

# Measurement Model of Spiritual Leadership Competencies for Educational Middle Leaders in Malaysia

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## **Abstract**

In an effort to provide the best supportive leadership group for educational institutions in Malaysia, middle leaders need to be empowered with various knowledge and skills. Middle leaders are the link between top management and a group of educators and also the support

staff. Therefore, middle leaders need to have various competencies to balance their functions as leaders and followers at the same time. However, this middle leader's position is like a sandwich, causing them to be stuck meeting the needs of the top leaders and the group they lead. This study aims to test the validity of the measurement model for the construct of spiritual competencies among mid-matriculation college leaders. A questionnaire instrument containing constructs and nine items of spiritual competencies was presented to a total of 162 middle leaders. The findings of this study show that the measurement model tested is fit with the data in the field. The RMSEA = 0.07, CFI = 0.988, TLI = 0.983, and ChiSq/df = 1.896. In addition, the values of convergent validity (AVE = 0.743) and composite reliability (CR = 0.953) also exceeded the minimum value required in structural equation modeling (SEM). This study also presents a new construct by taking important items in the context of competencies involving middle leaders that are appropriate to the context of educational leadership in Malaysia as an expansion to the existing competencies model.

**Keywords:** Model, Spiritual Leadership, Educational Middle.

### **Introduction**

The fourth agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030 emphasizes the imperative of achieving quality education worldwide. UNESCO (2018) asserts that to realize this goal, more courageous efforts are needed in the field of education. In line with this, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MoE) has implemented various policy changes to ensure the realization of the goal of attaining quality education. Confronting the future of education requires a paradigm shift and leadership transformation in alignment with the objectives of quality education. Current policy changes inevitably demand a shift in commitment and accountability in educational management operations (Jones et al., 2015). The excellence of educational institutions can be actualized through the excellence of leaders (Ding et al., 2019; Beram et al., 2022), who are required to guide educators towards actions that align with current educational policies. This situation necessitates educational leadership that is knowledgeable, skilled, and highly competent to yield positive outcomes (Beram et al, 2023; Reselena & Mohd Izham, 2015; Grootenboer, 2018). Educational leadership required is not solely dependent on the capabilities of the organization's top leadership (Gurr, 2018; Beram et al., 2021). Educational leadership must take into account the entirety of leaders within the organizational structure, including mid-level leaders (Harllinger & Wang, 2015; Harris et al., 2018).

The fifth component of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 explicitly indicates the Ministry of Education's (MoE) commitment to ensuring high-quality leadership at both the primary and support levels to drive the performance of schools and educational institutions (KPM, 2018). To achieve this objective, the MoE has endeavored to prepare exemplary leaders by providing the Malaysian School Principal Competency Standards (SKKSM) as guidance for school principals (KPM, 2006). This standard is further reinforced by the Compass Model (KPM, 2010), the recent Compass Model 2.0, and the National Professional Qualification Courses for Educational Leaders (NPQEL) (Beram et al., 2023). However, SKKSM, Compass, and NPQEL predominantly focus on the leadership of principals and headmasters, neglecting the broader spectrum of leadership within educational institutions, such as in matriculation colleges and Teacher Education Institutes. Therefore, a specific competency model for mid-level leaders should be developed (Roselena & Mohd Izham, 2015) to address the needs of mid-level leaders, particularly in matriculation colleges.

Mid-level leaders are required to carry out management tasks and simultaneously engage in teaching and learning (TnL) responsibilities, distinguishing them from their colleagues without managerial duties (De Nobile, 2019; Harris et al., 2018; Gurr, 2018). Frequently raised is the issue of their position resembling a 'sandwich'; they must execute directives from top management while maintaining positive relationships with colleagues (Belasen & Belasen, 2016; Irvine & Brundrett, 2017; Lipscombe et al., 2023; Tay et al., 2019; Wei, 2018). Moreover, educational mid-level leaders contend with complex roles and tasks, facing heightened pressure within the organization (Fabio et al., 2023). This circumstance necessitates mid-level leaders who are resilient and capable of balancing directives from superiors while maintaining relationships with subordinates.

A study conducted by Lipscombe et al. (2023), utilizing the Scopus and ERIC databases, identified only 35 articles published on mid-level leaders from 14 different countries. This underscores the limitations in research involving mid-level leaders. In the context of mid-level leaders in post-secondary educational institutions in Malaysia, a study involving 473 mid-level leaders across 27 institutions found that 68.9% of Department Heads exhibited high potential, 30.67% were at a moderate level, and 0.5% demonstrated low potential (KPM, 2018). It is evident that there is still a 31% competency gap among the analyzed mid-level leaders. This underscores the need to develop a specific competency standard for mid-level leaders. Furthermore, management in educational institutions differs from the situation in schools; therefore, these organizations need to establish a competency model that aligns with their job clusters (Beram et al., 2023; Kragt & Day, 2020; Roselena & Mohd Izham, 2015).

This study was conducted with the aim of validating the measurement model of the dimensions of spiritual leadership competence among mid-level leaders in matriculation colleges under the auspices of the Ministry of Education (KPM). The dimensions of spiritual leadership competence constitute one of the constructs in the developed competency model for mid-level leaders. In line with this, the study seeks to address the question of whether there is congruence between the measurement model of the spiritual leadership competence construct and the field data. The study employs Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to answer this research question. It involves mid-level leaders from matriculation colleges across Malaysia, selected randomly. Therefore, the findings of the study do not represent mid-level leaders from other KPM educational institutions or the school system.

### **Literature Review**

This study is guided by the Self Leadership Theory (Manz, 1986), the Job Competency Model (Boyatzis, 1982), the Competency Iceberg Model (Spencer & Spencer, 1993), and the Management Competency Model (Slocum, Jackson & Hellrigel, 2008). All elements from one theory and three competency models, totaling 79 items, were re-mapped and organized into the study's constructs. Extensive literature review was conducted to obtain a comprehensive understanding of spiritual leadership competencies. The Self Leadership Theory by Manz (1986) focuses on the individual's ability to lead oneself, emphasizing personal responsibility and self-direction. Boyatzis's (1982) Job Competency Model highlights the importance of competencies in job performance, considering a range of skills, knowledge, and abilities. The Competency Iceberg Model by Spencer and Spencer (1993) underscores the visible and hidden aspects of competencies, with explicit and tacit dimensions. Lastly, the Management

Competency Model (Slocum, Jackson & Hellrigel, 2008) provides a framework for managerial competencies, emphasizing leadership skills within organizational contexts. Combining these perspectives, a total of 79 items were derived and organized into the constructs of the study. The comprehensive literature review was instrumental in gaining insights into the spiritual leadership competencies discussed in various sources.

#### *Competency*

McClelland (1973), Boyatzis (1982), Spencer and Spencer (1993), Mc Lagan (1986), Dubois and Rothwell (2000), and Slocum et al. (2008) are among the key scholars referenced in competency studies. Various definitions of competency have been presented by scholars from the 19th to the 21st century. The examination of the competency concept is often associated with a set of behaviors involving knowledge, skills, attitudes, and intentions within an individual. Excellent job performance can be achieved by individuals with outstanding levels of competency (Boyatzis, 1982; 2008). In the Malaysian context, competency is defined as the combination of an individual's knowledge, skills, and personal characteristics related to the competence in performing tasks (Saedah & Mohamed Sani, 2012). Individual performance will improve with a set of competencies that align with the profession (Mohd Faiz & Jamal@Nordin, 2016) or career pursued. Meanwhile, the Malaysian Teacher Standards (SGM, 2009) also refers to competency as the professional skills of teachers based on professional values, knowledge and understanding, and teaching and learning skills. Therefore, in the context of educational leadership, the competency aspect also encompasses knowledge, skills, and attitudes relevant to the needs of the teaching and learning environment.

#### *Spiritual Leadership Competency*

Competency in spiritual leadership is commonly defined as values or individual contexts associated with the concepts of spirituality or divinity (Hodge, 2016). This spiritual competency also refers to elements of spirituality and is increasingly accepted among professional groups worldwide (Lu, Woo & Huffman, 2018). Spiritual strength aids leaders in shaping personal character, ultimately leading to the effectiveness of organizational management. Positive values and attitudes can be manifested in leadership when spiritual elements serve as a guiding principle for a leader. Nopriadi (2012) reveals that spiritual competency is powerful, holistic, and involves elements of human sustainability. Moreover, Vasconcelos (2019) states that issues such as corruption, lack of ethics, and excessive individualism have driven the resurgence of spiritual practices in management over the last two decades. Therefore, competency in spiritual leadership can be formulated as commendable values, principles, attitudes, and traits held to balance the needs of self and organization based on the cherished principles of values.

#### *The Elements of Spiritual Leadership Competency*

This study underwent a competency item mapping process using one theory and three existing competency models. However, the mapped items focused on personal competency, organizational leadership, and social skills. Guided by the views of six educational leadership experts interviewed in the needs analysis phase, and subsequently supplemented by the perspectives of 30 educational leadership experts at various levels during the development phase using the Fuzzy Delphi Method, the study identified a total of nine spiritual leadership items commonly practiced in educational leadership in Malaysia. The spiritual leadership competency items validated by leadership experts encompass moral values, trustworthiness,

integrity, humanity, honesty, work as worship, pure values, personality, and transparency. These items were then tested with a group of mid-level leaders in the field.

### Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research approach, involving a sample of 162 mid-level leaders selected randomly from a population of 278 individuals using the Random Sampling QuickCalcs application. Each mid-level leader in matriculation colleges was assigned a number based on their position, and sample selection was based on the selected draw numbers from the QuickCalcs application.

### Validity and Reliability

The research instrument used was a questionnaire set containing the constructs of spiritual leadership competency validated by six field experts and one language expert. Content validity analysis was conducted using the Content Validity Index (CVI) (Lynn, 1986), and the Kappa coefficient index is presented in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1  
*Content Validity Index for Spiritual Competency*

B il	Item	Expert rt 1	Expert rt 2	Expert rt 3	Expert rt 4	Expert rt 5	Expert rt 6	Expert Agreement (A)	I- CVI	Pc	Kappa Coefficient
1	Sp 1	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	1	25	1.00
2	Sp 2	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	1	25	1.00
3	Sp 3	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	1	25	1.00
4	Sp 4	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	1	25	1.00
5	Sp 5	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	1	25	1.00
6	Sp 6	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	1	25	1.00
7	Sp 7	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	1	25	1.00
8	Sp 8	0	1	1	1	1	1	5	0.83	50	0.83
9	Sp 9	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	1	25	1.00

S-CVI/Ave=0.99 (diterima). I-CVI= item content validity index, Pc= Probability of change agreement, S-CVI= Scale content validity index.

Table 1 shows that all items of the spiritual leadership competency construct are accepted with an S-CVI value of 0.99. Only one item, Sp8, obtained an I-CVI of 0.83, while the remaining eight items received an I-CVI of 1.00. These findings clearly indicate that expert consensus was achieved, and all proposed items of the spiritual leadership competency construct were

accepted. Kappa coefficient values ranging from 0.83 to 1.00 indicate that all items referred to the experts were unanimously considered highly suitable for use (Lynn, 1986).

Furthermore, the developed instrument was administered to 105 respondents with similar characteristics to test reliability. The obtained Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis yielded a value of 0.95 for the 9 tested items. A Cronbach's Alpha value exceeding 0.7 is considered good, and if it exceeds 0.9, it is considered excellent (Sakaran & Bougie, 2016). Based on Table 2, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test value of 0.935 indicates that the sample is adequate with a value exceeding 0.5, and the Bartlett's sphericity test value of Chi-square = 1486.522 at the degree of freedom = 36 is significant at the 0.00 level (Norzalina et al., 2022).

Table 2

## KMO dan Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.935
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1486.522
	df	36
	Sig.	.000

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted using the varimax orthogonal rotation method at an Eigenvalue=1 to confirm that all items are in the same construct (Norzalina et al., 2021). Items with loading values less than 0.5 were eliminated. The EFA results indicate that all items are within the same construct, and the total extracted variance explained by the tested construct is 77.53%, surpassing the minimum threshold of 60% (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 3

## Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% Variance	% of Cumulative	Total	% Variance	% of Cumulative
1	6.978	77.530	77.530	6.978	77.530	77.530
2.....	0.526	5.850	83.380			
9	0.107	1.188	100.000			

*Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.*

After passing all validity and reliability tests, as well as undergoing Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), the research instrument has been finalized. The researcher obtained approval from the Ministry of Education (KPM) and the Matriculation Division beforehand. Subsequently, the instrument was distributed to the respondents, who are mid-level leaders in matriculation colleges.

## Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To enable accurate testing of the measurement model, the obtained data must follow a normal distribution. The data in this study falls within the range of  $\pm 1.96$  and meets the prerequisites for a normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidel, 2013) for the next steps. The confirmatory factor analysis is conducted using IBM-SPSS-AMOS to measure all the covariances of the tested items. This study employs fitness indices, namely absolute fit indices using the root mean square of approximation (RMSEA) <0.08. Additionally, incremental fit indices are utilized, including the comparative fit index (CFI) >0.90 and the Tucker-Lewis Index

(TLI) > 0.90. Finally, the model is assessed using the parsimonious fit index with  $\text{ChiSq}/\text{df} < 0.5$  (Hair et al., 2010; Zainudin et al., 2018).

### Research Findings

The tested construct of spiritual leadership competency for mid-level leaders involved 162 respondents and comprised 9 items. The study data were analyzed using IBM-SPSS-AMOS ver.24. The findings for the measurement model of the spiritual leadership competency construct are illustrated in Figure 1.

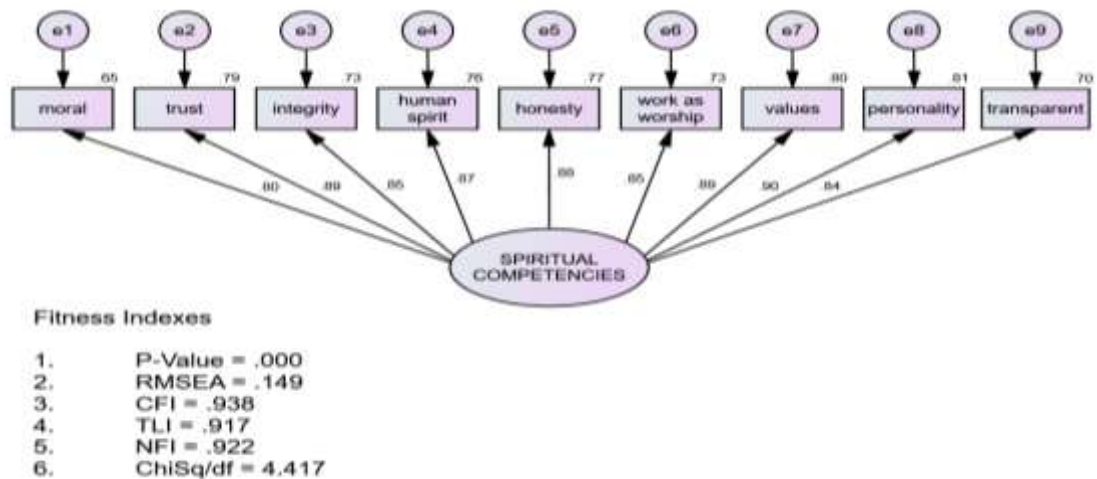


Figure 1: Spiritual Leadership Competency Construct before Modification

Figure 1 depicts the results of the measurement model before modification. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) revealed that the developed measurement model did not fit well with the absolute fit values, as indicated by  $\text{RMSEA}=0.149$ , which is  $\geq 0.08$ . Additionally, the values of  $\text{CFI}=0.928$ ,  $\text{TLI}=0.917$  ( $\geq 0.9$ ), and  $\text{ChiSq}/\text{df}=4.417$ , which is  $> 5.0$ , exceed the recommended fit indices. Since the factor loading values exceeded 0.6 for all elements, modification indices were employed.

AMOS output was referenced to eliminate items with the highest redundant values, and subsequently, the confirmatory factor analysis was re-conducted. After dropping two elements, namely e1 and e3, the tested measurement model was found to meet the fit indices, as illustrated in Figure 2.

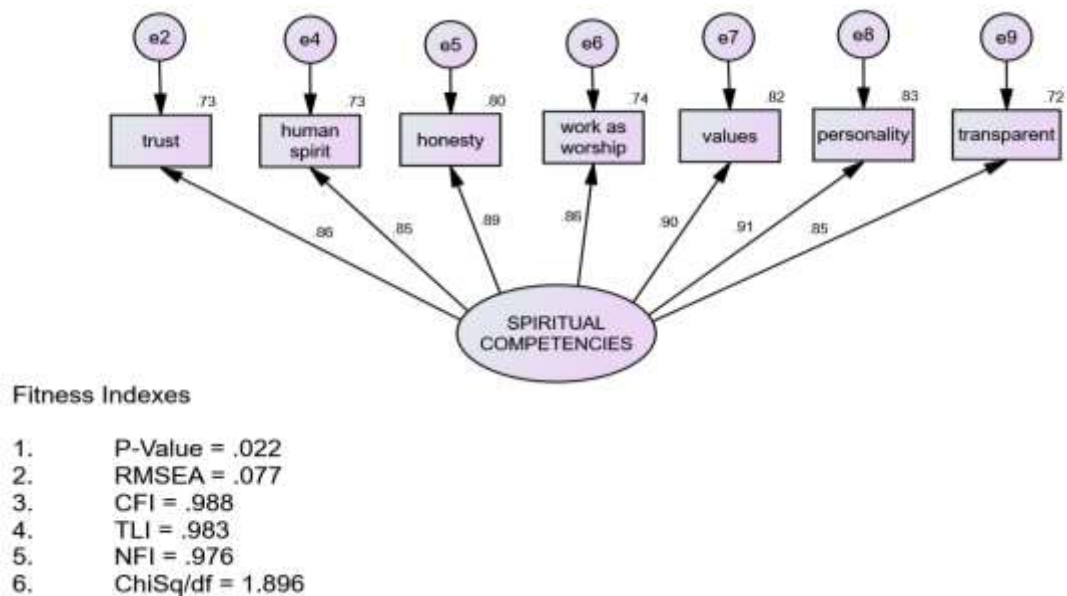


Figure 2: Measurement Model of Spiritual Leadership Competency Construct after Modification

After modification, the absolute fit value, RMSEA=0.077 ( $\leq 0.08$ ), and the incremental fit indices, CFI=0.988 and TLI=0.983 ( $\geq 0.9$ ), along with the parsimonious fit index ChiSq/df=1.896, indicate excellent fit indices with values  $\leq 3.0$ . The measurement model that has achieved these fit indices is further analyzed using convergent validity, where the average extracted variance (AVE) must exceed 0.5, and the composite reliability (CR) must exceed 0.6 (Hair et al, 2017), as shown in Table 4.

Table 4  
*Convergent Validity and Composite Reliability*

Construct	Items	Factor Loading	AVE	CR
Spiritual Leadership Competencies	Trust	0.80	<b>0.743</b>	<b>0.953</b>
	Human Spirit	0.87		
	Honesty	0.88		
	Work as worship	0.85		
	Values	0.89		
	Personality	0.90		
	Transparent	0.84		

Table 4 shows that the convergent validity analysis has been achieved with the AVE value of 0.743, exceeding the threshold of 0.5. Additionally, the composite reliability (CR) requirement is also fulfilled with a CR value of 0.953, surpassing the minimum of 0.6. Therefore, it can be concluded that the measurement model for the dimension of spiritual leadership competency for mid-level leaders is congruent with the data in the field.

**Discussion and Recommendations**

Results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the measurement model of the spiritual leadership competency construct in the field indicate that all nine tested elements meet the



specified fit indices. Additionally, the model satisfies convergent validity and composite reliability. Therefore, the measurement model confirms that the spiritual leadership competency construct for mid-level leaders comprises seven essential elements: trustworthiness, humanity, honesty, work as worship, moral values, personality, and transparency. The model further achieves AVE=0.743 and CR=0.953.

The findings of this study directly confirm the significance of the spiritual leadership competency construct in the context of educational leadership practices in Malaysia, specifically within matriculation colleges. This statement aligns with the view that leaders with spiritual strength, such as having ethical conduct and moral values, are capable of leading more effectively (Fariza & Ahmad Marzuki, 2020; Aswatun et al., 2020). Moreover, in the Western world, emphasis on spirituality in organizational leadership is growing. Vosconcelos (2019), for example, explains that the spiritual elements within individuals are gifts that contribute to the success of organizations and society. The difference lies in the Western perspective, where the spiritual construct is often seen in the context of religious practices (Hodge, 2007; Lu et al., 2018), as opposed to the Eastern societal environment, where the concept of spirituality is embedded in daily life practices, including education (Aswatun et al., 2020).

Leaders who possess mastery in spiritual competency in management practices can influence the implementation of actions and enhance the motivation of the led staff. Spiritual competency helps leaders guide organizations towards more meaningful excellence by considering tasks as a part of worship. Nopriadi (2021) believes that spiritual competency can shape holistic individuals and contribute to creating superior human resources. In the context of leadership, this spiritual aspect can aid leaders in shaping characters in human resource development practices (Widi et al., 2020). Issues faced by mid-level leaders discussed by scholars like Harris et al. (2018), Belasen & Belasen (2016), and Gurr (2018) can be addressed when they possess strong spiritual leadership competency.

In the specific context of competencies, major competency models such as the Iceberg Competency Model (Spencer & Spencer, 1993), Job Competency Model (Boyatzis, 1982), and Management Competency Model (Slocum et al., 2008) do not directly address spiritual competencies. The Iceberg Competency Model lists 20 competency elements, the Job Competency Model involves 19 elements, while the Management Competency Model also lists 19 elements. However, the elements enumerated in these models focus on the best management practices and competency elements without involving spiritual elements. Therefore, spiritual leadership competency contributes to the development of existing competency theories and practices. Simultaneously, this study can also contribute to the expansion of literature related to mid-level leaders for use by scholars in the future.

The elements of the spiritual competency construct tested in this study are universal among the people of Malaysia and do not specifically emphasize religious characteristics. Therefore, these competencies are also aligned with the elements of humane skills required by mid-level leaders. It is suggested that the construct of spiritual leadership competencies be highlighted as one of the unique aspects in the leadership of mid-level leaders in educational institutions in Malaysia. Researchers in educational leadership are also encouraged to test this spiritual leadership construct in other educational institutions, including schools, which may yield different findings, further enriching the discovery of spiritual elements in mid-level leadership within the education system in Malaysia.

## Conclusion

This study has validated the measurement model of the construct of spiritual leadership competence among mid-level leaders in matriculation colleges. The construct, approved by experts and subsequently deemed fit with the field data, can be extrapolated to all levels of mid-level leadership, including in schools, and tested for its suitability. Different respondents may yield different findings. Further research with the addition of new items can enrich the construct of spiritual leadership competence in the future. This aligns with the Ministry of Education's aspiration to provide the best support leaders who contribute to the future of education and thereby empower an excellent educator workforce. Kajian ini membuktikan bahawa konstruk dan elemen kompetensi spiritual boleh diuji secara empirikal di dalam amalan kepimpinan pendidikan. Oleh itu, kompetensi kepimpinan spiritual boleh dijadikan asas dalam membangunkan model atau teori kepimpinan yang bersesuaian dengan acuan di Malaysia.

Kajian ini turut mengembangkan asas Teori Kepimpinan Diri (Manz, 1986) yang diasimilasikan bersama Model Kompetensi Iceberg (Spencer & Spence, 1993), Model Kompetensi Kerja (Boyatzis, 1982), Model Kompetensi Pengurusan (Slocum, Jackson & Hellriegel, 2008) dan Model Unsur Elemen Dalam Sistem (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Konstruk kompetensi kepimpinan spiritual merupakan suatu dimensi baharu yang merupakan pengembangan kepada teori kepimpinan dan model-model kompetensi sedia ada. Dalam amalan kepimpinan barat, penekanan terhadap aspek spiritual agak terbatas kepada aspek ritual keagamaan, sebaliknya kompetensi kepimpinan spiritual yang dikemukakan dalam kajian ini menjurus kepada amalan seharian dalam kepimpinan di rantau Asia. Elemen-elemen yang diuji dalam kajian ini tidak menjurus kepada dominasi sesuatu agama, sebaliknya merupakan nilai universal rakyat Malaysia. Oleh itu, kajian lanjutan dicadangkan agar penyelidik bidang kepimpinan memperluaskan lagi aspek kepimpinan spiritual ini bagi meningkatkan lagi kualiti kepimpinan pendidikan di Malaysia.

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