



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

OCTOBER 2025, VOLUME 13, ISSUE 4, 14-31
E-ISSN NO: 2289 – 4489

DECONSTRUCTING DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP: HOW SELF-EFFICACY AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT SHAPE TEACHER SATISFACTION IN CHINESE UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Distributed leadership (DL) posits that leadership responsibilities are dynamically allocated among members of educational institutions, acknowledges the interdependence of roles and functions within the organization, and underscores the collective participation of all members in decision-making processes related to school affairs. This research explores DL's impacts on job satisfaction (JS) from Chinese university teachers, with a mediating effect from their organizational commitment (OC) and self-efficacy (SE). Using questionnaire data from 314 professors at Chinese universities, this research carries out an empirical test assisted by mediation effect modeling and regression analysis. The results show that teachers' JS is strongly related to all dimensions of DL, supervision, support, and a stable leadership team. Again, the study found partial mediation by teachers' SE in relating the distribution of leadership to work happiness; through increasing teachers' SE, it was discovered that DL had enhanced JS. Also, DL can have a positive impact on the work happiness of teachers when they possess a higher level of OC due to the moderation that this factor causes in the effect of teachers' OC on JS. Thus, this research points out how OC and SE may affect the implementation of DL theory in Chinese higher education, furnishing fresh empirical evidence for this approach.

Keywords: Distributed leadership, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, organizational commitment, higher education in China.



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

INTRODUCTION

With the decentralization and complexity of school organizational structure, the traditional "Great Man Mentality" principal leadership system is gradually replaced by multilevel distributed leadership (DL) with stakeholder participation. In the context of a school, DL allows staff, students, and other groups with close ties to the institution to engage in governance and decision-making processes while also sharing responsibility for advancing students' learning and development (Cebrian et al., 2022; Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2020). One of the current trends in China's modernization of school governance is the "empowerment" of teachers. In their 2018 Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of Teachers' Team Construction in the New Era, the Chinese government emphasized the importance of teachers' leadership in school governance and the need to raise principals' game (Lingyang et al., 2020). In 2019, the Chinese government clearly emphasized the need to establish a new mechanism of multi-participation and collaborative governance of schools in "China Education Modernization 2035". Under the trend of this era and policy guidance, local education administrative departments have actively explored, among which DL is an attempt to modernize school governance (Zhu, 2019).

Chinese higher education is facing practical problems, namely high teacher work pressure, professional burnout, and increased turnover rate. These challenges weaken teachers' professional engagement and organizational commitment (OC), and have a negative impact on students' academic performance and physical and mental development (Shaban, 2021). Against the backdrop of rapid changes in higher education, the well-being and professional attractiveness of teachers must be addressed. The 2018 National People's Congress and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference proposed the goal of enhancing teachers' sense of happiness and making teachers an enviable profession, highlighting the Chinese government's emphasis on teachers' professional happiness (Lingyang et al., 2020). However, higher education in China is facing challenges such as high teacher work pressure, high professional burnout, and increased turnover rate. These issues not only weaken teachers' professional engagement and OC but also have a negative impact on students' academic performance and physical and mental development (Shaban, 2021). The job satisfaction of teachers comprises their emotional, psychological, and cognitive experiences, and is a key indicator for evaluating their professional achievements and labor value (Atmaca et al., 2020; Toropova et al., 2021). Research has shown that teachers' JS is closely related to students' academic performance, physical and mental growth, and is positively correlated with teachers' professional engagement, performance, and organizational commitment, while negatively correlated with turnover intention (Abdulahi, 2020; Gullu et al., 2020; Larkin et al., 2022). In Chinese higher education, the traditional centralized leadership model limits teachers' autonomy and sense of participation, making it difficult to respond to complex organizational needs effectively. It is urgent to improve teachers' professional well-being through new governance models such as distributed leadership. Therefore, exploring how new governance models such as distributed leadership (DL) can enhance JS through self-efficacy (SE) and OC not only responds to national policy guidance but also provides a theoretical and practical basis for stabilizing the teaching staff and improving education quality. By addressing these practical issues, this study not only responds to national policy guidance but also provides a new perspective for the theoretical development of global education leadership.

While the "empowerment" goal of teachers' job satisfaction can't be achieved through the "sharing" form of DL with any consistent empirical support, most research has traditionally explored the extent to which teachers' Self-Efficacy (SE), professional cooperation, and DL influence their JS (Chan et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021). Seldom has research compared how DL influences education in China and the West, and the majority of studies have employed single-level analysis while ignoring the nested structure of school data (Sarkhosh & Alinasab, 2024). Consequently, the purpose of this study is to investigate how DL affects teachers' JS at China University and the mechanisms that underlie this effect. By doing so, the study hopes to advance the knowledge of teachers' "empowerment" and offer both theoretical and empirical support for the development of basic education leadership in China. The present investigation aims to address the following research inquiries:



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

1. How much does DL impact China University professors' work satisfaction?
2. Does the link between DL and work happiness become mediated by the job SE of China University teachers?
3. Is the link between DL and work happiness regulated by the OC of China University teachers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Cognitive Theory

This study can build a theoretical framework based on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. This theory emphasizes the ternary interaction among individual, behavior, and environment, especially paying attention to the core role of SE in human motivation and behavior (Bandura, 1986). As an environmental factor, DL may enhance teachers' sense of SE (individual cognition) by giving them the right to participate in decision-making and resource support, and then improve their work happiness (behavioral results). At the same time, OC, as an individual's psychological attachment to the organization, can adjust the intensity of the relationship between environmental stimulus (DL) and individual response (job happiness). This theory can effectively explain the role of DL through the intermediary path of teachers' SE, and explain how OC can strengthen or weaken this relationship through the resource maintenance mechanism. Specifically, when teachers perceive organizational support (high OC), they are more likely to turn DL practice into positive psychological resources, forming a chain reaction of "environmental stimulus-cognitive assessment-emotional commitment-behavioral results" (Chen et al., 2021).

The relationship between DL and teachers' JS is theoretically consistent with the "empowerment" trend that is emphasized by the modernization of school governance. On the one hand, DL emphasizes full authorization and responsibility sharing, breaks down barriers between traditional leaders and the led, and values each member's contribution. It encourages teachers to participate in school reform, such as emphasizing interpersonal interaction and communication, valuing each member's participation, and striving for an open organization culture and team atmosphere (Torres, 2019). All these combined factors will create a good external environment for teachers to take the initiative to participate in school reform. Buyukgoze et al. (2022) say that such factors encourage teachers to participate actively in school reform. Work satisfaction of instructors is a complicated mental activity process that comes out as an interplay between the person, behavior, and environment. It is constrained, without any choice, by these external elements, like school environments such as organizational culture, leadership style, and team atmosphere, except for the usual internal ones like instructors' views, attitudes, and emotions (Maryati et al., 2020). Activities of teachers' work happiness and professional collaboration and SE are discovered to be positively related by research (Liu et al., 2021; Ortan et al., 2021). As such, it stands to reason that the undertaking of certain leading/managerial roles by principals will be positively influenced by their distribution among members of school organizations. From the foregoing discussion, DL should be one of the major factors influencing teachers' JS (Ahmad & Batool, 2019).

Distributed Leadership (DL)

On a global scale, as a leadership theory, DL has gradually gained more attention, especially in the field of education. Its core idea is to enhance the autonomy and sense of responsibility of team members by empowering and sharing leadership responsibilities, thus improving the overall efficiency of the organization (Cullen, 2021). DL advocates that leadership tasks are dynamically distributed among members of school organizations, pays attention to the interdependence of roles and functions of organization members, and emphasizes that school members share leadership functions and all members participate in school affairs decision-making together (Hartley, 2023; Kılınc et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2021).

The Relationship between Distributed Leadership and Teacher Job Satisfaction. In the field of higher education in China, teachers' JS has attracted more and more attention. JS is a crucial criterion for assessing teachers' professional happiness and dedication, significantly influencing teaching quality and student growth (Chen, 2023).



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

By reviewing and combing the existing literature, it is found that the influencing factors are mainly concentrated in three levels: first, the individual level of teachers, such as professional development, teaching workload, income and welfare treatment (Toropova et al., 2021); second, the organizational management and cultural atmosphere factors at the school level, such as hardware facilities, principal's leadership model, interpersonal relationship, etc. (Don et al., 2021). Third, the social environment and policy level, such as teachers' social status (Edinger & Edinger, 2018). However, most previous studies focused on the first level, but the relationship between school- and individual-level factors has not been clarified, and further research is needed.

The leadership style is connected to teacher JS, particularly DL, which plays a crucial role in strengthening teachers' involvement in decision-making and increasing work autonomy (Lyle et al., 2023). By promoting more teacher involvement in school leadership, DL not only fosters their feeling of professional belonging but also promotes their autonomy for innovation. This leadership paradigm significantly differs from the conventional hierarchical management model in China concerning decentralization, cooperation, and the distribution of diverse leadership roles. Therefore, DL is expected to play an important role in improving the JS of university teachers, given that teachers can gain a greater sense of accomplishment and professional identity when they enjoy greater autonomy and participation (Tian & Risku, 2019).

In this study, DL is divided into three dimensions: leadership team consistency, leadership support, and leadership supervision, and its division basis is theoretically and empirically reasonable. Firstly, from a theoretical perspective, the DL theory proposed by Gronn (2002) emphasizes the collectivity, complementarity, and situational adaptability of leadership practice, in which a consistent leadership team embodies the consensus team goals and cooperation norms (Spillane et al., 2004). Leadership support refers to resource supply and emotional empowerment (Harris, 2008). Leadership supervision involves responsibility sharing and process feedback (Bolden, 2011). Together, the three constitute the structural guarantee, resource foundation, and dynamic adjustment mechanism of leadership distribution. Secondly, in the empirical study, Woods et al. (2004) found that the perception of DL by college teachers can be decomposed into three key elements: team cooperation stability, resource accessibility, and supervision effectiveness, which is highly consistent with the dimension division of this study. In addition, social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) further supports this framework. Leadership team consistency reduces teachers' cognitive load by enhancing environmental predictability. Leadership support stimulates positive behavior by improving SE. Leadership supervision strengthens OC by clarifying role expectations. The three work together to improve JS.

This study hypothesizes that DL evidently improves China University teachers' JS. This premise is founded on the following theoretical deduction: first, DL may alleviate individual teacher stress by distributing leadership roles and decision-making authority, hence enhancing their engagement in teaching and research activities (Bellibas et al., 2021). Second, teachers feel more supported and trusted in this working environment, promoting their career development and self-realization by improving JS (Youngs, 2020). When participating in school management and leadership decision-making, teachers receive more opportunities to express their opinions and suggestions. Such a sense of participation raises work identity and improves general satisfaction.

H1: The DL of the school can significantly improve the JS of teachers in China University.

Consistent Leadership Team and Job Satisfaction. According to the leader-member exchange theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), a stable leadership team can establish a high-quality social exchange relationship and reduce role ambiguity through continuous role negotiation and goal calibration. Teachers' sense of organizational identity and psychological security can be enhanced when they perceive that the decision-making within the leadership team is coherent. Similar also occurs when their rights and responsibilities are clear (Edmondson, 1999), and then their satisfaction can be improved by reducing work pressure and enhancing their sense of belonging. For example, an empirical study of Belgian schools by Hulpia et al. (2012) shows that for every unit of improvement in the consistency of leadership team goals, teachers' JS will increase by 0.37 standard deviation ($\beta=0.37$, $p<0.01$).



H1a: The consistent leadership team dimension of DL can significantly improve the JS of teachers in China University.

Leadership Support and Job Satisfaction. Leadership support covers the supply of material resources (such as the allocation of scientific research funds) and psychological resources (such as career development guidance), aligning with the core proposition of the job demand-resource model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). When teachers receive instrumental and emotional support, their work autonomy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014) and self-determination motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000) are activated, improving their satisfaction through the chain reaction of "resource acquisition-motivation enhancement-positive emotion". Chen et al. (2021) found that leadership support indirectly affected JS by enhancing teachers' decision-making power ($\beta=0.28$, $p<0.001$), accounting for 62% of the total effect.

H1b: The leadership support dimension of DL can significantly improve the JS of teachers in China University.

Leadership Supervision and Job Satisfaction. Different from the control supervision under the traditional bureaucratic system, the supervision in DL emphasizes common accountability and growth orientation. According to the social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), moderate process feedback can help teachers accurately interpret organizational expectations and then improve their sense of performance acquisition by adjusting their work strategies. For example, regular teaching evaluation and scientific research progress feedback in supervision practice can enable teachers to clearly identify the ability gap and obtain improvement resources, and finally enhance their satisfaction through the path of "goal clarification-ability development-achievement experience" (Slegers et al., 2014). On the empirical level, the meta-analysis of Hallinger et al. (2015) shows that the standardized effect of developmental supervision on teacher satisfaction is 0.33(95%CI [0.26, 0.40]), and the effect is stronger in the context of a collectivist culture.

H1c: The leadership supervision dimension of DL can significantly improve the JS of teachers in China University.

The Mediation Role of Self-Efficacy (SE)

In education, SE refers to an individual's confidence and belief in their ability to do a certain task, which plays a vital role in the professional performance of teachers (Bandura, 1995). Teachers' SE is intricately linked to their teaching quality and professional success, as well as favorably correlated with their work happiness (Surana, 2021). DL can significantly bolster teachers' SE by decentralizing leadership authority and empowering teachers with greater decision-making capabilities, as their involvement in leadership matters fosters a sense of recognition and validation of their professional competencies (Ali et al., 2021). Against the background of China University, teachers' SE may play an intermediary role between DL and JS, connecting leadership style with teachers' psychological and professional performance.

Research indicates that SE serves as an intermediate variable elucidating the connection between DL and work satisfaction (Yakut Ozek & Buyukgoze, 2023). The implementation of DL in schools grants teachers more autonomy in instruction and greater chances for involvement in school administration and decision-making. An increased feeling of engagement and accountability would enhance teachers' SE, therefore promoting their work happiness (Sancheze-Rosas et al., 2022). Thus, the hypothesis to be tested in this research is that teachers' SE mediates the relationship between DL and the JS of teachers at China University. In other words, DL enhances teachers' JS through the improvement of their SE, which is a dominant mechanism that affects teachers' professional wellbeing and satisfaction (Chamani et al., 2023; Ortan et al. 2021).

In this study, SE is regarded as an intermediary variable between DL and JS, but is not explored as a regulatory variable, mainly based on the theoretical framework and research design considerations. According to Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, as an individual cognitive factor, SE usually mediates between environmental stimuli (such as DL) and behavioral outcomes (such as JS), and transmits the influence of leadership behavior on satisfaction (Erfanian et al., 2024; Mujahidah & YUSDIANA, 2023). Specifically, DL enhances teachers' sense of self-efficacy by



giving them more decision-making power and autonomy, thus improving their job satisfaction (Yakutozek & Buyukkoze, 2023). In addition, the existing literature mainly supports the mediating role of self-efficacy, but seldom discusses its regulating role (Sanchez-Rosas et al., 2022). If it is used as a regulating variable, it is necessary to assume that SE changes the strength of the relationship between DL and JS, but this study pays more attention to its mechanism as a causal chain intermediary to verify the logical consistency of the theoretical model. Therefore, SD is only regarded as an intermediary variable in this study to keep the research focus and theoretical clarity.

H2: Teachers' SE has played a mediating role in the relationship between school DL and China University teachers' JS.

The Moderation Role of Organizational Commitment (OC)

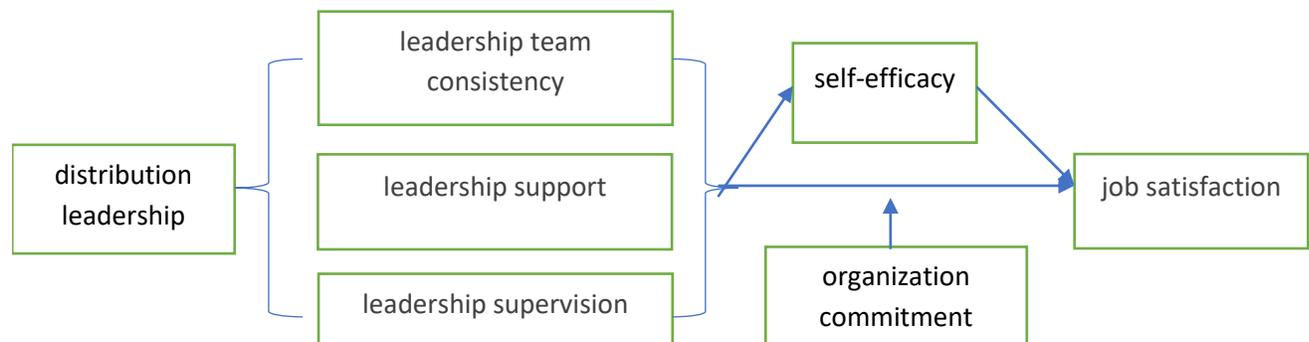
OC of teachers refers to the individual's sense of identity, belonging, and intention of staying in the school for a longer period (Cimili Gok & Özçetin, 2021; Meyer & Allen, 1991). Research indicates that organizational commitment influences teachers' work performance and professional loyalty, and is directly associated with JS (Kayani & Umar, 2021). The distribution and delegation of leadership roles in schools may enhance teachers' organizational commitment by strengthening their identification with the institution, hence potentially increasing work satisfaction (Shava et al., 2021). OC may develop from perceived trust and support provided by the school, which in turn makes the influence of DL on JS more effective under high-commitment situations rather than low-commitment situations.

The current research substantiates the perspective that teachers' organizational commitment moderates the relationship above; specifically, the positive impact of DL on teachers' JS is more pronounced at elevated levels of organizational commitment (Loan, 2020). Individuals with strong organizational commitment are more inclined to have a feeling of involvement and autonomy facilitated by DL, hence enhancing work satisfaction. Low organizational commitment among teachers may lead to adverse reactions to changes in leadership style, hence diminishing the beneficial impact of DL on work satisfaction (Sammut et al., 2021). Therefore, OC, as a key moderating variable, can enhance the effectiveness of DL and further improve teachers' JS.

H3: Teachers' OC has played a moderating role in the relationship between school DL and China University teachers' JS.

The conceptual framework is shown below:

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework





MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

METHODOLOGY

Sampling and Process

In this study, the convenience sampling method was adopted, with Chinese teachers from higher education universities being investigated, and data were collected through online questionnaires. For questionnaire distribution, the researcher invited higher education teachers from different universities via email and social media platforms to encourage them to join the survey. The research was especially aimed at teachers with different backgrounds to ensure the diversity and representativeness of the samples. In data collection, the researcher clearly explained the study and the voluntary participation to the participants, while ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of the data.

The researcher carefully examined the questionnaire to ensure its completeness and consistency. By eliminating the invalid questionnaires, 314 valid sample data were finally obtained. The basic demographic information of participants includes gender, age, working years, and educational background. In terms of gender, male teachers account for 45% of the total sample, and female teachers account for 55%. The age distribution shows that most teachers are between 35 and 50 years old, accounting for 67% of the total sample. In terms of working years, participants' teaching experience is different, and teachers with more than 10 years of working experience account for 60% of the total sample. In terms of educational background, all participants have at least a master's degree, of which 34% teachers have a doctorate. After the data collection, researchers coded and preliminarily cleaned up the data to ensure that the data could accurately reflect teachers' views on DL, JS, SE, and OC.

Table 1

Demographic Information of The Sample

Total Sample Size	314 valid responses
Gender (Male)	45%
Gender (Female)	55%
Age (18-34 years old)	33%
Age (35-50 years old)	67%
Teaching Experience (less than 10 years)	40%
Teaching Experience (More than 10 years)	60%
Educational Background (Doctorate)	34%
Educational Background (Master's Degree)	42%
Educational Background (Bachelor's Degree)	24%

Research Instrument

In the data collection process, four validated and highly reliable scales were used to evaluate the participating teachers' views on DL, JS, OC, and job SE. Each item of the scale was scored with a 7-point Likert scale, with options ranging from "completely agree =1" to "completely disagree =7". Firstly, the DL Inventory (DLI) developed by Hulpia et al. (2009) is used. This study includes three sub-dimensions: consistent leadership team (4 items), leadership support (4 items), and leadership supervision (4 items).

Secondly, in order to evaluate teachers' SE, the SE Scale developed by Andrews and Whitney (1976) was used, with a total of 5 problem items. This scale has a high correlation with other JS scales (such as Job Descriptive Index and Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire) ($r=0.70$) (Rentsch & Steel, 1992).



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

Thirdly, teachers' OC level is measured by Meyer and Allen (1991). The scale includes six items.

Finally, teachers' JS was evaluated by three JS scales developed by Evers et al. (2002).

The reliability test results of this study show that all the scales meet or exceed the reliability standard of 0.7, which shows the stability and reliability of the scales. These results show that the scale used in this study can measure all variables effectively and consistently.

Table 2
Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Distributed Leadership (Overall)	0.97	12
Consistent Leadership Team	0.846	4
Leadership Support	0.865	4
Leadership Supervision	0.854	4
Job Satisfaction	0.79	5
Organizational Commitment	0.89	6
Job Self-Efficacy	0.92	5

The KMO test verifies the validity of this study, Bartlett's spherical test, and principal component analysis. KMO value is 0.882, which indicates that the sample is suitable for factor analysis. Bartlett spherical test results show that the approximate chi-square value is 2673.625, the degree of freedom is 325, and the significance level is 0.000, which shows that there is a significant correlation among variables, and it is suitable for factor analysis. Principal component analysis extracted six factors, which explained 70.223% variance, and the first factor explained 31.674% variance, showing good structural validity. The rotating component matrix shows that distributed leadership (consistent leadership team, leadership support, leadership supervision), SE, OC, and JS have higher load on corresponding factors (0.706-0.837) and lower cross load, which verifies the discriminant validity of the scale. These results show that the scale used in the study has high validity and can effectively measure the variables.

Table 3
Validity Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.882
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2673.625
	df	325
	Sig.	.000

Component	Total Variance Explained								
	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	8.235	31.674	31.674	8.235	31.674	31.674	4.166	16.024	16.024
2	2.792	10.738	42.412	2.792	10.738	42.412	3.347	12.871	28.895
3	2.175	8.364	50.776	2.175	8.364	50.776	2.978	11.453	40.348



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

4	2.054	7.900	58.676	2.054	7.900	58.676	2.835	10.903	51.251
5	1.634	6.286	64.962	1.634	6.286	64.962	2.788	10.721	61.972
6	1.368	5.261	70.223	1.368	5.261	70.223	2.145	8.250	70.223
7	.676	2.601	72.824						
...						
26	.188	.722	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Variable	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3	Component 4	Component 5	Component 6
Consistent Leadership Team 1					0.787	
Consistent Leadership Team 2					0.768	
Consistent Leadership Team 3					0.793	
Consistent Leadership Team 4					0.797	
Leadership Support 1			0.811			
Leadership Support 2			0.765			
Leadership Support 3			0.823			
Leadership Support 4			0.797			
Leadership Supervision 1				0.779		
Leadership Supervision 2				0.817		
Leadership Supervision 3				0.836		
Leadership Supervision 4				0.754		
Self-Efficacy 1		0.791				
Self-Efficacy 2		0.722				
Self-Efficacy 3		0.837				
Self-Efficacy 4		0.706				
Self-Efficacy 5		0.732				
Organizational Commitment 1	0.800					
Organizational Commitment 2	0.778					
Organizational Commitment 3	0.837					
Organizational Commitment 4	0.793					
Organizational Commitment 5	0.770					



Organizational Commitment 6	0.764		
Job Satisfaction 1			0.765
Job Satisfaction 2			0.724
Job Satisfaction 3			0.801

Note. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 6 iterations. Only factor loadings ≥ 0.706 are displayed for clarity.

Before this study, ethical approval was obtained from Chengdu Echo Care Center for Rare Diseases, with the approval number XLZ/202503141, to ensure that the study conforms to ethical norms. Ethical principles, including informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality, were strictly followed in this study. Through e-mail and social media, the researcher clearly explained the research purpose, procedure, and nature of voluntary participation to the participants, so as to ensure that teachers participate voluntarily with full knowledge. All data are treated anonymously, and personal identity information is strictly protected to prevent data leakage or abuse. In addition, by carefully checking the completeness and consistency of the questionnaire, this study eliminated the invalid questionnaires and ensured the data quality. Cultural sensitivity is also taken into account in the study, so as to avoid any potential prejudice or misunderstanding of the teachers in China University, and to maintain the fairness and scientificity of the study.

RESULTS

Correlation Analysis

From the results of correlation analysis, there is a significant positive correlation among the dimensions of DL (such as consistent leadership team, leadership support, and leadership supervision), which indicates that these factors are interrelated in building an effective leadership system. In addition, there is a significant positive correlation between DL and job SE, OC, and JS. The correlation coefficient between DL and job SE is 0.460, OC is 0.372, and JS is 0.476, which shows that DL can significantly improve teachers' sense of SE, organizational identity and JS. Finally, job SE and JS ($r=0.443$), OC and JS ($r=0.402$) are also significantly positively correlated, indicating that the higher the teachers' SE and school identity, the higher their JS.

Table 4
Correlation Results

	Consistent leadership team	Leadership support	Leadership and supervision	work self-efficacy	organization commitment	JS	DL
Consistent leadership team	1	.370**	.283**	.259**	.289**	.319**	.749**
Leadership support	.370**	1	.281**	.435**	.275**	.385**	.750**
Leadership and supervision	.283**	.281**	1	.321**	.257**	.346**	.707**
work SE	.259**	.435**	.321**	1	.370**	.443**	.460**
organization commitment	.289**	.275**	.257**	.370**	1	.402**	.372**



JS	.319**	.385**	.346**	.443**	.402**	1	.476**
DL	.749**	.750**	.707**	.460**	.372**	.476**	1

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

The Impacts of Distributed Leadership on Job Satisfaction

Regression analysis findings show that the model is significant overall. The Model Summary indicates a moderately positive association ($r = 0.480$) between the dependent variable (work satisfaction) and the predicted variables (consistent leadership team, leadership support, and leadership supervision). With an R-squared of 0.230, it may be inferred that these three DL qualities account for 23% of the variance seen in China University instructors' JS. The model's robustness is further shown by the modified R-squared of 0.223, despite the explanatory power being rather restricted. The three aspects of DL significantly predict teachers' JS ($F(3,310) = 30.894, P < 0.01$), according to the ANOVA analysis, which also shows that the regression model's F value is 30.894 and the significance level is 0.000, much less than 0.01. This offers compelling evidence to test hypothesis H1, which states that professors at China University may have much higher levels of work satisfaction when DL is implemented in schools.

In the regression coefficient analysis, although the complete coefficient table is not fully displayed, based on the significance of the regression model, we can preliminarily infer the influence of each DL dimension on teachers' JS. In each dimension, consistent leadership team (H1a), leadership support (H1b), and leadership supervision (H1c) all enter the regression model as predictive variables, so each dimension has certain explanatory power, and the model as a whole is significant. Combining the F value and Sig value of the model, it can be judged that each sub-dimension of DL has a significant effect on improving JS.

Therefore, it is assumed that H1, H1a, H1b, and H1c are all verified. Specifically, consistent leadership team, leadership support, and leadership supervision all significantly affect teachers' JS, which supports the theoretical inference that DL can have a positive impact on teachers' satisfaction through different dimensions.

Table 5

The Impacts of Distributed Leadership on Job Satisfaction

	Beta	Std. Error	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.45	0.312	4.652	0.000
Consistent leadership team	0.158	0.055	2.87	0.004
Leadership support	0.264	0.055	4.801	0.000
Leadership and supervision	0.232	0.054	4.303	0.000
R Square	0.23			
Adjusted R Square	0.223			
F value	30.894	0.000 ^b		

a. Dependent Variable: JS

b. Predictors: (Constant), Leadership and supervision, Leadership support, Consistent leadership team

The Mediation Role of Work Self-Efficacy

The aforementioned regression analysis findings demonstrate a substantial mediating relationship between school DL and work satisfaction, which teachers' SE mediates. Regression analysis is used in this study to ascertain the mediating role of SE (efficacy) between distributed Leader and teachers' work satisfaction (satis), using the PROCESS software of model 4.

First of all, regarding the regression model of SE, its R-squared value is 0.2120, which indicates that DL can explain the variance of SE of 21.2% ($R^2 = .2120, F(1, 312) = 83.9222, p < .001$), which indicates that DL has a significant



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

positive impact on SE ($b = .6035$). The improvement of leadership support can effectively enhance teachers' sense of SE, which shows that there is a strong positive correlation between leadership behavior and teachers' SE.

Secondly, concerning the regression model of JS, its R-squared value is 0.2901, showing that DL and SE jointly explain the 29.01% variance of teachers' JS ($R^2 = .2901$, $F(2, 311) = 63.5505$, $p < .001$). The direct effect of DL on JS is significant ($B = .4735$, $t = 6.4136$, $p < .001$), which shows that leadership behavior can directly affect teachers' JS. At the same time, the influence of SE on JS is also significant ($B = .2973$, $t = 5.2779$, $p < .001$), which shows that teachers' sense of SE can improve their JS.

According to the analysis of the mediation effect, the indirect effect of DL on JS through SE is 0.1794, and the Bootstrap confidence interval [0.1099, 0.2562] does not contain zero, which further verifies the significance of the mediation effect. This demonstrates that SE does operate as a bridge between work satisfaction and DL. As a result, the study makes the assumption that H2, according to which instructors' SE significantly mediated the link between DL and work satisfaction at China University. This finding demonstrates how schools may foster DL to increase teachers' feelings of SE, which will subsequently increase their work happiness. This shows the critical role that teachers' SE plays in the relationship between their leadership style and work happiness, in addition to providing theoretical support for the practice of DL.

Table 6
The Mediating Effect of Self-Efficacy

Outcome Variable: SE	Coeff	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	1.752	0.300	5.841	0.000	1.162	2.342
DL (X)	0.604	0.066	9.161	0.000	0.474	0.733
R ²	0.212					
F	83.922			0.000		
Outcome Variable: JS	Coeff	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	0.937	0.314	2.979	0.003	0.318	1.555
DL (X)	0.474	0.074	6.414	0.000	0.328	0.619
SE (M)	0.297	0.056	5.278	0.000	0.187	0.408
R ²	0.290					
F	63.55			0.000		
Direct and Indirect Effects	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI		
Direct Effect of X on Y	0.474	0.074	0.328	0.619		
Indirect Effect of X on Y via M	0.179	0.038	0.110	0.256		

- a. Confidence intervals (CI) are reported at the 95% confidence level
- b. Bootstrap samples = 5000.



The Moderation Role of Organization Commitment

The results of regression analysis reveal the influence of DL, OC, and their interaction on the JS of teachers in China University. In the abstract of the model, the regression coefficient r is 0.547, which indicates that the model has moderate predictive power for JS. R-squared is 0.300, which means that DL, OC, and their interaction explain the 30% variation of JS ($R^2 = .300$), which indicates that these variables have certain explanatory power for teachers' JS. In addition, the adjusted R-squared is 0.293, which shows that the model has good robustness in practical application. In ANOVA analysis, $F(3, 310) = 44.196$, $p < .001$, which indicates that the whole regression model is significant, which means that DL, OC, and their interactions have a significant predictive effect on teachers' JS.

The interaction term (organization commitment * DL), per the regression coefficient, significantly improves teachers' work satisfaction ($B = .137$, $p = .012$). This demonstrates how OC and DL may work together to somewhat increase teachers' job happiness. Consequently, it may be concluded that H3, which holds that teachers' OC moderates the relationship between DL and work satisfaction, is supported. That being said, there is no statistically significant relationship between DL and work satisfaction ($B = -.130$, $p = .626$). This indicates that although DL alone has little effect on teachers' work satisfaction, it may have a major positive impact when combined with OC. Furthermore, there is no significant direct influence of OC ($B = -.344$, $p = .168$).

Thus, the study's regression analysis findings support the H3 hypothesis by demonstrating that the relationship between DL and OC significantly regulates teachers' work satisfaction. Teachers' JS can be effectively increased by the mediation effect between DL and OC, even though neither strategy alone has a significant direct effect on it.

Table 7
The Moderation Test of Organization Commitment

	Beta	Std. Error	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.681	1.17	3.146	0.002
organization commitment *DL	0.137	0.054	2.531	0.012
commitment	-0.344	0.249	-1.383	0.168
DL	-0.13	0.266	-0.488	0.626
F value	44.196			.000 ^b
R Square	0.3			
Adjusted R Square	0.293			

a. Dependent Variable: JS

b. Predictors: (Constant), DL, commitment, organization commitment *DL

DISCUSSION

The hypotheses and data analysis results of this study are consistent with the theoretical framework discussed in the literature review in many aspects, but there are also some inconsistencies. This phenomenon suggests that there may be other potential factors that have not been fully explored when we study the complex relationship among DL, teachers' SE, OC, and JS.

First, data analysis supports the hypothesis H1, which states that DL may greatly increase instructors' work satisfaction at China University. Regression analysis findings show that there is a substantial positive link between teachers' work satisfaction and all aspects of DL, including consistent leadership teams, leadership assistance, and leadership supervision. This result is in line with Lyle et al. (2023)'s research finding, which indicates that DL can increase teachers' JS by enhancing their sense of participation and autonomy, and Cullen's (2021) theory, which suggests that DL can improve team members' sense of responsibility and autonomy. Moreover, researchers mentioned (Bellibas et al., 2021; Youngs, 2020) that DL is a necessary feature for this process; they also observed



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

that work satisfaction of the teachers is positively related to their professional commitment and their instruction quality. This study contributes to the growing evidence of how DL, as a collaborative, decentralized leadership model, can increase teachers' JS. As a consequence, the findings support the idea that DL improves teachers' work satisfaction.

However, the dimensions of DL have different influences on JS. For example, leadership support ($B = .264, p < .001$) has the strongest significance in the regression model, while consistent leadership team ($B = .158, p < .01$) and leadership supervision ($B = .232, p < .001$) also show higher significance. This shows that teachers pay more attention to the leadership support in their work, especially when they face challenges, and the leadership support can significantly improve their JS. This finding is consistent with the view put forward by Woods et al. (2004), that is, when teachers feel the trust and support from leaders, their career development and JS will be improved.

The H2 hypothesis that teachers' SE plays an intermediary role between DL and JS has also been verified. The regression analysis of SE shows that DL further improves JS by enhancing teachers' SE. This is consistent with Bandura's (1997) theory of SE. Teachers' sense of SE not only affects their teaching performance, but also directly affects their JS. This finding also supports the research results of Goddard et al. (2000), that is, DL can enhance teachers' SE by giving them more autonomy and decision-making power, thus improving JS.

However, although data support the H2 hypothesis, the influence of SE as an intermediary is relatively weak. According to the analysis of the intermediary effect, the effect of DL indirectly affecting JS through SE is 0.1794, which is significant but limited. This may be related to the working environment and cultural background of China University. In China's higher education system, teachers' SE may be influenced by more external environment, such as administrative requirements and social expectations, which restricts the influence of DL on SE to a certain extent. In addition, due to cultural differences, teachers in China may not be accustomed to actively participating in leadership affairs, or their autonomy is limited in practical work (Tian & Risku, 2019).

In the H3 hypothesis, that is, teachers' OC plays a moderating role between DL and JS, and the results of regression analysis also support this hypothesis. The interaction between DL and OC significantly affects JS ($B = .137, p = .012$), which shows that the positive influence of DL on JS is more significant when teachers' OC level is higher. This is consistent with Meyer and Allen's (1991) OC theory, which shows that teachers' sense of commitment to the organization can enhance the effectiveness of DL. However, the direct effects of OC and DL on JS are not significant, especially in the absence of interactive effects (DL, $B = -.130, p = .626$; OC, $B = -.344, p = .168$). This shows that although the interaction between OC and DL can significantly improve JS, their direct impact on JS alone is relatively limited. This may be because teachers are more willing to cooperate with the distributed management model of leaders under the condition of high OC, thus improving JS. In the case of low commitment, teachers are indifferent to the positive role of DL (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

Theoretically, this research confirms how critical OC and SE are in this connection, further extending the application of DL theory in the Chinese higher education environment. From a practical standpoint, school administrators should focus on raising the OC and SE of teachers. They should also use DL to improve teachers' work happiness and professional success. To get a deeper understanding of the DL effect and its impact in various settings, future studies might investigate the moderating function that cultural background, educational system, and other aspects play.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this research is to investigate how DL affects China University instructors' work happiness, with a focus on the mediating and moderating roles that SE and OC play in this connection. The study posits that DL has the potential to enhance teachers' JS considerably. Regression analysis and PROCESS mediation effect analysis are used in this study to confirm the impact of several DL dimensions (consistent leadership team, leadership support, and



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

leadership supervision) on teachers' JS. Valid questionnaires from 314 teachers at China University were collected for this purpose. According to the findings, DL may raise teachers' OC and SE, which would increase their work happiness greatly. This discovery provides theoretical support for the application of DL in higher education in China and verifies the important role of SE and OC in this process.

This study has important theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, by integrating social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) and the work demand-resource model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), the study deconstructs DL into three dimensions: team consistency, support, and supervision, and verifies its independent influence mechanism, which makes up for the deficiency of traditional research that regards DL as a single construct. At the same time, testing the moderating effect of OC in the context of universities in China can reveal the boundary between cultural values (such as collectivism) and leadership effectiveness, and expand the cross-cultural applicability of DL theory. This study systematically verified the unique role of three dimensions of DL (consistent leadership team, leadership support, and leadership supervision) on JS in the university environment of China for the first time, which filled the gap in the detailed analysis of DL dimensions in the existing research. Secondly, by verifying the role of self-efficacy (SE) as an intermediary variable and organizational commitment (OC) as a moderator variable, this study reveals how DL can improve teachers' satisfaction through psychological and organizational mechanisms, which provides a new theoretical perspective for China's higher education leadership practice. In addition, despite the lack of comparison with Western leadership theories, this study highlights the applicability of DL in non-Western cultures by combining the cultural background of China's collectivism, laying a foundation for future cross-cultural leadership research (Chen et al., 2021). These findings provide innovative empirical support for optimizing school governance structure and improving teachers' professional happiness.

Practically, the results provide specific paths for university administrators to optimize their leadership model: by building a leadership team with coordinated goals, improving the resource support system, and implementing developmental supervision strategies, teachers' JS can be systematically improved, thus improving teaching quality and scientific research innovation. In addition, this study found that the mediating effect of SE suggests the need to strengthen teachers' professional training, while the moderating effect of OC highlights the necessity of building institutional trust, providing empirical evidence for the education department to formulate teacher incentive policies.

However, the research also has some limitations. Firstly, the study adopted the convenience sampling method, and the representativeness of the samples may be limited, which cannot fully reflect the situation of all Chinese university teachers. In this study, multi-source data and strict scale verification (such as KMO value of 0.882 and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.79-0.97) are used to effectively deal with the common method deviation and ensure the data reliability. However, the adoption of a convenient sampling method limits the representativeness of the sample, which may not fully reflect the overall situation of teachers in China University, thus affecting the external validity of the research (Tian & Risku, 2019). Therefore, this study suggests that random sampling or a wider sample should be adopted in the future to enhance the universality of the results and calls for further discussion on external validity to deepen the understanding of the influence of distributed leadership in the context of higher education in China. To improve the external validity of the research results, random sampling or more representative samples can be considered in future research. Secondly, this study is only conducted under the background of higher education in China, and the cultural background may have an impact on the research results. The influence of DL in other cultural backgrounds or educational systems may be different. Future research can make cross-cultural comparisons in different countries or educational systems to further verify the universality and applicability of DL.

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