MAKING SENSE OF LEADERSHIP AND LANGUAGE STYLES OF STUDENT LEADERS IN A MALAYSIAN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Language plays an essential role in everyday experiences, given that it can facilitate and maintain congenial relationships if it is used properly. Not much is known about how young student leaders make sense of their communicative acts with their peers, especially in the Malaysian context. The study investigated student leaders' sensemaking of leadership and language use in a public secondary school in Northern Malaysia. Their narratives were obtained through a qualitative study using focus groups and face-to-face in-depth interviews. The findings revealed several themes that explain the preferred spoken language styles among the student leaders in performing their responsibilities at school. The study demonstrated that appropriate language use should be part of the training of student leaders at school or leadership training curriculum for secondary school leaders nationwide. In that way, the student leaders will not only be exposed to proper language use in communicating leadership, but they will also be motivated to polish up and reflect on their language use for continuous self-development.

Keywords: sensemaking; language style; student leaders; narratives; Malaysia; public secondary school

Introduction

Language is a significant aspect of leadership as it reveals the individuals' way of thinking, and measures their empowerment and mutual collaboration (Marquet, 2020). It is seen as a unique attribute of human beings (Gleason & Ratner, 2009) that reflects individual identities. Language facilitates the formation of ideas, represents various emotions, and elucidates complex concepts (Lewis, 2010), such as in the case of mentors' communicative styles (Culpeper & Kan, 2020). In particular, young leaders should know how to address others and communicate effectively with diverse communities and individuals based on their sensemaking acts (Harun, 2007; Harun et al., 2021). Even though the notion of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) relates much to viewing things sensibly in an organisation, it should be applied to understand how people consider their communication with others in various contexts. Moreover, the members of the current technology-addicted generation—popularly known as generation Z—process knowledge, talk, and think differently than their predecessors due to their pervasive use of digital resources (Poláková & Klimova, 2019). The Ministry of Education Malaysia (n.d.) has recognised the essential communication and leadership skills for students to acquire. Thus, more work should be done about not only student leadership in school but also the language of communicating leadership acts, given that it is a diverse field of theory and practice (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Tan, 2014; Tie, 2012).

During the last 15 years, the emerging patterns signify a renewed emphasis on improving key leadership indicators among young students. More recently, the momentum to enhance leadership qualities was developed primarily due to the upsurge in the monitoring process of policymakers, students, parents, and administrators to hold the teachers and school management accountable for their performance (Dugan & Komives, 2007). In this context, it is imperative to understand how the younger generation of leaders communicates and resolves disputes and compromises (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Although leadership is a well-studied research subject, the language of leadership and how it influences others is rarely examined, particularly in schools among young leaders in Malaysia (Harun & Din, 2017). This paper reports the qualitative research conducted in a Malaysian public secondary school to understand how the student leaders used language when performing leadership acts with their peers.

Making Sense of the Dynamics of Language, Style, and Leadership

We argue that understanding the various communicative styles can enhance our knowledge of how others use language and make us more conscious of the inherent power of language in leadership. The power dynamics are embedded in the language people use, especially the leaders (Marquet, 2020) on the importance of language in displaying leadership. People are encouraged to embrace language that connotes the intent to learn (learning from each other) rather than top-down (being directive) in connecting with people and getting things done. Given that language consists of verbal

and non-verbal communication, there are aspects of language use that mark the uniqueness of the individuals. The linguistic and non-linguistic features of human language tend to co-exist and co-operate in formulating and producing thoughts.

People use spoken and written expressions to convey ideas and create requests; in leadership, language acts as their most valuable resource (Marquet, 2020; Souba & Souba, 2016; Ting, 2010). It can be strenuous to set courses, create guidelines, or develop standards without proper use of language. From a cognitive standpoint, successful leadership practices are inextricably related to leaders' knowledge about their personal developmental experiences (Hartman & Conklin, 2020). Kouzes and Posner (2011) shared five practices of exemplary leadership, including the inspiration of shared vision among peers. Such practices include the leader setting an example, inspiring a mutual vision for the future, fostering others to collaborate and encouraging the followers for their accomplishments. Kouzes and Posner also highlighted how leaders would venture out and seek challenges that are thrown at them.

Typically, people utilise various styles while delivering ideas in spoken and written expressions due to diverse social and cultural aspects. Such types of discourse require the speakers or writers to be able to deliver their messages intelligibly despite the diverse accents or ways of communicating. Keraf (1984) stated that language style refers to the ability to construct a decent sentence. Meanwhile, Chaika (1982) claimed that style refers to the collection of linguistic forms to express social or artistic outcomes, and they consist of five different characteristics: (1) it is a communication form; (2) it helps to interpret a message; (3) it forms a mini communication system within the language itself; (4) it controls the speaker-listener interactions; and (5) it is integral to a social function that interaction cannot succeed without appropriate style. People can use these forms of expression to disseminate their ideas or to construct demands.

The language style is not just a technique of transmitting knowledge but is also a critical component of forming interpersonal relationships. According to Llamas (2007), "language style is a dimension of language where individual speakers have a choice" (p. 95). Moreover, individuals do not always uniformly express themselves and their language peculiarities can be referred to as style. In that way, language style can be defined as "a way to express the idea with a special language to show the writer's soul, spirit and concert (the use of vocabulary)" (Keraf, 1991, p. 113).

As such, relating to others becomes more challenging when the person is a leader or a potential leader. The leadership acts must be justifiable and understood by those who will have to perform the tasks. In turn, these acts will be converted into the desired outcomes. The medium used is, most often than not, the spoken language.

Joos (1967) categorised language style into five types: (1) frozen, (2) consultative, (3) casual, (4) formal, and (5) intimate. The "frozen" style is devoted to formal contexts, such as royal and religious rituals, weddings, literary works, and presidential speeches. The "consultative" style is the most common, as evident in the student data. It is used in semiformal contexts, for instance, with small groups and strangers. Meanwhile, the "casual" language style is the most frequently used among people with similar

characteristics such as age, gender, education, social standing, and ethnicity. This is also evident in the student narratives; for instance, they used informal vocabulary. The "formal" style often occurs in formal contexts without any mutual prior knowledge and monologues, whereas the "intimate" style is characterised by an absolute lack of social restrictions based on personalised language, for instance, more for family members and close acquaintances.

Understanding Generation Z through the Collective Acts of Sensemaking

Generation Z (hereinafter Gen-Z) are those born after the 2000s with the advent of advanced technology (Poláková & Klimova, 2019), and they process knowledge differently from previous generations. According to Demir and Sönmez (2021), Gen-Z are technology-dependent, to the point that they find it difficult to recall a life without the Internet and smartphone. They are creative and enthusiastic (Carter, 2018) but they tend to challenge and criticise everything (Torocsik et al., 2014). Some researchers have discovered that they are incredibly individualistic due to their widespread utilisation of modern technology, thereby losing their communication skills (Igel & Urquhart, 2012; Torocsik et al., 2014). As such, being acquainted with these people is essential as we can learn to understand how they view the world they live in through their perspectives.

In this advanced era of information and the evolution of our generation, societies must evaluate how Gen-Z leaders interact with one another effectively. According to the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2015-2025), members of Gen-Z are expected to take up the leadership role in the next few decades (Wiedmer, 2015). However, the differences between Gen-Z and previous generations are so evident that education and communication methods have significantly transformed to properly evaluate them (Prensky, 2001). Several studies have tried to understand the correlations between a generation and its leadership style bit few have focused on Gen-Z. Most of these studies (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Rosa & Hastings, 2018; Stein, 2013) concentrated on millennials.

Sensmaking is a critical leadership quality, which Weick (1995) had coined. The notion of sensemaking has been popularised in the understanding of organisation (Weick, 1995) and interpersonal relations (Harun, 2007). In sensemaking, a leader is expected to develop a reasonable understanding of the transforming world by utilising data insights and communication skills. In this manner, leaders can promptly comprehend the situation in their surroundings, which helps them plan their leadership undertakings, such as innovating, visioning, and associating with their followers. Many studies have exhibited that an efficient sensemaking process involves consistent behaviour, independence, and flexibility. Weick (1995) asserted that the process of sensemaking is on-going, which reflects identity, retrospect, enactment, social, ongoing, extracted cues, and plausibility. Admittedly, the process is complex as it requires individuals to rationalise the actions performed and subsequently manage them. Kramer (2017) claimed that "sensemaking explores what an experience means to the participants" (p. 1). Even though leadership is a well-researched study field, it is often

undervalued academically, especially among young leaders at schools. Hence, this paper discusses the research conducted that highlights the selected student leaders' (Gen-Z) language styles in a public secondary school based on sensemaking as coined by Weick (1995).

The study investigated student leaders' sensemaking of leadership and language use in a public secondary school in Northern Malaysia.

Methodology

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research design that focuses on conducting a case study. A case study is a study that focuses on in-depth studies regarding an individual or a group of people (Starman, 2013). By doing both in-depth and focus group interviews, the researcher was able to collect data, analyse the language use of Gen-Z student leaders, and trace the language style in their discourse. Therefore, such design allows for a more thorough and accurate result regarding these student leaders.

Study context and participants

Approximately 18 participants were carefully selected based on certain criteria, including characteristics, expertise, or knowledge required to gain extensive information about language use in leadership: (1) they have all served as prefects or held some leadership positions at school; (2) they have at least four years of leadership experience, and (3) they are 17 years old and in level five of secondary schooling.

Approximately 12 students joined the focus group interview, while the other six students took part in the in-depth interview. These students were in their senior year of high school and preparing for the *Sijil Peperiksaan Malaysia (Malaysian Examination Certificate)*, a compulsory national exam. For confidentiality purposes, pseudonyms are used to address the participants (Tables 1 and 2).

A small sample size was considered sufficient to collect data that could reflect the students' views of their leadership language and obtain more information-rich data (Liao, 2020; Patton, 1990).

Table 1
Respondents' Profile: Focus Group Interview

No	Name	Age	Gender	Position	Experience as a leader (years)
1	B4-FG	17	M	Prefect	4
2	B5-FG	17	M	Prefect	4
3	B6-FG	17	M	Prefect	6
4	B7-FG	17	M	Prefect	5

5	B8-FG	17	F	Prefect	4
6	G4-FG	17	F	Prefect	4
7	G5-FG	17	F	Prefect	4
8	G6-FG	17	F	Prefect	4
9	G7-FG	17	F	Prefect	5
10	G8-FG	17	F	Prefect	7
11	G9-FG	17	F	Prefect	4
12	G10-FG	17	F	Prefect	4

Note: M=Male F=Female
(Source: Researchers' data, 2021)

Table 2
Respondents' Profile: In-depth Interview

No	Name	Age	Gender	Position	Experience as a leader (years)
1	B1-II	17	M	Prefect	4
2	B2-II	17	M	Prefect	4
3	B3-II	17	M	Head prefect	9
4	G1-II	17	F	Prefect	4
5	G2-II	17	F	Assistant head prefect	4
6	G3-II	17	F	Head prefect	8

(Source: Researchers' data, 2021)

Data collection procedures

To explore the language use of student leaders, focus group interview and in-depth individual interviews were conducted. The group size was between six and 12 participants to ensure the convenience of mutual interaction among them. The interviews took place in the classroom, which offered familiarity, privacy, convenience, and comfort. Based on the predetermined systematic procedure, both types of interviews were held on weekdays (between 10:30 to 11:30 am) and during break time (1:30 to 2:30 pm) as advised by the school administrative staff .

For this purpose, a skillful moderator who could converse in the participants' native language was recruited to assist in the data collection process. The primary goal of the research was to evaluate and observe the participants' linguistic and non-linguistic responses based on the interview questions. These responses include the choice of words, the context, the internal consistency of participants' views, the rate of comments, the degree of agreement with the topic, the intensity of feelings toward the topic, and the conclusions of the discourse.

Two focus groups were formed with six participants in each group to ensure comfort and mutual interaction among the participants. They were briefed individually before signing the consent form. They were told that they could quit the interviews at

any time if they felt dissatisfied with the questions. They were given small tokens of appreciation for their valuable time and efforts. The group discussions were used to obtain the students' perspectives (Kruger & Casey, 2015), that is, to gather overall viewpoints of their leadership experiences.

The in-depth interviews were conducted with six students to probe and gain a better comprehension of the respondents' experiences. In that way, the researchers would learn more about many concealed factors such as reasons and particular events. The intention is "to see it from the other person's point of view" (Patton, 1987, p. 109). The individual interviews were approximately 20-50 minutes.

The responses and concerns of the student leaders about leadership styles, backgrounds, and use of language were shared and recorded, both digitally and manually (field notes). To avoid repetition, the interview was discontinued when no new information could be obtained (the data saturation was felt to have been reached). The students were interviewed in their native language. The participants' linguistic responses were observed based on the field notes. These responses include choice of words, context, internal consistency of participants' views, rate of comments, degree of agreement with the topic, intensity of feelings toward the topic, and conclusions of the discourse (verbal and non-verbal communicative acts).

The spoken data were subsequently transcribed through an interpreter. Both interviews were recorded for accuracy and clarity purposes. They yielded approximately 250 minutes of data. The transcripts were translated to English. Back-to-back translation was performed to maintain data accuracy with the professional expert's assistance.

Data analysis procedures

Braun and Clarke's (2013) thematic model guided the researchers in making sense of the spoken data, which exposed various keywords reflecting leadership and style. There were six stages involved in this study, starting with reading and re-reading of transcripts. This was followed by generating codes of the data, and categorising them thematically. Next, possible themes were identified and reviewed before defining the themes. The final stage was writing the report. Table 3 provides an overview of the steps involved.

Table 3

Overview of thematic analysis steps using Braun and Clark's (2013) model

Step	Explanation	Product
Reading and re-reading the transcripts	The related transcripts were read and re-read for at least 3 weeks to have an exhaustive understanding of the transcript by focusing solely on their verbatim responses.	At this stage, the researcher tried to understand the emerging themes through the reading of the transcripts to get an insight of the findings.
Generating codes	The transcripts of the respondents for both focus group and in-depth interview were scrutinised and went through an open coding process. In this process, all general themes that wererelated to the study were listed.	E.g.: language styles, support, politeness, consultative, kindness, angry, firm, soft.
Identifying possible themes	General themes were collected and compared with each other. The patterns of the emerging themes were identified.	E.g.: Apprehensive language, direct language, friendly, manipulate, helping, attentive, supportive.
Reviewing the themes	All related themes were reviewed and compared multiple times.	The review process took five days to complete.
Defining the themes	All the themes were finalised.	E.g.: Language style, politeness in communication, supportive language, consultative Language.
Writing the report	The report was written according to the emerging themes.	The researcher gathered and displayed the analysis according to the themes.

Results

The findings revealed four key themes of language styles of leadership: direct language, politeness, conversational support, and consultative. In this section, focus group is referred to as FG and in-depth interview as II in the codes given to participants.

The student leaders' language style

(i) Using direct language in communication based on context

The student leaders tended to use direct language in enacting leadership when communicating with their subordinates or handling conflicts. However, they were very much apprehensive with the types of words used during the conversations, depending on the situation. For instance, a male participant (B1-II) specified that he would employ different styles with different people; however, the real meaning or intentions would be directly portrayed based on particular circumstances (Excerpt 1).

(1) A leader must possess a different character based on (certain) situations and Context. For example, I will communicate differently based on whom I am communicating. If it is someone younger than me, I will use a different tone and jargon compared to when I'm communicating with older students or even with my friends. (B1-II)

Similarly, the same pattern was also observed in the language used by participant B2-II. In describing his experiences in handling conflicts, he admitted that his approach seemed a bit harsh and planned to use different methods for his expressions for delivering orders (Excerpt 2). Nonetheless, he still believed that as a leader, he necessitated being firm or direct in handling conflicts.

(2) So, I was called to the front and I was given a slot to talk to my friends who did something wrong and it angers me a lot. So, I scolded them and at the end of the day, I realized that they cannot absorb the information when I conveyed it through the medium of scolding. I was sad since they tend to distance themselves from me and I cried every night for it. So, I learned from that experience and changed my strategy where I'll start the conversation by being friendly and smiling more since it will create the sense of me as an approachable leader. There are moments where I have to be autocratic especially when it involves a rapid action by the subordinates. When the ship is sinking, of course, the captain must create a sense of urgency with his crews. He can't just use the normal ways of discussing calmly since they are running out of time. (B2-II)

Nevertheless, this observation is not bewildering, as several studies have already highlighted the impact of direct language in seeking the listener's attention or actions. For example, Groenewald et al. (2014) reported that direct language is easier to comprehend comparatively. Thus, it is not surprising that most participants would tend

to use direct language in their leadership roles. During the group discussion, most male participants expressed their opinions in directive ways. For example, one male participant (B4-FG) proclaimed the need for a leader to be friendly towards others. When inquired about the type of leadership skills (Excerpt 3).

> (3) … we as leaders need to be friendly, for example, if there's a problem. When we are friendly with others, people will be more open to sharing their problems. And we have to know how to manipulate others too. (B4-FG)

The same trend was also observed in the interview excerpts with two other male participants while responding to the same questions, as shown in Excerpts 4-5. B2-FG expressed his opinion more directly and used fewer hedges as compared to B5-FG.

> (4) A leader has to know how to control (his or her) emotion because if (he or she) can't control the emotion, people under (him or her) will suffer. (B5-FG)

> (5) For me as a leader, we must always help others that have problems…helping teachers, helping our friends at school or home. (B2-FG)

Direct language styles have primarily been associated with males in several past studies. For instance, Önem (2016) indicated that males preferred to use direct language rather than women. Similarly, Wahyuningsih (2018) concluded that Indonesian boys and men preferred to use the direct speech act in giving commands compared to females in the educational institute where the study was conducted.

(ii) *Emphasising the use of politeness in communication*

As observed in Excerpts 6-9, female students seemed to prefer using polite language styles while handling conflict or giving orders to their peers. In Excerpt 6, G2-II shared how she preferred to be polite in handling the situations as reflected by her response:

> (6) I use different language or communication styles depending on the person I communicate with. For juniors, I can be a bit firm, but with my peers, I cannot be rough with them, because people cannot accept it. I have to be firm with the juniors, but I have to be somewhat gentle with my peers. And I have to tell them nicely. (G2-II)

Similarly, G1-II also preferred to express herself politely as shown in Excerpt 7.

> (7) I prefer to... you know, slow talk with them, I don't like to you know, you know, using a very harsh way. I'm not like that. I'm a very... yea a soft person! (G1-II)

Besides, more hedges and modal patterns in conversation were observed in the interview sessions with the female participants (G3-II and G4-II) than males, as shown in Excerpts 8-9.

(8) Maybe a leader should be soft but strict, like, when. How ya? There is a way when leader talks, she (can) ask politely but it sounds strict, so the listener knows she is serious and it is easy to understand. (G3-II)

(9) … okay as a perfect, … or a leader, like me … now we have a task, right? The teacher asked us to do it, right? So, we need to be punctual … teacher gives the order, we must do it. (G4-II)

It seemed that most female participants preferred to use hedges and modal forms. Several past studies have also highlighted women's politeness in linguistics and female language was found to be more standard than the male language (Oktanika et al., 2017).

(iii) *Showing support for each other*

When the female student leaders expressed their opinions, they were observed to be supportive of others. This observation has been supported by past studies (Case, 1994), where women were reported to be more attentive and supportive. During the focus group interviews, when asked about whether the other students would judge them if they (participants) behaved improperly, G4-FG said, "It will lower our dignity" and G10-FG and G5-FG agreed with her.

Moreover, two other participants supported these remarks. This observation was quite evident, especially when the female students were communicating in groups. Another example can be witnessed when they were asked if a leader should have an ego when they deliver orders. Several students were echoing each other as shown in Excerpt 10.

(10)G5-FG   But (we should not) (have egos)...
G8-FG   (if we want to display it) (should be used) in moderation.
G9-FG   (we should not) show it (ego) in front of people.
G4-FG   Yes, yes!

In most cases, their responses were quite clear invalidating that leaders should not have egos. In contrast, when the same question was asked during the focus group interviews with male participants, they had diverse viewpoints on the subject. All of them had diverse opinions ranging from leaders having a big ego or moderate ego to no ego at all.

(iv) *Using consultative language to show care and support*

According to Chaer (2007), this kind of language style is often utilised in meetings, at school, while conducting business or discussions. It is observed that the consultative style was the preferred way of communication among the student leaders as evident in Excerpt 11:

(11)In my opinion, a monitor or a leader should be able to understand the people around her, for example like a prefect who will bound to have a lot of problems at school, so he should understand the problematic students because most of

the time. This is needed in this era, teens like to rebel, so we have to understand them according to the current age and time to solve the said problem. (G6-FG)

In this case, the participant emphasised that leaders need to understand their followers. If they do not handle their followers well, there may be many problems. Therefore, a leader should always focus on more interactions with their peers to understand their problems. This point is also validated by a study by Broderick (1976), which concluded that the consultative language style requires the speakers (e.g., a leader) to gain personal information about their listeners (e.g., a follower) to have better interaction. Additionally, when asked about their possible role models, the participant G2-II explained the reason for admiring her senior (Excerpt 12).

(12) Maybe it's her facial expression, when she gives orders, she is so gentle, people can accept, even if the way she talks sounds stern. (G2-II)

In the focus group, one respondent (B6-FG), imparted the same sentiment about a good leader by emphasising the communication skills and interaction with the followers (Excerpt 13).

(13) … and a leader should care about the problems of his followers because if he (leader) does not know the real situation, he may not be able to understand the personality of the followers, and a leader should not act like a boss. (B6-FG)

Overall, the results in all the interviews revealed that the student leaders not only appreciate using polite language but also value conversational support. For instance, these students often chimed in while others were exchanging opinions during the focus group interviews and gracefully did so to avoid any mutual offense. According to Cowan (2013), members of Gen-Z are overprotective as they grow up with parents who meticulously sweep all obstacles out of their way. Consequently, they developed a rather welcoming culture. They prefered a leader to speak in a consultative manner, demonstrating the difference in leadership language style from the previous generations when citizens or cultures were more transparent and willing to follow their leaders wholeheartedly.

Discussion

The findings reveal the young student leaders' views of their leadership acts and the need to use appropriate language in communicating with peers about the tasks. They made sense of their ways by reflecting and rationalising on word choice, the communicative acts, and their ways of conduct. The findings are consistent with previous studies (Cowan, 2013; Poláková & Klimova, 2019) about Gen-Z student leaders. The student leaders in the focus group interviews were observed to prefer talking to their peers in an explicit yet respectful way, which is a significant difference from the

previous generations who preferred authority and obedience (Poláková & Klimova, 2019). Leaders of previous generations had the habit of speaking in a formal tone and were rather ignorant of the listeners' feedback; they only wanted them to listen attentively and quietly (Broderick, 1976; Cilliers, 2017).

In the focus group interviews, the word "friendly" was repeated a few times by the students. This presents a politeness style of leadership. Moreover, the phrase *"control his/her emotions"* was mentioned numerous times in the focus group interviews. This matter further acknowledges the presence of a consultative style of leadership as most of them mentioned how being too emotional was something that leaders should not have.

The student leaders were seen as enthusiastic, which was evident in their body language and articulation of the narratives. They were observed to be concerned about their peers' feelings, particularly when it came to using language when giving commands or conveying messages. In the focus group interviews, the most common feature among the student leaders was their directness in communicating. Cowan (2013) claimed that Gen-Z is immature and lacks information awareness regarding factual knowledge. Consequently, they often utilise a more straightforward method of delivering instructions, as evident in this study about the school leaders. They reiterated that they should use language that is easily understood, simple, and less formal while delivering instructions. As observed, there was also frequent use of the pronoun "I" from the male student leaders as compared to the female student leaders. This reveals that the speaker believes the focus of the answer was on him (Hesti & Rosaria, 2019) even when talking about activities involving his followers or friends; however, the female leaders tend to use more plural forms (i.e., "we"). The student leaders could employ their interpersonal skills and frank communication styles to convey messages. In the in-depth interviews, they discussed how they exercised their authority more thoroughly. Throughout the interviews, they were observed as polite and demonstrating casual and consultative styles of communication based on Joos' (1967) classification. It was seen that the keywords "please" and "help" were repeated in the In-depth interview which indicates a consultative style of leadership. Not only that, it was also acknowledged that the word "soft" was also mentioned frequently by the students specifically in the focus group interviews. This shows an intimate style of leadership that was explained in data analysis.

The findings demonstrate that language style, mindset, and communication style, especially among Gen-Z, are integral factors for future leadership. However, a more profound analysis is required to comprehend the vocabulary used by these student leaders. Furthermore, since most research tends to focus more on the teachers, headmasters, and school administrators, it is imperative to understand leadership language from the young leaders' lens.

In general, since most studies (Cilliers, 2017; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Rosa & Hastings, 2018; Stein, 2013) focused on millennials, the study about secondary school leaders' language use can contribute to understanding Gen-Z student leaders to some extent. Language should be viewed as a valuable tool for resolving disputes, exchanging

ideas, and communicating orders. The world we live in provides the diverse cultural context that reflects a social language laboratory. Suffice it to know that in today's fast-paced, digitalised environment, where messages and ideas can be effortlessly circulated and misconstrued, exploring the language styles of student leaders seems more relevant (Harun & Din, 2017). Therefore, it is vital to promote the understanding, deliberating, encouraging, and adopting of effective language style(s) of leadership in schools and higher education institutions to promote peace and stability among the people.

Conclusion

The study on language styles of Gen-Z student leaders in a public secondary school in Malaysia highlights the language use, the styles adopted and preferred among both male and female student leaders through their sensemaking acts. They are the ones who rationalise their acts as sensible and believe in what they do in performing leadership. Sensemaking provides insights into the leadership acts of the student leaders and the preferred communication styles, including direct language, politeness, conversational support, and consultative language styles. The findings revealed that male students preferred direct language styles while female student leaders preferred politeness and consultative styles. These results indicated that young leaders in Gen-Z are more direct yet friendly and respectful than the leaders of the previous generations, who are more authoritative. The language styles of the young student leaders are very much influenced by the situation they were in at the time. They tend to be more direct with their juniors and gentle with peers. This study also reveals that the young student leaders are passionate and confident, which can be observed in their body language and style of speaking. Furthermore, they are more concerned about the feelings of their peers and followers during their command processes or conveyance of messages. Although this research study is not gender-focused, we could distinguish between the leadership styles of females and males. Future research should investigate the leadership roles and styles of both males and females. The main limitation of the study is that the student leaders were not observed performing the actual leadership acts in the real setting. Additionally, the focus is only on one secondary school, and all the selected student leaders, their followers, and peers belong to a single culture. Future studies should include other school leaders so that richer data about language use and leadership in various social and cultural contexts can be obtained.

Acknowledgement

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