Characteristics and Success Factors of Rural Community Leadership in Malaysia: A Focus Group Analysis

Ahmad Aizuddin Md Rami*, Mohd Faiq Abd Aziz, Nurfazreen Aina Muhamad Nasharudin and Roziah Mohd Rasdi

Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The leadership aspects of rural leaders in Malaysia are still unclear, and a consensus of the characteristics of credible rural community leaders has not been achieved. In addition, there is still a lack of specific and in-depth research on community leadership in rural areas in Malaysia. Therefore, a study was conducted to deepen understanding of leadership, specifically in the rural community leadership characteristics and success factors. The current study used a qualitative approach via a focus group discussion method involving 15 informants from the Village Development and Security Committee (JPKK) to gain in-depth information. The major themes that emerged from findings include inborn leadership, leadership quality, leadership characteristics, leadership motivation, and leadership training, referred to as leaders' success factors. The current study hopes that the government can provide focused and comprehensive leadership training programs to ensure leaders perform their duties effectively and efficiently.

Keywords: Community development, community leadership, leadership development, rural community

INTRODUCTION

Today's society is continuously confronted with demanding a leader develop strategies for achieving structured goals (Podsakoff et al., 2018). A leader is a person who controls or commands a group, organisation, or country. Leadership is the art of influencing and directing people to their obedience, confidence, and loyal cooperation in achieving common objectives (Gandolfi &

Stone, 2016; Northouse, 2012). Researchers have increasingly moved beyond simple interpretations of leaders as "born" or "special breed." Certain degrees of context-specific and always more complicated than monolithic appeal to personal attributes (Aziz et al., 2020; Kniffin & Patterson, 2019).

Successful societies are often associated with a leadership style and pattern that enables them to carry out their tasks towards achieving the goals (Xu et al., 2017). Successful leadership strongly influences followers (Rami et al., 2020b). In this context, leaders use influence to ensure their followers carry out tasks with dedication, sincerity, and commitment (Erdurmazlı, 2019). Leaders can also use their wisdom and authority to influence their followers to make positive changes and develop human resources to achieve organisational goals (Smith et al., 2004). Marion and Uhl-Bien (2001) stated that leaders and communities were near related and that management's effectiveness was often related to the leadership effectiveness. Northouse (2012) argued that a leader's effectiveness depends mainly on the wisdom to clearly define the mission and vision of the organisation, training, responsibilities, communication, initiatives, insights into the situations, collaboration, and being able to improve situations.

The success of leadership has been discussed in several previous studies. Among them are Yukl et al. (2009) and Rami et al. (2016). Researchers have reviewed the current information related to the best leadership practices and success factors and the impact of focusing on other leadership programs. Studies in community-based leadership believe that successful leadership prioritizes three stakeholders: the individuals and their families; the community; and organizations that strengthen the community (Edwards, 2015). Besides that, the public should understand that leaders are born and honed despite coming from many different backgrounds. Naturally, effective leadership programs must be applied to each leader to understand the community's needs and bring about changes (Rami et al., 2020a). Leadership programs should also identify, evaluate, and consider cultural issues and understand the impact on learning, communication, relationships, and other leadership development issues.

According to Beer (2014), effective community leadership programs typically have a strong community base, are prepared according to the particular needs of the community or agency, and are focused on leadership development efforts according to community needs. Besides that, community leaders and members support each other to bring about change at the three levels of individuals, families, and communities (Prummer & Siedlarek, 2017).

Ricketts and Ladewig (2008) mentioned that effective communication was fundamental to any well-functioning community. In every community and leaders' commands, being honest with their community members is essential. The success of a leader of a rural community depends on their ability to disseminate

information through proper channels, and at the same time, maintain confidential information as necessary (Rami et al., 2020a). The best way to build effective communication channels is to provide social media facilities and community websites, distribute information, hold regular meetings, and communicate with other community organisations.

Wilson (2012) argued that an effective leader must be visionary and capable of leading their followers transparently while creating an environment that allows the community to follow them willingly (hanging sentence). This process includes expressing shared vision, power, principles, relationships and beliefs, cooperation, networks, understanding, charisma, and team spirit (Boyatzis et al., 2015). Another idea of leadership among community leaders was emphasized by Lowndes (2004), who explained that networks and strategies of understanding and sharing related to shared vision were essential in this process.

Some experts and researchers related to community leadership emphasise cooperation, persistence, and influence processes based on the relationships between specific parties (Guay & Choi, 2015). When defining a relationship, all stakeholders are engaged in which the aspects of leadership are based on cooperation. A community leader's success depends on the situation and the leader's ability to solve the problem. Contemporary views on community leadership emphasise the importance of people or communities to voice their ideas in the decision-making process and policies that can impact their lives (Argent, 2011).

In Malaysia, rural community development is essential for rural people's well-being, as rural areas in Malaysia are still characterised by weak infrastructure, low population density, and limited access to public services (OECD, 2019). According to Samah et al. (2009), it is crucial that rural community leadership overcomes conventional obstacles and promotes development in new challenges. Furthermore, due to the tremendous pace at which development occurs, leadership is vital to ensure that rural residents are not left behind and compete with urban residents, particularly in development challenges. Therefore, an effective rural leader must guarantee creative and innovative responses to help achieve sustainable rural development. In this regard, local communities must pay attention to the success factors of village leaders in Malaysia, followed by establishing the suitable characteristics of a proper rural leader to discover one.

Many recent studies have focused on local community leadership and empowerment for rural community strengths (Charoenwiriyakul, 2016; Rami et al., 2017; Setokoe et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2017). However, in particular, the study in leadership paid little attention to leadership in rural community development that explicitly considers the unique success factors of the Malaysian rural leader while discussing the characteristics of a community leader. The previous studies were only conducted to determine the level of knowledge and perception of rural community leaders in

Malaysia (e.g., Masso & Man, 2016; Ngah et al., 2010). The actual features and success elements of rural community leaders need to be explicitly addressed. The two main questions that the present study tries to answer are: (a) What are the characteristics of a community leader in a rural area? (b) What are the features of a successful leader in a rural community? Therefore, this study aimed to deepen leadership knowledge, specifically understanding rural community leadership characteristics and success factors in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural Leadership and Rural Community Development

Since the pre-independence of Malaysia, western and local researchers have seriously looked into rural leadership and community development issues (e.g., Rogers, 1975; Wall Jr & Callister, 1999). The literature review first highlights the importance of local leaders' capability and commitment - two necessary qualities that ensure substantial and meaningful local participation and support to push ground activities forward (Abas & Abd Halim, 2018). Therefore, it is indicative that leadership and community development are two closely related constructs. Freddie et al. (2013) posited that the key factor of successful rural community development is an effective leader who consistently avails him/herself. To date, several approaches to leadership styles have been developed to demonstrate how their concepts can be used together to create community stability through the development of effectively functioning leaders and sustainable leadership interactions.

As such, trait leadership as one of the first approaches to leadership theory was introduced as early as 1948 to define leadership. According to Northouse (2012), trait leadership is defined as naturally distinctive leadership qualities–displayed since birth–that propel specific individuals into great leaders. In the 1960s, the prominence of trait leadership re-emerged where discussions were robust in explaining how traits play a leadership role. However, it was due to the general perspective that focused on the dynamics of social influence, relationships, and leadership styles. The fundamental focus areas when examining leadership styles were a leader's actions and disposition. This era also saw a shift in leadership theory; trait leadership moved towards the dynamism of transformational leadership (Palalic, 2020), which delivers a higher level of complexity and potency. This leadership style is based on leader-follower exchanges. Between the 1980s and '90s, transformational leadership evolved as a process where the leader's purposeful engagement with others closes the leader-follower gap. It results in enhanced motivation and morality in both parties. The leader, he/she demonstrates a leadership style that exudes an inspiring vision and charisma. At the same time, the follower develops into their full potential.

In the recent decade, leadership discourse has undergone another shift–towards the servant leadership approach.

Several studies have discussed leadership, commitment to communities, and leaders' sense of obligation to their people as the core contributors to achieving community goals and outcomes (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). For example, Greenleaf's (1996) concept of servant leadership is based on the leader's ultimate service goal instead of traditional leadership, focusing on community growth. In contemporary communities, it is crucial to look at how these varied approaches contribute towards leader-community engagements in a rural context. Therefore, ground activities spearheaded by local leaders and associations should orient less towards fulfilling individual interests and more towards meeting the encompassing needs and concerns of communities they serve.

Study Context

Malaysia is often cited as one of the front-runners in implementing rural development programs among the developing nations. Evolution and transformation in rural areas started in 1957 with the Pre-new Economic Policy to reduce poverty among the poor and the marginalised. In the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (*Rancangan Malaysia ke-11*) 2016–2020, the focus is on further developing the rural areas to balance the economic growth in rural and urban areas. In line with the establishment of the Malaysian Vision Policy, drives the nation towards achieving an equitable society.

Post-independence (31ˢᵗ August 1957), the Village Development and Security Committee advisory, locally known as *Jawatankuasa Pembangunan dan Keselamatan Kampung* (JPKK), was established to develop local leaders to stimulate development at the grassroots. It required leaders to work at the forefront of development and place themselves at the heart of project delivery, amenity provisions, day-to-day interactions of individuals, families, and the community's life in the village context. The JPKK unit performs the role of an intermediary, extending the services of the district office administration (Rami et al., 2020b). In essence, it carries out the liaison function between the village and the government agencies mandated to roll out programmes for community development. Another responsibility is to provide leadership and coordination of village resources to ensure that the community achieves development goals as intended. Also, JPKK works towards sustaining a stable safe ecosystem and protecting itself from social threats. In terms of membership, JPKK is chaired by the village headman, elected village leaders, and representatives of organisations in the village (Rami et al., 2021). However, village leaders share a similar reputation with district officers because both are the intended beneficiaries of development policies, especially when the former are political appointees.

In the current study, the JPKK leadership in the grassroots context was chosen because little is known about local leadership perspectives in Malaysian rural communities. Furthermore, it is imperative to recognise the quintessential roles of

village leaders and associations throughout community development programmes. Otherwise, we disregard social change agents who make decisions, provide leadership, and instigate community action, thereby missing the mark of community development itself.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Most past research on rural community leadership characteristics used quantitative methods (e.g., Islam et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2016). Therefore, we attempted to understand the rural community leadership experience through a detailed inquiry into the individuals' experiences rather than proving or refuting predetermined hypotheses. Therefore, this research method was deemed qualitatively more appropriate (Taylor et al., 2015). Furthermore, Taylor provides direct access to the subjective knowledge of rural people's leadership experiences, which focuses on achieving the research aim of this study.

Study Design

This study took a qualitative approach. The present study is a case study. In this case study, JPKK leaders were asked to participate in this research via focus group discussion (FGD) to collect data. FGDs are considered a form of planned discussion. The ideal number of informants is at least four and not exceeding 20 (Creswell, 2018). FGDs can vary from highly structured to unstructured, depending on the purpose of the study. A team consisting of a professional facilitator and an assistant needs focus group

discussion. Through the management of existing partnerships and establishing a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere for inexperienced participants, the facilitator is central to the conversation. Likewise, the assistant's role involves observing non-verbal interactions and the influence of group dynamics and recording the general content of the debate, supplementing the details (Nyumba et al., 2018; Rami et al., 2018). In this study, semi-structured questions were provided to facilitate discussions. The questions were about the informants' understanding of the meaning and characteristics of leadership, and the definition and requirements of a successful leader in a rural community, especially at the grassroots level. We then validate the interview questions through three steps: (1) a review of the literature, (2) verify the validity of the interview questions with both the target population and field experts, and (3) arrange the preparation of a provisional interview schedule or protocol.

Setting

With an estimated 31.5 million people population, Malaysia is one of the world's youngest populations (Statistics Department Public, 2020). In 2018, approximately 24 per cent of Malaysia's population resided in rural areas. The state of Terengganu is located in the east of Peninsular Malaysia. According to the statistical report published by the Terengganu State Economic Planning Unit (UPEN, 2012), the total population for the state of Terengganu in urban and rural areas was approximately 1,011,363 people.

Terengganu is one of Malaysia's most homogeneous states, along with Kelantan. More than 95% of the population is ethnically Malay. However, other ethnic groups live in the state as well, including Chinese (mostly Hoklo), Indians (predominantly Tamils), Siamese, and *Orang Asli* (Indigenous people of Batek and Semaq Beri).

Participant and Procedure

All participants were purposively selected. The sample of the FGD for this study involved a group of 15 JPKK leaders. All informants were members of the JPKK committee representing the local communities in a rural area in the state of Terengganu. The committee consisted of three groups: youth, women, and men. Besides being actively involved in the community or grassroots development programs, some informants worked in the government, private, and entrepreneurial sectors. Others run their businesses or become full-time housewives. In the interests of privacy and confidentiality of informants, pseudonyms were used.

All FGDs were conducted at the locations where the fifteen participants and JPKK leaders were recruited. The same person served as a moderator for all focus groups, accompanied by two assistant moderators. The interviews were audiotaped. Each participant was given a booklet containing an overview of the study, a consent form, and a background questionnaire for reference.

The moderator continued asking about the questions until roughly twenty minutes before the scheduled end of the session.

Then, the moderator discontinued the individual areas of discussion and began to ask the final summary questions to ensure that there would be enough time to conclude the discussions. Each session lasted approximately 2 hours.

Data Collection

To obtain the necessary data, a set of FGD guidelines, known as the FGD protocol, was used as the basis for this analysis (Krueger, 1997). The study was arranged based on three phases of FGD protocol: (i) Preparation before the focus group, (ii) Conduct the focus group, and (iii) Interpreting and reporting the results. The FGD questions were formulated based on past researches and the aims of the study. Ethically, the informants were given a consent form to ensure that they agreed to engage in the study. They were assured of anonymity and informed that all details would only be used for research purposes. The review of the data started as soon as the FGD was finished. Based on the interpretation of the FGD verbatim theme known as thematic analysis, data analysis was conducted. The versatile nature of thematic analysis allowed the researcher to define themes and prevalence in various ways.

Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis of the focus group data used a set procedure (Basch, 1987; Kitzinger, 1995; Stewart et al., 1990). The combination of interviews increases the trustworthiness of the information, making

the findings more robust. The interviews provided a wide variety of integrated care views, providing a realistic impression of views across the sector (Green & Thorogood, 2018). The audiotapes of the sessions were transcribed. The coding categories were developed through several iterations of analysing transcripts, generating categories, reviewing the proposed categories, and using the revised categories to code transcripts (Table 1).

Table 1

Demographic profile of participants

No.	Pseudonym	Employment	Years of leadership experience
1	Yusof	Self-employed	15
2	Hamid	Public officer	10
3	Halimi	Public officer	5
4	Rahmah	Entrepreneur	7
5	Maznah	Housewife	7
6	Roslan	Government Officer	7
7	Mohd	Government pensioner	3
8	Akmal	Entrepreneur	3
9	Jusoh	Farmer	8
10	Zaid	Self-employed	3
11	Zakuan	Private sector workers	3
12	Malik	Self-employed	3
13	Rashid	Self-employed	3
14	Wan	Private sector workers	3
15	Muhd	Entrepreneur	2

RESULTS

The data analysis revealed four major themes capturing the participants' rural community leadership characteristics and success factors. These themes were classified through data analysis, as shown in Table 2.

Background of Informants

The FGD consisted of 15 informants, comprising the chairman, secretary, and chair of the JPKK committee. The informants were typically in their 30s and 60s. All informants had experience in being leaders in their area. Each presided over a subcommittee of the JPKK, including

Table 2

Summary of findings

No.	Theme	Sub-themes
1	Inborn Leadership	• a natural-born leader • smart leader
2	Leadership quality	• Confidence extensive knowledge extensive experience accountability communication skills Physical and personal characteristics
3	Leadership motivation	• Family motivation • leadership position • Desire to help rural communities
4	Leadership training	• Listening skills • Organisational management skill

Note: (i) self-confidence, (ii) extensive knowledge, (iii) extensive experience, (iv) accountability, (v) communication skills, and (vi) physical and personal characteristics

the safety committee, youth development committee, infrastructure committee, women development committee, welfare committee, and economic development committee. The establishment of the JPKK followed the government's recommendation in areas with a population of over 2000. Its primary purpose was to mobilise community activities to improve the management and welfare of the population. Activities included organising health awareness programs, family welfare, entrepreneurship skills training, working with the private sector, and ensuring safety in their respective areas. Each JPKK was paid an allowance by the government and received a yearly financial grant from the government and local authorities. The elected JPKK leaders were expected to enhance the community's capacity and eventually become the catalysts for changing the rural community's well-being.

Emerging Themes

Inborn Leadership. The views of natural-born leaders and wise leaders were reflected in the FGD. Some informants claimed that some leaders were born with innate qualities, and some were born with natural talents. For example, Yusof thought:

> "...*today, many of us consider those who are highly educated and qualified to lead. Nevertheless, a person's leadership style is born with that trait, born with their natural talent. Even if a person has a great educational background, he cannot lead well if he is not gifted with the spirit and leadership qualities. Some people look like ordinary people, but*

because of the 'aura' of their leadership, they have many followers, and this is a leader….". (Yusof)

For example, Halimi stated that

"...*To be a leader, one has to be smart. If one does not have the confidence to speak, he will not see himself as a leader. A leader must be able to convey ideas and instructions clearly for his subordinates to understand....".* (Halimi)

Leadership Quality. Interviews with informants identified six leadership qualities that make rural leaders successful leaders: (i) self-confidence, (ii) extensive knowledge, (iii) a person with extensive experience, (iv) accountability, (v) communication skills, and (vi) physical and personal characteristics.

Self-confidence is the key to successful leadership. When there is ambiguity, making choices is unavoidable, and successful leaders take responsibility for choosing an unpredictable outcome. Roslan said:

"It is important to the rural leader to have that confidence…. Community leaders must have a certain degree of confidence in their ability to carry out various tasks for the community". (Roslan)

Besides, the findings revealed that high-quality leaders must draw from both knowledge and experience.

"...*a leader must always want to learn and equip himself with the latest*

knowledge in his field. A leader must be aware of the current developments and be able to handle any situation related to it….". (Zaid)

"...*in my opinion, a leader needs to have extensive experience in his or her family institution. If this is seen as beautiful, then the leader can carry out his duties as a good leader for the community....".* (Roslan)

The results also indicated that the essential qualities of a good leader include accountability.

"Usually, if there is a dispute or dispute over land or pet ownership, the leader should resolve it wisely without making a biased decision. This accountability personality trait is essential to maintaining communal harmony". (Malik)

Based on the findings, excellent leaders need to have communication skills, especially speaking in public. Besides that, communication skills are also essential in carrying out a leader's daily tasks, such as directing, conducting meetings, and building networks with external parties. Communication skills are also seen as necessary in carrying out tasks at the grassroots level, as illustrated by Maznah:

"...leaders should not be arrogant. For example, when meeting with subordinates, they should always admonish people, whether at work or outside. As a chairman, what I always practice is too often go out to the

community to hear the news and visit them in the event of an accident…". (Maznah)

Finally, the findings displayed the physical and personal characteristics that made up an ideal leader, as explained by the following excerpts:

"...*I think he (mentions the name of a leader admired) is different from other high-ranking leaders because he does not have too much control or protocol with the common people. Besides that, he can joke and, at the same time, maintain his manners and ethics*....". (Wan)

In addition to noble personality matters, physical characteristics also played an essential role for a leader. Among the things that the informants mentioned in their physical features included energetic and proactive actions, attractive external appearance, and know-how to dress appropriately for the occasion. Good-looking and attractive looks were also seen as a bonus that can enhance a leader's physical attractiveness.

Leadership Motivation. In short, three themes made the informants feel they were motivated to become leaders: (1) family motivation, (2) leadership position, and (3) desire to help rural communities. The influence of the family that drove the informant to become a leader was explained in the statements by Rahmah and Maznah as follows:

"...*My dad used to be a youth chairman, and we are a family involved in youth activities, such as organising programs, having dinner at home, and following dad to the program*….". (Rahmah)

"…*I have a family background of leaders, including myself. I think an early exposure since the early age is important*....". (Maznah)

In addition to family influence, informants also stated that their leadership position motivated them to become active members of society and leaders. Among them was the habit of not sitting still and hanging out with people.

"...*I have been the Chairman for 15 years, and no other candidate wants me. This year I am 60 years old, and I have been in the community for a long time, from a young age. In the past, my father was the Chairman of the village JPKK. I was active in a youth association in this village*....". (Yusof)

"...*Because I like to mix with people, and when I hold the position, the organisation and department are happy to work with me. After all, I am also a cleric of this mosque so it is easy for people to get used to us. I am the JPKK secretary here*....". (Halimi)

The final theme that drove the engagement as leaders were to help the community themselves. It was particularly emphasised by the focus group interviews consisting of top and middle leaders. For example, Maznah stated:

"... *I think the most important thing is the confidence in carrying out our responsibilities as leaders. Our presence in the organization can help the others in this area be together with the stream of development so that we do not miss out.…*". (Maznah)

Other informants agreed that local people must be confident about their ability to be leaders. Although they do not work in the public or private sector, the local people's roles and services are essential for a successful program at the community level. Previously, these groups were only associated as managers and leaders in households.

"…*If we think we have leadership qualities, then we can be leaders because we lead the small communities. The principle is that if a small group can accept us as leaders, then we can certainly lead others*….". (Rahmah)

Finally, leadership is also viewed from the standpoint of the leader-follower relationship and the leader's ability to mobilise the followers:

"…*Leaders must be aware of the intricacies of leadership and be able to motivate their followers. Besides that, leaders must have exceptional ideas that can be applied in various situations and motivating their followers. The friendly attitude towards the people on the field regularly, in terms of time and commitment is also important for leaders*....". (Hamid)

Leadership Training. The focus group interviews for the JPKK leaders also raised questions about informational leadership training. All informants stated that they were used to leadership training. Programs organised by the Ministry of Rural Development, Rural Development Institute (INFRA), Terengganu State Government Office, Jabatan Kemajuan Masyarakat (KEMAS), and District Offices provided extensive training on organisational management activities, paper preparation and presentation, and protocol and ethics training. Most informants agreed on the importance of leading, managing, communicating, and carrying out leadership tasks such as conducting meetings and giving helpful directions. Besides that, public speaking skills and the proper use of body language were also considered elements of communication skills. A small number of participants named listening skills as one of the training requirements. For example:

"...*Maybe listening skills are not needed by community leaders, but leaders of an organization or company need this skill. The subordinates will be concerned about my ability to speak when a leader does not have good listening skills*….". (Muhd)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In Malaysian society, community leaders are regarded as catalysts for improving and enhancing the rural community's living conditions. Moreover, there was then a great deal of government in Malaysia's

rural community about community leaders. Therefore, it can be said that qualitative research has helped researchers to deeply find answers concerning the community leaders in profound ways (Parry et al., 2014). Based on the shared experiences of the authors in conducting focus group interviews with JPKK leaders, it can be concluded that key characteristics and success factors of rural community leadership include four themes and thirteen sub-themes emerged from findings, including inborn leadership (i.e., a natural-born leader and smart leader), leadership quality (i.e., self-confidence, extensive knowledge, extensive experience, accountability, communication skills, and physical and personal characteristics), leadership motivation (i.e., family motivation and motivation position, and desire to help rural communities), and leadership training (i.e., listening skills and organizational management skills).

Since traits theory stated that only people with distinct characteristics could be leaders, results have shown that the unique personality traits of JPKK leaders may give them with a greater propensity to be leaders. In addition, the findings validated previous findings that born leaders have an unprecedented ability to inspire and empower community members to achieve their goals (Nichols, 2016). Besides, the essential qualities of a good leader mentioned in this study include confidence, extensive knowledge, extensive experience, accountability, communication skills, and physical and personal characteristics.

In addition, the results demonstrated that JPKK leaders are respectable community leaders as they are confident enough to serve and lead, knowing that their plan and goal are realistic for local people and the absolute best possible decision. In this study, community leadership was conceptually provided for through servant leadership theory. Using Greenleaf's (1996) Theory of Servant Leadership, JPKK leaders need to serve first- to give something back to their community. It is due to this desire that one invariably takes a leadership role within the community. Leadership with both of the study communities is very strongly aligned with our designation of leadership. Many even expressed how it was a part of their job to serve the community that has given them so much; others wanted to leave it a better place than when they were there.

Furthermore, the results highlighted that community leaders need to identify a plan as part of the decision-making process. In particular, the ability to suggest procedures and set expectations to achieve a shared vision has been correlated with successful leadership. Community leaders need to use their experiences (Cajete, 2016) and knowledge (e.g., Eva et al., 2019) to suggest successful strategies throughout the process. Our findings thus confirm that a successful JPKK leader needs comprehensive professional leadership experience and knowledge to develop an effective strategy in the community. Therefore, the need for a more noble leadership aspiration–one of community

vision and improvement–is important for future community development. It is one of the aspects of transformational leadership, as outlined by Kouzes and Posner (1993). Transformational leadership's role within these rural communities involves having an appropriate vision for the community and revitalising the community in times of need.

One specific area of communication that is especially relevant for high-quality leaders is the ability to reassure and influence others. Therefore, strong communication skills for JPKK leaders are utterly critical in terms of leadership quality. Communication is a primary function of leadership and a core attribute of a successful leader (Hackman & Johnson, 2013). Good leaders are always seen as first-class communicators, have a strong set of principles, and always believe in cultivating and inculcating those principles in others. It is why their community respect them and obey them as a leader. In the meantime, leadership communication inspires and encourages the community through a systematic and constructive exchange of knowledge through outstanding communication skills (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017). With an increase in the portfolio of community leaders, there is a need to adapt communication skills to navigate the wide horizon and make all possible circumstances far more successful.

When it comes to accountability, many reports show that the degree of community participation has decreased over the last two decades of the twentieth century (Gibson et al., 2005). The decrease in participation and trust is partly due to programmatic problems and the accountability of decision-makers and individuals for results and actions. It will no longer be sufficient for leaders to demonstrate efficiency. They must continue to demonstrate their responsibility for the relevant and appropriate use of resources. Results from our research confirmed that the high-quality community leaders would take responsibility for the work of local people and their own. They applaud when things go well. Besides, JPKK leaders need to be accountable for what they do. If they are doing well, give them a pat on the back, but if they are struggling, help them think about their mistakes and work together to make things better. Keeping them accountable for their decisions will build a sense of responsibility among these leaders and lead the community more seriously.

Lastly, physical and personal characteristics are a couple of leadership qualities that make up great community leaders (Grunberg et al., 2019). Based on the results, JPKK leaders need to be individually and physically organised and inspired. They have to become more effective, *must* learn how to influence others. Thus, these characteristics differentiate *leaders* from subordinates. There is no doubt that some individuals are more attracted to leadership positions than others. Even so, it would be absurd to suggest–though it has been said in the past–that only individuals with specific physical or personal attributes could lead. That is, few people are born leaders, but luckily leadership can be learned. Leadership motivation also is one of the processes of leading. The findings displayed

that the motivation to be a leader is an essential success factor in Malaysia's rural community leadership. Our findings are consistent with the previous research, which indicates that leadership motivation can be deemed a proximal variable of a leader's emergence. It appears that different dimensions of motivation to lead different offer levels of predictive value in community settings (Hong et al., 2011). It appears that various forms of driving motivation, such as motivation from family motivation, leadership position, and desire to help rural communities provide different degrees of predictive value in community settings.

Leadership training can include a degree of communication guidance as well as opportunities for practice in low-risk settings. Indeed, JPKK, as a local leader, had an understanding of the functions and characteristics of an effective leader. Moreover, the appointees were very dedicated and inspired to adopt programs in their respective communities. However, JPKK, as a local leadership group, also hoped that the government would be able to offer leadership training services that were more focused and thorough to ensure that they could fulfil their duties more effectively and efficiently.

IMPLICATIONS

Efficient rural leadership is essential to the growth of rural communities. This study indicates that rural leadership can be either innate or learned. Indeed, rural leadership's origins are partly due to inborn ability, making choosing an excellent rural leader easy. However, rural community leadership's success factors can be gained through formal and informal schooling, self-motivated, and on-the-job learning. A thriving rural leader is, in other words, a combination of both long-life learning and innateness. This issue has important implications for the rural community in developing rural leaders in Malaysia. Recruiting rural community members with leadership potential is just the first stage. The following significant stages provide opportunities for these leaders to build leadership skills by presenting them with significant challenges early in their careers, enabling them to continually improve, and presenting comprehensive training in a wide variety of leadership skills and perspectives.

Discovering that community leadership focuses on serving the community and its members brings up another important implication—leadership training. By providing practical leadership training using community leadership as a foundation, with cases specific to the problems and issues unique to that area, rural community leaders can more effectively learn how to lead and more effectively serve their community. An excellent way to market appropriate community leadership training is to appeal to those already in leadership positions, particularly those with especially public roles or younger leaders looking to take over responsibilities. By appealing to some of these influential individuals within the community, effectual leadership training may become the standard rather than the exception.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There were two limitations to this study. First, we only gained the rural community leaders' perspective on the rural community leadership's characteristics and success factors. Future researches should also consider the rural people's perspectives on rural leaders' characteristics and success factors. Second, it coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic. Future studies are encouraged to research how rural leaders can help manage their communities to deal with COVID-19.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

REFERENCES

Abas, S. A., & Abd Halim, N. (2018). The role of local leadership in community-based rural homestay in Malaysia. *Asia Proceedings of Social Sciences*, *2*(4), 65-71. https://doi.org/10.31580/apss.v2i4.307

Argent, N. (2011). What's new about rural governance? Australian perspectives and introduction to the special issue. *Australian Geographer*, *42*(2), 95-103. https://doi.org/10.1080/00049182.2011.569982

Aziz, F., Md Rami, A., Razali, F., & Mahadi, N. (2020). The influence of leadership style towards technology acceptance in organization. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology, 29*(7s), 218-225.

Basch, C. E. (1987). Focus group interview: An underutilized research technique for improving theory and practice in health education. *Health Education Quarterly*, *14*(4), 411-448. https://doi.org/10.1177/109019818701400404

Beer, A. (2014). Leadership and the governance of rural communities. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *34*, 254-262. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2014.01.007

Boyatzis, R. E., Rochford, K., & Taylor, S. N. (2015). The role of the positive emotional attractor in vision and shared vision: Toward effective leadership, relationships, and engagement. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *6*, 1-13. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00670

Cajete, G. A. (2016). Indigenous education and the development of indigenous community leaders. *Leadership*, *12*(3), 364-376. https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715015610412

Charoenwiriyakul, C. (2016). Local community leadership and empowerment for rural community strengths. *International Journal of Management and Applied Science, 2*(11), 215-218.

Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.

Edwards, G. (2015). *Community as leadership.* Edward Elgar Publishing.

Erdurmazlı, E. (2019). On the servant leadership behaviors perceived in voluntary settings: The influences on volunteers' motivation and organizational commitment. *SAGE Open*, *9*(3), 1-17.

Eva, N., Robin, M., Sendjaya, S., van Dierendonck, D., & Liden, R. C. (2019). Servant leadership: A systematic review and call for future research. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *30*(1), 111-132. https://doi.org/ 10.1016/j.leaqua.2018.07.004

Freddie, A., Kim, R. C., & Copeland, S. (2013). Leadership and rural communities. *International Journal of Bussiness, Humanities and Technology*, *3*(8), 53-59.

Gandolfi, F., & Stone, S. (2016). Clarifying leadership: High-impact leaders in a time of leadership crisis. *Revista de Management Comparat International*, *17*(3), 212-224.

Gibson, P. D., Lacy, D. P., & Dougherty, M. J. (2005). Improving performance and accountability in local government with citizen participation. *The Innovation Journal: The Public Sector Innovation Journal*, *10*(1), 1-12.

Green, J., & Thorogood, N. (2018). *Qualitative methods for health research* (4th ed.). Sage.

Greenleaf, R. (1996). *On becoming a servant-leader.* Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Grunberg, N. E., Barry, E. S., Callahan, C. W., Kleber, H. G., McManigle, J. E., & Schoomaker, E. B. (2019). A conceptual framework for leader and leadership education and development. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *22*(5), 644-650. https://doi.org/ 10.1080/13603124.2018.1492026

Guay, R. P., & Choi, D. (2015). To whom does transformational leadership matter more? An examination of neurotic and introverted followers and their organizational citizenship behavior. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *26*(5), 851-862.

Hackman, M. Z., & Johnson, C. E. (2013). *Leadership: A communication perspective*. Waveland press.

Hong, Y., Catano, V. M., & Liao, H. (2011). Leader emergence: The role of emotional intelligence and motivation to lead. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, *32*(4), 320-343.

Islam, M. R., Abd Wahab, H., & Anggum, L. A. (2020). The influence of leadership quality towards community cohesion in Iban community in Malaysia. *Heliyon*, *6*(2), 1-6.

Kitzinger, J. (1995). Qualitative research: Introducing focus groups. *British Medical Journal, 311*(7000), 299-302. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.311.7000.299

Kniffin, L. E., & Patterson, R. M. (2019). Re-imagining community leadership development in the post-industrial era. *Journal of Leadership Education*, *18*(4), 188-205.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (1993). *Credibility: How leaders gain and lose it, why people demand it*. Jossey-Bass Inc.

Krueger, R. A. (1997). *Analyzing and reporting focus group results* (Vol. 6). Sage publications.

Liu, Z., Müller, M., Rommel, J., & Feng, S. (2016). Community-based agricultural land consolidation and local elites: Survey evidence from China. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *47*, 449-458. https://doi.org/ 10.1016/j.jrurstud.2016.06.021

Lowndes, V. (2004). Reformers or recidivists: Has local government really changed? In G. Stoker & D. Wilson (Eds.), *British local government in the 21st century*. Palgrave.

Marion, R., & Uhl-Bien, M. (2001). Leadership in complex organizations. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *12*(4), 389-418. https://doi.org/10.1016/s1048-9843(01)00092-3

Masso, W. Y. A., & Man, N. (2016). Identify the knowledge level of rural leaders towards paddy farming technologies in Muda Agriculture Development Authority. *Indian Journal of Science and Technology*, *9*, 15-26. https://doi.org/10.17485/ijst/2016/v9i15/86726

Mayfield, J., & Mayfield, M. (2017). *Leadership communication: Reflecting, engaging, and innovating*. SAGE Publications.

Ngah, I., Preston, D., & Asman, N. (2010). *Current planning priorities in rural villages in Malaysia learning from the new Malaysian Village Action Plans.* ISDA 2010.

Northouse, P. G. (2012). *Leadership theory and practice*. SAGE.

Nyumba, T., Wilson, K., Derrick, C. J., & Mukherjee, N. (2018). The use of focus group discussion methodology: Insights from two decades of application in conservation. *Methods in Ecology and Evolution*, *9*(1), 20-32.

OECD. (2019). *OECD economic surveys: Malaysia 2019*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/eaaa4190-en

Palalic, R. (2020). Transformational leadership and MNCs: Evidence from Morocco community. *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*, *14*(2), 201-230.

Parry, K., Mumford, M. D., Bower, I., & Watts, L. L. (2014). Qualitative and historiometric methods in leadership research: A review of the first 25 years of The Leadership Quarterly. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *25*(1), 132-151.

Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2018). *The Oxford handbook of organizational citizenship behavior*. Oxford University Press.

Prummer, A., & Siedlarek, J.-P. (2017). Community leaders and the preservation of cultural traits. *Journal of Economic Theory*, *168*, 143-176. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jet.2016.12.007

Rami, A. M., Abdullah, R., & Ariffin, W. J. (2018). Strengthening social capital: Local leader's strategy toward developing rural community. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, *8*(1), 765-774.

Rami, A. A. M., Abdullah, R., & Ibrahim, A. (2016). The community leaders as a catalyst for rural community development in the state of Terengganu. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, *6*(12), 222-233.

Rami, A. A. M., Abdullah, R., & Simin, M. H. A. (2017). Influence of leadership in rural community development in the state of Terengganu, Malaysia. *Asian Journal For Poverty Studies*, *3*(1), 47-52.

Rami, A. M., Aziz, F., Zaremohzzabieh, Z., & Ibrahim, A. (2021). Assessing the challenges of local leaders in rural community development: A qualitative study in Malaysia. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, *29*, 1-18 https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.29.S1.01

Rami, A. M., Aziz, F., Razali, F., & Abdullah, I. (2020a). Effective local leadership to a successful council in the state of Terengganu, Malaysia. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology*, *29*(7), 205-210.

Rami, A. A. M., Aziz, F., Razali, F., & Yusof, M. R. (2020b). Leadership and ICTs implementation for rural development. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology*, *29*(7), 531-535.

Ricketts, K. G., & Ladewig, H. (2008). A path analysis of community leadership within viable rural communities in Florida. *Leadership*, *4*(2), 137-157.

Rogers, D. L. (1975). *An Annotated bibliography of rural development research in the North Central Region.* North Central Regional Center for Rural Development. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED108839.pdf

Samah, B. A., D'Silva, J. L., & Shaffril, H. A. M. (2009). Determinants of sustainable development dimension among leaders of rural community: A case study of Malaysia. *Journal of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development*, *1*(1), 18-26. https://doi.org/ 10.5539/cis.v5n2p98

Setokoe, T. J., Ramukumba, T., & Ferreira, I. W. (2019). Community participation in the development of rural areas: A leaders' perspective of tourism. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, *8*(2), 1-15.

Smith, B. N., Montagno, R. V., & Kuzmenko, T. N. (2004). Transformational and servant

leadership: Content and contextual comparisons. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, *10*(4), 80-91. https://doi.org/10.1177/107179190401000406

Statistics Department Public. (2020). *Mycensus*. Department of statistics. https://www.mycensus.gov.my/index.php/media-2/newsletter-infographics

Stewart, D. W., Shamdasani, P. N., & Rook, D. (1990). *Focus groups: Theory and practice*. Sage.

Taylor, S. J., Bogdan, R., & DeVault, M. (2015). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A guidebook and resource*. John Wiley & Sons.

UPEN. (2012). *Terengganu state economic planning unit primary data*. Terengganu State Economic Planning Unit. http://upen.terengganu.gov.my/index.php/download-data-asas-2012

Wall Jr, J. A., & Callister, R. R. (1999). Malaysian community mediation. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *43*(3), 343-365.

Wilson, G. A. (2012). Community resilience, globalization, and transitional pathways of decision-making. *Geoforum*, *43*(6), 1218-1231. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2012.03.008

Xu, K., Zhang, J., & Tian, F. (2017). Community leadership in rural tourism development: A tale of two ancient Chinese villages. *Sustainability*, *9*(12), 1-22. https://doi.org/10.3390/su9122344

Yahaya, R., & Ebrahim, F. (2016). Leadership styles and organizational commitment: Literature review. *Journal of Management Development*, *35*(2), 190-216.

Yukl, G., O'Donnell, M., & Taber, T. (2009). Influence of leader behaviors on the leader-member exchange relationship. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *24*(4), 289-299. https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940910952697