

Investigating Coaching Leadership Among Departmental Heads in Sabah, Malaysia: An Empirical Study on Lecturers' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to examine lecturers' perceptions of coaching leadership among department heads in Sabah, Malaysia. The sample comprised 56 lecturers from three private colleges in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, who responded to a structured questionnaire on Google Forms. Data were analyzed by using SPSS 29.0. Results showed that a low number of lecturers tend to perceive their department heads as coaching leaders (only 48.2 to 60.7 percent). On the other hand, nonparametric tests showed that there were no significant differences by way of gender, age, and job experience in perceived coaching leadership. Additionally, Wilcoxon signed rank test based on a hypothesized value of 3.5 showed that all coaching leadership items were significant at $p < 0.001$, having medians that were significantly different from the test value, and were likely to indicate strong disagreement. Lastly, in light of the findings, several recommendations were made for department heads to incorporate coaching leadership as part of their management to increase organizational productivity, job motivation, and organizational commitment amongst staff.

Contribution/Originality: This research offers a valuable contribution by examining lecturers' perceptions of coaching leadership among departmental 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 coaching leadership as a form of nascent governance at private higher educational institutions (PHEIs) in Sabah, Malaysia.

1. Introduction

According to [DeLuca \(2016\)](#), coaching leadership focuses on staff's personal and professional development through guidance, inspiration, and encouragement by establishing a collegial environment that makes staff become more cognizant of the expectations and strategies needed to accomplish the vision and mission of the organization. Further, coaching leaders often elicit positive emotional responses from staff; they strive to establish trust and rapport through effective interpersonal communication that brings mutual benefit. Besides, they often assign challenging yet attainable tasks to raise staff's self-assertiveness, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Besides encouraging calculated risk-taking amongst staff, they are also willing to readjust challenging tasks, which allows success to ultimately materialize. This leadership style is particularly effective with staff who desire greater professional development, while attempting to capture every opportunity to excel and grow within the organization. Lastly, coaching leaders emphasize human potential and truly believe in the individuals whom they are coaching. By underscoring mutual respect, they exude the synergistic energy that allows success to manifest for both staff and the management.

Coaching leaders are primarily leaders who show staff how their individual contributions support broader organizational goals. They are willing to invest time and effort to help staff tap their hidden talents to reach their full potential. Besides sharing information with less experienced staff, they often ask questions to spark deeper insight from others. Being more focused on empowering staff to reach greater heights, coaching leaders prioritize several attributes, which include (1) constructive feedback, (2) active listening, (3) emotional intelligence, (4) mentorship, (5) growth and development, (6) open communication, and (8) encouragement and support. Coaching leadership is most effective to (1) take over a team that has a toxic culture or deep distrust of the management, (2) lead a highly driven team that evidences low engagement and disinterest, (3) eliminate departmental or informational silos, and (4) overcome a disparity between organizational growth and personal goals. These situations require coaching leaders who are visionary, motivated, and empathetic, which enable the organization to confront various challenges and issues to improve its profitability, environmental sustainability, and social responsibility ([Boogaard, 2023](#)).

1.1. Background and Context of the Study

Coaching leaders help promote organizational innovation and change. Besides displaying talent and drive, their leadership acumen is often characterized by discipline, which enables them to manifest their management potential through commitment, practice, passion, patience, and perseverance ([DeLuca, 2016](#)). In today's PHEIs, coaching leadership is essential to help promote innovation and change through creativity and calculated risk-taking. Coaching leaders are capable of developing the appropriate mindset to create an effective blueprint to introducing new ideas, subsequently causing beneficial alterations in the organizational system, process, and environment. For innovation and change to flourish, coaching leaders constantly create an organizational setting that fosters creativity through effective mentoring, guiding, and nurturing, which promote lifelong learning, teamwork, and idea creation. Additionally, they introduce and reinforce novel skills and inventive habits to help staff face challenges and issues of the 21st century by propagating a resourceful and germinal mindset as well as fostering a culture that elicits the best amongst staff. Additionally, by encouraging staff to experiment, network, associate, question, and observe, coaching leaders are able to create

disruptive innovators who can challenge the status quo to generate new value and high-quality output. Lastly, in the context of PHEIs, coaching leaders strive to fulfill previously unmet needs of students, parents, and other stakeholders by improving program quality, making curricula changes, and engaging in community service. By staying ahead of the competitive curve, they are able to tap into new markets by adopting new management models to raise institutional rankings and sustainability in the digital era, which aligns with SDG 4 Quality Education.

1.2. Research Objective

A review of literature showed that empirical research on college staff's perceptions of coaching leadership is lacking in Malaysia. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to examine staff's perceptions of coaching leadership among department heads at PHEIs in Sabah, Malaysia. The research objective was to fill the knowledge gap in terms of coaching leadership and its attributes at PHEIs in Sabah, Malaysia.

1.3. Research Questions

To narrow the research gap and provide a contextual framework for the study, three research questions were formulated to guide the research:

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

1.4. Scope of the Study

The study was limited to 56 academics from three PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Deans, coordinators, and registrars of 10 randomly chosen colleges were contacted via email, but only three PHEIs agreed to participate in the study. Respondents were drawn from culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse communities in Sabah. The sample size was determined based on both 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](#)). The sample was deemed representative of lecturers from the local PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu; hence, selection bias was minimized. Systematic random sampling of colleges was done for its ability to capture a diverse range of perspectives across different age, gender, and work experience. 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.

1.5. Significance of the Study

Current findings can contribute to a greater understanding of lecturers' perceptions of coaching leadership at PHEIs in Sabah. Firstly, this research will extend the theoretical framework regarding coaching leadership, especially in complex, hierarchical PHEI settings. Besides, a novel leadership paradigm can be derived by exploring department heads' coaching leadership behaviors in Sabah, which can help address the everchanging tertiary environment in the digital era; therefore, this theoretical contribution will offer

PHEI leaders a more comprehensive and adaptable leadership approach. Secondly, this study will enrich the theoretical framework concerning coaching leadership by rendering deeper insight into the mechanisms underlying the behaviors and attitudes of PHEI leaders. Additionally, findings can provide a useful frame for them to integrate elements of coaching leadership into their governance to better align with the goals of SDG 4 Quality Education. Thirdly, this research will generate greater awareness on the leadership dilemmas and obstacles encountered by PHEIs, which are often associated with global volatility and unpredictability; in brief, coaching leadership can assist PHEI leaders in establishing more pliant and malleable academic teams through self-directed learning as well as ongoing professional development in the face of innovation and change. Further, this study also highlights the advantages for PHEI leaders to embrace coaching leadership because it fosters staff empowerment, boosts intrinsic job motivation, and promotes a stimulating and reassuring work environment, which ultimately contributes to increased innovativeness, experimentation, and overall organizational productivity. Finally, this study recommends the adoption of coaching leadership to provide personalized support and capitalize on academics' individual talents to accomplish aims, fulfill aspirations, or reach targets, while increasing their self-efficacy to undertake novel projects or eliminate barriers in the teaching and learning process.

2. Review of Literature

A literature review was conducted to collect relevant, timely research on coaching leadership in higher education, and subsequently, synthesize it into a cohesive summary of existing knowledge on the topic. Further, it prepared the writers for making their own argument on coaching leadership and for conducting their own quantitative research. Additionally, the literature review also allowed them to gain familiarity with the current knowledge on coaching leadership, besides its boundaries and limitations. Lastly, it enabled them to gain deeper understanding of coaching leadership theories, thus allowing them to place the research questions into proper context.

2.1. Attributes of Coaching Leadership

2.1.1. People Skills

One of the most crucial attributes of coaching leaders is their people skills characterized by an ability to empathize and communicate with others to promote a healthy and productive work environment for all. Effective coaching leaders are often thinking about what staff need from them. First and foremost, staff need leaders who value open communication and trust so that they can safely reveal their problems and struggles that require assistance. Additionally, staff tend to be more enthusiastic about their job when they know that their leaders are genuinely invested in their professional growth and are willing to help them attain their short- and long-term goals. Individuals who aspire to become effective coaching leaders need to acquire the functional habit of acknowledging staff's successes, victories, and overall diligence. Since the workplace can often become so hectic that work seems unbearably mechanical, coaching leaders often strive to acknowledge staff's job commitment and sacrifice. Allocating some time each day to simply tell staff what they are doing right makes them feel empowered and energized to grow, which helps foster a win-win relationship (Dennison, 2021).

Boogaard (2023) highlighted that coaching leaders exhibit four principal people skills. First, they often recognize and regard staff as individuals and then coach them

accordingly. They underscore the human aspect of staff rather than expecting them to just increase the value, output, or strength of the organization. They also adopt a flexible approach and treat staff as valuable human assets, rather than just people with exploitable skills. Second, as active listeners, they enthusiastically discern staff's desires, values, and goals, support them with appropriate advice, and ensure their continual growth and development. They are keen to witness everything that is associated with staff's professional and personal endeavors. Third, they possess a growth mindset as well as a beginner's mindset, and encourage staff to adopt the same attitude. They coach staff to behave like beginners who try to find alternative ways or more advantageous procedures of ameliorating problems or eliminating barriers. While they help staff pave their own way, they also balance out expectations with humor and acceptance, which helps staff feel more secure and buttressed. Fourth, coaching leaders are compassionate because they empathize with staff and utilize staff information to make informed choices that benefit not only the individual, but also the entire organization. Besides, being democratic, they rely heavily on staff's input and suggestions by prioritizing collegiality, collaboration, and team spirit. Being mindful, they are fully present at the moment and notice what is happening, rather than disregarding reactive patterns, which allows them to adjust and personalize their leadership approach. Lastly, as servant leaders, they desire to serve and elevate staff, rather than being authoritarian and taking all the credit.

2.1.2. Mentoring Skills

According to [John Mattone Global \(2025\)](#), coaching leaders act as mentors, who focus on individual and team growth, rather than issuing direct orders. By emphasizing guidance, support, and continuous professional development, they help staff unlock their full potential, while fostering a culture of accountability and innovation. As empowering coaching leaders, they (1) personalize staff development by tailoring their approach to each staff's strengths, weaknesses, and career aspirations, (2) practice active listening and constructive feedback by maintaining meaningful conversations, asking insightful questions, and providing useful suggestions, (3) encourage a growth ethos by helping individual staff embrace challenges, learn from failures, and strive for self-improvement, (4) instill accountability and transparency by fostering a supportive environment, whereby feedback serves as a mechanism for advancement, rather than penalty, (5) balance guidance with autonomy by ensuring that staff feel a sense of ownership over their work, while benefiting from structured support, and (6) invest time to produce higher-functioning teams and a perpetual organizational culture grounded on mentorship, trust, empowerment, collaboration, and lifelong learning. To drive dynamic performance and organizational commitment amongst staff, coaching leaders often (1) incorporate edification and enlightenment exercises into team meetings by encouraging staff to reflect on challenges and issues, share insights, and learn from one another, (2) shift from issuing orders to asking thought-provoking questions that guide staff toward innovative solutions, and (3) encourage peer coaching that empowers staff to share knowledge and mentor each other, while reinforcing a culture of collegiality and lifelong learning.

2.2. Benefits of Coaching Leadership

2.2.1. Effective Toolkit for Global Disruption

Coaching leadership provides a comprehensive toolkit of methods and expertise for staff to counter the constantly changing, shifting, and evolving dynamics of the work

environment characterized by digital disruption, disparate global teams and hybrid work (Numly - Leadership Coaching Group, 2022). Coaching leaders can effectively handle global stakeholders and embrace digital technology, while being empathetic and caring toward staff. They possess the resilience to confidently engage with the unknown, while displaying curiosity and leading others with self-assertiveness. As enablers of organizational success, they strive to help staff grow and develop professionally and personally to meet long-term goals. By adopting a style that drives collaboration and offers support and guidance, coaching leaders accentuate staff by guiding them through their professional endeavors and helping them traverse obstacles. By recognizing the strengths, weaknesses, and motivation of individual staff, they often generate sustainable organizational outcomes, while creating a fulfilling, and immersing staff experience rooted in understanding, empathy, and acceptance.

2.2.2. Ability to Drive Innovation and Change

To manage constant disruption and transformation, coaching leaders strive to drive intentional innovation and change by exploring strengths and gaps, developing a learning agenda, and adapting to an ever-evolving global environment. They often lead in a way that unleashes energy, enthusiasm, and commitment. Further, coaching leaders help staff cope with innovation and change by identifying novel learning opportunities, instituting a practical framework, and finally, staying the course. In today's dynamic and fluid working landscape, coaching leaders focus on upskilling and re-skilling to navigate the ever-increasing skills gap, besides helping staff gain complete clarity on how to initiate creative breakthroughs and transitions. They help staff identify best practices and clearly draft a pragmatic path to help them achieve them with quantifiable action. They also offer support during the process to ensure that staff remain accountable and committed to their goals through constant interaction, intentional conversations, and regular appraisal, thus ensuring that staff eventually materialize their goals and objectives (Numly - Leadership Coaching Group, 2022).

2.2.3. Capability to Drive Staff Engagement

Coaching leaders operate from a point of compassion by being nonjudgemental, while assessing individual staff's willingness to change. Their leadership becomes particularly crucial as an organization becomes more earnest in forging staff engagement through career pathing initiatives. Since staff perform better when they are psychologically motivated, coaching leaders often strive to build reverberant and impactful ties, which leverage on exploration, curiosity, and open-ended questions to identify challenges and discover innovative solutions. Through co-creative relationships, coaching leaders are effectual in driving innovation and change because it allows them to join forces with like-minded staff to achieve desired ends. Being non-directional, coaching leaders believe that staff only change when they want to and when they perceive the urgency. Therefore, they often encourage staff to approach predetermined goals through inquiry, analysis, and compassion rather than just focusing on the eventual results (Numly - Leadership Coaching Group, 2022).

2.2.4. Applicability in Specific Situations

Coaching leadership is particularly useful in certain situations. First, it can be adopted to build a shared vision. Given today's constant disruption and flux, coaching leadership is an efficacious style for organizations that aim to provide staff with a unified direction and

a sense of purpose. Second, it is a pragmatic way to align staff's personal goals with organizational development goals, besides being compatible for developing shared accountability and success across global and hybrid teams in the face of universal metamorphosis. Third, it enables organizations to confront issues related to geographical, cultural, and time constraints. By enhancing staff's locus of control, they enable them to take charge of their own work outcomes. It also helps them adopt a value creation and adaptive frame of mind with regard to their long-term career prospects and workplace experiences. Fourth, it helps eliminate limiting beliefs and perceptual distortions since it encourages staff to identify biases and mental pitfalls that impede their career progress. It also propels them to develop balanced, empathetic, and nuanced perspective to make the organization more equitable and accepting of differences. Finally, it improves staff's time management skills as it encourages them to avoid over-optimistic estimates, hasty planning, or inclinations. Instead, it encourages them to realistically focus on attainable goals, while establishing a culture that provides leeway for worthwhile and continuous collaboration ([Numly - Leadership Coaching Group, 2022](#)).

2.3. Three Key Benefits of Coaching Leadership

Coaching leadership offers three key benefits ([John Mattone Global, 2025](#)). First and foremost, coaching leadership improves individual and team performance by transforming the entire organization. By integrating coaching into their daily interactions, leaders can create an environment where staff feel supported, challenged, and motivated to grow. This style enables staff to achieve higher levels of collaboration, performance, and innovation, while ensuring that every individual is actively involved in his or her professional development. Additionally, coaching leadership emphasizes individual development to strengthen the entire team thorough personalized development, thus ensuring that all staff receive the guidance they need. By recognizing each person's strengths and areas for growth, coaching leaders can assign responsibilities that align with their potential. Individual staff members who feel valued and supported often become more engaged and willing to contribute to the overall success of the organization. Overall, coaching leaders often (1) identify key skills that staff should develop to reach their full potential, (2) offer continuous appraisal that helps staff refine their performance over time, and (3) provide adequate opportunities for staff to take ownership of their learning and progress.

Second, coaching leadership emphasizes the use of constructive criticism to drive improvement. Instead of flagging mistakes that often discourages staff, coaching leaders frame feedback as an opportunity for growth by (1) providing specific, actionable, and focused critique on behavior rather than personality, (2) reinforcing strengths, while addressing areas for improvement to foster staff's self-efficacy, and (3) practicing regular and fair evaluation to assess staff's progress to provide additional support when necessary ([John Mattone Global, 2025](#)).

Third, coaching leadership is effective in facilitating staff to achieve their individual goals. Coaching leaders are deeply aware that personal development contributes to overall organizational success by aligning individual growth with the concrete objectives of the organization and its ultimate future aspirations. Therefore, they challenge staff to brainstorm, generate, and filter innovative ideas, take initiative, and function more productively and competently as team members. By focusing on lifelong learning, coaching leaders regard mistakes as learning experiences, while regarding optimal performance as the standard. Additionally, they practice intelligent executive training by

adopting a structured approach and appropriate techniques. Besides, they also formulate a functional framework to refine their own coaching skills, enhance team performance, and foster long-term success with inner-core self-awareness and outer-core execution. Besides implementing executive coaching techniques to precisely guide and mentor staff, effective leaders regard coaching as an innovative way of thinking that enables them to align their style with long-term strategies that drive profitability, environmental sustainability, and social responsibility (John Mattone Global, 2025).

2.3. Impact of Coaching Leadership on Staff

According to Dennison (2021), oftentimes, people are not leaving because of the organization; they are resigning because of abrogating leadership that makes them feel static in their careers with little opportunity for professional advancement. Therefore, organizational leaders should coach their staff to develop mutual trust and loyalty, besides helping them gain traction by attaining short-term wins, while striving toward long-term goals with continuous momentum. Coaching leaders enable staff to experience the fulfillment of achieving immediate outcomes, while developing the skillsets needed to attain sustainable goals and career success. Besides focusing on staff performance and progress, coaching leaders also emphasize multisource appraisal, bilateral communication, and self-mastery, which fortify and invigorate each staff to create a triumphant team.

Tang et al. (2024), who inquired into the impact of coaching leadership on staff engagement, divulged that coaching leadership tends to significantly enhance staff engagement in terms of vigor, dedication, and immersion, with organizational self-esteem as a mediating factor. Findings reflect the salient function of coaching leadership, along with human resource strategies and metrics, in promoting a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to organizational governance and staff development. With cogent evidence that coaching leadership tends to have a significant and favorable impact on staff engagement, Tang et al. (2024) asserted that it has emerged as an evolutionary approach in today's capricious and ambiguous organizational landscape. Coaching leaders tend to focus less on providing direct solutions to staff; therefore, they empower them to address problems autonomously. In brief, they synergistically leverage on staff's intrinsic motivation, dedication, and steadfastness to attain the desired organizational outcomes that they strive to achieve.

Additionally, coaching leadership often prioritizes caring for and nurturing staff through inspirational communication methods to stimulate their intrinsic work motivation. Besides influencing work behavior, it also has a psychological ripple effect due to its emphasis on effective interpersonal communication, emotional support, and professional development, which often lead to improved organizational self-esteem, work attitudes, and allegiance. Lastly, coaching leadership is most evidenced amongst staff with a high learning goal orientation. Compared with less goal-oriented staff, those who are more goal-oriented often demonstrate a higher level of learning drive and achievement motivation. Lastly, by strengthening staff's organizational affinity, coaching leadership bolsters their job engagement, participation, absorption, and overall organizational performance (Tang et al., 2024).

Lastly, Ren et al. (2024), who examined the impact of coaching leadership on staff's taking charge behavior (e.g., initiative, assertiveness, and decisiveness), revealed that coaching leadership tends to be positively related to taking charge, mediated by work

meaningfulness. In contrast, high challenge stressors and high hindrance stressors were found to weaken the positive effect of coaching leadership on work meaningfulness. Findings imply that coaching leaders are crucial in activating staff's taking charge, while eliminating challenge-hindrance stressors to increase team effectiveness.

2.4. Impact of Coaching Leadership on Psychosocial Behavior and Attitudes

In their attempt to explore the influence of coaching leadership on staff voice behavior, [Yuan et al. \(2019\)](#) disclosed that it tends to promote voice behavior, while psychological security and openness to change tend to mediate the relationship between coaching leadership and voice behavior. Findings underscore the importance of encouraging managers to practice coaching leadership, which is conducive to enhancing staff psychological security and openness to change, thereby increasing their voice behavior. Lastly, they should also establish a secure voice atmosphere to improve staff's affective commitment to organizational innovation and change.

On the other hand, [Dai \(2019\)](#), who examined the impact of coaching leadership on staff's job motivation and innovation behavior, disclosed a significant and positive relationship between coaching leadership and innovation behavior with work motivation as a partial mediator. Findings imply that coaching leadership, with its emphasis on cooperation, interactive communication, and other expedient work behaviors tend to enhance staff's self-determination by meeting their own psychological needs. It also increases staff's enthusiasm for work, courage to take initiative, participation in teamwork and community service, propensity to confront problems, and demonstration of innovative behavior, all of which tend to increase organizational affiliation.

In a study that investigated the impact of coaching leadership on staff's in-role performance, [Huang \(2019\)](#) disclosed that it tends to exert a significant and positive influence on in-role performance, with the relationship being partially mediated by role ambiguity. Moreover, staff's social astuteness (a dimension of political skills) was found to positively moderate the relationship between coaching leadership and role ambiguity. Findings provide a vigorous theoretical perspective for explaining how coaching leadership affects individual occupational behavior. By equipping staff with relevant information to help them develop and improve their expertise, it augments their cognition and propensities in relation to their vocational roles, which not only improves role clarity, but also renders deeper insight into their own functions and capacities.

In their investigation into the impact of coaching leadership on teachers, [Park and Wee \(2020\)](#) discovered that its three subdimensions (direction, development, and accountability) tend to significantly influence teachers' job autonomy and job commitment, while job autonomy tends to significantly influence job commitment. Findings imply that coaching leadership is an incipient leadership style that can be leveraged to enhance teachers' job attitudes and organizational effectiveness by way of job autonomy and job commitment. For example, coaching principals can enhance organizational commitment by providing clear directions, developing career/coaching skills, and practicing fair evaluation to reinforce teachers' sense of job autonomy and job commitment. Lastly, as coaching leaders, principals need to acknowledge teachers' potential to help them develop and apply their competence, while fostering effective interpersonal relationships based on trust and mutual respect.

In a similar study, [Wee, Bang, and Park \(2020\)](#) disclosed that three subdimensions of coaching leadership (development, evaluation, and positive relationships) tend to be positively related to teachers' job satisfaction and organizational commitment, while organizational commitment tends to have a negative relationship with turnover intention. Findings imply that coaching principals often act as school managers who provide clear directions, promote career development, and foster collegial relationships based on open dialogue and mutual trust, which perpetuates teachers' organizational commitment. Additionally, teachers with high levels of organizational commitment are more likely to remain in their schools or continue the teaching profession, which enhances overall academic achievement and other educational targets.

Through their analysis of the impact of coaching leadership on staff's psychological capital and organizational commitment, [Kim and Park \(2022\)](#) indicated that two coaching behaviors (promotion and guidance) tend to significantly and positively influence psychological capital. Moreover, guidance was found to have a significant and positive impact on organizational commitment, while organizational commitment was found to be significantly and positively related to psychological capital. Findings imply that, to enhance organizational commitment, school leaders need to practice coaching leadership behaviors (e.g., inspiration, promotion, and guidance) to instill self-assertiveness, self-efficacy, and achievement motivation amongst staff. Lastly, to increase organizational commitment and psychological capital, they also need to encourage symbiotic and reciprocal communication and establish trusting relationships to make school management more effectual, fruitful, and operative.

On the other hand, [Wang et al. \(2022\)](#) systematically investigated the relationships among coaching leadership, supervisor-subordinate relationships, and commitment-based human resource management. Findings revealed that coaching leadership tends to positively facilitate staff's sense of gain (material/spiritual). Additionally, supervisor-subordinate relationships tend to have a partial mediating effect on the relationship between coaching leadership and staff's sense of material gain. Findings imply that leaders can instill a sense of spiritual gain by emphasizing rules and regulations, service awareness, and leisure activities amongst staff.

In their quantitative study, [Hwang, Kang, and Choi \(2023\)](#) confirmed that coaching leadership tends to be significantly and positively related to staff's creative performance, mediated by psychological empowerment and constructive voice behavior. Findings imply that psychological empowerment and constructive voice behavior tend to act as critical mechanisms that facilitate staff to excel in creative performance under coaching leadership, which in turn supports their career trajectories and job competency. Lastly, as a driver of creative performance, coaching leadership appears to encourage staff to acknowledge and cope with organizational innovation and change by cultivating the essential competencies needed to achieve all intents and purposes.

Lastly, [Mäkelä et al. \(2023\)](#), who explored coaching leadership as a link between individual- and team-level strength use at work, found that effective supervisors tend to use coaching leadership with their staff both individually and collectively. Besides, findings also indicated that strength use tends to largely depend on staff's own initiative and personal-level skills (e.g., self-leadership). Additionally, staff under coaching supervisors, who support their strength use, tend to demonstrate greater organizational commitment and lower intention to leave compared to those under non-coaching supervisors. Findings suggest that coaching leaders tend to identify individual strengths,

while displaying knowledge and acceptance of staff's personal characteristics. By paying individual attention to staff, coaching supervisors can get to know them better, which subsequently allows staff to identify and leverage their individual strengths. Besides, through dynamic and robust leadership, coaching supervisors also tend to use multiple methods to become better acquainted with staff, which include showing interest in routine situations through habitual interactions, repeated contacts, and customary gatherings. Such distinctive encounters allow them to exchange feedback, hold question-and-answer sessions, and engage in fruitful discussions about work, all of which enhance staff's competence and strength use.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Approach

The quantitative method was utilized in this study to systematically collect and analyze numerical data to interpret lecturers' perceptions of coaching leadership. It aimed to quantify coaching leadership variables and generalize findings to a broader lecturer population in Sabah, Malaysia. Additionally, the quantitative method in this study was characterized by structured data collection via a Coaching Leadership Questionnaire, a convenient sample of PHEI lecturers, and objective data analysis using SPSS 29.0. Further, data were converted into a quantifiable form that allowed the writers to determine frequencies, means, and significant differences in terms of gender, age, and job experience. Lastly, the quantitative approach was adopted to draw appropriate conclusions, make relevant recommendations, and generalize research findings on coaching leadership based on lecturers' perceptions in Sabah, Malaysia.

3.2. Research Location

Kota Kinabalu was chosen as the research location because it tends to impact the quality, cost, and feasibility of the research study. It has the highest concentration of PHEIs in Sabah, which facilitates data collection and impactful research collaboration. The current study involved three PHEIs that share geographic proximity, which boosts the sharing of knowledge and ideas. Since the PHEIs are all located in the Kota Kinabalu area, it helps reduce travelling time and expenses, thus making the research more affordable, convenient, and feasible. Additionally, Kota Kinabalu provides better access to research facilities and expertise that are crucial for the current study. It is much easier to conduct SPSS analysis in the state capital because of the availability of equipment, software, and technical assistance. Overall, Kota Kinabalu provides the specific educational context for data collection, statistical analysis, and community engagement. In brief, it allows the writers to engage with the local PHEI administrators and academics by offering an environment that is conducive to conducting quantitative research.

3.3. Sample and Justification

The sample of the current study comprised 56 PHEI lecturers ($n = 56$). This sample size could provide the statistical power needed to yield a desirable confidence level in the findings. It could also provide precise estimations of lecturers' perceptions of coaching leadership with a small margin of error, which would translate into reliable and accurate findings. [Pannell \(2023\)](#) maintained that a minimum of 30 respondents is needed for each group of continuous data. Further, according to the law of large numbers, the 56 data points should provide sufficient information to make a statistically sound conclusion

about the lecturer population in Sabah, besides adequately controlling variability and minimizing potential bias. For a simple survey on coaching leadership, the concept of big data is too costly and unnecessary because a sample size of 56 can generate sufficient numerical data for statistical analysis and interpretation of findings.

The sample consisted of 32.1 percent males and 67.9 percent females. Age-wise, 39.3 percent are 25 to 35 years old, 33.9 percent are 36 to 46 years old, 19.6 percent are 47 to 57 years old, and 7.1 percent are above 57 years old. Experience-wise, 21.4 percent have worked for less than five years, 16.1 percent have worked for six to 11 years, 35.7 percent have worked for 12 to 17 years, 8.9 percent have worked for 18 to 23 years, and 8.9 percent have worked for more than 23 years (see [Table 1](#)).

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents ($n = 56$)

Item	Profile	Description	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	18	32.1%
		Female	38	67.9%
2	Age	25-35 years	22	39.3%
		36-46 years	19	33.9%
		47-57 years	11	19.6%
		above 57 years	4	7.1%
3	Job Experience (years)	Less than 5	12	21.4%
		6-11	9	16.1%
		12-17	20	35.7%
		18-23	5	8.9%
		More than 23	5	8.9%

3.4. Instrument

A structured questionnaire was administered to examine PHEI lecturers' perceptions of coaching leadership among department heads in Sabah, Malaysia. The Coaching Leadership Questionnaire consists of 12 Likert-scale items derived from the literature ([Boogaard, 2023](#); [Mäkelä et al., 2023](#); [Stanier, 2023](#)). To determine the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted on 25 teachers and data were analyzed using SPSS 29.0. To determine how closely related the 12 items are as a group, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess reliability. Results indicated that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the Coaching Leadership Questionnaire is .81, indicating that it has high internal consistency. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was also conducted; results showed that the Cronbach's alpha value of coaching leadership is .97, also confirming its high internal reliability.

3.5. Data Collection and Analysis

PHEI lecturers were required to complete the Coaching Leadership Questionnaire online. They were told 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. Only the first writer has access to the data, guaranteeing that they were used solely for scholarly purposes.

Data were automatically transferred onto a spreadsheet and subsequently analyzed using SPSS 29.0. First, means and percentages on the coaching leadership variables were calculated. Second, Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences in lecturers' perceptions of coaching 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. Lastly, Wilcoxon signed rank test was used to determine if any of the coaching leadership items were significant at a hypothesized value of 3.5.

4. Findings

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

The overall mean of PHEI lecturers' perceptions of coaching leadership was calculated. Results showed that the mean was 3.84 out of 5.0, reflecting that a low number of lecturers tend to perceive their department heads as coaching leaders. Additionally, percentages of agreement (strongly agree/agree) were collapsed to gain an overview of lecturers' perceptions of coaching leadership among department heads in at the three PHEIs in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Again, results showed that a low proportion of PHEI lecturers (only 48.2 to 60.7 percent) tend to perceive their department heads as coaching leaders (see [Table 2](#)).

Table 2: Percentages of Agreement on Coaching Leadership

My department head believes that ...	1	2	3	4	5	4+5 (Collapsed)
It is important to invest time to allow staff to fully develop their skills and reach their fullest potential	7.1	10.7	23.2	41.1	17.9	59
The most effective way to motivate staff is to invest time and effort in them	7.1	10.7	21.4	39.3	21.4	60.7
It is crucial to provide constructive and motivational feedback to staff	10.7	7.1	26.8	39.3	16.1	55.4
They should allocate time to learn what staff expect and need from them	8.9	8.9	26.8	42.9	12.5	55.4
They often promote and support the success of staff through various means	7.1	8.9	23.2	37.5	23.2	60.7
They embrace staff's curiosity instead of leaping in with advice, opinions, and solutions	8.9	8.9	28.6	41.1	12.5	53.6
They offer staff the space and context to think about problems and provide relevant answers or suggestions	7.1	5.4	28.6	39.3	19.6	58.9
They avoid the hurry to offer advice and ask more questions, but prefer to stay curious a bit longer	5.4	10.7	32.1	35.7	16.1	51.8
They encourage independent thinking and do not do the work for staff, but let them do it for themselves	7.1	10.7	25	42.9	14.3	57.2

They are generous with staff in terms of autonomy, trust, and freedom of thought and expression	10.7	7.1	33.9	32.1	16.1	48.2
They facilitate staff's progress and advancement by allocating the right tasks to the right individuals	10.7	10.7	23.2	41.1	14.3	55.4

4.2. Inferential Statistics

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

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

Coaching	Nonparametric test	p-value
Gender	Mann-Whitney U test	0.319
Age	Kruskal-Wallis H test	0.814
Job Experience	Kruskal-Wallis H test	0.210

Wilcoxon signed rank test based on a hypothesized value of 3.5 showed that all coaching leadership items were significant at $p < 0.001$, having medians that were significantly different from the test value, and were likely to indicate strong disagreement (see [Table 4](#)).

Table 4: Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test on Leadership Styles (Hypothesized Value = 3.5)

My department head believes that ...	p-value	Conclusion
It is important to invest time to allow staff to fully develop their skills and reach their fullest potential	<0.001	Median significantly differs from the test value indicating strong disagreement
The most effective way to motivate staff is to invest time and effort in them	<0.001	Median significantly differs from the test value indicating strong disagreement
It is crucial to provide constructive and motivational feedback to staff	<0.001	Median significantly differs from the test value indicating strong disagreement
They allocate time to learn what staff expect and need from them	<0.001	Median significantly differs from the test value indicating strong disagreement
They often promote and support the success of staff through various means	<0.001	Median significantly differs from the test value indicating strong disagreement
They embrace staff's curiosity instead of leaping in with advice, opinions, and solutions	<0.001	Median significantly differs from the test value indicating strong disagreement
They offer staff the necessary space and context to think about questions and provide relevant answers or suggestions	<0.001	Median significantly differs from the test value indicating strong disagreement
They avoid the hurry to offer advice and ask more questions, but prefer to stay curious a bit longer to stimulate innovative thinking.	<0.001	Median significantly differs from the test value indicating strong disagreement
They encourage independent thinking and do not do the work for staff, but let them do it for themselves	<0.001	Median significantly differs from the test value indicating strong disagreement

They are generous with staff in terms of autonomy, trust, and freedom of thought and expression	<0.001	Median significantly differs from the test value indicating strong disagreement
They facilitate staff's progress and advancement by allocating the right tasks to the right individuals	<0.001	Median significantly differs from the test value indicating strong disagreement

*** $p < 0.001$

5. Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

First, nonparametric tests showed that there were no significant differences by way of gender, age, and job experience in lecturers' perceptions of coaching leadership. Findings imply that demographic characteristics do not significantly influence lecturers' perceptions of coaching leadership. Second, the mean and percentages of agreement related to coaching leadership were low. Lastly, Wilcoxon signed rank test based on a hypothesized value of 3.5 showed that all the coaching leadership items were significant at $p < 0.001$, having medians that were significantly different from the test value and were likely to indicate strong disagreement.

5.2. Implications

5.2.1. Competitive Authoritarian Rule

Current findings imply that high percentages of PHEI lecturers tend to perceive their department heads as non-coaching leaders. Previous research showed that Malaysian leaders tend to be authoritarian rather than coaching. Coaching leadership appears to be unpopular among PHEI department heads probably due to the political climate of Malaysia. [Giersdorf and Croissant \(2011\)](#) postulated that the Malaysian civil society is primarily influenced by competitive authoritarian rule. Ironically, the existence of a civil society may actually strengthen the stability of the authoritarian order due to historical institutionalism associated with colonialism. Institutional legacies have been, and still are, of great influence on the structures and functions of the Malaysian civil society. To a certain extent, the institutional framework of competitive authoritarianism tends to restrict civic engagement and the establishment of civic associations, which can reinforce authoritarianism rather than fostering coaching leadership. Similarly, [Sirat, Ahmad, and Azman \(2012\)](#), who examined the nature of the leadership crisis at Malaysian public universities, found that leadership at the top levels of university management tends to practice administrative hierarchy, which obstructs government institutions from outlining instructional leadership plans to attain greater heights. To promote meritocracy, PHEIs should adopt coaching leadership that tends to be more inspirational, visionary, and progressive in its approach.

5.2.2. Allocative and Authoritarian Model

Rather than adopting coaching leadership, many Malaysian educational institutions tend to embrace an allocative model, with principals sharing responsibilities with senior leaders in a manner that is similar to delegation ([Bush & Ng, 2019](#)). While coaching leadership is gaining prominence in the educational terrains overseas, it is rarely adapted for use in the highly centralized context of Malaysia, which is grounded on a rigid hierarchical model. Besides, Malaysian educational leaders are more likely to enact

leadership in ways that are congruent with their sociocultural backgrounds and assumptions rather than embracing emerging administrative policies. Additionally, [Parlar, Türkoğlu, and Cansoy \(2022\)](#) postulated that authoritarian leadership is more commonly seen in Eastern societies, including Malaysia. Nevertheless, authoritarian leadership tends to diminish teachers' affective commitment by decreasing trust in principals, while also increasing organizational silence. Similarly, [Chong and Yong \(2024\)](#) found that secondary school principals in Sabah tend to adopt an authoritarian leadership style that adversely affects job satisfaction among teachers.

5.2.3. Power Distance and Respect

Lastly, PHEI department heads tend to dismiss coaching leadership probably because their culture and communication style are characterized by power and respect. Baker (2021) conceptualized that Malaysian employees tend to accept inequality with certain expectations. They expect leaders to show compassion, while using more of an autocratic, rather than a participative, style. Besides strong group bonding, there are also connections between power and respect, whereby leaders often demonstrate prowess to mark their social status, educational level, expertise, and rank. Rather than merely accepting power differences, it is a matter of respect that subordinates have toward their superiors.

5.3. Recommendations

5.3.1. Close Supervisory Load Interactions

[Hwang, Kang, and Choi \(2023\)](#) summarized that coaching leadership tends to positively contribute to creative performance through close supervisory load interactions by providing material and psychological support to staff. Therefore, PHEIs should be aware of the favorable impact of coaching leadership and provide training programs to reinforce coaching leadership capabilities amongst administrative staff. Moreover, PHEIs should also establish an effective selection system based on valid and reliable coaching instruments to recruit administrative personnel who have the potential to become coaching leaders. Additionally, to increase organizational efficiency and productivity, PHEIs should facilitate a coaching organizational culture by encouraging deans, department heads, and coordinators to acquire various coaching behaviors and attributes. For instance, they can support coaching-related behaviors (e.g., guidance, facilitation, and inspiration) to enhance administrative personnel and staff's sense of belonging, psychological safety, and innovativeness. Besides, PHEIs also need to establish an open coaching culture that guarantees free and authentic communication and support systems at various organizational levels; it will not only strengthen psychological empowerment and constructive voice behavior, but it will also help them cultivate win-win relationships, which make staff feel empowered to engage in more prosocial and productive endeavors. Lastly, PHEIs should encourage administrative personnel and staff to frequently engage in creative behavior; it will place them in a better position to effectively utilize organizational resources to bring innovation and change in their own departments.

5.3.2. Continuous, Job-embedded Training

While traditional professional development models mainly focus on one-time workshops or lectures, [Majola, Setlalentoa, and Thabane \(2024\)](#) recommended that school leaders

receive continuous, job-embedded training opportunities. Coaching leadership programs should focus on long-term support for PHEI leaders by boosting their self-efficacy, individual growth, skills development, and internal locus of control. To encourage coaching leadership development among PHEI leaders, higher management needs to create an environment where conversations flow freely, while ideas are exchanged without hesitation. Additionally, PHEI leaders should be involved in ongoing and continuous engagement and dialogue with upper management to deliberate on matters that deal with the implementation of coaching leadership. They need to engage in purposeful growth conversations that will positively impact their collaborative decision-making, leadership behavior, and curricular planning. Lastly, PHEI leaders also need to acquire active listening skills to empathize with staff and provide constructive feedback through effective communication (Majola, Setlalentoa, & Thabane, 2024).

5.3.3. Development Goals, Professional Growth, and Role Clarity

According to Huang (2019), coaching leadership can modify staff's perceptions of their roles, goals, and other organizational aspects, thus improving their in-role performance. Therefore, PHEIs should inculcate coaching leadership behaviors by collaborating with staff to establish appropriate development goals through inspiration, authorization, guidance, and other coaching techniques. To be regarded as effective coach leaders, PHEI administrative personnel (deans, department heads, and coordinators) need to provide staff with opportunities for professional growth, allocate sufficient resources to augment staff's career development, and implement an appropriate appraisal system to motivate staff to improve their in-role performance. Since role clarity tends to mediate the relationship between coaching leadership and in-role performance (Huang, 2019), PHEI leaders can help staff improve their job performance by reducing role ambiguity, while clarifying their job specifications through language enhancement and positive reinforcement. Moreover, PHEI leaders can also modify job descriptions or reorganize organizational structures to specify the division of labor so that staff can accurately identify their professional goals, roles, and responsibilities.

Additionally, since social astuteness tends to assume a positive role in moderating coaching leadership and role ambiguity (Huang, 2019), coaching leadership tends to be less effective with staff who possess lower social astuteness than those with higher social astuteness. Therefore, PHEI leaders should explore appropriate leadership behaviors to help those with lower social astuteness by increasing role clarity and improving their on-task performance. Moreover, they can also utilize relevant tests to assess candidates' social astuteness as one of the recruitment and screening criteria. Lastly, PHEI leaders can also (1) provide relevant training based on their own development needs and staff's actual attributes, (2) raise staff's social astuteness, (3) underscore personal/professional growth and improvement, and (4) most important, encourage staff to adapt to the coaching leadership style.

5.3.4. Heuristic, Guiding Management, and Organizational Identification

Dong (2021) found that coaching leadership tends to have a significant and positive impact on staff performance, with organizational identity assuming an intermediary role in the relationship. Therefore, PHEIs that intend to improve staff performance and raise their rankings should practice coaching leadership to keep abreast with the digital economy, enhance staff's organizational identity, and improve staff's overall performance. Since many contemporary staff tend to possess high performance abilities and

adaptability, PHEI leaders should practice coaching leadership by adopting heuristic and guiding management models to make staff feel (1) more respected, needed, and appreciated, (2) more supportive of the organization's vision and mission, and (3) more integrated into the organization with a deeper sense of belonging.

Additionally, [Dong \(2021\)](#) posited that organizational identification tends to have a significant and positive impact on staff performance. Many contemporary PHEI staff tend to exhibit a strong sense of organizational identity and trust deep inside their hearts; therefore, they also tend to display high job enthusiasm and performance motivation to create value for themselves as well as for the institution. To promote coaching leadership, PHEIs should help staff realize their social identity and self-worth because these psychosocial elements tend to enhance their work efficiency and performance quality. Additionally, coaching leadership, characterized by timely feedback, often creates a deep sense of accomplishment amongst staff; this tends to boost their achievement motivation, willingness to collaborate with others, and ability to establish favorable interpersonal relationships. Lastly, by adopting the heuristic management style, PHEIs can encourage staff to (1) become more proactive in contributing to organizational growth, (2) seek common ground between the organization and self-worth, (3) establish greater organizational identity, and (4) improve the status and performance quality of the organization.

5.3.5. Effective Communication, Team Building, and Promotion and Training

[Dong \(2021\)](#) maintained that organizations can actively use coaching leadership to reap its benefits. First, PHEI leaders should actively and openly interact with staff to create an effective communication channel between superiors and subordinates. Effective communication helps PHEI leaders to promptly grasp staff's psychosocial dynamics, help staff resolve work/life difficulties, besides making them feel respected and appreciated. Second, PHEI leaders should organize team building activities, which help alleviate work pressure and negative emotions, while fostering a favorable relationship between leaders and staff, and also amongst staff. Moreover, team building activities also strengthen staff's team consciousness, while enhancing their sense of belonging and organizational identity. Third, PHEI leaders should pay attention to staff's inner feelings to enhance organizational identity by (1) understanding staff's authentic inner needs, (2) attaching importance to staff's interests, and (3) merging organizational goals with staff's personal goals. These practices allow staff to recognize their value and resonate with the organization both professionally and emotionally, thus making them feel that they share a similar direction and goals with the organization.

To promote coaching leadership, senior management of organizations should actively learn coaching leadership and its related concepts ([Dong, 2021](#)). PHEIs should formulate corresponding promotion and training plans to encourage administrative personnel (deans, department heads, and coordinators) to gradually incorporate coaching leadership elements into their existing management styles. Besides, PHEIs should also recruit administrative personnel with coaching leadership potential and incorporate coaching-based leadership into their annual appraisal. Lastly, PHEIs can foster coaching leadership by improving their administrative system in four ways; they can (1) improve their incentive mechanism with tangible/intangible rewards, (2) succinctly distinguish between rewards and punishments, (3) provide better work remuneration, and (4) encourage staff to demonstrate high organizational identity and job performance.

According to [Boogaard \(2023\)](#), educational leaders can integrate coaching leadership into their daily administration in various ways. PHEI leaders need to understand staff's individual development goals, ask open-ended questions, and be singularly focused. First, they need to focus on achieving a vision, not just the organization's vision, but also each individual staff's by acknowledging their goals and desires. They need to conduct productive, one-on-one conversations by asking open-ended questions that elicit authentic responses. To be singularly focused, they should ask one question at a time to avoid overwhelming staff. Second, PHEI leaders should prioritize frequent feedback that is (1) based on regular cadence, rather than limiting it to the annual performance review, (2) clear and succinct, evidenced by real-life examples, (3) actionable, supported by tangible aspects that staff need to improve, and (4) well-balanced, based on constructive criticism with praise and recognition to shape skills, build job efficacy, and raise performance motivation. Third, PHEI leaders should improve their own emotional intelligence to practice a highly personalized style that can coach staff in the most resonant and meaningful manner. Besides, they also need to raise their ability to recognize and effectively manage their own emotions, besides staff's. They can increase their own emotional intelligence by (1) soliciting timely feedback from staff, (2) identifying and acknowledging their emotions when they feel them, (3) practicing mindfulness to truly connect with their own emotions, and (4) actively listening to staff about their goals, challenges, and preferences to make the necessary adjustments.

5.3.6. Pivotal Human Resource Pillars

Leaders who are interested in instituting a coaching leadership style should enumerate three pivotal human resource pillars, including enlistment, job appraisal, and lifelong education ([Tang et al., 2024](#)). First, during enlistment, PHEI leaders should appraise job candidates' attitudes and beliefs to ensure that theirs are aligned with coaching leadership values by conducting in-depth interviews, administering appropriate psychometric tools, or implementing situational simulations. Moreover, PHEI leaders should also combine relevant experiential activities with performance metrics to elevate their own coaching behaviors to nurture academics' psychological potential and promote organizational synergy. Second, to bolster academics' organizational self-esteem, PHEI leaders should use appropriate reinforcement systems and reward schemes to incentivize outstanding performance, thereby enhancing their individual and collective psychological welfare. Additionally, PHEI leaders should foster team spirit and facilitate frequent knowledge exchange to make staff feel that they are at the core of the organizational superstructure, which increases their willingness to undertake challenging tasks and practice inventive problem-solving. Lastly, PHEI leaders should strategize around academics' learning/career goal orientation; for example, during recruitment, they should use valid and reliable personality tests to identify candidates who are target-driven, results-oriented, or achievement-driven. Subsequently, they can provide in-service training geared toward nurturing the identified qualities, for example, by assigning enterprising projects to the target-driven or task-oriented endeavors to the results-driven and achievement-inclined.

5.3.7. Empowerment Programs and Coaching Leadership Training

[Majola, Setlalentoa, and Thabane \(2024\)](#) postulated that, since coaching leadership plays a critical role in enhancing teachers' classroom management, career and personal development, and morale, principals need to be able to empower teachers to become the best versions of themselves. Instead of micromanaging every move, PHEI leaders should

learn to ask consequential questions and empathetically listen to responses. Therefore, school leaders need congruous guidance to help them demonstrate coaching leadership behaviors in a methodical manner. PHEI leaders can join empowerment programs, workshops, and training sessions that enable them to become effective adopters and enforcers of coaching leadership, who can facilitate staff in the same way that coaches do with players, by inspiring staff to navigate challenges and issues with minimal emotional or personal bias.

Lastly, while international sports coaches have adequate resources to facilitate their players' performance, many educational leaders in developing countries lack the basic knowledge and facilities to implement ongoing and continuous professional development amongst staff (Majola, Setlalto, & Thabane, 2024). PHEI leaders require professional development programs, mentorship, and continuous feedback to enhance their own coaching skills and competencies. They also need funding to join leadership workshops to equip themselves with the fundamental techniques to effectively coach their own staff. Lastly, the private sector and other stakeholders should provide support for PHEI leaders to develop coaching leadership skills by sponsoring workshops, seminars, and structured management programs.

6. Limitations

To conclude, this study contains some limitations that deserve mention, while also offering opportunities for future research. In the context of sampling, this research was limited to three PHEIs and 56 lecturers from the Kota Kinabalu area, which might dilute the generalizability of the findings across other higher education clusters and settings. Therefore, a larger sample, recruited from different states, could enrich the granularity of future investigations by offering deeper insight. Although this study primarily focuses on the elements associated with coaching leadership and yields new information, its impact on academics' psychosocial attributes (e.g., wellbeing, job satisfaction, goal orientation, and organizational commitment) is not examined. Therefore, future research on coaching leadership should adopt a multidimensional analytical approach by addressing how its different elements impact academics' behavior, beliefs, and attitudes. Lastly, the methodology adopted for this study, while beneficial, could be further refined to enhance scientific rigor, for example, future research should adopt a multifaceted methodological method, including interviews, focus groups, and case studies, to increase the extent to which current findings can be applied to other locations, populations, or educational settings.

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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