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A PROPOSED MODEL OF DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP, SOCIAL CAPITAL, AND TEACHER'S ORGANIZATION CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOUR BY USING MALAYSIAN SCALE

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a conceptual model that explores the relationship between distributed leadership and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) among Malaysian teachers, with social capital serving as a mediating variable. The model is grounded in the theoretical framework by Mahmud et al. (2022), which emphasizes the role of leadership in fostering trust and collaboration within educational institutions with the integration of the culturally relevant OCB scale developed by Ismail et al. (2021), which captures teacher behaviours specific to the Malaysian context. This model proposes that distributed leadership positively influences social capital, which in turn enhances OCB among teachers. By addressing both direct and indirect pathways, this framework provides a nuanced understanding of how leadership practices can foster positive, voluntary behaviours among educators. The article contributes to the literature by offering a localized, evidence-based model for leadership effectiveness in schools and sets the stage for future empirical studies to validate these proposed relationships in Malaysian educational settings.

Keywords: Organizational Citizenship Behaviour, Distributed Leadership, Social Capital

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Teacher commitment and engagement are widely acknowledged as vital components in driving the success and sustainability of schools. Beyond fulfilling academic responsibilities, highly engaged teachers often exhibit behaviours that benefit the broader school community, such as mentoring colleagues, volunteering for school activities, or supporting student well-being. These actions, although not explicitly required by job descriptions, fall under the umbrella of *Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB)* — discretionary behaviours that are not directly recognized by formal reward systems but contribute significantly to organizational effectiveness (Organ, 1988).

In the Malaysian context, the relevance of OCB has gained momentum due to ongoing reforms in the education sector. These reforms, as outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 (Malaysian Ministry of Education, 2013), emphasize school-based management, teacher autonomy, and collaborative governance, calling for more dynamic and participative leadership approaches. Consequently, leadership practices in schools have come under scrutiny for their role in shaping not only organizational structure but also teacher behaviour, motivation, and morale.

One leadership approach gaining recognition is Distributed Leadership (DL), which shifts the traditional top-down hierarchy into a more participatory model. Distributed leadership focuses on sharing leadership responsibilities among teachers, administrators, and staff, empowering individuals to contribute to school decision-making processes (Spillane, 2006). Unlike instructional or transformational leadership that often centralizes authority in a single leader, DL promotes a collaborative and inclusive leadership culture. Research indicates that when leadership is distributed effectively, teachers feel more valued, trusted, and involved factors that are positively associated with increased OCB (Harris & Muijs, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2007).

While distributed leadership offers promise, its effectiveness often hinges on the relational infrastructure within the school. This is where Social Capital (SC) plays a mediating role. Social capital refers to the network of relationships, trust, norms, and shared values that facilitate cooperation and knowledge exchange among organizational members (Putnam, 2000). In schools, social capital is reflected in the degree of collegiality, trust between teachers and administrators, and the strength of professional networks. Studies show that a high level of social capital leads to stronger collaboration, greater information sharing, and enhanced organizational commitment (Leana & Pil, 2006). In the context of leadership, social capital may act as a bridge that connects leadership practices to behavioural outcomes like OCB.

Rationale of the Study

Despite growing interest in distributed leadership and social capital in global education literature, studies that integrate these constructs within a unified model, particularly in Malaysia, remain scarce. Mahmud et al. (2022) addressed this gap by proposing a model where social capital mediates the relationship between distributed leadership and OCB among teachers. Their findings indicate that distributed leadership fosters the development of trust and cooperation, which in turn promote teachers'

willingness to engage in OCB. However, while their study provides a strong theoretical base, it lacks localization in terms of behavioural measurement.

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This is where the contribution of Ismail et al. (2021) becomes significant. They developed and validated a Malaysian-specific OCB scale for teachers, comprising behaviours contextualized to local educational settings. Unlike Western-developed instruments, which may overlook culturally embedded values and social expectations, this localized scale reflects the unique roles and responsibilities of Malaysian teachers. For example, the Malaysian OCB scale includes culturally significant behaviours such as involvement in community and religious events, mentoring students on moral values, and cooperation during national programs like school-based assessments.

Given the cultural and structural uniqueness of Malaysia's education system, integrating the theoretical framework of Mahmud et al. (2022) with the Malaysian-specific OCB scale by Ismail et al. (2021) offers a comprehensive and context-sensitive approach to understanding how leadership styles influence voluntary teacher behaviour.

Research Problem

While distributed leadership and social capital have both been associated with positive school outcomes globally, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these constructs interact in the Malaysian educational context, particularly in relation to OCB. Most existing research in Malaysia either focuses on leadership styles in isolation or adopts imported behavioural measurement tools that may not capture the nuances of Malaysian teachers' cultural and professional environments.

Specifically, three core issues emerge due to the limited integration of constructs. Firstly, there is a lack of integrative models in Malaysian education research that examine distributed leadership, social capital, and OCB in a single framework. The few studies that do exist often treat these variables independently, missing potential mediating effects that could explain how leadership leads to enhanced teacher behaviour. Next, another issue is regarding the measurement mismatch. Previous studies tend to rely on Western-based OCB scales that may not fully capture behaviours unique to Malaysian educators. This risks misinterpretation of findings and limits the practical applicability of research in local contexts. Finally, there is insufficient empirical validation of the framework. Although Mahmud et al. (2022) proposed a useful conceptual framework, there is a lack of empirical studies that test the proposed mediation effects using culturally relevant instruments such as the Malaysian-specific OCB scale by Ismail et al. (2021).

Objectives of the Study

This paper aims to address these gaps by proposing a conceptual model that links Distributed Leadership to Organizational Citizenship Behaviour among Malaysian teachers, with Social Capital acting as a mediator. The specific objectives are:

- To conceptualize the influence of distributed leadership on teacher OCB within Malaysian schools.
- To explore the mediating role of social capital in the relationship between distributed leadership and OCB.
- To apply the Malaysian-specific OCB scale for accurate and culturally relevant measurement of teacher behaviours.

- To provide a theoretically grounded framework that can serve as a basis for future empirical research.

Significance of the Study

This proposed model has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on educational leadership by localizing and contextualizing Western theories to suit the Malaysian school environment. Practically, it offers school leaders, policymakers, and education stakeholders a model for cultivating voluntary teacher behaviours through distributed leadership and trust-building strategies.

In addition, the use of a validated Malaysian OCB scale ensures that future research and school assessments can more accurately reflect teacher contributions that go beyond classroom teaching. These include behaviours that are essential for school-community engagement, student development, and national education goals.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Study

Distributed Leadership

Distributed Leadership (DL) has gained significant attention as a transformative alternative to traditional, top-down leadership models, particularly within educational institutions. Unlike conventional leadership paradigms that place authority in a single principal or head, DL emphasizes a shared and collaborative process. This approach redefines leadership as a collective endeavour, drawing on the strengths and expertise of multiple individuals across the school system. The concept is grounded in the influential work of Gronn (2000) and Spillane (2006), who conceptualize DL as a "practice distributed across the social and situational contexts of the organization," with Spillane (2006) famously describing it as "an emergent property of a group or network of individuals in which leadership tasks are distributed across multiple people."

In the school context, DL manifests through shared responsibility and collective decision-making. Harris (2004) and Harris & Muijs (2005) identified several defining characteristics of DL in schools. These include shared responsibility, where leadership functions are not monopolized by one individual but instead distributed among staff members; collaborative practice, which highlights the importance of cooperation and professional dialogue; capacity building, which empowers teachers to lead initiatives and take ownership of school development; and emergent leadership, where leadership arises organically through interactions rather than being dictated by hierarchical roles.

One of the key strengths of DL lies in its ability to foster innovation and strengthen teacher engagement. By decentralizing leadership roles, DL encourages wider participation, enhances trust, and builds a culture of continuous improvement. Teachers are more likely to feel valued and motivated when they are given opportunities to lead and contribute meaningfully to school governance. In rapidly changing educational environments, where adaptability, creativity, and responsiveness are essential, DL provides a structure that supports distributed accountability and collective problem-solving.

In the Malaysian education system, DL aligns well with policy directions set out in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025, which calls for school-based management, teacher empowerment, and participatory leadership. These policies recognize the need for decentralized authority to create more effective and context-sensitive schools. However, research indicates that the implementation of DL in Malaysia remains inconsistent. Salleh and Tan (2013) and Mahmud et al. (2022) found that many Malaysian schools still operate within centralized and hierarchical cultures, which restrict the genuine enactment of DL. Barriers such as limited trust among school staff, insufficient leadership training, and rigid bureaucratic norms often hinder the full realization of distributed leadership.

Nevertheless, when effectively implemented, DL has demonstrated positive outcomes in Malaysian schools. According to Abdullah and Ismail (2019), schools that practiced DL reported improvements in teacher collaboration, professional learning, and student performance. These findings suggest that while structural and cultural challenges exist, the potential of DL to transform school leadership and drive improvement remains strong.

In conclusion, Distributed Leadership represents a shift toward more inclusive and collaborative leadership models in education. Its relevance in dynamic school settings, including Malaysia, lies in its capacity to empower teachers, enhance professional capacity, and support collective growth. Moving forward, targeted training, trust-building, and policy alignment are needed to embed DL more deeply within the Malaysian school leadership culture.

Social Capital

Social Capital (SC) refers to the resources, values, and mutual obligations that arise from relationships within a social network. In essence, it is the "glue" that binds individuals and enables them to work together for shared goals. This concept has been widely studied by sociologists and organizational theorists, with foundational contributions from Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (2000). Each scholar offered a unique lens: Bourdieu viewed SC as a means of gaining individual advantage through social connections; Coleman emphasized its role in promoting trust and cooperation, especially in schools; and Putnam highlighted SC's role in enhancing community participation and institutional effectiveness.

One of the most influential frameworks for understanding SC in organizations was proposed by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), who identified three key dimensions of SC: structural, relational, and cognitive. The structural dimension refers to the existence and pattern of social ties—who interacts with whom, how often, and through what channels. This includes formal meetings, casual conversations, and communication networks that support knowledge flow. The relational dimension pertains to the quality of those relationships, including levels of trust, norms of reciprocity, and mutual respect. Finally, the cognitive component involves shared meanings—common goals, values, and understandings that align people's efforts.

In educational settings, these elements of SC are critical to effective teaching and school functioning. Teachers who trust one another, share goals, and communicate regularly are more likely to collaborate, support each other emotionally, and jointly solve problems. Leana and Pil (2006) found that schools with high SC tend to have stronger professional learning communities and better student outcomes, as teachers are more engaged and responsive to change. Similarly, Bryk and Schneider (2002) emphasized that relational trust among teachers and school leaders is a key factor in improving school performance and sustaining reforms.

In Malaysia, the role of SC in schools is increasingly recognized, especially in the context of leadership and organizational development. As schools move toward more collaborative and distributed leadership models under the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013–2025), SC becomes essential for facilitating shared leadership and collective responsibility. Mahmud et al. (2022) highlighted that SC serves as a mediating factor between leadership practices and teacher outcomes—when trust and shared norms are strong, leadership has a greater impact on teacher motivation, cooperation, and performance.

However, several challenges persist in building SC within Malaysian schools. Studies by Mokhtar et al. (2021) indicate that entrenched hierarchical structures, lack of open communication, and limited professional autonomy often hinder the development of trust and collaboration among staff. These cultural and systemic barriers must be addressed through leadership training, policy reform, and a school culture that values inclusivity and shared purpose.

In conclusion, Social Capital is a powerful yet often underutilized resource in education. By investing in relationships, trust, and shared goals, schools can foster environments that promote teacher collaboration, student success, and sustainable improvement. In the Malaysian context, enhancing SC is not only a theoretical concern but a practical imperative for educational transformation.

Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) in Malaysian Schools

Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) refers to voluntary actions performed by individuals that are not formally rewarded but contribute significantly to the effectiveness and overall climate of an organization. Originally conceptualized by Organ (1988), OCB encompasses behaviours such as helping colleagues, being punctual, taking initiative, and demonstrating loyalty to the organization. These behaviours, although not explicitly required by job descriptions, create a more cooperative and productive workplace environment.

Podsakoff et al. (2000) categorized OCB into five distinct dimensions. Altruism involves helping others with tasks or problems, while conscientiousness refers to going beyond minimum role requirements, such as consistently arriving early or maintaining high work standards. Sportsmanship reflects an employee’s ability to maintain a positive attitude, even in difficult circumstances. Courtesy involves being considerate and preventing conflicts, and civic virtue captures proactive involvement in organizational life, such as attending meetings and staying informed about school policies.

In schools, OCB is particularly vital. Teachers who engage in OCB contribute not only to a positive school culture but also to student success and staff cohesion. For instance, teachers may voluntarily assist new colleagues, participate in extracurricular events, or provide emotional support to students—acts that collectively enhance the school's functioning. Research by DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2001) found that higher levels of OCB among teachers are associated with better school climate and improved student outcomes. Similarly, Somech and Ron (2007) linked teacher OCB with stronger team dynamics and lower teacher turnover.

While the concept of OCB is globally recognized, its expression can be deeply influenced by cultural norms. In Malaysia, where collectivism, respect for authority, and religious values play a central role, Western-developed OCB scales may not fully capture the behaviours expected of teachers. Recognizing this limitation, Ismail et al. (2021) developed and validated a Malaysian-specific OCB scale for educators. This scale includes 35 items, 18 of which are culturally contextualized to reflect uniquely Malaysian values and practices.

For example, the Malaysian OCB scale highlights teacher involvement in community and religious events, mentoring students on moral and ethical values, and supporting national education initiatives like school-based assessments. These behaviours align with the cultural expectations of Malaysian society, where teachers are often seen as moral guides and community leaders—not just academic instructors. By incorporating these local behaviours, the scale offers a more accurate and meaningful tool for assessing teacher engagement and contribution.

Importantly, the findings of Ismail et al. (2021) underscore the need for culturally relevant instruments in educational research. Relying solely on Western-based OCB frameworks risks overlooking the nuanced ways in which teachers in different cultural settings contribute to school life. In the Malaysian context, integrating cultural, communal, and religious responsibilities into the understanding of OCB is essential for capturing the full scope of teacher engagement.

In conclusion, OCB is a crucial component of effective educational systems. By acknowledging and measuring culturally specific expressions of OCB, Malaysian educators and policymakers can better support and recognize the meaningful contributions teachers make beyond their formal duties.

Empirical Study

Relationship between Distributed Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour

In the evolving landscape of educational leadership, Distributed Leadership (DL) has gained prominence as a model that promotes collective responsibility, collaboration, and shared decision-making. Unlike traditional hierarchical leadership, DL decentralizes authority, encouraging multiple stakeholders, especially teachers, to engage actively in leadership practices. This inclusive leadership style has been shown to foster positive organizational outcomes, most notably Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) which is a set of voluntary, extra-role behaviours that contribute to overall organizational effectiveness (Organ, 1988).

OCB includes dimensions such as altruism, conscientiousness, courtesy, sportsmanship, and civic virtue (Podsakoff et al., 2000). In schools, these behaviours manifest as helping colleagues, mentoring students, participating in extracurricular events, and contributing to school development initiatives. While these actions are not formally rewarded, they significantly enhance school climate, teacher morale, and student outcomes.

A growing body of literature supports the link between DL and OCB. Harris (2004) emphasized that distributed leadership fosters collaboration and trust among teachers, which in turn enhances their willingness to go beyond job requirements. Leithwood et al. (2007) similarly argued that when teachers are included in leadership processes, they experience a greater sense of ownership and commitment, both of which are critical drivers of OCB. Teachers who are empowered to lead perceive their roles as more meaningful, motivating them to contribute voluntarily to the school beyond what is formally expected.

Mahmud et al. (2022) provided empirical evidence from Malaysian secondary schools showing that DL significantly predicts teachers' OCB, with Social Capital acting as a partial mediator. Their study revealed that when leadership is shared, it builds trust and reciprocity among staff, which enhances collaboration and strengthens professional bonds which are core mechanisms through which OCB is

cultivated. These finding echoes earlier work by Somech and Drach-Zahavy (2000), who found that participative leadership styles in schools correlate positively with teachers' discretionary behaviours.

International studies further affirm this relationship. In a study involving primary schools in Hong Kong, Nguyen et al. (2021) found that DL was positively associated with teachers' OCB through enhanced psychological empowerment. Similarly, Park and Kim (2018) in South Korea demonstrated that DL improved organizational commitment, which in turn influenced teachers' OCB.

In the Malaysian context, although the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 promotes school-based management and teacher empowerment, the practice of DL remains uneven. Salleh and Tan (2013) found that Malaysian schools often struggle to fully adopt DL due to entrenched hierarchical norms and limited leadership training. Despite these challenges, studies like Abdullah and Ismail (2019) have shown that schools successfully implementing DL report higher levels of teacher involvement, satisfaction, and OCB.

In conclusion, a substantial body of research supports a strong and positive relationship between Distributed Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour. DL creates conditions such as trust, shared responsibility, and psychological empowerment—that encourage teachers to contribute beyond their formal roles. As educational institutions continue to face complex challenges, investing in DL offers a strategic pathway to building collaborative cultures and enhancing overall school performance.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Distributed Leadership positively affects Organizational Citizenship Behaviour.

Relationship between Social Capital and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour

Social Capital (SC) and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) are two important constructs that contribute significantly to the success and sustainability of educational institutions. While social capital refers to the value created through trust, networks, and shared norms among members of an organization, OCB is defined as voluntary, extra-role behaviour that supports the overall functioning and climate of the organization (Organ, 1988). In recent years, scholars have increasingly recognized that strong social relationships within organizations, particularly schools, can foster behaviours that go beyond formal job expectations.

The connection between SC and OCB is grounded in the idea that individuals who feel embedded in a trustworthy and cooperative environment are more inclined to contribute voluntarily to group and organizational goals. According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), SC is comprised of three dimensions: structural (networks of relationships), relational (trust and norms of reciprocity), and cognitive (shared goals and understanding). These dimensions create an environment where positive informal exchanges thrive, promoting behaviours such as helping others, being courteous, and supporting school initiatives which are all key aspects of OCB.

Research consistently supports this connection. For example, Leana and Pil (2006) found that schools with higher levels of social capital among teachers reported better collaboration and improved student outcomes. Teachers who trust one another, share resources, and engage in open communication are more likely to demonstrate discretionary behaviours such as mentoring new teachers or participating in school programs. This is further supported by DiPaola and Hoy (2005), who observed that trust and strong professional relationships are predictors of OCB in schools.

In the Malaysian context, the importance of SC in fostering OCB is also evident. Mahmud et al. (2022) proposed a conceptual model linking Distributed Leadership, Social Capital, and OCB among Malaysian teachers. Their findings suggested that SC acts as a mediator, where increased trust and collaboration among teachers, fueled by leadership support, enhance teachers' willingness to perform extra-role behaviours. These behaviours include volunteering, helping peers, and contributing to school development beyond their teaching responsibilities.

Furthermore, Ismail et al. (2021) emphasized that OCB in Malaysian schools is deeply rooted in cultural and communal values. Their development of a Malaysian-specific OCB scale highlighted the significance of behaviours like participating in religious or community events and mentoring students on moral values, which are actions that are strongly supported by high levels of relational and cognitive social capital. In environments where such shared values and mutual support are present, OCB becomes a natural outcome of collective commitment.

In conclusion, the relationship between social capital and organizational citizenship behaviour is both theoretically and empirically supported. SC fosters an environment of trust, cooperation, and shared vision, which in turn motivates teachers to go beyond their formal roles. In schools, where collaboration and mutual support are essential, investing in the development of social capital is key to cultivating a culture of citizenship behaviour. Strengthening social capital is not only beneficial for teacher relationships but also vital for improving school performance and student outcomes.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Social Capital positively affects Organizational Citizenship Behaviour.

Mediating Role of Social Capital

In contemporary educational research, the connection between Distributed Leadership (DL) and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) has gained considerable attention. DL promotes shared decision-making, empowerment, and collaboration among teachers, while OCB refers to voluntary behaviours that go beyond formal job responsibilities, such as helping colleagues or participating in school activities (Organ, 1988). However, the mechanism by which DL influences OCB is complex and often indirect. One of the most critical mediating variables in this relationship is Social Capital (SC).

Social Capital refers to the resources embedded in social networks, characterized by trust, mutual norms, and strong interpersonal relationships (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). It consists of three key dimensions: structural (the network of connections), relational (trust and mutual respect), and cognitive (shared goals and understanding). When SC is strong in schools, it facilitates effective communication, collaboration, and support among teachers—conditions that promote OCB.

Distributed Leadership, by nature, fosters environments conducive to building social capital. When leadership is shared and teachers are empowered to contribute to school decisions, it builds trust and respect among colleagues. Spillane (2006) argues that DL is a practice distributed across people and situations, encouraging frequent interactions and knowledge sharing. These interactions serve as the foundation of social networks, increasing the structural dimension of SC. Additionally, when school leaders distribute leadership roles fairly and recognize teacher contributions, it fosters the relational aspect of SC which are trust and reciprocity.

Once SC is established, it becomes a powerful driver of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour. Teachers who feel a strong sense of belonging, shared identity, and trust within the school community are more

likely to engage in discretionary behaviours such as helping colleagues, volunteering for extra duties, or participating in school improvement initiatives. Leana and Pil (2006) confirmed that high SC in schools enhances cooperation and collective action, both of which are central to OCB.

Empirical studies support the mediating role of SC in the DL–OCB relationship. Mahmud et al. (2022) proposed a model in which SC acts as a bridge linking DL and OCB in Malaysian schools. Their findings suggested that DL alone may not directly lead to higher OCB unless it successfully builds social capital among staff. This highlights the importance of focusing not only on leadership practices but also on cultivating trust, shared norms, and social cohesion.

In the Malaysian context, the relevance of SC is even more pronounced due to cultural values emphasizing communal responsibility, respect, and collaboration. When DL practices align with these values and foster social capital, they are more likely to encourage OCB tailored to local expectations, such as mentoring students on moral values or engaging in community service (Ismail et al., 2021).

In conclusion, social capital serves as a crucial mediating mechanism in the relationship between distributed leadership and organizational citizenship behaviour. Schools that aim to enhance OCB among teachers should not only adopt inclusive leadership practices but also intentionally build and nurture social capital within their institutions.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Social Capital positively mediates the relationship between Distributed Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour.

Underpinning Theory

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) is a foundational framework in organizational behaviour, sociology, and psychology that explains interpersonal interactions based on principles of reciprocity, fairness, and mutual benefit. Developed by Homans (1958) and expanded by Blau (1964), SET proposes that individuals engage in relationships and behaviours when the perceived benefits outweigh the costs. In organizations, this theory has been instrumental in explaining why employees choose to go beyond formal role expectations, especially in response to fair and supportive leadership.

In educational institutions, SET provides valuable insights into how trust and mutual respect between teachers and leaders contribute to a positive and productive school culture. According to Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), employees who perceive their leaders as fair, empowering, and considerate are more likely to reciprocate with Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) through voluntary actions such as helping colleagues, mentoring students, and supporting school programs without expecting direct rewards.

One key element of SET is reciprocity. In schools, when teachers are trusted, given autonomy, and supported by leaders, they often feel morally obligated to give back. This is reflected in Podsakoff et al.'s (2000) five dimensions of OCB which are altruism, conscientiousness, courtesy, sportsmanship, and civic virtue—which often arise as responses to supportive and fair treatment.

SET also emphasizes perceived fairness, or justice. Colquitt et al. (2001) noted that perceptions of distributive (fair outcomes) and procedural (fair processes) justice lead to stronger social bonds and

increased discretionary behaviour. In the context of Distributed Leadership (DL), where leadership is shared across various school members, fairness becomes crucial. Teachers are more likely to participate in extra-role behaviours when they believe decision-making is inclusive and transparent.

Trust and commitment are also central to SET. Repeated positive exchanges between school leaders and teachers build a reservoir of trust, which sustains long-term cooperation. When teachers trust that their efforts are valued and reciprocated, they develop greater emotional commitment to the organization, often demonstrated through OCB. Nguyen et al. (2021) found that distributed leadership enhances psychological ownership, leading to higher OCB levels, especially when framed within a social exchange perspective.

Social Capital (SC) acts as a bridge between DL and OCB. SC encompasses trust, shared values, and strong social networks among school members. As DL empowers teachers and fosters collaboration, SC grows, creating a supportive environment that encourages reciprocal, voluntary behaviours. Mahmud et al. (2022) found that SC mediates the relationship between DL and OCB in Malaysian schools, highlighting SET's explanatory power.

In Malaysia's collectivist culture (Hofstede, 2001), where communal responsibility and moral reciprocity are emphasized, SET is particularly relevant. Teachers often engage in culturally significant forms of OCB such as mentoring students in moral values or participating in community events, not just as professional duties, but as reciprocal responses to school support and respect. However, challenges like hierarchical norms and symbolic leadership may hinder genuine reciprocity if empowerment is perceived as superficial.

In summary, Social Exchange Theory offers a comprehensive lens to understand how Distributed Leadership fosters Social Capital, which in turn enhances Organizational Citizenship Behaviour. It emphasizes that effective leadership is not only about managing tasks but about nurturing relationships built on fairness, trust, and mutual respect.

Gaps in Literature

Although Distributed Leadership (DL), Social Capital (SC), and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) have each been widely studied in organizational and educational research, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these constructs interrelate, especially in the context of Malaysian schools. Recent literature points to the value of exploring these concepts in an integrated model. However, several limitations persist in the current body of knowledge that must be addressed for a deeper and more culturally relevant understanding of teacher behaviour and leadership practices in Malaysia.

One of the most pressing gaps is the limited presence of integrated models that combine DL, SC, and OCB within a single theoretical or empirical framework. While each variable has been studied individually in educational settings, few researchers have explored how distributed leadership contributes to the development of social capital, which in turn fosters OCB. This omission is particularly notable in Southeast Asian contexts, where hierarchical leadership models have traditionally dominated. The conceptual framework proposed by Mahmud et al. (2022) represents a significant step forward by illustrating a pathway from DL to OCB mediated by SC. However, this model still requires robust empirical testing using culturally relevant instruments to validate its applicability in Malaysian schools.

Secondly, there is a clear issue of contextual misalignment in much of the research on OCB. The majority of existing studies rely on Western-developed OCB measurement scales, which may not fully capture the unique behavioural expectations, values, and social responsibilities of Malaysian teachers. For example, standard OCB scales often omit culturally embedded practices such as participation in religious events, mentoring students in moral or spiritual matters, and contributing to national programs like school-based assessments. To address this limitation, Ismail et al. (2021) developed a Malaysian-specific OCB scale for teachers, which includes 35 items, 18 of which reflect culturally meaningful behaviours. However, this scale has not yet been widely adopted in empirical research exploring DL and SC in Malaysian education.

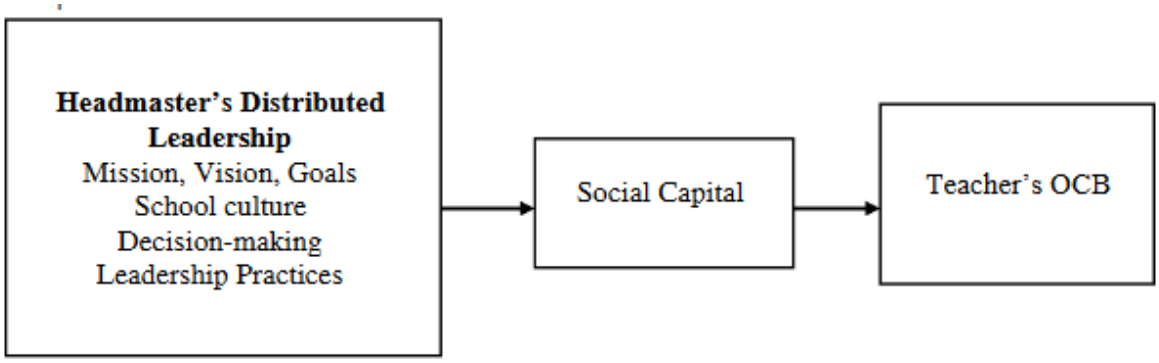
A third gap involves the lack of empirical validation of the DL → SC → OCB pathway using localized tools. While theoretical connections have been established, few studies have tested the full mediation model with quantitative data drawn from Malaysian school settings. As a result, policymakers and school leaders lack evidence-based guidelines on how leadership styles can effectively cultivate trust, collaboration, and voluntary teacher behaviours in culturally grounded ways.

Lastly, cultural considerations remain underrepresented in leadership and behavioural studies in Malaysia. The Malaysian teaching context is heavily influenced by collectivist values, religious obligations, and respect for authority, factors that shape how teachers perceive leadership and enact OCB. Ignoring these sociocultural dimensions risks producing findings that are either inaccurate or inapplicable. Therefore, any research in this domain must incorporate cultural frameworks to capture the realities of teacher behaviour in Malaysia more authentically.

In conclusion, addressing these research gaps is essential to building a comprehensive, culturally responsive model that explains how distributed leadership fosters social capital and, in turn, promotes organizational citizenship behaviour among Malaysian teachers.

Figure 1

A Proposed Model Framework



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