership.

The inclusion of the three components of excellence, spirituality, and togetherness/*kebersamaan* in the proposed theory of factors shaping the way women principals in secondary schools in Malaysia practise leadership corroborates with the importance of every component. These components are complementary and

interdependent. The important roles of every component are interrelated and as such, there is no component that overshadows the roles of the other. Hence, giving the same emphasis on every component is pertinent towards the leadership of women principals as shown in this study.

Other than the equal importance of spirituality and togetherness/*kebersamaan*, there is a subtle difference between how both components are placed and functioned in the leadership of women principals. While the presence of spirituality is from within oneself and driving them towards excellence, the presence of togetherness/*kebersamaan* is regarded as more holistic and lingering across the whole process of leadership. Spirituality represents sustainability, while togetherness/*kebersamaan* represents collectiveness towards excellence. This depicts an accurate picture of leadership as experienced and practiced by women principals in the Malaysian culture.

The study proposes this theory of the way women principals practise leadership in four secondary schools in Malaysia and is reflected by the contexts of the women principals' leadership of this study. Even though the study includes only four women principals' multi case studies, it is hoped that the proposed theory would be applicable to and would represent the practice of leadership by women principals in other similar contexts worldwide.

## **5.7 Summary of the Chapter**

The discussion provides the explanation of three priorities in women principals, which are excellence, spirituality, and togetherness/*kebersamaan*. Spirituality is important for creating togetherness/*kebersamaan* and as such, spirituality is seen as a means and not an end in itself. Whilst the function of the spirituality is to provide a strong foundation for togetherness/*kebersamaan*, the function of the

togetherness/*kebersamaan* instead, is to maintain the interaction and supports towards women principals' leadership in achieving excellence.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter is a recapitulation to the research questions guiding this study. This involves an attempt to directly answer the research questions and provide conclusions from the findings of the study. The chapter also includes the contribution of the research; theoretically and empirically, recommendations, as well as the limitation that may suggest opportunities for further research. The final section of this chapter is a personal reflection of the researcher.

#### **6.2 Summary of the Research Findings**

Summary of the research findings is the key findings of the study. In the following section, the key findings are explained according to the research questions.

##### **6.2.1 What key priorities determine the leadership of women principals?**

This study found that excellence (academic and non-academic) was a key priority for all women principals. This priority is determined by their accountability to the ministry, which entails a fulfilment to the aim and aspiration of attaining academic excellence. As such, of all other aspects, teaching and learning with its related aspects was always given more attention by the women principals. Besides what appeared to be a mandate from the ministry, the school's high performance was strongly influenced by the community's high expectations, due to the schools' various statuses of excellence. In addition, women principals were also found to be holding titles of excellent principals. These titles, together with the different statuses held by the schools, directly

influenced the women principals' priority towards academic excellence, regardless of how good or bad the level of academic attainment of the schools was. It is not an overstatement to say, in achieving students' academic excellence, these excellent women principals carried the burden and pressure of others' high expectation towards their role.

The expectations to achieve academic excellence towards women principals, with excellent principal title, are more apparent in the school that did not receive any awards - be it Cluster School of Excellence or High Performance School status. A probe in the leadership of excellent woman principal in academically non-excellent school provides a platform for a stronger sense of accountability and burden to be revealed. The pressure to fulfil the expectations of one's superiors, as well as subordinates, and the community towards academic excellence is felt more by the woman principal holding the title of excellent principal in a non-excellent school, which is in this study - Principal D.

The findings suggest that spirituality is another priority that shapes and influences the leadership of women principals. Apart from only inculcating the spiritual values in staff, most of the women principals in this study show that the inculcation starts with their own selves. The acts of modelling the aspects regarding spirituality is apparent in the leadership of most women principals in this study, especially women principals in religious schools (Principal A and C). Cultivating spirituality is challenging but believing in the idea that spirituality could be nourished, women principals in this study ensure that acts, such as performing congregational prayers with the students, become a routine. It is hoped that by doing it in such a way, a good example could be set for the students. The priority towards spirituality is not only confined towards religious acts

but also towards any act of kindness. Thus, spirituality is not an end in itself, but its presence leads towards other aspects, such as excellence; academically and non-academically.

### **6.2.2 In pursuing the priorities, how do the women principals interact with stakeholders and what values guide them?**

It is noticeable from the leadership of women principals that the goals are accomplished through collaborative vision or relational leadership. In other words, the goals are accomplished through the presence of those who the women principals work with. As such, the interactions of women principals with others and their togetherness within and outside the schools play an important role in the leadership of women principals in this study. In pursuing the priorities in leadership and to achieve togetherness, the acts of the women principals are articulated even through small gestures, such as wishing birthdays. This becomes among the normal practices for all women principals upon their subordinates.

In expressing thoughts towards others, it is not only limited to subordinates that women principals work with inside the school, but they also express their thoughts to those outside the schools, such as parents and the local community. This is achieved by the women principals themselves or/and teachers paying home visits to students' parents or sending students as representatives for the schools to religious programmes organised by the community around the school. Other than that, involving parents in some of the school curricular activities is also a way of how the women principals ensuring good parent-teacher relationships by acknowledging the parents' participation in their children's affair. Good relationship between schools and parents is found to be an advantage for the school in communicating school related issues,

such as how can schools and parents work together in order to achieve students' academic excellence. This clearly shows that the interaction between women principals and the stakeholders is based upon shared or collegial leadership in which the women principals share their thoughts that are directed by consensus in setting a leading direction.

Furthermore, good interaction is also found to be significant between women principals and the stakeholders in this study. Establishing collaborative relationship between school and parents is found to be crucial for women principals to maintain good interactions. Involving parents in the students' related programmes was always encouraged by the schools and the involvement of parents creates huge opportunities for women principals to maintain the interactions with parents. By creating this opportunity, the women principals will involve others in the school activities, simultaneously breaking out the racism among students and subordinates, as well as underscore the value of inclusion, in which the racism and diversity could be part of hindrances in the way women principals practise leadership.

School issues, such as academic performance, discipline, and inter-racial conflicts could also be resolved through a good interaction built between school and the stakeholders.

In sum, the leadership of women principals emphasises more on reaching the community and interacting with them within and outside the school through the concept of togetherness.

The concept of togetherness or '*kebersamaan*' is thus, very significant in the leadership of women principals in this study. The priority towards being together does not only maintain amongst the principal and those inside the school but also outside

the school whom their relations are direct such as the superiors, as well as indirect such as the local community. Togetherness provides a platform for all women principals in this study to practise empowerment towards their subordinates, while at the same time strengthen the relationship among each other. While togetherness in religious schools is achieved through most of the religious activities, the non-religious schools, a melting pot of different religions and races, also provide a platform for the women principals to give priority towards togetherness. For instance, togetherness can be achieved through the process of safe guarding the equality of multiracial students and their families. Women principals leading non-religious schools are also found to put extra efforts to make sure learners feel equal, regardless of their gender or races.

In sum, the interactions between women principals and all parties, such as the superiors, subordinates, parents, and students are shown as positive in most of women principals' leadership in this study. The interactions clearly show that there is a presence of togetherness in the leadership of women principals.

### **6.2.3 What kind of support exists towards women principals' success and attainment of their priorities and what support do women principals provide?**

Women principals in this study agree that the support received from the ministry as always sufficient and encouraging. Meanwhile, the ministry establishes the support for women principals' success and attainment of their priorities through the presence of the ministry officers at programmes organised by the schools. Similar information was sought from the interviews conducted with the ministry officers that most of the women principals are always appreciative of the representatives from the ministry attending the programmes organised. This is one of the indicators that women principals in this

study receive sufficient and motivating supports from the ministry towards their success and the attainment of their priorities. As such, in accomplishing their priorities in leadership, most of the women principals are fully supported by their superiors.

With regards to support from parents, women principals expressed their full satisfaction towards the supports provided. Principal B for instance, always receives motivating supports from parents especially when the students are going for school programmes internationally. Supports from parents always come in a form of financial, expertise, and even energy. Supports from parents could also be found in parents attending programmes organised by the schools, especially programmes related to academic excellence. Religious programmes that are normally held in conjunction with the preparation for the students' national examinations normally receive positive supports from parents in which this is shown through their attendance to the programme. Overall supports received from parents are positive for women principals' leadership. However, as opposed to financial support, most of the schools in this study is initially in need of more physical support rather than financial.

In relation to support from subordinates, those women principals in high performing school and cluster schools of excellence receive a better support, as compared to woman principal in school that did not receive any award like Principal D. As Principal D is near to her retirement and the duration of her stay in School D is not very long, support was found not to be as motivating as in other schools. However, the overall level of support is acceptable towards Principal D in which teachers consistently show their readiness to support.

Pertaining to students' attainment, most students in this study are well understood their women principals' aspirations are towards maintenance of excellence. As such,

students usually mention that one way of showing support to the principal is by obeying the rules, attending the programmes, and making teaching and learning process effective. This idea of showing support shared by the students is corroborated through the observation held during the data collection. Supports from students' alumnus is also apparent towards women principals as it could be observed that students usually come to the school to organise programme for their juniors.

Meanwhile, the most usual form of support provided by the women principals towards students and subordinates is in teaching and learning. Providing moral supports is the most frequent action taken by all women principals in encouraging better teaching and learning. This form of support is shown in all women principals' leadership as excellence is one of their key priorities in leading. The most useful platform for women principals to show support to the students is during the assembly. Almost in every assembly the women principals will remind their students regarding attainment and maintenance of excellence.

#### **6.2.4 What challenges do women principals face when practising leadership and how do they deal with the challenges?**

The main challenge highlighted by women principals in this study is the maintenance of academic excellence. The challenge to maintain academic excellence is mainly driven by the aim of the ministry, as well as the expectations of the society. Women principals' own status as excellent principals, as well as the awards received by the school; High Performance Schools or Cluster School of Excellence, are seen as factors that contribute more towards these challenges. Striving in maintaining the status of excellence is more challenging rather than not having the status. The society

for instance, puts higher expectations on academic attainment or maintenance for those principals or schools with awards or status.

Another challenge pointed out by women principals is in inculcating leadership characteristics and soft skills among students. The excellence that schools are aiming for is not only limited to academic excellence. By anticipating challenges students will face in the future, preparing them with leadership characteristics and soft skills is very crucial. This is to ensure that those who could not manage to excel academically could also have a bright future by making themselves excel non-academically. In dealing with challenges to inculcate leadership skills and soft skills among students, women principals built more interactions with those inside and outside the schools. In inculcating soft skills with regard to students' communication skills, women principal would involve the local community, for instance by providing the students with opportunities to organize communal activities or simply become a master of ceremony in communal events. In dealing with the challenges in inculcating leadership skills and soft skills, other than given more chance for the students to practice inside the school, togetherness with the community is seen to be another alternative.

Another challenge facing women principals is the students' discipline. Students' disciplinary problem usually occur in a more diverse students' background, such as in non-religious schools as compared to religious schools. With students from different backgrounds - races and religions, fighting among multiracial students for instance, is one of utmost challenging issues that women principals have to deal with. In dealing with this challenge, togetherness between women principals, disciplinary teachers, counsellors, as well as parents is significantly important. Parents' involvement and cooperation in solving the problem are among the ways of dealing with the challenge.

Thus, to collaborate with others and share the ideas in building consensus is very important.

Other than dealing with the challenges regarding students' discipline through physical disciplinary strategies, spiritually is also seen as a very significant disciplinary strategy in the leadership of women principals. Managing diversity such as gender, performance, race, and religions among students, as well as subordinates is very crucial. Diversity in ability to attain excellence for instance is dealt by making the students feel that they are equal and none of them are greater than the others. As such, there are students that will feel less confident in terms of their performance, whereas by feeling that they are equal it will boost their passion in learning. Dealing with the diversity in issues such as multiracial students, women principals usually take an approach to make them feel that the diversity or differences is something that should be celebrated and not to be separated. Making the students feel appreciated and equal is very much important in dealing with the issues. Leading with emphasis on social justice is very much important in this matter as justice determines that everyone is equal and has the same right to learn in a safe and sound environment.

Findings clearly show that women principals in this study value leadership as not a 'one woman show' but that it requires a collaborative approach or shared approach. As such, in dealing with the challenges, women principals in this study always encourage the involvement of others especially the subordinates to achieve the meaning of togetherness and to perform the principle of social justice to everyone in schools. The responsibility towards attainment of academic excellence is strengthened through collegial working environment in which the role of teachers for instance, is very much appreciated in the leadership of women principals in this study.

Besides teachers, the emphasis is also given with regards to involvement of others, such as parents and the local community.

### **6.3 Significance of the Research**

This section addresses the significance of the study on leadership of women principals as follows:

#### **6.3.1 Women, Excellence and Leadership**

Given the significance of leadership in promoting school excellence, the study of leadership of women principals contributes towards generating new knowledge in the field at different places with similar contexts. This study is believed to be the first on the understanding of leadership of women principals in secondary schools in Malaysia. This is specifically with regards to women principals with excellent principals' titles, women principals whose schools are conferred with *Bai'ah* (oath of allegiance), women principals in religious and non-religious schools, and women principals in High Performance Schools and Cluster Schools of Excellence. As mentioned clearly in Chapter One, there are very few studies conducted regarding women principals in Malaysia, let alone the studies on the leadership of women principals leading in various types of schools and aspects in leadership. Since different context brings different ways of practising leadership, therefore, by studying one specific context, a richer understanding of the specific context is developed.

The study shows that the title and awards in such a way becomes a motivational factor for the women principals to uphold the academic excellence or emphasis on the instructional leadership. Regardless of under the burden of hard works that women principals must bear in order to not losing the title and the awards, the study provides new insights into the way women principals practise leadership with or without the

title/awards. The title of excellent principals has somehow driven the women principals to work harder in maintaining excellence in their schools. Once they hold the status, they will feel more accountable to perform their job according to the responsibility assigned to them.

The study provides a new way of looking at the impact conferring different categories of prestigious awards or incentives towards principalship by the ministry. High Performance Schools and Cluster Schools of Excellence for instance, are statuses of schools that drive the women principals to work hard towards achieving the awards, despite the non-indication of aspects in which the schools excel. Whereas, those women principals whose schools have already received prestigious awards, the study revealed that they are more careful and diligent in maintaining the status of their school, as for them maintaining excellence is more difficult than achieving it. Consequently, despite the burden of carrying the prestigious awards, the awards serve the leadership of women principals a positive reinforcement towards achieving more and more excellences in the future.

### **6.3.2 Theoretical Contributions**

Using a qualitative approach, this study is distinctive in its own way. Methodologically, the study provides insights on women as leaders in education, focusing into how women enact leadership in secondary schools in Malaysia through the perspectives of not only the women principals themselves, but also the people they work with.

Most importantly, the elements such as reciprocal relationship, collegial work environment, as well as collaborative leadership found in the study underpin the theory on the way women principals practise leadership in secondary schools in Malaysia.

In terms of context, the study of women principals' leadership in the Malaysian context with its own characteristics of principals and schools addresses an under-researched area of women principals in Malaysia as no similar study has been conducted before. Meanwhile, the study is also significant in providing evidences that aspects such as spirituality and togetherness/*kebersamaan* strongly influenced the achievement of academic excellence. The significance of academic achievement, spirituality, and togetherness highlighted the needs towards theorising a model that is appropriate with the women principals in the context of this study (the proposed model of this study is presented in Chapter Five). The findings in this study extend the contribution in the leadership of women principals in different parts of the world that has similar contexts such as women principals leading schools in Muslims countries, religious schools and non-religious schools, High Performance Schools, and Cluster Schools of Excellence. Finally, the inclusion of four women principals is regarded as giving an opportunity for this study to be explored in depth. Even though it is limited in number of participants and allowing no generalisability due to its limited scope, the data provide a thorough and in-depth findings of the topic being researched.

#### **6.4 Recommendations**

*For researchers:*

- Further research on the under-researched area of women principals with more specific focus in types of schools or the awards granted to the principals/schools are suggested to be conducted. Whilst this study does not confine its scope to any types of schools, there is a need for more studies that have restricted focus so that a more in-depth understanding could be explored.

- To diversify the methods used is suggested as combination of mix methods research for instance, would probably yield different interesting findings as compared to a qualitative study such as the current study employed. A more in-depth theoretical in approach is also urged to be used so that a more in-depth understanding could be revealed and a more comprehensive theory could be constructed regarding women principals' leadership.

*For Policy Makers:*

- A stronger collaboration of the policy makers and the academic are needed to address a study pertaining to women principals in leadership. A study on the effect of the excellence awards has not been conducted and general information regarding these awards was difficult to find.
- The study was conceived of on the premise of lower women representation in school leadership and while it did not investigate reasons for this under-representation directly, it shed some light on the possible factors affecting the participation of women in school principalship. If the Malaysian government is serious about addressing gender gap, more research work should be funded and programmes that support women should be introduced.
- To provide more details and specific criteria of selection for any recognition, award or status granted to the principals, for instance detailed allocation on the recognition, award or status according to gender.

## **6.5 Limitations of the Research**

Despite the contribution of the study presented above, there are also a few limitations such as:

- This study established the factors that shaped the leadership of women principals who have attained the prestigious title of excellent principal. Thus, the apparent pressure to perform excellently, may not represent all women principals in Malaysia.
- Other than that, by involving only one type of gender which is women, the study does not provide a variety of findings regarding the topic being researched. Considering the sample bias, the findings cannot be generalised to the entire population of principals but limited to only women principals.
- The study which considers the understanding of women principals' leadership from the perspectives of women principals and people who work with them might not unfold the understanding of women principals' leadership in depth. However, the study includes only women principals with the exclusion of people who work with them, would make the topic being studied discovered in greater details.
- Whilst the methodology used is extensive and comprehensive, there is still limitation in the frequency of observations and the absence of shadowing. Thus, the depth of the support occurred from the observation may not represent the best level of data triangulation.

## **6.6 Personal Reflection**

It was not an easy task to embark on a journey unfamiliar to oneself, where one finds that each day is not without a challenge. That is, how I personally felt when I first

embarked on the journey of studying the leadership of women principals in Malaysia. Exploring the field that was totally hostile to myself easily made me feel time and again, demotivated. But I always reminded myself that it is the hard days that make me even stronger. Being a person who is always interested and passionate in searching new knowledge, a topic researched had become more interesting each day. As a researcher, I found myself being challenged by my own study every day. Having little knowledge on the topic under study, constantly motivated me to keep on with the struggle to know more and to keep polishing on my research skills. One of the things that I personally discovered is that difficulties in my journey made me a better person, a better researcher, and a better academician who is more reflective and thoughtful.

Reflecting on my understanding towards the role of women principals, I have come to understand that their role was more than just what I had in mind. They were not just leaders, managers, chiefs or implementers, but they are all a proper combination of love and passion towards knowledge and teaching. From all the women principals that I got to know whilst completing this study, their passion towards knowledge and teaching is even stronger than practising leadership itself, and the spirit that keep them going despite how difficult the challenges that they had to face in leading the schools.

When reflecting on the experience of doing this research, I realised how much I enjoyed it, despite the challenges that sometimes made me want to quit. Being surrounded by helpful and motivated people around me has kept my passion alive to complete this journey. On the whole, I feel that this journey is by far literally the most valuable and enjoyable experience that I have ever been through before.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Interview Guide

### General Information.

Name: ..... Years became a principal: .....

School: ..... Years spent in current school: .....

Age: ..... Years in service: .....

Qualification: .....

### Interview Questions:

#### 1. Introductory Questions:

- From my observation yesterday, I can see (explain in brief what has been observed). Was that a typical day for you? If yes:
  - What are the reasons of doing so?
  - Why do you think it is important to do so?
  - What are the feedbacks of the subordinates/students when you do so?

#### 2. (RQ1: What key priorities do women principals espouse?)

- What priorities is important do you think for you as a leader?
- What motivate you to uphold such priorities?
- What goals do you have for your role in this school? (e.g for subordinates, for students).
- How do you instill those priorities in your subordinates?
- What values are important in pursuing these goals?

- Can you give examples of what you may have done showing the importance of this priorities?
  - What are your views about the position of women in leadership?
3. (RQ2: How do women leaders interact with their staff and stakeholders?)
- What strategies do you use in exercising your leadership with the superiors, subordinates, students and parents?
    - Can you describe how you interact and communicate with members of your staff?
    - Are there any different strategies used when interacting with the superiors, subordinates, students and parents? If yes, can you give examples?
    - How do you maintain your good relationship with the superiors, subordinates, students and parents?
4. (RQ3: What levels of support exist to advance the situation of women principals from within and outside schools?)
- What is your main source of support in performing your leadership role?
  - What development support does the ministry provide?
    - What kind of support do you need from them?
    - Are you satisfied with the support you get at the moment?
    - Are there programmes within the school advancing women teachers?
  - What supports do you provide for your staff?
    - How do you encourage the teachers for a better position such as in the administrative levels or principalship?

5. (RQ4: What challenges do women principals face in exercising their leadership and how do they deal with them?).

- What are some of the challenges you face in your leadership role?
  - How have you dealt with these challenges?
  - How would you describe the way you resolve conflict?
  - Can you give an example of you resolved conflict with members of staff?
  - Can you give examples of how you have dealt with challenges regarding students?
  - Can you give example how do you deal with difficult members of staff?

6. Concluding Questions:

- In your opinion, has gender (you being a woman) played any role in how you exercise your leadership? Why? Why not?
- Is there anything else that you would like to share about your role as a leader?

Thank you very much for your time, participation and cooperation.

## Appendix B: The Process of Conducting Interviews and Codes Used

### School A

No	Types of Interviews Conducted	Participants	Duration (hours/minutes)
1.	Individual face-to-face	Principal A (PA): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview 1 (PA/1)</li> <li>• Interview 2 (PA/2)</li> </ul> ❖ PA - Principal A	1 hour 6 minutes 20 minutes
		Senior Leadership Teams: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (1SLTM1, 1SLTM2, 1SLTM3, 1SLTM4)</li> <li>• Female (1SLTF1)</li> </ul> ❖ 1SLTM2, 1 - School A ❖ SLTM - Male Senior Leadership Team ❖ SLTF - Female Senior Leadership Team	36 minutes 50 minutes 33 minutes 32 minutes 36 minutes
		Administrative staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (1AS1)</li> <li>• Female (1AS2)</li> </ul> ❖ AS - Administrative Staff (1 - Male, 2 - Female)	55 minutes 28 minutes
		Parents Teachers Associations Representatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (1PM)</li> <li>• Female (1PF)</li> </ul> ❖ PM – Father ❖ PF – Mother	36 minutes 40 minutes
2.	Focus Group	Teachers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (1TM1, 1TM2, 1TM3, 1TM4, 1TM5)</li> <li>• Female (1TF1, 1TF2, 1TF3, 1TF4, 1TF5)</li> </ul> ❖ TM - Male Teacher ❖ TF - Female Teacher	1 hour 50 minutes
		Students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (1SM1, 1SM2, 1SM3, 1SM4, 1SM5)</li> </ul>	43 minutes

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Female (1SF1, 1SF2, 1SF3, 1SF4, 1SF5)</li> <li>❖ SM - Male Student</li> <li>❖ SF - Female Student</li> </ul>	43 minutes
3.	Telephone Interviews	<p>State Education Officers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (1SEOM1, 1SEOM2)</li> <li>❖ SEO – Male State Education Officer</li> </ul>	23 minutes 16 minutes

### School B

No	Types of Interviews Conducted	Participants	Duration (hours/minutes)
1.	Individual face-to-face	<p>Principals (PB):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview 1</li> <li>❖ PB - Principal B</li> </ul>	30 minutes
		<p>Senior Leadership Team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Female (2SLTF1, 2SLTF2, 2SLTF3)</li> <li>❖ 2SLTF3, 2 - School B</li> <li>❖ SLTF - Female Senior Leadership Team</li> </ul>	28 minutes 15 minutes 37 minutes
		<p>Administrative staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (2AS1)</li> <li>• Female (2AS2)</li> <li>❖ AS – Administrative Staff (1 - Male, 2 - Female)</li> </ul>	11 minutes 30 minutes
2.	Focus Group	<p>Teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (2TM1, 2TM2, 2TM3, 2TM4, 2TM5)</li> <li>• Female (2TF1, 2TF2, 2TF3, 2TF4, 2TF5)</li> <li>❖ TM - Male Teacher</li> <li>❖ TF - Female Teacher</li> </ul>	43 minutes 18 minutes
		<p>Students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Female (2SF1, 2SF2, 2SF3, 2SF4, 2SF5, 2SF6, 2SF7, 2SF8, 2SF9, 2SF10)</li> <li>❖ SF - Female Student</li> </ul>	18 minutes

		Senior Leadership Team: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Female (2SLTF4, 2SLTF5)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ SLTF - Female Senior Leadership Team</li> </ul>	15 minutes
3.	Telephone Interviews	State Education Officer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Male (2SEOM1)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ SEOM – Male State Education Officer</li> </ul>	22 minutes
		District Education Officer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Female (2DEOF1)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ DEOF – Female District Education Officer</li> </ul>	37 minutes
		Parents Teachers Association Representative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Male (2PM1)</li> <li>Female (2PF1)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ PM - Father</li> <li>❖ PF - Mother</li> </ul>	28 minutes 18 minutes

### School C

No	Types of Interviews Conducted	Participants	Duration (hours/minutes)
1.	Individual face-to-face	Principals (PC) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interview 1 (PC/1)</li> <li>Interview 2 (PC/2)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ PC - Principal C</li> </ul>	1 hour 20 minutes 8 minutes
		Senior Leadership Team: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Female (3SLTF1, 3SLTF2, 3SLTF3, 3SLTF4, 3SLTF5)</li> <li>Male (3SLTM1)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ 3SLTF4, 3 - School C</li> <li>❖ SLTF - Female Senior Leadership Team</li> <li>❖ SLTM - Male Senior Leadership Team</li> </ul>	17 minutes 18 minutes 37 minutes 18 minutes 18 minutes 20 minutes
		Administrative staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Male (3AS1)</li> <li>Female (3AS2)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ AS – Administrative Staff (1 - Male, 2 - Female)</li> </ul>	15 minutes 27 minutes

2.	Focus Group	Teachers:	20 minutes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (3TM1, 3TM2, 3TM3, 3TM4, 3TM5)</li> <li>• Female (3TF1, 3TF2, 3TF3, 3TF4, 3TF5)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ TM - Male Teacher</li> <li>❖ TF - Female Teacher</li> </ul>	27 minutes
		Students:	23 minutes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (3SM1, 3SM2, 3SM3, 3SM4, 3SM5)</li> <li>• Female (3SF1, 3SF2, 3SF3, 3SF4, 3SF5)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ SM - Male Student</li> <li>❖ SF - Female Student</li> </ul>	25 minutes
3.	Telephone Interviews	State Education Officers:	15 minutes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (3SEOM1, 3SEOM2)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ SEOM – Male State Education Officer</li> </ul>	18 minutes
		Parents Teachers Association Representative:	32 minutes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (3PM1)</li> <li>• Female (3PF1)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ PM - Father</li> <li>❖ PF - Mother</li> </ul>	25 minutes

### School D

No	Types of Interviews Conducted	Participants	Duration (hours/minutes)
1.	Individual face-to-face	Principals (PD)	33 minutes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview 1 (PD/1)</li> <li>• Interview 2 (PD/2)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ PD - Principal D</li> </ul>	16 minutes
		Senior Leadership Team:	20 minutes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (4SLTM1, 4SLTM2)</li> <li>• Female (4SLTF1, SLTF2, 4SLTF3)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ 4SLTF3, 4 - School D</li> <li>❖ SLTF - Female Senior Leadership Team</li> <li>❖ SLTM - Male Senior Leadership Team</li> </ul>	23 minutes
			13 minutes
			15 minutes
			15 minutes

		Administrative staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (4AS1)</li> <li>• Female (4AS2)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ AS – Administrative Staff (1 - Male, 2 - Female)</li> </ul>	15 minutes 12 minutes
		Teachers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (4TM5)</li> <li>• Female (4TF4, 4TF5)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ TM - Male Teacher</li> <li>❖ TF - Female Teacher</li> </ul>	28 minutes 23 minutes 12 minutes
2.	Focus Group	Teachers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (4TM1, 4TM2, 4TM3, 4TM4)</li> <li>• Female (4TF1, 4TF2, 4TF3)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ TM - Male Teacher</li> <li>❖ TF - Female Teacher</li> </ul>	23 minutes 17 minutes
		Students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (4SM1, 4SM2, 4SM3, 4SM4, 4SM5)</li> <li>• Female (4SF1, 4SF2, 4SF3, 4SF4, 4SF5)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ SM - Male Student</li> <li>❖ SF - Female Student</li> </ul>	17 minutes 17 minutes
3.	Telephone Interviews	District Education Officer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (4DEOM1)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ DEO – Female District Education Officer</li> </ul>	28 minutes
		Parents Teachers Association Representative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (4PM1, 4PM2)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ PM - Father</li> <li>❖ PF - Mother</li> </ul>	17 minutes 28 minutes

## **Appendix C: Documents Referred to for Document Analysis**

### **School A:**

- Minutes of Meeting for Administration: Meeting 1/2013, Meeting 2/2013, Meeting 3/2013, Meeting 1/2014, Meeting 2/2014, Meeting 3/2014, Meeting 4/2014, Meeting 5/2014, Meeting 6/2014, Meeting 7/2014.
- School Magazine: Volume 27/2011, Volume 29/2013.

### **School B:**

- Minutes of Meeting for Administration: Meeting 1/2014, Meeting 2/2014, Meeting 6/2013, Meeting 4/2013, Meeting 2/2013, Meeting 7/2012.
- School Progress Planner (Curriculum) 2015.
- Clients' Charter.

### **School C:**

- Minutes of Meeting for Administration: Meeting 3/2014, Meeting 4/2014, Meeting 5/2013, Meeting 6/2014, Meeting 7/2014, Meeting 8/2014, Meeting 9/2014, Meeting 10/2014, Meeting 11/2014, Meeting 12/2014, Meeting 13/2014.
- Special Edition School Magazine in conjunction with School's Golden Jubilee, 1959-2009, School Magazine 31<sup>st</sup> Edition, 2014, School Magazine 32<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2014.

### **School D:**

- Minutes of Meeting for Teachers, Volume 1, 2014.
- Planning for Management and Educational Administration Book, 2014.
- Planning for Management and Educational Administration Book, 2015.

## Appendix D: Excerpts from Interviews and Examples of Coding Process

<p><b>Text segments from the transcripts in Malay language</b></p> <p>PA/1: PA=Principal A, 1=Interview round 1 IV: Interviewer</p>	<p><b>Text segments from the transcripts translated in English language/Open coding process</b></p>	<p><b>Selective coding/generated themes</b></p> <p>RQ#1: Priority in women principals' leadership</p> <p>Green: Non-Academic Excellence Blue: Academic Excellence</p>
<p>IV: Hmm...Di surau Ust berjemaah sekali ke macam mana?</p> <p>PA/1: Ha... Sambil berjemaah tu kita boleh tengok budak-budak lah. Jadi maksudnya saya ni, mula di surau akhir pun di surau sebab Isya' nya di surau dengan budak-budak.</p> <p>IV: Lagi kuat ujian?...</p> <p>PA/1: Haa... lagi kuat ujian. Bercakap tentang menanamkan nilai sahsiah yang baik, menjadi pengetua di sekolah agama lebih mencabar. Kita nak tengok perkembangan akhlak pelajar terbentuk selari dengan Falsafah Pendidikan Islam. Saya selalu mengingatkan guruguru... Tanggungjawab kita sebagai pendidik adalah besar, dan kita di sekolah agama kita ada pemegang taruh dan pemegang taruh kita buka satu.... Dan sekarang Bahagian</p>	<p>IV: So... At the prayer hall you pray congregationally or how is it?</p> <p>PA/1: Yes... Whilst praying congregationally, we (referring to I) can look at the students too. So, what I mean, I start at the prayer hall and end up also at the prayer hall because Isya' (the night-time daily prayer) at the prayer hall with the students.</p> <p>IV: So, it is much more challenging?</p> <p>PA/1: Haa... that is much more challenging. Speaking of instilling good moral character, being a principal in a religious school is more challenging. We want to see that the development of students' moral character is shaped in line with the Philosophy of Islamic Education. I always remind my subordinates... Our responsibilities as educators are big, and we at the religious school, we have stakeholders and our stakeholders are not one...</p>	<p>Priority in leadership - Non-academic excellence; students' good conduct</p> <p>Priority in leadership – Non-academic excellence; students' good conduct</p> <p>Priority in leadership – Academic excellence; accountability towards stakeholders</p>

<p>Pendidikan Islam mahu 10% A. Saya kata saya tak boleh capai tapi macam mana pun, saya kena juga... Sebab jangkaan mereka sangat tinggi terhadap kami”</p> <p>IV: Bila Ust ikut depa sembahyang berjemaah apa tu Ust ada bagi tazkirah/teguran sekali?</p> <p>PA/1: Ha sekali dengan teguran. Bila kita solat berjemaah, kita ada peluang untuk membetulkan pelajar kita, peluang tu lebih. Apa yang saya dapat lihat, pelajar di sekolah agama mudah untuk dibentuk (dibentuk akhlaknya), mudah... Tetapi masalahnya kita (sebagai guru) perlu bijak untuk menggunakan peluang membetulkan mereka (pelajar). Oleh itu, menggunakan masa sebelum dan selepas solat adalah antara masa untuk membetulkan mereka”.</p> <p>IV: Jadi setiap hari la berpeluang?</p> <p>PA/1: Ha memang berpeluang tiap-tiap hari. Sebab saya solat dengan pelajar setiap hari, bahkan setiap waktu solat. Saya selalu percaya bahawa solat mampu memberikan perubahan kepada kita dari dalam dan apa yang lebih penting dari perubahan tersebut, ianya dari dalam dan bertahan lebih lama... Saya selalu percaya bahawa jika kamu mencapai penghayatan solat ia bukan saja membuatkan kamu rasa wajib untuk melaksanakannya, tapi ia juga menyebabkan kamu</p>	<p>And now the Islamic Education Division wants 10% A's. I said I can't but whatever it is, I have to... Because their expectation is high towards us”</p> <p>IV: When you pray congregationally with the students, do you also give reminders/advices?</p> <p>PA/1: Yes, together with advices. “... When we pray congregationally, we have the chance to correct our students, the chance is more... What I can see, the students at the religious school is easy [to shape their behaviours], easy... But the thing is we [teachers] have to be smart to grab the chances to correct them. Thus, using the time before and after the prayers is one of the times to correct them”</p> <p>IV: Thus, every day you have chances (to advice)?</p> <p>PA/1: Yes, the chances are opened every day. Because I pray with students every day, in fact, every prayer time. I always believe that prayer enable us to create changes from within an individual and what is more important of that changes is, it comes from within and last longer... I always believe that when you achieve the internalization of prayer it will not only make you feel obliged to perform it, but you will feel more motivated. This is because I believe, if you have good relationship with your God, your relationship with others also</p>	<p>Priority in leadership – Non-academic excellence; Instilling Islamic values, shaping future leaders</p> <p>Priorities in leadership - Non-academic excellence; Instilling Islamic values, students' good conduct</p> <p>Priorities in leadership – Non-academic excellence; Instilling Islamic values</p> <p>Priority in leadership - Instilling Islamic values; performing prayers</p>
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<p>rasa lebih mendapat motivasi. Ini kerana, saya percaya jika kamu ada hubungan yang baik dengan Tuhan, hubungan kamu dengan orang lain juga akan baik yang mana akhirnya kamu akan rasa suka dengan diri sendiri dan mudah untuk termotivasi”.</p>	<p>good which finally make you feel good about yourselves and you easily get the motivation in yourselves”</p>	
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# Appendix E: Ethical Approval Form



## Application for Ethical Approval for Research Degrees

**Name of the Student:** Sakinah Binti Ahmad

**Course:** PhD Education

**Student ID:** 1290129

**Project Title:** An Insight into Women Principals' Leadership in Malaysia: A Case Study.

**Supervisors:** Dr. Pontso Moorosi

### **Funding Body (if relevant)**

Ministry of Education, Malaysia.

### **Methodology:**

**Please outline the methodology e.g. observation, individual interviews, focus groups, group testing etc.**

The data in this research will be gathered by three means:

#### 1. Interview:

Semi structured interview which involved three schools will be conducted with the women Principals, Senior Management Teams, the District Education Officers, teachers, students from the Students' Representative Councils, administrative staff and parents. The duration for the interview session is one week for each school which will start in September 2014 till October 2014 or September 2014 (for pilot study) and January until February 2014 (for actual data collection) depending on the approval from the Ministry of Education, Malaysia. The whole process of the interview is illustrated as follows:

*sample  
ethics!*

### 1.1 Individual Interview:

Individual interview with semi-structured questions will be used in the interview session with the women Principals, Senior Management Teams, the District Education Officers, administrative staff as well as parents. By using the guide of the interview questions, the researcher will have the opportunity of adjusting the questions while the interview is taking place.

### 1.2 Focus Groups:

The focus groups consist of two groups of teachers and two groups of students from the Students' Representative Council. The purpose of conducting focus group interview is to allow more opportunity for the participants to express themselves when they are part of the group as compared to being a solo interviewee.

The questions that will be used in the individual interview as well as the focus group interview are designed by the researcher based on the research objectives and guided by the review of the related literature.

## 2. Observation:

The observation will be conducted in the interactional setting in schools between women principals and others such as Senior Management Teams, teachers, students and the administrative staff. It will include the a typical day of shadowing of the principals, observation of the management meetings, staff meetings as well as Parents Teachers Association meeting and other related job activities of the principals depending on the availability of the events during the data collection period. Leadership of the principals such as making administrative decisions, staff management, student management and discipline will be observed. However, if there will be no events as have been mentioned earlier, the assembly or any arising incidents involving the principals inside the schools will be recorded on hourly basis. The incidents, the reasons, the time of the incidents, as

well as other related themes to the leadership of women principals will be recorded on paper. The observation of the unexpected or impromptu events will allow more opportunity for the researcher to observe how the principals creatively apply their leadership in order to react appropriately to the events.

As this study applies grounded theory approach, there's no specific elements of observation will be determined in specific before the observation takes place. However, every incident as mentioned before will only serve as the basis for this research which will be recorded on hourly basis and the emergence of themes will be identified from the data. The observation will be conducted prior to interview to allow further clarification from the participants. It will involve mainly the principals, however indirectly it will also involve those who work closely to the principals such as teachers and senior management teams.

### 3. Document Analysis.

The document analysis will be employed in order to support the data collected in the interview and the observation. Among the documents that will be analyzed are the minutes of the meeting, students' discipline books and the schools' newsletters. From the minutes of the meeting for instance, the researcher will be able to know what are the planning pertaining to the schools, how the planning will be executed and how was the achievement of the previous planning. By referring to the documents also it will give more opportunity for the researcher to immerse in the data. This is because, when referring to the documents, the researcher has to interpret them on her own and find the connections between the data during the document analysis and the data from other sources of data collections namely; interview and observation. The document analysis will be done prior to the interview in order to help the interview session to flow smoothly as the researcher will be able to minimize asking unclear information such as the spelling of certain name or title.

**Participants:**

The participants of this study are from three secondary schools in Malaysia which are headed by the women principals. The participants consist of women Principals, District Education officers, Senior Management Teams, teachers, students, administrative staff as well as parents. The women principals will consist of those their length of service is at least 3 years and teachers will consist of those their length of service is at least two years. The samples will be chosen on the basis that it is likely that women principals and teachers in post for a significant of time will have a greater understanding than those who have been appointed recently.

on basis of }  
principals?

**Respect for participants' rights and dignity:**

**How will the fundamental rights and dignity of the participants be respected, e.g. confidentiality, respect of cultural and religious values?**

- First and foremost, the approval to conduct the data collection will be obtained from the Economic Planning Unit in Prime Minister's Department, Malaysia, the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, the State Education Office, Malaysia, the District Education Office, Malaysia and the schools in two states namely Negeri Sembilan and Kedah, Malaysia. The informed consent will be obtained first before the data collection takes place.
- A short bio-questionnaire consists of info such as gender and length of service will be developed to get the most suitable participants. This will be followed with the researcher asking the teachers to participate on voluntary basis in order to respect the participants' rights and dignity.
- The purpose and the potential benefits of the research will be explained to the participants before the data collection takes place in October 2014 (pilot study) and January-February 2015 (actual data collection) or October-November 2014 (for both pilot study and the actual data collection) depending on the approval from Ministry of Education, Malaysia.
- The participants will be informed that the data obtained from this study will be treated with strict confidentiality and will only be used for academic purposes.
- The interview questions are designed primarily in English Language. However, the participants will be asked in Malay Language if they feel this is more comfortable to

them. Only appropriate language will be used in the communication during the interview and no additional remark will be made on their feedback which might hurt them or make them uncomfortable.

- The participants will not be forced to talk about issues which they are not comfortable with.
- The interview for the focus group which will involve both gender; female and male will be conducted separately depending on participants' request.

#### **Privacy and Confidentiality:**

**How will confidentiality be assured? Please address all aspects of research including protection of data records, thesis, reports/papers that may arise from the study:**

- Details of the students involved as focus group interviewees and the data collected will not be shared and their details will be made anonymous. h e
- The data collected will be used for academic purpose. Data will be stored securely for the period needed only. h e
- The participants' personal information such as names, phone numbers and emails will be kept confidential and reported anonymously in the study to ensure their safety and privacy. Coding will be used for each participant such as Principal A, Teacher A, Student A and so on to maintain the anonymity of the participants.
- The researcher will ask permission from the school to conduct the interview at a private and comfortable place to ensure privacy of the participants. Prior permission to record the conversation will be obtained before the interview. Questions will be repeated if the participants are not clear.
- The data collection from the interview will be discussed with the participants for verification and trustworthiness purposes at the end of the data collection procedure.

### Consent

**Will prior informed consent be obtained?**

**From participants?** Yes

**From others?** Yes (Ministry of Education, Malaysia).

(District Education Office, Malaysia).

(State Education Office, Malaysia).

(The schools involved in this study).

**Explain how this will be obtained. If prior informed consent is not to be obtained, give reason:**

- Consent will be obtained by writing letters to the head of the institution/respondents and mentioning clearly about purpose of the research and all relevant details. All measures regarding confidentiality and privacy will also be mentioned in the letter.

**Will participants be explicitly informed of the student's status?**

- All participants will be told that this study is a part of doctoral thesis.

### Competence

**How will you ensure that all methods used are undertaken with the necessary competence?**

- The review of the literature pertaining to the methods of collecting the data has been made. Only the most appropriate methods will be employed in this research.
- The data collection procedure will be piloted in which the first of the three case studies will be treated as a pilot. This is to ensure the smooth process of the actual data collection procedure. Necessary measures will be taken to improve the methods based on the responses from pilot participants. Discussion with the supervisor will be done from time to time.

### Protection of participants

**How will participants' safety and well-being be safeguarded?**

- The interview will be only conducted in a safe and comfortable place at a suitable time to ensure the participants' comfort and safety. Prior arrangement will be made with the school in order to get the most suitable place for the interview.
- The data will not be shared with others from or within the organization and will only be used for the sake of academic purpose only.
- Details of the data will be discussed and shared for the purpose of academic only and the pseudonyms will be maintained throughout the study.

### Child Protection

**Will a CRB check be needed?** (NA)

### Addressing Dilemmas

**Even well planned research can produce ethical dilemmas. How will you address any ethical dilemmas that may arise in your research?**

- The nature and purpose of the research will be explained clearly to the participants verbally as well as in writing.
- The data gathered will not be shared with their superiors as well as subordinates. Hence, their reputations will not be at risk in any way and will protect them from harm as professionals and individuals.
- The details and all mentioned experiences will be dealt with confidentiality and anonymity.

### Misuse of research

**How will you seek to ensure that the research and the evidence resulting from it are not misused?**

- The data will be kept in secure place and if necessary will only be shared with anyone with valid reasons.
- The data will not be disclosed to any other parties apart from the researcher. If it is necessary, in case others' assistances are needed during the data analysis procedure, it will be made anonymous before it is presented.
- The data will also be made accessible to the researcher and the supervisor.

### Support for research participants

**What action is proposed if sensitive issues are raised or a participant becomes upset?**

- The nature and the purpose of the study will be explained before the data collection. Their consent will be sorted out beforehand.
- Only prepared and willing participants will be approached for the purpose of data collection.
- The researcher will explain clearly that the refusal to participate will not involve any penalty. If sensitive issues occur, the participants who feel upset do not have to continue the interview, they also have their full right not to answer the questions if they feel uncomfortable. If the participant declines to continue, the interview session will be terminated.
- Anonymity of the respondents will be maintained in the research.
- Background information of the respondents and their experiences will not be disclosed to anyone.
- Identity of the respondents will be protected in all cases.

**Integrity:**

**How will you ensure that research and its reporting are honest, fair and respectful to others?**

- Direct quotation will be used to avoid misinterpretation when it is necessary.
- Data will be shared with the participants to ensure that its interpretation has been rightly done.
- Any sensitive issues that might arise from the interview sessions will be checked with the participants before being reported.
- Interpretation of the data will be done under the guidance of supervisors.

**What agreement has been made for the attribution of authorship by yourself and your supervisor(s) of any reports or publications?**

- The publication/s done during the doctoral study will be co-authored with the name of the supervisor and the publication/s done after the completion of the doctoral study will be solo authored.

**Other issues?**

**Please specify other issues not discussed above, if any, and how will you address them.**

Not any

Signed

**Research Student:** Sakinah Binti Ahmad

**Date:** 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2014

**Supervisor:** Dr. Pontso Moorosi

**Date:** 13 June 2014

Action :

Please submit to the Research Office

Action taken

- Approved
- ✓ • Approved with modification or conditions-see below
- Action deferred. Please supply additional information or clarification-see below

Name *Goeff Kinley* Date *26.6.16*

Signature *Goeff Kinley* Stamped

Notes of Action

# Appendix F: Approval Letter from the Economic Planning Unit



**UNIT PERANCANG EKONOMI**  
**Economic Planning Unit**  
Jabatan Perdana Menteri  
*Prime Minister's Department*  
Block B5 & B6  
Pusat Pentadbiran Kerajaan Persekutuan  
**62502 PUTRAJAYA**  
**MALAYSIA**



Telefon : 603-8000 8000

Ruj. Tuan:  
*Your Ref.:*

Ruj. Kami:  
*Our Ref.:* UPE: 40/200/19/31

Tarikh:  
*Date:* 28 May 2014

## APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN MALAYSIA

With reference to your application, I am pleased to inform you that your application to conduct research in Malaysia has been *approved* by the **Research Promotion and Co-Ordination Committee, Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department**. The details of the approval are as follows:

Researcher's name	:	SAKINAH AHMAD
Passport No./ I.C No	:	790420-09-5042
Nationality	:	MALAYSIA
Title of Research	:	"AN INSIGHT INTO WOMEN PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP IN MALAYSIA : A CASE STUDY."
Period of Research Approved	:	3 MONTHS

2. Please collect your Research Pass in person from the Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department, Parcel B, Level 4 Block B5, Federal Government Administrative Centre, 62502 Putrajaya, Malaysia and bring along two (2) colour passport size photographs.

## Appendix G: Approval Letter from the Ministry of Education, Malaysia

 <b>KEMENTERIAN PENDIDIKAN MALAYSIA</b> <b>Bahagian Biasiswa</b> Aras 2, No. 2, Menara 2 Jalan P5/6, Presint 5 62200 W.P. PUTRAJAYA	 <b>KEMENTERIAN PENDIDIKAN MALAYSIA</b> Tel : 03 - 8870 6000 Faks : 03 - 8870 6839 Laman Web : www.moe.gov.my
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Ruj.Kami : KPT(BS) 790420095042  
Tarikh : 23 Februari 2015

Pendaftar  
Jabatan Pendaftar  
Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM)  
71800 Nilai  
**NEGERI SEMBILAN**  
(u.p: En. Md. Ishah Rahman)

Tuan,

**PERMOHONAN PULANG KE MALAYSIA BAGI TUJUAN KUTIPAN DATA**

**NAMA** : SAKINAH BINTI AHMAD  
**PERINGKAT** : PHD  
**KURSUS** : EDUCATION  
**UNIVERSITI** : WARWICK UNIVERSITY, UK

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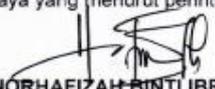
Dengan hormatnya saya diarah merujuk kepada perkara di atas.

2. Dimaklumkan bahawa, Kementerian tiada halangan di atas permohonan pegawai tuan, Sakinah binti Ahmad untuk pulang ke Malaysia bagi tujuan kutipan data bermula 12 Januari 2015 hingga 12 Mac 2015 (2 bulan 1 hari). Sehubungan itu, pegawai tuan adalah layak untuk diberi kemudahan pembiayaan tiket penerbangan kelas ekonomi pergi dan balik dari United Kingdom ke Malaysia.

3. Walaubagaimanapun, sekiranya tempoh kutipan data yang dijalankan melebihi 3 bulan yang disyaratkan, kadar elaun akan diselaraskan mengikut kadar dalam negara.

Sekian, harap maklum.

Saya yang menurut perintah,

  
**(NORHAFIZAH BINTI IBRAHIM)**  
Bahagian Biasiswa  
b.p Ketua Setiausaha  
Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia

## Appendix H: Approval Letter from the State Education Department of Kedah

	<p>جایزه بین المللی سرپرستی و رهبری در ایالت کداح</p> <p><b>JABATAN PENDIDIKAN NEGERI KEDAH DARUL AMAN</b> KOMPLEKS PENDIDIKAN, JALAN STADIUM 05604 ALOR SETAR KEDAH DARUL AMAN</p>	<p>No. TELEFON : 04-740 4000 No. FAKS : 04-740 4342 LAMAM WEB : <a href="http://www.jpn.moe.gov.my/jpkedah">www.jpn.moe.gov.my/jpkedah</a></p>
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Ruj Kami : JPK03-07/3212 Jld 13 ( 57 )  
Tarikh : 17 September 2014

Tuan/Puan,

**Kebeneran Untuk Menjalankan Kajian/ Soal Selidik di Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri / Pejabat Pendidikan Daerah dan Sekolah – Sekolah di Negeri Kedah Darulaman**

Saya dengan hormatnya diarah merujuk kepada perkara tersebut di atas.

2. Dimaklumkan bahawa permohonan tuan/puan untuk menjalankan kajian yang bertajuk "An Insight Into Women Principals Leadership In Malaysia : A Case Study." telah **diluluskan**.

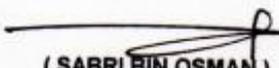
3. Kelulusan ini adalah berdasarkan kepada apa yang terkandung di dalam cadangan penyelidikan yang tuan/puan kemukakan ke Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia. Tuan/Puan dikehendaki mengemukakan senaskah laporan akhir kajian setelah selesai kelak dan diingatkan supaya mendapat kebenaran terlebih dahulu daripada Jabatan ini sekiranya sebahagian atau sepenuhnya dapatan kajian tersebut hendak dibentangkan di mana-mana forum, seminar atau diumumkan kepada media.

4. Kebeneran ini adalah tertakluk kepada persetujuan Pengetua sekolah berkenaan dan adalah sah sehingga 30 November 2015 sahaja.

Sekian, terima kasih.

**" BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA "**  
**" PENDIDIKAN CEMERLANG KEDAH TERBILANG "**

Saya yang menurut perintah,

  
**( SABRI BIN OSMAN )**  
Penolong Pengarah Kanan (Ketua Unit)  
Unit Perhubungan dan Pendaftaran  
Sektor Pengurusan Sekolah  
b.p. Pengarah Pendidikan Negeri Kedah Darul Aman.

## Appendix I: Approval Letter from the State Education Department of Negeri Sembilan

 **جائين فديديكن نكري سميلن دارا لخصوص**  
**JABATAN PENDIDIKAN NEGERI**  
**NEGERI SEMBILAN DARUL KHUSUS**  
JALAN DATO' HAMZAH KARUNG BERKUNCI No. 6  
70990 SEREMBAN, NEGERI SEMBILAN DARUL KHUSUS  
Tel : 06-7553100 - Fax : 06-7529969

 **KEMENTERIAN**  
**PENDIDIKAN**  
**MALAYSIA**

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**"MALAYSIA : RAKYAT DIDAHULUKAN PENCAPAIAN DIUTAMAKAN"**

Ruj. Kami : JPN.SPS.PP.100-1/7 Jdt.10( > )  
Tarikh : 11 NOVEMBER 2014

Tuan/Puan,

**Kebeneran Menjalankan Kajian Ke Sekolah-Sekolah Di Negeri Sembilan Darul Khusus Di Bawah Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia**

Saya dengan hormatnya di arah memaklumkan bahawa permohonan tuan/puan untuk menjalankan kajian bertajuk: **"An Insight Into Women Principals' Leadership in Malaysia: A Case Study"** telah diluluskan.

2. Tuan/Puan hendaklah berjumpa terus dengan Pengetua atau Guru Besar sekolah berkenaan untuk meminta persetujuan dan membincangkan kajian tersebut di tempat seperti berikut:

1) [REDACTED]  
2) [REDACTED]

3. Dimaklumkan bahawa kebenaran ini diberi berbasarkan surat kelulusan dari pihak Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, Bahagian Perancangan Dan Penyelidikan Dasar Pendidikan, nombor rujukan KP(BPPDP)/003/5/Jd.00/34 bertarikh 20 Mei 2014.

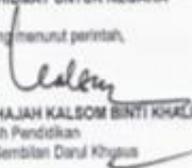
4. Tuan/Puan hendaklah menghantar satu naskah hasil kajian ke Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Sembilan (i.p. Unit Perhubungan, Pendaftaran & Pelajaran Swasta).

Sekian untuk makluman dan tindakan tuan/puan selanjutnya.

Terima kasih.

**"BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA"**

Saya yang menurut perintah,

  
**DATO' HAJAH KALSOM BINTI KHALID**  
Pegawai Pendidikan  
Negeri Sembilan Darul Khusus

s.k. Pengetua atau Guru Besar sekolah berkenaan.

Nota: -Sila beri satu salinan surat kelulusan semasa membuat kajian di sekolah.