

The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction in the Relationship between Leadership Styles and Teacher Performance in Kota Kinabalu Schools, Sabah.

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Abstract

The research examined the mediating role of job satisfaction between leadership styles and teacher job performance in Kota Kinabalu schools, Sabah. The study's motivation is based on the need to improve teacher performance, which requires leadership that promotes motivation, commitment, and satisfaction in the workplace. The primary aim was to assess the direct effect of the autocratic, democratic, transactional and transformational styles of leadership on teacher job performance and the indirect effect on teacher job performance mediated by job satisfaction. The study was quantitative, cross-sectional, survey based with 250 teacher respondents, using partial least squares structural equation modelling to analyse data. The results indicate that the most significant predictor of teacher job performance is job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.783$, $p < 0.001$). Transformational leadership had a significant effect on job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.388$, $p < 0.001$) and teacher job performance ($\beta = 0.303$, $p = 0.001$). The positive effects of the democratic leadership were also quite pronounced, and those of the autocratic leadership were less but nevertheless significant. But, transactional leadership was not a significant predictor of job satisfaction and teacher job performance. The model accounted for 61.2% of the variance in teacher job performance and 78.2% of the variance in job satisfaction. The study concludes that the leadership practices of school leaders based on satisfaction, especially transformational and democratic approaches, can best influence teacher performance...

Keywords: leadership styles; job satisfaction; teacher job performance; PLS-SEM; Kota Kinabalu schools.

INTRODUCTION

The performance of teachers has come into focus in the current education systems as a strategic issue since the quality of education is actually manifested in the professional activities of the teacher in and out of the classroom. For the purpose of this study, teacher job performance is defined as teachers' effectiveness in classroom management, collaboration with colleagues, assessment of learners, lesson planning, school improvement, and teaching. Recent empirical findings reveal that teacher performance is not a personal attribute, but it is a workplace phenomenon, which has to do with the organisational support, emotional satisfaction, professional confidence, and leadership conditions (Li et al., 2025). In addition, a recent structural model has validated that supportive organisational conditions can positively influence teacher job performance through, among other factors, job satisfaction (Li et al., 2025). Professional attitude, well-being, self-development, and job satisfaction have been found to have a correlation with the teacher performance in the broader context of Asian education, implying the assumption that a good performance is related to an enabling environment and not limiting (Murwaningsih & Fauziah, 2023). This discussion is happening around the world because schools are being urged to offer more learning outcomes in addition to subjecting to curriculum change, technological change, diversity in students, and expectations of parents and learning recovery after the pandemic (Khan, 2025).

However, the debate on leadership-performance has since transcended the concept that the performance of teachers could be due to individual competence or institutional accountability on the international scale. According to recent studies, principals and school heads are important to influence psychological experiences, self-determination, and the degree of teacher discretion of teachers (Bellibaş et al., 2025). This connection between transformational leadership and the subsequent rise in motivation, trust, autonomy, and work performance is a common phenomenon as it enables teachers to see school objectives as important professional commitments and not administrative mandates (Khan, 2025). Even in schools, transactional leadership is not a bad idea, since it assists in communicating expectations, gives incentives to adhere, and offer guidelines on performance standards, although excessive use of transactional strategies can suppress creativity and motivation, and eliminate genuine interest (Maheshwari, 2022). Democratic leadership is also key as teachers are knowledge workers and as such may need to be involved, given a voice and a sense of collegiality to ensure long term satisfaction and professional ownership (Panagopoulos et al., 2024). On the other hand, despite the effectiveness of autocratic leadership in emergency cases, according to stated findings in the literature, when a teacher feels undervalued, ignored or over-controlled by a given leadership style, the job satisfaction decreases (Bellibaş et al., 2025).

In Malaysia, it is a highly significant subject since the school system is massive and in many ways centralised and greatly depends on the quality of teachers and school principal leadership, to bring about reform in schools. The number of government and government-aided schools in Malaysia for 2023 was 10,231 with 232,693 primary teachers and 178,619 secondary teachers, representing the magnitude of the teaching force in the country which need to be led, motivated and supported. Department of Statistics Malaysia (2024). Teaching quality, leadership quality and school improvement have been the priority of the Malaysia Education Blueprint to increase the attainment of national education (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2024). Newer Malaysian studies also indicate that the principals need more systems of appointment, preparation and continuous assistance because they have to meet the demands of the technological, social, economic, cultural and learning nature (Kenayathulla et al., 2024). Malaysian data on teachers also indicates that job satisfaction and leadership styles are associated and that it is possible to mediate up to the association between leadership styles and organisational commitment which supports the argument that leadership indeed influences teachers in psychological and motivational processes (Abdul Halim et al., 2021). Therefore, teacher performance in Malaysia cannot be perceived as a direct tool of compliance but an outcome of strategic human resource pertaining to the climate of leadership and teacher satisfaction (Sothinathan et al., 2024).

In particular, the Sabah context is important especially in the state level, where the spread of the education system is extensive, encompassing the urban, semi-urban, rural, geographically spread locations with the leadership of schools and teacher motivation being the determinant. By 30 June 2025, the rate of teachers placing in Sabah was 97.78 per cent, whereby 44,058 teachers are placed against 45,057 approved posts in 1,298 Ministry schools meaning that teacher placement has been a major concern in the state in both administrative and performance aspect (Nabalu News, 2025). Kota Kinabalu, the state capital and administrative city as per the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2024) has schools with urban demands to encompass and which are nevertheless included in the other state-wide problems such as workforce allocation, leadership potential and capacity, multicultural student needs, and unequal access to professional services. The practical and theoretical need inspiring this research is as follows: leadership practices aimed at improving job performance of teachers and even job satisfaction in schools are required in Kota Kinabalu (Kenayathulla et al., 2024). This research matters since it is a research that focuses on four types of leadership behaviour, including autocratic, democratic, transactional, and transformational leaders (simultaneously) with job satisfaction as the mediating variable between the leadership behaviour and job performance of the teachers (Bellibaş et al., 2025). By doing so, the study will support the requirement of a local model that can be utilized to inform school leadership development, teacher-support policies and performance-driven education management at the schools at Kota Kinabalu (Abdul Halim et al., 2021).

Teachers are also facing a performance challenge in the current context of pressure on their workload, professional identity, accountability and digital adaptation. The teachers will have a combination of pedagogical skills and will be requested to be innovative, teachers of difference, data evaluators, inclusive classroom practitioners, and lifelong learners (Li et al., 2025). Only if there is adequate satisfaction, fairness, recognition and psychological support for teachers in their school environment, can these expectations enhance the effectiveness of the school (Murwaningsih & Fauziah, 2023). Leadership is a human-capital governance matter: Principals can encourage teachers to view reforms as valuable opportunities, rather than as value addition (Kenayathulla et al., 2024). That is why job satisfaction was considered as the mediator in this study, as it can help to understand that leadership styles can strengthen teachers' positive attitudes toward their job and eventually enhance their performance (Sothinathan et al., 2024).

2. Literature Review

This study treats the job performance of teachers as the dependent variable, which denotes the observable manifestation of teachers' professional behaviour, instructional contribution, collaboration and school related responsibilities. In recent studies, however, technical competence alone does not account for teacher performance, which relies on the organisational conditions that make it more likely for teachers to put in the effort and be psychologically invested in their work and also make it more likely that they will be able to convert their competence into practice (Li et al., 2025). Research on education management has revealed that there is a relationship between job satisfaction and the performance of teachers since a satisfied teacher will exhibit positive work attitudes, work enthusiasm and persistently stay engaged with learners (Murwaningsih & Fauziah, 2023). The mediation of job satisfaction is, therefore, theoretically appropriate, as leadership behaviour may not directly influence on teachers' performance but may impact on teachers' job satisfaction first, such as satisfaction with their job, recognition, autonomy, workload and professional relationships (Sothinathan et al., 2024). This logic is very applicable to schools, as principals and administrators help shape the emotional climate of schools, the sharing of responsibility, and the sense of fairness in making decisions in schools (Panagopoulos et al., 2024). This study uses four leadership variables that reflect different leadership styles frequently mentioned in the literature of educational leadership. Autocratic leadership is a directive style of leadership where decisions are

made by the leader and with minimal input from perhaps others, including teachers, which may result in quick decisions made but with less teacher voice and ownership (Bellibaş et al., 2025). Democratic leadership is more inclusive, participatory, shared decision making and professional engagement and when practiced in good faith can increase the sense of belonging and satisfaction of teachers (Panagopoulos et al., 2024). Transitional leadership, which is an exchange-based style, transparency of roles, surveillance, rewarding, and corrective measures when metrics about performance must be measurable and clearly defined can be useful (Tran et al., 2022). Transformational leadership is a leadership style that focuses more on motivation, vision, attention to individuals, intellectual motivation and professional development and is relevant especially in increasing motivation and performance of teachers in transformation processes in schools (Khan, 2025). Empirical studies in Vietnam revealed that teacher satisfied with the job performance and related to the teacher-perceived transformational and transactional leadership. It implies that these two aspects of leadership should be taken into consideration simultaneously (Maheshwari, 2022).

There are two theories that are particularly pertinent to this research. Firstly, the theory of transformational leadership can explain why leaders could go beyond the level of compliance of the followers and inculcate a sense of vision, purpose, motivation and commitment towards common goals (Bass, 1985). This theory can be useful in the school environment since principals will differentiate their work, besides the encouragement of instructional purpose, teacher confidence, and teacher buy-in towards student learning (Khan, 2025). In this way, the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction and teacher job performance support positively due to the transformational leadership theory since the teacher will be able to demonstrate his job performance in case he feels trusted, inspired and professionally developed (Maheshwari, 2022). Secondly, the social exchange theory argues that when a worker is subjected to good treatment, fairness, support, and recognition, he/she will restore greater commitment and productivity (Blau, 1964). Social exchange theory does subscribe to the notion that democratic, transactional, and transformational leadership may have a positive influence on job satisfaction and performance provided that teachers believe that leaders treat them with respect, that leaders are transparent, that they are helpful, and an equitable exchange is achieved (Sothinathan et al., 2024). The central argument of the problem statement is that, along as one should acknowledge the role of teachers performance in the classroom meal handling even though it has been acknowledged that there is still a dearth of scholarship on the subject explaining the impact of the classroom teacher performance as a result of classroom leadership. The effect of teacher performance in the classroom is still listed as the part of the concerns in the classroom management, although there is still a lot of research that has been conducted stating the effect of the performance of the teacher as a direct influence of the leadership that has not been studied in a proper manner in regard to the psychological mechanism (Li et al., 2025). The importance of teacher job performance is that it is the practical execution of education policy, curricular goals, classroom education quality, evaluation and provision of learners (Murwaningsih and Fauziah, 2023). Job satisfaction is significant since it is an internal motivational state that can be transformed into professional effort and school commitment via leadership climate (Abdul Halim et al., 2021). The styles of leadership are important as principals control workload goals, teacher rewards, classroom freedom, and professional learning opportunities, as well as school discipline, climate of communication, and participation in decision-making (Kenayathulla et al., 2024). When leadership is overly command and/or unreliable, it might be the case that although teachers are compliant, they are not involved in seeking discretionary adventure, teamwork or creativity (Bellibaş et al., 2025). Participative, supportive, developmental leadership would work more to assist teachers translate a satisfaction to better job performance (Khan, 2025).

To some extent, the previous research has addressed certain issues of this relationship and there are areas that have not been addressed. The mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationship between leadership style and organisational commitment has been studied in Malaysia yet lacks a direct test of job performance of teachers as the dependent variable (Abdul Halim et al., 2021). Despite numerous studies that were conducted on transformational and transactional leadership and the connection between the two in the context of satisfaction and performance, many studies are conducted in other countries and therefore might not be applicable to the scenario of schools in Sabah (Maheshwari, 2022). According to recent studies, the dimensions of transformational leadership and teacher work performance had some mediating variables, among which were job autonomy and trust, thereby further confirming the significance of testing mediation with the addition of testing direct paths (Khan, 2025). Also, meta-analyses of study results show that the correlation between types of leadership and teacher satisfaction is not identical; local models are also needed because of cultural, organisational and policy contexts that influence the impact of leadership in schools (Bellibaş et al., 2025). The present study, therefore, is an extension of previous studies in the sense that it constructs a model that compares the four types of leadership namely autocratic, democratic, transactional and transformational leadership and to examine the mediation effect of job satisfaction between the types of leadership and teacher job performance in schools in Kota Kinabalu (Panagopoulos et al., 2024).

The literature also demonstrates empirical gap to be contextual and methodological. Contextually, research on leadership-performance is under-represented in Sabah and Kota Kinabalu, and the state implies a variety of different school contexts and an ongoing need to create well-established systems to assist principals (Nabalu News, 2025). Based on the development of principals in Malaysia, there is a need to further develop theories that highlight the importance of continuity of leadership support; however, there is still a lack of direct evidence linking specific leadership styles to teacher job performance via job satisfaction in the context of state schools (Kenayathulla et al., 2024). In comparison with both correlation and regression models, a mediation model based on using PLS-SEM will allow estimating the relationships between several leadership styles, job satisfaction, and teacher job performance at the same time, because this approach has more methodological explanations (Hair et al., 2019). This research therefore fills this gap and develops an inflated quantitative model of Kota Kinabalu schools that provides leadership style and mediator/performance outcome in a single structural model (Hair et al., 2022). In conclusion, the sources confirm the presence of data that supports the fact that the job performance of a teacher depends not only on his/her competency, but also on leadership climate and job satisfaction, and the context of Sabah country makes this research timely and relevant to the academic background (Li et al., 2025).

Of particular importance as a mediator is job satisfaction because it is a point of transition where external leadership practices transform to internal teacher motivation. The leaders can introduce such policies, schedules of supervision, rewards, consultation or teacher professional development programs, but these practices will only influence performance when the teachers believe that this can be useful and helpful (Abdul Halim et al., 2021). Such a mediating process echoes recent empirical studies that found that organisational support was related to the better outcome of teacher performance through teachers satisfaction (Li et al., 2025). It also correlates with the studies on educational leadership that center its attention on how teacher satisfaction is among the processes through which the leadership impact is experienced over the commitment and school contribution (Sothinathan et al., 2024). This implies that for schools in Kota Kinabalu, leadership style must be evaluated in not only its administrative efficiency, but also its teacher satisfaction leading to willingness to go the extra mile (Bellibaş et al., 2025).

It is also stated in the literature that there are two leadership styles, autocratic as well as democratic leadership that have not been extensively covered in the literature as compared to other styles that have been studied more intensively. Transformation leadership is a leadership style that is most likely to be talked about most of the time because it has a conceptual relationship with motivation, vision, trust and professional development (Khan, 2025). The role of the transactional leader is also strong as schools need performance standards, rules, timetables, records and accountability systems (Maheshwari, 2022). However, autocratic and democratic behaviours may also occur among the school leaders in their daily leadership especially when it comes to instilling discipline, making sound judgments, engaging the teachers, organizing the curriculum, and resolving issues that affects a school (Panagopoulos et al., 2024). The combination of all four styles in the same model can subsequently display a more realistic view of school leadership behaviour, and allow the research to identify the style (or styles) that best reflects teacher satisfaction and performance in Kota Kinabalu context (Bellibaş et al., 2025).

3. Methodology

The research design used in this study will be quantitative, cross-sectional and explanatory in nature to analyze the nature of the relationship between leadership styles and teacher's job performance through job satisfaction. The choice of quantitative design is suitable as the study entails measuring latent constructs, testing hypothesised relationships and estimating the direct and indirect effects of multiple variables (Hair et al., 2019). Target population shall be teachers at selected primary schools and secondary schools in the city of Kota Kinabalu, public and government aided schools and private schools if available (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2024). The unit of analysis will be the individual teacher as the perceptions of leadership, job satisfaction and job performance are measured by the self-reported responses of the teachers (Li et al., 2025).

Demographic characteristics and construct measurement items should be included in the questionnaire. Demographic information is required since teacher perceptions can be different based on gender, age, teaching experience, academic qualification, school level, job position, and school type (Panagopoulos et al., 2024). Construct items can be adapted from existing leadership, job satisfaction and performance studies and modified the wording to the Kota Kinabalu school context (Maheshwari, 2022). Leadership should be measured by the leadership section as autocratic leadership, democratic leadership, transactional leadership, and transformational leadership; job satisfaction should be measured by the mediator section; and the dependent-variable section should measure teacher job performance (Abdul Halim et al., 2021). A five-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree should be used for all items as this is appropriate to measure attitudes, perceptions and organisational behaviour constructs (Tran et al., 2022).

In the proposed demographic profile section, there should be: gender, age group, academic qualification, teaching experience, school level, employment status, type of school. The researcher will use these characteristics to describe the sample and determine if the respondents will represent the teaching population in a balanced way

(Hair et al., 2022). Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) will be used for data analysis, preferably using the SmartPLS software since the model contains several independent variables, one mediator and one dependent variable (Hair et al., 2019). Indicator loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted, Fornell-Larcker criterion, HTMT ratio and collinearity diagnostics will be used to evaluate the measurement model (Hair et al., 2022). Bootstrapping will then be used to test path coefficients, the coefficient of determination, effect sizes, predictive relevance and mediation effects for the structural model (Li et al., 2025). The primary analytical contribution of this study will be to determine if the relationship between each of the leadership styles and teacher job performance can be explained by job satisfaction, as found in the mediation test (Sothinathan et al., 2024).

The sampling strategy must be formulated to ensure the responses of the teachers from various schools and various of the teacher's' demographics in Kota Kinabalu. If the researcher can be assured that schools are accessible by level, type and location of school then a purposive or stratified sampling approach may be used, however if school permission and teacher availability is limited then a convenience sampling approach may be used (Hair et al., 2022). A pilot study of the main survey should be used prior to the main study to test the clarity of the items and the time required to complete the survey, as well as to provide preliminary reliability, with approximately 30 teachers (Hair et al., 2019). Ethical procedures must involve: informed consent, anonymity, voluntary participation and a statement that responses will be used solely for academic research purposes (Li et al., 2025). These procedures are needed as teachers might be sensitive to the evaluation of leadership behaviour and their own performance, especially in schools where hierarchical relations are powerfully established (Abdul Halim et al., 2021).

4. Findings

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 250)

Demographic variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	80	32.0
	Female	169	67.6
	Prefer not to say	1	0.4
Age group	Below 25	12	4.8
	25-34	65	26.0
	35-44	86	34.4
	45-54	65	26.0
	55 and above	22	8.8
Academic qualification	Diploma	22	8.8
	Bachelor degree	153	61.2
	Master degree	65	26.0
	PhD/Doctorate	7	2.8
	Others	3	1.2
Teaching experience	Below 5 years	52	20.8
	5-10 years	56	22.4
	11-15 years	53	21.2
	16-20 years	39	15.6
	Above 20 years	50	20.0
School level	Primary school	120	48.0
	Secondary school	124	49.6
	Both/other	6	2.4
Employment status	Permanent	205	82.0
	Contract	29	11.6
	Temporary/substitute	9	3.6
	Others	7	2.8
School type	Public	188	75.2
	Government-aided	25	10.0
	Private	21	8.4
	International/other	16	6.4

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the generated sample of 250 teachers, which is reasonably diverse in terms of gender, age, academic qualification, professional experience, school level, employment status and school

type. Female teachers make up 67.6% of the respondents and male teachers make up 32.0%. Looking at the age, the largest group is in the 35-44 age band which means that many of the respondents are probably in their mid-career. Academic qualification distribution indicates that majority of respondents have a bachelor's degree, with masters' degree holders coming next, indicating a professionally qualified teaching staff. Teaching experience also is widely distributed with the respondents in the early career, mid-career and highly experienced groups. This difference is helpful since perceptions of leadership style, job satisfaction, and teacher performance can vary based on professional maturity and exposure in the workplace. The primary-secondary school split in distribution is quite even, supporting the representativeness of the sample in the Kota Kinabalu school context. The majority of the respondents are permanent teachers and are working in public schools, which are the predominant institutional structure in Malaysia's educational system.

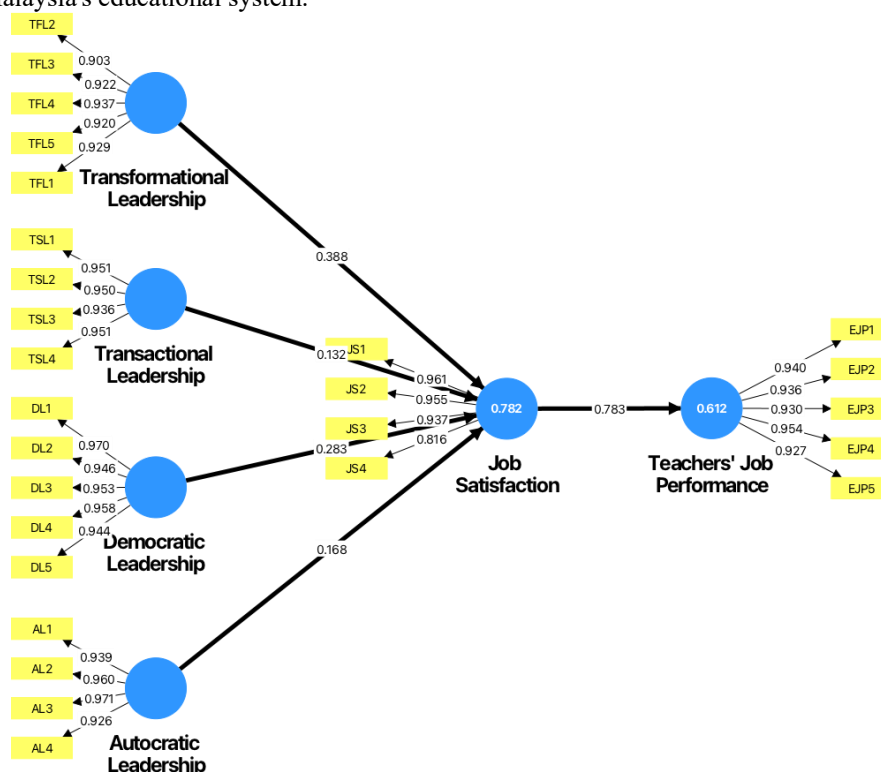


Figure 1. Construction of SEM on SmartPLS

The entire SmartPLS structural model for the relationships between the four leadership styles, job satisfaction, and teacher job performance is presented in Figure 1. The figure is significant as it visualizes the measurement model and structural model within one analytical approach. From the measurement side of the model, it can be seen that many of the loadings for transformational leadership, transactional leadership, democratic leadership, autocratic leadership, job satisfaction, and teacher job performance are greater than .90 and none of the loadings are below .70, which is the commonly recommended value for high loadings. High indicator loadings in PLS-SEM imply that the items are highly related to the related latent constructs and that the measurement model is appropriate for structural interpretation (Hair et al., 2020). Thus, the figure provides validity for the construct measurement internally prior to interpreting causal-predictive relationships. The structural side of the figure indicates that leadership styles have a positive prediction to job satisfaction, and job satisfaction has a positive prediction to teacher job performance.

Table 2 Structural Model Results for Leadership Styles, Job Satisfaction, and Teacher Job Performance

Endogenous construct	Structural path	O (beta)	M	SD	t	p	Decision	f ² interpretation	R ² / Adjusted R ²
Teacher Job Performance	Autocratic Leadership -> Teacher Job Performance	.131	.130	.052	2.535	.011	Supported	NR	.612 / .611

Endogenous construct	Structural path	O (beta)	M	SD	t	p	Decision	f ² interpretation	R ² Adjusted R ²
Job Satisfaction	Autocratic Leadership -> Job Satisfaction	.168	.166	.064	2.600	.009	Supported	.054 / Small	.782 / .779
Teacher Job Performance	Democratic Leadership -> Teacher Job Performance	.221	.227	.081	2.736	.006	Supported	NR	.612 / .611
Job Satisfaction	Democratic Leadership -> Job Satisfaction	.283	.289	.100	2.839	.005	Supported	.082 / Small	.782 / .779
Teacher Job Performance	Job Satisfaction -> Teacher Job Performance	.783	.782	.049	16.037	<.001	Supported	1.580 / Large	.612 / .611
Teacher Job Performance	Transactional Leadership -> Teacher Job Performance	.104	.104	.064	1.607	.108	Not supported	NR	.612 / .611
Job Satisfaction	Transactional Leadership -> Job Satisfaction	.132	.135	.086	1.539	.124	Not supported	.021 / Small	.782 / .779
Teacher Job Performance	Transformational Leadership -> Teacher Job Performance	.303	.299	.088	3.464	.001	Supported	NR	.612 / .611
Job Satisfaction	Transformational Leadership -> Job Satisfaction	.388	.380	.103	3.760	<.001	Supported	.157 / Medium	.782 / .779

Note. O = original sample; M = sample mean; SD = standard deviation; t = bootstrapped t statistic; p = significance value; NR = not reported in the uploaded SmartPLS output. For Teacher Job Performance, R² = .612 and adjusted R² = .611, indicating moderate explanatory power. For Job Satisfaction, R² = .782 and adjusted R² = .779, indicating substantial explanatory power. Hypotheses are treated as supported when p < .05.

Table 2 presents the key results of the structural model in SmartPLS in a consolidated format, which includes the path coefficients, the results of the hypothesis test, the coefficient of determination (R²) values, and the effect sizes reported. The overall results suggest that the model provides a good explanation for the teachers' job performance, with the combined effects of the leadership styles and the teachers' job satisfaction accounting for 61.2% of the variance. This degree of explanatory power is significant in the context of educational leadership research because teacher performance is typically influenced by individual, organisational, instructional and contextual factors. Hair et al (2019) pointed out that R² values in PLS-SEM should be understood in the context of the model complexity and the research context. Thus, the R² value of teacher job performance indicates that the model is considered to have sufficient predictive relevance for understanding this relationship between leadership practices and teacher satisfaction and performance outcomes in schools.

The highest score is the one for job satisfaction with teacher job performance (beta = .783, t = 16.037, p < .001). This path is statistically significant and practically potent as the effect size is very large (f² = 1.580). This implies that those teachers who feel more satisfied with their work, leadership environment and school conditions are more likely to show higher professional performance. The finding agrees with Maheshwari (2022) that school leadership is able to positively impact teachers' satisfaction and performance through the motivational climate established by the principals. It also corresponds with Nguni et al (2006) who found that teacher satisfaction is an important psychological mechanism through which leadership influence teacher outcomes.

Transformational leadership has the highest contribution to job satisfaction (beta = .388, t = 3.760, p < .001) and significantly predicts teacher job performance (beta = .303, t = 3.464, p = .001). It has a medium effect size (f² = .157) on job satisfaction and is the most practically relevant leadership antecedent of job satisfaction. This suggests inspirational motivation, professional support, sharing the vision, and individualised consideration may be more effective than control based or exchange-based practices. There are also strong positive relationships between democratic leadership and job satisfaction (beta = .283, p = .005) and between democratic leadership and teacher job performance (beta = .221, p = .006) but the effect size for job satisfaction is small (f² = .082).

There is statistically significant but comparatively weaker effect for autocratic leadership on job satisfaction ($\beta = .168$; $p = .009$) and teacher job performance ($\beta = .131$; $p = .011$). This can mean that directive leadership may help with clarity and discipline in some school contexts, but is not the best path for maintaining satisfaction. Transactional leadership is not a significant predictor of teacher job performance ($\beta = .104$, $p = .108$) or job satisfaction ($\beta = .132$, $p = .124$) and the effect size of transactional leadership on job satisfaction is small ($f^2 = .021$). Overall, the overall table gives support to the conclusion that teacher performance is best bolstered by leadership practices that increase job satisfaction especially transformational leadership and democratic leadership. The findings also validate that reporting path coefficients, R^2 and f^2 values concurrently is beneficial as practical relevance and statistical significance are complementary evidence in PLS-SEM reporting (Hair et al., 2020).

5. Conclusion

The SmartPLS results show that job satisfaction is the main mechanism through which leadership practices are related to teacher job performance in schools in Kota Kinabalu. Job satisfaction to teacher job performance had the strongest path, indicating that teachers who are satisfied with their jobs are likely to exhibit a high level of instructional commitment, professional responsibility and work effectiveness. This aligns with research showing that teacher satisfaction is linked with working conditions and teacher functioning in schools (Toropova et al., 2021). The R-square value of teacher job performance ($R^2 = 0.612$) suggests that leadership styles and job satisfaction account for a significant portion of the variation in performance. The results showed that transformational leadership was the most important leadership style as it showed significant positive effect on job satisfaction and teacher job performance. The influence of democratic leadership also had a significant positive impact, reflecting the role of teacher participation, consultation and shared decision making. Autocratic leadership was statistically significant but the impact was less, so it should be used sparingly in cases of urgency to achieve administrative clarity, but not in routine school management. Transactional leadership was not significant, suggesting that rewards, rules and monitoring that support compliance may not be enough to enhance the outcomes for teachers. In addition, evidence from Malaysia shows that job satisfaction is another important factor that mediates teacher-related leadership outcomes (Abdul Halim et al., 2021). At the policy level, leadership development programmes where principals and senior assistants are trained in transformational and democratic leadership should be emphasized by the Sabah State Education Department, District Education Offices and school administrators. Professional learning communities, consultation panels, mentoring systems, and feedback-based appraisal practices should be built into the systems of school improvement to provide the voice of teachers. Job satisfaction has the most significant impact on performance and policy should look on it as a strategic performance driver not just a welfare problem. In order to enhance the education delivery in schools in Kota Kinabalu, schools should have regular monitoring of teacher satisfaction; workload balance; recognition practice; accessibility to professional development and quality of communication from leadership. Schools should regularly monitor teacher satisfaction, workload balance, recognition practices, professional development access, and leadership communication quality to improve education delivery in Kota Kinabalu schools..

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