

Influence of Authoritarian, Instructional, and Transactional Leadership Styles on Teachers' Job Satisfaction in Sabah, Malaysia

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of authoritarian, instructional, and transactional leadership styles on teachers' job satisfaction in Sabah, Malaysia. Findings revealed that principals tended to adopt authoritarian leadership, which was found to have a non-significant relationship with teachers' job satisfaction. In contrast, instructional and transactional leadership styles were found to have a positive and significant relationship with teachers' job satisfaction. Findings implied that principals should incorporate instructional and transactional leadership styles, which can promote inclusivity, support, and professional growth to create a more engaging and fulfilling work environment for teachers. In light of the findings, principals were recommended to become less authoritarian by adopting strategies that can increase participatory decision-making that enhances transparency in communication, while fostering open dialogue. Principals can also promote emotional intelligence by showing empathy and considering teachers' needs, while gradually delegating more responsibility to empower teachers and boost their job satisfaction. Lastly, recognizing and rewarding teachers' contributions can help create a more favorable work environment, which in turn fosters innovation and organizational commitment while balancing authority and approachability.

Keywords: authoritarian instructional, leadership styles, transactional, job satisfaction, Malaysia, Sabah, teachers.

I. INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership plays a vital role in cultivating a positive school culture and has a significant impact on teachers' job satisfaction and student outcomes. Effective leadership can be the catalyst for transforming an average school into a thriving one. While there is no single leadership style that suits all situations, applying different strategies based on specific needs is essential for creating an optimal learning environment. Whether authoritarian, instructional, or transactional, each leadership style offers benefits that can be leveraged to enhance educational success (Mathias, 2023). This study aimed to examine the influence of authoritarian, instructional, and transactional leadership styles on teachers' job satisfaction in Sabah, Malaysia.

Effective principals play a crucial role in building strong relationships, establishing a shared vision, modelling key values, and encouraging teamwork. They also celebrate achievements, set appropriate consequences, create unique school traditions, and ensure inclusivity so that everyone feels welcome and engaged in the school community. Additionally, they possess a unique blend of qualities and skills that drives meaningful change, while having a clear vision that enables them to establish and drive critical goals. Additionally, they adopt data-driven decision-making to shape policies and improve educational practices, besides demonstrating emotional intelligence that allows them to connect with, and motivate, their staff. Lastly, they display effective communication skills to engage with the entire school community and foster professional development amongst staff (Pruitt, 2023).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Authoritarian Leadership

Authoritarian leadership, also known as autocratic leadership, is characterized by a leader who makes all decisions and exerts strict control over the group and tasks. This leadership style, which emphasizes control, organization, and discipline, was prevalent a century ago. Today, it is seen as a practice that is useful in specific situations, but should be part of a broader range of leadership approaches. Modern leaders are often expected to challenge the status quo and guide teams through effective change rather than solely dictate actions (Candy, 2020).

According to Wang *et al.* (2022), authoritarian leadership is characterized by absolute control, stringent discipline, and a demand for obedience from staff. This leadership style can have significant implications for employee behavior, particularly in terms of safety practices. Additionally, in some Asian countries, it is deeply influenced by traditional Confucian and feudal values that emphasize hierarchy and authority. It involves four key dimensions, including centralizing power and closely monitoring employees, projecting a confident authoritarian image, devaluing subordinates' abilities by dismissing their contributions, and setting high performance standards with direct reprimands for underperformance. In educational settings, such leadership can suppress teachers' creativity and autonomy, leading to lower job satisfaction due to the lack of recognition and restricted decision-making opportunities.

Nawaz *et al.* (2022) maintained that authoritarian leadership concentrates power and authority in one individual, often leading to significant control over subordinates. In Asia, aligned with cultural norms, this style mirrors the patriarchic family system, where the father holds most of the authority. While this leadership style can improve task clarity and responsiveness to problems, it tends to stifle creativity, innovation, and job satisfaction, thus leading to higher employee turnover and reduced motivation. Huang *et al.* (2022) maintained that authoritarian leadership is characterized by a leader's tight control and demand for unquestioned obedience from subordinates. Such a leader often enforces stern discipline, makes independent decisions little staff input, and usually penalizes employees who fail to comply with directives. This style, often viewed as autocratic, can negatively impact employee performance due to limited power and information sharing. Given the negative impact of authoritarian leadership on employee outcomes, principals should involve subordinates in decision-making and provide clear guidelines. While authoritarianism may be necessary in some Asian organizations, it should be grounded in professional expertise.

Similar to other researchers, Hanna and Sales (2023) posited that authoritarian leadership is a management style that allows the leader to exert complete control over decision making and retain maximum authority. This approach involves giving directives that staff are expected to obey with little input or participation. It is characterized by a top-down approach, where decisions are made solely by the leader, with meagre contribution from team members. The leader's decisions are final, thus emphasizing a centralized power structure with all authority and responsibility concentrated at the top. In brief, authoritarian principals often make decisions independently without seeking input from subordinates, who have limited autonomy.

Shan *et al.* (2022) found that authoritarian leadership, characterized by strict control and demands for obedience, tends to make staff prioritize work over health. It also tends to increase job demands and workload, thus indirectly promoting staff presenteeism. The authors concluded that authoritarian leaders typically exhibit four main characteristics, including an autocratic style that involves centralizing power, controlling information, and closely monitoring subordinates; a tendency to undermine subordinates by disregarding their contributions; the manipulation of information to craft a favorable image; and a focus on instructional behaviors that emphasizes performance and guidance to achieve high standards.

B. Instructional leadership

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) defined instructional leadership as the actions that principals take to promote a positive learning environment and improve teaching quality. This leadership style involves setting clear goals, managing the curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, and fostering a positive academic climate. According to Graczewski, Knudson, and Holtzman (2009), instructional leadership promotes standards-based accountability, which emphasizes principals' responsibility for student performance. It is characterized by a leader's knowledge of, and impact on, instruction, which is perceived as a key determinant of academic achievement. Further, principals, by focusing on instructional leadership and professional development, play a crucial role in improving teaching practices, which in turn, enhances student

outcomes. Additionally, effective instructional leadership is linked to coherent professional development that aligns with school goals and curriculum-focused learning, which can positively influence teachers' instructional methods, and ultimately, student achievement. Lastly, this approach enables principals to establish a clear and coherent vision for their schools, thus ensuring that professional development is both aligned with school objectives and tailored to staff's needs.

Hallinger *et al.* (2017) highlighted the importance of contextualizing educational leadership and management models within societal and school settings of developing countries, with a synthesis of global knowledge with local practices to create relevant leadership models. Malaysian educators, influenced by global research and national policies, have shown a growing interest in instructional leadership, particularly through graduate program studies that have demonstrated how this model can be applied within the Malaysian context. Further, many have been proactive in integrating instructional leadership models into their schools. The emphasis on instructional leadership reflects a broader, policy-driven movement aimed at enhancing the quality of education through strong, academically focused leadership at the school level. According to Liu, Bellibas, and Gümüş (2021), instructional leadership tends to enhance teacher performance, and has long been recognized as a decisive factor in school structure, particularly in terms of the quality of school learning, as it prioritizes teaching and learning, as well as teacher performance in relation to student achievement. Additionally, teachers' job satisfaction is closely tied to instructional leadership. Since teachers are essential for improving school quality, principals should prioritize teacher satisfaction through instructional leadership. In short, effective principals are those who efficaciously manage and utilize school resources to achieve educational goals, thereby fostering a supportive environment that promotes teachers' job satisfaction.

Akram, Malik, and Taj (2022) asserted that principals, in their role as instructional leaders, usually collaborate closely with staff to shape their schools by emphasizing shared leadership, professional development, and staff commitment. They often effectively manage both administrative and instructional tasks to ensure quality education, guiding their teams to improve student learning. Moreover, by sharing leadership roles with staff, instructional principals often promote reflective practices and collaborative inquiry, thus contributing to school improvement in the long run. They often engage in discussions with staff, arrange staff development, support teaching and learning, and address curriculum and assessment issues through collaboration and gathering staff input to boost academic achievement. Principals who effectively collaborate with teachers and leverage their expertise tend to treat them as learners by providing frequent opportunities for staff development, while improving student learning and enhancing teachers' instructional skills. Moreover, they also model desirable behaviors by focusing on lifelong learning, while maintaining high visibility through interactions with students, teachers, and parents. They strive to enhance school effectiveness by providing the resources needed to maximize instructional design and staff development, while offering prompt feedback and monitoring progress. Yesoo and Alias (2023) reiterated that instructional principals tend to exert a significant influence on teachers' job satisfaction by fostering collaboration, providing constructive feedback, and supporting professional growth. By capitalizing on the school's climate and available resources, they are able to create a positive and supportive climate that makes teachers feel valued and empowered.

C. Transactional leadership

According to Burns (1978), transactional leadership can be described as the relationship between leaders and followers, where both parties engage in an exchange to fulfil their self-interests. The leader usually offers something of value (such as rewards, recognition, or other incentives) in exchange for the follower's compliance, effort, or productivity, which creates a relationship that is built on mutual benefit, whereby each party tries to fulfil the needs of the other. In brief, the leader ensures that organizational goals are met through established processes and structures, rather than inspiring change and innovation. Additionally, transactional leaders use contingent rewards to motivate staff, which are directly tied to their performance and behaviors. Staff who have met or exceeded the expectations will receive the promised rewards. In contrast, those who have not, will face negative consequences, such as loss of rewards or even punishment. Lastly, transactional leadership is generally oriented toward achieving short-term goals, whereby the transactions or exchanges are typically designed to meet immediate needs or objectives, without necessarily considering any long-term consequences.

Berkovich and Eyal (2019) asserted that transactional leadership, which emphasizes exchanges and mutual benefits, is consistent with utilitarian ethics, which focuses on maximizing benefits for the majority. Transactional leaders value

procedural fairness and adherence to rules; therefore, in educational settings, it aligns with such ethical principles as justice and community welfare. Since transactional leaders are more aligned with utilitarianism, they tend to emphasize utilitarian moral reasoning and prioritize practical outcomes and the welfare of the majority.

Lastly, Chin, Yong, and Lee (2022) summarized that transactional principals tend to possess several attributes that enhance productivity, job satisfaction, and sustainability. They reward subordinates with contingent incentives, honor, and promises when they have successfully fulfilled organizational commitments, which boosts their job satisfaction and commitment. Moreover, transactional principals are characterized by agreeableness and conscientiousness that are moderated by a dynamic working environment. By setting clear expectations and rewarding teachers for meeting expectations, they often create a structured and predictable work environment that yields high job satisfaction, as teachers feel that their efforts are acknowledged and rewarded.

D. Job satisfaction

According to Locke (1976), job satisfaction can be defined as a positive or pleasing emotional state resulting from the evaluation of an individual's job or work experience. Employees who find their job fulfilling and rewarding are likely to show greater satisfaction with their work, which is widely considered a crucial factor for organizational success. Job satisfaction often results from the gap between perceived and desired outcomes, together with the personal importance of each outcome. However, cognitive discrepancies alone do not evoke strong emotions; it is the importance of the outcome that drives a person's affective responses. In brief, individuals only experience strong satisfaction or dissatisfaction when the issue at hand holds significant personal importance. Wahab *et al.* (2020) found that teacher performance encompasses the actions that can be measured, which contribute significantly to the achievement of school or organizational goals. Additionally, job satisfaction plays a crucial role in enhancing teacher performance; teachers who are satisfied with their jobs tend to be more motivated, committed, and likely to exhibit a positive work spirit. Factors that contribute to job satisfaction include favorable working conditions, fair salaries, opportunities for professional development, and a supportive environment, which in turn boost teacher performance. To experience job satisfaction, teachers need to be highly motivated and equipped with the necessary expertise that will lead to better performance and successful attainment of professional goals. Lastly, Liu, Bellibaş, and Gümüş (2021) noted that instructional leadership tends to improve teacher job satisfaction since it fosters collegiality between the principal and teachers, which creates a comfortable and inspiring work environment.

E. Gap, significance of the study, and research questions

While leadership styles and teacher job satisfaction are widely researched in other countries, there is little research in these constructs in Malaysia. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the influence of three leadership styles on teacher job satisfaction in Sabah, Malaysia. The significance of this study lies in its potential to enhance understanding of how different leadership styles can affect teachers' job satisfaction in Malaysian schools. Additionally, findings of this study would generate new knowledge on, and deeper insight into, leadership styles, while providing actionable recommendations for principals on adopting leadership practices that could foster high levels of job satisfaction among teachers. Considering the research gap, as well as the study's purpose and significance, three research questions were developed to guide this investigation:

- Was authoritarian leadership significantly related to teacher job satisfaction in Malaysia?
- Was instructional leadership significantly related to teacher job satisfaction in Malaysia?
- Was transactional leadership significantly related to teacher job satisfaction in Malaysia?

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Sample

The sample consisted of 154 respondents, comprising primary and secondary teachers from 20 public schools in Sabah, Malaysia. The sample selection was facilitated through the Education Research Application System in Malaysia, which allowed the distribution of the questionnaires. After gaining approval from the 20 principals, the survey link was emailed to them so that they could share it with teachers; some teachers also received the link directly via email. Demographic information of the sample is found in Table I.

TABLE I: Demographic Information

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Age	20-30 years	24	15.6
	31-41 years	50	32.5
	42-52 years	53	34.4
	53 and above	27	17.5
Gender	Male	49	31.8
	Female	105	68.2
Working experience	Less than 1 year	9	5.8
	1-3 years	6	3.9
	4-6 years	15	9.7
	7-10 years	32	20.8
	More than 10 years	92	59.7
Highest qualification	Diploma	71	46.1
	Bachelors	83	53.9
	Masters	0	0
	PhD	0	0

B. Instruments

To examine the influence of authoritarian, transactional, and instructional leadership styles on teachers' job satisfaction, four questionnaires were adapted to collect data. First, the Leadership Questionnaire (LQ) by Northouse (2014) was used to assess authoritarian leadership; previous research on its use is not available. Second, the Instructional Leadership Questionnaire (ILQ) by Akram, Kiran, and Ilgan (2017) was used to measure instructional leadership; previous research showed that its Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0.75 to 0.90. Third, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) by Bass and Avolio (1995) was used to measure transactional leadership; previous research showed that its Cronbach alpha ranges from 0.74 to 0.91. Lastly, the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) by Spector (2022) was used to assess job satisfaction; previous research showed that its Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0.70 and 0.91.

C. Data analysis

Teachers were required to complete the questionnaires online, with consent implied by submission. All respondents remained anonymous, while their responses were kept strictly confidential. Data were transferred onto a spreadsheet, and subsequently analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0, which was particularly beneficial in handling correlational/relationship studies with small sample sizes (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2022).

IV. FINDINGS

A. Authoritarian leadership

Current findings indicated that authoritarian leadership had a mean score of 3.1. Item 2 had the highest percentage, whereby 44.1 percent of teachers strongly agreed/agreed that their principal considered most teachers in general were lazy. Item 5 had the second highest percentage, whereby 42.2 percent of teachers strongly agreed/agreed that their principal perceived themselves as the chief judge of their achievements (see Table II).

Table II: Descriptive statistics of authoritarian leadership

Item	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
1 My principal thinks that teachers need to be supervised closely, or they are not likely to do their work.	9.1	26.6	24	25.3	14.9	3.11
2 My principal considers most teachers in the general population to be lazy.	10.4	19.5	26	30.5	13.6	
3 My department head believe teachers must be given rewards or punishment in order to motivate them to achieve organizational objectives.	6.5	23.4	28.6	29.2	12.3	

4	My principal feels most teachers are insecure about their work and need direction.	7.1	26	28.6	26.6	11.7
6	My principal believes that he or she should give orders and clarify procedures for teachers.	7.8	30.5	27.3	22.1	12.3

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

B. Instructional leadership

Current findings showed that instructional leadership had a mean of 2.9. Item 3 had the highest percentage, whereby 42.2 percent of teachers strongly agreed/agreed that their principal regularly visited the class to observe their performance. Item 5 had the second highest percentage, whereby 38.9 percent of teachers strongly agreed/agreed that their principal organized teachers’ meetings that focused on professional development (see Table III).

TABLE III: Descriptive statistics of instructional leadership

Item	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
1 My principal encourages teachers to freely use available resources.	11.7	33.1	23.4	19.5	12.3	2.9
2 My principal recommends resources in areas in which teachers need.	14	30	18	23	15	
3 My principal regularly visits the class to observe teachers’ performance.	10.4	26	21.4	31.2	11	
4 My principal is visibly present in the building for teachers.	9.7	31.2	26	25.3	7.8	
6 My principal arranges teachers’ meetings to help them grow professionally.	13	27.3	24.7	20.8	14.3	
7 My principal ensures that all teachers are present in the office/classroom during working hours.	14.9	31.2	20.1	22.1	11.7	
8 My principal protects working time from outside interruptions.	12.3	21.4	29.2	26	11	
9 My principal meets with teachers individually to discuss issues related to teachers’/students’ progress.	15.6	31.2	16.9	27.9	8.4	
10 My principal discusses goals and outcomes with teachers for organizational strengths.	14.3	29.2	21.4	24	11	
11 My principal provides verbal and written feedback to teachers.	12.3	33.1	21.4	23.4	9.7	
12 My principal reinforces teachers through teachers’ meetings/newsletters/memos.	13.6	29.9	28.6	17.5	10.4	
13 My principal ensures teachers commit to the required rules and regulations.	11.7	26	25.3	22.7	14.3	
14 My principal plans teachers’ meetings for professional development progress.	18.8	33.1	21.4	19.5	7.1	

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

C. Transactional leadership

Current findings showed that transactional leadership had a mean of 2.9. Item 5 had the highest percentage, whereby 40.9 percent of teachers strongly agreed/agreed that their principal made changes when necessary. Item 3 had the second highest percentage, whereby 39.6 percent of teachers strongly agreed/agreed that their principal took action before the problem became serious (see Table IV).

TABLE IV: Descriptive statistics of transactional leadership

Item	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
1 My principal provides assistance in exchange for teachers' efforts.	12.3	24.7	26.0	23.4	13.6	2.9
2 My principal does not wait for things go to wrong before taking action.	10.4	33.8	20.1	20.8	14.9	
3 My principal takes action before problem become serious.	10.4	23.4	26.6	27.3	12.3	
4 My principal gives full attention in dealing with mistakes, complaints or failure.	14.9	30.5	24.0	18.8	11.7	
5 My principal makes changes when necessary	11.0	28.6	19.5	28.6	12.3	
6 My principal clarifies teachers' expectations related to performance goals.	11.7	24.0	29.2	24.0	11.0	
7 My principal expresses satisfaction when teachers fulfil performance goals.	15.6	30.5	18.2	23.4	12.3	
8 My principal protects working time from outside interruptions.	14.9	33.8	17.5	21.4	12.3	

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

V. JOB SATISFACTION

Current findings showed that job satisfaction had a mean is 2.9. Item 24 had the highest percentage, whereby 43.5 percent of teachers strongly agreed/agreed that they did not have too much to do at work (were not overworked). Item 3 had the second highest percentage, whereby 42.2 percent of teachers strongly agreed/agreed that their principal was quite competent in doing his or her job (see Table V).

TABLE V: Descriptive statistics of job satisfaction

Item	1	2	3	4	5
1 I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do.	9.1	32.5	26.6	19.5	12.3
2 There is a high chance for promotion on my job.	9.7	24.7	24.7	25.3	15.6
3 My principal is quite competent in doing his or her job.	16.9	24.7	21.4	23.4	13.6
4 I am satisfied with the benefits I receive.	11.7	31.2	26.0	20.8	10.4
5 When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive.	9.7	31.2	27.3	23.4	8.4
6 Many of our procedures make doing a good job easy or smoothly.	7.8	26.0	29.2	26.6	10.4
7 I like the people I work with.	14.9	33.8	22.1	22.1	7.1
8 I feel my job is meaningful.	16.9	26.0	23.4	22.1	11.7
9 Communications seem good within this organization.	14.3	29.9	22.7	20.8	12.3
10 Salary raises are regular (annually).	15.6	32.5	26.0	18.2	7.8
11 Teachers who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted.	7.1	24.0	37.0	21.4	10.4
12 My principal is fair to me.	17.5	27.3	23.4	22.7	9.1
13 The benefits we receive are as good as most other organizations offer.	14.9	29.9	27.9	19.5	7.8
14 I feel that the work I do is appreciated.	11.0	24.7	26.0	26.6	11.7
15 My efforts to do a good job are seldom blocked by red tape.	15.6	26.0	22.1	28.6	7.8

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16	My principal does not wait until problems get serious.	13.6	24.7	24.0	29.9	7.1
17	I don't have to work harder at my job due to others' incompetence.	13.0	31.2	24.7	22.7	8.4
18	The goals of this organization are clear to me.	9.7	24.7	29.9	25.3	10.4
19	I feel appreciated by the organization when I think about what they pay me.	11.0	26.6	31.8	20.8	9.7
20	Teachers get ahead as fast here as they do in other places.	9.7	29.9	30.5	24.0	5.8
21	My principal shows deep interest in the feelings of subordinates.	15.6	25.3	28.6	20.8	9.7
22	The benefit package we have is equitable (fair).	11.7	25.3	33.8	20.1	9.1
23	There are good/enough rewards for teachers who work here.	7.8	26.6	32.5	20.8	12.3
24	I don't have too much to do at work (I am not overworked).	8.4	22.1	25.3	28.6	14.9
25	I enjoy my co-workers.	11.7	33.1	13.6	27.3	14.3
26	I know what is going on with the organization.	12.3	31.2	29.2	18.2	9.1
27	I feel a sense of pride in doing my job.	11.7	24.7	29.2	20.1	14.3
28	I feel satisfied with my chances for salary increases.	13.6	25.3	27.9	25.3	7.8
29	There are benefits we have that we should have.	12.3	30.5	29.9	21.4	5.8
30	I like my principal.	14.3	28.6	18.8	27.3	11.0
31	I don't have too much paperwork.	8.4	25.3	31.8	22.1	12.3
32	I feel my efforts are rewarded the way they should be.	7.1	25.3	27.3	22.1	18.2
33	I am satisfied with my chances for promotion.	11.7	29.9	26.6	24.7	7.1
34	There is little bickering/quarrelling and fighting/arguing at work (teachers are collegial).	15.6	19.5	33.8	20.8	10.4
35	My job is enjoyable.	13.0	32.5	22.1	21.4	11.0
36	Work assignments are fully explained.	14.9	29.2	24.0	23.4	8.4

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

VI. COEFFICIENTS

For this study, if *p* was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis would be rejected because it showed that the independent variable tended to significantly predict the dependent variable. Since authoritarian leadership had a *p* value of .348, it failed to reject the null hypothesis, indicating that its impact on job satisfaction was not significant (see Table VI). On the other hand, instructional leadership had a *p* value of .000, so the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, it had a significant and positive impact on job satisfaction, indicating that higher levels of instructional leadership tended to be associated with higher levels of job satisfaction (see Table VI). Similarly, transactional leadership also had a *p* value of .000, so the null hypothesis was rejected; hence, it had a significant and positive impact on job satisfaction (see Table VI).

TABLE VI: Coefficients

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig. (<i>p</i>)
	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>		
(Constant)	1.034	.182		5.682	.000
Authoritarian Leadership	.034	.037	.050	.942	.348
Instructional Leadership	.419	.056	.538	7.524	.000
Transactional Leadership	.190	.044	.303	4.270	.000

a. Dependent Variable

VII. CORRELATIONS

Findings revealed that authoritarian leadership had a *t* of -0.084 which was not significant, indicating that authoritarian leadership was not significantly correlated with job satisfaction (see Table VII). On the other hand, instructional leadership had a *t* of 0.735, which was significant, indicating that, as instructional leadership increased, job satisfaction also tended to increase (see Table VII). Transactional leadership had a *t* of 0.662, which was also significant, indicating

that, as transactional leadership increased, job satisfaction also tended to increase. In sum, both instructional and transactional leadership were significant predictors of job satisfaction, while authoritarian leadership did not have any meaningful impact (see Table VII).

TABLE VII: Correlations

Correlations		Authoritarian	Instructional	Transactional	Dependent variable
Authoritarian Leadership (AL)	Pearson Correlation	1	-.180*	-.123	-.084
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.025	.128	.298
	<i>n</i>	154	154	154	154
Instructional Leadership (IL)	Pearson Correlation	-.180*	1	.678**	.735**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025		.000	.000
	<i>n</i>	154	154	154	154
Transactional Leadership (TL)	Pearson Correlation	-.123	.678**	1	.662**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.128	.000		.000
	<i>n</i>	154	154	154	154
Dependent Variables (DV)	Pearson Correlation	-.084	.735**	.662**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.298	.000	.000	
	<i>n</i>	154	154	154	154

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

VIII. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

A. Conclusion

Current findings revealed that authoritarian leadership had the highest mean score of 3.1, indicating that most teachers perceived their principals as authoritarian. However, this leadership style had a *p* value of .348, thus showing that it had no meaningful impact on job satisfaction. In contrast, instructional and transactional leadership, both with mean scores of 2.9, had a significant and positive impact on job satisfaction, with *p* values of .000. Further analysis showed that instructional and transactional leadership tended to increase job satisfaction ($t = 0.735$ and $t = 0.662$, respectively). Lastly, these results suggested that, instructional and transactional leadership styles, which often promote collaboration and professional growth, are more effective in enhancing teachers' job satisfaction in Malaysian schools.

B. Implications

Current findings implied that principals in Sabah tend to adopt an authoritarian leadership style, which in turn lowers teacher job satisfaction. This is consistent with prior studies, including research by Hanna and Sales (2023), which highlighted that authoritarian leadership tends to limit innovation and lead to staff dissatisfaction. Additionally, Wang *et al.* (2022) reiterated that this leadership style, often influenced by traditional values, suppresses creativity and autonomy in educational settings, further reducing teachers' job satisfaction. Instructional leadership, on the other hand, tends to significantly increase job satisfaction; this finding is supported by Graczewski, Knudson, and Holtzman (2009) who have emphasized that it tends to have a positive impact on teacher growth, performance, and school success.

Principals who promote collaboration, provide feedback, and uphold teacher development often contribute to a more supportive environment, which enhances staff's motivation and job satisfaction. Studies by Yesoo and Alias (2023) and Hallinger *et al.* (2017) further affirmed the effectiveness of instructional leadership, especially in developing countries. Similarly, this study implied that transactional leadership tends to augment teachers' job satisfaction. Chin, Yong, and Lee (2022) maintained that transactional leadership, through clear expectations and contingent rewards, often fosters

productivity and collaboration, leading to higher job satisfaction amongst staff. These findings underscore the importance of instructional and transactional leadership styles in enhancing teachers' job satisfaction, compared to authoritarian approaches.

Current findings implied that authoritarian leadership is common among principals in Sabah, which could lower teachers' job satisfaction. Prior research supported this finding, noting that authoritarian leadership tends to hinder innovation and autonomy (Hanna & Sales, 2023; Wang *et al.*, 2022). Conversely, instructional and transactional leadership tend to improve teachers' job satisfaction as they foster collaboration, professional growth, and a supportive environment (Graczewski *et al.*, 2009; Yesoo & Alias, 2023). Therefore, principals should shift from authoritarian styles by encouraging participatory decision-making, enhancing transparency, and recognizing teacher contributions (Bimshas, 2023; Huang *et al.*, 2022). As authoritarian leadership becomes outdated, Malaysian principals should embrace collaborative approaches, leveraging technology to involve teachers in real-time decision-making (Cascade Team, 2022).

According to Bimshas (2023), to prevent the rise of extreme authoritarianism, leaders at various levels must actively foster environments that prioritize transparency, inclusion, and diversity. Therefore, principals should practice precise, open and transparent communication to ensure accountability and prevent the concentration of power. Further, they should also encourage diverse voices in decision making to allow for a broader representation of ideas and opinions, while alleviating the risk of authoritarian control. By adopting more democratic values and human rights, they can help build a foundation of ethical leadership and civic responsibility. By fostering open communication, involving diverse voices in decisions, and promoting democratic values, they can counter authoritarian tendencies.

The rigid hierarchical structure of authoritarian leadership may hinder innovation and reduce teacher morale (Hanna & Sales, 2023). Malaysian schools should therefore shift toward more collaborative leadership models, whereby teachers are given a voice in decision-making processes. This shift can create a more open and supportive work environment, which is essential for fostering job satisfaction amongst teachers. By involving teachers in discussions on policy, curriculum design, and school improvement plans, principals can cultivate a more inclusive atmosphere, whereby teachers feel valued and are encouraged to contribute actively to the attainment of school goals.

Hallinger *et al.* (2017) posited that schools should invest in leadership development programs that emphasize instructional leadership; these programs should be designed to equip principals with the skills to manage the complexities of modern education, particularly in diverse contexts. By developing strong leadership capabilities, principals can enhance their ability to drive positive change, improve teaching standards, and ultimately, elevate the quality of education across the region. Huang *et al.* (2022) elaborated that, to become less autocratic, authoritarian principals can adopt strategies that promote teacher engagement and trust. These include encouraging participatory decision-making, which enhances transparency in communication, while fostering open dialogue. Additionally, principals can also promote emotional intelligence by showing empathy and considering teachers' needs. By gradually delegating more responsibility to teachers, principals can empower them and boost their job satisfaction. Lastly, recognizing and rewarding teachers' contributions helps create a more favorable work environment, which is essential for promoting innovativeness and commitment. While balancing authority and approachability.

In summary, generalizability of the current findings is limited; future research on principal leadership styles should employ larger samples obtained from different locations in Malaysia. It should also examine leadership styles in relation to other teacher variables, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-assertiveness. Lastly, questionnaires with better validity and reliability should be used.

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