

Job Satisfaction as a Mediator between Leadership Styles and Organisational Commitment of Teachers in Malaysia

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Abstract: To better understand the organisational commitment of teachers, the current study examined job satisfaction as a mediator between organisational commitment and the three dimensions of leadership, namely transformational, transactional and passive-avoidant. The study involved 381 school teachers in Malaysia, and the multiple-model analysis used showed partial mediation on the negative association of passive-avoidant leadership style with teachers' commitment to their organisation. The study found a relationship between transformational leadership and organisational commitment through job satisfaction. As expected, job satisfaction also fully mediated between transactional leadership and organisational commitment among teachers, and that teachers who are highly satisfied with their jobs attributed their commitment towards their school to transactional leadership. This study extends the knowledge on the effects of teachers' leadership styles on their organisational commitments through a mediating factor. Higher education can play an important role in changing pre-service teachers' and future school principals' mindsets to exhibit transformational and transactional leadership competencies. Therefore, leadership development and training of future school administrators during their tertiary education are important in order to enhance teachers' job satisfaction and commitment.

Keywords: Teachers, Job satisfaction, Leadership styles, Organizational commitment, Malaysia

1. Introduction

In Malaysia, the government aims to produce a learning environment that encourages students to be self-disciplined, self-motivated and grow up to be competent members of society. Teachers are the most significant contributors to improving school effectiveness, but teaching in Malaysian schools is challenging. Teachers need to face frequent shifts in educational needs and also deal with challenges that demand higher skills and knowledge to handle diverse types of students with different strengths, motivations and conspicuous behaviours. Hence, these teachers often have to channel more effort and dedication to improve their teaching skills to maximise their students' performance. Past studies have shown that the level of effort and involvement of teachers in supporting high-quality teaching is reflected in their commitment to schoolwork. In fact, studies conducted in Malaysia highlighted that highly committed teachers go the extra mile in driving their schools towards their goals (Selamat et al., 2013). Lai et al. (2014) posited that Malaysian school effectiveness is easier to accomplish by

committed teachers, whereas less committed teachers can create undesirable and adverse effects that can be costly for the Malaysian education system.

Leadership styles in education are instrumental in shaping the commitment of teachers (Alegado, 2018), and it can also affect teachers' job satisfaction (Kunagaratnam, 2018). Efficient school leadership is increasingly seen as the foundation of a far-reaching transformation in education. Educational leaders can turn average schools into strong ones with the appropriate leadership styles. Several studies conducted indicated that three leadership styles—transformational, transactional and passive-avoidant—have a positive and significant relation to teachers' job satisfaction and commitment. Although the systemic approaches that shape and motivate these leadership styles have not been fully examined, numerous scholars have suggested paying more attention to understand how these three types of leadership styles influence teachers' job satisfaction and commitment, particularly in Malaysian schools.

According to Yang (2012), there is no empirical research in which leadership styles, job satisfaction and organisational commitment are scrutinised concurrently within a shared context. Past research demonstrated linear effects of leadership types, satisfaction at work, and employees' commitment towards their organisations (Abouraia & Othman, 2017). A recent study reported that job satisfaction mediated between work stress variables and organisational commitment (Alsughayir, 2021). However, there is no study on the role of job satisfaction as a mediator between leadership and organisational commitment of teachers. Hence, this present study seeks to fill this research gap by determining the mediating role of job satisfaction between leadership styles and organisational commitment in Malaysian secondary schools. The findings from this research will be significant as it will provide insights into local teachers' organisational commitment and its antecedent variables.

2. Literature Review

For the past 50 years, school leadership has been under the radar of numerous researchers (Yukl, 2012). Many scholars agree that leadership styles determine how organisations function (Nguni et al., 2006). Additionally, teachers' commitment was found to be impacted by school principals' leadership (Ross & Gray, 2006). According to Erben et al. (2019), successful leaders can provide a high level of job satisfaction to subordinates and improve their working conditions. This has been reported in industries such as finance, healthcare and education, where studies on the association between leadership styles and work satisfaction were conducted (Abd Rahman et al., 2013). Significant associations between school leadership styles and the level of commitment of teachers were observed in research carried out in educational organisations (Pawirosumarto et al., 2017). In schools, the leadership styles of managers in presenting guidelines, executing strategies and inspiring individuals have been reported to have a positive effect on the morale and success of staff, corporate justice, school culture and environment, and work satisfaction, while decreasing tension, burnout and intention to leave (Mahmud et al., 2019; Yilmaz & Altinkurt, 2012). Meanwhile, Avolio and Bass (2004) categorized leadership styles into one that transforms, one that is based on transactions, and one that passively avoids responsibilities.

(a) Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership is characterised as seeking the existing energy in followers. The main aim of transformative leadership is to enhance the sense of corporate success among employees (Currie & Lockett, 2007; Muda & Fook, 2020). Four distinct aspects are analysed: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised attention (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Idealised influence implies the vision of the leader by bringing the followers into the process (Nguni et al., 2006). Motivation that is inspirational motivation is developed by a leader to accomplish corporate goals (Eliyana & Ma'arif, 2019). Intellectual stimulation is the leader's encouragement for innovative followers. Individualised attention is connected to the development of an acceptable and inclusive atmosphere in which personal differences are taken into account (Badham & King, 2019; Ali et al., 2020). Another link that has been widely explored is between transformational leadership and job satisfaction (Boamah et al., 2018). In a study of Pakistani bank staff (Fatima et al., 2011) and Jordanian nurses (Mohammad et al., 2011), the researchers found a positive link between this leadership style and

job satisfaction. In a Malaysian school, Arokiasamy et al. (2016) found similar results, where a significant association exists between the transformational leadership of headmasters and teachers' job satisfaction. Jalal and Zaheer (2017) noted that the job satisfaction of Malaysian educational staff was related to intellectual stimulation rather than personal consideration.

(b) Transactional leadership

This leadership style encourages workers to work with the aid of external inspirations (Cemaloğlu et al., 2012). Nguni et al. (2006) showed that this type of leaders do not worry about the personal growth of employees, and they favour a policy of maintaining the status quo. According to Bass et al., (2008), the four aspects of transactional leadership are conditional reward, management by exception (active), management by exception (inactive), and laissez-faire. A conditional reward is a shared transaction mechanism in which the leader seeks to empower supporters with incentives (Bass et al., 2008). Management by exception (active) is about leaders monitoring the success of workers and correcting their faults (Bass et al. 2008). Management by exception (passive) means that the supervisor does not interfere in workplace issues until a stricter condition is required (Voon et al., 2012). Laissez-faire is an absolutely passive leadership style that is devoid of leadership (Bass et al., 2008). Sušanj et al. (2020) reported that transactional leadership affects job satisfaction. Similarly, Sarwar et al.'s (2015) research in Pakistan found that perception of job satisfaction is significantly linked to transactional leadership. In the Pakistani education sector, Cemaloğlu et al. (2012) found that this type of leadership style has a positive correlation to employees' satisfaction. However, Voon et al.'s (2012) research on Malaysian government organisations reported that transactional leadership negatively influenced job satisfaction, which was supported by Saleem's (2015) findings that showed transactional leadership negatively impacted job satisfaction. The possible explanation offered by the researcher is that the negative results may be due to the practice of not associating goal achievements with rewards, which are prevalent in the public sector.

(c) Passive-avoidant style

The third leadership style is passive-avoidant approach. Frooman et al.(2012) described it as when leaders fail to make decisions, are not available when needed, and choose to avoid taking responsibility for their absence of leadership skills. However, very little literature explores the extend of how leadership style is connected to employees' sense of being satisfied with their job and their sense of commitment towards their organization (Aziz et al., 2020; Oleribe et al., 2019). In addition, researchers discovered that this passive-avoidant approach in leading followers is not related to the latter's job satisfaction (Mosadeghrad & Ferdosi, 2013). However, Taştan and Davoudi (2019) found that this leadership style is significantly correlated to workplace satisfaction, albeit negatively. Since this is the least effective leadership, researchers often shun investigating it (Sušanj et al., 2020). This explains the scarcity of literature on passive-avoidant leadership, especially in the context of schools in Malaysia. Therefore, this study aimed to overcome this gap by examining these variables in the co-curricular field in secondary schools in Malaysia.

2.1 Mediating role of job satisfaction

The association between job satisfaction and organisational commitment is verified by several studies (Huang & Hsiao, 2007). The satisfaction, described by Huang and Hsiao (2007) as the precursor of dedication, may benefit from both evolving effects of human actions and increasing commitment, where people will be more committed to their work if they feel satisfied. In addition, the mediating effect of job satisfaction was reported by Yang (2012) when studying the correlation between transformative leadership and organisational commitment. This is consistent with the study of Nguni et al. (2006) who found that the relationship between leadership styles and teachers' commitment to their school was partially mediated by job satisfaction. This means that to achieve the objective of the nation to produce quality human capital, every co-curricular teacher needs to have a high level of commitment. It has also been reported that leadership styles and job satisfaction influence organisational commitment. For instance, Mosadeghrad and Ferdosi (2013) reported that a good association with leaders will increase

teachers' feeling of enjoyment and less stress, which in turn will heighten teachers' desire to put in extra effort, but a bad association will decrease the teachers' commitment. Thus, we propose to examine job satisfaction as a possible mediator in the relationship between different leadership styles and co-curricular teachers' organisational commitment. As such, the following hypotheses are postulated:

Hypothesis 1: Job satisfaction will mediate the association between transformational leadership and organisational commitment.

Hypothesis 2: Job satisfaction will mediate the association between transactional leadership and organisational commitment.

Hypothesis 3: Job satisfaction will mediate the association between passive-avoidant leadership and organisational commitment.

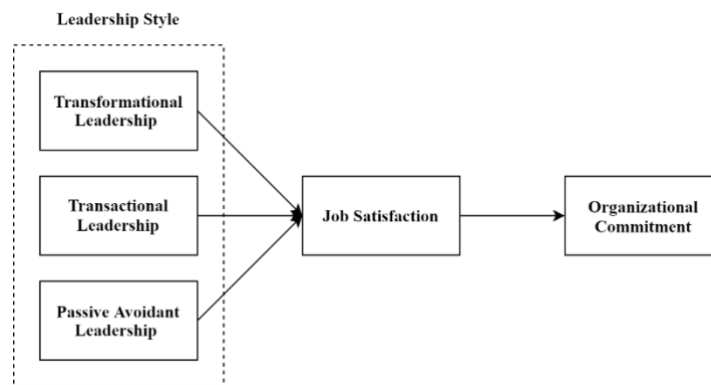


Fig1. Conceptual framework of the study

3. Method

3.1 Participants and Procedure

Regular secondary schools make up the largest number of schools in Malaysia (83.21%) (Ministry of Education, 2017). This study was conducted in Malaysia's public secondary schools, and for data collection from all the 13 states and 3 federal territories, the researchers grouped the states and federal territories into five geographical zones (northern, central, southern, eastern zones, and East Malaysia). Through stratified random sampling using the Research Randomizer software, a state is selected from each zone (see Table 1). The researcher acknowledged that the Federal Territory of Labuan that was selected resulted in a relatively small number of teachers. However, since it was selected through the random sampling technique, data from there (FT Labuan) were included in the study. For this research, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed as justified and qualified by the sample of 400 which met the 10:1 ratio criteria (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The researcher used the latest version of Amos (v. 26) software to run the analysis. A total of 381 usable questionnaires were returned, representing a 95.25% response rate. For questionnaire completion, the respondents were informed beforehand that their comments are held confidential in order to gather truthful answers.

Table 1. Number of Teachers Required According to State.

No	State	Total Number of Teachers	Proportion by Percentage	Number of Required Teachers
1	Perak	15 649	$15\ 649 / 65711 \times 100 = 23.8\%$	$23.8\% \times 400 = 95.2 = 95$

2	Selangor	23 054	$23\ 054/65\ 711 \times 100 = 35.1\%$	$35.1\% \times 400 = 140.4 = 141$
3	Johor	18 779	$18\ 779/ 65\ 711 \times 100 = 28.6\%$	$28.6\% \times 400 = 114.4 = 115$
4	Terengganu	7 774	$7\ 774/ 65\ 711 \times 100 = 11.8\%$	$11.6\% \times 400 = 46.4 = 46$
5	Labuan	455	$455/ 65\ 711 \times 100 = 0.7\%$	$0.7\% \times 400 = 2.8 = 3$
Total		65 711	100	400

Note. Source: Ministry of Education, 2017.

3.2 Measures

Transformational leadership. The five dimensions were measured with the 20-item Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) 5X Short Form (Avolio & Bass, 2004). A sample item is “Talks optimistically about the future”. With a 5-point Likert scale, responses ranged from 1 as “completely disagree” to 5 “completely agree”. The internal consistency score (α) was 0.974.

Transactional leadership. A self-reporting scale with eight items was employed to measure contingent reward and management by exception (Avolio & Bass, 2004), and the replies were based on a 5-point Likert scale. A sample item is “Express satisfaction when I meet expectations” ($\alpha = 0.939$).

Passive-avoidant leadership. Avolio and Bass’ (2004) self-reporting scale with was employed to measure passive-avoidant leadership. The answers were based on a 5-point Likert scale that assessed 8 items. A sample item is “Resist being involved when there are major problems.” It had strong reliability and internal consistency for the present analysis ($\alpha = 0.932$).

Job satisfaction. Nine dimensions of job satisfaction (pay, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent reward, operating procedures, co-worker, nature of work and communication) were measured using the Job Satisfaction Scales (Spector, 1997), which included 35 items. A sample item is “I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do”. It had acceptable reliability and internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.965$).

Organisational commitment. It was operationalised in dimensions of affective, continuance and normative commitment as suggested by Allen and Meyer (1990), which included 17 items in the Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) instrument (Meyer & Allen, 1997). A sample of the item is “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this school”. It had good reliability and internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.903$).

The instruments were openly published on the web and reproduced in previous articles (e.g., Boamah et al., 2018; Nantsupawat et al., 2017, Treem & Leonardi, 2013). The author has attempted to seek permission for the use of the instruments.

4. Findings

4.1 Respondents' Profile

The data will provide a better picture of the respondents' demographics. The sample consists of 34.9% male respondents versus 65.1% females. In comparison, there are clear age disparities among the co-curricular teachers, where those aged 30 to 39 years constitute 42.5% of the sample. In terms of teaching experience, the respondents were categorised into five groups. The majority of them have between 5 and 10 years of experience (32.5%). Most of the respondents have Bachelor's degrees (85.55%), while 13.6% (n = 52) have Master's degrees, and 0.5% (n = 2) have PhDs (Table 2).

Table 2. Respondent’s Profile.

No.	Demography	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Gender		

	Male	133	34.9
	Female	248	65.1
2	Age		
	20 - 29 years	30	7.9
	30 - 39 years	162	42.5
	40 - 49 years	144	11.8
	> 50 years	45	7.9
3	Teaching Experience		
	< 5 years	20	5.2
	5 - 10 years	124	32.5
	11 - 15 years	69	18.1
	16 - 20 years	74	19.4
	> 20 years	94	24.7
4	Educational Level		
	Bachelor	327	85.5
	Master	52	13.6
	Doctorate	2	0.5

4.2 Descriptive statistics

Passive-avoidant leadership was shown to be negatively correlated with transactional leadership ($r = -.22, p < .001$) but positively associated with transformational leadership ($r = .34, p < .001$). Passive-avoidant leadership, on the other hand, did not significantly associate with organizational engagement ($r = -.11, p > .001$). The results also displayed that there is a positive association between transformational leadership and job satisfaction ($r = 0.65, p < 0.001$). The analysis also revealed that there is a positive association between transactional leadership and job satisfaction ($r = 0.63, p < 0.001$). However, analysis of Pearson correlation showed that there is a negative association between both variables ($r = -0.23, p < 0.001$). Overall, the findings revealed that the level of job satisfaction among co-curricular teachers is moderate (Mean = 3.59, $SD = 0.59$) (Table 3).

Table 3. The mean, standard deviations, and correlation among study variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
Mean	4.02	3.71	2.27	3.90	3.99
<i>SD</i>	0.81	0.95	0.98	0.79	0.63
1. TFL	1				
2. TSL	0.52*	1			
3. PAL	0.34*	-0.22*	1		
4. JS	0.65*	0.63*	-0.23*	1	
5. OC	0.31*	0.28*	-0.11	.58*	1

Note. * $p < .001$. Transformational leadership (TFL), transactional leadership (TSL), passive avoidant leadership (PAL), job satisfaction (JS), and organizational commitment (OC).

4.3 Measurement model for constructs

The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) showed that the factor loadings of the items ranged from 0.50 to 0.89, which are above 0.5 (Kline, 2005). To seek goodness-of-fit evidence for the proposed model, we selected key fit indices such as the figure must be above the cut-off point (>0.90), RMSEA score of below 0.08, and CMIN/df below 5 (see Table 4).

Table 4. The measurement model for each scale.

Measurement model	CMIN/df	RMSEA	CFI	NFI	TLI
TFL	2.410	.061	.976	.960	.966
TSL	2.078	.053	.993	.987	.987
PAL	3.070	.074	.992	.988	.981
JS	2.433	0.061	.967	.946	.952
OC	2.994	0.072	.989	.983	.966

Note. * $p < .001$. Transformational leadership (TFL), transactional leadership (TSL), passive avoidant leadership (PAL), job satisfaction (JS), and organizational commitment (OC).

4.4 Mediation assessment of job satisfaction

The structural model confirmed satisfactory fit (CMIN/df = 4.67, $p < .01$, CFI = 0.921, GFI = 0.96, NFI = .928, TLI = 0.912, and RMSEA = 0.07). The three dimensions of leadership jointly explained almost 41% of the variance in organisational commitment. Overall, 45% of the variance in organisational commitment was accounted for by leadership styles and job satisfaction. To address H₁, H₂ and H₃, the multi-model analysis was used to test mediation. The findings, as displayed in Table 5, showed low significance of the linear relationship between transformational leadership and organisational commitment ($\beta = .161$, $p > .01$). Including the job satisfaction mediator in the proposed model minimised the path coefficient from transformational leadership to organisational commitment ($\beta = .159$, $p < .01$), but is still significant; thus supporting hypothesis 1. Additionally, the direct association of transactional leadership with organisational commitment was not significant ($\beta = .387$, $p > .01$). When job satisfaction was included as a mediator, the association between transactional leadership and organisational commitment was significant ($\beta = .349$, $p < .01$). Thus, there is full mediation between transactional leadership and organisational commitment through job satisfaction, so hypothesis 2 is supported.

Table 5. Mediation assessment.

DV		IV	Model		
			Mediation	Direct	Indirect
JS	←	TFL	.119**	–	.17**
OC	←	JS	.48**	–	.103**
OC	←	TFL	.159**	.161	
OC	←	TSL	.349**	.387	
JS	←	TSL	.273**		.127**
OC	←	PAL	-.101**	-.114**	
JS	←	PAL	-.782**	–	-.117**

Note. ** $p < .01$.

The findings propose that a partial mediation occurred since the direct effects of passive-avoidant style on organisational commitment was reduced ($\beta = .114$, $p > .01$) but remained significant with the addition of organisational commitment as the mediator in the model. Thus, hypothesis 3 is supported.

5. Discussion and Implications

The key aim of the research is to confirm if Malaysian school teachers' satisfaction with their job mediates between each of the leadership styles and organizational commitment. We found that job satisfaction mediates transformational leadership towards organisational commitment. This result is similar to the findings of Sušanj and Jakopec (2012) that job satisfaction acted as a mediator. It is also consistent with the work of Yang (2012), who observed that job satisfaction played the instrumental

role of a mediator between transformational leadership and organisational commitment. This study shows that principals can enhance teachers' organisational commitment by paying attention to their job satisfaction. For transactional leadership, job satisfaction is a mediating variable between the relationship of transactional leadership and organisational commitment. In a study of Indonesian workers in state-owned organisations, Wulandari et al. (2015) reported that job satisfaction is a mediator between transactional leadership and their commitment. This result is also consistent with Ismail and Daud's (2014) finding among secondary school teachers in Malaysia. For the passive-avoidant leadership, job satisfaction plays only a partial mediation. Some studies have documented teachers reporting positive associations between job satisfaction and commitment (Canrinus et al., 2012). Overall, the results from the current study show that the association between leadership styles and teachers' organisational commitment is mediated by job satisfaction. The findings are consistent with Williams and Hazer's (1986) results that the influences of the predictor variables were assumed to be mediated via job satisfaction.

The present study hopes to expand this line of inquiry in non-Western societies. Bass and Avolio (2004) posit that leadership styles are ubiquitous across distinct societies, and the findings of the present study are important for the education sector, especially in terms of school leadership and inclusive teacher education. Additionally, school principals could enhance job satisfaction among teachers by displaying high-level leadership while subjugating passive-avoidant leadership style. Since school principals' leadership styles influence teachers' organisational commitment and job satisfaction, school leaders should undergo professional development courses, including those offered by universities, in order to exhibit favourable leadership styles. The fact remains that when teachers have high levels of organisational commitment, the aim of the Malaysian education system to build the nation through co-curricular programs can be achieved.

One finding from the present study is that there are school leaders who practice passive-avoidant leadership. It shows that not all school leaders know effective leadership styles. Hence, leadership development and training of future school administrators during their tertiary education are important. In addition, higher education can play an important role in shaping pre-service teachers' and future school principals' mindsets to exhibit transformational and transactional leadership competencies. Therefore, the Ministry of Education, as the policymaker, should design joint training programmes with universities that target school administrators and with the aim of producing transformational and transactional leaders. Overall, the results expanded the scientific literature and highlighted the mediating role of job satisfaction. The Malaysian Ministry of Education should not neglect job satisfaction as it is an important antecedent that can enhance teachers' commitment.

6. Limitation and scope for future studies

This study focuses on leadership styles, teachers' organisational commitment and job satisfaction in secondary schools in Malaysia. Since leadership styles may differ in different environments, the findings from this study can only be generalised to school leaders and teachers. One limitation of this study is the data collection method, which is self-reporting. The concern with this method is the validity of the participating teachers' responses. To minimise the impact of this concern, the instruments used were properly tested to eliminate potential ambiguities. It is recommended to conduct qualitative research using in-depth interviews and case studies for comparative purposes. Another limitation of this study is the instruments used. All three instruments used for this study are standardised ones developed by Western countries; hence they might not accurately measure the underlying leadership practices, organisational commitment and job satisfaction in the context of Malaysian secondary schools. Furthermore, back-to-back translation had to be used to translate the wordings used in the instruments. Lastly, there may be other variables that affect teachers' job satisfaction and commitment towards their work and schools. As such, it is recommended that future research include other mediating variables.

7. Conclusion

This study presents preliminary evidence of the mediated association of transactional, transformational and passive-avoidant leaderships with organisational commitment via job satisfaction

in Malaysia. It has been shown that teachers with a high level of job satisfaction do not mind spending extra time and effort for the schools. They are also committed despite being governed by different leadership styles, where transformational and transactional leaderships have been found to affect organisational commitment positively, consistent with the findings of other studies. Overall, the results proved that job satisfaction is an antecedent for teachers to reinforce and sustain their commitment towards achieving school goals. In fact, teachers' job satisfaction affects both their work environment and commitment to the schools, and this is one area where the Ministry of Education and schools should work together to come up with initiatives to develop a highly satisfied teaching workforce.

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