

## THE LEADERSHIP STYLES OF SECONDARY MATHEMATICS TEACHERS IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

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### Abstract

The leadership style a teacher possesses is one of the influential factors in students' learning, motivation and output. Applying the type of suitable leadership style, by other supposedly stable factors, can be regarded as an effective factor in shaping the teachers' success in teaching the subject they are entrusted to teach. There are many different types of leadership styles. However, for this study, we focused on the three major styles of leadership, in particular the democratic leadership, the autocratic leadership and the laissez-faire leadership. In this study, we investigated the preferred leadership style of the secondary Mathematics teachers in Brunei Darussalam. In addition, we also identified the relationship of leadership styles with the teachers' education level, age, gender and their years of teaching experience. This study also explored the factors that contribute to the mixed leadership styles of the teachers. A survey using the leadership styles questionnaire were distributed to a sample of 44 Mathematics teachers in two government secondary schools in Brunei Darussalam. From the findings, democratic leadership style was dominantly portrayed by majority of the Mathematics teachers (52%). Furthermore, the teachers' leadership styles had no significant correlation with their gender. Interestingly, this study revealed that there were significant correlations between the teachers' democratic leadership styles and their age, education level and years of teaching experience. A further analysis of the data showed that four teachers had a mixed leadership style, a combination of autocratic and democratic. Interviews were conducted with two selected Mathematics teachers who we found to have the mixed leadership styles, and based from the interviews, the major feature we detected was that they were both teaching students of mixed abilities. Observations of their teaching lessons were also conducted and we detected that these two teachers tend to apply autocratic leadership style in teaching the low ability students. For example, direct instructions were given in class so that the students were clear on what to do. In contrast, they also tend to apply democratic leadership style in teaching the high achieving students. For instance, instead of giving direct instructions to solve a particular problem, they usually allowed time and opportunities for students to think and express their ideas in how to solve a particular problem.

**Keywords:** Leadership style, mathematics teachers, secondary schools

### 1 INTRODUCTION

In the school contexts, the principals and the teachers are responsible in shaping the students' future, and importantly, the school culture and values (Shahrill, 2014). They are the ones seen as leaders fronting these organizations. Yet, the essence of effective leadership is 'judgment' and making judgment calls is the essential job of a leader (Tichy & Bennis, 2009). On the other hand, the leadership style of the teachers is one of the influential factors in students learning, motivation and output. Applying the type of the suitable leadership style, by other supposedly stable factors, can be an effective factors in teachers' success. Identification and evaluation of the affective factors on leadership style of teachers are very essential (Jamrok & Neisari, 2013).

There are many different types of leadership styles. However, an early study carried out by a group of researchers led by a psychologist named Kurt Lewin identified three major styles of leadership, in particular around decision-making; the democratic leadership, the autocratic leadership and the laissez-faire leadership (Cherry, 2014).

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Defining the Types of Leadership Styles

According to Newstrom and Davis (1993), leadership style is a leader's style of providing direction, implementing plans and motivating people. Meanwhile, Ware (2010) defined leadership style as the methods used by individuals to make decisions, influence others, use authority and treat people. Given below are the three types of leadership styles as defined by Cherry (2014).

- *Autocratic leadership* is also known as the authoritarian leadership. The leader takes decisions without consulting with others. There is no need for input on the decision from group members. In other words, autocratic leadership involves absolute, authoritarian control over a group.
- *Democratic leadership* is also known as the participative leadership. According to Cherry (2014), democratic leaders lead people within teams by offering guidance to the group members and allowing input from other group members.
- *Laissez-faire leadership* is also known as the delegative leadership. In this type of leadership style, the leaders give complete freedom for group members to make decisions and solve problems on their own. Researchers have found that this is generally the leadership style that leads to the lowest productivity among group members.

In a study by Lewin and Lippitt (1938), they found that participative leadership, also known as democratic leadership, is generally the most effective leadership style. Subsequent research findings have also been suggested that there is a change from the autocratic leadership approach to a more democratic approach nowadays which can lead to effective teaching in classroom (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1988). However, Cherry (2014) argued that autocratic leadership does have some potential benefits in teaching.

### 2.2 Factors Affecting Leadership Styles

#### 2.2.1 Age

Dadashi et al. (2012) claimed that from their findings, there was a significant relationship between teachers' age and their leadership styles. Meanwhile, the findings from the study by Tatlah et al. (2010) found that age was significantly correlated with the autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire types of leadership styles. Nevertheless, such findings contradict with a recent study on factors affecting leadership styles. Sawati and colleagues (2013) argued that there was no association between the principal's age and leadership style.

#### 2.2.2 Gender

Tatlah and colleagues (2010) also found that the teachers' gender was significantly correlated with the leadership styles. However, Jamrok and Neisari (2013) were against the statement. They claimed that from their findings, there was no significant relationship between teacher's gender and leadership style.

#### 2.2.3 Education Level/Qualification

According to the findings of Sawati et al. (2013), there was no significant association between the qualifications of the principals and their leadership style. However, others argued that there was a significant correlation between the teacher's education and his or her leadership style (Jamrok & Neisari, 2013; Dadashi et al., 2012). Professional qualification was also significantly correlated with delegating leadership style of teachers (Tatlah et al., 2010).

#### 2.2.4 Experience

Jamrok and Neisari (2013) reported that there was a significant relationship between teachers' experience and the leadership styles. Tatlah et al. (2010) also claimed that teachers' experience had significant correlation with participating and delegating leadership styles. Nonetheless, according to Sawati and colleagues (2013), there was no significant association between principals' professional experiences and their leadership styles.

## 2.3 Researches into Mixed Leadership Styles

Many researches have been conducted on the benefits or drawbacks of effects of either autocratic or democratic leaders on students in school. A study by Mkhize (2005) found that the Principal's leadership style has an autocratic bias that did not possess a balance between autocratic and democratic leadership. Mkhize recommended that for a leader to be effective, it would require a balance between democratic and autocratic leadership styles. Meanwhile, McDonald and Hershman (2010) also suggested that a balanced approach of classroom management could let students feel valued, motivated and actively involved in the classroom, and thus this will enhance their learning.

Further research needs to be done to probe how mixed leadership styles affect the teachings in Mathematics. Consequently, it will also be our goal to investigate any common background factors portrayed by any of the Mathematics teacher sample that have mixed leadership styles in teaching their students.

## 3 PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the preferred leadership style of the secondary Mathematics teachers in Brunei and to find out the relationship of leadership styles with teachers' education level, age, gender and their years of teaching experience. This study also aimed to analyze the teachers' background factors that contribute to their mixed leadership styles.

There are three research questions guiding this study.

- What is/are the preferred leadership style(s) used by the Brunei's secondary Mathematics teachers in general?
- Are there any correlations between the background factors of the secondary Mathematics teachers and their leadership styles?
- What is/are the background factor(s) for the secondary Mathematics teachers to have mixed leadership styles?

## 4 METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Research Design

The approach taken for this study was a mixed, quantitative and qualitative, method research design. A mixed method approach was used because we are investigating the preferred leadership style of the secondary Mathematics teachers in Brunei; to find out if there exists any significant relationships between the teachers' background factors and their leadership styles, and finally to explore what are the teachers' background factors that contribute to their mixed leadership styles.

### 4.2 Participants

The study was carried out on a sample of 44 Mathematics teachers in two government secondary schools in Brunei. However, only 35 out of 44 Mathematics teachers participated in answering the questionnaire, and since 3 out of the 35 Mathematics teachers were reluctant to fully complete the questionnaire, their data were discarded. Hence, data analyses will only focused on the remaining 32 participants.

### 4.3 Instrumentation and Data Collection

For this study, a rating scale of four point Likert scale leadership questionnaire was used to identify the leadership styles of the secondary Mathematics teachers. This questionnaire also required the teachers to fill in their background information. All data collected were then analyzed quantitatively to generate the correlation between the teachers' background factors and their leadership styles.

Finally, interviews were carried out to selected secondary Mathematics teachers and their responses were analyzed qualitatively for an in-depth investigation of the background factors which may contribute to their mixed leadership styles of teaching.

### 4.4 Piloting Procedures

To determine the leadership styles that the Mathematics teachers in Brunei have in general, a tentative questionnaire was set by seven teacher candidates who enrolled in the Master of Teaching programme specializing in Secondary Education in the learning area of Mathematics, on the topic "Leadership in Secondary School Mathematics". Once the tentative questionnaire was set, it was partially validated by piloting among five secondary schools in Brunei, which were eventually excluded in the final implementation

of this study. After the questionnaire was validated, it was then circulated among schools in the respective placement schools in smaller groups of two. It was hoped that by circulating the questionnaires among secondary Mathematics teachers in Brunei and analyzing the results of the data, the leadership styles among Mathematics teachers in teaching students can be generalized and a pattern can be identified to improve the teaching of mathematics in school.

#### 4.5 Data Analysis

For the quantitative analysis, simple descriptive statistics were used to examine the secondary Mathematics teachers' preferred leadership styles and the correlation between the background factors of the secondary Mathematics teachers and their leadership styles. The simple descriptive statistics utilized here were the statistical charts such as the data represented tables in percentages, bar graphs and pie charts.

If there is a significant relationship shown from the simple descriptive statistical results, further analysis on the correlation between the particular background factor and leadership style will be determined and confirmed by the statistical software, SPSS. A null hypothesis stating there is no correlation between the secondary Mathematics teachers' background factor and their leadership styles will be used along with an alternative hypothesis stating there is a correlation between the secondary Mathematics teachers' background factor and their leadership styles. There is a reason to reject the null hypothesis with at least a 95% confidence level if there is a significant change that is equal to or lesser than the level 0.05.

For the qualitative analysis, we analyzed and compared the responses of the interviews from the selected teachers to identify which background factors that may contribute to their mixed leadership styles.

### 5 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed to reveal the following results and findings.

#### 5.1 Teachers' Preferred Leadership Style

As shown in Table 1, 52% of secondary Mathematics teachers in the sample have a democratic leadership style in their teaching. Hence, democratic leadership style is dominantly portrayed by majority of the Mathematics teachers in the sample. There are four teachers that have a mixed leadership style of autocratic and democratic. Interestingly, none of the teachers have a Laissez-faire style of leadership.

Table 1. The Frequency of Teachers with Different Leadership Styles.

Leadership Styles	No. of Teachers (%)
Autocratic	12 (36%)
Democratic	17 (52%)
Laissez-faire	0 (0%)
Autocratic & Democratic	4 (12%)

#### 5.2 Gender and Leadership Styles

From the 32 secondary Mathematics teachers that participated in the survey, 8 are male teachers and 24 are female teachers.

Table 2. The Frequency of Teachers with Different Leadership Styles Associated with Gender.

Leadership Styles	Gender	
	No. of Male Teachers (%)	No. of Female Teachers (%)
Autocratic	3 (37%)	8 (33%)
Democratic	4 (50%)	13 (54%)
Laissez-faire	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Autocratic & Democratic	1 (13%)	3 (13%)

From Table 2, majority of the male (50%) and female (54%) secondary Mathematics teachers have democratic leadership style. As the proportion of leadership styles among male and female teachers is almost the same, this shows that gender is not a significant factor to determine the leadership of a secondary Mathematics teacher. In other words, there is no significant relationship between the gender of the secondary Mathematics teachers and their leadership styles.

#### 5.3 Education Level and Leadership Styles

From the analysis of the data obtained, it was found out that majority of the secondary Mathematics teachers

graduated with Bachelor (18) and Master (14) degrees, and none with Diploma or Doctorate degree. As shown in Fig. 1, most (50%) of the teachers holding a Bachelor degree have an autocratic leadership style while less than half (44%) with a democratic style of leadership. In contrast, teachers with a Master degree as their highest qualification, more than half (64%) are democratic and only 14% with autocratic leadership style.

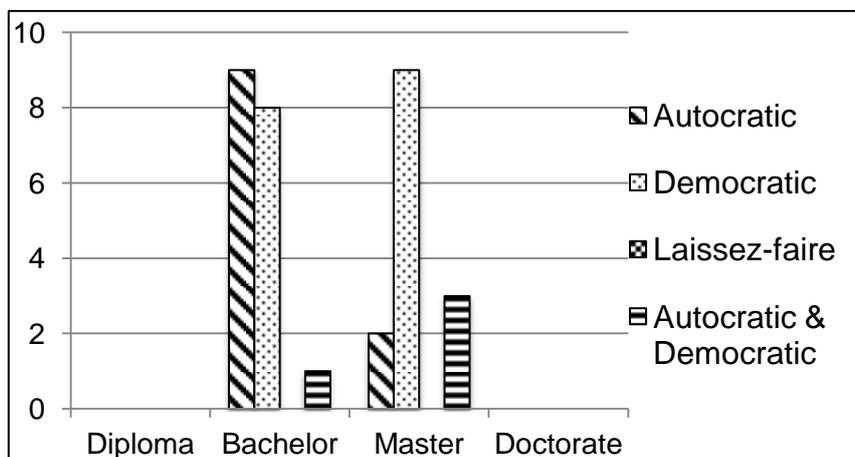


Fig. 1. The Frequency of Secondary Mathematics Teachers with Different Leadership Styles Associated with their Educational Level.

The percentage of Mathematics teachers with different leadership styles varies with their education level. It shows that education level could be one of the factors affecting teachers' leadership styles. To prove this, further analysis was conducted using SPSS to find out the correlation between the teachers' education level and their leadership styles (refer to Tables 3, 4 and 5 below).

Table 3. The Correlation between Teachers with Autocratic Leadership Style and their Education Level.

		Education Level	Autocratic
Education Level	Pearson Correlation	1	.005
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.980
	N	32	32

Table 4. The Correlation between Teachers with Democratic Leadership Style and their Education Level.

		Education Level	Democratic
Education Level	Pearson Correlation	1	.472**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.0006
	N	32	32

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5. The Correlation between Teachers with Laissez-faire Leadership Style and their Education Level.

		Education Level	Laissez-faire
Education Level	Pearson Correlation	1	.197
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.280
	N	32	32

Indicated in Table 4, the significant value between teachers with democratic leadership style associated with their education level is 0.0006. Since it is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no correlation between education level and democratic leadership style. We can conclude that there is a correlation between education level and democratic leadership style.

#### 5.4 Age and Leadership Style

As shown in Table 6, most teachers possess democratic leadership styles in particular within the age range of 31 to 35 years. Whilst teachers within the age 26-30 years old have either democratic or mixed leadership styles (autocratic & democratic).

Table 6. The Frequency of Teachers with Different Leadership Styles Associated with their Age.

Leadership Styles	Age Range (Years)						
	Under 25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55
Autocratic	0	1	9	1	0	0	0
Democratic	1	3	6	2	2	1	2
Laissez-faire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Autocratic & Democratic	0	3	1	0	0	0	0

Remarkably, the number of teachers who are have autocratic leadership styles in the age range of 31- 35 years old is significantly high, and a notable difference is observed between this age range than the others. Therefore, it shows that there might be an effect of age and their leadership styles. To prove this, further analysis was conducted using SPSS to find out the correlation between the teachers' age and their leadership styles (refer to Tables 7, 8 and 9 below).

Table 7. The Correlation between Teachers with Autocratic Leadership Style and their Age.

		Education Level	Autocratic
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	.098
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.595
	N	32	32

Table 8. The Correlation between Teachers with Democratic Leadership Style and their Age.

		Education Level	Democratic
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	.363*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.041
	N	32	32

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 9. The Correlation between Teachers with Laissez-faire Leadership Style and their Age.

		Education Level	Laissez-faire
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	-.012
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.948
	N	32	32

As shown in Table 8, the significant value between age and democratic leadership style is 0.041. Since it is less than 0.05 we reject the null hypothesis that there is no correlation between age and democratic leadership style. We can conclude that there is a correlation between age and democratic leadership style.

## 5.5 Teaching Experience and Leadership Style

From Table 10, most of the Mathematics teachers showed democratic leadership style as they started teaching (within 0-5 years of teaching experience). For those with 6 to 10 years of teaching experience, majority of them have autocratic leadership style. As the teaching experience of teachers increases, especially with more than ten years, majority of leadership styles are democratic.

Table 10. The Frequency of Teachers with Different Leadership Styles Associated with the Years of Teaching Experience.

Leadership Styles	Years of Teaching Experience			
	0-5	6-10	11-15	>15
Autocratic	1	7	3	0
Democratic	4	5	5	3
Laissez-faire	0	0	0	0
Autocratic & Democratic	3	1	0	0

Specifically, the number of teachers with 6 to 10 years of teaching experience is mostly autocratic and is significantly high. It seems that the number of years of teaching experience does have an effect on teachers' leadership style. In order to prove this, further analysis was conducted using SPSS to find out the correlation between the teachers' years of teaching experience and their leadership styles (refer to Tables 11, 12 and 13 below).

Table 11. The Correlation between Teachers with Autocratic Leadership Style and Years of Teaching Experience.

		Education Level	Autocratic
Years of Teaching Experience	Pearson Correlation	1	.064
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.728
	N	32	32

Table 12. The Correlation between Teachers with Democratic Leadership Style and Years of Teaching Experience.

		Education Level	Democratic
Years of Teaching Experience	Pearson Correlation	1	.353*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.047
	N	32	32

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 13. The Correlation between Teachers with Laissez-faire Leadership Style and Years of Teaching Experience.

		Education Level	Laissez-faire
Years of Teaching Experience	Pearson Correlation	1	-.051
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.781
	N	32	32

As shown in Table 12, the significant value between years of teaching experience and democratic leadership style is 0.047. Since it is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no correlation between years of teaching experience and democratic leadership style. We can conclude that there is a correlation between the teachers' years of teaching experience and their democratic leadership styles.

## 5.6 Mixed Leadership Styles

There were two teachers, from each of the participating schools, which were identified to have mixed leadership style (they both had the same scores of 20 in both autocratic and democratic leadership styles). These two teachers were interviewed to investigate which background factors that may have contributed to their mixed leadership styles. With regard to their background factors, they both have four years of teaching experience and were in the same age range of 26 to 30 years. When they were asked about the teaching approaches they have towards different abilities of students, both teachers mentioned they have different approaches depending on the student's ability in learning.

Subsequently, they were asked about any changes they have encountered throughout their teaching journey and both of them mentioned that they did face changes in teaching. One of them said the changes are based on students' performance in terms of lesson preparation, self-confidence and content knowledge. While the other teacher said the changes are based on experiences in teaching different year levels and the different types of students. Consequently, when they were enquired about the preferred teaching approach in teaching exam-oriented class, both of them mentioned that they would apply direct instructional method and let students practice more on exam-based questions. Now this particular finding may be typical of most teachers in Brunei where emphases on reviewing exam-based questions reflects a direct indication that the key goal of the teachers' classroom practice was to prepare students for their respective examinations towards the end of each school year (Shahrill, 2009; Hamid et al., 2013; Shahrill et al., 2013; Wahid & Shahrill, 2014).

## 6 DISCUSSION

Majority of Mathematics teachers in Brunei possess democratic style of leadership. Based on previous literature, democratic leadership style leads to effective teaching. Hence, it can be generalized also that Mathematics teachers in Brunei may be attempting to conduct effective teaching in their lessons.

This study revealed that there is no significant correlation between the gender of the secondary Mathematics teachers and their leadership styles. This particular finding of the study supports the findings of Jamrok and Neisari (2013). We then found that there is a significant association between the age of the secondary Mathematics teachers and the democratic leadership style. This finding corresponds with the

findings of Tatlah et al. (2010), which they claimed that teachers' age had a significant correlation with the people oriented leadership, participating and delegating leadership. However, this finding partially supports that of Dadashi et al. (2012).

With reference to relationship of leadership styles and teaching experience of the secondary Mathematics teachers, we found that there is an association between the teaching experience and the democratic leadership style. This finding partially supports the findings of Jamrok and Neisari (2013). However, our finding here fully supports the findings found by Tatlah and colleagues (2010) in which they claimed that the teachers' experience had significant correlation with participating and delegating leadership styles. This study also shows that the teachers' level of education has a significant correlation with their democratic leadership style. This finding is supported by the findings of Jamrok and Neisari (2013) as well as Dadashi et al. (2012).

Based on the interviews with the two selected Mathematics teachers who have mixed leadership style, the major feature was that they were both teaching mixed ability students. From our observations of their lessons, we found that they tend to apply autocratic leadership style in teaching low ability students. For instance, direct instruction was given in class so that students were clear on what to do. On the other hand, they tend to apply democratic leadership style in teaching the high achievers. For example, instead of giving direct instruction to solve a particular problem, they usually allowed time and opportunities for students to think and express their ideas in how to solve the problem.

## 7 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings in this study, the summary of the conclusions drawn from this study is as follows.

- Majority of secondary Mathematics teachers in Brunei have democratic leadership style.
- There is no significant association between the secondary Mathematics teachers' gender and their leadership styles.
- Specifically, there is a significant correlation between the secondary Mathematics teachers' education level and their democratic leadership style.
- There is a significant correlation between the secondary Mathematics teachers' age and their democratic leadership style.
- There is also a correlation between the secondary Mathematics teachers' years of teaching experience and their democratic leadership style.
- The years of teaching experience and age can be the factors contributing to teachers having mixed leadership style.
- If Mathematics teachers are teaching mixed ability students, there is a trend to develop mixed leadership in teaching.

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