

# Principals' Communication Styles and School Culture in Vocational Colleges in Selangor

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**Abstract:** This study investigated the principals' communication styles and school culture in vocational colleges in Selangor. A total of 244 teachers involved in this study. Data was collected using Google Form due to the COVID-19 outbreak. This study adapted questionnaires known as "Principals' Communication Styles Questionnaire for Teachers" (PCSQT) and Revised School Culture Element Questionnaire (RSCEQ) and employed a correlational research design. The findings revealed that most of the dominant communication styles practiced by the principals at vocational colleges in Selangor was assertive communication style. The results also showed that the level of school culture at vocational colleges in Selangor was high based on three factors which are shared leadership and vision, collegial teaching and learning, and professional commitment. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to investigate the relationship between principals' communication styles and school culture. The results showed a moderately significant relationship between principals' communication styles and school culture at vocational colleges in Selangor. In short, when principals are proven to be good role models for teachers, it is also important to enhance on the effective communication with useful tools and application for a highly needed leadership competency to enable them to work with teachers of varying characteristics.

**Keywords:** Communication styles; School Culture; Vocational Colleges

## 1. Introduction

Leadership is often viewed as one's ability in becoming influential on a group of people towards achieving the targets in an institution. Nevertheless, researchers have been describing the concept of leadership in various ways; like Goddard Tim (1997), who perceived leadership as the action of working in a group with other people for the sake of achieving the community objectives. While consistent with Yulk (2003), leadership involves a process of social influence through which a person practises an intentional influence over people in desire to construct behaviors and interactions within a group or organization. Schein (1992) relates leadership to the power of performing action beyond the boundary of culture to begin progressive changes with greater flexibility. Moreover, individuals who are referred as good leaders will ensure that personal and educational values representing the objectives of their community are well-informed and communicated (Day et al; 2001).

One of the elements in leadership competency is communication. The concept of communication involves the process where messages are created and exchanged. This competency is a tool, behavior, and capability that a person needs to be successful at motivating and directing others. According to Stephen (2011), communication could be a crucial key in conducting and organizing the manpower in the direction of accomplishing the targets and objectives of one organization. Based on Okotoni & Akinwale (2019), communication in any organization is vital to the survival, smooth running and success of the organization. In fact, the ability to communicate is not the only factor necessary for an instructor to meet success in delivering knowledge but also a critical factor or attribute in effective classroom management (Teoh, Nasaruddin & Parmjit, 2017).

In schools, just like any other organizations, a series of communication skills which comprises the formal and informal skills is applied by the principal. Similarly, communication can exist in many forms; be it through planned or ad hoc; digital or non-digital; virtual or face to face; verbal, video or written. Communication at schools also takes place between and among principals, teachers, auxiliary support staff, students as well as other stakeholders. Communication that is efficient will establish the knowledge, competence, and constitution as required by the principals to exert either direct or indirect influence on teachers and the school's community. The school objectives are shared by the principals with the school's community through communication. It could be said that without effective communication, the school achievement of educational goals may not be successful.

Other than communication, principals must be conscious of their school culture of which they have become a part of (Schein, 2003). Besides, Leah (2018), expressed that many principals are intuitively mindful of the fact that the culture of one organization could be the foundation of the school success. In addition, school culture is one of the important elements to move schools in the direction of empowerment, and a framework was developed as a guideline in future work by identifying the types of school culture that could contribute to teachers' psychological empowerment (Leele, Badji & Chan, 2019).

In the "Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013 – 2025" the emphasis on leadership of great quality as a feasible approach to strengthen and transform education is highlighted whereby Shift 5 stresses on the quality of leadership within a school principal. It basically highlights the aim on the strategy that equips top leaders to the schools in enhancing students' performances, in which, vocational colleges are no exception.

In any schools including the vocational colleges in Malaysia, communication occurs from all directions. Junior principals or experienced principals are all faced with various challenges in communication, and they have certain styles of communication too. A communication style is a method by which it negotiates situations involving others. Negotiation is based on the scenarios involving others such as using proper words gently but still being firm or willing to consider other opinion before making any decision. Hence, principal-teacher communication at school comprises the interpretation of a teacher towards the figurative behavior of a school principal. Due to the diversity of school leaders and teachers, it can be quite difficult to create shared meaning at schools. In addition, the school hierarchy can distort the message (Wee, 2011).

Based on past studies by Ibrahim & Mahmoud (2016), they generalized that there is a lack of communication at schools. Teachers complained that they are less motivated by principals in decision-making (less supportiveness) and their principals are also not expressing expectations for the achievement of educational goals (lack or preciseness). It shows that there is an absence of appropriate communication styles implemented by the principals in timely manner to help the schools.

Besides communication problem, issues regarding the school culture also illustrate the community of the school that the principal leads. Every school has a culture, and every school can improve on its culture. In any ordinary school, the members should have mutual agreement on how things are done and what are worth to be done. School culture can be seen as the morality and common standard practiced by all teachers in the school and shows the positive side of the school to the students, parents, and communities. Schools are being pressured in pursuing education policies through rapid reformation and changes in the system of education. This creates changes in school culture and in the education system as well. In addition, existing thoughts, strategies, beliefs, and

philosophies also progress in the world of education in line with the system's changes. These pressures affect teachers as they are constantly required to accept changes.

While the change in the education system is very rapid, it should not be an obstacle to effective transmission of education services. Like any other organization, there is the importance of organizational culture in enhancing other aspects in the quality management. For instance, learning culture and the high performance and productivity culture are important variables that help organizations to implement effective ways in elevating their employee's job satisfaction. In order to achieve that, organizations are encouraged to put emphasis on the learning activities with updated knowledge and important skills (Muda, Fook. & Nordin, 2014). Nonetheless, this include effective communication trainings.

Following this, school culture can make or break the strategic management of the schools. If the school has a negative school culture, it needs to be fixed because if the school members do not work together as a team to achieve a mutual goal, the usual cause is poor communication. If there is limited communication and fewer connections, it will weaken the culture. For example, if some of the teachers never directly communicate with the principal, then messages about shared beliefs and responsibilities will be difficult to spread (Leah, 2018).

Thus, this research aims to investigate the relationship between principals' communication styles and school culture from the perceptions of teachers at vocational colleges in Selangor. This study also sought to identify the patterns of principals' communication styles and their influence towards school culture.

## **2. Method**

This study used quantitative approach through a survey to seek the relationship between principals' communication styles and school culture, Figure 1.

### **Fig 1 Research design**

Figure 1 shows the research design employed in this study. Basically, this research design is referring to the correlational research which is to investigate the relationship between these variables: 'principals' communication styles' and 'school culture'. Survey will be used to identify the trend of

communication styles adopted by the principals and to measure the level of school culture at vocational colleges in Selangor. Based on the survey, the data will be analyzed using descriptive analysis, and Pearson Correlation Coefficient will be used to explore the relationship between principals' communication styles and school culture.

A set of questionnaires was adapted from the previous study done by Okotoni & Akinwale (2018), known as Principals' Communication Styles Questionnaire for Teacher (PCSQT) and by Thomas et al (2012), known as Revised School Culture Element Questionnaire (RSCEQ).

**Table 1.** Questionnaire by section, dimension and items

Section	Dimension	No. Item	Total Items
A	<b>Demographic Profile</b>		7
B	<b>Principals' Communication Styles</b>		
	Open Communication Style	B01 – B07	7
	Assertive Communication Style	B08 – B14	7
	Inclusive Communication Style	B15 – B21	7
	Aggressive Communication Style	B22 – B28	7
C	<b>School Culture</b>		
	Shared Leadership & Vision	C01 – C07	7
	Collegial Teaching & Learning	C08 – C14	7
	Professional Commitment	C15 – C20	6
Total			55

To obtain the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire which was adopted and adapted need to be reviewed before the distribution process. A university professor and an English teacher were involved in reviewing and checking on the content validity and the mechanics of language used to ensure that all items were clear and verified. The questionnaire was modified according to their feedbacks. There were some corrections made to the grammatical errors, punctuations and word coices based on the feedbacks. The arrangement of the items in Section B has also been modified. The validation of the questionnaire was obtained after the refinement and alteration completed. Subsequently, the questionnaires were used in a pilot-test which was conducted involving 30 teachers at vocational colleges in Kuala Lumpur who were not involved in the actual study. Based on the feedbacks from the pilot-test, 28 teachers commented that they could answer all the questions clearly.

The pilot-test was also conducted to obtain the reliability of the instrument. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were extracted based on the pilot-test. The reliability analysis Cronbach's Alpha for four dimensions of principals' communication styles were .916, .919, .793, and .846 respectively for the dimension of Open communication style, Assertive communication styles, Inclusive communication style and Aggressive communication style.

An overall Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient for the principals' communication styles instrument was .873, which indicates a good internal consistency. With regards to school culture, the analysis shows that the internal consistency values of each dimension is .929, .922, and .832 respectively for the Shared leadership and vision, Collegial teaching and learning, and Professional commitment. An overall Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient for the school culture instrument was .924, indicating an excellent internal consistency.

Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was extracted from the overall items from Section B of principals' communication styles and Section C of school culture. The results of Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was .914 and it indicates that the overall internal consistency of this questionnaire is excellent, thus highly acceptable to be used in the actual study (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Reliability Analysis of Overall Items in the Questionnaire (Section B & C)

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.914	48

Besides the validity and reliability, this study followed research ethical principles as it involved freedom of participation, anonymity, confidentiality of data, and the right to access to the researcher. An approval letter from the Ministry of Education (MoE) under the Educational Planning and Research Department (EPRD) was also obtained. This was followed by a second approval letter from the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Department (BPLTV) so researchers then could proceed directly to the director of each college.

The population of this study involved teachers at eight vocational colleges in Selangor. Using a simple random sampling technique, 244 teachers responded in the survey through Google Form due to the Movement Control Order (MCO) period of Covid-19 outbreak.

### 3. Results

Table 3 shows the demographic profile in distribution of respondents by gender and races. A total of 31.1% (N=76) male and 68.9% (N=168) female involved in this survey. The frequency of respondents according to race is as follow: Malays 95.5% (N=233), Chinese 2.0% (N=5), Indians 2.0% (N=5) and other races 0.5% (N=1).

**Table 3.** Demographic Profile

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	76	31.1
Female	168	68.9
Race	Frequency	Percent
Malay	233	95.5
Chinese	5	2.0
Indian	5	2.0
Total	244	100.0

In determining the Principals' Communication Styles and analysing school culture in the vocational colleges, 5-point Likert scale (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, and 5=always) was used. Table 4 presents the overall mean scores of the principals' communication styles. Results indicated that among the four communication styles, Assertive Communication Style obtained the highest mean score with M=4.01 (SD=0.60). It is closely followed by Open Communication Style with mean score of M= 3.90 (SD=0.63). Inclusive Communication Style scored M= 3.79 (SD=0.52) and the lowest mean score with M=2.81 (SD= 0.96) is Aggressive Communication Style.

**Table 4.** Principals' Communication Styles

Principals' Communication Styles	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Open Communication Style	244	3.90	0.63
Assertive Communication Style	244	4.01	0.60
Inclusive Communication Style	244	3.79	0.52
Aggressive Communication Style	244	2.81	0.96

In analysing the school culture, three dimensions were measured using similar 5-point Likert scale; (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, and 5=always). Table 5 presents the mean scores of all the dimensions of school culture used in this study. Results indicated that Professional Commitment scored the highest mean score with M=4.23 (SD=0.49). It is followed by Collegial Teaching and Learning and Shared Leadership and Vision with the mean scores of M=4.11 (SD=0.55) and M=3.87 (SD=0.66) respectively. The overall mean score of school culture with M=4.07 (SD=0.47) perceived by teachers at vocational colleges in Selangor is high indicating their school has a "good culture" when teachers are expressing a shared vision and students are succeeding through positive culture learning environment. It depicts that teachers at vocational colleges in Selangor were committed to their jobs as educators.

**Table 5.** The level of school culture among teachers

School Culture	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Shared Leadership and Vision	244	3.87	0.66
Collegial Teaching and Learning	244	4.11	0.55
Professional Commitment	244	4.23	0.49
School Culture	244	4.07	0.47

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (*r*) analyses were performed to investigate the relationship between principals' communication styles and school culture. Table 6 shows that there is a moderate correlation and significant relationship ( $r = .574$ ,  $p < .05$ ) between principals' communication styles and school culture at 0.05 level. This means, there is a moderately significant relationship between principals' communication styles and school culture as perceived by teachers at vocational colleges in Selangor.

**Table 6.** Correlation Coefficient between Principals' Communication Styles and School Culture at Vocational Colleges in Selangor.

		Principals' Communication Styles	School Culture
Principals' Communication Styles	Pearson Correlation	1	.574
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	244	244
School Culture	Pearson Correlation	.574	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	244	244

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

#### 4. Discussion

The discussions are based on the analysis of the principals' communication styles as perceived by teachers and the school culture as being practised at Vocational Colleges in Selangor. It also includes finding a relationship between both variables that could lead to a better understanding of the communication factors that influence school culture.

##### 4.1 Principals' communication styles as perceived by teachers

The study revealed the communication styles adopted by the principals' as perceived by teachers at vocational colleges in Selangor as assertive communication followed by open communication and inclusive communication style. The responses from teachers also indicated that principals of vocational colleges in Selangor rarely used the aggressive communication style.

In view to this, Akinwale & Okotoni (2018) stated in their study that adopting open communication, assertive communication and inclusive communication style can be regarded as a democratic communication style. While the aggressive communication style is seen as an autocratic communication style, it obviously shows that the principals of vocational colleges in Selangor are people-oriented leaders who usually care about the welfare and the well-being of their subordinates. This democratic communication style is attributed to collaboration, language style that is democratic and political, authorization of occupation and force, respect for others' opinions and the communication that is done in two-way. These are some of the characteristics of the principals that can be exemplified in managing the schools and will also give some positive impact on teachers and schools' environment.

In view of the items in assertive communication style, principals take the lead in communication, followed by determining the direction of communication in a meeting and gives concise and clear messages to the teachers. Besides, the findings are also in favor of principals respecting the rights and honor of the teachers in school. This findings are in line with Sherman (2015) study that considered assertiveness as defending ones rights which is done through expression of opinions, emotions, and faiths directly, honestly and appropriately. The findings also revealed the characteristic of the principals who adopted this assertive communication style such as starting with a clear statement of needs and desires, expressing feelings clearly, listening well without interruption, being in control, being in a proper and respectful manner, engaging well with others through eye contact, using tranquil and pleasant tone of voice, feeling united with other people and creating an

environment of respect for all. These characteristics traits are ideal for leaders who can set a good example for others.

The communication styles adopted by the principals at vocational colleges in Selangor will undoubtedly enhance effective administration of the schools and necessary to strengthen teachers' involvement within the schools. In addition, the appropriate communication styles used by the principals as perceived by teachers can create a good relationship between principal and teachers. Hence, a positive environment will be formed in the organization and leads to the achievement of the educational goals and shared objectives of the schools. This corroborates the findings of Fashiku (2016), that open communication style, assertive communication style and inclusive communication style enhance effective administration of the schools which in turn helps in boosting the morale of the school members.

#### **4.2 Level of school culture as perceived by teachers**

Based on the three constructs of school culture, the highest mean score for professional commitment, followed by collegial teaching and learning, and shared leadership and vision indicated strong beliefs of values for the schools. Teachers are willing to show persistent effort representing the school, and strongly desire to sustain as school members. It is expected as vocational schools in Malaysia are well establish and the skills training institutions are accredited, which could lead strong engagement of employers to achieve the vision of schools.

In the professional commitment elements, teachers believed that all students could learn. Teachers also give priority in helping the students to develop their own skills and willing to spend times in reflecting their work so that they can make some improvement based on the reflection after classes. As mentioned by Harris et al (2013), professional teachers will be open-minded and able to interact with others to solve problems and plan together in building educational goals in school. For example, Ministry of Education (MoE) implemented a program called as Professional Learning Community (PLC) which provides opportunities for teachers to sit together and discuss various matters related to educational issues happened at schools. This program illustrates the vocational colleges' teachers conscious of their responsibility as educators. The program has proven the impact on teachers in sharing information and ideas for best practices (Ghani, 2013).

Other than that, collegial teaching and learning also contributed to the high level of school culture as perceived by the teachers at vocational colleges in Selangor. Based on the finding, it shows that teachers at vocational colleges in Selangor can professionally learn from each other. As in TVET or vocational education, students have the opportunity to learn from basic to advanced levels; so, it is important that teachers encourage each other to improve their teaching, shares the norms and motivate to instill the awareness of joint responsibilities towards teaching and learning processes. This was supported by Jurasaitė-Harbison & Rex (2010), who defined collegial teaching and learning as being able to talk about problems in education and work as a group to improve the performance of individuals and schools.

However, shared leadership and vision did not seem to be always practiced among teachers. Shared leadership and vision are about the leading practice that is shared by all members in the organization which is used in conversion process of value to action, vision to existence, challenge to innovation, seclusion to unity, and liability to profit (Kauzes & Posner, 2012). Teachers felt that despite the strong professional commitment there is lack of support from the administrator. For examples, issues related to teachers' problems, like facing difficulties with works and when teachers need assistance to enhance their quality of teaching and learning in their classroom. This may lead to failure of encouraging teachers to work willingly to achieve the common goals for the students and school success. In fact, the success of a school is determined by supportive leaders or principals.



### **4.3 The relationship between principals' communication styles and school culture**

The research findings concluded a moderate correlation between principals' communication styles and school culture as perceived by teachers at vocational colleges in Selangor. The findings are consistent with the findings of the study conducted by Sahin (2011), who found moderate correlation between communication skills of the school principal and the school culture. The researcher suggested that principals should exhibit instructional leadership behaviours to help develop the unity of vision and mission, and improve the culture of education. These findings are consistent with findings from previous studies (DuPont, 2009; Lord, 2001; Miles, 2002)

A further analysis of this study shows that the element of principals' communication style thus has the most significant relationship with the school culture is open communication style. This indicates that principals who adopt the open communication style can raise the level of school culture. For instance, principals who encouraged the creation of surrounding for school members to communicate their perspectives and thoughts openly regarding issues in school and accepted feedbacks and comments are the ones who allow achievement of goals and objectives of their schools. Generally, this communication style puts encouragement towards the members expressions of the school policy and problems that may affect their work at school. This style will also enable teachers to be acknowledged by the principals as professionals and not only as employees. This is because principals recognize teachers perspectives and ideas and willing to put into consideration for effective administration of the schools.

In view with the above description on open communication style, adopting this communication style may also increase the level of contribution on shared leadership and vision among the school members at vocational colleges in Selangor. In contrast, principals who used aggressive communication style had a significant relationship with school culture but were negatively correlated. This means the more principals adopt this aggressive communication style in mobilizing the school members, the lower the level of school culture will be obtained.

It is supported by Clegg, Kornberger and Pitsis (2004). They claimed that there is a close connection between communication and culture. Culture uses communication as its medium. Through communication, it is possible to relay the values and emphasize on certain aspects, as communication helps to reveal on what is acceptable and unacceptable. This findings also aligned with the previous studied by Arlestig (2008), who stated that communication can be seen as relying upon the relationship quality within an organization, which indirectly puts trust as important variable in communication process. If no trust exists between the principal and the teachers, there will be no effective communication between them. The consequences that will happen is the relationship between the principal and teachers is impaired and thus creates a hostile environment and presents a negative culture to the students, parents, and local community.

It is extremely inappropriate for a school to display a culture that is offensive to the public. Therefore, the principal needs to use appropriate communication styles according to the situation so that the culture that exists in the school is a culture that is exemplary and appropriate as educational centers that goes hand in hand with training and positive learning experience.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study contributes to the knowledge about principals' communication styles at vocational colleges in Selangor which is an area of research that has received little attention. This study helps clarify the relationship between principals' communication styles and school culture. Furthermore, the study identifies school principals' communication styles which could impact school culture positively and negatively. Strategies are needed for the school principals to reshape their communication styles in ways that could improve the school culture. Principals of vocational colleges in Selangor should be concerned with enhancing their school culture especially in terms of shared leadership and vision by using communication as their medium. The vocational college teachers in Selangor are professional and committed in their work and the level of collegial teaching and learning is also very

commendable. Teachers only need proactive support from the principals and administrators as catalysts in fulfilling their responsibility to educate the students.

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