

# Innovations

## An Empirical Study on Teachers' Perceptions of Empowering Leadership Behaviours Among Principals in Malaysia

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of empowering leadership among primary and secondary school principals. The sample comprised 63 teachers from two primary and four secondary schools in Sabah and Sarawak who completed a questionnaire online. Data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0. Kruskal-Wallis H test revealed no significant differences in teachers' perceptions of empowering leadership by way of age and years of experience, while Mann-Whitney U test showed no significant differences in terms of gender and type of school. Wilcoxon signed rank test showed that 35 of the items were significant at  $p$ -value of 0.05. Group means showed that principals were perceived to be average in leading by example, informing and showing concern or interacting with staff. They were viewed as low in coaching and participative decision-making. With regard to their principals' leadership, the participants (teachers) demonstrated more than 80 percent agreement ("Often" and "Always") on four out of five questionnaire items for Dimension 1 (leading), three out of 11 items for Dimension 2 (coaching), one out of five items for Dimension 3 (informing) and two out of nine items for Dimension 4 (sharing concerns or interacting with teachers) respectively. However, none of the teachers exhibited more than 80 percent agreement on any of the six items within the last dimension (participative decision-making). In light of the findings, some recommendations were made on ways to improve empowering leadership among principals.*

*Keywords: 1. empowering leadership 2. Malaysia 3. teachers' perceptions*

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## Introduction

Empowering leadership involves helping service sector employees, for example, teachers, experience a sense of ownership and independence in their work, besides an exchange of power for a greater feeling of investment. Having autonomy to control certain elements of their everyday work or leadership opportunities within their role often makes these teachers feel empowered. According to Herrity (2022), empowering leadership leads to improved accountability, quicker turnaround, better customer service and increased productivity. First, accountability enables teachers to feel ownership over their work and develop a greater sense of responsibility. Specifically, having control over their work often makes them care more about the outcomes, resulting in better work overall. Second, quicker turnaround occurs when teachers have the autonomy to appraise their own work rather than seeking approval for every task. Therefore, empowering principals often grant teachers some decision-making capabilities rather than maintaining total control over their work. Third, teachers with empowering leaders offer better student service since they have a certain amount of leeway to improvise to make their own decisions, rather than following a strict script. Empowered to maintain strong performance metrics, teachers can gain confidence in their judgment and problem-solving skills, resulting in more favourable student appraisal. Fourth, empowering leadership often leads to increased productivity since it permits teachers to exert more control over their job performance, thus contributing to higher levels of job commitment and sense of ownership, while feeling more investment in the teaching and learning outcomes.

Herrity (2022) added that empowering leadership also leads to higher rates of job satisfaction, greater initiative, better collaboration, more leadership potential and reduced costs. First, a greater sense of control over their work often gives teachers higher job satisfaction that can have a positive impact on academic achievement. Teachers with high job satisfaction enjoy more value from their work that in turn can improve their quality of life and intention to teach. Second, empowering principals encourage teachers to improve their own initiative by giving them space to question processes, devise smarter strategies and offer helpful suggestions. Being respected for their work further prompts teachers to feel more enthused to do better. Third, teachers who feel a sense of empowerment are more likely to collaborate and share ideas. They become more open to sharing best practices and helping one another improve their work, thus establishing a more collaborative atmosphere. Fourth, empowered teachers with a high level of control over their work enjoy greater opportunities for professional growth, thus enabling them to acquire leadership skills or management positions.

Empowering leaders recognize teachers' achievements and continue to challenge them, thus helping them realize and develop their leadership potential and fill leadership gaps within the school. Lastly, empowering leadership often yields potential cost savings in terms of lower attrition rates and recruiting costs. Higher retention rates, internal experience and productivity levels among teachers also lead to lower costs and greater profit margins for private schools.

## **Review of Literature**

A review of literature was conducted to find the gap in research and provide a theoretical and practical framework for the practice of empowering leadership in Malaysian schools. Sagnak (2012) who examined the relationships among empowering leadership, creative behaviour and innovative climate among 710 teachers and 55 principal state elementary schools found that empowering leadership significantly predicted teachers' creative behaviour and innovative climate. In turn, innovative climate was significantly related to teachers' creative behaviour, while partially mediating the relationship between empowering leadership and teachers' creative behaviour. Additionally, Gkorezis (2016) who examined the effect of empowering principal on 201 teachers' innovative work behaviour found that teacher exploration tended to mediate the relationship between empowering leadership and innovative work behaviour.

Grill et al. (2017) examined the impact of vocational education influence on 1,907 students' expectations on empowering leadership in terms of implicit leadership theories (ILT). Students' ILT knowledge was assessed to determine if they were influenced by the empowering leadership of teachers and supervisors during the training. Findings showed that the students' ILT knowledge tended to increase during training, while supervisors' leadership tended to positively influence students' ILT, implying that students' ILT are dynamic and responsive, thus enabling them to change as they transition into vocational life. On the other hand, Lee, Idris and Delfabbro (2017) who examined the relationships among empowering leadership, hierarchical culture and work engagement among 134 private employees in Malaysia found that empowering leadership tended to play a significant role in enhancing work engagement. Empowering leaders tended to interact directly with staff through verbal communication and bidirectional feedback, thus boosting staff engagement through trust and mutuality, besides

equipping them with opportunities to learn new things and develop a sense of belonging amongst them. Surprisingly, findings also showed that empowering leadership tended to enhance work engagement within a hierarchical culture; both were also found to significantly influence work meaningfulness.

Qian et al. (2018) who examined the impact of empowering leadership on staff feedback-seeking, task performance, charge taking and voice among 32 supervisors and 197 staff found that empowering leadership was positively related to staff feedback-seeking, while feedback-seeking was positively associated with task performance, charge taking and voice. Lastly, staff feedback-seeking tended to mediate the positive relationships between empowering leadership and task performance, taking charge and voice. Further, Chow (2018) who examined the impact of empowering leadership on staff creativity among 535 supervisor-subordinate dyads found that staff's openness to experience (a creative personality) tended to moderate the effect of empowering leadership on staff creativity via either motivation to learn or trust in the supervisor. However, the effect of empowering leadership on creativity via motivation to learn was found only among staff with lower level of openness to experience. In contrast, empowering leadership on creativity via trust in the supervisor occurred only for staff with higher level of openness to experience. Findings implied that higher management could boost staff motivation through learning and trust that is aligned to their openness to experience, thus increasing the practical utility of empowering leadership.

Zhang et al. (2018) examined the relationship between empowering leadership and creativity among 217 staff and their supervisors by exploring the context-specific mechanisms (access to resources and information) and actor-related mechanisms (organizational self-esteem). Interactions among resource and information access, self-esteem and creativity were also examined. Findings revealed that self-esteem and resource access mediated the relationship between empowering leadership and creativity. Moreover, high resource access significantly moderated the relationship between self-esteem and creativity, implying that empowering leaders might increase creativity by influencing staff self-esteem and resource access. On the other hand, Lin et al. (2019) who examined the impact of empowering leadership on hospitality organizations among 558 staff and 86 department managers found that middle-level empowering leadership tended to positively influence staff service-oriented behaviours.

Zhu, Yao and Zhang (2019) examined the relationships among empowering leadership, teacher

psychological empowerment, psychological safety and teacher innovative behaviour among 114 teaching and/or research groups. Findings showed that empowering leadership tended to improve teacher innovative behaviour by enhancing their psychological empowerment. Separate analysis revealed that the relationship between team psychological safety and teacher innovative behaviour was mediated by psychological empowerment. More over, Jung, Kang and Choi (2020) who examined the relationship between empowering leadership and commitment to organizational change among 275 staff found that empowering leadership was positively related to commitment to organizational change, while risk-taking behaviour positively mediated the relationship between empowering leadership and commitment to organizational change. Lastly, empowering leadership had an indirect effect on commitment to organizational change via stronger risk-taking behaviour and higher task complexity.

Byun et al. (2020) examined the impact of empowering leadership across hierarchical levels among 209 subordinate-supervisor dyads, hypothesizing that it would promote employee task performance. Findings revealed that empowering leadership among higher-level leader stended to enhance the empowering leadership of lower-level leaders, while improving employee task performance. Further, performance pressure perceived by lower-level leaders tended to moderate the relationship between the empowering leadership of both higher- and lower-level leaders. Findings implied that social learning tends to promote empowering leadership, while performance pressure lowers empowering leadership and exerts a negative influence on employee task performance. Further, Atik and Celik (2020) examined the impact of empowering school principals on the job satisfaction of 401 teachers, while examining the mediating effect of trust and psychological empowerment. Findings revealed significant relationships between psychological empowerment and empowering leadership, between empowering leadership and trust in principals and between empowering leadership and job satisfaction. Lastly, trust and psychological empowerment tended to mediate the relationship between empowering leadership and job satisfaction.

Kim and Beehr (2020) examined the impact of empowering leadership on work–home enrichment via psychological needs satisfaction and work engagement among 289 employees. Findings showed that empowering leadership tended to predict employees' need satisfaction, which in turn, predicted their work engagement. Moreover, work engagement was related to positive spill-over from work to home roles, implying that empowering leadership could help fulfil important psychological needs, besides

promoting employees' work engagement and their home functioning. Dağlı and Kalkan (2021) who examined the relationship between principals' empowering leadership and self-efficacy and job satisfaction among 260 teachers found that teachers tended to perceive their principals' empowering leadership as high; moreover, their self-efficacy and job satisfaction were also high. Findings also showed positive relationships among empowering leadership, teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction. While empowering leadership and self-efficacy significantly predicted job satisfaction, self-efficacy partially mediated the relationship between empowering leadership and job satisfaction.

Riaz, Shahid and Ali (2021) examined the relationship between empowering leadership and innovative work behaviour among 433 software engineers by analyzing the mediating role of staff psychological empowerment and a high-performance work system. Findings revealed that empowering leadership had a direct impact on innovative work behaviour and psychological empowerment, while a high-performance work system moderated the relationship between empowering leadership and psychological empowerment. Additionally, the high-performance work system ended to arbitrate between empowering leadership and innovative work behaviour, implying that staff under a high-performance work system tend to reciprocate positively to the organization. Çelik and Konan (2021) who examined the impact of empowering school principals, self-efficiency and organizational citizenship behaviour among 483 teachers found that the empowering leadership tended to positively predict teacher self-efficiency and organizational citizenship behaviour, while teacher self-efficiency tended to positively predict their organizational citizenship behaviour.

Dahleez, Aboramadan and Abu Sharikh(2022)examined the relationship between empowering leadership and staff work-related outcomes among 228 healthcare employees, using safety climate as a mediator between empowering leadership and organizational citizenship behaviour and between empowering leadership and risk-taking behaviour. Findings showed that empowering leadership was related to extra-role behaviours, while safety climate fully mediated the relationships between empowering leadership and organizational citizenship behaviour and between empowering leadership and risk-taking behaviour. On the other hand, Limon (2022) who examined the relationship between empowering leadership and job performance among 324 teachers found that empowering leadership significantly predicted organizational commitment, while organizational commitment, in turn,

significantly predicted job performance. Lastly, findings also indicated that the relationship between empowering leadership and job performance mediated by organizational commitment.

Horoub and Zargar (2022) examined the relationship between empowering leadership and job satisfaction among 178 academic staff to determine the moderating effect of leader-member exchange (LMX) for increasing job satisfaction that could lead to enhanced overall wellbeing. Findings showed that empowering leaders tended to have a significantly positive impact on job satisfaction with the moderating role of LMX along with the mediating effect of trust. Further, Zhang et al. (2022) who examined the relationships among empowering leadership, inclusive of psychological empowerment and innovation capacity among 1,355 nurses found that empowering leadership, inclusive leadership and high psychological empowerment were significantly related to high innovation capacity. Additionally, empowering and inclusive leadership tended to have a significant impact on innovation capacity through psychological empowerment, implying that both empowering and inclusive leadership, mediated by psychological empowerment, could promote innovation capacity among nurses. Lastly, Ahmed et al. (2022) examined the effect of empowering leadership on the job performance among 400 higher education staff with goal clarity and self-efficacy as mediators. Findings showed that empowering leadership tended to have a significantly positive effect on goal clarity, self-efficacy and job performance. Goal clarity and self-efficacy also acted as significant mediators between empowering leadership and job performance, implying that empowering leadership could have collaborative impact on self-efficacy, goal clarity and job performance.

### **Significance of the Study and Research Questions**

The literature review shows that empowering leadership is scarcely researched in the educational context in Malaysia. Further, previous studies primarily focused on the corporate sector, while the academic domain has been largely neglected. A thorough literature review indicated that no research has been conducted on primary and secondary principals' empowering leadership in Malaysia, particularly in the Bornean states of Sabah and Sarawak. This study is important because the findings would test theory that link empowering leadership with primary and secondary school management in the Malaysian context, besides providing principals with a framework to understand in what situations or circumstances that empowering leadership can enhance teachers' work engagement, job satisfaction and commitment.

Consequently, the purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of empowering leadership among primary and secondary principals in the two Bornean states of Malaysia, with the following research questions to guide the current research:

- Were there any significant differences in perceptions of empowering leadership by way of gender, age, years of experience and type of school?
- Were there any significant differences in empowering leadership behaviours based on the hypothetical value of 3.5?
- What were the group means and percentages of agreement among teachers with regard to empowering leadership among principals?

## **Methodology**

### **Instrument**

The Empowering Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) developed by Arnold et al. (2000) was used to collect data. It consists of 36 Likert-scale items ranging from Never = 1, Rarely = 2, Sometimes = 3, Often = 4, and Always = 5. It has five dimensions: (1) leading by example, (2) coaching, (3) informing, (4) showing concern/interacting with teachers and (5) participative decision-making. For Dimension 1, the total score is 25 (high = 23-25, average = 20-22, low = less than 20). For Dimension 2, the total score is 55 (high = 50-55, average = 44-49, low = less than 44). For Dimension 3, the total score is 25 (high = 23-25, average = 20-22, low = less than 20). For Dimension 4, the total score is 45 (high = 41-45, average = 36-40, low = less than 36). For Dimension 5, the total score is 30 (high = 27-30, average = 24-26, low = less than 24).

Arnold et al. (2000) had provided a detailed description on the construction and empirical evaluation of the questionnaire based on two separate studies; results indicated that all the dimensions had adequate validity and reliability to describe the data. Additionally, factor analysis from their third study showed that the ELQ dimensions partially overlapped with previously identified constructs. Foster (2019) who

tested its reliability on 206 respondents obtained a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.97. Lastly, to establish its reliability for the current study, a pilot test was carried out with 25 Malaysian teachers. Data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0 and results indicated that its Cronbach's alpha value was 0.98.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Participants were invited to complete the ELQ questionnaire online and were told that completion of the survey was their indication of consent to voluntarily participate in the study. All responses remained anonymous, while their identity remained confidential.

The sample comprised 63 teachers from two primary and four secondary schools in Sabah and Sarawak who had received teacher training before being posted in the schools. About 68.3 percent were males and 31.7 percent were female teachers; 34.9 percent taught at primary, while 65.1 percent taught at secondary schools. All of them came from diverse ethnic communities and were fluent in both the Malay Language and English. Demographic information of the sample is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents**

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	Below 25	0	0.0
	26-36	11	17.5
	37-47	26	41.3
	48-58	21	33.3
	More than 58	5	7.9
Gender	Male	43	68.3
	Female	20	31.7
Year of experience	Less than 5	10	15.9
	6-10	9	14.3
	11-15	9	14.3
	16-21	5	7.9
	More than 21	30	47.6
Type of school	Primary	22	34.9
	Secondary	41	65.1

Data that were collected were automatically transferred onto a spread sheet and subsequently analyzed using SPSS 26.0. First, Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences in the teachers' perceptions of empowering leadership in relation to age and years of experience, while Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine if there were any significant differences in terms of gender and type of school.

Second, Wilcoxon signed rank test was used to determine if any of the questionnaire items were significant at a hypothesized value of 3.5. Lastly, descriptive statistics were used to present group means and percentages of agreement on each item.

## Findings and Discussion

### Non-parametric Results

Kruskal-Wallis H test revealed no significant differences in teachers' perceptions of empowering leadership by way of age and years of experience, while Mann-Whitney U tests showed no significant differences in terms of gender and type of school (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U results**

Variable	Non-parametric test	<i>p</i> -value
Age	Kruskal-Wallis H test	0.310
Gender	Mann-Whitney U test	0.854
Years of experience	Kruskal-Wallis H test	0.890
Type of school	Mann-Whitney U test	0.053

Results of the Wilcoxon signed rank test showed that 35 of the questionnaire items in terms of empowering behaviours were significant at a *p*-value of 0.05 (see Table 3).

**Table3: Wilcoxon signed rank test based on the hypothesized value of 3.5**

<b>Dimension and Questionnaire Item</b>	<b>p-value</b>
<b>Dimension1: Leading by example</b>	
Sets high standards for performance by his/her own behaviour	<0.001*
Works as hard as he/she can	<0.001*
Works as hard as anyone in the school	<0.001*
Sets a good example by the way he/she behaves	<0.001*
Leads by example	<0.001*
<b>Dimension2: Coaching</b>	
Helps teaching groups see areas in which they need more training	0.002*
Suggests ways to improve teaching group's performance	0.004*
Encourages teaching group members to solve problems together	<0.001*
Encourages teaching group members to exchange information with one another	<0.001*
Provides help to teaching group members	0.002*
Teaches teaching group members how to solve problems on their own	<0.001*
Pays attention to efforts of teaching groups	<0.001*
Tells teaching groups when they perform well	0.003*
Supports the efforts of teaching groups	<0.001*
Helps teaching groups focus on their goals	0.001*
Helps develop good relationships among teaching group members	<0.001*
<b>Dimension3: Informing</b>	
Explains school decisions	<0.001*
Explains school goals	<0.001*
Explains the purpose of the school's policies to teaching groups	<0.001*
Explains rules and expectations to teaching groups	<0.001*
Explains his/her decisions and actions to teaching groups	<0.001*
<b>Dimension4: Showing concern or interacting with staff</b>	
Cares about teaching group members' personal problems	0.020*
Shows concern for teaching group members' well-being	<0.001*
Treats teaching group members as equals	0.001*
Takes the time to discuss teaching group members' concerns patiently	0.001*
Stays in touch with teaching groups	<0.001*
Gets along with teaching group members	<0.001*
Gives teaching group members honest and fair answers	<0.001*
Knows what work is being done in teaching groups	<0.001*
Finds time to chat with teaching group members	0.001*
<b>Dimension5: Participative decision-making</b>	
Encourages teaching group members to express ideas/suggestions	<0.001*
Listens to teaching group's ideas and suggestions	<0.001*
Uses teaching group's suggestions to make decisions	0.001*
Gives all teaching group members a chance to voice their opinions	<0.001*
Considers teaching group's ideas even when he/she disagrees with them	0.041*
Makes decisions that are based on everyone's ideas	0.070

\*p < 0.05

**Means and Percentages of Agreement**

Group means showed that principals tended to be average in leading by example, informing, and showing concern or interacting with staff. They tended to be low in coaching, and participative decision-making (see section under Instrument on how the levels are obtained for each dimension and Table 4 below).

**Table 4: Group means on the five dimensions of empowering leadership**

Dimensions	Group means
Dimension 1: Leading by example	21.4 (average)
Dimension 2: Coaching	43.5 (low)
Dimension 3: Informing	20.2 (average)
Dimension 4: Showing concern or interacting with staff	36.0 (average)
Dimension 5: Participative decision-making	23.6 (low)

To gain an overall view of the teachers' perceptions of empowering leadership among principals, percentages of "Often" (agree) and "Always" (agree) on each questionnaire item were collapsed. For Dimension 1 (leading), teachers revealed more than 80 percent agreement ("Often" and "Always") on four questionnaire items; 87.3 percent of them (30.2 + 57.1) revealed that principals often/always worked as hard as they could. Another 85.8 to 88.9 percent revealed that principals often/always worked as hard as anyone in the school (30.2 + 55.6 = 85.8), set a good example (36.5 + 50.8 = 87.3) and led by example (36.5 + 52.4 = 88.9). For Dimension 2 (coaching), teachers revealed more than 80 percent agreement ("Often" and "Always") on only three questionnaire items; 80.9 to 82.6 percent revealed that principals often/always supported their efforts (36.5 + 44.4 = 80.9), paid attention to their efforts (50.8 + 30.2 = 81) and encouraged them to exchange information with one another (54 + 28.6 = 82.6), as shown in Table 5.

For Dimension 3 (informing), teachers revealed more than 80 percent agreement on only one questionnaire item; 82.5 percent of them revealed that principals often/always explained rules and expectations to them (49.2 + 33.3). For Dimension 4 (sharing concern and interaction with teachers), teachers revealed more than 80 percent agreement on only two questionnaire items; 84.1 percent revealed that principals got along with them (50.8 + 33.3) and 84.2 percent gave them honest and fair answers (42.9 + 41.3). Lastly, for Dimension 5 (participative decision-making), none of the teachers revealed more than 80 percent agreement on any of the questionnaire items (see Table 5).

**Table5: Percentages of agreement on teachers’ perceptions of empowering leadership**

Item	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Dimension1:Leadingbyexample</b>					
Setshighstandardsforperformancebyhis/herownbehaviour	1.6	4.8	22.2	31.7	39.7
Worksashardashe/shecan	1.6	3.2	7.9	30.2	57.1
Worksashardasanyoneintheschool	4.8	1.6	7.9	30.2	55.6
Setsagoodexamplebythewayhe/shebehaves	1.6	1.6	9.5	36.5	50.8
Leadsbyexample	3.2	0.0	7.9	36.5	52.4
<b>Dimension2:Coaching</b>					
Helpsteachinggroupsseeareasinwhichtheyneedmoretraining	6.3	0.0	23.8	42.9	27.0
Suggestswaystoimproveteachinggroup'sperformance	6.3	6.3	14.3	42.9	30.2
Encouragesteachinggroupmemberstosolveproblemstogether	3.2	6.3	11.1	46.0	33.3
Encourages teaching group members to exchange information with one another	1.6	7.9	7.9	54.0	28.6
Provideshelptoteachinggroupmembers	4.8	6.3	15.9	39.7	33.3
Teachesteachinggroupmembershowtosolveproblemsontheirown	0.0	9.5	14.3	54.0	22.2
Paysattentiontoeffortsofteachinggroups	3.2	6.3	9.5	50.8	30.2
Tellsteachinggroupswhentheyperformwell	4.8	7.9	15.9	36.5	34.9
Supportstheeffortsofteachinggroups	3.2	3.2	12.7	36.5	44.4
Helpsteachinggroupsfocusontheirgoals	4.8	3.2	22.2	38.1	31.7
Helpsdevelopgoodrelationshipsamongteachinggroupmembers	3.2	7.9	9.5	34.9	44.4
<b>Dimension3:Informing</b>					
Explainschooldecisions	1.6	4.8	15.9	46.0	31.7
Explainschoolgoals	3.2	6.3	15.9	34.9	39.7
Explainspurposeoftheschool'spoliciestoteachinggroups	3.2	6.3	14.3	36.5	39.7
Explainsrulesandexpectationstoteachinggroups	1.6	4.8	11.1	49.2	33.3
Explainshis/herdecisionsandactionstoteachinggroups	3.2	4.8	12.7	41.3	38.1
<b>Dimension4:Showingconcern/interactingwithstaff</b>					
Caresaboutteachinggroupmembers'personalproblems	4.8	7.9	22.2	33.3	31.7
Showsconcernforteachinggroupmembers'well-being	1.6	7.9	14.3	39.7	36.5
Treatsteachinggroupmembersasequals	1.6	14.3	9.5	31.7	42.9
Takesthetimetodiscussteachinggroupmembers'concernspatiently	1.6	6.3	22.2	41.3	28.6
Staysintouchwithteachinggroups	3.2	4.8	15.9	34.9	41.3
Getsalongwithteachinggroupmembers	1.6	6.3	7.9	50.8	33.3
Givesteachinggroupmembershonestandfairanswers	1.6	1.6	12.7	42.9	41.3
Knowswhatworkisbeingdoneinteachinggroups	1.6	3.2	19.0	42.9	33.3
Findstimetochatwithteachinggroupmembers	0.0	7.9	22.2	42.9	27.0
<b>Dimension5:Participativedecision-making</b>					
Encouragesteachinggroupmemberstoexpressideas/suggestions	3.2	6.3	12.7	31.7	46.0
Listentoteachinggroup'sideasandsuggestions	1.6	7.9	20.6	28.6	41.3
Usesteachinggroup'ssuggestionstomakedecisions	1.6	3.2	27.0	39.7	28.6
Givesallteachinggroupmembersachancetovoicetheiropinions	1.6	4.8	15.9	31.7	46.0
Considersteachinggroup'sideasevenwhenhe/shedisagreeswiththem	1.6	9.5	25.4	41.3	22.2
Makesdecisionsthatarebasedoneveryone'sideas	1.6	9.5	27.0	41.3	20.6

*Never=1, Rarely=2, Sometimes=3, Often=4, Always=5*

As suggested by the findings, the majority of the teachers tended to perceive principals as demonstrating low to average levels of empowering leadership. Findings implied that Malaysian principals need to gain deeper insight into the important dimensions of empowering leadership. This is because empowering leadership is crucial as it not only encourages decision-making among teachers, but also increases their sense of meaning, while offering them opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills. Moreover, teachers can only function to their best ability with high self-efficacy over their vocation; in contrast, over-adherence to hierarchy or standard procedure tends to have an adverse impact on service excellence. Empowering leadership serves as a powerful variable that can enhance the teaching and learning process in the long run since it grants self-sufficiency that increases principals' trust in the teaching teams and collaboration through shared leadership. Under current competitive global conditions, service organizations, especially private schools, need to empower teachers to have greater participation in decision-making.

### **Recommendations and Concluding Word**

In order to practise empowering leadership, first, principals can become leaders by example who possess the ability to guide teachers through positive behaviour and attitudes with the intention is to inspire them to emulate desirable behaviour. According to Lynch (2020), principals who lead by example get things done by taking their work seriously and performing their fair share of the work rather than staying in their office all day and delegating the heavy tasks to their deputies. For example, they spend time walking the halls, going from classroom to classroom where the real action is, thus setting the tone for appropriate classroom conduct and creating an active learning environment. During classroom visits, they look for specific examples of student learning and ownership, besides talking to students and teachers about their goals.

Second, principals can act as instructive coaches to teachers by focusing on improving classroom instruction, not just managerial tasks (Guhlin, 2022; Steiner & Kowal, 2007). To ensure that their instructional coaching is geared toward meeting the specific needs of the school, faculty and students, they can determine goals and needs carefully, select a coaching approach to fulfil them, and ultimately, sustain them with time and support. They have thorough knowledge of the curriculum, lesson plans and resources, besides taking the time to observe the flow of lessons and primary elements of learning. They model the actions they want teachers to enact and work together with them to instil norms, values and rituals that authentically reflect a shared campus culture.

Third, principals can take several actions to empower teachers (Ziegler, 2022). They can display trust toward teachers by giving them the autonomy they require for success. Trust encourages teachers to engage in efficacious decision-making and be held accountable for the outcomes. Further, they can cultivate an inclusive environment

that encourages and supports all teachers, making them feel respected and valued. Moreover, principals can act in the way in which they want their team to act by being respectful and open-minded. They can also establish a concise and detailed set of values and practise what they advocate, by praising and rewarding individuals who uphold them.

Fourth, to be more empowering, principals can demonstrate effective communication, active listening and integrity (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023). They can practise effective communication by speaking clearly to teachers when discussing expectations, providing feedback or explaining the teaching and learning requirements of a project or task. Further, they can practise active listening by giving their full attention to teachers while they are speaking and by limiting external distractions while having a conversation with them. They can display integrity by being honest, reliable and trustworthy, and by acting in accordance with their previous promises or expectations.

Fifth, principals can demonstrate empathy, decisiveness and adaptability to empower teachers (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023). Being empathetic, they will be more aware of teachers' emotions, and try to understand their feelings and provide support to them, so that the teachers feel more comfortable approaching them with issues or seeking their guidance. To become effective decision-makers, principals can obtain teachers' input before making important decisions that enable them to understand the impact of each choice, besides empowering teachers to participate in decision-making. To be adaptive, they should be able to face unfamiliar situations and use them as an opportunity to grow and learn more about the education industry.

To conclude, this study was an initial step in examining teachers' perceptions of empowering leadership behaviours among principals in Malaysia. Future research can examine the constructs in relation to teachers' job satisfaction, motivation, collegiality and other psychosocial variables that influence the relationship between teachers and principals. To improve generalizability of findings, future research can adopt larger, random samples drawn from different locations in relation to various demographic variables.

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