

Unveiling the leadership essence: exploring the authenticity of primary school headmasters in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The development of the current modernity in regardless of the explosion of industrial revolution 4.0 (IR4.0) in the 21st millennium has influenced the leaders of educational institutions towards the transformations of the effective organizational leadership. Therefore, this study is aimed to identify and redetermine the factors that influence the authentic leadership practices among the headmasters. The quantitative study using the cross-sectional research from the adaptation of authentic leadership questionnaire (ALQ) based instruments has been distributed to 436 teachers via online, as they were also being randomly selected through a stratified simple random sampling technique. The study data has been analyzed through the descriptive statistics and exploratory factor analysis (EFA), as a confirmatory procedure and an analysis factor (CFA) using IBM-SPSS-AMOS software. The results of the study shows that all four dimensions of authentic leadership are at a high-level course. Meanwhile, the CFA analysis showed that the four dimensions together with the 16 indicator items in authentic leadership, were accepted and confirmed. In addition, the data analysis also found out that the influence of all dimensions in the authentic leadership of headmasters are in positive and at a high rate. Finally, this study has successfully developed a measurement model for the authentic leadership of headmasters. In spite of that, it is suggested that a further studies on a larger scale which involves the qualitative and quantitative methods could be carried out by the future researchers in providing greater benefits and better contributions in the next findings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has set a clear direction to be listed among the countries that are able to provide a high-quality and high-impact education system. In line with the vision and mission of the Malaysian Ministry of Education (KPM), various transformation in education has been implemented to upgrade the quality of education, as at the same time helping to improve the leadership level of leaders in education for the country [1]. Thus, a leader has a potential to improve the excellence through the education system and are capable to build a progressive organization, to be competitive and able to survive the changes in transforming the national education [2], [3]. In accordingly, an authentic leaders should have self-awareness, be transparent in organizational relationships, wise and intelligence in processing the information, instilling the high morals and ethical values. In other words, school leaders should have an attractive leadership style in promoting positive psychological relationships. Apart from that, they should have an internal moral ethics, ability to

process and balanced the information, build friendly relationships between leaders and subordinate staff to foster an excellent work climate [4], [5].

In the 2nd shift of the Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM) 2013-2025, the administration of an educational organization should receive a cohesive and sustainable injection from effective leaders [6]. As a consequence, a leader should express his authority to teachers, subordinates and to be transparent, have a clear moral, flexibility, willing to negotiate, and remain loyal to the organization so that the organization's journey is more effective [7]–[9]. As in the context of authentic leadership in schools, headmasters should be responsible and always show a high level of integrity, in order to lead the organization's path to be more effective and outstanding towards the longer term [4], [10]. Therefore, a leader should have an intellectual endurance and power to analyze an accurate information in building a strong team and to be realistic for their goals and visions in planning the management and leadership to for future generations [11], [12].

2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

A quality leader are the pillars of success of the country's education system [6], [13], [14]. Considering the very large role of leaders in schools, the Ministry of Education and Culture has allocated a large allocation for school leadership development [15]. However, the results of the analysis from the past studies showed that the school leaders' authentic leadership practices are at a less encouraging level. There are authentic leadership practices who are still not commensurate with what has been spent [16].

According to a study [17], there are some of the authentic leaders who are still lack in knowledge and skills in making plans or decisions for their organizations because the level of authentic leadership among headmasters is still at a moderate level [5], [18]. It is so irritating that the low level of leadership among the headmasters and the lack of concern for the school community has led to a lack motivations and teachers' satisfactions in carrying out the tasks [19]–[21]. Furthermore, Aria *et al.* [22] revealed that the weak integrity and moral factors of authentic leaders had directly affected the motivational readiness of school students [9]. At the same time, Adigüzel and Kuloğlu [7], also stated that the attitude of headmasters is less committed in managing their organization with their own quality as they are busy with departmental affairs such as attending various meetings, courses or workshops, which has caused the welfare of school members to be increasingly neglected, and also has an impact on motivational in teacher's teaching [4].

In Malaysia, the workload of teachers also affects the transformation of education. This phenomenon will indirectly give temperance especially to the workload that will be borne by teachers [4]. Piling up assignments will necessarily bring various issues and problems such as lack of teacher commitment, increased work pressure and affect teachers' jobs satisfaction [23], [24]. Among the signs of job dissatisfaction occurs among teachers are absenteeism, work boredom, grievances, protests, commitment to low-level work, resignation, early retirement, loss of trust, stress, burnout, declining performance and teachers' application to change [24]. However, it happens due to the changes in the leadership style of the modern era as seems to be as one of the factors that causes challenges in work including the conflict of the role itself, work pressure, task confusion, student's discipline and lack of computer technology skills. Based on the issues and problems discussed, it is important that researchers had to conduct research in order to analyze and verify the authentic leadership practices among headmasters as a level of practices towards the building teacher capacity and becomes a broad perspective to be explained.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are four dimensions of authentic leadership, which are self-awareness, balanced processing information, appreciation of moral values and transparency of relationships [25]–[27]. First, the dimension of self-awareness, which is the leader's confidence to assess his own strengths and weaknesses as well as their ability to interpret people's views towards him [25], [28]. This, in turn, leads those around them to perceive the leader as someone with a strong internal compass. This process involves an understanding of strengths, weaknesses, and the impact of leadership on their followers [28]. Therefore, as in the school context, the dimension of self-awareness refers to the actions of principals and headmasters to convey meaningful information to their teachers as well as how to position themselves in having an impact of the organization they lead within time to time [10].

The second dimension refers to the balance in processing the information, leader's ability to analyze data and a decision making. Apart from that, the dimension is also based on the leader's capability in obtaining views and ideas from his employees which are related to any issues or problems that arise in his organization. As for the third dimension, it is an appreciation of moral values, which explains the leader's orientation in achieving the moral standards and ethical behavior [22], [27]. Therefore, leaders should ensure that the moral and ethical values are integrated in their local organization and community [12]. A leader who

embodies moral values places a strong emphasis on issues of ethics in their work. They not only prioritize ethics but also put them into practice based on positive values and morals within their team, organization, and community. They align their actions with the moral values they hold, creating a harmonious relationship between their personal values and their professional conduct [12]. Transparent relationship also includes in authentic leader's behavior towards other people which concludes the last dimension [21]. This behavior involves an open interaction in information sharing, and the expression of a leader's heart intention to build good relationships in his organization [7]. On top of that, relationship transparency can create a friendly relationship which can develop a high level of trust between the employees and their leaders [29]. However, transparency in relationships emerges when an individual shares their feelings and goals in a constructive manner, displaying the positive values within themselves [30]. Ultimately, a transparent relationship can give an impression that the leaders are capable to process values and thoughts simultaneously and could create a relationship of trust and openness in the organization [7].

Hence, almost two decades ago, an authentic leadership began to receive wider attention among researchers due to the trend of thinking among the members of society in producing such an honest and authoritative leader [16], [28]. A domestic study which had been conducted towards the school teachers, revealed that an authentic leadership had a positive significant effect on their teaching motivation, but in otherwise it also brought a negative significant effect which involved between the authentic leadership and the teacher's work pressure. The significant negative effect shows that the higher the level of authentic leadership, the higher the teacher's teaching motivation will occur [9]. In addition to that, from the study which was conducted by Ismail *et al.* [31] showed that there is a particular relation and significant moderate negative relationship among the authentic leadership and work pressure. What's more, a positive relationship with employees in the organization also plays an important role in shaping the reputation of the organization in contributing the organization's achievement goals and could increasing the effectiveness of employees [32]. On that account, a leader who practices an authentic leadership style will create a trusted relationship with the people around him [9].

Through an overseas study, the positive relationships between leaders and employees in organizations could play an important role in shaping the reputation of an organization [32]. Undoubtedly, in the effort of an authentic leaders while producing teachers to keep on contributing to the school, they themselves should play an important role to create a healthy organizational culture. From an Iranian high school's study, was found out that the principals who practices an authentic leadership style are able to shape their teachers as a support medium for organizational improvement, and ultimately it has become an important resource in improving organizational performance [22]. Similarly, a study in India also shows that an authentic leadership style is an effective basis for an effective behavior between teachers and students [17].

4. METHOD

This quantitative study uses a cross-sectional survey research design where the data is collected to explain the procedures used in the study [33]. The pilot and actual research data were collected from teachers who are under the management of the Ministry of Education and culture in primary schools in Malaysia. Stratified random sampling is used to select respondents among teachers. In addition, this sampling method is selected due to the gender imbalance between male and female teachers, teacher's experiences and their study locations [34]. The authentic leadership questionnaire (ALQ) instrument is a measurement tool developed by Avolio *et al.* [35] which is used to obtain quantitative data in this study. Therefore, a pre-test is early conducted to ensure the language and content validity of the research instrument for an actual field work. The validity of the ALQ content was assessed by five content experts who worked for more than 10 years and the academics on the same field. After that, the ALQ instrument is submitted to a language expert for a back-to-back translation in English to Bahasa Malaysia in ensuring the language validity.

After the verification procedure has been completed, a pilot study is conducted on 100 verified respondent answers which involves the minimum sample size that is required in this study [34], [36], [37]. The pilot study data is analyzed through the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) before involving to the actual study. The actual data is obtained from 500 respondents where the total of 436 answers that were found to be acceptable. The IBM-SPSS-AMOS version 25 software has been used for a data screening, EFA is also used to confirm the measurement model through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) [37].

Furthermore, descriptive analysis was employed to assess the mean scores and standard deviations to identify the level of authentic leadership among school headmasters using the interpretation values from Darusalam and Hussin [38]. Finally, to determine the contribution of authentic leadership among school headmasters, coefficient values such as the critical ratio (CR) and standardized regression coefficient (β) were utilized. When the CR value exceeds ± 1.96 , and the significance level is $p < 0.5$, the analyzed variables are suggested as significant predictors [34], [36], [37].

5. RESULTS

5.1. Level of authentic leadership of headmasters

All in all, the findings of the study shows that headmasters practice authentic leadership at a high level of ($M=4.27$, $SD=0.59$). The data analysis for all four dimensions also recorded a high level of transparency in relationships (KDP) of ($M=4.34$, $SD=0.57$), followed by the dimension of appreciating moral values (PNM) of ($M=4.26$, $SD=0.58$), a balance processing information (KMM) of ($M=4.23$, $SD=0.61$) and self-awareness (KD) of ($M=4.23$, $SD=0.59$). In general, this finding gives the perception that headmasters in Malaysia have shown a high level of authentic leadership as it is described in Table 1.

5.2. Confirmatory factor analysis

The CFA procedure is used to assess uni-dimensionality, validity, and reliability [34], [37]. Uni-dimensionality can be achieved through the procedure of removing items that have a weak loading factor that is <0.50 [37], [39]. There are three types of validity in the CFA procedure, which are convergent validity, construct validity and discriminant validity. For convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) value needs to be above 0.5 and for construct validity, the values are to be reached as to fit the indexes for the measurement model [34]. Meanwhile, for discriminant validity, the value of the square root of AVE needs to be higher than the latent correlation value that involved [37], [39]. Finally, the reliability for this measurement model is analyzed through the composite reliability (CR) value, which is at least above 0.60 and the AVE value must be above 0.5 [39].

5.2.1. Uni-dimensionality

The first procedure of CFA is to determine the elements of uni-dimensionality. This process can be achieved if each and every item in the dimension has a high loading factor. To ensure the uni-dimensionality of any measurement models, the items with low loading factors should be dropped. In addition, the loading factors should be at 0.50 or a bit higher for newly developed items, as the loading factors itself should be at 0.60 or higher than that which respectively involved for the developed items. The factors should be in positive stage or in one direction [36], [37]. Therefore, all loading factors in this study have exceeded to the value of 0.70 and above which as explained in Table 2. From the findings in Table 2, it is confirmed that all the items from each of these dimensions have exceeded the loading factor values which are suggested by several researchers [34], [37] and therefore, there are no items dropped in this procedure.

5.2.2. Convergent validity

Convergent validity is a procedure to check the validity of ideas and measures the construct statements [34], [36], [37]. The procedure is achieved when all the items in the measurement models were significant. Therefore, the convergent validity is evaluated with the value of AVE which required to be above 0.50 ($AVE > 0.50$). Meanwhile, the items that failed in achieving the loading factors which are above 0.50 must be dropped out [37], [39]. The AVE values for all dimensions exceeded to the minimum value of 0.50 as explained in Table 3. The dimension of self-awareness (KD) obtained the highest AVE value of (0.700) compared to the dimension of appreciation of moral values (PNM) which obtained as the lowest of (0.632) of AVE value. Therefore, it concluded that the model has achieved the convergent validity.

5.2.3. Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity refers to the extent on which the measurement model of a dimension is independent to the overlapping items (redundant items). The Fornell-Larker method is used in this study. In this method, the value of the square root of AVE must be greater than the correlation value between other dimensions [34], [36], [40]. As explained in Table 4, the value of the square root of AVE for the dimension of self-awareness (KD) is the highest which is on 0.837, while the dimension of appreciation of moral values (PNM) received the lowest value of square root of AVE which is 0.795. Therefore, it is concluded that the model has achieved the discriminant validity.

Table 1. Levels of authentic leadership of headmasters

Code	Dimension	N	Mean	SD	Level
KDP	Transparency in relationships	436	4.34	0.57	High
PNM	Appreciation of moral values	436	4.26	0.58	High
KMM	Information processing balance	436	4.23	0.61	High
KD	Self-awareness	436	4.23	0.59	High
ALH	Authentic leadership of headmasters.	436	4.27	0.59	High

Guidelines: (1.00-2.33: low), (2.34-3.67: moderate), (3.68-5.00: high) [38]

Table 2. Overall item of loading factor values

Dimension/items		Loading factors
Transparency in relationships		
KDP1	My headmaster is clear about the information that he wants to convey.	0.73
KDP2	My headmaster admits his mistake when he realizes it.	0.80
KDP3	My headmaster encourages all teachers to share their opinions.	0.78
KDP4	My headmaster tells the truth even though it difficult.	0.84
KDP5	My headmaster shows his stable emotions.	0.82
Appreciation of moral values		
PNM1	My headmaster expresses his consistent belief which is parallel in his actions.	0.88
PNM2	My headmaster makes decisions based on the value of his own responsibility.	0.89
PNM3	The headmaster asked me to take actions that could support the value of his responsibility.	0.72
PNM4	My headmaster makes a difficult decision in his a highly ethical evaluation.	0.76
Information processing balance		
KMM1	The headmaster asks for an opinion in facing the issues that may challenges his position.	0.71
KMM2	My headmaster analyzes appropriate data before making his decisions.	0.87
KMM3	My headmaster carefully listens to various points of view before making any decisions or conclusions.	0.87
Self-awareness		
KD1	My headmaster seeks feedback in improving the interactions with others.	0.83
KD2	My headmaster accurately describes how others perceive his abilities.	0.81
KD3	My headmaster knows in reassessing his position when facing with any important issues.	0.88
KD4	My headmaster understands that an action can affect others as well.	0.82

Table 3. Convergent validity of authentic leadership dimensions

Sr No	Code	Dimension	AVE (>0.50)
01	KDP	Transparency in relationships	0.664
02	PNM	Appreciation of moral values	0.632
03	KMM	Information processing balance	0.675
04	KD	Self-awareness	0.700

Table 4. Discriminant validity of authentic leadership dimensions

Sr No	Code	Dimension	\sqrt{AVE}
01	KDP	Transparency in relationships	0.815
02	PNM	Appreciation of moral values	0.795
03	KMM	Information processing balance	0.822
04	KD	Self-awareness	0.837

5.2.4. Composite reliability

The next CFA procedure is to determine the CR of each dimension through the construct reliability. Therefore, the CR value must be above 0.60 (CR>0.60) [34], [36], [37]. However, to ensure that the dimension is measured perfectly, then the value of (CR>0.708) must be concurrent [36]. The analysis showed that the CR values for all dimensions in the model exceeded to the required limit of >0.708. Therefore, the CR of the research model has been achieved as it is described in Table 5.

5.2.5. Construct validity

Construct validity is achieved when the fit index of the model reaches the required level [37], [39]. There are several criteria to determine the fitness of the model which are called as root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI) and Chi square/degrees of freedom (Chisq/df). These criteria must be concurrent so that the measured models will reach the required level of the fit index [34], [36], [37]. As shown in Table 6, the authentic leadership model encounters all three categories of fit index, as RMSEA on <0.08 (0.071), CFI on >0.90 (0.961) and Chisq/df on <5.0 (3.186). Therefore, this study has revealed the required construct validity.

Table 5. Composite reliability of authentic leadership dimensions

Sr No	Code	Dimension	CR
01	KDP	Transparency in relationships	0.887
02	PNM	Appreciation of moral values	0.896
03	KMM	Information processing balance	0.861
04	KD	Self-awareness	0.903

Table 6. Authentic leadership model fitness index

Category	Level/acceptance index	Value	Results
Absolute	RMSEA<0.08	0.071	The required level is obtained
Relative	CFI>0.85, ideal if >0.90	0.961	The required level is obtained
Parsimonious	Chi-Square/df<5.0, ideal if<3.0	3.186	The required level is obtained

5.3. Authentic leadership measurement model of headmasters

Figure 1 displays the authentic leadership measurement model of headmasters in order to determine whether the research data is consistent with the developed model. In order to evaluate the fit indices for the measurement model, there are several fit indices as for instance, Chisq/df, CFI, RMSEA, parsimony-normed fit index (PNFI) and parsimony comparative of fit index (PCFI) which were used to determine whether the developed model matched the study data [37]. When the significant value of Chisq/df is less than 5.0, then the model matches the study data. Likewise, the CFI values that exceed to 0.90 are considered to be appropriate. Meanwhile, the acceptable RMSEA value is less than 0.08 [40]. As for PCFI and PNFI values, it must be above of 0.50 [39], [40]. This model is matched when one of each absolute, relative and parsimony categories reached the set value. Based on Figure 1, it shows that all the matching index values reach the set values and correspond to the study data. The findings of this CFA analysis shows that the dimensions and items that are acquired in the authentic leadership with four dimensions and 16 indicator items, have been approved. In overall, this authentic leadership model is consistent to fit the index values of CFI=0.961, Chisq/df=3.186 and RMSEA=0.071.

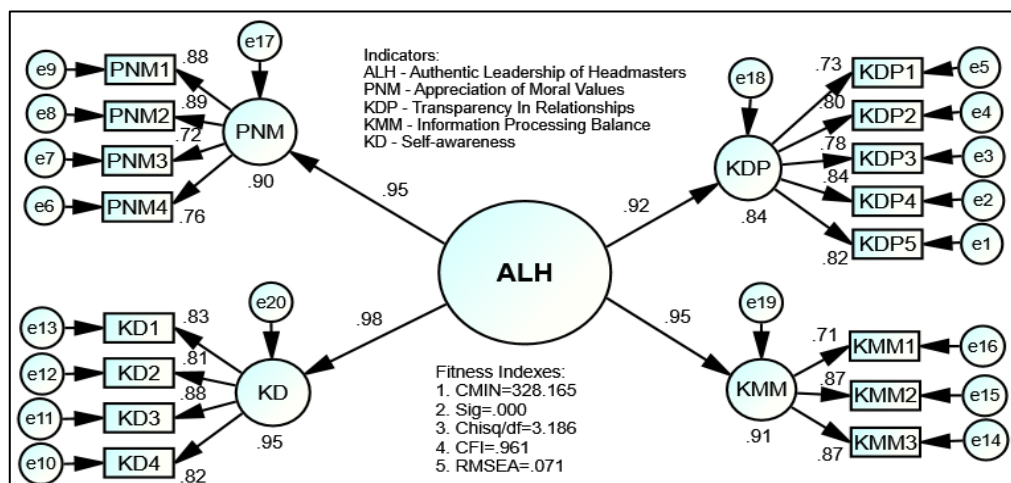


Figure 1. Authentic leadership measurement model of headmasters.

5.4. The influence of authentic leadership of headmasters

In order to determine the contribution between the variables, the observed CR value is greater than ±1.96 [41]. This finding found out that the authentic leadership significantly predicts the dimensions of relationship transparency, appreciation of moral values, information processing balance, and self-awareness when the respective CR values exceed ±1.96. To determine the influence between the variables value of R² is observed. Authentic leadership affects all dimensions with a R² value for the KMM (information processing balance) dimensions of =0.908, KDP (transparency in relationships) =0.842, KD (self-awareness) =0.954 and PNM (appreciation of moral values) =0.897 was examined and displayed in Table 7. The finding shows that the KD dimension is the most dominant contributor to authentic leadership which is 95.4% followed by KMM of 90.8%, PNM of 89.7% and KDP of 84.2%.

Table 7. Regression coefficients between dimensions of authentic leadership

	β	R ²	S.E.	CR	P	Result
KMM <-- ALH	0.953	0.908	0.052	21.274	***	Significant
KDP <-- ALH	0.918	0.842	0.041	21.749	***	Significant
KD <-- ALH	0.977	0.954	0.045	24.152	***	Significant
PNM <-- ALH	0.947	0.897	0.045	22.575	***	Significant

6. DISCUSSION

Authentic leadership is a modern leadership style which is practiced by leaders to deal with issues and challenges in leading the organizations of the 21st millennium [31]. Therefore, the findings of this study are expected to help school leaders to justify their leadership style and explore the best practices in improving organizational excellence. Generally, the findings of the study show the impact of authentic leadership of headmasters at a high level. The analysis of this study also found out that all four dimensions were accepted and confirmed. Consequently, the leadership practices that have been given priority among headmasters to manage the organizations is also seeking feedbacks to improve interactions with teachers and shows mutual trust in the organization [4]. For that reason, the high self-awareness of headmasters illustrates the way on how they gain inner awareness and the process of self-awareness which contributes to their actions either in taking care of teacher's welfare, constantly providing guidance, shelter or bringing positive response in the organization [10], [11].

The findings of this study also revealed that the dimension of self-awareness (KD) makes a high contribution to authentic leadership. It is in line with the study of Saffardin and Mydin [12] where the dimension of self-awareness recorded the highest mean value. On that account, the leadership practice is given priority among headmaster when managing a school and also to get feedback in improving the interactions with teachers and always show high trust in the organization [4]. In other words, self-awareness refers to the leader's awareness. The self-awareness of the headmaster shows that the understanding of how they gain their self-awareness and the contribution to the view of themselves and others by always to looking after the welfare of their teachers, providing guidance, shelter and positive responses in order to overcome the shortcomings [10], [11].

In the interval, the information processing balance dimension (KMM) is also a high-level contributor to authentic leadership. Therefore, the influence of information processing balance among authentic leaders in different studies shows positive results [5]. It is because, a wise headmaster is always alert in processing the information accurately, has a strong influence and always maintains a good relationship that will cause teachers and members of their support group to feel comfortable and safe in their workplace [10].

From the study of Saffardin and Mydin [12], it revealed that there is the difference from the findings because the appreciation of high moral values is able to contribute the headmasters to cultivate moral values by always concerning about issues and ethics in their organization towards achieving standard high morals and ethical activities. It may be due to the effect of teachers experiencing pressure at school due to misbehavior among their students and also the factors of school leaders' instructions that are not consistent at school. In addition, in a different study, it found out that the mental well-being of teachers is also affected by the workloads and genders where the female teachers with heavy tasks have a lower mental health status [31].

As comprehensive, the findings of the study showed that the level of authentic leadership practices for all dimensions was at a high level. Hence, the analysis results of this study also shows that the headmasters in Malaysia emphasize these four dimensions in their administration at a high level. Particularly, the headmasters as the leaders in schools show their sensitivity to the needs of teachers and school members [10]. This is in line with the findings of the study by Yusoff *et al.* [24] which shows that the school leaders need to be constantly aware of their leadership development so that they can improve the performance of teachers in shaping the school organization, to be more effective in creating a prosperous organizational culture and also to increase students and employee's excellence [3].

7. CONCLUSION

As a summary, the results of this study give an implication to the field of school leader's leadership and also confirm the dimensions and behaviors of school leader's authentic leadership style in developing teacher capacity. The results of the study also confirm that all four dimensions of authentic leadership are at a high level. In addition, the influence of authentic leadership of school leaders is positive and at a high level. This study could not reveal everything in detail because the selected respondents could not be generalized as a finding for the whole country. Thus, further research is suggested to other variables that can be considered to be included in the study to improve the authentic leadership of school leaders. In addition, this study can be further developed by looking at the influence of authentic leadership among teachers and its relationship with other variables shown by teachers in Malaysia. To boot on it, a qualitative approach is also suggested as an alternative method to find out on the authentic leadership practices in the future.




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