

The Role of Work Engagement in the Relationship Between Authentic Leadership and Innovative Work Behaviour Among Teachers

Nik Karimah Binti Nik Hassan and Nurul Fadly bin Habidin

Abstract– This study examines the role of work engagement in the relationship between authentic leadership and innovative work behaviour among teachers. Grounded in Authentic Leadership Theory (ALT) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the research investigates how work engagement facilitates the link between leadership and innovation. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 483 teachers in the East Zone of Peninsular Malaysia and analysed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). Results indicate that authentic leadership does not directly enhance work engagement but has an indirect effect on innovative work behaviour through work engagement. These findings contribute to leadership and educational research by emphasizing work engagement as a mechanism linking authentic leadership to teacher innovation. Practical implications highlight the need for leadership strategies that enhance teacher engagement to foster innovation. Future research should explore longitudinal effects and moderating variables to further refine these relationships.

Keywords– Authentic Leadership; Work Engagement; Innovative Work Behaviour; Teachers

I. INTRODUCTION

We are witnessing an unprecedented imperative for pedagogical innovation amid rapid technological and policy shifts in education (Janssen, 2000). Teacher innovation is increasingly recognized as essential for enhancing learning outcomes and promoting equity (Avolio et al., 2004; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Authentic leadership—characterized by relational transparency, ethical decision-making, and balanced processing—nurtures work engagement by satisfying teachers' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005). Elevated work engagement—marked by vigor, dedication, and absorption—mobilizes the cognitive and emotional resources necessary for teachers to experiment with novel instructional strategies and respond creatively to curricular reforms (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008; Gorgievski et al., 2020).

Yet, the mechanisms through which authentic leadership translates into innovative work behaviour remain underexplored, especially within Malaysia's East Zone, where professional autonomy is constrained by institutional hierarchies and resource disparities (Ibrahim et al., 2019; Zhou et al., 2022). Grounded in Authentic

Leadership Theory and Self-Determination Theory, this study investigates how work engagement mediates the relationship between authentic leadership and innovative work behaviour among secondary school teachers in Kelantan, Terengganu, and Pahang. By unpacking these motivational processes, the research aims to inform leadership development and policy strategies that foster a sustainable culture of innovation in education.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Modern educational systems increasingly demand teacher-led innovation to address diverse learning needs and policy reforms (Janssen, 2000; Gorgievski et al., 2020). Authentic leadership—marked by transparency, ethical decision-making, and balanced processing—has emerged as a promising catalyst for fostering engagement and creative teaching practices (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Yet, empirical evidence reveals inconsistent direct links between authentic leadership and innovative work behaviour among teachers, with some studies reporting non-significant effects (Bamford et al., 2013). This inconsistency suggests that underlying motivational processes, such as work engagement, may mediate how leadership translates into classroom innovation (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008; Rahmadani et al., 2020). In Malaysia's East Zone—where institutional hierarchies, limited professional autonomy, and resource disparities pose distinct challenges (Ibrahim et al., 2019)—understanding this mediation is critical. Accordingly, this study investigates whether and how work engagement functions as the psychological mechanism linking authentic leadership to innovative work behaviour among secondary school teachers in Kelantan, Terengganu, and Pahang.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Authentic leadership, characterized by transparency, ethical conduct, balanced information processing, and self-awareness, establishes trust and psychological capital that energize employees and foster deeper emotional and cognitive investment in their work (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008). When leaders create environments that satisfy basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness core tenets of Self-Determination Theory teachers experience heightened vigor, dedication, and absorption in their roles (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005). This elevated engagement mobilizes the cognitive and emotional resources necessary for innovation, as evidenced by teachers proactively designing new instructional strategies

Nik Karimah Binti Nik Hassan, Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia (Email: p20192001579@siswa.upsi.edu.my)
Nurul Fadly bin Habidin, Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia (Email: fadly@fpe.upsi.edu.my)

and adapting to pedagogical reforms (Gorgievski et al., 2020).

Crucially, empirical studies demonstrate that work engagement serves as a key mediator between leadership and innovative behaviours: in contexts lacking psychological safety or institutional support, the direct impact of authentic leadership may be muted, but its indirect effect channeled through enhanced engagement consistently predicts innovation (Zhou et al., 2022; Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009; Yan et al., 2021).

IV.METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Participants

This study was conducted utilizing a deductive approach grounded in theoretical frameworks. A survey strategy was adopted as the primary research method, aligning with a quantitative research design (Saunders, 2019). The study's respondents comprised 483 teachers from schools in the East Zone of Peninsular Malaysia.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using validated instruments for authentic leadership (ALQ; Walumbwa et al., 2008), work engagement (UWES; Schaufeli et al., 2002), and innovative work behaviour (Janssen, 2000). PLS-SEM was utilized for hypothesis testing and mediation analysis (Hair et al., 2019).

V. FINDINGS

This study tested three hypotheses examining the relationships among authentic leadership (AL), work engagement (WE), and innovative work behaviour (IWB), H1: Authentic leadership (AL) has a positive and significant effect on work engagement (WE), H2: Work engagement (WE) has a positive and significant effect on innovative work behaviour (IWB) and H3: Work engagement (WE) mediates the relationship between authentic leadership (AL) and innovative work behaviour (IWB). The measurement model demonstrated strong psychometric properties (see Table I), with all constructs achieving composite reliabilities above 0.94 and AVE values exceeding 0.63, indicating robust internal consistency and convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019).

TABLE I: COMPOSITE RELIABILITY AND AVE FOR CONSTRUCTS

Construct	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Authentic leadership	0.967	0.660
Work engagement	0.940	0.639
Innovative work behaviour	0.951	0.685

Structural model assessments (Table II) reveal that authentic leadership did not exert a direct effect on work engagement (H1: $\beta = -.034$, $T = 0.352$, $p = 0.725$), whereas work engagement significantly predicted innovative work

behaviour (H2: $\beta = 0.668$, $T = 19.519$, $p < 0.001$) and mediated the relationship between leadership and innovation (H3: $\beta = 0.223$, $T = 4.012$, $p < 0.001$). These results underscore work engagement as the critical mechanism through which authentic leadership translates into teachers' innovative practices.

TABLE II: DIRECT AND INDIRECT RELATIONSHIP

Hypothesis	Path	β	T	p	Result
H1	AL $\rightarrow$ WE	-0.034	0.352	0.725	Not Supported
H2	WE $\rightarrow$ IWB	0.668	19.519	0.000	Supported
H3	AL $\rightarrow$ WE $\rightarrow$ IWB	0.223	4.012	0.000	Supported

VI.CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

Limitations

While this research demonstrates work engagement's pivotal role in translating authentic leadership into teacher innovation, three key limitations warrant acknowledgment. First, its cross-sectional design offers only a temporal snapshot, constraining causal inference; longitudinal or experimental studies are needed to map how leadership and engagement interact over time. Second, the exclusive use of self-reported questionnaires may inflate observed relationships due to social desirability or response biases; integrating objective performance indicators and peer assessments would strengthen validity. Third, focusing solely on secondary school teachers in Malaysia's East Zone reflects specific cultural and institutional contexts, which may limit broader applicability; replicating this study across diverse regions and educational levels will test the generalizability of these findings.

Conclusion and Implications

This study advances our understanding of how authentic leadership drives innovative work behaviour through the motivational mechanism of work engagement. Grounded in Authentic Leadership Theory and Self-Determination Theory, the findings reveal that leadership's influence on innovation is indirect requiring an engaged workforce to convert leadership behaviours into creative outcomes. Practically, school leaders should cultivate transparent, ethical, and supportive environments that fulfill teachers' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness to sustain high engagement. By reducing administrative burdens, promoting pedagogical autonomy, and fostering a culture that values experimentation and tolerates reasonable failure, educational institutions can leverage engagement as a catalyst for sustained innovation. Future research should explore intervention-based leadership development programs and longitudinal designs to establish causality and test applicability across varied educational contexts.

REFERENCES

- Avolio, B. J., & Gardner, W. L. (2005). Authentic leadership development: Getting to the root of positive forms of leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(3), 315–338. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.001>
- Avolio, B. J., Walumbwa, F. O., & Weber, T. J. (2009). Leadership: Current theories, research, and future directions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60(1), 421–449. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163621>
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2008). Towards a model of work engagement. *Career Development International*, 13(3), 209–223. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430810870476>
- Bakker, A. B., Schaufeli, W. B., Leiter, M. P., & Taris, T. W. (2008). Work engagement: An emerging concept in occupational health psychology. *Work & Stress*, 22(3), 187–200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678370802393649>
- Bamford, M., Wong, C. A., & Laschinger, H. (2013). The influence of authentic leadership and areas of work-life on work engagement of registered nurses. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 21(3), 529–540. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2834.2012.01399.x>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behaviour. Springer.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behaviour. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01
- Gagné, M., & Deci, E. L. (2005). Self-determination theory and work motivation. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 26(4), 331–362.
- Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2019). A primer on partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Hakanen, J. J., Perhoniemi, R., & Toppinen-Tanner, S. (2008). Positive gain spirals at work: From job resources to work engagement, personal initiative, and work-unit innovativeness. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 73(1), 78–91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2008.01.003>
- Janssen, O. (2000). Job demands, perceptions of effort-reward fairness, and innovative work behaviour. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 73(3), 287–302. <https://doi.org/10.1348/096317900167038>
- Niemiec, C. P., & Ryan, R. M. (2009). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom: Applying self-determination theory to educational practice. *Theory and Research in Education*, 7(2), 133–144. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878509104318>
- Salanova, M., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2008). A cross-national study of work engagement as a mediator between job resources and proactive behaviour. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19(1), 116–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190701763982>
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2019). Research methods for business students (8th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Walumbwa, F. O., Avolio, B. J., Gardner, W. L., Wernsing, T. S., & Peterson, S. J. (2008). Authentic leadership: Development and validation of a theory-based measure. *Journal of Management*, 34(1), 89–126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206307308913>
- Xanthopoulou, D., Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2009). Work engagement and financial returns: A diary study on the role of job and personal resources. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 82(1), 180–200.