Servant Leadership, Leadership Competency, Self-Efficacy and Job Performance of Malaysian Universities' Leaders

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Abstract

Malaysia is inspired to become the world's education hub as stated in the Malaysia Blueprint for Higher Education 2015-2025 and Malaysia is targeting to achieve the admission of 250,000 foreign students in the year 2025. To attract foreign students to enrol in a university is through the university's ability to be known as a world-class university. One of the factors that can make a university to be considered a world-class university is its achievements and the achievements of a university depend on the leadership of its leader. Hence, the purpose of undertaking this research was to examine the relationship between servant leadership, leadership competency and self-efficacy with the job performance of Malaysian public universities' leaders. Findings showed that the independent variables (servant leadership, leadership competency, and self-efficacy) do have a significant relationship with the universities' leaders' job performance with p-value = 0.000 and all t-values higher than 1.675. Although all hypotheses are supported and the model is found to fit with the data with R2 = 56.7%, one of the profound limitations of this study is the inability of the results to be generalised as this study only involved public universities' leaders. Future researchers could consider extending similar research by involving the private universities' leaders or other leaders from different industries. Nevertheless, this research does provide a meaningful contribution to the policymakers, university leaders, students as well as other practitioners from the human resources and management field.

Keywords: Job Performance, Leadership Competency, Self-Efficacy, Servant Leadership

Introduction

Malaysia is expecting to increase foreign students from 200,000 in the year 2020 to 250,000 in the year 2025. Besides that, Malaysia is aiming to be the main location for foreign students to pursue their studies at a higher level (UNESCO, 2020). Foreign students and their parents are reported more inclined toward universities with good reputations and performance (Ahmad & Keerio, 2020). According to Hashim et al. (2019), one of the elements that influenced universities' performance is the universities' leaders. Therefore, Malaysian universities need to be spearheaded by high-performing leaders. Issues related to the poor performance of Malaysian universities, specifically the public universities due to poor leaders' performance have long been discussed for many years. The situation has become quite alarming as it is deemed to impede Malaysia from achieving its goal of becoming the world's

education hub by the year 2025 (Abu Bakar et al., 2020; Munusamy & Hashim, 2019). This has become the main reason for this research being conducted.

Literature Review

Job Performance

Fox et al. (2005) defined job performance as people's behaviour, action, or reaction towards something that will eventually affect their organisations' goals. Universities' leaders' job performance is purported to be one of the main elements that influence universities' overall performance (Ahmad & Keerio, 2020). Although many past studies have studied matters related to leadership in higher education institutions, but study to determine the elements that influence universities' leaders' job performance is still sparse (Abu Hassan Asaari et al., 2016; Leow et al., 2018). Thus, this research is considered significant to fulfil the literature gap in identifying variables that might have a significant influence on the job performance of the universities' leaders.

Servant Leadership

Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) described servant leadership is someone who has high empathy and often puts other individuals first than himself. Therefore, leaders who adopt servant leadership often highlight the attitude of humility, authenticity, stewardship, forgiveness, accountability, and courage. As claimed by Ricky (2016), servant leadership is a leadership style that is suitable for leaders who lead higher education institutions, and the institution's performance is deemed to improve with servant leadership. Despite the claim, there is also an opinion saying that the knowledge or awareness about servant leadership especially among Malaysian leaders is still lacking. This is because research on servant leadership especially in the context of higher education is still insufficient (Mat Desa & Abu Hassan Asaari, 2020).

Leadership Competency

Leadership competency is a set of knowledge, skills, behaviours, and attitudes that are required by individuals, especially leaders, to guarantee successful career achievements (Khadka, Gurung, & Chaulagain, 2014). Leadership competency is said to have a correlation with universities' leaders' performance which indirectly affect the overall performance of the universities too (Ahmad & Keerio, 2020; Teh et al., 2017). Despite this, many still report that research to investigate the relationship between leadership competency and leaders' job performance is still few, especially in the field of education (Abdo Sayed & Edgar, 2019).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is about the level of self-confidence in individuals that allows them to carry out their tasks effectively. Self-efficacy is stated to be very important, especially for individuals who hold the position of leadership within an organisation (Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001). Lim (2017) cited that effective and high-performance university leaders must possess self-efficacy. However, empirical studies to prove his testament are still lacking (Ogunbado, Bakar, & Saidi, 2020) thus explaining the significance of this research.

Objectives of the Study

Following the managerial problem and problem statement discussed in the literature review for each variable involved in this research, the research objectives (RO) for this research are then developed as below.

RO1: To examine the significant relationship between servant leadership and universities' leaders' job performance.

RO2: To examine the significant relationship between leadership competency and universities' leaders' job performance.

RO3: To examine the significant relationship between self-efficacy and universities' leaders' job performance.

Proposed Research Framework and Underpinning Theories
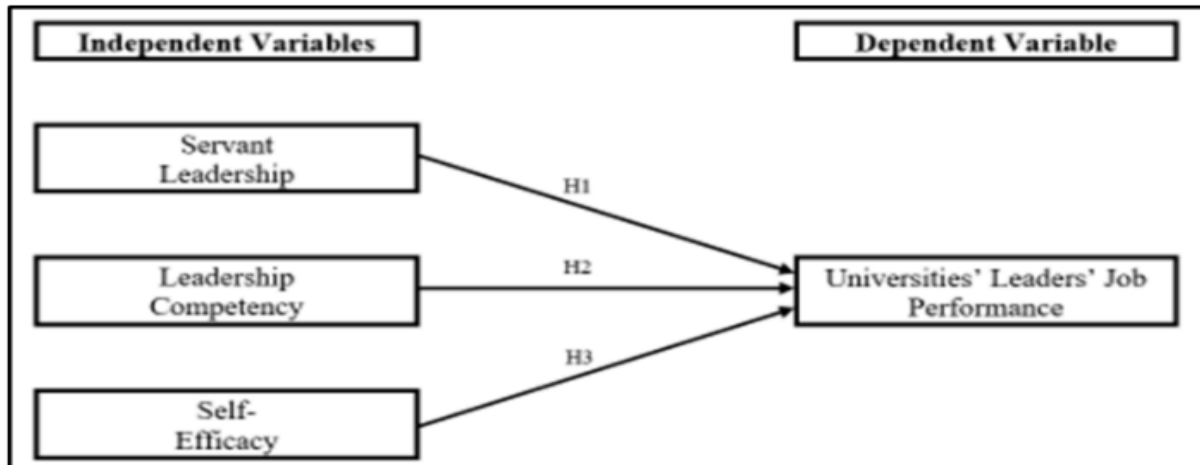
Figure 1 Aligned with the research objectives, the proposed research framework for this research is as shown in Figure 1.

Contingency Theory

According to Fiedler's (1972) contingency theory, leaders must have unique leadership skills that are deemed critical to enable leaders in facing all kinds of situations. This underpinning theory is to underpin the relationship between servant leadership and job performance. Leaders who practice servant leadership skills are considered unique because these leaders always portray noble personal qualities like humility, authenticity, stewardship, forgiveness, accountability, and courage (Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011) when leading their people as well as the organisations. Hence, it is these values that facilitate these leaders to be capable and always ready to face any type of challenge that comes their way.

Social Cognitive Theory

The second underpinning theory that bolstered this research framework is the social cognitive theory by Bandura (1991). He coined that for a leadership job, self-efficacy is the most important quality that must exist in leaders. Therefore, this theory is to underpin the relationship between independent variables (leadership competency and self-efficacy) and job performance. Competency (i.e., expertise and knowledge) complemented with self-confidence, these universities' leaders can certainly face or respond to any form of test and still act in their best manner.

Based on the underpinning theories used to support the research framework, hence the hypotheses are as below:

H1: There is a significant relationship between servant leadership and universities' leaders' job performance.

H2: There is a significant relationship between leadership competency and universities' leaders' job performance.

H3: There is a significant relationship between self-efficacy and universities' leaders' job performance.

Methodology

This research is a quantitative, non-experimental correlation-designed research. The measuring instruments were adapted from previous works of literature. The independent variables (servant leadership, leadership competency, and self-efficacy) were adapted from Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011); Khadka et al. (2014); and Chen et al. (2009) respectively. The dependent variable (job performance), on the other hand, has adapted the measuring instrument from Fox et al. (2005). The reason for adapting their measuring instruments was because this research has adopted the operational definition coined by them. Besides that, their measuring instruments are found to be appropriate for the context of this research.

The population involved in this research were the public university leaders in Malaysia including Sabah and Sarawak. A total of 2921 university leaders were identified and based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970), only 341 samples are required. This research has employed proportionate stratified random sampling to ensure each university is better represented (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

A total number of 520 questionnaires were disseminated through a self-administered google form and only 433 questionnaires (usable and unusable) were returned. For this research, the researchers have decided to proceed with data analysis once all universities have been represented with enough respondents as advised by (Bartlett et al., 2001). SPSS version 26 was used for data analysis that comprised data cleaning, measurement model analysis and structural model analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Data Cleaning

This research has undergone the data cleaning process to ensure there are no outliers that can distort the results of the findings (Hair et al., 2017). Figure 2 represents the boxplot before the data cleaning procedure. The Mahanalobis Distance Outliers analysis was conducted where seven (7) outliers have been identified and removed. Figure 3 represents the Boxplot after the removal of the outliers.

Besides the Mahanalobis Distance Outliers, the researchers have also performed the Cook's Distance procedure to ensure the remaining outliers as pictured in Figure 2 will not significantly impact the results of the research. Figure 4 refers to the scatter plot of the Cook's Distance. No data was found to exceed the maximum value of Cook's Distance 0.3000 hence no data will distort the final finding of this research (Hair et al., 2017).
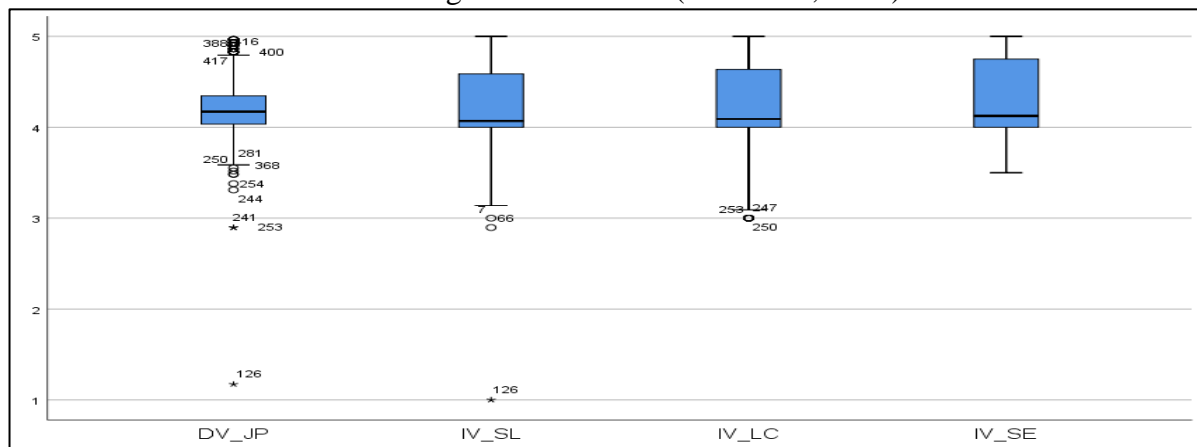
Figure 2 Boxplot before data cleaning
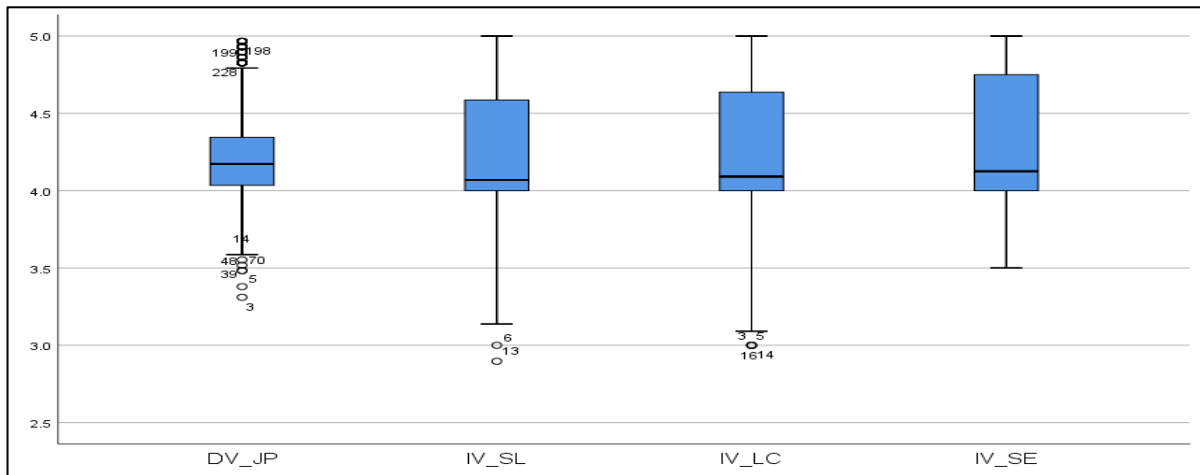
Figure 3 Boxplot after data cleaning
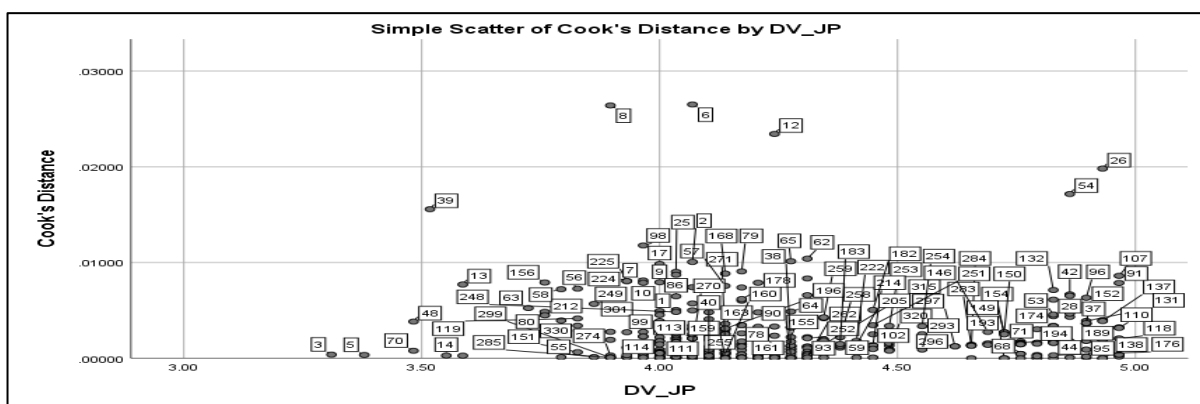
Figure 4 Scatter Plot of Cook's Distance

Finally, this research has undergone the normality testing procedure to check on the data skewness and kurtosis. Based on the Skewness ($-2 \leq x \leq 2$) and Kurtosis ($-3 \leq x \leq 3$) results presented in Table 1, it can be confirmed that normality issues do not exists.

Table 1: *Normality Testing for Variables of Study*

	Overall Mean	Skewness	Kurtosis
Job Performance	4.2519	0.646	0.041
Servant Leadership	4.1908	-0.153	-0.582
Leadership Competency	4.2193	0.085	-0.527
Self-efficacy	4.3046	0.528	-0.921

Measurement Model Analysis

The measurement model analysis was conducted too before proceeding to the structural analysis to ensure the soundness of the measuring instruments. For this research, reliability analysis has been conducted and the results are displayed in Table 2 below. Cronbach's Alpha results confirmed there are no reliability issues exist for all variables since all results are above 0.70 (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

Table 2: *Reliability of the Instruments*

	Cronbach's Alpha
Job Performance	0.935
Servant Leadership	0.954
Leadership Competency	0.931
Self-Efficacy	0.887

Structural Model Analysis

This section explained the relationship between two variables as well as the impact of one construct on the other constructs via the path coefficient and multiple regression respectively.

Multicollinearity Analysis

Multicollinearity analysis has been done as a first step to ensure that collinearity issues do not exist which could affect the correlation results when running path coefficient. According to Hair et al. (2017), to determine whether the multicollinearity issue does not exist, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) must be in the range of 1 to 10 and the tolerance must not be less than 0.3. Results reported in Table 3 below showed multicollinearity issue does not exist.

Table 3: *Multicollinearity Test Results with Job Performance as Dependent Variable*

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)		
	Servant Leadership	0.501	1.995
	Leadership Competency	0.300	3.345
	Self-Efficacy	0.462	2.164

Path Coefficients

The purpose of the path coefficient is to evaluate the significance and relevance of the structural model relationship and answer the research objective as well as test the hypotheses of this research. Based on Table 4a below, it can be concluded that all independent variables (servant leadership, leadership competency, and self-efficacy) do have a significant relationship with public universities' leaders' job performance with p-Value = 0.000 and all t-values higher than 1.675 (per Table 4b). Hence, H1, H2, and H3 are supported.

Table 4a: *Path Coefficients with Job Performance as Dependent Variable*

		JP	SL	LC	SE
JP	Pearson Correlation	1.000	0.673**	0.697**	0.575**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	426	426	426	426

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

Table 4b: *Path Coefficients with Job Performance as Dependent Variable*

Model	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	Beta		
(Constant)		13.127	0.000
SL	0.379	8.370	0.000
LC	0.301	5.132	0.000
SE	0.178	3.787	0.000

Servant leadership is found to have a significant relationship with the universities' leaders' job performance plausibly because the universities' leaders (the respondents) believe that having the servanthood quality like a high sense of empathy will enable them to easily earn trust and support from their employees. Employees' support and trust are deemed critical as they allow these university leaders to easily perform their duties as leaders.

Other than servant leadership, leadership competency is also found to have a significant association with universities' leaders' job performance reasonably because, the universities' leaders think that with competencies, talent as well as skills, self-confidence will present naturally and enhanced. Possessing a higher level of self-confidence is pivotal to enabling these leaders to earn respect and trust among their employees and other stakeholders. This will indirectly assist these universities' leaders to perform their tasks smoothly, efficiently, and effectively

Self-efficacy refers to confidence in oneself (Chen et al., 2001). Similar to servant leadership and leadership competency, self-efficacy is found to be significantly related to university leaders' job performance. This is probably because the universities' leaders opined that leaders who appear confident and assertive will look more convincing and thus will easily earn trust from their employees. The trust earned from the employees will facilitate these universities' leaders in their job performance.

The correlation strength between the independent variables (servant leadership, leadership competency, and self-efficacy) and public universities' leaders' job performance are found to be large with $r = 0.673$, 0.697, and 0.575 respectively (Cohen, 1988). Despite all the independent variables possessing a large correlation strength with the dependent variable, servant leadership is found to be the most influenced factor towards public universities' leaders' job performance with β Value = 0.379 as presented in Table 3. The plausible reason to explain this finding is that servant leadership refers to leadership style or pattern. The pattern can be easily changed according to time and situation unlike competency which is related to one's wisdom and self-efficacy on the other hand is related to self-confidence that is deeply rooted in one's upbringing.

Multiple Regression Analysis

The multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the R2 value of the model. Based on R2 value result in Table 5, it can be summed up that the dependent variable (job performance) is 56.7% explained by the model and could be considered relatively strong in the field of social science (Chin, 1998).

Table 5: *R Square*

Model	R	R Square
1	0.753[a]	0.567

Table 6 represents the ANOVA analysis for the research model. Since p-value = 0.000, it can be concluded that the whole model used in this research is statistically significant (Cohen, 1988).

Table 6: *ANOVA*

	Model	Mean Square	F	Sig
1	Regression	8.427	184.279	0.000[b]

Recommendation and Conclusion

The research only involves the direct relationship between the independent variables (servant leadership, leadership competency, and self-efficacy) and the dependent variable (job performance). Therefore, it is recommended that future researchers consider a variable as an intervening factor to explain the significant relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable by adapting the same research framework. Additionally, future researchers may also consider a moderator to figure out what element can strengthen or reduce the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Another

consideration for future research is to expand the study population and include leaders from private universities or leaders from other industries to generalise the findings.

As shown in Table 5, job performance is explained by the independent variables of 56.7%. Hence, future researchers can consider other variables like working environment, remuneration etc. to find out if these elements also correlate with universities' leaders' job performance.

In conclusion, all independent variables (servant leadership, leadership competency, and self-efficacy) were found to have a significant relationship with the public universities' leaders' job performance. Thus, the findings from this study are expected can be a reference for university leaders in improving the quality of their work in leading their employees as well as managing their universities. Furthermore, it is also hoped that this study can be used as a basis for policymakers in formulating policies for the search or recruitment of university leaders.

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