

Exploring Authoritative Leadership Among Department Heads in Sabah, Malaysia: A Quantitative Study

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to examine lecturers' perceptions of authoritative leadership among department heads in Sabah, Malaysia. The sample consisted of 46 lecturers from three private higher educational institutions (PHEIs) located in Kota Kinabalu, who were asked to fill out the Authoritative Leadership Questionnaire on Google Forms. Responses were subsequently transferred onto a spreadsheet and SPSS 29.0 was used to analyze the data. Findings imply that low-average to average proportions of lecturers tend to perceive their department heads as authoritative. Only three items imply that slightly above average proportion of lecturers tend to perceive their department heads as authoritative. Further, nonparametric tests showed that there were no significant differences in perceived authoritative leadership by way of gender, age, and job experience. Wilcoxon signed rank test revealed that all authoritative leadership items were significant at $p < .001$, with medians significantly different from the hypothesized value of 3.5, indicating strong disagreement. In light of the findings, implications and recommendations on authoritative leadership were made in the context of PHEIs in Sabah, Malaysia.

Contribution/Originality: This research offers a valuable contribution by examining lecturers' perceptions of authoritative leadership among department heads in Sabah, Malaysia. Besides narrowing the gap that exists in the educational leadership literature, it is the first quantitative study that examines lecturers' perceptions of authoritative leadership in the Bornean state, thus adding to the limited evidence base on the extent to which leaders at Malaysian private higher educational institutions

(PHEIs) provide a clear vision, guidance, motivation, and stability to inspire staff to follow a collective goal, while fostering a sense of autonomy and personal achievement via a strong presence, assertiveness, mentorship, and coaching.

1. Introduction

Gaining increasing prominence in today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, authoritative leadership is characterized by a hands-on, visionary approach where leaders provide a clear vision, guidance, and motivation to foster autonomy and growth among staff and students. While avoiding micromanagement, authoritative leaders act as mentors who offer personalized feedback and support to achieve a shared vision and positive learning environment. By exerting a keen balance between assertiveness and empathy, they provide a transformative framework for directing staff toward shared goals with purpose and clarity ([Join the Collective, 2023](#)). Transcending traditional, hierarchical leadership paradigms, they propagate a culture of empowerment and effective decision-making by guiding staff with foresight, while acknowledging and incorporating their input. Their management style not only drives productivity, but it also nurtures an educational environment that underscores reciprocal communication, mutual respect, and shared values.

By adopting a supportive yet assertive stance, authoritative leaders align decision-making with team development and foster a resilient organizational culture that is change-capable and innovative in the face of challenges. Additionally, their nuanced dynamics often harnesses the diverse strengths of staff and channels them toward organizational sustainability. By setting vivid goals, providing constructive feedback, and practicing open dialogue, authoritative leaders often cultivate an engaging culture that facilitates flexibility, autonomy, and cohesion, thus yielding improved job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work efficacy. With their capacity to persuade and motivate, they are able to set clear expectations that align with the organization's vision and mission without practicing authoritarianism or autocracy. Through open dialogue, they encourage staff to voice their ideas and concerns, besides offering constructive feedback that nurtures growth and development. Characterized by empathy, acceptance, and understanding, their management style underscores individual strengths and leverage diverse talents, which enable them to achieve organizational initiatives more effectively ([Join the Collective, 2023](#)).

1.1. Situations for Authoritative Leadership

Authoritative leaders are particularly effective in situations that require quick decisions rather than collective and collaborative ones ([London Premier Centre for Training, Ltd., 2024](#)). As supervisors, they possess the self-assertiveness and empathy to convince staff, especially during times when they need reassurance, assurance, and collegiality to face challenges. Being trustworthy, they provide clear guidance and strong influence that enable staff to handle major and abrupt transformations, while assertively guiding inexperienced staff who still need to improve their competencies. Moreover, successful authoritative leaders do more than just giving orders; they establish realistic goals to let staff know what they are trying to achieve.

Besides providing a central and vivid vision for staff to follow, they also practice reciprocal communication to ensure that their expectations and directives are properly

communicated, while seeking constant staff feedback to promote mutual understanding and collaboration. Further, they also avoid oppression or rigidity by balancing control with fairness and respect to avoid frustrating or antagonizing any staff. Instead, they support staff by providing resources, training, and coaching, which not only enhance overall organizational performance, but also the self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and organizational commitment amongst them.

According to [Hawley \(2024\)](#), authoritative leaders are transformational when dealing with certain situations. First, they are effective in turning around situations. For example, organizations undergoing restructuring or those struggling with inefficiencies can benefit from authoritative leaders who establish clear directives and realign the team dynamics with strategic goals. Second, startups and new ventures require authoritative leaders who can formulate a strong, guiding vision to grow the business, set the tone for success, and provide focus and direction for new teams. Third, high-risk industries, including healthcare, law enforcement, and military operations, require authoritative leaders to direct team members in a decisive and confident manner. Fourth, authoritative leaders are also needed to manage crises because they can make immediate and accurate decisions to steer the team toward swift and effective action, for example, in product recalls, natural catastrophes, civil unrest, healthcare emergencies, or financial downturns.

Authoritative leadership tends to stand out when clear direction and quick decision-making are crucial to thrive in the fast-paced and ever-evolving corporate world ([London Premier Centre for Training, Ltd., 2024](#)). With its emphasis on achieving goals and adhering to standards, it ensures quality work under an insightful and inventive leader with a vivid vision, open communicational style, and trust in the team, who essentially inspires and motivates staff to attain a common goal. Authoritative leaders tend to exhibit several attributes. As team leaders, they are neither autocratic nor authoritarian because they often adopt a flexible, impactful, and agile leadership style by directing and guiding their organization and staff. Characterized by an influential personality and clarity in decision-making, authoritative leaders often actively listen to ideas and insights from staff, which fosters a sense of belonging, appreciation, and mutual respect.

1.2. Attributes of Authoritative Leaders

1.2.1. Sub-styles and Qualities

Three salient sub-styles of authoritative leadership were identified by [Hawley \(2024\)](#). First, pathfinders demonstrate the ability to envision a harmonious team and to create a pathway to achieve it by channeling positive energies and using them as foundational pillars for building structured outcomes. Second, navigators command control and aim to be the driving force behind organized success by seeing the larger picture and leveraging on key elements or stakeholders to ensure the entire system runs smoothly. Third, guides possess a deep understanding of the existing context, while sharing insights and helping others manage through complexities and using innovative knowledge to direct staff efforts toward intended outcomes.

According to [Greenhalgh \(2025\)](#), while authoritarian leaders try to hold unrestricted power by exerting full control of a team and creating bottlenecks where they are a single point of approval or failure, authoritative leaders try to help the organization deploy its

resources more effectively. Authoritative leaders possess strong qualities that both motivate and support staff. They organize their team around a common goal and inspire team members to work together as one cohesive unit. Instead of leading from a place of fear, they advocate a position of respect that inspires staff try to emulate them. They provide authoritative space without micromanaging. After providing guidance, they encourage to approach them if they are stuck because they value creativity and are solution-oriented. Besides, this style often helps create a positive work environment, where staff feel united around a common goal, besides placing a high priority on long-term impact, encouraging the organization to create long-term solutions. Since it has a positive impact on staff retention and development, it is a good strategy for cultivating and fostering and growing talent. As leaders, their priority is to develop people to get ready to take their job. By rallying staff around a shared vision and allowing them to chart their own progress, authoritative leaders offer a strong balance between hands-on and hands-off management, which gives staff the autonomy and opportunities for growth.

1.2.2. Mentorship and Emotional Intelligence

Authoritative leaders inspire staff by offering mentorship, establishing a vivid vision, outlining the goals they intend to fulfill, and overcoming potential barriers (Vistatec, n. d.). They equip staff with a set of goals, plans, and needs to help keep them within the radar, while ensuring an equitable division of work duties. Being highly enthusiastic, they often increase staff's motivation, achievement orientation, and organizational commitment. Besides, with a high degree of emotional intelligence, they are also able to effectively identify with staff to assertively guide them through change, challenges, and barriers. While authoritarian leaders require staff to toe the line without any argument or discussion, authoritative leaders provide action-backed focus and inspiration by instilling staff with the knowledge and confidence needed to create and excel in crucial developmental opportunities.

Besides inspiring and guiding the team, authoritative leaders strive to create a culture of goodwill, productive work engagement, and pragmatic focus. While authoritarian leaders often command staff what to do and expect them to obediently follow instructions authoritative leaders strive to build trust through mentorship by acknowledging every staff and providing feedback and assistance geared toward helping them overcome obstacles and achieve professional success. While authoritarian leaders expect staff to adhere to the same procedures that the staff have always used, authoritative leaders lead by example by supporting and empowering staff, while helping them determine how to best accomplish tasks (Vistatec, n. d.).

1.3. Challenges of Authoritative Leadership

Leaders face resistance when trying to integrate authoritative leadership within the organization (Join the Collective, 2023). Therefore, they need to discuss the advantages of authoritative leadership, address issues and concerns, and highlight how the transition will support both individual and organizational growth. Further, they must strike an appropriate balance between self-assertiveness and approachability by practicing active listening, welcoming feedback, and ensuring that their decisions are always transparent and detailed, which is crucial in earning trust and respect from staff. Additionally, they must leverage existing staff's strengths by aligning them with relevant training and developmental initiatives, which not only eases the transition, but also

promotes a sense of continuity and stability, whereby staff demonstrate gradual and consistent change and development with their traits persisting over time.

To overcome challenges and barriers, leaders who intend to practice authoritative leadership must develop effective communication strategies that ensure clarity, encourage open dialogue, and foster an environment where staff feel engaged and valued, which can be achieved through regular meetings, individual consultations, and the use of succinct language. Further, they should propagate an environment that is conducive to lifelong learning and professional growth, which treats mistakes as opportunities for growth, while encouraging creative problem-solving within safe boundaries. Besides providing constructive feedback, they must also monitor and modify their approach by regularly soliciting feedback from staff and appraising its impact on staff morale, performance, and organizational dynamics. Lastly, by acknowledging and celebrating milestones and successes during the transition, they can reinforce the desirable aspects of the change and build momentum for ongoing engagement and progress ([Join the Collective, 2023](#)).

1.4. Statement of the Problem

A review of literature showed that quantitative research on college staff's perceptions of authoritative leadership is lacking in Malaysia, especially in the context of PHEIs in Sabah. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to examine lecturers' perceptions of authoritative leadership at three PHEIs in Sabah, Malaysia, which would help fill the research gap and establish a theoretical framework for the study. Lastly, findings of this study would generate novel knowledge on the extent to which department heads at local PHEIs adopt authoritative leadership principles that are based on a clear vision, motivation, mentorship, empowerment, and empathy.

1.5. Research Questions

Three research questions have been formulated to provide focus and direction in the study. Serving as a compass, they keep the authors on track, thus allowing them to concentrate on the relevant areas of investigation. Besides providing a framework for the entire research process, they also help in defining the scope of the study, thus ensuring that the research remains manageable and targeted. The research questions are as follows:

- i. What were the descriptive statistics of authoritative leadership among department heads at PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah and implications?
- ii. Were there any significant differences in lecturers' perceptions of authoritative leadership in terms of gender, age, and job experience?
- iii. Were any of the authoritative leadership items significantly different based on a hypothesized value of 3.5?

1.6. Significance of the Study

Quantitative research on authoritative leadership at PHEIs is significant for various reasons. First and foremost, it highlights the tangible benefits of authoritative leadership. Findings of this study would render greater insight into authoritative leadership as an effective management style that fosters team cohesion through clear objectives and a supportive environment that unifies staff, which often results in enhanced organizational performance. Second, findings would show that authoritative

leadership combine clear guidance and autonomy, which allows staff to excel in their roles, thus boosting overall productivity. Third, this study would provide a framework for practicing authoritative leadership to navigate change, thus making it easier for staff to adapt in unpredictable circumstances.

Fourth, it would inspire PHEI leaders to show genuine concern for staff wellbeing and professional growth, thus cultivating a more engaged and committed workforce. Fifth, this study would equip PHEI leaders with better knowledge on the advantages of authoritative leadership. By practicing it, they can achieve efficiency and high performance because this leadership style reduces confusion and delays by underscoring the cruciality of direct instructions, quick decision-making, and specific goals. Besides, it would persuade PHEI leaders to practice reciprocal communication to foster an environment where every staff feels heard and informed. Lastly, it can inspire them to establish a compelling vision to mobilize staff to achieve objectives, while setting high standards and holding staff accountable to drive strong performance and achieve goals.

2. Review of Literature

A literature review was conducted to obtain a comprehensive survey of published work on authoritative leadership by synthesizing existing research, theories, and evidence on the leadership style. It enabled the authors to provide the context for the new study, develop understanding of the construct, identify knowledge gaps, and highlight key findings. It also allowed them to offer critical evaluation and a structured argument, thus forming a key section of a larger academic paper. Overall, the literature review indicated that empirical research on authoritative leadership is lacking, thus compelling the authors to download and appraise the few conceptual papers available online.

2.1. Criteria for Authoritative Leadership

To successfully implement authoritative leadership, organizations should establish open lines of communication, clearly define objectives, encourage autonomy within a structured framework, and foster professional development ([Join the Collective, 2023](#)). First, they should encourage regular feedback and be willing to discuss issues and concerns, which promote transparency and trust. Second, they should ensure that all staff understand their job specifications and how they contribute to the overall picture. Third, they should give staff the autonomy to approach tasks that align with their strengths and specified goals. Fourth, they should provide staff training and development opportunities to enhance their skills and advance their professional endeavors.

According to [Boogaard \(2024\)](#), authoritative leaders should meet five criteria, which primarily require them to act as dedicated coaches and enlightened mentors who possess self-assertiveness, decisiveness, emotional intelligence, focus, enthusiasm, and strategic-mindedness. First, they need self-confidence to instill trust amongst staff with regards to their decisions. Second, they need to be decisive when relaying important information to staff because they have the ultimate authority and power to influence outcomes. Third, they need to be emotionally intelligent to become more people-focused, empathetic, and responsive toward staff's needs and concerns. Fourth, since they hinge on rallying staff around a vision, they need to establish a mission statement that defines the organization's current purpose and operation, while elaborating on its future

endeavors. Besides focusing on the present organizational activities and stakeholders, they also need to prioritize the future by providing an ultimate aspiration that inspires staff and aligns resources. Fifth, rather than brandishing orders and directives, they need to motivate staff and elicit genuine enthusiasm for goal attainment. Fifth, as innovative and transformational drivers, they need to be strategic at setting and steering the organization's long-range vision, making decisions, and influencing staff to achieve organizational goals in an everchanging environment. They also need to anticipate future challenges, while connecting the overall picture with the daily operations to ensure that the organization remains resilient and competitive

2.2. Authoritative Leadership Strategies

Authoritative leaders practice ten strategies that serve to enhance both individual and collective performance within the organization ([Join the Collective, 2023](#)). First, they conduct a detailed assessment of the current leadership approaches to gain an understanding the existing dynamics, besides identifying areas for improvement. Second, they embrace visionary leadership by articulating a succinct and compelling outlook for the future, which serves as a compass for staff to direct and inspire them to strive toward common goals. Third, they are committed to fostering honest and reciprocal communication characterized by transparency and mutual respect. Fourth, they cultivate an environment in which feedback is appreciated and acted upon, which not only instills trust, but also makes staff feel more connected and engaged with the organization.

Fifth, authoritative leaders develop clear, achievable goals that are challenging yet realistic, thus aligning them with the organization's overall vision besides inculcating staff with a sense of purpose and direction. Sixth, they cultivate an atmosphere of support and empowerment, which makes staff feel valued and respected. Seventh, they offer regular opportunities for professional growth and development, while allowing staff to take ownership of their work within the parameters. Eighth, they implement a structured decision-making process to make informed and well-received decisions in a swift manner, while involving staff in the process to foster a sense of inclusion. Ninth, to accentuate relevance and effectiveness, they strive to be change-capable and stay abreast with innovation and transformation. Tenth, they continuously monitor and evaluate the impact of their leadership by identifying areas of success as well as those needing adjustment, which ensures that their approach remains dynamic, responsive, and aligned with the organization's vision and mission ([Join the Collective, 2023](#)).

Being confident and enthusiastic, authoritative leaders are empowering, which staff find encouraging and supportive ([Vistatec, n. d.](#)). They demonstrate expertise as team leaders by providing clear guidelines, while focusing on the lay of the land and determining how each team member fits into the scenario. Further, they empathize with staff by familiarizing with their specific needs and wants, while guiding them in the desired direction based on vivid goals, besides providing advice and scaffolding to overcome potential obstacles. Since their primary goal is to mentor and guide staff to accomplish tasks or engage in lifelong learning, authoritative leaders strive to lead by example by modeling on-task behaviors, comprehending various staff-related aspects, and providing ongoing support to staff. They also strive to adopt effective leadership components to deal with multifarious situations to maintain a sense of direction and progress. Additionally, authoritative leaders equip staff with the tools needed to accomplish tasks independently, including innovative problem-solving skills that

promote performance outcomes. To help newcomers overcome obstacles, they often place experienced staff or high performers on the team. Lastly, they help staff advance in their areas by emphasizing overall knowledge and growth, which encourages them to share their input and perform collaboratively, while promoting buy-in and innovative problem-solving.

2.3. Career Growth, Clarity, Trust, and Consistency

Individuals can successfully grow their career through authoritative leadership ([International Institute for Management Development, 2025](#)). It is particularly beneficial for organizations that require quick turnabouts for projects, encounter crises or emergencies, or desire to boost productivity. Further, it helps create a more efficient work environment and encourages accurate, high-quality performance by promoting rapid decision-making and forward thinking, while emphasizing minute details and proper guidance. Besides, authoritative leadership also boosts staff's careers by fostering stronger bonds and collaboration. Additionally, authoritative leaders often urge staff to trust them as mentors and guides; this action fosters a deeper bond when staffs entrust their leaders. Lastly, authoritative leaders can boost staff's careers because they take an empathetic approach to understand and validate their needs and emotions, while steering them toward the right path, besides strengthening work ethic and articulating a compelling future that motivates staff to work toward it.

Additionally, authoritative leadership is characterized by clarity, trust, and consistency ([International Institute for Management Development, 2025](#)). First, authoritative leaders provide a clear and actionable vision goals and growth potential by demonstrating in-depth knowledge about the organization and strategizing to prepare for its future. Besides, they also uphold clarity by encouraging open communication when things appear ambiguous, which inspires staff to follow their guidance in the face of confusing or conflicting issues or tasks. By emphasizing clarity, authoritative leaders oversee everything to ensure that everyone is under the same radar and progressing toward the same goal. Second, authoritative leaders encourage trust between staff and the organization, while remaining empathetic toward their problems. They inspire staff and form a bond with them to ensure that they trust and support the organization's vision. Moreover, their visionary approach and positive reinforcement encourage staff to follow them willingly. Lastly, trust also promotes task engagement and high-quality work since it motivates staff to adhere to the organization's code of ethics and perform their best. Third, authoritative leaders set clear standards and guidelines for staff, which promote consistent outcomes in less time. With their guidance, staff often confidently accomplish tasks and develop innovative strategies to achieve professional goals. By effectively leading the team toward a unified vision, authoritative leaders promote individual and group success within the organization. Lastly, by having a comprehensive plan to ensure that work is promptly done every time, they are able to produce consistent premium outcomes.

2.4. Authoritative School Leaders and Professionalism

[Dinham \(2005; 2007\)](#) maintained that authoritative school leaders possess the positive attributes of democratic and authoritarian leaders. Besides being warm and supportive, they are responsive to individual and collective needs. As active listeners, they are able to build consensus and commitment, while acting as effective networkers beyond their school profile. Demanding good results, they set clear expectations for themselves, staff,

and students by communicating high standards and serving as role models for others to emulate. While assertive, but unlike authoritarian leaders, they avoid rigid rules and sanctions. Additionally, authoritative leaders exercise authority appropriately and in a timely fashion because they know when to consult and when to be decisive, besides demonstrating the skills and courage to act autonomously as well as to work with others. Prioritizing students and their learning, they regard student welfare as essential to academic success; therefore, they establish clear welfare policies and procedures to help every student overcome challenges and attain success.

Additionally, authoritative school leaders place a strong emphasis on professionalism by modeling it for others. They encourage, entrust, and support staff to develop new programs, policies, and practices, while recognizing their capabilities and untapped potential in individuals. Additionally, to promote professionalism, authoritative school leaders strive to move staff out of their comfort zones based on continual evaluation, data-based evidence, and action-oriented planning. Moreover, they also build leadership capacity and provide for leadership succession and sustainability by establishing learning communities geared toward improving educational outcomes. Action-focused, learning communities enable staff to (1) engage in innovative problem-solving, (2) develop a desire to learn about learning and teaching, (3) capitalize on the use of pedagogic terminology, models, and theory, (4) perceive learning as an on-going process, (5) develop competent, assertive, self-regulated skills, (6) improve their self-accountability, (7) engage in experimentation, calculated risk taking, and innovative teaching and learning, (8) modify their way of thinking and acting through questioning and reflection, and (9) uphold social maintenance to augment the school, department, or faculty (Dinham, 2005; 2007).

2.5. Schools and Voluntary Organizations

Marsh, Waniganayake, & De Nobile (2013) presented a mixed methods on authoritative leadership as a critical element in educational leadership. Findings showed that authoritative leaders tend to be skillful in nurturing relationships, while building a learning culture that demands excellence. Findings imply that, although school leadership has become increasingly complex, authoritative leaders tend to demonstrate high presence by establishing supportive relationships with staff and exerting a positive influence upon the school climate and culture, leading to improved teacher agency and organizational commitment.

Additionally, Milofsky (2000) postulated that authoritative leadership is central to the management dynamics in voluntary organizations. Authoritative leaders often represent followers' self-interest as well as the larger mission of the organization, which inspire subordinates to follow their orders or directions. In contrast to authoritarian leaders who often use coercion, explicit exchange, or an economic contract, authoritative leaders possess the expertise that followers respect and the democratic principles that garner group consensus. Besides, authoritative leadership is central to the dynamics of schools, churches, medical institutions, voluntary groups, and self-help organizations, all of which require leaders who can (1) help subordinates to advance their learning and personal development, (2) support interdependent task groups, and (3) lead symbolic, ritual events that address larger life issues and concerns.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Approach

A quantitative research design was adopted to allow the authors to systematically investigate perceived authoritative leadership through the use of numerical data and statistical analysis to quantify lecturers' perceptions of the management style, with the primary objective of drawing meaningful conclusions and generalizing results to a broader lecturer population in Sabah. Further, statistical methods were used to calculate means, percentages of agreement, and significant differences by way of age, gender, and work experience. The key elements of the current quantitative research design included (1) three succinctly stated research questions, (2) a convenient sample of lecturers ($n = 46$) as a representative subset, (3) a list of authoritative leadership variables to be measured, (4) an appropriate data collection method, (5) specific statistical methods to analyze data, and (5) ethical considerations (i.e., informed consent and privacy protection).

3.2. Research Location

This study was conducted in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, the capital city of the island state where quantitative research on leadership styles at PHEIs is scarce. Kota Kinabalu was chosen for its distinctive educational landscape, which includes a list of 16 PHEIs ($N = 16$) that can provide a sufficiently representative sample of the lecturer population in Sabah, thus allowing for a relatively fair assessment of lecturers' perceptions of authoritative leadership at local PHEIs.

3.3. Sample and Justification

The sample of this study comprised 46 lecturers ($n = 46$) recruited from three PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, who possess at least a bachelor's degree, English proficiency, and a full-time contract at their respective institutions. Initially, deans, coordinators, and registrars of eight (8) randomly selected PHEIs were contacted via email and phone, but eventually, only three (3) agreed to participate in the study. Subsequently, the PHEI leaders shared the survey link with lecturers and urged them to respond. Voluntary participation and convenient access were the main considerations of this selection procedure, which could yield a realistic and contextually relevant sample.

Respondents come from culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse communities in Sabah. The sample size was determined according to theoretical and statistical considerations. According to the central limit theorem, a minimum of 30 participants is generally sufficient to ensure statistical power and generalizability for basic survey research (Roscoe, 1975; RUBIKTOP, 2023). Additionally, the sample was deemed representative of lecturers from the local PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu; hence, selection bias was minimized. Systematic random sampling of PHEIs was initially done, whereby every second college on the list was contacted. This selection method was practiced for its ability to capture a diverse range of perspectives across different age, gender, and work experience among lecturers. By allowing all eligible PHEIs an equal chance of selection, this method could prevent the under- or over-representation of specific groups, while increasing the generalizability of findings to a broader population of PHEI lecturers.

Additionally, PHEIs were chosen based on their physical proximity to the university college where the first author serves as program leader in its Master of Education in Leadership. In general, the study was delimited by proximity, accessibility, and administrators' willingness to participate in the research study. A total of 46 lecturers responded to the questionnaire online; completion of the questionnaire was interpreted as informed permission, with all participants assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

While the sample size seemed small, it met the minimum requirement for quantitative research in the social sciences, particularly in educational leadership and educational psychology. For example, [Roscoe \(1975\)](#) recommended a sample size of 30 to 500 for most statistical research. This rule of thumb is supported by the central limit theorem, which stipulates that sampling distributions will approach normality when there are 30 or more respondents, allowing for acceptable statistical inference. Furthermore, the current sample size ensured a reasonable margin of error and enough power to identify modest effects in nonparametric analyses, such as the Kruskal-Wallis, Mann-Whitney U, and Wilcoxon signed rank tests, which were used to interpret data in the current study.

The sample consisted of 32.6 percent males and 67.4 percent females. Age-wise, 32.6 percent are 24 to 34 years old, 32.6 percent are 35 to 45 years old, 17.4 percent are 46 to 56 years old, and 17.4 percent are above 56 years old. Experience-wise, 41.3 percent have worked for five to 10 years, 21.7 percent have worked for 11 to 16 years, 13 percent have worked for 17 to 22 years, and 23.9 percent have worked for more than 22 years (see [Table 1](#)).

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents ($n = 46$)

Variables	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Age	24-34	15	32.6
	35-45	15	32.6
	46-56	8	17.4
	Above 56	8	17.4
Job Experience	5-10	19	41.3
	11-16	10	21.7
	17-22	6	13.0
	Over 22	11	23.9
Gender	Male	15	32.6
	Female	31	67.4

3.4. Instrument

A questionnaire was developed to collect data on authoritative leadership. It comprises 24 Likert-scale questions derived from the literature ([Hawley, 2024](#); [Join the Collective, 2023](#); [London Premier Centre for Training, Ltd., 2024](#)). Responses range from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5. To determine its suitability for the current study, it was pilot-tested on 25 lecturers and data were analyzed using SPSS 29.0. Results indicated that its Cronbach's alpha is 0.988, thus indicating that the questionnaire has strong internal consistency. Moreover, the items within the questionnaire are highly correlated with each other, suggesting they are all measuring the same theoretical construct (authoritative leadership). Lastly, the questionnaire elicits consistent responses; respondents who give a high score on one item are likely to give high scores on the rest of the items.

3.5. Data Collection and Analysis

PHEI lecturers were required to complete the questionnaire on Google Forms and were informed that completion of the survey was their indication of consent to voluntarily participate in the study. Ethical issues were prioritized throughout the data collection procedure. All participants were given informed consent in relation to the purpose of the study, its voluntary nature, and the possibility to withdraw at any time without any repercussions. To ensure confidentiality, all responses were anonymized and the data were securely stored in a strong room. Only the first writer has access to the data, thus guaranteeing that they would be used solely for scholarly purposes. Data were automatically transferred onto a spreadsheet and subsequently analyzed using SPSS 29.0. First, percentages of agreement on perceived authoritative leadership were calculated. Second, Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences in lecturers' perceptions of authoritative leadership in relation to age and job experience. Third, Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were any significant differences in terms of gender. Fourth, Wilcoxon signed rank test was used to determine if any of the authoritative leadership items were significant at a hypothesized value of 3.5.

4. Findings

4.1. Percentages of Agreement

Percentages of agreement (strongly agree/agree) were collapsed to gain an overview of perceived authoritative leadership. A low average proportion (52.2 to 58.7 percent) of lecturers strongly agreed/agreed that department heads tend to (1) encourage staff to follow them through positive reinforcement, (2) encourage staff to gain familiarity with one another, (3) encourage staff to persevere when they make mistakes, (4) practice two-way communication, (5) offer constructive feedback rather than criticism, (5) communicate and get along with staff, (6) guide staff toward collective success, and (7) take a hand-on approach to guide the organization and staff (see [Table 2](#)). Further, an average proportion (60.8 to 69.6 percent) of lecturers strongly agreed/agreed that department heads tend to (1) expect staff to trust them as guides, (2) mentor staff and work to inspire them, (3) develop new strategies to help staff achieve goals, (4) promote consistent, high-quality results in less time, (5) guide staff to confidently assume tasks, (6) identify what needs to change and define a plan to tackle issues, (7) provides staff with an actionable vision of organizational goals, and (8) provide staff with a clear direction concerning the organization and work. Lastly, only slightly above average proportion (71.8 percent) of lecturers strongly agreed/agreed that department heads tend to (1) takes the lead and encourage staff to follow, (2) motivate staff to do their best, and (3) strategize to get ready for the organization's future (see [Table 2](#)).

Table 2: Percentages of Agreement on Perceived Authoritative Leadership

Item	1	2	3	4	5	4+5 (collapsed)
Takes a hand-on approach to guide the organization and staff	4.3	13	23.9	28.3	30.4	58.7
Mentors staff and works to inspire them	6.5	21.7	10.9	26.1	34.8	60.9
Takes the lead and encourages staff to follow	4.3	6.5	17.4	26.1	45.7	71.8

Guides staff toward collective success	4.3	19.6	19.6	21.7	34.8	56.5
Motivates staff to do their best	6.5	10.9	10.9	28.3	43.5	71.8
Provides staff with a clear direction concerning the organization and work	6.5	4.3	19.6	32.6	37	69.6
Offers constructive feedback rather than criticism	10.9	15.2	17.4	21.7	34.8	56.5
Communicates and gets along with staff	8.7	17.4	15.2	17.4	41.3	58.7
Practices two-way communication	10.9	21.7	10.9	17.4	39.1	56.5
Encourages staff to gain familiarity with one another	8.7	21.7	13	21.7	32.6	54.3
Encourages staff to persevere when they make mistakes	10.9	17.4	17.4	28.3	26.1	54.4
Expects staff to trust him or her to guide them	6.5	15.2	17.4	39.1	21.7	60.8
Is empathetic and validates staff's views and emotions	13	15.2	13	28.3	30.4	58.7
Provides staff with an actionable vision of organizational goals	6.5	13	15.2	30.4	34.8	65.2
Strategizes to get ready for the organization's future	6.5	10.9	10.9	43.5	28.3	71.8
Oversees everything to ensure staff are on the same wavelength	6.5	8.7	28.3	26.1	30.4	56.5
Ensures that staff trust and support his or her organizational vision	4.3	13	26.1	30.4	26.1	56.5
Encourages staff to follow him or her through positive reinforcement	8.7	15.2	23.9	17.4	34.8	52.2
Sets clear standards and guidelines for staff	6.5	6.5	19.6	32.6	34.8	67.4
Promotes consistent, high-quality results in less time	8.7	2.2	26.1	39.1	23.9	63
Guides staff to confidently assume tasks	6.5	15.2	15.2	34.8	28.3	63.1
Develops new strategies to help staff achieve goals	6.5	15.2	15.2	23.9	39.1	63
Identifies the strengths and weaknesses in the organization	4.3	10.9	17.4	32.6	34.8	67.4
Identifies what needs to change and defines a plan to tackle issues	6.5	8.7	19.6	34.8	30.4	65.2

Strongly disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly agree = 5

4.2. Nonparametric Test Results

Nonparametric tests showed that there were no significant differences in perceived authoritative leadership by way of gender, age, and job experience (see [Table 3](#)).

Table 3: Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H Results

Public leadership	Nonparametric test	p-value
Gender	Mann-Whitney U test	0.309
Age	Kruskal-Wallis H test	0.835
Job experience	Kruskal-Wallis H test	0.228

4.3. Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results

Wilcoxon signed rank test revealed that all authoritative leadership items were significant at $p < .001$, with medians significantly different from the hypothesized value of 3.5, indicating strong disagreement (see Table 4).

Table 4: Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results

Item	<i>p</i> -value	Conclusion
Takes a hand-on approach to guide the organization and staff	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Mentors staff and works to inspire them	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Takes the lead and encourages staff to follow	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Guides staff toward collective success	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Motivates staff to do their best	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Provides staff with a clear direction concerning the organization & work	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Offers constructive feedback rather than criticism	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Communicates and gets along with staff	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Practices two-way communication	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Encourages staff to gain familiarity with one another	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Encourages staff to persevere when they make mistakes	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Expects staff to trust him or her to guide them	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Is empathetic and validates staff's views and emotions	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Provides staff with an actionable vision of organizational goals	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Strategizes to get ready for the organization's future	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Oversees everything to ensure staff are on	< 0.001**	Median significantly differed

the same wavelength		from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Ensures that staff trust and support his or her organizational vision	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Encourages staff to follow him or her through positive reinforcement	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Sets clear standards and guidelines for staff	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Promotes consistent, high-quality results in less time	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Guides staff to confidently assume tasks	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Develops new strategies to help staff achieve goals	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Identifies the strengths and weaknesses in the organization	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Identifies what needs to change and defines a plan to tackle issues	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Interacts and communicates with staff as often as possible	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement
Knows the staff and their strengths	<0.001**	Median significantly differed from the test value indicating strong disagreement

** $p < .001$

5. Implications and Recommendations

5.1. Transformational, Transactional, and Paternalistic Leadership

Findings imply that low-average to average proportions of lecturers tend to perceive their department heads as authoritative. Another three items imply that a slightly above average proportion of lecturers tend to perceive their department heads as authoritative. Previous research showed that Malaysian leaders tend to adopt transformational and transactional leadership more often than other styles (Arham, Boucher, & Muenjohn, 2012; Ismail & Zulqernain, 2020; Marmaya, et al. 2015; Musa, 2013).

Additionally, rather than authoritative, many Malaysian leaders tend to be paternalistic, who strive to equip staff with guidelines and directions, which results in a more formal leadership style with strict adherence to rules and regulations. Moreover, Malaysian leaders also tend to be hierarchical, with a strong emphasis on respect for authority and deference to those with prominent status. Nevertheless, besides work, they often demonstrate concern for their staff's general welfare, including housing, healthcare, and other issues, implying that they value harmonious relationships and consensus at the workplace. Unlike authoritative leaders, Malaysian leaders tend to perceive time in a

unique way. Being relationship-oriented, they tend to adopt a fluid time culture, which discourages strict adherence to deadlines. While authoritative leaders provide direct and authentic feedback, Malaysian leaders, being paternalistic, strive to avoid criticizing staff openly; therefore, they prefer to counsel them in private, similar to the way a parent would speak to a child (Commisceo Global Consulting, Ltd., n. d.). Lastly, Malaysian leaders prefer to be paternalistic because it tends to improve organizational commitment. Hakimian et al. (2014) found that paternalistic leadership tends to be significantly related to affective, continuance, and normative commitment. It acts as a persuasive factor that motivates staff to continue serving the organization rather than constantly looking for a job elsewhere.

5.2. PHEI Situations for Authoritative Leadership

According to Tan (2024), authoritative leadership, compared to the authoritarian style, is a more visionary and sustainable approach. PHEIs present several ideal situations to leverage its strengths. First, since they constantly face organizational change in the face of globalization and digitalization, PHEIs need authoritative leadership for transformation, especially when they are undergoing prominent changes, such as restructuring, mergers, or adopting new strategies. Authoritative leaders can provide a clear vision and direction, which helps staff understand the purpose of the changes and subsequently align their efforts toward common goals. Second, to promote innovation and change, PHEIs need to introduce new programs, services, and processes; authoritative leadership enables them to articulate the vision and inspire staff to embrace innovative problem-solving to achieve goals. Third, to promote sustainability, PHEIs often need to form new teams and continually revitalize and reenergize them. When forming new teams, authoritative leadership enables them to establish a clear vision and mission, thus creating a strong foundation for the teams' culture and dynamics. When revitalizing or reenergizing teams, authoritative leadership enables PHEIs to reinvigorate teams to become more versatile, modular, and motivated by demonstrating foresight and inventiveness.

Authoritative leadership is also effective under certain exemplary circumstances (Tan, 2024). First, PHEIs need to set long-term goals and strategies to meet the triple bottom line, which encompasses the 3Ps (profitability, people, and planet). Authoritative leadership enables them to effectively communicate strategic objectives, which ensures that staff are aligned and motivated to work toward attaining them. Second, to promote socioeconomic progress in terms of educational goods and services, alongside inclusion, social justice, and the common good, PHEIs need to implement future-focused initiatives. In situations that require a future orientation, such as sustainability initiatives or market expansion, authoritative leadership enables PHEIs to focus on the global picture, encompassing a diverse range of high-achieving, globally-recognized international curricula and pedagogical approaches; interest-based, student-driven projects; and real-world learning that fosters intellectual rigor and individual growth. Third, PHEIs need to have crisis recovery plans in place to counter economic downturns, natural disasters, or public relations issues. Authoritative leadership can guide them through recovery by setting a clear path forward and inspiring confidence in the future. It also helps stabilize operations to restore things quickly by reestablishing order and focus.

Additionally, organizations need to demonstrate high performance by consistently exceeding expectations and delivering high-quality outcomes, besides fostering a powerful organizational culture (Tan, 2024). First, authoritative leadership enables

PHEIs to set ambitious goals and inspire staff to take initiative, contribute to innovation and change, and exceed their limits. It also enables them to foster talent development by focusing on professional growth and development through mentorship, inspiration, and positive reinforcement. Second, all PHEIs need a strong organizational culture to uphold a cohesive and widely shared set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that guide staff behavior and decision-making, which fosters high engagement, productivity, and sustainability. Authoritative leadership can effectively communicate and promote organizational transformation that is based on transparent communication, clear vision and mission, supportive leadership, professional development, and collaboration, which yield greater staff retention and satisfaction.

5.3. Authoritative Decision-Making and Approachable Authority

To effectively practice authoritative decision-making and approachable authority, organizations need strike the right balance in authoritative leadership (Tan, 2024). First, PHEIs can adopt the Vroom-Yetton model, which offers a structured approach to decision-making by considering task complexity and follower expertise, while balancing leader authority with staff involvement to achieve optimal outcomes. This model enables PHEIs to determine when to seek input from staff, while ensuring that decisions are aligned with organizational goals. Second, when faced with complex tasks or issues, PHEIs need to adopt more participative approaches that leverage collective insights for comprehensive solutions. By adapting decision-making styles based on situational demands, PHEIs can foster staff engagement and enhance overall team performance. Second, when making decisions involving staff, authoritative leadership adopts collaborative approaches to confront complex challenges that demand diverse perspectives. By involving staff, it harnesses collective intelligence, fosters teamwork and collaboration, and enhances staff commitment.

To achieve approachable authority in leadership, organizations need to implement four strategies (Tan, 2024). First, PHEIs need to foster a culture that is grounded on open communication, which cultivates transparency, while ensuring that all staff understand their job specifications and responsibilities. Besides, setting clear goals and deadlines also helps staff grasp their roles, while fostering a sense of ownership. Second, PHEIs should empower staff by delegating tasks appropriately, which also boosts their self-esteem and accountability. Third, by providing autonomy in decision-making, PHEIs enable staff to take responsibility for their actions and outcomes. Further, by building trust, they create an environment where mistakes are regarded as learning opportunities rather than failures, which enhances accountability. Lastly, by generating regular feedback, they reinforce trust, while encouraging continuous improvement amongst staff.

5.4. Ways to Cultivate Authoritative Leadership

5.4.1. Clear Vision and Communication Skills

To become more authoritative, leaders need to engage in intentional effort and practice by communicating a clear vision, enhancing their communication skills, and fostering a culture of collaboration and empowerment (Holistique Training, 2024). PHEI leaders should establish an inspirational and sustainable vision that aligns with the institution's goals and resonates with their staff. To achieve this, they need to allocate time focusing on the future direction of the institution and staff, while strategizing objectives and

assessing how each staff contributes to this overall scenario. Once they have a well-defined vision, they need to communicate it effectively to their team, which requires consistency and clarity. To focus on the vision, they also need to share progress updates, justify the cruciality of specific goals, and help staff see how they contribute to the overall mission.

Since effective communication is crucial for authoritative leadership ([Holistique Training, 2024](#)), PHEI leaders need to elaborate their vision, provide succinct instructions, offer constructive feedback, and practice productive conversations with staff. Cultivating strong communication skills involves active listening, which requires them to concentrate on their team's ideas, concerns, and feedback. Besides, they also need to be approachable and receptive of feedback to propagate a collaborative culture. Moreover, active listening shows staff that their perspectives are valued, while building trust and encouraging two-way dialogue. Another means of communication is by providing constructive feedback that focuses on staff development and progress. Rather than focusing solely on mistakes, PHEI leaders should offer suggestions for improvement and highlight successes, which encourages sustained development and increases staff morale.

To foster a collaborative and empowering culture ([Holistique Training, 2024](#)), PHEI leaders need to strike balance between directing and allowing independence by encouraging staff to collaborate, share ideas, and develop solutions as a cohesive team. Besides, they also need to delegate important work assignments and duties, which allows staff to develop problem-solving skills, take initiative, and reinforce their sense of accountability. Lastly, they should support creativity and innovation by fostering an environment that motivates staff to engage in innovative problem-solving and take calculated risks. By demonstrating that they welcome innovative ideas and different viewpoints, PHEI leaders can inspire staff to improve their critical thinking and inventiveness. By allowing autonomy and adequately allocating resources for lifelong learning, they encourage staff to be proactive and take the initiative to start projects or tasks without being told to do so, which generates a sense of ownership, self-motivation, and futuristic thinking amongst staff.

5.4.2. Emotional Intelligence and Professional Development

Authoritative leadership is often characterized by high emotional intelligence ([Holistique Training, 2024](#)). High emotional intelligence enables PHEI leaders to understand and manage their own emotions, while being attuned to the emotions of others. It also enables them to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically, which helps create a harmonious and productive workplace. PHEI leaders can improve their emotional intelligence through self-awareness, which helps them understand their own emotional triggers and how their behavior affects others. For example, they can reflect on their leadership style and how their team responds to their guidance, which helps them regulate their own emotions and remain calm and composed under pressure. Besides, they can also enhance their emotional intelligence through greater empathy, which encourages them to understand their team's emotions, concerns, and needs by showing compassion when team members face challenges and offering support when necessary. Besides empathy, PHEI leaders should also develop conflict resolution skills to mediate confrontations in a way that builds understanding and resolves issues without compromising relationships.

Additionally, leaders can also cultivate authoritative leadership through professional development (Holistique Training, 2024). By prioritizing lifelong learning and development initiatives, PHEI leaders can promote continuous growth and development for themselves and their team. They should focus on self-improvement by continuously enhancing their leadership skills through training programs, leadership workshops, or mentorship. They should also reflect on their leadership experiences, learn from feedback, and apply new knowledge to augment their abilities. To develop staff, they should encourage them to pursue professional development by offering mentorship, training programs, and growth opportunities, besides challenging assignments that push them out of their comfort zones to develop new skills and take on greater responsibilities. To foster a growth mindset, they should promote a culture of continuous learning that regards mistakes as opportunities for growth.

5.4.3. Adaptability, Flexibility, and Role Modelling

Finally, cultivating adaptability and flexibility and leading by example are two other ways to practice authoritative leadership (Holistique Training, 2024). First, to be adaptable and open to change, PHEI leaders need to acknowledge that effective leadership is not only related to effective enforcement of rules, but it also requires flexibility and responsiveness to deal with changing times. To adaptability, they need to welcome feedback and constructive criticism from staff, which helps them adjust their leadership style, while ensuring that they are meeting institutional and staff needs. They must also be willing to change gears when the path to reaching their vision requires adjustments by displaying flexibility and courage to modify their style based on novel information or changing circumstances. Second, leading by example enables PHEI leaders to establish the mood, atmosphere, or character right at the beginning, while ensuring that their actions align with the organization's vision and values. Besides, they also demonstrate accountability, integrity, and dedication in everything they undertake, which makes staff regard them as inspiring role models. To ensure that staff collaborate, innovate, and communicate effectively, they demonstrate the desired behaviors themselves by having an unwavering dedication to achieving the highest standards in their leadership, professional pursuits, and interactions with others. As role models, they also exhibit self-assertiveness with a touch of humility and receptiveness for new ideas, which inspires trust and a culture of integrity and excellence.

6. Final Thought

First, the literature review of this study has relied heavily on secondary research; there is a dearth of quantitative research on authoritative leadership due to the emphasis on other styles, such as transformational, transactional, authoritarian, and democratic leadership, which have received greater attention, potentially overshadowing empirical studies on the authoritative approach. Moreover, the existing body of research suggests a need for a multifaceted approach that considers how authoritative leadership interacts with other factors in higher education. More context-specific studies on authoritative leadership should also be conducted, such as its impact on academic achievement, job performance, teaching efficacy, and organizational commitment in the different states or regions of Malaysia. Second, the current study only surveyed a small convenient sample using a questionnaire, which may limit generalizability of findings. Therefore, future research should strive to overcome sampling problems by increasing the sample size, employing random sampling methods, besides ensuring that the sampling frame is

complete and accurate. Lastly, more pilot tests should be carried out to provide clear incentives for participation and make adjustments through proper data weighting.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study has strictly adhered to all ethical procedures involving the use of human subjects. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents who were ascertained of their anonymity, with their responses kept strictly confidential. They were also informed that the study was of low risk and that they could stop participating any time without any repercussions.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no potential conflict of interest regarding this study in terms of the research, or publication of this article.

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