Do Emotionally Intelligent Leaders and Academically Optimistic Teachers Determine the Organisational Commitment of Malaysian Educators?

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Abstract

Emotionally intelligent leaders have been described as one of the major factors influencing various aspects of employees' job performance in the organisation. This study investigated the influence of leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' academic optimism on teachers' organisational commitment in Malaysian secondary schools. Furthermore, the mediating effect of teachers' academic optimism on the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' organisational commitment was also investigated. A total of 385 teachers were randomly selected from four states situated in the northern region of Peninsular Malaysia. Data for this survey was collected through a questionnaire which was adapted from literature review. The results of the multiple regression analysis showed that leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' academic optimism had a significant influence on teachers' organisational commitment. Meanwhile, teachers' academic optimism acted as a partial mediator on the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' organisational commitment. In terms of the implications, this study showed that the role of the emotionally intelligent leader is extremely important in enhancing teachers' academic optimism in order to foster the organisational commitment of teachers in schools.
Keywords: Leaders' emotional intelligence, Teachers' academic optimism, Teachers' organisational commitment, Secondary schools, Leadership

Introduction

Malaysia's education sector is entering an extensive phase of transition in line with the implementation of the Education Blueprint by the Ministry of Education (MOE), which would make necessary preparations for a gradual and efficient reform of its educational system by 2025. This entirely new perspective demands the teachers as an executant agent to be more motivated, dedicated, and committed to face various challenges as well as behold a strong bond to the school organisation in order to lift achievements for all students. On top of that, school leaders need to be highly competent in an environment where organisation, leadership, and

emotional intelligence (Stephens & Hermond, 2010) have gained a great deal of attention to support the teachers.

Emotional intelligence has become one of the significant features of leaders. As a result, statistical data has revealed a consistent increase in emotional intelligent leadership, manifesting itself in the workplace. The term of emotional intelligence has arisen as early as the 1920's. Since then, many researchers began to introduce the idea of this non-cognitive intellectual ability, particularly in leaders. In organisations such as schools, principals as leaders bear huge responsibilities to demonstrate and foster a positive environment in order to help teachers overcome their increasing professional barriers and challenges towards student and school success. However, in recent years, individual characteristics of teachers have proven to stand out as an important factor in rebuilding themselves. Grounded in positive psychology research, the academic optimism of teachers complements the teachers' beliefs, which act as cognitive filters to track actions and thoughts that are also expressed in their teaching practices and other attitudes relevant to their work (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008).

As such, both leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' academic optimism have been chosen to be investigated by many researchers as an explanation of school issues, specifically teachers' organisational commitment. In facing the increasingly competitive and high expectations of the nation's educational provision, it is significant for schools to receive more committed teachers and talented leaders to meet today's demand. The constantly changing restrictive Malaysian educational system has prompted transitions in the positions, duties, and responsibilities of teachers. The effect relates not only to classroom teaching but also to different duties and responsibilities, which later increase the burden of the teachers (Sharifah et al., 2014) and cause frustration and mental or emotional outbursts among teachers (Idris, 2003; Noriah et al., 2006; Noriah et al., 2010). Moreover, teachers have excessive tasks that enable them to make proactive attempts to increase student involvement (Sharifah, 2014).

Leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' academic optimism seem to be useful tools for schools in this context. Leaders have been regarded as one of the most significant drivers to support and transform the teachers in providing a quality learning environment. This argument is supported by a number of empirical evidence, which found that leaders' emotional intelligence is one of the statistically significant predictors of teachers' academic optimism (Perelli, 2018), self-efficacy (Tsai, 2011; Rathi & Rastogi, 2009; Pierce, 2001), and academic emphasis (Teague, 2015). Furthermore, both leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' organisational commitment are also found to be the necessary conditions to achieve organisational objectives (Wong et al., 2010; Norshidah, 2012; Saleem et al., 2017). This is because the leaders are seen to be a trigger to the teachers in creating and sowing commitment to the organisation. Leaders' emotional intelligence establishes a better setting for the teachers so that the teachers have a sense of belonging to the schools. Leaders also show a genuine interest in helping the teachers, which make the teachers stay loyal to the organisation.

There has been a growing trend in recent years of schools taking greater responsibility for the purpose of generating world-class teaching and retaining highly skilled human resources. Many educational leaders perceive aiding and assisting teachers in improving their characteristics as important (Donovon, 2014) to both individual and organisational achievements. Academic optimism of teachers is a detailed view of the human agency that

describes the cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects of teachers' attitude. Thus, leaders play a significant role in supporting the characteristics of individual teachers and their attitudes or beliefs, as well as improving organisational commitment. Ideally, emotionally intelligent leaders exhibit actions and behaviours that will drive the teachers continually to develop themselves to execute actions for a positive effect on student achievement. Integrating these elements together, leaders' emotional support for the enhancement of the beliefs and attitudes of teachers – namely, leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' academic optimism – is assumed to have a positive impact on the development of teachers' organisational commitment. Teachers with high organisational commitment are considered as assets in any school, and such commitment is one of the main factors in increasing the capacity of teachers and schools (Ates & Buluc, 2015).

As per the report from OECD and TALIS which reflects that the commitment issue among Malaysian school teachers are still being debated, it is clear that the independent variables that have been used in most of the studies on teachers' organisational commitment in Malaysia were not strong enough to explain the issue. Given the importance of organisational commitment, numerous determinants of organisational commitment have been explored by researchers; there is still a need to recognise various other predictors (Singh, 2016), such as leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' academic optimism, which were undertaken for the present study. Meanwhile et al. (2006) noted that leadership as a social phenomenon affecting the final output of an organization and the feelings of personnel is rarely studied. Thus, as suggested by Norshidah (2011), there is a need for further investigations in the study of emotional intelligence, specifically in the context of Malaysian secondary schools.

Leaders' emotional intelligence

The importance of emotional intelligence in an organisation is well backed up by researchers from a wide range of fields, including organisational leadership (Singh, 2007; Kerr et al., 2006), employee performance (Hayward, 2005; Rangriz & Mehrabi, 2010), job satisfaction (Ruestow, 2008; Wong et al., 2010; Aghdasi, et al., 2011; Seyal & Afzaal, 2013), job performance (Myint & Aung, 2016), organisational commitment (Modassir & Singh, 2008; Khalili, 2011; Norshidah, 2012; Ates & Buluc, 2015; Saleem et al., 2017; Sayir, 2018), and self-efficacy (Rathi & Rastogi, 2009; Tsai et al., 2011; Leornard & Green, 2018).

The concept of leaders' emotional intelligence revolves around the fundamental obligation of leaders to trigger good feelings in the people they are leading by transforming the organisation through people and teams with strong interpersonal skills, understanding others, and exercising high levels of intelligence and energy. This study used the Emotional Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) developed by Nokelainen et al. (2007) and operationalised Goleman et al. (2002) four dimensions of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Each dimension of the leaders' emotional intelligence is addressed in the following.

The self-awareness dimension refers to a deep understanding of one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs, and drives (Goleman, 1998). Self-awareness is the foundation that the remaining domains build on, and without realising one's own emotions one would not be able to excel in the other domains. Leaders who understand emotional intelligence most

effectively often have a high degree of responsibility and self-awareness (Goleman et al., 2002). The ability to understand moods and emotions in oneself contributes to leadership effectiveness and positively influences follower commitment, innovation, team cohesion, and healthy organisational life (George, 2000).

The second element of leaders' emotional intelligence is the self-management dimension, which includes managing ones' internal states, impulses, and resources. Ganta and Manukonda (2018) commented that leaders who can manage and regulate their emotions are better positioned to influence others and their performance. Empirical studies found that principals' self-management was a strong predictor of the academic emphasis of teachers (Perreli, 2018; Mason, 2018; Tsai et al., 2011; Pierce, 2001). This result, however, is opposite and contradicts with the research done by Leornard and Green (2018), who noted that there is no relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and teacher self-efficacy.

A closely influential dimension to the content of leaders' emotional intelligence is social awareness. In this study, social awareness refers to how people deal with the relationships and awareness of the feelings, needs, and concerns of others. Social awareness is a necessary ingredient in leadership (Goleman et al., 2002). With leaders who are emotionally intelligent, social awareness is always practised and put forward in organisations. An emotionally intelligent leader is socially aware and has the interpersonal skills to listen to and to respond appropriately to an employee (Contino, 2004). Fullan (2014) stressed that a principal's role is to lead the school teachers in a process of learning to improve their teaching while learning alongside them about what works and what doesn't.

Another relevant dimension of leaders' emotional intelligence is relationship management, which refers to the skill or adaptability to induce desirable responses in others. Relationship management incorporates persuasion, conflict management, collaboration, and the handling of other people's emotions (Goleman et al., 2002). Leaders who are not emotionally intelligent, or those who lead in a way that does not pay attention to the impact of emotions, will be ineffective in promoting productive teams. In organisations like schools, most of the work is conducted through the team format; therefore, any unproductive teams in education can hamper the effectiveness of a school and produce less committed teachers (Goleman et al., 2002). Bradberry and Su (2006) remarked that leaders who use emotional intelligence to build solid relationships are likely to perform well in their jobs. The results of their study highlighted that a leader's utilisation of the relationship management skill was far more important to his or her job performance than the other three skills in the emotional intelligence model.

Taken these together, leaders' emotional intelligence as defined by Goleman et al. (2002) is mainly focused on defining emotional intelligence using a wide range of skills and competencies affecting leadership performance. The provision of leaders' emotional intelligence is particularly vital for future leaders who are said to be resonant leaders, whereby they establish deep emotional connections with others, bring out the best in their people, and build resilient and adaptive organisations.

Hypothesis 1: Leaders' emotional intelligence is positively related to teachers' organisational commitment.

Hypothesis 2: Leaders' emotional intelligence is positively related to teachers' academic optimism.

Teachers' organisational commitment

Organisational commitment plays a major role in acquiring a company's employee loyalty. Teachers committed to their job would be associated with their school organisations. As a result, they strive for organisational goals and the academic growth of students, as well as work hard for the improvement of the school. Committed teachers are prone to be hard-working, have the strength to continue with the organisation, and are dedicated to their profession. The conceptualisation of teacher commitment can be synthesised by a multidimensional approach. It is not one-dimensional but has many layers and dimensions (Day, 2000; Day, 2004). The behaviour of teachers differs based on the type of commitment they emphasise. A lower commitment of teachers signifies that the teachers are less effective in their professional achievement and affects badly on the effectiveness of the schools. It is obvious that lower committed teachers fail by directing students to behave according to different goals apart from the school's goals. This would create difficulties that would lead to a divergence from the school's educational goals. According to Celep (2000), the sense of working conditions that teachers have is influential on their working habits. One factor that is the source of the teachers' perception of working conditions is the attitudes and expectations of the teachers towards the objects in their working environment such as their job tasks, materials, students, and the school. Therefore, teachers perform the tasks in line with their interaction and concern with these objects. Thus, by taking into account the views of Celep (2000), in this research, teachers' organisational commitment refers to the degree of the psychological bond of the teachers to the school, teaching work, work group, and teaching occupation.

Teachers' academic optimism

Teachers' academic optimism exists at the individual basis, and it is a crucial feature of an individual teacher's characteristics. It is one of the frameworks representing the expectations of teachers and their efforts to increase student outcomes. It has proven to increase student academic success. Typically, teachers' academic optimism is a combination of three dimensions to create a constructive learning process with each other. In the context of this review, teachers' academic optimism refers to teachers' belief that they have the capability to positively affect student achievement by believing in themselves and trusting others.

With three essential and related dimensions, the construct is multidimensional: self-efficacy, trust, and academic emphasis. Self-efficacy is personal belief or assumption, which displays the cognitive part. Trust is an affective reaction, and academic emphasis is the focus on specific behaviours in the classroom (Fahy et al., 2010). Thus, teachers' academic optimism is fundamentally dependent upon each other as a relational set of interactions.

The academic optimism of teachers in the context of Malaysian secondary schools is often overlooked. Teachers' beliefs act as cognitive filters to track actions and thoughts, which are also expressed in their teaching practices and other attitudes relevant to work (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008). This is in accordance with the Ministry of Education's commitment to produce high quality educators as it is the most significant school-based factor in determining

student outcomes. This is closely related to an international study stating that the excellence of each pupil depends on the quality of the teachers (MOE, 2013).

Based on the work of Fahy et al. (2010), three main dimensions of teachers' academic optimism are used to investigate the process of the academic optimism of teachers in the context of Malaysian secondary schools, and these include: (1) a teacher's sense of self-efficacy, (2) a teacher's trust in parents and students, and (3) a teacher's academic emphasis. Çoban and Demirtaş (2011) in their study concluded that teachers devote more time and effort into their organisation if they believe in their teaching ability, trust their students, and emphasise academic instruction. According to Sharifah (2014), Malaysian teachers have excessive tasks that enable them to make proactive attempts to increase student involvement. Thus, emotional support from emotionally intelligent leaders could facilitate the beliefs and attitudes of teachers and inspire teachers' organisational commitment.

Hypothesis 3: Teachers' academic optimism is positively related to teachers' organisational commitment.

Hypothesis 4: Teachers' academic optimism has a mediating effect on the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' organisational commitment.

The following research framework in Figure 1 has been developed in which leaders' emotional intelligence works as the independent variable, teachers' academic optimism is the mediator variable, while teachers' organisational commitment is the dependent variable. The framework is based on the mediator model as proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986). As the mediator variable, teachers' academic optimism can be tested to measure the direct effect or indirect effect on the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' organisational commitment. This argument is in line with the views of Kurz et al. (2007) in their study which mentioned that teacher beliefs about student-centered instruction, humanistic classroom management, and professional commitment were individually and collectively related to the explanation of the teachers' sense of academic optimism.
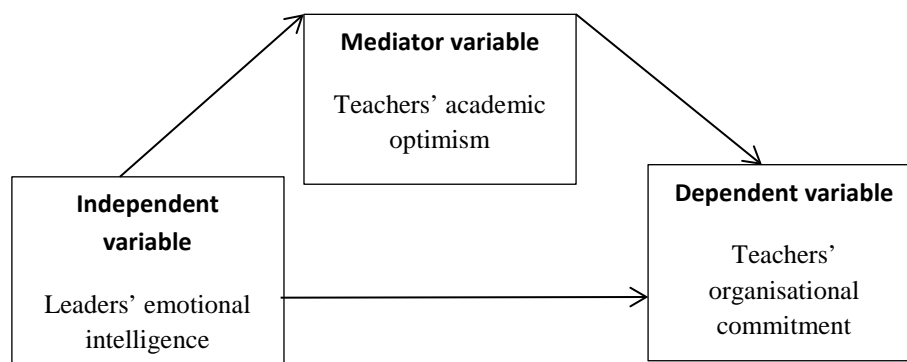

Figure 1 Research framework

For this reason, this paper aimed to estimate the influence of leaders' emotional intelligence on teachers' academic optimism and teachers' organisational commitment in Malaysian secondary schools, with a special focus on the mediating effect of teachers' academic optimism on the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' organisational commitment.

Materials and methods

The study was conducted using the survey method. A subset of 385 teachers was randomly selected out of the entire population of 38,269 secondary school teachers based in the northern zone of Peninsular Malaysia, which covers four states (i.e. Kedah, Penang, Perlis, and Perak). A questionnaire consisting of four sections was used for data gathering, namely:

Section A: Demographics of the Respondents. This part was comprised of a few questions about the respondents' demographic background, i.e. gender, ethnicity, age, marital status, years of services in current school, educational background, and principal's gender.
Section B: Leaders' Emotional Intelligence. This part was assessed using the Emotional Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) (Nokelainen et al., 2007). Leaders' emotional intelligence consisted of four dimensions, i.e. (1) self-awareness (8 items), (2) self-management (20 items), (3) social awareness (7 items), and (4) relationship management (16 items). The factor loading of confirmatory factor analysis for items of each subscale was between 0.70-0.85. The teachers gave their opinion and agreement to the items related to leaders' emotional intelligence for all four dimensions using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (low to high), where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Rarely Agree, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree.
Section C: Teachers Sense of Academic Optimism for Secondary Teachers (TAOS-S) (Fahy et al., 2010). This part consisted of three dimensions, i.e. (1) a teacher's sense of self-efficacy, (2) a teacher's trust in parents and students, and (3) a teacher's academic emphasis (Hoy et al., 2006b). The factor loading of confirmatory factor analysis for items of each construct was between 0.75-0.87. A five-point scale was used, ranging from 1 to 5 (low to high), where 1 = Nothing, 2 = Very Little, 3 = Some Influences, 4 = Quite a Bit, and 5 = A Great Deal.
Section D: Multi-Dimensional Commitment to Educational Organisation-Teacher Questionnaire. This part was adapted from Celep (2000), which consisted of 28 items for four dimensions, i.e. (1) commitment to school, (2) commitment to teaching occupation, (3) commitment to teaching work, and (4) commitment to work group. The factor loading of confirmatory factor analysis for items of each construct was between 0.70-0.89. This instrument used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (low to high), where 1 = Very Seldom, 2 = Rarely Occurs, 3 = Sometimes Occurs, 4 = Mostly Occurs, and 5 = Always Occurs.

The results were drawn using mean, Pearson correlation, and hierarchical linear regression on the data that was collected. Appropriate consideration has been taken to protect the confidentiality of the respondents for different purposes, and no personal details or authentication variables have been collected from the respondents. Furthermore, it was explicitly stated in the questionnaire that the data collected was for research purposes only.

Results and discussion

   Multiple regression analysis was used to measure the feedback or responses of leaders' emotional intelligence on teachers' academic optimism and teachers' organisational commitment. The multiple regression results in Table 1 indicated significant leaders' emotional intelligence responses, each accounting for 27 percent of the variance changes in teachers' organisational commitment and 28 percent of the variance changes in teachers' academic optimism. Hypothesis 1 was supported, where leaders' emotional intelligence is positively related to teachers' organisational commitment ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.05$). Hypothesis 2 was supported, where leaders' emotional intelligence is positively related to teachers' academic optimism ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 1 Influence of leaders' emotional intelligence on teachers' academic optimism and organisational commitment

Variable	Teachers' Academic Optimism	Teachers' Organisational Commitment
Leaders' Emotional Intelligence	0.42	0.41
R^2	0.28	0.27
Adjusted R^2	0.28	0.27
F value	149.46*	143.11*
Durbin Watson	1.79	1.77

* Significant at p < 0.05

   The results in Table 2 shows the multiple regression analysis performed on teachers' organisational commitment and teachers' academic optimism variables. The findings found that teachers' academic optimism had significantly contributed 31 percent of the variance changes for teachers' organisational commitment. The assessment of the value of the beta coefficient (β) indicated that teachers' academic optimism had a positive effect on teachers' organisational commitment ($\beta = 0.55$, $p = 0.01$). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Table 2 Influence of teachers' academic optimism on teachers' organisational commitment

Variable	Teachers' Organisational Commitment
Teachers' Academic Optimism	0.55
R^2	0.31
Adjusted R^2	0.3
F value	168.01*
Durbin Watson	1.68

* Significant at p < 0.05

Hypothesis 4 was supported as illustrated in Table 3, where teachers' academic optimism partially mediated the effect of leaders' emotional intelligence on teachers' organisational commitment based on the guidelines set forth by Baron and Kenny (1986) for testing mediation. The regression coefficients in Tables 1 and 2 show that teachers' academic optimism was significantly (and positively) related to leaders' emotional intelligence (independent variable) and teachers' organisational commitment (dependent variable), thus, meeting the conditions for mediation (mediator variable was significantly related to the independent and dependent variables).

Table 3 Mediating effect of teachers' academic optimism

Variable	Dependent Variable (DV): Teachers' Organisational Commitment		
	DV (β)	DV without MV (β) (Model 1)	DV with MV (β) (Model 2)
Independent variable (DV)			
Leaders' Emotional Intelligence	-	0.41*	0.26*
Mediator variable (MV)			
Teachers' Academic Optimism	0.42*	-	0.28*
R^2	0.28	0.27	0.36
Adjusted R^2	0.28	0.27	0.35
F Value	149.46*	143.11*	105.65*
Durbin Watson	1.79	1.77	1.76

* Significant at $p < 0.05$

The results in Table 1 indicated that leaders' emotional intelligence had a significant influence on teachers' organisational commitment. This finding is parallel with previous studies conducted by Wong et al. (2010), Norshidah (2012), and Saleem et al. (2017), who found that leaders with emotional intelligence have a significant impact on teachers' commitment to the organisation. Thus, it can be suggested that leaders' should spur emotional support in order to enhance the commitment of teachers to the schools, teaching occupation, and working groups; and eventually to help achieve organisational objectives. The finding also supports the dynamics of the social exchange theory, which was used in this study in influencing teachers' obligation towards schools. This is in line with past studies conducted by Chou and Hsu (2016) and Yigit (2016), whereby their findings revealed that when the level of organisational commitment increases, the social exchange level of employees also increases.

Furthermore, the results in Table 1 showed that leaders' emotional intelligence had a significant influence on teachers' academic optimism, which reflects that in education the emotional intelligence of leaders helps in maintaining a favourable learning environment as well as creating harmonious relations between teachers and students (Mason, 2018). This shows that emotionally intelligent principals generate actions and behaviours to continually

develop themselves and others, which leads teachers to be optimistic and eventually bring students to high levels of academic achievement. The findings here are similar with the findings of Perelli (2018), who noted that there was a significant relationship between principal support and teachers' academic optimism, and emotional support was a strong predictor of teachers' academic optimism. This result is also very similar to the social cognitive theory by Bandura (1997), who noted that self-awareness, self-regulation (self-management), and control of emotions (all considered to be constituents of emotional intelligence) are critical in the development of self-efficacy perceptions.

Meanwhile, the results in Table 2 demonstrated that teachers' academic optimism had a significant influence on teachers' organisational commitment in Malaysian secondary schools. This clearly shows that in order for teachers to show their commitment to the organisation, they need to believe that they have the capacity to affect the quality of teaching and learning process and to devote their time and effort to improving instruction. The findings also seem to be supported by the findings of Coban and Dermitas (2011), which showed a correlation between the academic optimism and organisational commitment of teachers.

Next, the results in Table 3 found that teachers' academic optimism was the partial mediator on the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' organisational commitment. This indicated that teachers' academic optimism had partially intervened in the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable. The increment of R^2 values, where $R^2 = 27$ in Model 1 to $R^2 = 36$ in Model 2, showed that there was an increment of variance change in the teachers' organisational commitments after the inclusion of the mediator, i.e. teachers' academic optimism in the relationship model between leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' organisational commitment. This finding best explained the social exchange theory, whereby the initiating action of leaders by keeping disruptive emotions and impulses in check, by being able to read subtleties in body language, and by hearing emotional messages behind people's words had sowed a positive relationship between leaders and teachers. This created an environment that enabled effective teaching, which in turn, positively impacts teachers' belief that they can make a difference in the academic performance of students and eventually be committed to the organisation. Based on the results, it can be concluded that schools led by emotionally intelligent leaders require positive inclinations of teachers on academic optimism in order to enhance their organisational commitment. According to Akomalafe and Olatomide (2013), teachers can only be effective in their work if provided the right environment and job satisfaction to spur their motivation, commitment, and retention; and these require significant emotional intelligence on the part of administrators (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017). This finding is consistent with the study of Kurz (2006), who noted that optimistic teachers were more committed to their profession and their students because their positive quality translated into their teaching and professional commitments when they have optimistic beliefs. The principals who nurtured emotional intelligence indirectly became the main factor in stimulating teachers' academic optimism. This positive role has been reported to more likely induce teachers' organisational commitment, such as to communicate and collaborate with their fellow teachers, demonstrate collegial behaviour, use a variety of teaching methods, plan diverse lessons to cater to unique learning styles of students, give feedback on student work more quickly and frequently, and

take care of their own professional growth (Blasé & Blasé, 1998; Chrispeels, 1992; Goddard et al., 2000; McEwan, 1998 as reported by Anwar, 2016). It is presumed that principals with high emotional intelligence have encouraged teachers to work hard for their schools, enjoy teaching, feel proud of themselves and their colleagues as teachers, and create close relationships among themselves. This reciprocate action has driven them to have a highly academic emphasis, whereby teachers are making great efforts to ensure that their students are actively engaged in a conducive learning environment in which academics are the prime concern. Thus, the presence of leaders' emotional intelligence enables teachers to continuously develop themselves (Rathi & Rastogi, 2009; Tsai et al., 2011; Leornard & Green, 2018) and contribute to a variety of organisationally desirable outcomes.

Conclusions

This study provides information and prior knowledge about the influence of leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' academic optimism on teachers' organisational commitment. The findings of this study showed that the elements of leaders' emotional intelligence as introduced by Goleman et al. (2002) are well adapted to the context of the educational system in Malaysia. Regression analysis showed that leaders' emotional intelligence has a significant influence towards teachers' academic optimism and teachers' organisational commitment. Furthermore, the results also revealed that there is a partial mediating role of teachers' academic optimism on the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' organisational commitment. Theoretically, this study has proved that principals in Malaysia have developed a manifestation of the exchange process on teachers' academic optimism and teachers' organisational commitment in the secondary school setting as mentioned in the social exchange theory. When the principals effectively manage their own emotions and recognise and understand the emotions of their subordinates, they induce good feelings in the people they lead; and in return, when the team members are feeling good, they are poised to perform well and be committed. Furthermore, this study also provides details and relevant understanding regarding the criteria of emotionally intelligent leadership, which eventually can assist the MOE in providing training to future principals.

The ultimate limitation of this study was in the nature of a fully quantitative study, where data was collected at one specific point in time using the survey method. Methodological triangulation by using qualitative methods, involving participant observations and using in-depth interview methods, would provide greater ways to get in-depth and comprehensive information for the cause and effect of leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' organisational commitment. Further research is needed to explore the comparison of leaders and teachers between secondary and primary schools, between urban and rural schools, and between public and private schools. These comparisons can help researchers to identify the differences in school culture, principals' leadership, teachers' organisational commitment patterns, and teachers' academic optimism level in schools. The research model presented here could act as a springboard for more empirical studies in the future.

Previous studies have shown that leaders with emotional intelligence fundamentally influence their employees' sense of academic optimism and organisational commitment for the achievement of the organisation's priorities and objectives. This study aimed to demonstrate

the influence of leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' academic optimism on teachers' organisational commitment. In addition, as a pioneer, the role played by teachers' academic optimism as a mediator in educational organisations in Malaysia has been explored. The results of this study showed that leaders' emotional intelligence was positively related to teachers' academic optimism and teachers' organisational commitment. Furthermore, the findings also revealed that teachers' academic optimism mediated the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and teachers' organisational commitment. Based on the results, it can be concluded that leaders, specifically the principals in Malaysian secondary schools, should perceive emotional intelligence as a way to enhance teachers' academic optimism and teachers' organisational commitment. Emotional intelligent leadership has provided principals with an opportunity to execute emotional competence in ways that influence the views of teachers in regard to their academic optimism and commitment to their schools. Thus, leaders have to consider exhibiting emotional intelligent leadership attributes in order to create a positive organisational environment and promote a balanced and fair relationship between them and their subordinates.

Acknowledgements

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