

# Engaging Leadership and Teachers' Motivation to Lead: Evidence from Malaysian Secondary Schools

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**Abstract** – Educational leadership today requires more than management alone. On the contrary, it also demands added value in the form of inspiration, relationships, and empowerment. Distributive leadership practices are highly encouraged in Malaysian schools, and this national effort is supported by the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025). However, empirical studies exploring how principals' Engaging Leadership (EL) fosters teachers' Motivation To Lead (MTL) are still limited. Transformational or instructional leadership is the main focus of research, and existing studies still emphasize the psychological mechanisms that motivate teachers to assume leadership roles. The framework for this quantitative study is based on Schaufeli's (2015) Engaged Leadership and Chan and Drasgow's (2001) MTL. This cross-sectional study used stratified random sampling to survey 380 teachers in secondary schools throughout Kelantan. Moreover, questionnaires comprising the Involvement Leadership Scale and the MTL Scale were administered, and the data were analyzed using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 29. Results from descriptive, correlation, and regression analyses revealed a weak but positive relationship. Principal involvement, leadership, and teacher MTL also reflected significant relationships. Although it reveals that the relationship was modest, it provides valuable insights into the principal practices that will foster teacher MTL. These findings practically underscore the need for professional learning programs to equip principals with participatory leadership competencies to foster a culture of shared leadership and empowerment. Therefore, by bridging leadership and motivation through the lens of participatory leadership, this study contributes to Malaysian and global discussions on how schools can become transformative ecosystems for leadership, learning, and innovation.

**Keywords** – Engaging Leadership (EL), Motivation To Lead (MTL), teacher leadership, educational transformation, Malaysia.

## I. INTRODUCTION

School leadership plays an important role in the effectiveness of school organizations, teacher motivation, and learning quality in the current 21st-century educational transformation. The Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM) 2013–2025 serves as a guideline for this change agenda by placing school leadership as a key factor towards improving school quality (Ministry of Education Malaysia [MOE], 2013). The MOE Strategic Plan 2024–2030 is still in its early implementation phase. However, it also emphasizes facing the challenges of collaborative, digital, and sustainable education (MOE, 2024).

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In this context, Engaging Leadership (EL) emerges as a leadership style that emphasizes quality relationships, psychological empowerment, and professional support for teachers. Principals who practice EL create a positive work environment, instill trust, and foster inspiration among teachers (Schaufeli, 2015). Hence, this approach is particularly relevant in today's educational ecosystem, which demands that teachers serve as instructional, collaborative, and innovative leaders.

Concurrently, Motivation To Lead (MTL) refers to a teacher's willingness and inclination to take on leadership roles. Although teachers often assume a variety of responsibilities, such as serving as a committee chair, mentor, program coordinator, or innovation leader, their level of MTL is strongly influenced by their relationship with school leadership (Chan & Drasgow, 2001).

Therefore, the relationship between principals' EL and teachers' MTL needs to be understood. This is important from a scholarly perspective and to support national agendas and global-level recommendations. Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education also calls for responsive, inclusive, and effective educational leadership (United Nations Educational, Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2016). This study also aligns with Malaysian school assessment standards, such as SKPMg2/Kualiti@Sekolah, which emphasize supportive, collaborative, and empowering leadership (MOE, 2017).

## Background of the Study

The Malaysian education sector is entering a challenging phase of change, driven by social change, digitalization, and the increasing complexity of the teaching profession. On the ground, implementation still demonstrates a mismatch, despite the PPPM 2013–2025 emphasizing teacher empowerment and improving the quality of school leadership (MOE, 2013). On the other hand, teachers continue to face work pressures, technologically driven pedagogical changes, and high collaboration needs, which demand a more holistic, human, and support-oriented form of leadership than traditional management approaches (MOE, 2024).

In this context, EL offers a more relevant approach due to its emphasis on professional relationships, trust, autonomy, and inspiration. EL behaviours have been demonstrated to strengthen psychological well-being and organizational commitment (Schaufeli, 2015), making them important in school environments that rely on social interaction and emotional support. Concurrently, teachers are increasingly playing a broader leadership role. However, their readiness depends on MTL, an internal tendency, social responsibility, and a willingness to lead without relying on rewards (Chan & Drasgow, 2001).

Although policies such as SKPMg2 and Kualiti@Sekolah call for teacher involvement in school leadership (MOE, 2017; Jemaah Nazir & Jaminan Kualiti, 2019), the level of MTL among school teachers remains moderate (Mohamad. M, 2020). Thus, this indicates that principals' leadership experience is a key driver of MTL. However, empirical studies on the relationship between EL and MTL remain limited in the Malaysian context, particularly in the state of Kelantan, which has its own organizational cultural dynamics. Consequently, this gap calls for more in-depth research to understand how principals' engaging and supportive leadership styles can sustainably build MTL among teachers.

## II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Although school leadership is at the core of the Malaysian education system's aspirations, the implementation of leadership that truly supports teachers' professional development remains inconsistent. The PPPM 2013–2025 report demonstrates significant gaps between policy and reality, particularly in relation to psychosocial support, teacher autonomy, and involvement in decision-making (MOE, 2013; 2024). On the other hand, local pilot studies have also reported that principals' participatory leadership practices vary widely across schools, which in turn affects teachers' MTL (Hamzah & Ishak, 2024).

However, Malaysian research in the last five years has mainly focused on traditional leadership models such as instructional and contextual leadership. For example, Hassan's (2023) study shows that instructional leadership practices are still the main focus of school leadership teams in Malaysia, while Othman's (2024) study also highlights the continued emphasis on instruments that measure instructional leadership and organizational commitment. In addition, Yusoff's (2022) study found that principals' contextual leadership has a significant relationship with teacher commitment, indicating that the focus on traditional leadership models still dominates academic discourse. In the secondary school context, engaging leadership (EL), which emphasizes human relationships, empowerment and inspiration, is still under-explored empirically. The lack of research on EL in the education system creates a theoretical gap. This research is important to understand the psychological and social mechanisms that can increase motivation to lead among teachers..

Furthermore, although policies such as SKPMg2 and SKPM Kualiti@Sekolah require active involvement of teachers in school leadership, recent studies have shown that teachers are often given leadership roles not simply because of intrinsic motivation or sufficient leadership support (Goh, 2023). Therefore, this situation indicates a mismatch between policy expectations and the reality of teacher motivation..

This knowledge gap is more pronounced in the Kelantan context, where state-specific empirical studies have a limited understanding of EL's effectiveness in building teacher leadership motivation. Notably, leadership development strategies are difficult for schools

and policymakers to implement without contextual data. Global agenda efforts, such as SDG 4, to develop inclusive school environments and teacher capacity (UNESCO, 2016), are also affected by this gap. Thus, the importance of this study is obvious for sustainable teacher leadership development, as it fills a literature gap and provides empirical evidence.

This study aims to identify the level of EL among secondary school principals in Kelantan and the level of MTL among secondary school teachers in the same region. It will also analyze the relationship between EL and teacher MTL, and evaluate how EL influences teacher MTL. Additionally, the study will offer suggestions for enhancing principal leadership based on empirical findings to support the development of teacher leadership.

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Engaging Leadership*

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008) and the Job Demands-Resources (JDR) Model (Demerouti et al., 2001) serve as the foundation for the concept of EL. To increase work engagement and decrease burnout, Schaufeli (2015) incorporated leadership into the JDR model and argued that "engaging" leaders help meet the three fundamental psychological needs of followers: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Moreover, to increase employee work engagement, Schaufeli (2021) recently defined EL as leadership behaviour that connects, inspires, empowers, and strengthens. Hence, this model highlights that effective leadership involves creating a work environment rich in social and psychological resources rather than merely issuing directives.

According to Schaufeli (2015, 2021) and supported by Ramadani et al.'s (2020) validation of the scale, the four core elements of EL include strengthening. This involves leaders recognizing contributions, providing positive and developmental feedback, and helping teachers improve professionalism. Such actions satisfy the need for competence and strengthen teachers' self-confidence. Furthermore, the second element is connecting. In this context, leaders create opportunities for teachers to communicate openly, foster a sense of belonging within the organization, and encourage collaboration among organizational members. This element meets the need for relatedness through positive working relationships and social support. Subsequently, the third element is empowering, in which leaders provide teachers with autonomy, decision-making space, and trust. Hence, this strengthens teachers' sense of autonomy and makes them more willing to take leadership initiatives (Van Tuin et al., 2021). Inspiring is the final element, where leaders communicate a meaningful vision, give tasks meaning, and channel moral and emotional inspiration. This element fosters a sense of meaningfulness in work and encourages teachers to engage in leadership and innovation (Schaufeli, 2021). In a school setting, all four are given space to lead a project, they are recognized for their efforts, a

collaborative culture is fostered among school staff, and daily tasks are connected to educational goals.

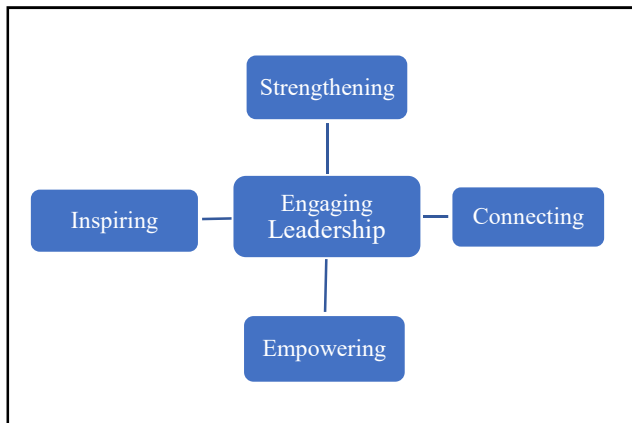


Figure 1. Engaging Leadership (Schaufeli, 2015)

### Motivation to Lead

MTL was introduced by Chan and Drasgow (2001) as a psychological construct that explains the extent to which individuals are motivated to assume leadership roles. The original MTL model includes three dimensions: affective-identity, social-normative, and noncalculative (Chan & Drasgow, 2001). Moreover, recent systematic and empirical reviews by Auvinen et al. (2020) and Amadi et al. (2025) emphasized that MTL is tied to a combination of internal factors, such as personality, values, leadership self-efficacy, and contextual factors, including leadership climate and leadership experience.

According to Chan and Drasgow (2001), MTL has three core dimensions. Affective Identity MTL refers to individuals who lead because they enjoy leadership and view it as part of their identity. They feel comfortable in leadership roles and tend to take on leadership responsibilities voluntarily (Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Auvinen et al., 2020). Subsequently, Social Normative MTL refers to individuals who are motivated to lead because they perceive it as a moral or social responsibility. They lead because it is “right” or “appropriate” based on organizational norms, culture, or community values (Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Amadi et al., 2025). Finally, Non-Calculative MTL refers to individuals who are willing to lead without overestimating personal costs and rewards. They do not make personal benefits the main condition for assuming a leadership role. This dimension is important in the context of teachers who often lead even with limited material rewards (Amadi et al., 2025). Recent reviews emphasize that MTL can also be understood as a comprehensive orientation to seeking, accepting, and maintaining leadership roles over time, dependent on experience, self-efficacy, and the organizational leadership climate (Auvinen et al., 2020; Amadi et al., 2025).

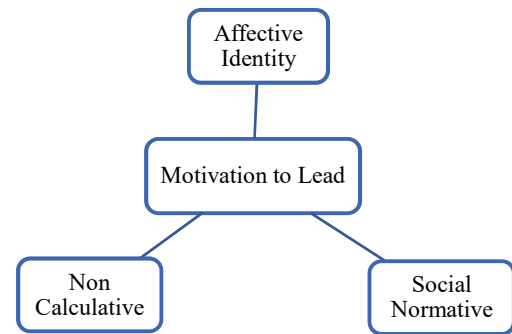


Figure 2. Motivation to Lead (Chan & Drasgow, 2001)

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study integrates the EL (Schaufeli, 2015) and MTL (Chan & Drasgow, 2001) models to explain how principals’ leadership experiences influence teachers’ propensity to lead. Based on both theories, leadership that involves, supports, and inspires is expected to create a conducive work environment, thereby increasing teachers’ motivation to assume leadership roles. Thus, this framework assumes a direct relationship in which principals’ EL predicts teachers’ MTL in secondary schools in Kelantan.

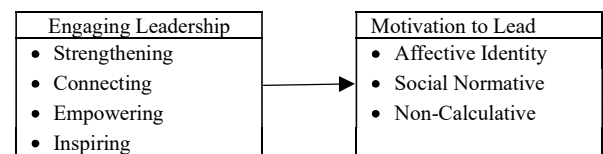


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework

## IV. METHOD

### Study Design

This study used a cross-sectional quantitative survey design to assess the relationship between principals’ EL and teachers’ MTL in secondary schools in Kelantan. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for collecting data from a large population over a specific period of time, and allows for the analysis of relationships and tendencies in behavioural patterns as described by Creswell and Creswell (2018). Additionally, the survey method allows testing theoretical models involving psychological variables such as EL and MTL, which require large samples to yield stable statistical estimates.

### Population and Sampling

The study population comprised government secondary school teachers across the state of Kelantan. A stratified random sampling procedure was used to ensure representation across different districts and school categories, thereby reducing the risk of selection bias. According to the Krejcie and Morgan’s (1970) sample size determination table, the minimum sample size for a large population is approximately 375. However, this study

involved 380 teachers, which met the statistical requirements for correlation and regression analysis, as recommended by Creswell (2012).

**Research Instruments**

The research instruments consisted of a structured questionnaire that included demographic data of the respondents, the EL construct, and the MTL construct. Specifically, the EL scale in this study was adapted from an instrument developed by Schaufeli (2015), while the MTL scale was adapted from Chan and Drasgow (2001). All items used a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The use of this standardized scale aligns with Creswell and Creswell (2023) recommendations to use valid and robust psychometric instruments in quantitative research.

**Instrument Validity**

The instrument’s validity is assessed through face and content validity. Face validity is established when the instrument is reviewed by experts in educational leadership, psychometrics, and research methodology. The expert panel assesses clarity, language suitability, and item coherence with the local context. Notably, this review ensures that each item is clearly understood by teachers, as Mohajan (2017) explained, highlighting the importance of face validity in increasing the reliability of respondents’ responses.

The Content Validity Index (CVI) in Table 1 shows that the constructs of EL and MTL each obtained a value of 1.00, while the construct of Motivation to Lead recorded a value of 0.99. Content validity is confirmed using the Content Validity Index (CVI) as described by Polit and Beck (2006). The overall CVI value is above 0.80, indicating that the questionnaire items have sufficient ability to represent the constructs of EL and MTL accurately.

**TABLE 1: CONTENT VALIDITY INDEX (CVI) OF THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

Variable	Panel					Content Validity Index (CVI)
	1	2	3	4	5	
Engaging Leadership	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Motivation to Lead	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.99	1.00	0.99

**Instrument Reliability**

The reliability of the instrument is tested using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. Notably, reliability values for the constructs of Engaging Leadership (0.880) and Motivation to Lead (0.788) are well above the 0.70 threshold recommended in social research (George & Mallery, 2019), indicating strong item stability. As reported in Table 2, the overall Alpha value (0.940) further confirms that this instrument is robust and suitable for quantitative measurement in the context of educational

organizations. These reliability findings assure that the instrument used has strong measurement stability for analysis in this study.

**TABLE 2: RELIABILITY FINDINGS FOR THE QUESTIONNAIRE ON ENGAGING LEADERSHIP AND MOTIVATION TO LEAD.**

Variable	Item	Cronbach’s Alpha
Engaging Leadership	12	0.884
Motivation to Lead	27	0.800
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>0.940</b>

**Data Analysis Procedure**

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Version 29, which included descriptive statistics to characterize the respondents. Normality tests based on skewness and kurtosis were used to assess the normality assumption, as suggested by (George & Mallery, 2006). Subsequently, Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between EL and MTL. To test EL’s ability to predict MTL, a linear regression analysis was conducted. This analytical procedure followed the guidelines of multivariate analysis as suggested by Hair et al. (2019) and Tabachnick and Fidell (2019).

Moreover, through this comprehensive methodological approach, the study provided valid and robust empirical evidence on the influence of principals’ EL on teachers’ MTL in Kelantan secondary schools.

**V. FINDINGS**

Descriptive analysis revealed that principals’ EL was high among secondary school teachers in Kelantan. As depicted in Table 3, the overall mean score for EL was 4.26 (SP = 0.42), indicating a very high level. Of the four dimensions measured, the element of connecting recorded the highest score (M = 4.51, SP = 0.51), followed by empowering (M = 4.23, SP = 0.53) and inspiring (M = 4.22, SP = 0.53). Although empowering recorded the lowest score among the other dimensions, its value was still high (M = 4.07, SP = 0.51). Thus, this finding indicates that teachers rated their principals as individuals who consistently engage school members through strong interpersonal relationships, professional empowerment, and inspirational delivery.

**TABLE 3: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR ENGAGING LEADERSHIP (EL)**

Dimension	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Connecting	4.51	0.51	Very High
Empowering	4.23	0.53	High
Inspiring	4.22	0.53	High
Strengthening	4.07	0.51	High
<b>Overall EL</b>	<b>4.26</b>	<b>0.42</b>	<b>Very High</b>

For the MTL construct, the overall score was moderate (M = 3.36, SP = 0.31), as presented in Table 4.

The social normative dimension recorded the highest value ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SP = 0.48$ ), indicating that teachers are more motivated to lead based on professional responsibility and social norms that encourage involvement in leadership. On the other hand, the affective identity dimensions ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SP = 0.38$ ) and non-calculative identity dimensions ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SP = 0.47$ ) were at a moderate level. This indicates that teachers' desire to lead based on internal motivation or without considering personal costs was lower than motivation in the form of social responsibility.

**TABLE 4: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR MOTIVATION TO LEAD (MTL)**

Dimension	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Affective Identity	3.26	0.38	Moderate
Non-Calculative	3.06	0.47	Moderate
social Normative	3.76	0.48	High
<b>Overall MTL</b>	<b>3.36</b>	<b>0.31</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

Overall, the descriptive analysis reflects that although principals' EL practices are at a very high level, teachers' MTL remains moderate. Notably, this pattern suggests that positive leadership behaviour has not fully translated into teachers' active motivation to assume leadership roles. This justifies the need for inferential analysis to understand the true impact of EL on MTL in the context of secondary schools in Kelantan.

Pearson's correlation analysis demonstrated a positive, significant relationship between principals' EL and teachers' MTL. As presented in Table 5, the correlation between the two constructs was  $r = .416$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating a moderate level of relationship strength. Thus, this finding indicates that the higher the level of EL demonstrated by principals, the higher the tendency of teachers to assume leadership roles in schools.

**TABLE 5: PEARSON CORRELATION BETWEEN ENGAGING LEADERSHIP AND MOTIVATION TO LEAD (N=380)**

Variable	Motivation to Lead (MTL)	P
Engaging Leadership (EL)	$r = .416$	$< .001$

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

This moderate relationship suggests that leadership practices that connect, strengthen, empower, and inspire do indeed play an important role in stimulating teacher leadership motivation. However, they are not the only determining factor. This result is consistent with international findings that positive leadership experiences contribute to psychological growth and increased leadership motivation in educational organizations. Nevertheless, the relationship is often moderate due to other contextual factors such as school culture, workload, and peer support.

Overall, these correlation findings provide initial evidence that EL is a relevant predictor of MTL among secondary school teachers in Kelantan and justify further regression analysis to determine the unique contribution of this variable to teachers' leadership motivation.

Furthermore, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which principals' EL predicted teachers' MTL. The analysis revealed that EL was a significant predictor of MTL (Table 6). The independent coefficient value ( $B = 0.313$ ,  $SE = 0.035$ ) and the standardized coefficient ( $\beta = 0.416$ ) indicated that a one-unit increase in EL was associated with a 0.313-unit increase in MTL. The high t-value ( $t = 8.902$ ,  $p < .001$ ) confirmed that this relationship was statistically significant.

**TABLE 6: LINEAR REGRESSION PREDICTING TEACHERS MOTIVATION TO LEAD (N=380)**

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	P
(Constant)	2.031	0.150	-	13.529	$< .001$
Engaging Leadership	0.313	0.035	0.416	8.902	$< .001$

Therefore, this finding indicates that engaging, supportive, and inspiring leadership practices by principals have a significant impact on teachers' propensity to take on leadership roles in schools. Although the effect is moderate, the strong and significant beta value indicates that EL makes a unique and important contribution to predicting teachers' MTL, consistent with international literature that emphasizes the role of interpersonal relationships and empowerment as drivers of leadership motivation in educational organizations.

Overall, the results of this regression confirm that EL is a significant predictor of MTL among secondary school teachers in Kelantan, thereby reinforcing the need to strengthen principals' leadership competencies through continuous professional development grounded in a more engaging and supportive leadership approach.

## VI. DISCUSSION

The study revealed that principals' EL was at a very high level, while teachers' MTL was at a moderate level. Correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive relationship between the two variables ( $r = .416$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and regression analysis confirmed that EL was a significant predictor of MTL ( $\beta = .416$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Additionally, these results confirmed that leadership behaviours involving support, connection, and inspiration play a crucial role in enhancing teachers' tendency to lead, align with Schaufeli's (2015) findings and the extended findings by Schaufeli (2021), which established that EL can boost intrinsic motivation through positive psychological experiences.

Notably, these results are in line with local evidence in Hoque and Raya (2023) study which reported that principal leadership styles that emphasize human relations and sensitivity to teachers' emotional needs are important drivers of teachers' professional attitudes and behaviours. Furthermore, Goh (2023) study found that a collaborative school culture with strong principal support also empowered teacher leadership – suggesting that elements of emotional support, human relations and building a positive school culture play important roles in influencing

teachers' motivation and professional behaviours. The study confirmed that teachers are more responsive to leaders who practice leadership styles grounded in empathy, empowerment, and trust. Thus, this finding complements the results of this study, which demonstrated EL as a significant predictor of leadership motivation.

Comparisons with international studies reveal both similarities and differences. Mazzetti et al. (2022) revealed that EL increased commitment and proactive behaviour in organizations, consistent with this study's findings of increased MTL aligning with EL practices. Similarly, van Tuin et al. (2021) demonstrated that EL can strengthen employee engagement and motivation through strong interpersonal relationships and emotional support, also supporting the moderate positive relationship identified in this study. However, the effect sizes in these international studies tend to be higher than those in this study, suggesting that contextual factors such as school work culture and administrative structure may influence the strength of relationships within the teacher population in Kelantan.

On the other hand, comparisons with recent studies examining MTL also demonstrate a consistent pattern of findings. Al Sabei et al. (2024) reported that a supportive work environment and leadership increased employees' MTL, although the effect was modest—a pattern very similar to the findings of this study. Likewise, Badura et al. (2020) also emphasized that leadership motivation is influenced by a combination of psychological factors, social relationships, and professional identity, which explains why teachers' MTL in this study was only moderate, even though principals' leadership was rated very highly. Hence, this suggests that increasing leadership motivation requires a combination of interpersonal support and internal elements that shape teachers' leadership identities.

In studies examining the direct relationship between EL and MTL, this study's findings are consistent with the meta-analysis by Stiehl et al. (2015), which reported that positive leadership experiences enhanced leadership motivation, although the relationship is generally modest in strength. Conversely, Cheng et al. (2025) also reported, in the context of higher education, a modest positive relationship between leadership style and motivation to participate in leadership training. Although the context is different, these findings reinforce the understanding that EL has a significant, though not unique, effect on increasing leadership motivation.

In the local context, the findings of this study confirm those of a pilot study by Hamzah and Ishak (2024), which reflected those variations in the level of EL across schools affect teachers' MTL. This full study provides large-scale empirical evidence that reinforces these conclusions and demonstrates that even though EL practices are at a high level, MTL still requires additional support through systemic strategies such as teacher role empowerment, workload reduction, and increased professional autonomy. Additionally, this is also supported by Beram et al. (2023), which determined that principal leadership competence is a critical factor in building a supportive culture that encourages teacher leadership.

On the other hand, the findings demonstrating the social normative dimension as the highest motivating factor also have important implications. This reflects that teachers in Kelantan are more motivated by professional norms and organizational expectations than by internal leadership identity. Notably, this pattern is consistent with the findings of Auvinen et al. (2020), who stated that in collective cultures, leadership motivation often takes the form of social responsibility rather than self-motivation. Therefore, strengthening internal leadership identity should be the focus of leadership interventions.

Overall, this study's findings contribute to the educational leadership literature by demonstrating that EL is an important predictor of MTL among teachers. Nonetheless, its effect is influenced by cultural factors, work structures, and social norms. Consequently, this study strengthens the understanding that EL is relevant and important in the Malaysian school context and provides an empirical basis for developing policies and leadership training programs that are more relational, collaborative, and supportive of teacher well-being.

### ***Theoretical Implication***

Therefore, the findings of this study strengthen the EL framework (Schaufeli, 2015; Schaufeli, 2021) by providing empirical evidence that leadership behaviours that involve, inspire, connect, and empower have a significant impact on MTL. The modest positive relationship observed is consistent with a cross-national study by Mazzetti et al. (2022), which revealed that EL increases commitment and intrinsic motivation by fulfilling basic psychological needs.

In addition, the findings of this study extend the understanding of the MTL theory (Chan & Drasgow, 2001) by demonstrating that in a collective cultural context such as Malaysia, the normative motivational component plays a more dominant role than affective identity. Hence, this is consistent with the findings of Auvinen et al. (2020), who emphasized that social norms and professional expectations largely influence leadership motivation in a collective environment.

Thus, this study makes a theoretical contribution by confirming that MTL is driven by individual personality and competence, as well as by the principal's leadership qualities and the dynamics of school relationships. Additionally, these findings supported the meta-analysis proposal of Stiehl et al. (2015) that positive leadership experiences are an important, but not the only factor in stimulating leadership motivation.

### ***Practical Implication***

From a practical perspective, this study emphasizes that principals play a critical role in shaping teacher leadership motivation. In particular, emotional support, professional recognition, and autonomy empowerment are consistently associated with increased leadership motivation in international studies (van Tuin et al., 2021).

Moreover, local findings also confirmed this pattern. A study by Mohamed et al. (2023) demonstrated that

principals' professional leadership competencies, particularly in communication, human relations, and school culture building, influence teachers' willingness to engage in leadership roles. Hence, this reinforces the study's conclusion that EL should be a key focus in implementing teacher development.

Given that MTL is at a moderate level despite very high EL, this indicates "motivation leakage" due to workload factors, collective norms, and a lack of teacher leadership career paths—an issue also highlighted by Badura et al. (2020). Therefore, practical interventions need to include restructuring teacher responsibilities, a clear instructional leadership role, and professional guidance support (coaching and mentoring).

### Policy Implication

This study provides empirical evidence supporting the importance of strengthening EL practices in Malaysian leadership development policies. Aligning with the PPPM 2013–2025 and SKPMg2, these findings indicate the need to integrate relational leadership elements into formal leadership training such as National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders (NPQEL) and United Nations (UN) programs, in line with the recommendations of the regional education study by Cheng (2025).

Furthermore, the study results support UNESCO's (2016) findings on SDG 4, which emphasize developing educator capacity through inclusive leadership and supporting well-being. With moderate leadership motivation, it is clear that the MOE's policies need to expand support mechanisms, including reducing non-teaching workload, teacher leadership pathways, and formal incentives for pedagogical leadership roles.

Moreover, given that these findings are consistent with the national study by (Beram et al., 2023) and internationally (Mazzetti et al., 2022; van Tuin et al., 2021), policymakers can use this evidence to design teacher leadership development strategies that are more sustainable, relational, and impact school leadership literacy as a whole.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This study provides an important empirical contribution to understanding the relationship between principals' EL and teachers' MTL in secondary schools in Kelantan. Moreover, the findings reveal that although EL practices are at a very high level, teachers' MTL remains moderate. Correlation and regression analyses confirm that EL is a significant predictor of MTL. Nevertheless, its effect is moderate, suggesting that other factors also influence teachers' leadership motivation.

Conversely, these findings reinforce the existing literature on the role of interpersonal relationships, empowerment, and inspiration in building leadership motivation, while expanding theoretical understanding in the context of Malaysian school culture. This study also contributes relevant local empirical evidence to strengthen

teacher leadership development policies and educator capacity building in line with the PPPM 2013–2025 and SDG 4.

Overall, this study demonstrates that EL is an important component of the school leadership ecosystem that can influence MTL. However, its effectiveness depends on systemic support, organizational structure, and leadership opportunities available to teachers.

### Recommendation

First, principals need to enhance the application of EL by implementing more targeted support strategies, such as mentoring, professional dialogue, and recognition of teacher leadership. The ability of principals to build strong interpersonal relationships, provide professional autonomy, and consistently deliver inspiration can enhance teachers' motivation and leadership identity.

Second, schools need to create a work ecosystem that provides teachers with clearer leadership opportunities. Specifically, this includes restructuring the roles of committee chairs, program coordinators, and pedagogical mentors. Hence, they truly empower decision-making rather than just administrative tasks. Providing more formal career paths for teacher leadership can also strengthen MTL in the long term.

Third, professional development based on teacher leadership needs to be strengthened through systematic training such as peer coaching programs, decision-making skills, instructional leadership, and innovation management. As a result, this competency-based training can strengthen teachers' ability to lead more confidently and effectively.

Fourth, policymakers at the MOE and State Education Department levels are advised to integrate EL elements into national leadership training modules such as NPQEL and PPB courses, and to add support mechanisms, such as reducing non-teaching workload to provide space for teachers to assume professional leadership roles.

Finally, further research is recommended to examine other factors that contribute to MTL, including teacher well-being, school collaborative culture, digital readiness, and colleague support. Studies employing mixed-methods or multivariate analysis are also recommended to deepen understanding of the mechanisms underlying EL's influence.

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