PRINCIPALS' MANAGEMENT EMPOWERMENT PRACTICES AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH WORK SATISFACTION AMONG SCHOOL MID-LEVEL ADMINISTRATORS

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Abstract

Principals' leadership that is based on management empowerment practices is one approach that has a significant impact on school success. The study attempts to investigate the relationship between principal's management empowerment practices and the level of job satisfaction among school mid-level administrators. A quantitative approach was employed to examine the extent to which the five-dimensional management empowerment practices, namely decision making, professional development, status of responsibility, impact, and autonomy are related to the level of job satisfaction of mid-level administrators in Malaysian secondary schools. The data were obtained from 118 respondents using a set of questionnaires. The findings of the study show that gender factors and positions held are not significantly related with the level of job satisfaction among school administrators. Nonetheless, the five dimensions in the principals' management empowerment practice were all found to have a significant, positive, and strong correlation with the administrators' level of job satisfaction.

Keywords: principal management empowerment, job satisfaction, school administrators

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Renowned journalist Fred M. Hechinger once said that the ups and downs of a school is very much determined by the quality of the principals or headmasters (Ang & Balasandran, 2009). Some schools are moving backward, and some have excelled due to the quality of the principals. This gives an idea of the importance of the role and leadership of the principals towards the development of a school. Therefore, leadership or management factors will determine the degree to which an institution's goals can be achieved, especially in the context of students' excellence.

As a major stakeholder in the management of school institution, the government has taken various initiatives to ensure that it can be managed properly so that the impact of success could be enjoyed by the students. The Ministry of Education Malaysia (MoE) has also implemented several steps towards an 'independent' school management system without the control from the State Education Department (JPN), in order to reduce bureaucracy and to improve autonomy and quality of education administration (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2001). This includes efforts to enable financial management, the purchase of office equipment and some other management responsibilities on the shoulders of school principals. In order to meet the MoE's goals, principals' leadership that characterises 'empowerment practices' is one approach that could determine the success in school management (Ishak, 2006). In other words, principals need to delegate and empower responsibilities to their subordinates as they are not able to manage all their tasks alone (Azlin, 2008).

Past studies have shown that employees who have a high level of job satisfaction will be more positive in their careers than employees whose level of satisfaction is low. For instance, employees who are dissatisfied with their careers are found to be unhappy in their work, undisciplined, complaining and less committed (Ab. Aziz, 2010). This situation implies that a person's job satisfaction will have a positive impact on the individual himself or herself and in turn on their organisation's growth. Furthermore, according to Tang (2008), the higher the teachers' satisfaction, the better their commitment and productivity. In school, one of the ways to increase teacher's satisfaction is through 'management empowerment'. Management empowerment is a concept of power sharing, solidarity between principals and their mid-level administrators and between school managers and their staff. Through this practice, mid-level administrators would get the opportunity and space to show their performance which in turn making them more prepared and committed to the implementation of their responsibilities as well as increasing work motivation (Davis, Joan, Wilson & Sandra, 2000).

So, in this study, the researchers examined the relationship between the practices of management empowering by the principals and the level of job satisfaction among mid-level administrators. In-line with this, five dimensions that are related to the practices of empowerment, which include decision-making, professional development, responsibility status, impact and autonomy were examined.

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Leadership Theory

Leadership can be defined as the ability to influence, motivate and change the employees' attitudes and behaviors in order to implement change towards achieving organisation's objectives (Ishak, 2002). There are many theories about leadership, including leadership behaviour theory, contingency and situational theory, transformational leadership theory, instructional theory, and pedagogical leadership theory. Another two significant theories are Burn's (1978) charismatic leadership theory and Grieves's (2010) servant leadership theory.

Behavioural leadership theory deals with two important aspects, namely behaviour that prioritises tasks or initiating structure and behavioural leadership that emphasises consideration of human relations or consideration. Past studies give an idea of how much power is needed in managing an organisation. Therefore, the existence of an administrator or manager without authority is likely to cause the organisation not able to manage as smoothly as expected. Furthermore, in the conceptualisation or theory of power, power is seen as a zero nature possessed by the individual and is evident when the individual is able to act deliberately to obstruct others or to motivate others to act (Buchanan & Badham, 2008). Arendt (in Siti Khadadiah, 2015) stated that power is not the property of individuals, but it comes from a group that remains and exists as long as the group keeps it together.

2.2   Job Satisfaction Theory

In this study, job satisfaction is defined as a positive and enjoyable emotional state resulting from a person's interpretation of his job as pleasant and successfully completed (Suriany, 2015). Job satisfaction is also a response to the work of individuals involved (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2005). Thus, job satisfaction is an emotional response that involves an employee's interaction with his or her job. It also involves a person's emotional response, for example if an effort or job is successfully completed then his emotional response is fun or satisfied. But if he fails, then the person will be disappointed or even dissatisfied.

According to Mumtaz (2010), there are five elements that affect a person's job satisfaction: the nature of job itself, colleagues, career paths, leadership and wages received. Moreover, job satisfaction in the context of school mid-level administrators is influenced by the existence of positive interactions between principals and them. Therefore, principals who

have high communication skills are considered to have a greater impact on their employees' job satisfaction. However, according to Hussein (2008), job satisfaction will only be met when a leader is fair in making assessments, awarding and placement or job position.

Job satisfaction also can be explained by Equity Theory, which is about the perception and emotion of a person who feels he or she has received fair treatment as received by other employees (Ainon, 2005). In this theory, individuals will make a comparison between the rewards received and the work contributions they give or do. Equity Theory is similar to Locke's Theory of Value which argues that job satisfaction will exist if the reward (output) received is equal to what is expected.

Employees' job satisfaction is also often associated with motivation level. For example, Herzberg's Two Factor theory presents two factors that normally influence employee's motivation, namely health and growth (Ainon, 2005). Similarly, in Motivator-Hygiene Theory (Hertzberg, 1959), two factors are also identified: motivation and hygiene. In addition, The X and Y Theory introduced by Douglas McGregor shows the relationship between the career and the employee. In Theory X, one will tend to avoid being tied to a job while Theory Y sees people naturally liking a given job or task. Besides, Theory of Achievement (McCelland, 1961) centred on the three needs that an individual wants to achieve in life. The three focuses are the need to achieve a level above the existing level (achievement), the need to join (affiliation) refers to the need to communicate and connect to avoid conflict with other individuals. It can be concluded that job satisfaction is a response from the emotions of the individual, and it is translated in the form of behaviour after assessing his or her job whether it is appropriate or not by considering the approval and appreciation from the superordinate.

3.0   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The theoretical framework of this study (Figure 1) incorporates Maslow Theory, which is the hierarchy of human needs and the DEFFRAAC management model in school management. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory of motivation which highlights five categories of human needs that dictate an individual's behaviour. These needs are physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. Based on this framework, two variables were quantitatively measured. The first variable concerns the factors that enable the principals in practising management empowerment (independent variable) and the second

variable is related to job satisfaction among mid-level leaders or administrators in school (dependent variable).
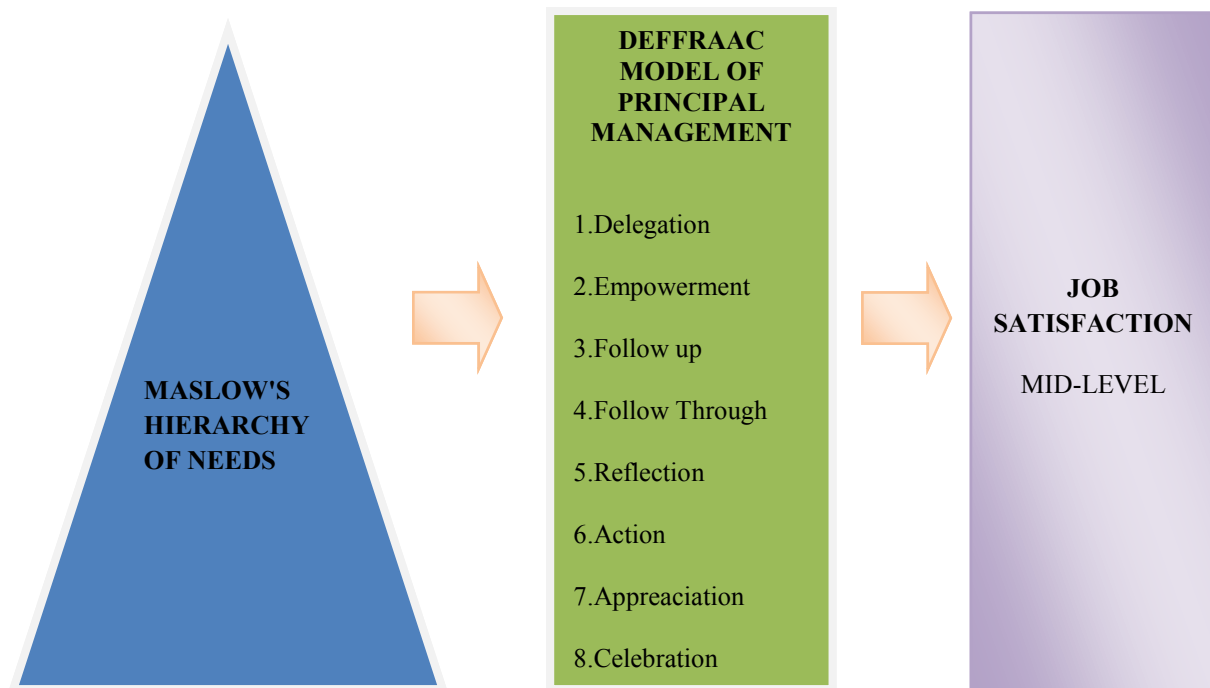
Figure 1: DEFFRAAC Management Model Theoretical Framework and Maslow Theory

4.0   RESEARCH CONTEXT, INSTRUMENT AND DATA ANALYSIS

This study involved 24 secondary national schools in Malaysia. Among the 118 respondents from these schools, some held the position as senior assistant principals and some as head of department or head teachers.

A survey was administered to gather data from the respondents. The survey questionnaire consists of three parts: Demographic information (part A), Construct for Management Empowerment Practices (part B) and Construct for Job Satisfaction (part C). In part B, the factors that determine principals' management empowerment were measured following the empowerment dimensions listed in Short and Rinehart's (1992) "School Participant Empowerment Scale (SPES)". The questions in part C were adapted from Surainy (2015). This construct focused on four factors or dimensions: task suitability, freedom of decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and the dimensions of recognition.

For data analysis, *t*-test was used to measure the level of satisfaction of mid-level secondary school administrators based on gender factors and positions held by the

administrators. In addition, Pearson Correlation analysis was used to test if there is a significant relationship between principals' management empowerment practices with the level of job satisfaction of mid-level school administrators.

5.0 FINDINGS

5.1 Principal's Management Empowerment Practices

Table 1 below shows that the mean score distribution of the 25 items related to principal's management empowerment practices is between 3.65 to 4.40. This implies that management empowerment is widely practised by the principals and the trend is also preferred and welcomed by the mid-level administrators. However, it is important for principals to pay attention on the aspects that display a mean score of less than 4.00 such as the freedom to decide on what to teach (item 10), making decisions related to school expenses (item 12), having high level of knowledge related to job (item 19), having the opportunity to influence others (item 20) and having the right to reject superior's inappropriate suggestions (item 24).

Table 1: Principal's Management Empowerment Practices

No.	Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	S. P
1.	I was given the responsibility of overseeing the school program.	0.0%	0.8%	0.8%	56.8%	41.5%	4.39	0.555
2.	I am working in a professional environment.	0.0%	1.7%	1.7%	58.5%	38.1%	4.33	0.600
3.	I was honoured at school.	0.0%	0.0%	9.3%	66.1%	24.6%	4.15	0.564
4.	I am able to ensure that the plans made are implemented.	0.0%	0.8%	1.7%	60.2%	37.3%	4.34	0.558
5.	I was entrusted to decide on the implementation of a new program in the school.	0.0%	5.1%	9.3%	61.9%	23.7%	4.04	0.733
6.	I am involved in staff development.	0.0%	1.7%	1.7%	58.5%	38.1%	4.33	0.600
7.	I gives advice and guidance to the teachers in the school.	0.0%	0.0%	2.5%	67.8%	29.7%	4.27	0.501
8.	I have the opportunity to improve my profession.	0.0%	0.0%	4.2%	59.3%	36.4%	4.32	0.553
9.	I was respected by my classmates at school.	0.0%	0.8%	7.6%	57.6%	33.9%	4.25	0.626
10.	I have the freedom to decide what to teach.	1.7%	13.6%	12.7%	50.8%	21.2%	3.76	0.993
11.	I believe I have influence in school.	0.8%	6.8%	30.5%	50.0%	11.9%	3.65	0.810
12.	I was involved in making decisions related to school expenses.	0.0%	6.8%	19.5%	57.6%	16.1%	3.83	0.777
13.	I work in a school that prioritizes students.	0.0%	1.7%	6.8%	52.5%	39.0%	4.29	0.668
14.	I get support from other teachers.	0.0%	0.8%	6.8%	61.9%	30.5%	4.22	0.601

No.	Item							
15.	I have the right to make decisions about curriculum matters.	0.0%	3.4%	4.2%	70.3%	22.0%	4.11	0.624
16.	I was one of the decision makers at the school.	0.0%	1.7%	11.0%	59.3%	28.0%	4.14	0.666
17.	I have the opportunity to continue my learning.	0.0%	0.0%	5.9%	60.2%	33.9%	4.28	0.568
18.	I have the opportunity to guide the teachers in the school.	0.0%	2.5%	1.7%	57.6%	38.1%	4.31	0.636
19.	I have a high level of knowledge related to my job.	0.0%	6.8%	11.0%	63.6%	18.6%	3.94	0.754
20.	I believe in having the opportunity to influence others.	0.0%	5.9%	16.1%	63.6%	14.4%	3.86	0.727
21.	Principals, teachers and school staff ask for my views.	0.0%	0.8%	5.1%	78.8%	15.3%	4.08	0.482
22.	I was given the opportunity to work with teachers at other schools.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	60.2%	39.8%	4.40	0.492
23.	I am confident that I have done a good job.	0.0%	0.8%	6.8%	60.2%	32.2%	4.24	0.609
24.	I can reject the suggestions of superiors if it is found to be inappropriate.	2.5%	10.2%	12.7%	63.6%	11.0%	3.70	0.890
25.	I am convinced that I have influence among teachers and students.	0.8%	5.1%	11.9%	61.9%	20.3%	3.96	0.778

5.2 Job Satisfaction among Mid-Level Administrators

The mid-level administrators' level of job satisfaction was measured on16 aspects (see table 2). The findings show that the mean scores for the items fall between 3.76 to 4.48. This score level is considered high based on the classification proposed by Mohd Najib (1999) and Baharin Abu, et. al. (2007). On overall, the level of satisfaction among mid-level school administrators is high.

Table 2: Mid-level Administrators' Job Satisfaction

No.	Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	S.P
1.	I have the opportunity to use my own methods when carrying out tasks.	0.0%	0.0%	7.6%	64.4%	28.0%	4.20	0.563
2.	I can use my own judgment when making decisions.	0.0%	12.7%	11.0%	63.6%	12.7%	3.76	0.834
3.	I agree with the policies implemented in my organization.	0.0%	2.5%	8.5%	66.9%	22.0%	4.08	0.635
4.	I have the opportunity to perform the tasks based on my abilities.	0.0%	0.8%	2.5%	68.6%	28.0%	4.24	0.534
5.	I have the opportunity to perform an assignment that is not against my conscience.	0.0%	5.1%	11.9%	64.4%	18.6%	3.97	0.715
6.	I am able to do the task given.	0.0%	3.4%	11.9%	66.1%	18.6%	4.00	0.667
7.	I was given responsibilities that matched my qualifications.	0.0%	2.5%	2.5%	68.6%	26.3%	4.19	0.598

8.	I was given an assignment according to my interests.	0.0%	4.2%	9.3%	60.2%	26.3%	4.08	0.723
9.	I was given opportunity to represent my department.	0.0%	5.9%	11.9%	60.2%	22.0%	3.98	0.762
10.	I get appreciation for every task that I perform.	0.0%	1.7%	16.9%	66.1%	15.3%	3.95	0.625
11.	I have the opportunity to be promoted.	0.8%	2.5%	21.2%	61.9%	13.6%	3.85	0.712
12.	I got positive feedback from my principal.	0.8%	3.4%	11.0%	61.9%	22.9%	4.03	0.745
13.	I will receive praise from my principal when successfully completing each task.	0.0%	3.4%	7.6%	62.7%	26.3%	4.12	0.681
14.	I have a good relationship with my principal.	0.8%	0.8%	9.3%	54.2%	34.7%	4.21	0.714
15.	I have a good relationship with my colleagues.	0.0%	2.5%	2.5%	45.8%	49.2%	4.42	0.671
16.	My principal is very wise in taking care of his/her subordinates.	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	46.6%	51.7%	4.48	0.595

5.3 Relationship Between Management Empowerment Practices and Job Satisfaction Level

To examine if the principals' management empowerment practice has a significant relationship with secondary school mid-level administrators' level of job satisfaction, Pearson Correlation test was conducted to analyse the data. The findings show that there is a significant relationship between the two variables ($r = 0.790$, $p < 0.01$). This relationship is deemed positive as the Pearson Correlation coefficient is above 0.70 which indicates a very high correlation (Davis, 1972). The test results imply that if the principal's management empowerment level increases, the mid-level school administrators' level of job satisfaction will also increase accordingly, and vice versa.

Table 3: Relationship Between Principal's Management Empowerment Practices and Job Satisfaction Level

Pearson Correlation	0.790**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
N	118

** Correlation is significant at level 0.01 (2-tailed)

Besides that, the correlation of the five-dimensional aspects of principals' management empowerment practices and the level of job satisfaction among the mid-level administrators were also examined in this study. These five dimensions are decision making, professional development, status of responsibility, impact, and autonomy.

5.3.1 Relationship between Decision-making and Level of Job Satisfaction

The correlation test analysis show that there is a significant relationship between the decision-making dimension in the management empowerment and the level of job satisfaction among secondary school administrators ($r = 0.687$, $p < 0.01$) (Table 4). The results show that if the principals' management empowerment in terms of decision-making increases, the level of job satisfaction will also increase, and vice versa. In other words, whenever the principals provide opportunities or enable their mid-level administrators to make decisions in the management process, the administrators' level of satisfaction will increase. These decisions may include having the right to make decisions about curriculum matters and having the opportunity to influence others.

Table 4: Relationship Between the Aspect of Decision-making in Principals' Management Empowerment and Job Satisfaction Level

Pearson Correlation	0.687**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
N	118

** Correlation is significant at level 0.01 (2-tailed)

5.3.2 Relationship between Professional Development and Level of Job Satisfaction

In terms of the dimension of professional development in the principals' management empowerment and the level of job satisfaction, a strong relationship is also found between these two variables ($r = 0.703$ and $p < 0.01$). This implies that if the empowerment in terms of professional development increases, the level of job satisfaction of the mid-level administrators will also increase, and vice versa. In the context of this study, empowerment of professional development includes having the right to work in a professional environment, having the freedom to decide what to teach, being a decision maker in the institution and having the opportunity to guide other teachers in the school.

Table 5: Relationship Between the Dimension of Professional Development in Principals' Management Empowerment and Job Satisfaction Level

Pearson Correlation	0.703**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
N	118

** Correlation is significant at level 0.01 (2-tailed)

5.3.3   Relationship between Status of Responsibility and Level of Job Satisfaction

The correlation analysis on the variables of status of responsibility in the principals' management empowerment practices and the mid-level administrators' job satisfaction level indicates a significant correlation ($r = 0.672$ and $p < 0.01$). This means that if the principals' management empowerment practices in terms of status of responsibility increases, the administrators' level of job satisfaction will also increase. Among the core aspects in this dimension includes involvement in staff development, having influence in school, having the opportunity to further study, and having the opportunity to work with teachers in other schools.

Table 6: Relationship Between the Dimension of Status of Responsibility in Principals' Management Empowerment and Job Satisfaction Level

Pearson Correlation	0.672**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
N	118

**** Correlation is significant at level 0.01 (2-tailed)

5.3.4   Relationship between Impact and Level of Job Satisfaction

Based on the results of the Pearson Correlation test (Table 7), there is a strong relationship found between the dimension of impact in the principals' management empowerment practices and the mid-level administrators' job satisfaction level ($r = 0.711$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that principals who practise empowerment management in terms of impact dimension will increase their mid-level administrators' job satisfaction level. Management empowerment in terms of impact include having the confidence to decide on the implementation of a new program in school, having the opportunity to improve one's profession, getting support from other teachers, and having influence among teachers and students.

Table 7: Relationship Between the dimension of Impact in Principals' Management Empowerment and Job Satisfaction Level

Pearson Correlation	0.711**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
N	118

**** Correlation is significant at level 0.01 (2-tailed)

5.3.5   Relationship between Autonomy and Level of Job Satisfaction

The final inference analysis concerns the relationship between the dimension of autonomy in the principals' management empowerment practices and the level of job satisfaction among mid-level administrators. As shown in Table 8, there is a significant relationship between these two variables ($r = 0.691$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that if the management empowerment score for the autonomy dimension increases, the level of job satisfaction will also increase, vice versa. In this study, the dimension of autonomy covers several aspects which include having autonomy to ensure that a plan is implemented, giving advice and guidance to other teachers in the school, working in a school that prioritizes students, having a high level of knowledge related to one's job, and having the right to reject the suggestions of superiors if found inappropriate.

Table 8: Relationship Between the Dimension of Autonomy in Principals' Management Empowerment and Job Satisfaction Level

Pearson Correlation	.691**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
N	118

** Correlation is significant at level 0.01 (2-tailed)

5.4   CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study found that gender factor and positions held were not significantly influence the level of job satisfaction among mid-level school administrators. This finding glaringly implies that school principals should fairly treat their subordinates regardless of their gender when assigning duties and responsibilities. Instead, school managers should put staff welfare, working environments and other aspects as the priority in administration or management.

In general, the practice of management empowerment by principals was found to have a significant relationship with the level of job satisfaction among the administrators. Additionally, this relationship was also further examined in terms of the five dimensions in management empowerment, namely decision making, professional development, position status, impact, and autonomy. Interestingly, all the five dimensions show a significant, positive, and strong correlation with the level of job satisfaction among the mid-level administrators. This clearly implies that the five-dimensional empowerment practices by principals would contribute to the increase in the level of job satisfaction among school administrators. Thus,

leadership style which is guided by these five dimensions needs to be considered by principals in school management as it would influence their staff's job satisfaction, which will in turn have an impact on their commitment and productivity. In relation to this, it is highly recommended for current and future school leaders to undergo training, workshops, and courses so that they will be able to apply the appropriate empowerment leadership style.

Furthermore, this study also shows that empowerment in terms of the dimension of decision-making is deemed important and impactful in increasing the level of satisfaction among school staffs. This involves the principals' practice of giving opportunities or trust to others or empowering their subordinates to make decisions on his or her behalf. This is in-line with Dirks and Ferrin's (2001) claim that leadership style that shows trust in the abilities of staff in performing their task will produce excellent employees that possess creative thinking and high commitment to the organisation. However, before making any empowerment on the staffs, principals need to take into consideration the limits of decision-making that can be granted to the staffs. Besides that, the findings also show that mid-level administrators will be more satisfied if their professional development is taken care of. In fact, the study also found that recognition or respect for the position held would give them satisfaction and confidence. When it is recognized or appreciated by the principals, the administrators will also be respected by their colleagues or subordinates and in turn they will be more influential in school.

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