

# The Relationship of Principal's Authentic Leadership and Teacher's Job Motivation in Excellence Cluster Schools.

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between principals' authentic leadership practices and teachers' job motivation within Excellence Cluster Secondary Schools (Sekolah Kluster Kecemerlangan, SKK) in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. Authentic leadership, characterized by integrity, ethical decision-making, and genuine behavior, has been underscored in the Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM) 2013–2025. Through its Fifth Shift, the PPPM emphasizes the need for high-performance leaders in schools to meet the evolving demands of global education. Despite this focus, research indicates that some school principals still fall short in executing their roles effectively. This study, therefore, aims to examine the correlation between the level of authentic leadership exhibited by principals and the resultant job motivation among teachers. Employing a quantitative methodology, the study utilized purposive sampling to gather responses from 187 teachers across three SKKs in Johor Bahru through a structured questionnaire. Data analysis was conducted via the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20, and revealed a significant positive correlation between principals' authentic leadership practices and teachers' job motivation, as determined by the Spearman Correlation Test. Based on these findings, the study recommends enhancing authentic leadership through ongoing training, recognition programs, and a commitment to positive reinforcement. Future research should expand this work through qualitative approaches and broader demographic sampling to explore authentic leadership impacts across varied educational settings, including private institutions and other school types under the Malaysian Ministry of Education.

**Keywords:** Authentic Leadership, Job Motivation, Principal, Teacher, Excellence Cluster School

## INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM 2013–2025) aligns Malaysia's education standards with global benchmarks, focusing on preparing students for the demands of the 21st century. This alignment requires effective, high-performing school leadership, with principals who possess the competencies to lead schools toward enhanced competitiveness and academic excellence on a global scale (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Leadership excellence among school principals significantly impacts Malaysia's educational objectives and is identified as critical to achieving the targeted quality of education (Hamzah, 2021).

The establishment of Cluster Schools of Excellence (SKK), as part of Malaysia's decentralization process, empowers school principals with autonomous authority over school administration and decision-making. This autonomy is intended to foster an environment that motivates teachers and improves school-wide performance (Ali Zeb, Hashim & Rahman, 2019). The empowerment of principals to act as decision-makers aligns with global trends in educational leadership, where autonomy and accountability are linked to innovation and progress (Leithwood & Azah, 2020). However, issues surrounding accountability and credibility continue to challenge some school leaders. Training initiatives at the Aminuddin Baki Institute (IAB) aim to equip principals with the skills necessary to foster trust and drive educational success. However, studies indicate a persistent gap in some principals' abilities to fulfill these roles effectively, underscoring the need for further professional development (Goh & Dimmock, 2021; Taufik, 2022).

In addressing teachers’ job motivation, a fundamental component of educational quality, the principal’s leadership approach plays a critical role. Teacher’s job motivation is essential, not only for maintaining quality instruction but also for fostering student engagement and achievement (Santisi & Di Blasi, 2014). Recent studies suggest that increasing clerical and administrative duties detract from teachers’ primary responsibilities of instruction and student engagement, which ultimately affects their motivation (Ebrahimi & Khani, 2022). Principals who are responsive to the challenges faced by teachers can foster an environment of support that reignites teacher motivation and resilience in the face of competitive demands (Zamri, Farooq & Awanis., 2022; Farooq & Kaur., 2022). Furthermore, teacher motivation requires ongoing alignment with educational demands, especially with the implementation of the increasingly rigorous Standard Secondary School Curriculum (KSSM) (Malik & Arshad, 2023).

In modern leadership theory, an authentic approach is increasingly emphasized as essential for adapting to 21st-century challenges, where transparency, ethical grounding, and meaningful relationships foster trust and motivation among subordinates (Kernis & Goldman, 2021). The hierarchical, directive styles of past decades are no longer viable in contemporary educational environments, where complex problem-solving, two-way communication, and leader-subordinate trust are critical for success (Zaliza & Mohd Izham, 2022). Studies conducted in Malaysian educational contexts highlight that principal effectiveness is directly linked to school success and teacher motivation (Awanis & Zuraidah , 2019).

By cultivating a positive organizational culture, authentic leadership among principals fosters deeper thinking and personal accountability, encouraging teachers to engage more fully with their work (Zamri, Farooq & Awanis, 2022). An authentic leadership style fosters a culture of trust and motivation, making it crucial in restoring community confidence and advancing education reform, specifically in SKK institutions (Taufik & Awanis, 2023). This research addresses an existing gap by investigating the relationship between authentic leadership among SKK principals in Johor Bahru and teachers’ job motivation—a factor increasingly recognized for its impact on student outcomes. Unlike prior studies, which often focus on broader educational contexts, this research zeroes in on the unique dynamics within SKK schools, contributing a deeper understanding of how authentic leadership shapes teacher motivation in Malaysia’s high-performance educational environments.

The conceptual framework of this study (**Figure 1**) illustrates the relationship between principals’ authentic leadership practices and teachers’ job motivation. Authentic leadership dimensions such as self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced information processing, and internalized moral perspective (Walumbwa, 2008) are posited to influence intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors (Herzberg, 1966) in teachers, ultimately impacting school effectiveness and student outcomes.

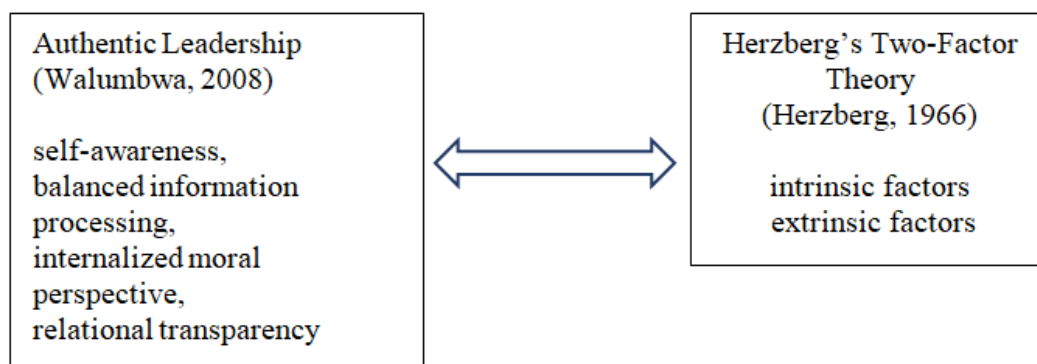


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Linking Authentic Leadership to Teacher’s Job Motivation

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the relationship between principals’ authentic leadership practices and teachers’ job motivation levels within the context of Excellence

Cluster Secondary Schools (SKK) in the Johor Bahru. This approach is suitable for investigate the relationship between the specific leadership styles and teacher motivation, which is central to understanding broader school effectiveness (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The study targeted teachers from three Excellence Cluster Secondary Schools (SKK) in Johor Bahru. A purposive sampling technique was used to focus on teachers from SKK schools due to their established performance standards and unique leadership dynamics. A total of 187 teachers participated, representing an adequate sample size for quantitative analysis. This sampling method ensured the inclusion of teachers whose experiences are directly relevant to the study's focus on authentic leadership and motivation within high-performance educational settings.

Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire divided into two primary sections. The first section measured principals' authentic leadership using the *Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ)* developed by Walumbwa et al. (2008). The ALQ is a validated instrument that assesses four core dimensions of authentic leadership: self-awareness, balanced information processing, internalized moral perspective, and relational transparency. These dimensions were adapted to the Malaysian context, with expert validation to ensure cultural appropriateness and content relevance (Walumbwa et al., 2008). The teacher motivation component was designed using elements grounded in Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic factors affecting workplace motivation (Herzberg, 1966). This section of the questionnaire was reviewed by three educational experts to ensure alignment with motivational constructs relevant to the SKK context, similar to methods utilized in previous educational research (Ebrahimi & Mohamad Khani, 2014). The questionnaires were distributed both in paper form and electronically via email to accommodate the participants' preferences. Teachers were given a two-week period to complete the survey, with follow-up reminders sent to ensure high response rates. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Malaysian Ministry of Education, with anonymity and confidentiality assured for all respondents (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013).

Data analysis was performed using SPSS software, version 20. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, summarized the principal's authentic leadership practices and teachers' motivation levels. Pearson correlation analysis was used to explore the relationship between the principal's authentic leadership practices and teacher motivation levels (Field, 2018). Reliability analysis showed Cronbach's alpha values of 0.85 for the ALQ section and 0.83 for the motivation section, indicating high internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2016). Although purposive sampling provided targeted insights into the SKK context, it may limit generalizability to other school types or regions. Furthermore, self-reported data can introduce response biases, though anonymity was assured to mitigate this risk (Podsakoff, Mac Kenzie, Lee & Podsakoff., 2003). Future research could expand to include mixed methods or longitudinal designs to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of leadership impacts on teacher motivation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The study highlights a significant positive correlation between the principal's authentic leadership and teachers' job motivation within Johor Bahru's Excellence Cluster Schools (refer to Table 3.1). This relationship is consistent with the objectives of the Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM) 2013–2025, particularly the Fifth Shift, which emphasizes the transformation of school leadership as a cornerstone for improving the quality of education. According to the Fifth Shift, effective leadership is vital to creating high-performing schools by fostering environments where teachers feel supported, empowered, and motivated to achieve excellence.

Findings from Ahmad, Zafar, and Shahzad (2015) and more recent studies by *Frontiers in Psychology* (2023) demonstrate that authentic leadership fosters high levels of employee motivation and engagement across diverse cultural contexts (Frontiers in Psychology, 2023; Harvard Business, 2023). This aligns with the PPPM's focus on empowering teachers through professional development and adaptive leadership models that cultivate intrinsic motivation—an approach critical for transforming Malaysian education into a globally competitive system.

Authentic leadership practices, characterized by Self-Awareness, Transparency, Balanced Information Processing, and a Commitment to Moral Values, are essential for achieving the Fifth Shift's goals. By emphasizing autonomy and intrinsic motivation, authentic leadership directly supports the development of highly motivated and resilient teachers who are equipped to adapt to the dynamic challenges of 21st-century education. Furthermore, studies such as Sang-Woo's (2018) research in Korea and Sylvie, Lapalme, and Michel's (2015) Canadian study corroborate the relevance of such practices in enhancing teacher creativity, organizational commitment, and overall school performance through trust and transparent communication. These traits are critical for fostering the innovative and collaborative teaching environments envisioned by the PPPM.

Table 3.1 The relationship between the principal's level of authentic leadership practices and the job motivation of SKK teachers

		Authentic Leadership	Teachers' Job Motivation
Spearman's rho	Authentic Leadership	Correlation Coefficient	1
		Significant (2-tailed)	.848**
		N	187
	Teachers' Job Motivation	Correlation Coefficient	.848**
		Significant (2-tailed)	1
		N	187

\*\* . The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

## CONCLUSIONS

In the Malaysian context, the findings of this study underscore the principal's role as a transformative leader in aligning individual and collective goals to achieve national education objectives. Through authentic leadership, principals cultivate a teaching workforce that is engaged, motivated, and committed to the school's mission—directly addressing the Fifth Shift's call for leaders who can inspire and sustain educational excellence. By reinforcing a culture rooted in trust, moral values, and mutual respect, authentic leadership catalyzes a synergistic environment where personal and institutional aspirations converge. This alignment is crucial for driving educational quality and achieving the PPPM's overarching vision of a world-class education system by 2025.

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