

LEADERSHIP STYLE OF MAHATHIR MOHAMAD: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT--National leadership is a key element of the perpetual administration and development of a nation. Mahathir Mohamad is one example of an excellent national leader based on his leadership style. To date, no systematic review has been done on his leadership style. Therefore, this article aims to analyse the existing literature on the leadership style of Mahathir. Using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) Statement, 11 related studies were identified from the Web of Science and Scopus databases as well as through direct handpicking of related sources. Further review of the articles through qualitative analysis ensued in nine core themes on Mahathir's leadership, namely, people-oriented, resourceful, visionary, pragmatic, good communication skills, highly ethical, trustworthy, core value-based, and authentic. Meanwhile, there were a total of 22 sub-themes under these core themes. In general, Mahathir's leadership style is holistic and his elements of leadership that are good and effective can be emulated and practised by individuals and leaders in their daily life. The findings can contribute to and empower the leadership field of study, particularly national leadership and good governance. Several recommendations are emphasised such as to conduct further quantitative or mixed methods studies, to highlight the theoretical or conceptual leadership frameworks employed in studies about Mahathir's leadership, and to underscore the contribution of Mahathir's leadership in the leadership field of study.

Keywords--Mahathir Mohamad; Mahathir's leadership style; leadership style; national leadership; systematic literature review

I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is an essential element in human life. Every matter and stage of human life requires a process of being led and leading due to the need for survival and adaptation to change (Bryson & Crosby, 2005). Similarly, for a state institution, national leadership plays an important role (Breadsworth, 2017). National leadership is the backbone of the administration and development of a country's social, economic, and political aspects (Bulpitt,

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1986), in which the national leader acts as the main actor who leads the people to achieve the country's interests at the national and international levels (Breadsworth, 2017).

According to Harold Geneen (1984, as cited in Krass, 1998, p. 4), leadership is 'to inspire other people to work together [as a team], following the lead, in order to attain a common objective'. In the context of a nation, a leader's ability is proven when he successfully inspires and unites the people to achieve the nation's goal of moving towards a better direction (Burns, 1978). Even though national leaders essentially play a crucial role in the governance and leadership of their country, based on records available thus far, not all national leaders can carry out their duties and mandates as a good leader (Case, 2017). Leaders involved in corruption and abuse of power have faced rejection from their own people (Doucette, 2017; Lee, 2018; Phongpaichit & Baker, 2008). The people are more engaged in such issues, especially in today's unlimited Internet and digital era (Chinnasamy & Manaf, 2018). Vast democratisation of information that is taking place today compared to decades ago have made it easier for people to get information on anything without restrictions including the wrongdoings of state leaders (Chinnasamy & Manaf, 2018; Funston, 2018; Nadzri, 2018). Nonetheless, there are still many leaders around the world who are people-oriented and have strong principles in leading their country's administration (Abdullah, 2019; Mutu, 2019; Ruzgar, 2019).

In the context of Malaysia in particular, the leadership of Mahathir Mohamad as the prime minister is an example of excellent national leadership (Chin, 2018). He made a comeback to the country's political scene as the seventh prime minister on May 10, 2019 after Pakatan Harapan (PH), an opposition coalition he presides, won a majority of seats in the parliament and formed the federal government, defeating the incumbent winner, Barisan Nasional (BN) (Abdullah, 2019; Nazri, 2018). For the first time in the country's political history, the opposition coalition won the general election (Wong & Ooi, 2018).

Mahathir had been the prime minister of Malaysia for 22 years from 1981 to 2003 and was the only prime minister to hold office for more than two decades (Beng, 2006). He is known as the bridge between two generations of United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). Furthermore, during his first tenure as prime minister, he became known as the national architect, community engineer, and father of modernisation of Malaysia for his success in driving the nation's development and modernisation (Mohamad & Ibrahim, 1994; Omar & Pandian, 2006; Rohman & Sabri, 2017; Ukin, Efendi, & Ahmad, 2012). For example, Vision 2020 is one of his master plans to transform Malaysia into a developed nation (Khalid, 2011; Khattab, 2004). It is seen as a long-term visionary goal that enhances people's inspiration (Omar & Pandian, 2006). He is particularly respected by a majority of Malaysians for his service to the nation and its people (Rohman & Sabri, 2017) and also by most third-world countries as he has successfully brought their voices to the international stage (Furuoka, 2007; Vatikiotis, 1992). Meanwhile, at the global level, he is highly regarded by many world leaders for being very vocal, especially on issues related to the war on Muslim countries by the United States and Israel (Akbarzadeh & Connor, 2005; Renwick, 2007).

After retiring from the country's political arena for 15 years, Mahathir has re-emerged as the prime minister through the 14th Malaysian general election (Chin, 2018). Since his return to the administration of the country, he has been awarded various prestigious degrees from many countries and institutions for his outstanding contributions and achievements as a statesman. According to Time Magazine (2019), he has also been hailed as

one of the most influential people in the world in 2019 with other world leaders. Hence, specific elements of Mahathir's leadership are important to be reviewed.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A systematic review is an examination of a specific formulated question that engages systematic and transparent methods to recognise, select, and synthesise the finest available evidence from relevant previous research (Boland, Cherry, & Dickson, 2017). The review results are useful for advancing the research area, providing recommendations, and enlightening future research or practices (Xiao & Watson, 2019).

Even though research on Mahathir's leadership style has been carried out, overall, a systematic review of this study area has not been performed. Hence, this study has taken the step to fill this gap so that Mahathir's leadership style can be more systematically analysed, categorised, and understood. Besides, this study can identify other gaps that exist, if any, in the study of Mahathir's leadership style. Previous studies on Mahathir's leadership have discussed the elements of his leadership from different perspectives (Case, 1991; Cheah, Yusof, & Ahmad, 2017b; Hussain, 1997; Jaes, 2017; Omar & Pandian, 2006; Rohman, 2017; Suhaimy, 2007; Suppiah, Ahmad, & Gunasekaran, 2018), whereas this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of his leadership. This study is important at this time as there is still a lack of research that underscores the broad foundation of Mahathir's leadership style. In addition, this study is worth pursuing because of Mahathir's unique leadership style, especially since he has returned to head the country's administration (Chin, 2018). Therefore, details of Mahathir's leadership style in the existing literature must be identified as it will give an overview of what has been given attention to and what needs attention in future studies.

The main research question of this study is 'what is Mahathir's leadership style?' since the focus of this study is to identify Mahathir's leadership style. His leadership as the prime minister in leading the people and civil servants, as well as managing the national administration and foreign affairs have been given greater emphasis as these matters reflect his leadership style (Cheah et al., 2017b; Hussain, 1997; Jaes, 2017; Omar & Pandian, 2006; Rohman & Sabri, 2017; Suhaimy, 2007; Suppiah et al., 2018).

III. METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the methodology used to retrieve articles related to Mahathir's leadership style. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) Statement approach was employed, wherein the Web of Science and Scopus databases were used to find related articles. Review process steps, which included identification, screening, and eligibility were also carried out followed by data abstraction and analysis.

PRISMA was used because it allows a review to be conducted systematically. It has three advantages, which are: 1) clarifying research questions, which enables systematic research; 2) identifying the inclusion and exclusion criteria; and 3) enabling the examination through large databases of scientific literature in a timely manner (Sierra-Correa & Kintz, 2015). This also meant that PRISMA enabled words related to Mahathir's leadership style and its effectiveness to be rigorously searched. Therefore, this method was used to review Mahathir's leadership style.

3.1 Resources

This review employed the Web of Science and Scopus databases as the source of relevant articles. The Web of Science is a prominent database of over 12,000 journals (Harzing, 2019). It covers research disciplines that include arts and humanities and social sciences. It was built by Clarivate Analytics and contains citation data from the last century. Scopus, on the other hand, is a database developed by Elsevier in 2004. It covers more than 22,000 journals from nearly 11,000 publishers with most of the journals being peer-reviewed in areas such as social sciences, life sciences, health sciences, and physical sciences (Yeung, 2019). In addition, Google Scholar, a web search engine, was used to search and obtain an article related to the objective of this study. All the identified articles were then successfully downloaded through Google Scholar.

3.2 Systematic Review Process

The systematic review process was conducted in April 2019 (Figure 1) and it consisted of four stages. In the first stage, keywords were identified using search strings through the databases (Table 1). Before searching for related keywords in the databases, words which were similar and related to leadership and style were searched based on previous studies and the thesaurus. A total of 103 articles were identified through this process. Additionally, an article related to Mahathir's leadership style from a local university's journal was also included due to its relevance to this study. The handpicking method was used because it allows relevant material to be selected directly. Google Scholar was used to obtain the article.

The second stage was screening. After the relevant articles were identified based on the keywords specified, a total of 31 identical articles from the two different databases, Web of Science and Scopus, were removed. The articles that met the inclusion criteria were included after careful screening (Table 2). Nine out of 73 identified resources were removed, which comprised books, chapters in book, editorial materials, and non-English articles. The third stage was eligibility. At this stage, contents of the articles were assessed. Through careful examination, a total of 53 articles were removed for discussing Mahathir's leadership in general without specific empirical data on his leadership style. Due to a lack of comprehensive empirical articles on Mahathir's leadership style, articles that had a subtopic on his leadership style with empirical data were also included in this review. Finally, the fourth stage was the review of 11 identified articles related to Mahathir's leadership style through qualitative analysis.

Table 1: The search strings used in the systematic review process.

Database	Keywords Used
Web of Science	TS = (("mahathir" OR "mahathir mohamad" OR "dr mahathir" OR "dr mahathir mohamad" OR "dr. mahathir" OR "dr. Mahathir mohamad") AND ("leader*" OR "leadership" OR "administration" OR "premiership" OR "political leadership*"))

Scopus TITLE-ABS-KEY (("mahathir" OR "mahathir mohamad" OR "dr mahathir" OR "dr mahathir mohamad" OR "dr. mahathir" OR "dr. mahathir mohamad") AND ("leader*" OR "leadership" OR "administration" OR "premiership" OR "political leadership*"))

Table 2: The inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Literature type	Articles from indexed journals and papers from indexed conference proceedings (except an article that was included through the handpicking process).	Articles from non-indexed journals, systematic review articles, chapters in book, and books.
Language	English, Bahasa Malaysia	Non-English (except Bahasa Malaysia)
Indexes	Social Science Citation Index, Art and Humanities Citation Index, and Emerging Sources Citation Index.	Science Citation Indexed Expanded

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People	Visionary	Highly Ethical	Core Value-Based
Oriented	TF = Transforming	EF = Effective	PR = Prioritised Religion
DM =	GO = Goal Oriented	DC = Dedicated	PN = Prioritised Nation
Democratic		IT = Integrity	PAV = Practising Asian
TG =	Pragmatic	DP = Discipline	Values
Togetherness	GM = Good Managerial		
	PC = Practical	Trustworthy	Authentic
Resourceful		RS = Responsible	AT = Autocratic
WT = Wise		BV = Believable	SP = Strong Personality
Thinker		RF = Respectful	

SR = Source of Reference

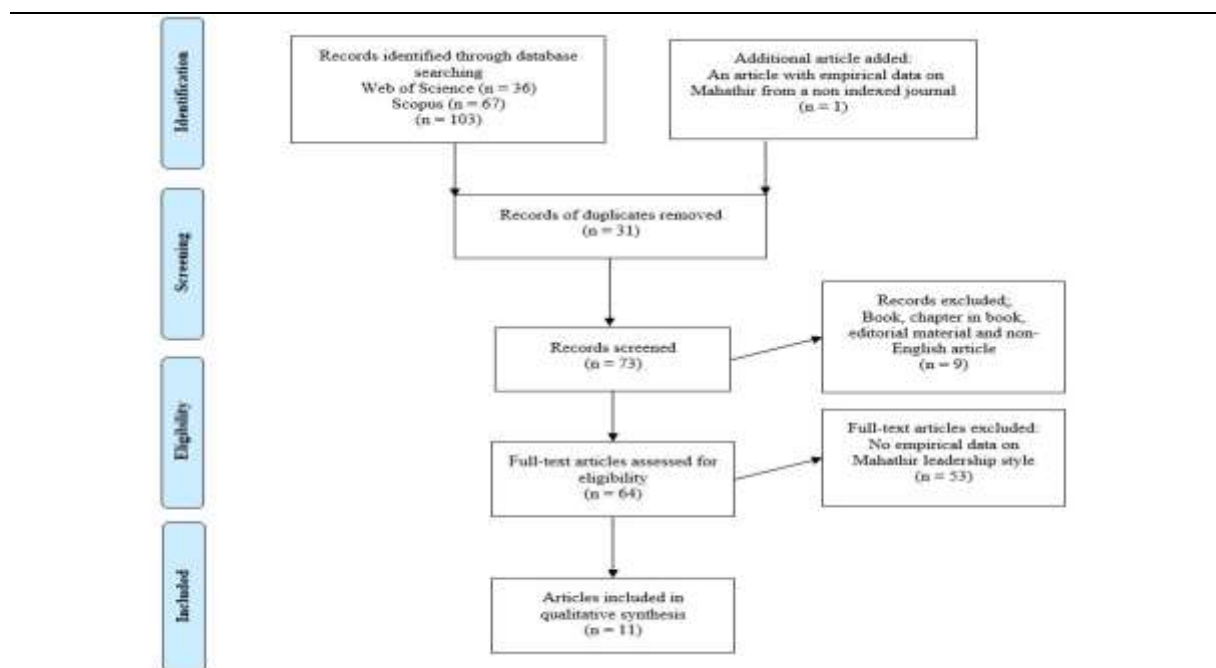


Figure 1: The flow diagram of the systematic review process (adapted from Moher et al., 2009).

3.3 Data Analysis Strategy

A total of 11 articles, which focused on specific studies related to the research questions were assessed and analysed. Qualitative content analysis was performed to identify the themes and sub-themes corresponding to Mahathir's leadership style. The extraction of data from each article was started with first, reading through the abstract and later, in-depth reading of the whole article to recognise fitting themes and sub-themes. Then, the sub-themes were allotted under the themes established by typology.

IV. FINDINGS

The assessment and analysis of the 11 articles resulted in nine main themes and 22 sub-themes pertaining to Mahathir's leadership style. The nine main themes were people-oriented, resourceful, visionary, pragmatic, good communication skills, highly ethical, trustworthy, core value-based, and authentic. This result illustrated a wide-ranging yet inclusive analysis of Mahathir's leadership style. Two of the studies were conducted by international researchers, while two more and the rest of the seven studies were conducted by regional and local researchers, respectively.

Four studies focused on Mahathir's leadership in government administration. Meanwhile, three studies concentrated on Mahathir's leadership in Malaysia's political scene. Next, three more studies focused on

Mahathir's leadership communication and the last one on his foreign relations orientation. All the studies employed qualitative methods varying from archive research, in-depth interview, and visual research that employed content analysis. Regarding the years of publication, one article each was published in 1999, 2002, and 2006. Furthermore, two articles each were published in 2013 and 2017, while one each was published in 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2019.

I = International; R = Regional; L = Local; QL = Qualitative.

4.1 Mahathir's Leadership Style

This section discusses Mahathir's leadership styles that have been identified, namely, people-oriented, resourceful, visionary, pragmatic, good communication skills, highly ethical, trustworthy, core value-based, and authentic.

4.1.1 People-oriented

A total of three out of 11 studies had identified people-oriented as one of Mahathir's leadership styles. Two studies suggested that Mahathir is a leader who practices democracy (Omar & Pandian, 2006; Embong, Hassan, & Ibrahim, 2016). Meanwhile, Sani and Azizuddin (2013) found that Mahathir also practised togetherness in leading Malaysians (Table 3).

Regarding being people-oriented, democracy is one of Mahathir's leadership styles. As a prime minister, Mahathir is a democratic but unique leader in his own way (Omar & Pandian, 2006). This is based on his approach and modification to the practice of democracy during the administration of the country. Mahathir has argued that the democratic approach that Malaysians practice is based on their involvement in the national general election. The uniqueness of Mahathir's democratic practice is closely related to the control of several democratic processes such as freedom of speech, social justice, media freedom, and the rule of law (Omar & Pandian, 2006), in contrast to the western approach to democracy. On the other hand, according to Embong et al. (2016), the democratic angle in Mahathir's leadership is evident in the way he responds to the questions raised by the people. This situation shows that he is a leader who values the people's voice and cares about the problems faced by them. Moreover, he also values the voices of subordinates and civil servants who are the catalysts for government-led machinery.

Apart from that, Mahathir's leadership style that symbolises people-oriented can be seen based on the element of togetherness (Sani & Azizuddin, 2013). Mahathir prefers consensus in decision making. The idea of working together and being consensus-based is essential in creating a harmonious and equitable state for a multiracial country such as Malaysia (Omar & Pandian, 2006). The final decision on matters pertaining to the country and the people will only be made by Mahathir after open discussions with other government leaders (Sani & Azizuddin, 2013). Hence, the elements of democracy and togetherness reinforce Mahathir's people-oriented leadership style.

4.1.2 Resourceful

Three studies have reported resourceful as one of Mahathir's leadership styles. Under this theme, two sub-themes appeared, i.e. wise thinker and source of reference. Wise thinker was mentioned by two studies while another one focused on source of reference (Table 3). According to Ong (2005) and Cheah et al. (2017b), Mahathir

is a wise thinker. His medical training and career as a medical doctor have trained him to be a brilliant thinker (Ong, 2005). He can think and develop a set of actions that are appropriate to a situation. Not only that, he can diagnose things carefully and well. The side of Mahathir as a wise thinker is greatly influenced by his experience in the medical field, which has enabled him to apply that side to other issues. Besides, Cheah et al. (2017b) described Mahathir as a wise thinker because of his reading habit. Mahathir is well known for his love of reading. His extensive reading has made him knowledgeable and highlighted his intelligence through his actions. The knowledge gained has enabled Mahathir to manage the country well and master the intricacies of developing the country so that he can attain great achievements.

Next, source of reference is another element under Mahathir's resourceful leadership style (Embong & Hassan, 2013). An individual will be a source of reference when he or she has expertise in a particular field or wisdom to solve a problem. Mahathir as a leader is an important source of reference because he is well versed in various aspects of the country's administration including economic, political, and social. He has been referred to by many other leaders concerning the administration of the country because of his deep understanding of all matters pertaining to the country. This is evident by his titles such as the national engineer or the national architect.

4.1.3 Visionary

Visionary was mentioned in many studies on Mahathir's leadership style. Three studies have stated that visionary is one of Mahathir's leadership styles in holding the trust as the country's leader. Two sub-themes existed under this theme, which were goal-oriented and transforming. Two studies found that Mahathir was goal-oriented and was practised by him in leading Malaysia. Another study determined that transforming was a leadership approach of Mahathir in driving national modernisation (Table 3). Goals, or particularly ideological goals, refer to a direction to realise the ultimate long-term goal (James & Lahti, 2011). According to Embong et al. (2016) and Cheah and Ahmad (2017a), Mahathir is a goal-oriented leader. For instance, Embong et al. (2016), based on Lat's visual analysis, reported that Mahathir showed his determination to secure Japan's consent to make East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) successful with patience despite him being forced to work beyond his working hours. This example shows that he is a leader who is patient and strong in ensuring that his goals are achieved. He will not budge until the final decision is made.

On the other hand, according to Cheah and Ahmad (2017a), Mahathir's ideological goal-oriented style is reflected in national policies formulated during his tenure of state administration. Those policies were aimed at bringing people together, creating harmony, and achieving success (Cheah & Ahmad, 2017a).

The next characteristic of Mahathir's leadership is transforming (Suppiah et al., 2018). Transforming is closely related to the visionary leadership style. According to Suppiah et al. (2018), Mahathir is a transformational leader as he has successfully increased the motivation of all Malaysians including the minorities like the Indians to work together to achieve a vision that directly transforms Malaysia into a successful industrial nation. Mahathir's accomplishment in moving the country to another level indicates that he has successfully made a social change in Malaysia (Suppiah et al., 2018). In short, elements like goal-oriented and transforming has reinforced Mahathir's visionary leadership.

4.1.4 Pragmatic

Pragmatic is another theme associated with Mahathir's leadership style. Under this theme, one sub-theme appeared, namely good managerial qualities. Two studies, Mauzy and Milne (1983) and Ong (2005), have indicated that he has good managerial qualities as a leader (Table 3). His managerial qualities include attention to information distribution and a sense of urgency (Mauzy & Milne, 1983). For example, Mahathir was directly involved, on a daily basis, in administrative affairs whereby civil servants were supervised, monitored, and encouraged by him to work hard (Mauzy & Milne, 1983). Apart from that, he also practised a culture in which each minister had to explain the latest actions that each specific and related civil servant should take immediately after his cabinet meeting was completed (Mauzy & Milne, 1983). Meanwhile, according to Ong (2005), Mahathir's good managerial qualities are based on his ability to manage his true career as a medical practitioner and his side career as a politician when he was appointed as the head of UMNO's Kedah state branch.

4.1.5 Good Communication Skills

Several studies have described good communication skills as a leadership style that Mahathir has. There were three sub-themes related to this theme, which were excellent spokesman, clarity, and inspiring. One study stated that Mahathir is an excellent spokesman, another identified clarity, while one more mentioned inspiring (Table 3). Good communication skills have made Mahathir an excellent speaker, as reported by Suppiah et al. (2018). Good body language, spontaneous speech delivery, factual content, and powerful messages are his communication skills, which have led him to be an excellent spokesman (Suppiah et al., 2018).

According to Cheah and Ahmad (2017a), clarity is also one of the good communication skills that Mahathir possesses as a leader. His ability to deliver a clear and concise speech enables all segments of society to easily comprehend his message (Cheah & Ahmad, 2017a). Padlock (2008) has opined that leaders who use clear language in communication can provide a distinct understanding to their people. In addition, inspiring is another important element under good communication skills that should be owned by a leader. Mahathir can communicate perfectly because he can create an inspirational imagery of himself to the audience, whether to the people or others (Cheah & Ahmad, 2017a). The inspirational imagery of a leader is connected to the elements of loyalty, confidence, and dignity (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

4.1.6 Highly Ethical

The next style of leadership is highly ethical, which has been widely reported by studies on Mahathir's leadership style. A total of four out of 11 studies have described highly ethical as his leadership style. Besides, four sub-themes were identified in relation to this theme, namely efficient, dedicated, integrity, and discipline. One study described efficient as his leadership style, whereas another one stated that Mahathir is a dedicated person. Other than that, one study stated integrity, while one more reported discipline as his leadership style (Table 3). High ethics among workers are an asset to any institution including government institutions. It will help facilitate the administration of the country.

The first sub-theme, efficient, refers to performing an assigned task efficiently and reflects the ethical values held by an individual. In carrying out his duties as a prime minister, efficiency is one of Mahathir's leadership styles (Mauzy & Milne, 1983). Furthermore, Mauzy and Milne (1983) stated that Mahathir repeatedly emphasised

the importance of efficiency to civil servants in the administration of state affairs while highlighting the importance of hard work, discipline, productivity, motivation, values, and cultures.

On the other hand, dedication concerns the commitment or dedication in holding and carrying out responsibilities, which demonstrates an individual's ethics. As the head of the state, Mahathir has displayed his dedication in carrying out his duties (Embong & Hassan, 2013), as clearly reflected in situations in which he will continue to work until his goals are achieved.

Besides dedication, integrity is also an important element of highly ethical. An individual's integrity can be seen in their honesty in carrying out their assigned duties and responsibilities. According to Ong (2005), Mahathir is a leader with integrity. This quality can be measured based on the situation in which Mahathir admits that he has failed to fulfil his role as a prime minister, particularly in developing the Malays (Ong, 2005). He did not hide his failure but made it public before his retirement. This shows his integrity.

Next, discipline is undoubtedly reflected in Mahathir's leadership style (Omar & Pandian, 2006; Embong et al., 2016). He is disciplined while serving as the prime minister and wants civil servants and Malaysians to be disciplined in work or in their daily life. Moreover, the modernisation of Malaysia is the result of Mahathir's discipline to govern the country according to its own mould (Omar & Pandian, 2006). This proves Mahathir's leadership style as a highly-ethical leader. He has practised efficiency, dedication, integrity, and discipline in carrying out his duties as the head of state.

4.1.7 Trustworthy

A total of three studies identified Mahathir as a trustworthy leader in leading the country. Under this theme, there were three sub-themes, i.e. responsible, believable, and respectful. Two studies have reported that Mahathir's leadership style is responsible. Meanwhile, one more revealed that Mahathir is a believable person, while another indicated that he is a respectful person (Table 3).

Trustworthy is an important attribute for someone who is called a leader. A responsible leader is a trusted leader and responsible is one of Mahathir's leadership styles (Ong, 2005; Embong & Hassan, 2013). According to Ong (2005), Mahathir's sense of responsibility is rooted in his experience as a medical practitioner. He understands the illness or hardship faced by his patients or people and feels responsible for treating or resolving it (Ong, 2005). On the other hand, Embong and Hassan (2013) stated that Mahathir is a responsible leader because he will know everything that happens in the country even when he is not in the country. The country's matters are always at his heart. Furthermore, he will also be consulted by ministers on various matters even when he is abroad (Embong & Hassan, 2013).

Next, the believable element in Mahathir's leadership has to do with the people's confidence in his ability to govern the country (Cheah et al., 2017b). All races in Malaysia, including the Chinese and Indians, are convinced of Mahathir's ability to make social changes (Cheah et al., 2017b; Suppiah et al., 2018). Cheah et al. (2017b) have opined that the Chinese community believed in Mahathir's leadership as he has successfully transformed Malaysia into a modern country from an agricultural-based nation while allowing the Chinese community to share its wealth and power with the majority race of Malaysia, the Malays.

The next element of his trustworthy leadership style is respectful. Mahathir is a respectful person because he respects the culture, customs, and traditions of others (Embong & Hassan, 2013). He has also done so to strengthen the good relations with those he deals with, including bilateral relations between Malaysia and other countries.

4.1.8 Core Value-Based

Core value-based is among Mahathir's leadership styles. The three sub-themes under this theme were prioritising religion, prioritising nation, and practising Asian values. Overall, two studies indicated prioritising religion, while another two mentioned prioritising nation and one listed practising Asian values as Mahathir's leadership style (Table 3). According to Mauzy and Milne (1983) and Abdullah (2019), the element of prioritising religion is part of Mahathir's leadership style. He emphasised the importance of Islam throughout his administration of Malaysia without discriminating against other religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity from being practised by their followers.

Mahathir has upheld Islam, the official religion of Malaysia, as can be seen from the progressive process of Islamisation when he held the administration of the country. The process started with the launch of three major projects, namely, the establishment of the International Islamic University, the Islamic Bank, and the inclusion of Islamic civilisation subjects in tertiary education institutions in his second year as the prime minister (Mauzy & Milne, 1983). Although it has been said that this was due to the UMNO led by Mahathir in the 1990s was being threatened by the wave of Islam brought by *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* or Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) and *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* or the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM), Mahathir has constantly repeated his stance on fighting for Islam, the nation, and the race through UMNO (Mauzy & Milne, 1983).

According to Abdullah (2019), Mahathir's emphasis on the importance of Islam in his leadership was seen when he openly voiced opposition on international platforms to western countries' discrimination against Islamic countries. For example, he stated his stand against the violence and opposition to the 'War on Terror' mission launched by the United States. Most Muslim countries claim that Mahathir is a spokesman for Islamic countries because of his courage to speak out publicly when most other Muslim countries do not take the initiative.

In addition to prioritising religion while leading Malaysia, as the leader of a multiracial nation, Mahathir also acted fairly by emphasising the rights of the Malays as bumiputra while also upholding the rights of the Chinese and Indians (Omar & Pandian, 2006; Abdullah, 2019). He did not ignore the social, economic, and political rights of the Chinese and Indians as minorities. His approach was to ensure the harmony and well-being of all Malaysians and to reflect his side as a Malaysian nationalist.

Omar and Pandian (2006) have stated that Mahathir is a leader with a high spirit of nationalism. This spirit made him believe in governing Malaysia without being influenced by other countries. He has repeatedly reminded Malaysians to unite regardless of race to fight against any external elements that may divide the people. The importance of history has always been reminded by Mahathir to all Malaysians as a guide to keep the country in harmony. Moreover, based on Abdullah (2019), Mahathir is fortunate to have been appointed as a people and national fighter by not only the Malays but also all Malaysians. Mahathir is believed by the Malays because he has never neglected the Malays' rights as the bumiputra. Meanwhile, the Chinese and Indians trust him due to his reputation as a statesman who has brought success and prosperity to the nation and people (Abdullah, 2019). Apart from that, in the context of leadership style based on core values, according to Sani and Azizuddin (2013), Asian

values are undeniably a priority and practised by Mahathir in administering Malaysia. In the Malaysian context, Asian values have several important elements such as challenging western imperialism culture, upholding cultural values, championing the Malay agenda, and defending Islamic values (Sani & Azizuddin, 2013). Mahathir is said to be a leader who prioritises Asian values because he upholds the local cultural values that are held in common among Malaysians.

4.1.9 Authentic

Several studies have described authenticity as Mahathir's leadership style. Under authenticity, there were two sub-themes, which were autocratic and strong personality. The autocratic leadership style was reported in one study. Meanwhile, two other studies reported strong personality as Mahathir's leadership style (Table 3). Generally, an administration that practices authoritarianism is governed by a dictatorial or autocratic leader. Mahathir has been called autocratic (Omar & Pandian, 2006). Nonetheless, his autocratic side is not absolute and has been misinterpreted by some parties. As the leader of a democratic country, having been elected by the people to hold the mandate and given the authority to lead the country, Mahathir argues that the delegated authority needs to be respected (Omar & Pandian, 2006). He has only carried out his duties or authority as the prime minister.

Another element of Mahathir's authentic leadership style is his strong personality. As a political figure or as an individual, Mahathir has a strong personality (Suppiah et al., 2018; Abdullah, 2019). According to Suppiah et al. (2018), Mahathir's strong personality is reflected in his bold actions in implementing ideas that are out of the box in his efforts to develop the country. Although viewed as a dictator, the social changes that his ideas brought about have led him to be considered a transformational leader rather than a dictator. This is especially true when he first wanted to take action against mainstream ideas (Suppiah et al., 2018).

Abdullah (2019) further explained that Mahathir is a strong figure. His presence alone has succeeded in imposing the transition of the Malaysian government, which had been controlled by a single party since independence. His strong personality is attributed to his influence and experience as Malaysia's former and the longest prime minister when he was the fourth premier and his contribution to the development of Malaysia.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study has systematically analysed existing literature related to Mahathir's leadership. Based on the rigorous review process conducted, 11 articles that discussed Mahathir's leadership were identified. The results showed that Mahathir's leadership consisted of several leadership styles that included nine core themes and 22 sub-themes. This section will discuss further these findings.

People-oriented is one of Mahathir's leadership styles (Embong, Hassan, & Ibrahim, 2016; Omar & Pandian, 2006; Sani & Azizuddin, 2013). This element indirectly indicates that Mahathir has been a democratic leader throughout his tenure as the prime minister. Furthermore, this has proven that he was elected by the people based on the general election process. The involvement of the people in the affairs of state administration is at the forefront of the democratic practice in Malaysia although the democratic approach taken by Mahathir is quite different from the original approach to democracy (Means, 1976). Mahathir's democracy style, which some have perceived as autocratic, is unique due to the restrictions placed by him in administering Malaysia. Matters such as

freedom of speech, social justice, media freedom, and the rule of law that Mahathir governed during the administration of Malaysia were solely to preserve the stability of a relatively new country that achieved independence (Mauzy, 1996; Milne & Mauzy, 1999). Moreover, this approach was also taken to maintain the smooth administration of the country, political stability, and prosperity.

Listening to the voice of the people led is also crucial for a leader to provide the necessary solutions or needs required to address the problems faced by them (Coetzer, Bussin, & Geldenhuys, 2017; Gabriel, 2015). This is also the approach taken by Mahathir throughout the administration of Malaysia, which shows his people-oriented side in governing the country. He strives to communicate and connect with people of all ages to obtain direct feedback, for instance, he is in contact with the people using latest facilities such as the Internet (Embong et al., 2016). He cares about the people's opinions, keeps abreast of current developments, and applies latest technologies in governing the country. Indirectly, he has set a good example for fellow Malaysians to use existing technology facilities for good purposes. Besides listening to the complaints and opinions of the people, Mahathir has also never ignored the voice of his subordinates and civil servants working directly under him (Omar & Pandian, 2006). This shows that Mahathir does not blindly govern Malaysia in accordance with his will, but actions are taken by him after considering the views of the people.

The element of togetherness in leadership has been practised by Mahathir throughout his tenure as the prime minister of Malaysia. During the leadership of the BN government from 1981 to 2003, Mahathir always took a cautious approach by discussing, consulting, and tolerating any matter before making a final decision that would be fair to all involved (Keling, 2006). The same process applies when dealing with sensitive matters such as those involving racial or religious issues. For example, although Mahathir has been claimed to be a true champion of Malay rights, ironically, other ethnic groups such as the Chinese and Indians have shown support for his leadership and honoured him as a prime minister (Cheah & Ahmad, 2017a; Suppiah et al., 2018). Chinese and Indians supported Mahathir because their rights as a minority group were not denied by him when he governed the country even though he maintained the majority rights of the bumiputra so that no one was left behind. This proves that he has practised togetherness in administering Malaysia. In fact, Mahathir was also said to be the individual who united Malaysians to elect the opposition in the 14th general election, when he became the interim chief of the opposition coalition (Abdullah, 2019). He brought Malaysians together to elect a new government representative instead of BN who previously had long been the sole government of Malaysia.

The next leadership style of Mahathir is resourceful, with elements such as wise thinker and source of reference (Embong & Hassan, 2013; Omar & Pandian, 2006; Ong, 2005). Mahathir as a wise thinker is believed to have stemmed from his experience as a medical student and a medical practitioner. In the medical field, the cause or symptom of a condition is a basic matter that doctors must identify before taking further action (Ong, 2005). Through this process, the best solution can be prescribed to the patients (Omar & Pandian, 2006). The same approach was followed by Mahathir in administering the country. Before taking any further action, he will investigate the causes of the problem, examine the problem, and then find and suggest the best course of action that can be done to improve the problem being faced by the country or the people. His involvement in the medical field before entering the national leadership field has greatly influenced his approach to carrying out his duties as a state leader. Although these two fields are somewhat distinct, the attention required in the medical field has shaped Mahathir into an attentive national leader in dealing with the problems confronted by the people. Besides

being a wise thinker, Mahathir also acts as a source of reference, for all matters relating to the country for various parties (Embong & Hassan, 2013). This is because he is very knowledgeable and insightful on many matters related to national management and leadership. The wisdom he gained was due to his exposure to the culture of knowledge since his childhood. Reading is the door to knowledge and Mahathir does not take lightly the advantages of reading. Born into a family that prioritised learning, Mahathir began reading from a very young age (Omar & Pandian, 2006). The advantages of reading are certainly evident in his self-presentation. For example, he can deliver thoughtful ideas and challenge local habits. Besides, he has been writing materials from a young age even before he became involved in politics. He could write about the politics of Malaya before independence. Not many individuals have the capacity to do so. His mastery of knowledge can also be seen from outside-the-box ideas such as the first national car project, the Multimedia Super Corridor project, the Twin Towers, and Putrajaya, which were considered mega projects for Malaysia as a developing country at that time (Ismail & Saad, 2007).

The third leadership style is visionary. Being goal-oriented is one of the characteristics of visionary leaders (Kearney, Shemla, van Knippenberg, & Scholz, 2019). In addition to providing a clear picture of what to accomplish, step-by-step goals are important to achieve the desired big vision (Jensen, Andersen, & Jacobsen, 2019). Mahathir is also a visionary leader as he has governed the country with goal orientation (Cheah & Ahmad, 2017a; Embong et al., 2016). He has placed a set of priority goals that must be realised, and he is committed to achieving his goals, for instance, Vision 2020. Not only that, he is also a leader who adheres to the ideological goal because he observes the principle that it is important for followers to understand the visions that are fought for in order to achieve them (Cheah & Ahmad, 2017a). He tells the people about the goals, ambitions, and visions that he wants to achieve for Malaysia so that the people can understand what he is thinking and be involved in attaining those goals and visions.

Mahathir's visionary side can also be seen in his transformational leadership. This is because to make a transformation, a leader must start with a vision or a goal to change a situation for the better (Burns, 1978). According to McCleskey (2014), in addition to the process of helping each other between a leader and his followers to reach higher levels of morality and motivation, a transformational leader will provide his followers with a vision and mission that inspires their own identity. In this context, Mahathir has done this well. He has succeeded in transforming Malaysia into a modern nation by striving to inspire the people of Malaysia to participate in and work towards that direction (Cheah & Ahmad, 2017a; Suppiah et al., 2018). As a result, most people have experienced an improvement in their standard of living while Malaysia has upgraded from an agricultural country to a modern nation. Thus, visionary leadership is important for a country's leader to practise to improve the development of the country.

The next leadership style associated with Mahathir is pragmatic. According to Arlene (2001) and Lovelace, Neely, Allen, and Hunter (2019), a leader who is directly involved in administrative management is a pragmatic leader because he does what he says. Mahathir is known to be a pragmatic person (Mauzy & Milne, 1983; Ong, 2005). He not only states what his subordinates and the people need to do but also participates and monitors the work progress (Mauzy & Milne, 1983). This is done to facilitate all matters and the results of any action can be immediately identified. Although he has a mammoth task of running the country, with his management skills, he can oversee his subordinates as well as the national projects in progress. Particularly, Mahathir's good managerial qualities can be traced back to when he first entered the political arena. Although he still worked as a medical

practitioner, he was still able to carry out his duties as the state head of UMNO (Omar & Pandian, 2006). Both jobs required attentiveness and Mahathir's ability to hold office and manage both careers at the same time proved his managerial qualities.

Mahathir is also well known for his good communication skills, another vital leadership style. According to Johansson, Miller, and Hamrin (2014), the ability to communicate well is important for a leader. They further stated that communication, either through speech, written documents or behaviour, enables followers and leaders to understand one another and the influence of leaders can also be built through such communication. Mahathir has applied the space to communicate with the people as best as possible. Although he is not like Anwar Ibrahim, the president of *Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR)*, who has outstanding public speaking skills, Mahathir is still an excellent speaker (Suppiah et al., 2018). His unique communication skills such as being spontaneous, factual, clear, and inspiring make the listeners engage and understand the essence of what he wants to convey easily (Cheah & Ahmad, 2017a; Suppiah et al., 2018). With effective communication, Mahathir has managed to get the people's attention to work together towards the desired goal. This is in line with Lovelace, Neely, Allen, and Hunter (2019), who have claimed that successful leaders are those who can build their perceptions in the way people see reality and seek to change it.

In addition, highly ethical is also a leadership style that has been reflected in Mahathir's leadership. Burns (1978) stated that a leader must have high ethics, which is required to enhance the quality of leading the followers and to implement ethical practices among them (Ng & Feldman, 2015). High ethics is also important for leaders to practice for the greater good of the people because proper and good practices are fundamental to the formation and change of a nation. Mahathir's highly ethical angle can be seen through the elements of efficient, dedicated, integrity, and discipline in his leadership (Embong & Hassan, 2013; Embong et al., 2016; Mauzy & Milne, 1983; Omar & Pandian, 2006).

Mahathir values efficiency because by being efficient, everything can be well supervised and all the issues that arise can be resolved as competently as possible (Mauzy & Milne, 1983). Efficiency will benefit all aspects of people's lives and the administration of the country (Ng & Feldman, 2015). Dedication is also important to a leader and Mahathir's dedication to his role has been very evident throughout his tenure as the prime minister. For example, he comes to work at 8.00 a.m. just like any other civil servant but leaves later than them at 6.30 p.m. (Omar & Pandian, 2006; Rohman & Sabri, 2017).

Apart from that, Mahathir is a man of integrity in carrying out his duties as the prime minister, whereby he has strongly condemned corruption, money politics, and abuse of power among state leaders, civil servants, and the people. He often repeats the disadvantages of these practices in his speeches (Omar & Pandian, 2006). In addition, he does not hesitate to point out his weaknesses in leading a country, which portrays him as a man of integrity (Ong, 2005). It is not a shame to admit self-weaknesses and with this approach, other leaders are aware of their shortcomings and can provide solutions. Similarly, people also become aware of their shortcomings and thus can work to change them.

Mahathir is also a very disciplined person. According to Winston (2002), discipline is an element of leadership that involves behaviour control. Discipline is a very important practice because it enables every matter to be done in an organised manner. Mahathir is highly disciplined in governing the country and he encourages Malaysians to adopt a disciplined attitude to succeed in developing the country (Omar & Pandian, 2006; Embong et al., 2016).

van Houwelingen, van Dijke, and De Cremer (2015) have argued that followers are easy to discipline if leaders also practise discipline. Mahathir, who is highly ethical in his role as the leader of a nation, has not only urged the people to be disciplined, but he also followed the same practice, which indirectly set an example to them (Rohman & Sabri, 2017). This practice is important for a national institution because besides enhancing national productivity, it can also promote the holistic development of the country.

Furthermore, trust in leaders is crucial as it shapes followers' perceptions, behaviours, and values in seeing the successes, failures, or risks that they and their countries will face. Not only that, leaders indirectly develop a sense of self-efficacy and self-worth within themselves and their followers (Coetzer, Bussin, & Geldenhuys, 2017). This development enables leaders and followers to work better together to meet the challenges of achieving their set goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Mahathir is a trustworthy leader because he is a responsible, believable, and respectful person (Cheah et al., 2017b; Embong & Hassan, 2013; Ong, 2005; Suppiah et al., 2018). Trust between him and his followers exists because of these three aspects that have become his practice in carrying out his duties. His intentions, actions, and behaviour have made the people's level of trust in him to increase. Moreover, he is a man of action instead of word. The vision and mission to develop the country that he has espoused are grounded in a sense of responsibility to provide the best solution to lessen the hardships of the people. People's trust in him also exists because of his respectful behaviour towards others (Embong & Hassan, 2013). Mahathir respects the individuals he deals with, whether they are from other countries, investors, or the people. It is this behaviour that has made him trustworthy.

In addition, beliefs and values are fundamental in every person's life. As an individual and a leader, Mahathir esteems local beliefs and values (Mauzy & Milne, 1983; Abdullah, 2019). A successful leader is someone who can convey the vision and mission that needs to be accomplished by aligning those vision and mission with the beliefs and values held by the followers (Sendjaya, Pekerti, Härtel, Hirst, & Butarbutar, 2016). As a religious Muslim man, Mahathir upholds the dignity of Islam in the administration of Malaysia and celebrates other religions of the people of Malaysia.

Besides, he has frequently expressed the misunderstanding of Islam among Muslims in Malaysia. He has emphasised that the true teachings of Islam are not just about compulsory worship but also about being progressive in their pursuit of knowledge and striving for the development of the nation (Mauzy & Milne, 1983). Mahathir frequently mentions the importance of Islam because most Malaysians are Muslims. However, he does not neglect the other religions, whereby he reminds the people that every religion wants its followers to be good and beneficial individuals to the country. Apart from focusing on religion in leading Malaysians, he also fights for the rights of the Malays and Malaysians, making him a true Malaysian nationalist. He fights for the rights of the Malays because they are the indigenous people of the country, and issues regarding their rights are sensitive even to the Malays themselves. Nevertheless, the rights of the Chinese and Indians have never been denied by Mahathir, whereby he has created and provided them with appropriate opportunities. In fact, they have shown strong support throughout Mahathir's tenure as premier (Cheah et al., 2017b; Suppiah et al., 2018). Unifying all the races in Malaysia is Mahathir's main goal to make Malaysia a developed nation.

Mahathir is also a champion of Asian values. He was seen as a spokesman for Asian values in Malaysia alongside Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore. Asian values refer to the same local cultural values among Asian countries compared to Western values that are being assimilated within Asian countries (Chandra, 1995; Mauzy, 1996;

Milner, 1999). Mahathir argues that Asia in general and Malaysia in particular, have a set of values that are eastern in nature and if these values are practised well, then, the dream of success can be achieved (Sani & Azizuddin, 2013). These values are important because they enable an individual or a nation to attain success without neglecting local customs, cultures, and traditions.

Furthermore, Mahathir is also an authentic leader because of the unique elements underlying his leadership style. One of the uniqueness of Mahathir's leadership style is that he is seen as an autocratic leader even though his government practices democracy and he is loved despite his strong personality (Abdullah, 2019; Omar & Pandian, 2006; Suppiah et al., 2018). According to Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, and May (2004) and Sendjaya, Pekerti, Härtel, Hirst, and Butarbutar (2016), authentic leaders are those with the deepest level of commitment. Mahathir's deep commitment to leading Malaysia is closely linked to his leadership style, which consists of the elements autocratic and strong personality.

Mahathir has applied democracy in his own way by reducing the scope of some of the basic principles that are foundations of the original democracy concept to ensure the establishment of a strong state administration and enable the well-being of the people to be maintained. He sees the selection of the government through election as a practice of democracy practised by the people (Omar & Pandian, 2006). Then, once the government is elected, it needs to be given full trust and authority to govern for all administrative matters to proceed smoothly. Leaders must be respected for such authority to be strong because, without the powerful authority, society is exposed to chaos that disturbs the development, prosperity, and well-being of the people and the country, especially in developing countries (Omar & Pandian, 2006). Although Mahathir is said to be autocratic and has a strong personality, ironically, the people are comfortable with his leadership. This is because his unique, authentic approach coupled with his strong personality has enabled the goal, vision, and mission of developing Malaysia to be achieved. His strong personality undoubtedly plays an important role in the history of Malaysia. Moreover, his return to the political scene has changed the political landscape of the country (Abdullah, 2019). Although factors such as dissatisfaction with the previous administration had led the people to reject the BN government, the presence of Mahathir-led PH further strengthened Malaysians to elect the opposition coalition he led. This further reinforces the authenticity of Mahathir's leadership because it shows that a strong personality or role of personalities plays an important part in the notion of government transition. As argued by O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986 as cited in Abdullah, 2019), 'no transition takes place without a regime split'.

VI. CONCLUSION

This systematic review had scrutinised Mahathir's leadership style in detail. Achievements such as the development and modernisation of Malaysia, improving the government machinery from time to time, and strengthening of bilateral relations with foreign countries while holding the administration of the country have shown and demonstrated the superiority of Mahathir's leadership. Regarding this, several perspectives like personality, actions, communication, and values practised have been used to evaluate Mahathir's leadership. Based on the systematic review conducted, nine key styles of Mahathir's leadership were identified, namely, people-oriented, resourceful, visionary, pragmatic, good communication skills, highly ethical, trustworthy, core value-based, and authentic. There were 22 sub-themes found, which were embedded under the nine core themes. Sub-

themes included democracy, togetherness, wise thinker, source of reference, transforming, goal-oriented, good managerial qualities, spokesman, clarity, inspiring, efficient, dedicated, integrity, discipline, responsible, believable, respectful, prioritising religion, prioritising nation, practising Asian values, autocratic, and strong personality.

Nonetheless, there are still many aspects of Mahathir's leadership that have not been explored yet and if they are studied, various things can be traced and learned from his leadership. Hence, several limitations noted in this study can be a guide for future studies. Firstly, all the articles reviewed were studies that used a qualitative approach. This indicates that there is a lack of quantitative or mixed methods studies related to Mahathir's leadership. Thus, future studies are recommended to employ quantitative or mixed methods approaches. Although studies related to leadership are more compatible with qualitative approaches, if quantitative or mixed methods techniques are used in leadership-related studies, especially Mahathir's leadership, other aspects of his leadership value can be identified and viewed. Secondly, most of the studies in this review did not use or associate Mahathir's leadership with existing leadership theories or concepts. Therefore, the use of leadership theory or concept in future studies is highly recommended so that Mahathir's leadership can be analysed based on established theories or conceptual frameworks of leadership, which can then confirm the effectiveness and practicality of his leadership. This step is important because there could be elements of Mahathir's leadership that can be discovered inductively and be useful for improving the theory or concept of leadership in general. The third limitation is the lack of attention and discussion on how Mahathir's leadership can benefit the field of leadership. As one of Malaysia's longest-serving leaders, who has successfully developed and modernised the country and regained control of the country after retirement, there is a lot to be learned from Mahathir's leadership. Hence, his leadership can be a reference for leadership studies in which every aspect of his leadership, actions, and policies during the governance of Malaysia could be studied and discussed in the field of leadership. Research on his leadership style is still limited despite the advantages that could be extracted and learned from his leadership. As such, a further study of Mahathir's leadership is relevant to be carried out.

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