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Scenario in Teacher Retention: Does Principals' Contextual Intelligence Matter?

* **Suhaili Binti Mohd Yusoff, *Phd*¹, Nazatul Shahreen Binti Zainal Abidin², Zuraidi Bin Wahid³, Mohd Aliziyad Bin Abas⁴, Ahmad Satmi Bin Salleh⁵ & Siti Meriam Binti Deraman⁶**

¹Institut Pendidikan Guru Kampus Sultan Mizan, Malaysia

²Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

^{3,4,5,6}Pejabat Pendidikan Daerah Besut, Malaysia

| Article Info | ABSTRACT |
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| <p>Article history: Received: 25 July 2023 Revised: 2 August 2023 Accepted: 20 August 2023 Published: 1 September 2023</p> | <p>It has been recognized that the principal's leadership style has a significant influence on the psychology and behavior of teachers. A positive internal environment will make teachers happy and enjoy their work even when faced with various challenging tasks. This study focuses on the influence of the Contextual Leadership for School Principal (CLP) on teacher retention (TR) and identifies significant dimensions of CLP as predictors of TR. The measurement tools used consist of the Malaysian Contextual Leadership for Principals in School (MyCLIPS) and the Employee Retention Instrument which measure the variables in the study. This study is a cross-sectional survey involving 367 schoolteachers selected through multi-level sampling in the state of Terengganu. The results show that gender does not differentiate the level of TR in the study while the length of service proves to be significant in differentiating the level of TR. The results also show that there is a strong influence of CLP on TR ($R=.53$, $p<0.01$) and CLP was also found to contribute as much as 39% to the variance of TR ($R^2=.39$, $F=91.178$). While CLP, through two dimensions namely Collegiality and Contextual Intelligence, positively becomes a significant predictor for TR which are ($\beta=0.39$, $p<0.01$) and ($\beta=0.65$, $p<0.01$), respectively. This finding has given a new discovery in school leadership that being skilled in thinking contextually, prioritizing the element of collegiality with teachers, and providing pedagogical support needs to be empowered by the school leadership to ensure the existence of a positive perception of teachers towards work and school. In addition, this positive perception guarantees teachers to continue to remain in service at the current school.</p> |
| <p>Keywords: Contextual Leadership for School Principal, teacher retention, contextual intelligence, engagement</p> <p></p> | |

Corresponding Author:

*Suhaili binti Mohd Yusoff

Institut Pendidikan Guru Kampus Sultan Mizan, Malaysia

Email:suhaili@ipgmksm.edu.my



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INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has proven to be challenging for the education world. Among the main challenges are organizational management and human resource management. This has demanded educational organizations be managed wisely, brilliantly, and creatively (Noor et al. 2018), in addition to always being ready, sensitive, and wise in interpreting the current context especially in facing the challenges of the current world which is constantly fluctuating (volatility), uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (Bahtiar et al., 2020). The sustainability of an organization cannot only be based on a clear goal without being supported at the implementation level. In fact, previous studies have also shown that organizational effectiveness and sustainability are closely related to employee productivity and employee emotions (Bardach et al., 2022; Gordon et al., 2018; Lucas-Mangas, 2022; Yusoff et al., 2022), management creativity, leadership style, work environment and organizational policies (Benawa et al., 2018; Bibi et al., 2019; Yusoff et al., 2022). The level of harmony among educators needs to be prioritized because the behavior of an educator is proven to have a direct influence on student achievement (Tropova et al., 2021). Therefore, this study will focus on looking at the influence of contextual leadership factors on teacher retention variables in schools. These two variables can be explained by a combination of Fieldler's Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1967) and the Two Factor Theory by Herzberg (1959).

Every organization craves competent and committed employees. The existence of competent and committed employees in an organization can increase the competitiveness and sustainability of an organization (Gordon, 2018). In other words, committed employees who remain in the organization are one of the key drivers of the organization's success. However, the challenges of the VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) world have a great impact on the motivation and emotions of employees, that this uncertain situation causes their resilience in work to decrease (Stewart et al., 2021). Therefore, the issue of employee retention in any organization is a big concern that must be addressed by organizations, whether they are profit-oriented organizations or the service sector because there are workers who fail to retain their services due to work environment factors such as extreme fatigue (burnout) or individual factors such as resilience. Studies have found that teacher retention in the United States (US) is critical (Education Support, 2019; Waley, 2022) and it is closely related to the work environment (Matthews et al., 2022) apart from school leadership (Matthews et al., 2022). These factors have an impact on teacher satisfaction at work (Yusoff & T-Arifin, 2020). This less encouraging working condition became more apparent when the world faced the COVID-19 pandemic (Billett et al., 2022; Bradshaw, 2023).

In addition, the lack of teachers is also one of the global issues facing the world of education (See & Gorard, 2022; Williams III et al., 2022). What is also alarming is when Malaysia is surprised by numerous decisions made by teachers related to the issue of early retirement. The trend of educators retiring early seems to be happening among Malaysian teachers even though educators are the main pillar of the sustainability of Malaysian education. According to Nasbah (2022), this trend becomes more worrying when the figure continues to increase to 4,360 early retirement applications in 2021, which is equivalent to 1.06 percent of the total number of teachers. Therefore, the leadership factor should be emphasized in ensuring that educators at the school level continue to serve despite facing the various challenges of 21st century education and the VUCA world. Therefore, the study of employee retention among teachers that focuses on factors forecasting leadership needs to be studied and improved considering that among the significant factors in ensuring teachers to remain in service are work motivation and camaraderie in the workplace (Casely-Hayford, 2022). Leadership that is appropriate and responsive to the current context is postulated to have a positive effect on teachers' feelings and emotions to continue contributing to their schools.

Research Objectives and Questions

Specifically, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- i) Identify Contextual Leadership for School Principal (CLP) level and teacher retention level (TR)
- ii) Identify differences in teacher retention (TR) based on demographic factors (gender and length of service)
- iii) Identifying the influence of the Contextual Leadership for School Principal (CLP) on teacher retention (TR)

HYPOTHESIS

H₀1: There is no significant difference in TR based on the teacher's gender factor.

H₀2: There is no significant difference in TR based on the teacher's tenure factor.

H_A3: There is a significant and positive influence of CLP on TR

H_A4: The overall CLP significantly contributes to the variance of TR

H_A4a: The Contextual Intelligence dimension is a significant predictor for TR

H_A4b: Collegiality dimension is a significant predictor for TR

H_A4c: Pedagogical Support Dimension is a significant predictor for TR

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contextual Leadership for School Principal

The element of 'context' in educational leadership has begun to receive attention from leadership experts since the early 2000s and it is still debated until now that the element of context needs to be given attention in ensuring leadership is more effective. Among the experts in the field of education who often insist that a school leader needs to be sensitive to elements of this wider context are Hallinger (2016), Harris and Jones (2022), and Leithwood (2017). Although this concept of contextual leadership is seen as still new, it is based on Fiedler's Contingency Model (Fiedler, 1978) which perceives that there is no effective solo leadership that is appropriate to practice in every situation. Rather, effective leadership needs to be based on the context in which the leader is in (Hallinger, 2016). Some recent studies (such as Harris & Jones, 2022; Yusoff et al., 2022) have also proven that leadership based on this context can bring schools to a better level.

In other words, broader factors, as suggested by leadership prominent scholars such as Braun et al. (2011) and Hallinger (2016), they highlighted the importance of school in terms of the locality, history, policies and cultures, are clearly among the context factors will influence the leadership style of a school leaders. Therefore, factors need to be paid attention to in improving school effectiveness. In other words, the wisdom factor of the school leader is very crucial in trying to diagnose the internal and external factors of the school to face challenges and balance it with the current needs so that it meets the needs of the school itself (Harris & Jones, 2022).

In this study, the contextual leadership of the principal refers to how teachers perceive the leadership and management of the principal who is agile and thinks wisely in interpreting the context, managing, administering, and leading the school with full prudence. This construct consists of three dimensions namely: i) pedagogical support; ii) collegiality; and iii) contextual intelligence (Yusoff & T-Ariffin, 2021).

Teacher Retention

Recent studies have shown an upward trend in examining the issue of teacher retention and teacher shortages due to the challenges of the VUCA world and coupled with the challenges facing the COVID-19 pandemic which had a great impact on the world of education. Pushing factors such as increased work, in addition to current context issues have given implications to their motivation to continue serving as teachers in schools (Billett et al., 2022; Bradshaw,

2023; Matthews et al., 2022; Symonds & Hansen, 2022). In detail, the study by Matthews et al. (2022), Toropova et al. (2021) have identified repulsive factors such as work environment and school leadership among the factors that can be linked to the issue of teacher retention in schools which can influence teachers whether they will continue to serve or even make a decision to migrate to another place that feels more beneficial to them. Although external factors are often associated with teacher retention issues, other studies also found that teachers' personal factors are also among the factors that can be associated with teacher retention. Among the factors that include independent factors are teachers' academic preparation and qualifications (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). This means that the teachers have a positive perception towards their current workplace factors, but because they have good qualifications and for their professional development, they will also decide to change workplaces in order to improve their own careers. Although many studies discuss context factors and teachers' personal factors (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Billett et al., 2022; Bradshaw, 2023; Matthews et al., 2022), but the wisdom of a school leader who is able to control internal school factors such as culture and work environment, as well as being able to make teachers have the perception that they are always supported by the administration while working is postulated to make teachers more loyal to being in the current school and not have the intention to change or even want to retire early.

The school leader factor in this study is seen as one of the variables that needs attention because the foundation of an institution's rise or fall and good resource management certainly depends on the wisdom and competence of the organization's leader (Cells et al., 2023). Using this approach can contribute to the teacher retention literature by providing a more comprehensive theoretical framework involving the merging of two main theories, namely Fiedler's Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1967) and Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1959). In this study, employee retention is defined as the teachers' perception of themselves, that is, the extent to which they feel their work at the school gives them satisfaction and the benefits they will receive if they remain loyal to their current school.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

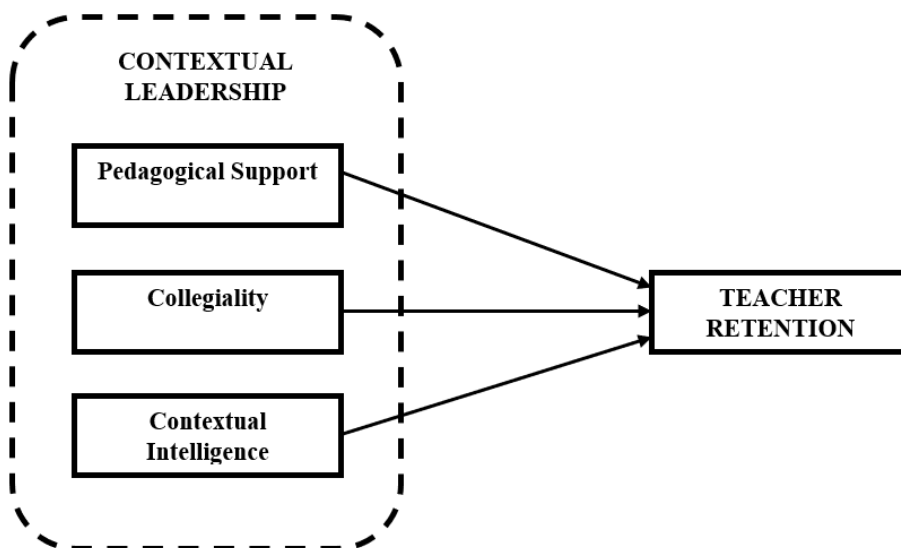


Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework that links the variable Contextual Leadership for School Principal (CLP) with Teacher Retention (TR) is based on the combination of Fiedler's Contingency Theory (1967) with the Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1959).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This quantitative research uses a cross-sectional survey design. Respondents were selected using a random sampling procedure as recommended by Sekaran and Bougie (2013). In terms of population, the population of this study consists of all secondary school teachers of the Terengganu State Education Department (JPNT) based on multistage procedures. A total of 8 Education District Office for the entire state of Terengganu were involved including a total study sample (n=367) of secondary school teachers based on the recommendations of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) with a confidence level of 95% (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The total number of populations is as many as (N=7792) based on 2023 data taken from JPNT Terengganu. Table 1 below shows the two instruments used in measuring the two variables in the study. Both instruments show high consistency (α) as recommended by Taber (2018). The alpha values (α) show that all items are good for measuring CLP and TR.

Table 1: Study Instrument

| Instrument | Source | Number of Items | Alpha Value |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| <i>Malaysian Contextual Leadership Instrument for Principal in School</i> | Yusoff and T-Ariffin (2021) | 29 | 0.91 |
| <i>Employee Retention</i> | Kyndt et al. (2009) | 11 | 0.90 |

Data analysis was done with IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SDSS) version 25.0 with a significant level of $p < 0.05$. The interpretation of this mean scale is based on the procedure of Best and Kahn (1977). While the t-test and ANOVA were conducted to analyze the differences in TR based on the demographic factors of the teacher's gender and the teacher's tenure. In addition, an inference analysis is generated through a Multiple Regression Test to identify the influence of CLP on TR, then determine the predictor factor which is the dimensions of CLP (Contextual Intelligence, Pedagogical Support, Collegiality) on TR.

FINDINGS

Level of Contextual Leadership for School Principal (CLP) and Teacher Retention (TR)

Through t-test analysis, the level of CLP is very high (M=6.30, SD=.61). All three dimensions of CLP are also very high. Likewise, the unidimensional variable TR shows a high mean value (M=5.49, SD=0.65). The Contextual Intelligence dimension shows the highest mean value (M=6.31, SD =0.58) compared to the other two dimensions. The Collegiality dimension shows the second highest mean value which is (M=6.30, SD=0.71). This finding reflects that the teachers also have a very positive perception on the principal, and they believe that their principal has high moral values and can work as a team to ensure that the goals and direction of the school are achieved. While the Pedagogical Support Dimension shows the mean value (M=6.26, SD=0.69). This shows that the teachers believe in the ability of the principal in making efforts to improve the quality and achievement of the school through programs organized either at school level including strengthening the quality of teachers. In addition, the high mean values for all dimensions of the CLP indicate that the principal in the context of the study has adopted a humanitarian approach, prudent in managing teacher resources, intelligent, and efficient in acting.

Differences in Teacher Retention Levels Based on Demographic Factors (Gender and Length of Service)

There are two hypotheses in identifying differences in TR levels based on demographic factors, namely:

H₀1: There is no significant level difference in TR based on the teacher's gender.

H₀2: There is no significant level difference in TR based on the teacher's tenure.

Based on the results of the t-test, although male teachers showed a higher mean score (M=5.61, SD=0.63) compared to the mean score of female teachers (M=5.46, SD=0.65), the findings showed that there was no significant difference in TR level based on teacher's gender ($t(203) = 1.47, p = 0.14$). Therefore, hypothesis H₀1 is accepted in this study.

To test the difference in the level of TR based on the service duration, a one-way ANOVA test was used. Table 2 below is a summary of the analysis.

Table 2: Anova Analysis of Teacher Retention Based on Length of Service

| Age | N | M | SD | F | df |
|--------------------|-----|------|------|------|-------|
| Less than 10 years | 14 | 5.81 | 0.48 | 3.23 | 2,202 |
| 10-20 years | 69 | 5.57 | 0.53 | | |
| 21-30 years | 122 | 5.41 | 0.71 | | |
| OVERALL | 205 | 5.49 | 0.65 | | |

Findings based on Levene's homogeneity test show a significance ($p=0.04$) that the assumption of homogeneity in the data is not met. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the level of TR based on their tenure [$F(2,202)=3.23$, $p=0.04$]. Therefore, the H_0 hypothesis in this study is rejected. Based on Table 2, teachers who have just served, i.e., less than 10 years of service, show the highest level of TR ($M=5.81$, $SD=0.48$), while teachers who have served as teachers for more than 21 years show the lowest level of TR ($M=5.41$, $SD=0.65$). The findings show that the perception of teachers who are still new in the service shows a positive perception to continue to stay in the current school while for teachers who have been in the service for more than 21 years shows a desire to leave the current school and serve elsewhere.

The Influence of Principal Contextual Leadership (CLP) on Teacher Retention (TR)
Assumptions hypothesized in testing the influence of CLP on TR are:

- H_{A3} : There is a significant and positive influence of CLP on TR
- H_{A4} : The overall CLP significantly contributes to the variance of TR
- H_{A4a} : The Contextual Intelligence dimension is a significant predictor for TR
- H_{A4b} : Collegiality dimension is a significant predictor for TR
- H_{A4c} : Pedagogical Support Dimension is a significant predictor for TR

Table 3 below shows the results of One-Way Regression Analysis to identify the influence of CLP on TR.

Table 3: Model Summary

| Model | R | R ² | R ² Adjusted | Standard Error Estimates |
|--|------|----------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | 0.53 | 0.39 | 0.40 | 0.55 |
| a. Predictors (constant), Contextual Leadership for School Principal, Support, Teacher Retention | | | | |

Regression analysis is conducted to explain the tendency of the dependent variable (TR) to change when there is a change in the independent variable (CLP). The model is shown using R and R² values. The R value is the correlation coefficient between the dependent variable and the value predicted by the regression model. Therefore, the study shows that there is a significant positive influence of CLP on TR ($R=0.53$, $p<0.01$). In addition, the influence also shows a strong influence as suggested by Cohen (1988). Therefore, H_{A3} is supported and successfully proven based on this study. While R² is a measure of the usefulness of the regression model for this study by explaining the contribution of CLP to the variance of TR. The results of the One-Way Regression Test showed that CLP contributed as much as 39% to the variance of TR ($R^2=0.39$, $F(1,203) = 91.18$, $p<0.01$). In other words, 61% of the variance of TR depends on other variables. Therefore, H_{A4} is also supported and successfully proven based on the sample of this study, which is, CLP significantly contributes to the variance of TR.

The Multiple Regression Test was used to obtain the certainty of the significant dimensions of CLP in predicting TR. Based on the analysis, the Contextual Intelligence Dimension proved to be a significant predictor of TR ($\beta=0.65$, $p<0.01$). So H_{A4a} is supported in this study. The Collegiality dimension also proved to be a significant predictor of

TR ($\beta=0.39$, $p<0.01$). Then H_{A4b} is also supported. However, the Pedagogical Support Dimension was not successfully proven as a significant predictor of TR ($\beta=0.23$, $p>0.01$).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The combination of these two theories postulates that the principal's contextual wisdom in managing the school, having a high level of camaraderie, and supporting the organized programs will make teachers feel comfortable and happy to serve longer in the school. In other words, CLP is one of the elements in the hygiene factor proposed in the Two-Factor Theory by Herzberg (1959). When the hygiene factor and the motivation factor, based on Herzberg (1959), are balanced then the effect is on the teacher's behavior such that the decision to continue serving longer at the school will result. What is important here is how and to what extent the school leader is responsive to factors so that teachers remain faithful to serve in the school. The findings of this study have proven that leadership that is responsive to the context, friendly with the teachers under him/her, and working together to achieve the school's goals successfully influences the perception of teachers to continue serving in the current school. Even the influence of CLP on TR in this study is also strong.

This study has also supported the findings of previous studies which also found that the leader factor is significantly positive towards teacher retention, i.e., whether they want to continue serving in the same school or vice versa (Cells et al., 2023; Matthews et al., 2022; Symonds & Hansen, 2022). Although the studies of Billett et al. (2022) and Bradshaw (2023) show that internal factors such as increased work in schools in addition to external factors of the school, namely the VUCA world and the COVID-19 pandemic, have had negative implications on the motivation of teachers to continue serving as teachers in schools, but the researchers believe that such issues should be dealt with wisely by school leaders, especially principals. Leaders who have high soft values such as having good relationships with fellow teachers are believed to contribute to teacher retention factors (Casely-Hayford et al., 2022; Diaz, 2022; Herman et al., 2023) and even increase work motivation and well-being of teachers in the workplace (Herman et al., 2023; Yusoff & Tengku Ariffin, 2022). Therefore, this study also supports previous findings such as the study by Casely-Hayford et al. (2022) and Diaz (2022), who found that principals who have a good relationship with teachers will positively increase their desire to continue serving in the school. In other words, the element of camaraderie or 'collegiality' in leadership is a significant dimension to support the work of teachers and further ensure that teachers' emotions are always positive although various literature have acknowledged the issues of workload and stress of teachers in schools (Banal et al., 2022; Turner, 2022).

The basis for the need for leaders to have contextual intelligence is based on the Triarchic Model by Sternberg (1985) who asserts that the contextual intelligence possessed by a person enables more creative thinking by having the ability to generate new ideas even in new situations and adapt to the situation. Model of Sensemaking by Weick et al. (1995) is also used as a basis for the importance of a school leader in having contextual intelligence to be able to make good judgments in making decisions. With good judgment, leaders can understand the characteristics of a positive work environment that will affect the teachers' emotions to continue to stay in the school. So, the principal needs to strengthen the good relationship between the principal and the teachers through the support given to them in addition to being wise in managing and administering the school by making the context factor the basis for making wise decisions and actions. This effective behavior and management certainly create well-being at work which will eventually be embodied with positive behavior towards school and work.

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