SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN MULTICULTURAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS: USING CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE IN LEADING CULTURALLY DIVERSE LEARNING ORGANISATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This mixed methods study determines the level of cultural intelligence of school leaders in national secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur and explains the ways cultural intelligence is used in leading a multicultural organisation. Using sequential explanatory approach, quantitative data was collected using survey questionnaire answered by 476 school leaders and analysed using SPSS v. 23 for mean and standard deviation. This was followed by semi-structured interviews with eight school leaders. Analysed using Atlas.ti, the qualitative data was used to explain the quantitative findings. The integrated data showed that the high level of cultural intelligence of school leaders could be explained by the following themes: interacting with people from different cultures; knowing values, religions, and customs; adjusting cultural knowledge; being conscious of cultural knowledge; and, altering verbal and nonverbal language. With the capability to be culturally intelligent, school leaders in Malaysia could maximise this strength in sustaining a positive learning environment.

Keywords: Cultural Intelligence, School Leadership, Secondary Schools, Malaysia, Explanatory Mixed-Methods Research.

INTRODUCTION

The current multiculturalisation of educational organisations presents opportunities for intercultural learning; however, it also poses institutional challenges brought about by differing perspectives. In this scenario, school leaders serve as a central figure in ensuring that academic goals are met despite the prevailing cultural and ideological differences (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). The capabilities of school leaders in leading multicultural schools can be measured through multiple lenses. Despite the existence of various leadership models and framework, further introspection of factors contributing to effective school leadership necessitates psychological and behavioural traits (Bush, 2007). In this study, cultural intelligence has been identified as a key aspect in measuring leadership capabilities of school leaders in culturally diverse academic organisations.

Cultural intelligence pertains to the cognitive and behavioural capability of an individual to adjust in a cross-cultural interaction (Earley, 2002). Stemming from the general notion of multiple intelligences, the premise behind the acquisition and formation of an individual's cultural intelligence lies in the natural notion that individuals develop their awareness of others' cultures through interactions in their society (Earley & Ang, 2003). The potential of studying cultural intelligence as a causal factor in effective leadership has been well-established in the field of business and management, as culturally intelligent leaders have been noted to be highly transformational yet sensitively managerial (Jyoti & Kour, 2017). In the field of educational leadership, discovering the full potentials of cultural intelligence is still at a limited stage (Ott & Michailova, 2018). Therefore, understanding the role of cultural intelligence in school leadership begins with identifying the level of cultural

intelligence of school leaders in order to present a generalisable claim in establishing the application of cultural intelligence in leading in multicultural organisations.

The value of culturally intelligent leaders has been noted to have concrete manifestations in leadership in multicultural organisations in various fields particularly in countries considered to be culturally diverse. For instance, managers in multinational companies who have high level of metacognitive cultural intelligence were found to motivate their employees to be more innovative (Solomon & Steyn, 2017). Likewise, international school leaders from Hong Kong who have registered a generally high level of cultural intelligence were able to show transformational leadership attributes (Keung & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013), which have been regarded as an effective leadership style especially in a multicultural context (Avolio, 2011). In the Malaysian setting, studies among expatriates revealed that behavioural cultural intelligence indicates a relatively high level of adaptability. Given the multicultural nature of the Malaysian society (Harris & Han, 2020), it would be of great interest to explore how cultural intelligence is being used by leaders in multicultural learning organisations, such as secondary schools, in order to present a full view of this phenomenon and its prospective effects on effective leadership and organisation.

In line with promoting effective school leadership, the systems transformation path introduced by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) has clearly stipulated the need for capable school leaders in every school. Particularly at this moment when the final phase of the transformation initiative of the MOE is about to commence (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013), it is just proper to ensure that effective school leaders are in place. Although the MOE has specified that school leaders should be instructional leaders, local critics argue that the transferability of instructional leadership roles in the Malaysian context can only provide a general perspective since effective leadership is contextual and situational, driven by social-individual factors like cultural intelligence (Bush et al., 2019; Hoy, Miskel, & Tarter, 2013). As such, this mixed methods study addresses the need to contextualise effective school leadership in the multicultural setting of Malaysian national secondary schools and from the lens of cultural intelligence by answering this research question:

To what extent and in what ways do school leaders in secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur perceive their cultural intelligence in leading in a multicultural setting?

LITERATURE REVIEW

School Leadership

The role of school leaders in schools has been characterised in terms of its effects on students' learning outcomes and organisational dynamics. Since school leadership has been argued to only have indirect effects on students' learning outcomes, the shift towards its effects on organisational factors paved the way for studies to identify causal variables that enable leaders to be more effective in a particular organisational setting. The prevalence of various educational leadership models to explain school leaders' effectiveness traces its theoretical roots from the idea that leadership roles and effects are defined by the context or situation, which is also influenced by the leader him/herself (Hoy et al., 2013). Based on this theoretical assumption, the roles and responsibilities of school leaders are not only defined by stipulated conditions, but also by internal socio-cultural factors that influence the mindset, behaviour, and actions of the leader.

Although school leadership can be defined in different, sometimes contradicting perspectives, the contextualisation of the roles and responsibilities of school leaders limit the broad definition within the parameters of multicultural secondary schools in Malaysia. Malaysia's Ministry of Education has clearly defined school leaders as those who are holding the following formal positions: principals, deputy principals, and heads of departments (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). This goes against the traditional notion of a school leader as an individual (i.e. principal or headmaster) rather as a group with designated and distributed roles and responsibilities for efficient capacity building (Bush, 2007). Several studies on school leadership in Malaysia have attributed improved organisational dynamics on behavioural, personal, and professional traits of school leaders, such as emotional or social intelligence, motivation, and professional development (Arokiasamy, Abdullah, Ahmad, & Ismail, 2016; Bush, Abdul Hamid, Ng, & Kaparou, 2018; Musa & Mohd Noor, 2017; Velarde, 2017). However, substantial evidence is needed to support the claim that the multicultural environment of Malaysian schools may lead to effective school leadership characterised by a high level of cultural intelligence.

Cultural Intelligence

From the theoretical notion that human intelligence is multidimensional, complex, and evolving, cultural intelligence has been conceived to measure the cultural knowledge of individuals in this era of increasing global or cross-cultural interactions and the extent this knowledge can be used to adapt well in any given situation (Earley, 2002). Although cultural intelligence could be similar with interpersonal intelligence, social intelligence, or emotional intelligence, Earley and Ang (2003) argued that cultural intelligence is a distinct intelligence construct because of its focus on cultural attributes and intercultural skills as defined by the following dimensions: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural. Metacognitive cultural intelligence pertains to the inherent knowledge of culture based on the surroundings of the individual. Cognitive cultural intelligence covers the acquired knowledge of cultural factors such as religion, races, norms, beliefs, language, and social classes to name a few. Motivational cultural intelligence refers to the belief of an individual to use his or her cultural knowledge to adapt in a situation; whereas, behavioural cultural intelligence manifests how a person uses his cultural knowledge in a cross-cultural situation (Earley & Ang, 2003). Because of the factors that require cross-cultural interactions to substantiate its validity, the test of cultural intelligence is usually applied in multicultural settings. Hence, the multiracial and multireligious environment of Malaysia, specifically national secondary schools, can be an ideal testing ground for cultural intelligence.

In studies about the nature and application of cultural intelligence in multicultural organisations, leadership actions that have a positive effect on organisational dynamics are usually attributed to cultural intelligence factors. Given the dependency of cultural intelligence on the quality of the environment, Gooden and O'Doherty (2015) noted that cultural exposure can enhance the cognitive cultural intelligence of an individual thus allowing the person to manifest openness and adaptability in a multicultural organisation. In Thailand, a study among college instructors led to the conclusion that cultural intelligence allows the lecturers to be more motivating and inclusive especially in organisational functions and in performing their instructional duties, which are perceived to be good leadership attributes (Kainzbauer & Hunt, 2014). In a study among national secondary school leaders in Malaysia, Velarde,

Ghani, Adams and Cheah (2020) established the effects of cultural intelligence on the capabilities of school leaders to utilise transformational leadership attributes that could lead to a positive school climate. Given that these studies measured cultural intelligence using self-report instruments, the extent and specific ways school leaders use their cultural intelligence necessitate further explanation to fully understand cultural intelligence in the context of school leadership in culturally diverse schools.

METHODOLOGY

A sequential explanatory mixed methods design was employed in order to fulfil the aim of this study to determine the level of cultural intelligence of school leaders in national secondary schools in Malaysia and explain the ways the school leaders manifest or use their cultural intelligence in leading in a multicultural learning organisation. Following this pragmatic research approach, the process started with a quantitative phase and then followed by a qualitative phase to explain the results and provide an integrated response to the research question (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Quantitative Phase

A survey questionnaire with close-ended questions was distributed to school leaders in national secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur. The instrument was adapted from the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) (Earley & Ang, 2003), and the 20 items covered the four dimensions of cultural intelligence: metacognitive (MCQ), cognitive (CCQ), behavioural (BCQ), and motivational (MOCQ). A 5-point Likert scale was followed with the corresponding descriptors: 1 for strongly disagree; 2 for disagree; 3 for neutral; 4 for agree; and 5 for strongly agree.

In selecting the target population, the researchers purposefully selected national secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur since Ministry of Education Malaysia (2013, pp. 7-17) claims an "urban SK [primary schools] may have more ethnically diverse student enrolment" and that "this improves at the secondary level when students from different primary schools converge in SMKs [secondary schools]." Using random sampling, it was determined that out of the estimated 810 school leaders from 90 national secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur, 458 was deemed to be a representative sample size at 95% confidence interval. The determination of the sample size was derived from Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, which Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) consider a reliable sampling technique. A total of 476 school leaders from 60 schools responded to the questionnaire, which was 4% more than the target sample size. As per Ministry of Education Malaysia (2013), school leaders can be defined as principals, deputy principals, and heads of department. Demographically, 48 principals, 198 deputy principals, and 230 heads of department responded to the questionnaire. In terms of the racial profile of the participants, 67.5% of the respondents were Malay, 21.8% were Chinese, 9.4% were Indians, and 1.3% were others (mixed race or ethnic groups). Although majority of the respondents were Malay, a significant number of respondents came from other racial groups, which was indicative of the diverse nature of the schools in this study.

Validity and reliability tests were ensured prior to data analysis. Content validity of the questionnaire was done with four experts in quantitative research in educational leadership and management by acquiring detailed feedback on the construction and alignment of the items with the dimensions, as well as the clarity and accuracy of the

language used in every item. For instance, one field expert added the word 'perception' to the instruction to make it clearer and reworded some items to facilitate self-reflection rather than an assessment. In addition, the language expert noted a few discrepancies in the translation of culture-related terms and made the necessary adjustments. Data cleaning and normality tests were also conducted to ensure that the data for each item follows a normal distribution to attest the quality of the data for descriptive analysis. As shown in Table 1 below, the Cronbach's alpha scores of the dimensions of the CQS and the questionnaire were above the acceptable level of 0.7 thus establishing the reliability of the questionnaire (Cohen et al., 2011).

Table 1: *Cronbach's Alpha Scores for Reliability of Construct and Dimensions*

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Dimensions	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Cultural Intelligence (CQ)	20	0.90	Metacognitive (MCQ)	5	0.71
			Cognitive (CCQ)	5	0.72
			Motivational (MOCQ)	5	0.73
			Behavioural (BCQ)	5	0.74

Using IBM SPSS 23.0, mean and standard deviation were generated to respond to the research question. The analysed quantitative data was used in planning the qualitative phase of this study in order to determine which items needed further explanation.

Qualitative Phase

An interview protocol with open-ended questions was designed based on the quantitative data results to further explain how school leaders use their cultural intelligence in leading in a multicultural environment. In the development of the interview protocol, two experts in qualitative research were invited to critically examine the appropriateness, relevance, and clarity of the questions, as well as to ensure that the interview questions were designed to be aligned with the quantitative findings. For instance, since it was determined in the quantitative study that school leaders had a high level of motivational cultural intelligence, the researcher and the experts agreed that one of the questions in the interview should be, "How do you use your knowledge of other cultures in leading teachers and students in this school?"

After the questions were formulated, field and language experts checked the content and clarity of the questions to ensure credibility. Three experts in the field of educational leadership and management thoroughly assessed the interview protocol according to the following criteria set by Cohen et al. (2011) in ensuring that the instrument was designed to obtain meaningful, relevant, and transferrable data. A language expert also went through the clarity and linguistic accuracy of the questions to avoid misinterpretation during the interview session.

Using purposive sampling, eight school leaders from four national secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur participated in the one-on-one interview sessions. Based on sampling guidelines in mixed methods research, the sample in this case study came from the same pool of respondents in the quantitative phase to ensure consistency (Creswell

& Plano Clark, 2017). Moreover, the four schools were ensured to be culturally diverse through the ethnic composition of the student population and that the school leaders were representative of the dominant racial groups in Malaysia as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: *Profile of Schools and School Leaders in the Interview Session*

School	Ethnic Composition of Student Population	School Leader	Position	Race
SMK A	63% Malay 18% Chinese	SL1	Principal	Malay
	18% Indian 1% Others	SL2	Assistant Principal	Malay
		SL3	Assistant Principal	Chinese
SMK B	64% Malay 14% Chinese 20% Indian	SL4	Head of Department	Chinese
	2% Others	SL5	Assistant Principal	Chinese
SMK C	33% Malay 22% Chinese 33% Indian 12% Others	SL6	Assistant Principal	Malay
SMKD	52% Malay 30% Chinese 14% Indian	SL7	Head of Department	Indian
	4% Others	SL8	Principal	Malay

The interviews were audio-recorded upon the interviewees' consent and lasted for an average of 20 minutes. The data from the interviews were transcribed and organised. A coding framework following the guidelines set by Creswell (2012) was used for a structured thematic analysis using ATLAS.ti. To further ensure trustworthiness and credibility, member checking was done in such a way that the transcripts and codes were sent to the interviewees and research experts before the finalisation of codes and subthemes. The results of the qualitative data analysis were used to explain the quantitative findings for integration.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Methods

The value of mixed methods research lies in the integration between the quantitative and qualitative (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Fielding, 2012). The first point of integration was the double-barrelled research question, which was addressed in the quantitative and qualitative phases. The second point of integration was in the design of the interview protocol and selection of participants in the qualitative phase, which was informed by the quantitative results. The final point of integration was in the data analysis. As shown in Figure 1, a network was set up on ATLAS.ti to show how the qualitative subthemes could be used to explain the quantitative findings. The

integration of qualitative and quantitative data will be presented in the discussion section of this paper.
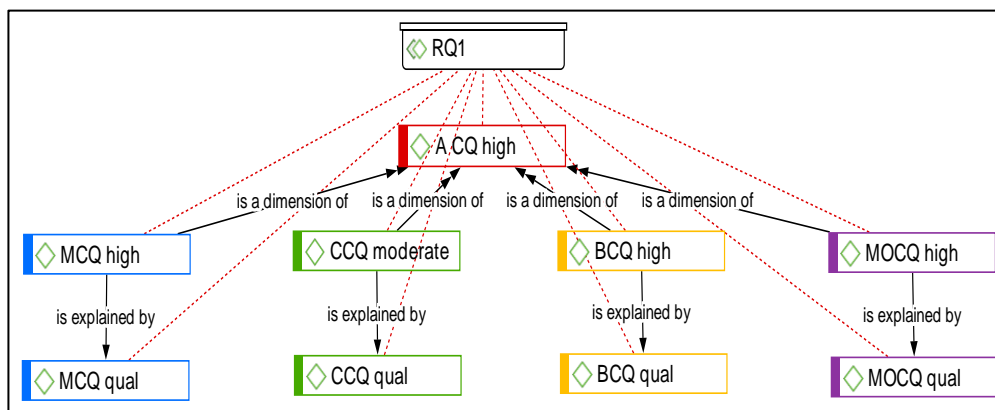

Figure 1. Network showing how the qualitative data explains the quantitative findings

FINDINGS

Quantitative: The Level of Cultural Intelligence of School Leaders

Using descriptive statistics, the survey responses from the 476 school leaders were analysed using mean and standard deviation to show the extent of cultural intelligence of school leaders in national secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur. The levels were based on the assumption of distribution of mean scores in which high level ranges from 3.67-5.00, moderate from 2.34-3.66, and low from 1.00-2.33 (Hadiyanto, Mukminin, Hidayat, & Failasofah, 2013). The first dimension of cultural intelligence, metacognitive cultural intelligence (MCQ), measures the level of cultural consciousness of an individual in a cross-cultural interaction. The school leaders' perceived level of MCQ is high (M=3.95, n=476) with items B1, "I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds," (M=4.24, SD=.576) and B5, "I adjust my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from a culture that is unfamiliar to me," (M=3.97, SD=.571) posing the highest means.

The second dimension of cultural intelligence, cognitive cultural intelligence (CCQ), measures the level of cultural content knowledge of an individual (i.e. religion, language, arts, etc.). The school leaders' perceived level of CCQ is moderate (M=3.42, n=476) with items B14, "I know the cultural values and religious beliefs of other cultures," (M=3.75, SD=.623) and B2, "I know the legal and economic systems of other cultures," (M=3.54, SD=.714) posing the highest means.

The third dimension of cultural intelligence, motivational cultural intelligence (MOCQ), measures the attitude or confidence of an individual to use his or her cultural knowledge in an interaction. The school leaders' perceived level of MOCQ is high (M=3.75, n=476) with items B3, "I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures," (M=4.07, SD=.640) and B7, "I am confident that I can socialize with locals in a culture that is unfamiliar to me," (M=3.96, SD=.638) registering the highest means.

The fourth dimension of cultural intelligence, behavioural cultural intelligence (BCQ), refers to the linguistic actions of an individual in a cross-cultural interaction. The school leaders' perceived level of BCQ is high (M=3.74, n=476) with items B4, "I change my nonverbal behaviour (gestures, actions) when a cross-cultural situation

requires it," (M=3.97, SD=.656) and B12, "I vary the rate of my speaking when a cross-cultural situation requires it," (M=3.78, SD=.626) rendering the highest means.

In general, the level of cultural intelligence of school leaders in national secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur is high (M=3.72, n=476). As shown in Table 3, three of four CQ domains registered high mean scores while CCQ was at a moderate level. Nevertheless, this illustrates the extent school leaders manifest their cultural intelligence in leading in culturally diverse settings. The manner by which they use their cultural intelligence in specific situations will be explained in the next sub-section.

Table 3: *Summary of Mean Scores and Levels of Cultural Intelligence Factors*

Domains	Mean	Level
Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence (MCQ)	3.95	High
Cognitive Cultural Intelligence (CCQ)	3.42	Moderate
Motivational Cultural Intelligence (MOCQ)	3.75	High
Behavioural Cultural Intelligence (BCQ)	3.74	High
Overall Mean	3.72	High

Qualitative: Cultural Intelligence and Leading in Multicultural Schools

In this sequential explanatory mixed methods research, the quantitative findings will be further explained with the use of qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews with the school leaders. In selecting the research setting, the schools with leaders whose level of cultural intelligence reflected the quantitative results were chosen. In addition, it was ensured that the schools have a culturally diverse environment, reflective of Malaysia's cultural profile. As such, four national secondary schools were selected, and eight school leaders participated in the interview sessions. The leaders were chosen according to the following criteria: high level of cultural intelligence based on their response; must hold a formal leadership position; and, must be in position for at least three years. The interview responses from the school leaders rendered the following subthemes related to how they use their cultural intelligence in leading in multicultural schools: interacting with people from different cultures; knowing values, religions, and customs; adjusting one's cultural knowledge; being conscious of one's cultural knowledge; and altering verbal and nonverbal language.

Interacting with People from Different Cultures

In leading in their schools, the school leaders explained certain ways they interact with the members of their culturally diverse school community. Generally, the leaders maintain a positive interaction despite differences in religious or ideological beliefs as they always highlight the values of respect, professionalism, and acceptance. As one principal noted:

> *"When they come to me, there's always respect from me to them, and I do feel that they do respect me because they respect the position that I am in."* (I, SL1: L26-29, 08/07/2019)

To be more specific, choosing the right words also reflected the leaders' knowledge of the Malaysian culture of putting family at the centre. A deputy principal explained:

> *"With teachers first, I let them call me Kak Mi [Sister Mi], even though I'm a teacher and the other person is a teacher, they don't call me Puan [Madam] to be very formal because I want them to have a sense of family."* (I, SL2: L20-23, 09/07/2019)

From a cultural perspective, the school leaders' knowledge of the various religions and belief systems in the Malaysian society reflected their high metacognitive and cognitive cultural intelligence. This enabled them not to discriminate against people from other races or cultures and allowed them to be more open-minded and inclusive especially in working with people from different cultures to work towards the same goal.

Knowing Values, Religions, and Customs

The interview responses revealed the extent of cultural content knowledge of the school leaders with respect to race-specific values, religions, and ethnic customs. Since Malaysia is a multi-religious and multi-ethnic country, this environment created an exposure for the school leaders to be aware of others' specific beliefs. Although cultural knowledge is important, it is more interesting to note how school leaders use their knowledge to be better leaders. A deputy principal illustrated:

> *"For example, you're a Christian, we know many students in this school are Christians then we don't have any program on Sundays because on Sunday they have to go to Church and so on."* (I, SL5: L77-79, 16/07/2019)

In addition, a principal highlighted the importance of knowing cultural traditions especially in planning programs:

> *"Like Chinese New Year, we had the calligraphy writing, the lion dance, and everybody was involved."* (I, SL8: L60-62, 31/07/2019)

The cultural content knowledge of the school leaders was noted to have been used as an essential factor in the decision-making process in the school especially when it comes to programs and activities. Other than that, this was linked with the organisational procedures and policies that guide the school in achieving its mission and vision.

Adjusting One's Cultural Knowledge

In relation to the metacognitive domain of cultural intelligence, the school leaders reported how they adjust their cultural knowledge by acknowledging the reality of cultural coexistence and by embracing cultural diversity. A head of department emphasised:

> *"I think generally is that they come from different cultural background and they are different in their belief systems and all different from me, but ultimately it falls back to I respect you, and you respect me."* (I, SL3: L24-26, 09/07/2019)

A principal relayed how acknowledging someone's background can influence the quality of interaction:

> "*When you have intuition about the background of the person you're speaking, I take account their background and where they're coming from."* (I, SL1: L10-11, 08/07/2019)

As school leaders, the manner of adjusting cultural knowledge adds to the relatability of the leaders, which enable them to manage the sensitivities in their school brought about by the differences in religion and ideologies. Thus, the leaders agree that it is important to know others' cultures and have the capability to adjust to the specific situation in order to create an inclusive environment for teaching and learning.

Being Conscious of One's Cultural Knowledge

In relation to the cultural content knowledge shared earlier, the school leaders' consciousness of the cultural differences in their school community stems from the culturally diverse nature of the Malaysian society. As one deputy principal shared:

> *"I come from the estate when I was young, and there were a lot of Indians. I had a lot of Indian neighbors, and I also lived in another estate where majority of the people were Malay, so I do not have problems getting along with Indians or with Malays, so as to speak. I come from a family, Chinese culture background, and I apply what I learned at home, the values, what my parents taught me, instilled in me, and also religion, because I'm a Christian."* (I, SL3:L26-29, 156-158, 09/07/2019)

The cultural consciousness of the school leaders has implications on the way they manage certain programs and procedures as explained by a principal and deputy principal:

> *"Majority of the population here are Malays, so I need to be more alert about their prayer times."* (I, SL5: L46-47, 19/07/2019)

> *"All the programs must comply with every race, every ethnicity, so let's say the teachers want to have the student affair like we do have Pilihan Raya [election], like university, like we have to have all the races."* (I, SL8: 67-69, 31/07/2019)

Altering Verbal and Nonverbal Language

With respect to the behavioural aspect of cultural intelligence, the school leaders talked about how they alter their verbal and nonverbal language during interactions with members of their school community. For example, a head of department explained:

> *"I think the tone of voice, my approach, and well, with a smile. That makes a lot of difference. 'Cikgu [Teacher], could you please do this?' That would make them feel better to want to respond to you."* (I, SL3: L45-47, 09/07/2019)

Aside from the shift in linguistic patterns, a principal shared how she consciously changed her expressions when dealing with parents:

> *"Let's say with some parents who are non-Malays and also they do not speak English really well, so I try to simplify my words to make them understand what I'm saying. And I do mix a bit of BM or English when I speak to this kind of parents. But for parents who are very educated and very well-versed in BM and English, then I use formal language with them."* (I, SL1: L40-43, 08/07/2019)

During cross-cultural interactions, the school leaders also mentioned the importance of smiling and showing a positive disposition, which should be reflective of the values of respect and politeness. In this way, the leaders also served as models of positive character for the students and teachers to emulate in this culturally diverse learning environment.

DISCUSSION

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings has led to the establishment of the notion that school leaders in national secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur evidently use their cultural intelligence in leading in their culturally diverse organisations. Generally, the school leaders registered high levels in the metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural domains of cultural intelligence while moderate level in the cognitive domain. This was supported by the findings from the interviews in such a way that the school leaders strongly manifested their utilisation of cultural intelligence by interacting with people from different cultures, knowing values, religions and customs, adjusting their cultural knowledge, being conscious of their cultural knowledge, and altering verbal and nonverbal language.

In contributing to advancing the body of knowledge and theoretical understanding with respect to cultural intelligence, this study highlighted the importance of a tolerant and inclusive multicultural environment in developing metacognitive, cognitive, behavioural, and motivational attributes of cultural intelligence. This manifestation was attributed primarily to the exposure in a multicultural environment where the individuals grew up and got accustomed to interacting with people from different religions or races (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015). Moreover, the motivation of the school leaders to use their cultural content knowledge in a situation is shaped by the environment itself where understanding and embracing cultural differences is an integral part of daily life (Earley & Ang, 2003). Similar to other multicultural societies like Hong Kong, school leaders from international schools have also reported high levels in the metacognitive and motivational domains of cultural intelligence because of the highly diverse environment of international schools and the Hong Kong society (Keung & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013). Therefore, further studies on cultural intelligence in multicultural organisations can go beyond the examination of the extent multicultural environment and exposure can influence the level of cultural intelligence of an individual.

As projected by the interview responses, the application of cultural intelligence in leadership actions and management roles is evident in the practices and interactions between the leaders and stakeholders, the procedures enforced, and the programs implemented in the schools. The self-awareness of the school leaders in a cross-cultural interaction allows leaders to act appropriately in a given situation (Solomon & Steyn, 2017). In multicultural organisations, a leader's usage of cultural content knowledge creates a sense of interpersonal trust between leaders and stakeholders (Rockstuhl & Ng, 2015). Thus, integrating cultural intelligence and leadership actions in practice implicates improving organisational dynamics geared towards achieving not only academic-related aims, but also a positive learning environment.

Particularly in the Malaysian setting where the values of tolerance and respect towards other religions are institutionalised and nationalised (Harris & Han, 2020), the motivation of school leaders to use cultural intelligence creates opportunities to further promote values at an organisational level. Since various studies have

established the need for effective leadership in schools through behavioural leadership styles (Bush et al., 2018; Velarde, 2017), the practice of applying cultural intelligence in school leadership fits the Malaysian context especially in mitigating plausible conflicts due to racial or religious differences. Consequently, the actions displayed by the school leader to show their cultural intelligence are aligned with fundamental leadership expectations and ideals to be more inclusive in order to achieve shared goals. Thus, in response to the Ministry of Education's aspiration to promote national unity and inclusivity (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013), this study has provided an optimistic outlook with regards to the state of school leadership, particularly in developing values-driven leaders.

CONCLUSION

This mixed methods study determined the high level of cultural intelligence of school leaders in national secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur and illustrated the specific instances cultural intelligence was manifested in leading in multicultural schools. From a theoretical standpoint, this study presents a new perspective in understanding school leadership especially in multicultural schools by putting forth cultural intelligence as a potential qualifier to effective leadership. In as much as the quantitative findings tried to give a generalisable viewpoint in gauging the level of cultural intelligence of Malaysian school leaders in the context of a culturally diverse urban environment, further studies should cover a wider regional or national scope. Nevertheless, the insights from the school leaders on how they use their cultural intelligence especially in advocating the values of acceptance, tolerance, and respect could provide current and aspiring leaders a template for values-oriented leadership. To be culturally strategic in a highly diverse organisation could also be applied in the development of training programs on effective leadership. Most importantly, at this time when the world faces conflicts stemming from cultural differences, the findings of this study serve as a gentle reminder that leaders should be culturally intelligent in their words and actions in leading multicultural organisations harmoniously.

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