Teachers' Interpersonal Behaviour in Classroom: An Assessment of Teachers' Leadership and Attitudes in Malaysian Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT

Teachers use a seemingly limitless array of interpersonal attitudes to achieve academic goals. The broad conceptualization of behavioral characters of teachers in the classroom could be narrowed down to what is essential and existing in a positive learning environment. This research aims to evaluate school teachers' leadership skills and their interpersonal attitudes with the students in a conducive classroom learning environment. In addition to the qualitative data from the interviews, this study sought the perception of 199 students on classroom environment and teacher's leadership skills from national-type secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur. A sequential 36-item survey questionnaire was used to collect the data from students, and SPSS v23 was used for data analysis. The descriptive statistical analysis found that students perceive their teachers to have strong leadership skills, as well as high levels of understanding, friendliness, openness, and strictness. Inferential statistics rendered that teachers' leadership has a significant relationship with teachers' interpersonal attitudes. To further explore the quantitative results, qualitative findings from interviews with students revealed that being caring, humorous, patient, and fair were crucial aspects of teachers' attitudes to consider in enhancing classroom learning environment. Hence, this study hopes to inspire schoolteachers to improve their attitudes and practices to create a better learning environment in multicultural urban schools to improve student learning outcomes.

Keywords: teachers' attitudes; classroom learning environment; multicultural; secondary schools; Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The quality of learning environment reflects a complex combination of pedagogical standards and interpersonal characters. A capable teacher who could juggle academic ideals and interactive norms in order to build and sustain a conducive classroom setting. Hence, these emotional and social aspects are characterised as the ability of a teacher to emulate and the better learning (Ghafarpour & Moinzadeh, 2019). Although the central role of teachers in the classroom remains as transferring the knowledge and skills, the specific capabilities and attitudes of teachers have a significant impact on students' learning environment.

The classroom environment requires constant interaction between teachers and students. The interpersonal behaviour of a teacher, therefore, has a significant impact on the overall quality of teaching and learning (Pennings et al., 2018). This safe environment helps the students to find their potential talents and to communicate with their teachers on the one hand, on the other, it will help the teacher to guide these talents towards holistic growth and development (Brok, Brekelmans, & Wubbels, 2004). Thus, teachers hold the central position in classroom, and his or her behaviour has an impact on the attitudes of students in the class.

Since teacher play a key role in creating and enhancing he interpersonal attitudes of teachers have been identified as significant. For example, interpersonal skills of teacher as well as have identified in New Zealand as significant to address disciplinary issues and interpersonal conflicts (Greenier & Whitehead, 2016). In an experimental study in Netherlands also highlighted positive teacher-student relationship, particularly the professional behaviour of the teacher (Pennings et al., 2018). It shows teachers' behaviour is essential in creating a conducive learning environment.

In accordance with global standards of education, the Malaysian government clearly stipulated raising the quality of teachers by enhancing interpersonal attitudes of teachers in classroom. The standards set by the Malaysian Ministry of Education begin with a description of a "high performing teacher". The high performing teacher is described as "teaching and learning expertise, professional values, non-classroom activities, and professional contributions. These dimensions underline the behaviour of teachers as significant beyond their cognitive capabilities and professional training. Moreover, in the continuous professional development of teachers in Malaysia, the training programs are not only focused on enhancing pedagogy, but also on strengthening interpersonal skills, values, and attitudes essential in a classroom environment.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the interpersonal skills of teachers have an impact of students learning environment. Realizing this situation, the Malaysian government also gives emphasis on interpersonal skills, values, and attitudes of teachers in teacher training and continuous teachers' assessment.

Therefore, teachers' attitudes in classroom should be assessed by examining their interpersonal skills in classroom.

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Wilson (Wilson, 2017) defined the learning environment as a place where individuals could utilize resources and produce outcomes or solve problems. From this definition, the learning environment is accepted as an organization of people that enables individuals to create ideas and to find solutions to their problems and challenges. This organization involves an interaction between students and their teachers. A safe learning environment, however, provide opportunities for students to construct their thoughts and method of thinking to deal with issues objectively (Pate et al., 2016). In this case, teachers provide the students with necessary tools and employ strategies to find their potential talents and skills. The classroom environment includes physical space in a school as well as social and emotional world of a student outside school. A positive learning environment, therefore, could be created not only by the teacher and students, but also by fellow students and the people who involve in the affairs of the students (Gilbert & Moore, 1998). Hence, learning environment could be defined as positive or negative depending on physical, social and emotional dimensions of a student.

Koci (2013) found the ability and leadership skills of the teacher as fundamental in creating learning environment. A teacher with effective leadership skills and positive attitudes will produce a positive, comfortable, controlling, and connecting to the real-world classroom. Although there are many factors contribute in enhancing classroom learning environment, studies highlight remarkable influence of teachers' leadership styles and their attitudes (Zyad H., 2016; Luo T., & Murray A., 2018; Thibaut et al., 2018). However, Greenier and Whitehead (2016) argued that the teachers' leadership should be authentic that the intentions and actions are aligned especially with the students. Nevertheless, teachers as leaders in the classroom have an impact on the behaviour of students as they guide them towards a defined role in the society (Malak, 2017).

Teachers' interaction with students utilize certain methods that diversely reflect cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains (Corsini & Auerbach, 1998). In regard to positive learning environment, Koka & Hein (2005) stated that it is an environment where teachers are willing to explain things again and again and could hold students' attention. In effect, students in this environment achieve intrinsic motivation to be involved in learning activities (Koka & Hein, 2005). In this environment, students perform better and have more positive attitudes toward the subject matter. Hence, effective learning environment improves student performance and expands quality learning (Admiraal et al., 2016; Schildkamp et al., 2016; Ladd, H. F., & Sorensen, L. C., 2017; Capel et al., 2019). Generally speaking, the interpersonal traits of teachers are considered to have a significant influence on the quality of the learning environment.

Using leadership and interpersonal attitudes, teachers interact with students in the classroom environment to achieve academic and individual goals. This environment provides lot of opportunities to study the quality of teachers' attitudes towards their students. With strong leadership skills, safe and positive classrooms are essential elements in measuring the impact of teacher attitude in a conducive classroom environment (Purwanto & Abadi, 2015). Likewise, Koci (2013) identified the levels of comfort, control, and connection to the real world as some variables that could be used to evaluate the impact of teachers' interpersonal attitudes on the classroom environment.

Adopting a sequential explanatory mixed method, this article therefore seeks the connection between interpersonal attitude of teachers in classroom and students' academic performance. To respond to the following questions:

1. To what extent and in what ways do secondary school students in Kuala Lumpur perceive their teachers' leadership skills?
2. To what extent and in what ways do secondary school students in Kuala Lumpur perceive their teachers' attitude in terms of being understanding, admonishing, friendly, free, and strict?
3. Are teachers' leadership skills correlated with students' perceptions of their attitudes?

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Interpersonal attitudes, in theory, are a broad and general conception (Pincus and Ansell, 2003). To find an effective method to measure the teachers' interpersonal attitudes in classroom, this research used quantitative methodology to identify the factors while interviews from selected students were used to understand the deeper meaning of these factors and its implications as well as variations (Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005).

In evaluating the impact of teachers' attitude on the classroom environment, this paper referred to theories and models on interpersonal behaviour and teacher-student interactions.

Originating from earlier theories in the 1950's, the assumptions of the interpersonal theory of personality rest on the integration of interpersonal, social, emotional, and cognitive functions. Sullivan (1954) defined interpersonal behaviour as an expression of personality differentiated by a set of cognitive responses shaped by experiences and environment. The similar interpersonal situation involves the interaction with needs, aspirations, and shared actions (Sullivan, 1954). In describing attitudes from an individual differences approach, the Interpersonal Circle (Wiggins, 1995) is one of the models that illustrate the different types of interpersonal behaviour according to the following domains: assured-dominant, gregarious-extraverted, warm-agreeable, unassuming-ingenuous, unassured-submissive, aloof-introverted, cold-hearted, and arrogant-calculating. In extending the understanding of this theory, Pincus and Ansell (2003) advocated to test the differences and applicability of these variables in

different contexts by examining its effects on individual or organizational development and motivation. Hence, this theory sets the parameters in examining the teachers' attitudes in this study.

Anchored on the premises of utilizing skills for effective interaction and communication, the Model for Interpersonal Teacher Behaviour (MITB) shares similar roots with the interpersonal theory of personality although it provides a unique set of characters among teachers in the classroom (den Brok, 2001; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). Based on the contents of MITB, teachers express an array of attitudes and attributes depending on their communication patterns with students, and these could be classified as Dominance-Submission through Cooperation and Dominance-Submission through Opposition, which can be further subdivided according to the following characteristics: leadership, helpful or friendly, understanding and dissatisfied, admonishing, strict.

In studying interpersonal behaviors and their effects on the learning environment, Wubbels and Levy (1993) adopted the interpersonal communication theory to describe communication patterns based on two dimensions. The influence dimension determines the frequency of communication and teachers' control on students while the proximity dimension describes the level of cooperation between students and teachers' closeness. Both dimensions are independent and could be used to explain effective teachers' behaviour in the classroom. Furthermore, systems communication theory is another model to analyse teachers' behaviour in classroom learning environment. According to this theory, the occurrence of cyclic processes, stability, and resistance to change are important features to understand human communication (Watzlawick & Beavin, 1967). The connection between the MITB, interpersonal communication theory, and systems communication theory identifies personal and social attitudes of teachers in classrooms. Therefore, understanding the individual characteristics of teacher-student communication provides the foundation in systemically understanding key interpersonal attributes that teachers project in the classroom.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

From above literature discussed, this study's conceptual framework illustrated the hypothesized relationship between teachers' leadership and their attitudes towards a safe and positive learning environment in secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. As shown in Figure 1, the leadership attributes of teachers and their interpersonal attitudes are under the context of positive learning environment. Both of them are based on students' description. Based on the Model for Interpersonal Teacher Behaviour, the teachers' interpersonal attitudes defined in this study are as follows: understanding, admonishing, friendly, strict, and freedom. The process of examining these variables will be discussed in the following section.

FIGURE 1. Teachers' Leadership and Attitudes in a Positive Learning Environment
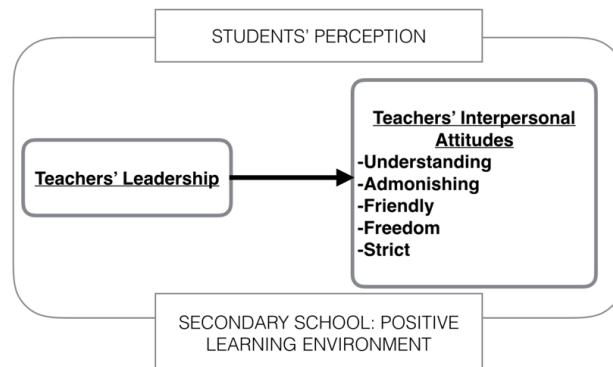
METHODOLOGY

Following the aforementioned conceptual framework, this paper adopts a mixed methodology following a sequential explanatory approach to determine the teachers' leadership attributes and interpersonal attitudes in a safe & positive learning environment of secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur. By utilizing qualitative methods to explain the quantitative results, this study adopts two research techniques to address the weaknesses prospectively, and to further test the findings in response to the initial research objectives (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). Hence, this study begins with a quantitative approach, which is followed by qualitative procedures to explain teachers' attitudes and behaviour.

QUANTITATIVE PHASE

For the first stage of this research, a quantitative design was utilized to measure the teachers' leadership attributes and their attitudes based on the perceptions of students in secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur. Following a deductive approach, the quantitative phase of this study adopted a 36-item Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction with a five-point Likert scale ranging from "0" as "Not likely" and "4" as "Most likely" (QTI: Wubbels et al., 2006; Brekelmans, DenBrok, & Wubbels, 2011) to measure views on teachers' leadership and attitudes, such as understanding, admonishing, friendly, free, and strict. The reliability of the instrument was examined through the internal consistency of the items manifested by a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.77, which is above the accepted level of 0.70 (Pallant, 2013).

The survey participants in this quantitative study were students from public secondary schools in Malaysia. The secondary schools were chosen based on the quality of their learning environment, according to the report from the Ministry of Education, and all of which were all-girls schools. By using random sampling, 209 students agreed to participate in this study, and they were informed of the research objectives. After the data cleaning process, 199 responses were deemed fit for further analysis.

To identify the extent of the leadership attributes and interpersonal attitudes of the teachers, descriptive statistics using SPSS version 23 was employed to calculate the mean score and the levels. In addition, inferential statistics using Pearson's Correlation was used to examine the relationship between leadership attributes and teachers' attitudes. Pallant (Pallant, 2013) highlighted the significance of Pearson-r coefficient in measuring the association between two variables and the strength of their relationship. The results of these statistical measures will be presented in the findings section of this paper.

QUALITATIVE PHASE

The second stage of this sequential explanatory mixed methods study adopted an in-depth interview due to the flexibility it offers and the ability to delve deeply into particular topics relevant and important in this research. Interviews were carried out over the span of a week. An interview protocol was designed adopting the informal conversational interview (Turner III, 2010). Furthermore, as an integration procedure, the questions were designed based on the results of the quantitative survey (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). The interview protocol involved open-ended questions and probing questions related to teachers' proactive behaviour and passive actions in the classroom.

As another point of integration, the population and sample for the qualitative stage were taken from the pool of respondents from the quantitative phase; however, purposive sampling was employed by ensuring that the students were from different range of abilities, gender, and race as shown in Table 1. In each interview, participants were given a brief introduction of the research and the research objective. A confidentiality clause was also explained to the

students before the interview, and the students agreed to participate in the interview session. Furthermore, the schools provided written consent allowing their students to participate in the research. Also, the researchers received consent letters from their parents. The duration of each interview was between 10 minutes and 15 minutes. All the data were recorded with the interviewee's consent. Six students (N=6) for the interviews were chosen by using purposive sampling techniques as they were fair representation of scores, gender equality and race.

TABLE 1. Details of the Participants for in-depth interviews

Performance	ID	Gender	Race	Age	Subject
Excellent result	A_1	Female	Chinese	17	Maths
Good result	A_2	Female	Indian	16	Malay
Pass result	A_3	Female	Malay	16	English
Excellent behaviour	T_3	Male	Malay	15	Malay
Good behaviour	T_2	Male	Chinese	16	Maths
Naughty behaviour	T_1	Male	Indian	16	English

For the qualitative data analysis, a systematic thematic approach was used using the multi-stage coding framework designed by Creswell (2012). In this approach, the interviews were transcribed in verbatim and the quotes were coded on Atlas.ti based on the themes of teachers' leadership and attitudes. Then, the transcription and codes were shared with the interviewees and experts in the field of educational research for member checking and auditing. In this process, the codes were reduced, and another round of member checking with an expert in qualitative research ensured the credibility of the data analysis processes by minimizing biases in the assignment of the codes. The sub-themes in the findings section of this article presents the final grouping of the codes and quotes to meet the objectives of this research.

Creswell and Plano-Clark (Creswell & Plano, 2011) noted that the final point of integration in a mixed methods study lies in establishing the link between quantitative and qualitative findings. As such, the interview responses were compared with the figures from the survey to establish how the qualitative results explain the quantitative findings. The first two research questions of this study enable an integrated analysis through the connection between the extent and the ways teachers use their leadership attributes and interpersonal attitudes in a positive learning environment. Consequently, the integrative analysis will be presented in the discussion section of this paper.

FINDINGS

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

In determining the perceived level of teachers' leadership based on the students' responses, descriptive statistics was used to identify the mean score and the level of this variable. The six items rendered an overall mean score of 3.04. This figure indicates that the students perceived that their teachers have a high level of leadership as it falls within the range of 2.67-4.00.

With respect to the interpersonal attitudes of teachers, Table 2 illustrates the extent of students' perception of the following traits: understanding, admonishing, strict, friendly, and freedom. Understanding had the highest mean score of 3.81, and it was perceived to be at a high level since the mean score was between 2.67-4.00. Friendly also had a high level of perception since its overall mean of 3.01 was between 2.67-4.00. Strict and Freedom registered moderate levels of perception since their overall mean of 2.27 and 1.94 were between 1.34-

2.67. On the other hand, admonishing rendered the lowest mean score of 1.62 although it still fell under the moderate level range of 1.34-2.67.

TABLE 2. Students' Perception of Teachers' Interpersonal Attitudes

Attitudes	Mean Score	Level
Understanding	3.81	High
Admonishing	1.62	Moderate
Strict	2.27	Moderate
Friendly	3.01	High
Freedom	1.94	Moderate

The relationship between teachers' leadership and interpersonal attitudes was determined using the Pearson-*r* correlation test. As illustrated in Table 3, leadership has moderate and positive relationship with understanding and friendly attitudes. Although weak, leadership is positively correlated with strict and freedom attitudes.   On the other hand, there is no relationship between teachers' leadership and their admonishing attitude based on the perception of students.

TABLE 3. Pearson-*r* Correlation Test Results between Leadership and Teachers' Attitudes

Relationship	*r Coefficient*	Strength of Correlation
Leadership-Understanding	0.64**	Moderate, Positive
Leadership-Admonishing	-0.10	No relationship
Leadership-Strict	0.31**	Weak, Positive
Leadership-Friendly	0.63**	Moderate, Positive
Leadership-Freedom	0.31**	Weak, Positive

With the quantitative results from the descriptive and inferential statistics, the interview protocol questions were designed to explore ways teachers show their leadership attributes, as well as attitudes that manifest understanding, strictness, friendliness, and freedom. The interview responses from the students will be presented in the next section.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

From the transcripts of interviews and the codes from the thematic analysis, the qualitative data revealed four main aspects of teacher attitudes' that affect learning environments in Malaysian secondary schools, which are leadership, professionalism, friendliness, and motivation. These findings elaborate ways teachers employ leadership capabilities and show understanding, strict, friendly, and open attitudes, which supports the findings from the quantitative stage.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership is the first theme that emerged from the thematic analysis. Leadership was determined to be an important aspect of teacher attitude and behaviour. Under this theme, the following sub-themes will be discussed in this subsection: authority, engagement, and managing.

Authority. Research found that teachers typically establish an image of authority in the classroom. Students feel that their teachers are authoritative regardless of the students' academic performance. Almost all students who were interviewed said that their teachers are authoritative (A_2-230519-1-2). For instance, a student referring to their language learning said,

"Mostly, I will like to listen to my teacher. It's an important thing to listen to your teacher." (T$_1$-250519-1-2).

It can be concluded that students listen to their teachers without question as they assume it to be a part of learning. This establishes teachers' authority over students. Furthermore, students conveyed that their teachers get angry if the students do not listen to their teacher. For instance, one student, when answering a question about whether her teacher gets angry when the students do not listen, the student said that her teacher would get angry when students do not listen. She continued, "So far, I never [let my teacher get angry], because I listen to her always" (A$_1$-230519-42-42). This answer demonstrates the authoritative attitude of teachers in the classroom.

Engagement. Teachers usually adopt multiple strategies to engage students to actively participate in the learning process. This research found that adopting different teaching techniques and making the lesson fun serves as a strong leadership skill of the teacher to engage the class. When asked whether the teacher uses different method of teaching techniques, a student responded by saying: "I can say yes because my friends, all of them, felt interesting when Math teacher come to the class. She gets everyone's attention as she uses different learning methods to explain Maths interestingly." (A$_1$-230519-55-57)

Based on the student' narratives about the mathematics teacher, this teacher was able to engage almost all students. Students responded that this teacher made mathematics interesting and easy, resulting in students feeling that mathematics was interesting and not boring. Furthermore, students also expressed a liking for language teachers, particularly those teaching Malay studies. The students were engaged by the teaching style of their Malay language teacher. One student shared the style of their Malay language teachers: "Yes. She is engaging. We love the way she tells us stories, the way she physically expresses herself when she tells stories. So we focus on her." (A$_2$-230519-41-44)

This response shows that the Malay teacher has the ability to engage her students by skilfully integrating stories in the class. She dramatizes the stories and uses body movements and expressions to enrich the stories. Students are so engrossed in class that learning Malay has become fun. Thus, the Malay teacher naturally became a leader in the classroom.

Managing. The third sub-theme of leadership is managing, referring to the management skill of a teacher in a classroom. Research found that some teachers can manage a class very well, while others cannot manage their class. When students were asked about their teachers' managerial abilities, they replied how their mathematics teacher can manage her class well. One student said: "Yes. When we feel sleepy in class, she asks us to stand up and then we feel fresh and can stay focus." (T$_3$-250519-22-24).

This response shows that the mathematics teacher can manage her class by using different mechanisms to maintain the focus of students. This teacher's management skills were further elaborated on by students who said that although she punished the students who fall asleep in class, the students did not perceive it as punishment, but rather as a method to refresh them.

PROFESSIONALISM

The second main theme of the findings is professionalism. This theme describes the teacher's knowledge and skills in a subject as well as their use of different instructional technologies. This research found that some teachers are not professional, although they demonstrate positive behaviour and attitudes. In referring to their mathematics teacher, students said that because their teacher is young, she can understand them well. However, they consider her subject difficult as noted by one student: "Maybe we are having hard time together. Especially when we were in first class and second class, there are a lot of hard subjects we need to focus, so sometimes our math class become quite hard for us. But this teacher is good and wanted to

finish the syllabus early. In each class, she comes to our table and guide us after finishing the explanation if we do not understand" (A_1-230519-3-14).

According to the students' experience with their mathematics teacher, her positive behaviour and attitude led to her being described as a good teacher who can help the students personally. However, their narrative shows she does not demonstrate the quality of a 'professional teacher' because students categorize mathematics as a difficult subject. "The content is just too tough." (T_1-250519-45-47) Furthermore, the teacher is more interested in completing the syllabus than supporting her students' understanding of the subject. Students shared similar feedback about their English teacher: "Hmm, sometimes our English teacher is quite strict. If we do mistakes, she says, 'I have more experiences than you, so you have to, you know.'" (A_2-230519-3-10) Students feel the English language subject difficult, and they do not enjoy learning it.

However, the students' experience with learning Malay is different. One student said, "Yes, every day she comes to class and shows us easy way of understanding the course and guide us different methods". (T_2-250519-4-6) This shows the Malay teacher not only demonstrates a positive attitude but is also professional. Student, as a result, categorized learning Malay as easy and interesting.

FRIENDLINESS

The third theme of this research finding is friendliness. This theme consists of four sub-themes: caring, humour, patience and fairness.

Caring. Responses showed that the teachers are friendly and caring. When asked whether teachers like to help their students, the majority of them said yes. The mathematics teacher was found to be the teacher that students remarked took the most care of her students, while another student felt that their English teacher is also very caring. One student spoke about the mathematics teacher, "Yes, she always shows me how to do the task." (T_2-250519-2-3) Regarding the English teacher, another student remarked: "Yeah. For example, she told me personally not to be so stressed because of exam marks and I feel she is so caring." (A_3-230519-2-6)

A teacher's caring quality is further elaborated by another student: "Yes, she always like assist us, and she comes to our desk and make sure whether we understand the lesson" (A_2-230519-16-18).

Teachers are caring and loving, and this is welcomed by their students. According to the student's experience with their English teacher, the teacher was described as caring. Similarly, the students described their mathematics and science teachers as caring. Even though some of these teachers were not professional, all of them are recognized by students as caring.

Humour. The second subtopic of friendliness is humour. This research found that the teachers are humorous although they do not exhibit this quality frequently. When asked whether teachers are humorous in class, one student responded, "Yes. By her jokes, by her ways of teaching us." (T_2-250519-26-26). The same question was asked with a negative framing in order to confirm the students' perception about their teachers' humour, these students responded: "No, she always." (A_1-230519-43-43). Another student clarified this feedback: "She [the teacher] makes jokes related to the studies" (A_2-230519-38-38).

Students found that their teachers deliberately create a relaxed and humorous learning environment. However, this was not an easy feat as some students hold negative perceptions about older teachers. According to them, these teachers could not relate due to the generation gap: "I think she had hard time to make jokes. In my opinion, she is old. We are teenagers. It's about age gap." (T_1-250519-27-29).

These two students reveal a positive reaction to their teachers' humour in the classroom. Students feel humour can create a conducive and relaxed classroom atmosphere. However, students also expressed reservations about older teachers whose sense of humour might not resonate with their students. This shows that students not only appreciate teachers who are fun and interesting, but also have many other qualities that can convey a sense of friendliness and build a good relationship between teachers and students.

Patience. Patience is another aspect of friendliness. Research found out that patience is a key word that students often use when they answered various questions. The importance of patience for teacher is elaborated by a student: "I'm a naughty person in the class. I really have bad relationship with my teachers. But I think the teacher should be more patient with students if they choose to be a teacher, I mean, it's their responsibility." (T$_1$-250519-48-52)

This comment shows that students, regardless of their own classroom behaviour (whether positive or negative) expect patience from their teacher. Indeed, this research found that teachers in secondary schools in Malaysia are patient. A student described her Malay language teacher: "She is very patient" (A$_2$-230519-39-39), while another student used the same word when she described her English teacher: "No, she is very patient" (A$_3$-230519-44-44). Teachers will wait for students to understand and resolve problems in the class as described by one student: "She waits for us to solve the issue first, then she tells us what's wrong if we make mistakes. Then she demonstrates the right answers." (T$_2$-250519-9-11)

According to students' descriptions of teachers' attitudes towards mistakes or uncertainty about the content, researchers found that teachers generally respond and accept the mistakes of their students. However, there are some who believe that teachers should be patient regardless of their students' behaviour. These students consider it is the teachers' duty to tolerate inappropriate actions in class.

Fairness. Research found that treating students fairly is another aspect of friendliness. Teachers should not be biased in term of race, language, economic status, gender, or other factors; being unbiased will create a positive learning environment for students. The respondents communicated that their teachers are fair with all students. Referring to the mathematics teacher, a student said: "Actually, I hope all teachers should be like her. Because, I see her attitude is really nice and fair. Although some teachers are better with the students who take more marks than the students who get less marks, this teacher always consider both and treat them fairly. She never talk about us with someone else after the class." (A$_1$-230519-61-69)

According to this student's narrative, the mathematics teacher not only treated students fairly, but is also helpful and avoids backbiting. Students judge whether a teacher is fair or not when teachers treat the students in the class equally. This research found a majority of teachers in secondary school in Malaysia are fair and tolerant.

MOTIVATION

The fourth theme is motivation that contains of two sub-themes: praising students with higher academic performance and praising the students publicly.

Praising students with higher academic performance. This research shows that motivating students involves commending outstanding students for their high academic performance. This not only encourages high-performing students, but also weaker students. Teachers in secondary schools in Malaysia praise their students to motivate them. In response to the question on motivation and praise, a student said, "Yeah, always teachers appreciate high performance." (A$_1$-230519-30-30) Another student added: "Our teacher really praises the students who get good marks and show improvement from earlier. She really praises them, makes them feel better. Like my friend I mentioned before, she got a very high mark in last

exam. This teacher felt quite shock because usually she gets very low marks in exam and teacher really praised her for her achievement." (A$_3$-230519-45-54)

Teachers motivate their students by praising their high performance in class. Students who exhibit relatively more inappropriate or difficult behaviour also expressed this: "I think I never get any praise, but I know it is because my attitude. Because I am a very naughty person." (T$_1$-250519-20-22)

Praising the students publicly. Malaysian secondary school teachers like to show their approval and affirmation of students by announcing the students' results publicly. A student observed and said: "She criticizes all students. Every time she is going to review the marks of everyone and announce publicly from top to bottom. She justified this act and said that we can feel motivation from this announcement." (A2-230519-11-15)

Though teachers felt this public announcement of marks serves as motivation for their students, the students do not agree as they consider the public announcement of their marks as criticism. Teachers might argue that when students are praised publicly in the class, they would be encouraged and get more confidence in their work. Although some students are motivated by receiving praises for their high achievements, all students agreed that teachers should not compare them with others. The students appreciated the teacher who praised a student that usually received low marks but did well on their last exam. To effectively motivate students, it appears that teachers should avoid public comparisons.

DISCUSSION

In examining teachers' actions and behaviour in a positive learning environment, this study integrates the findings from the survey questionnaire and the interview responses from the students. Based on the survey, students perceive that their teachers have a high level of leadership, and this was supported by the interview responses attesting that teachers have a strong sense of authority, engagement, and management. The perspectives of the students further establish the enduring role of teachers as leaders in their classrooms. In this learning environment, teachers utilize essential leadership traits like taking initiative and managing instruction in order to sustain a conducive learning environment for improved student learning outcomes (Koci, 2013). The potential for teachers to be instructional leaders not only in their classrooms but also in their respective departments or the entire school begins with the prospect of developing leadership capabilities addressing students' needs. Henceforth, teachers are regarded as the authority in classroom teaching and learning, and priority should be given to further developing their pedagogical capabilities.

The interpersonal attitudes of teachers that matter the most in a positive learning environment are those traits that reflect understanding, freedom, friendliness, strictness, and admonition. Although students rated admonishing to be the least desirable trait for a teacher, striking a balance between appropriate attitudes is necessary in sustaining a conducive learning environment and in driving students to be the best that they could (Koka & Hein, 2005). In line with this, the interview responses from the students revealed anecdotal accounts of a wide array of teachers' attitudes that may seem to be contradicting. Even though the students in this reported how friendly their teachers are because of their humour and compassion, they also took note of the level of professionalism of their teachers, which is driven by the strong desire to adhere with the curriculum and achieve set standards. As a dynamic learning environment, maximizing opportunities for teaching and learning requires a certain extend of fluidity and flexibility especially for the teachers to address issues and celebrate successes that arise spontaneously (Wilson, 2017). Essentially, these attitudes present opportunities for development for teachers to be more effective in the classroom by aligning themselves with students' expectations.

As the interview findings confirmed the extent and ways teachers show leadership traits and interpersonal attributes, a relationship between teachers' leadership and specific attitudes was further established by this study. Notably, teachers' leadership capabilities influence their disposition to be understanding, friendly, strict, and open.   The correlation between teachers' leadership and attitudes strengthens the role of teachers as a bridge towards building a safe and positive learning environment by opening the right channels of communication by taking initiatives and modelling appropriate values (Wasson et al., 2016). Leadership is also identified as a predictor of positive behavioral intentions, which leads to teacher effectiveness with respect to school factors such as students' achievement and motivation (Malak, 2017). Thus, developing leadership skills has a ripple effect on character building necessary for a genuinely optimistic learning environment.

CONCLUSION

From the students' perspectives, teachers will always be their beacon of light. For them, their teachers evidently manifest leadership skills and positive attitudes in the classroom. Subsequently, leadership and interpersonal attitudes go hand in hand in meeting school aims and in sustaining a positive learning environment. In as much as this paper has utilized quantitative and qualitative approaches to establish the aforementioned claims, future studies may scrutinise a specific type of leadership that teachers manifest or employ to be effective in the classroom. Since using students' perspectives is still debatable in the field of educational research due to psychological and ethical reasons, other school stakeholders who have direct and constant interaction with teachers could be used to study teachers' interpersonal attitudes. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, this study has systematically presented students' perceptions and insights, which current and aspiring teachers may refer to in order to continuously improve their teaching practices and principles for their students' achievement.

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