

The Factors Affecting Teacher Leadership in Malaysian Primary Schools

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DOI: 10.6007/IJARBSS/v7-i6/3025 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v7-i6/3025>

ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the level of leadership among teachers and the factors that are affecting teacher leadership. A total of 250 teachers from 25 primary schools participated in this study. This study used questionnaire for data collection. The data were analysed by using descriptive and correlation tests to investigate the relationship between the focused factors. The results showed that the level of leadership among teachers is moderate. The findings also showed that there is a significant relationship between school culture and teachers' attitude and personality factors with teacher leadership. Meanwhile, the management support factor does not show a significant relationship with teacher leadership. This study suggested that the competency and leadership courses should be provided to teachers including the management, to improve the leadership skills of teachers in schools.

Keywords: Teacher Leadership, School Culture, Teacher's Personality, Management's Support

INTRODUCTION

Teacher is an education leader, not only in school but also outside the school (Danielson, 2006). Teachers become leaders starting from the classroom and later expand the scope of their work in the school and in the community. School teachers are accountable for shaping the development of students' potential as outlined in the national education philosophy. Outside the school, teachers have to engage with parents and community from inside as well as outside the country. Teachers will be leaders when they functioned efficiently in learning communities that have an impact on students' learning, school's improvement, promote excellence and encourage the adoption of stakeholders to be involved in the education development (Childs-Bowen et al., 2000; Crowther et al., 2002).

Teacher leaders are able to influence beyond their classrooms and have autonomy in carrying out their duties (Murphy, 2005). According to Danielson (2006), Teacher leadership is a set of skills that a teacher can influence their students inside and outside the classroom. In addition, the construction of learning communities and teacher leadership in the school is supported by the findings of Barth (1990), Fullan (2001), Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001), Lambert (1998, 2003), Lieberman and Grolnick (1996), Lieberman, Saxl, and Miles (1988), and McLaughlin and Talbert (2001). Teacher leadership is giving positive impacts on school's achievement. Teacher leadership at school has many benefits such as can be involved in decision making and increase teachers' sense of belonging and teachers' commitment in their profession to improve the school's goals. Teacher leaders will develop their teaching and learning through sharing knowledge and skills with others. At the same time, they will also continue to learn as well as leading and collaborating with others (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Overall, a leader is able to inspire others to change the value to action, the vision to reality, the barriers to innovation, the collapse to unity and the risk to reward (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Foster (1997) states that all teachers should be leaders in education in order to improve students' achievement. In classrooms teachers become instructional leaders who strive with strong commitment to ensure students' excel in academics. In addition, teachers can also create a conducive atmosphere for teaching and be able to control and manage the classroom well. Besides managing the classroom from the physical aspect, the teacher is also responsible for managing students' emotion and discipline. Failure to serve as a good classroom manager will lead to ineffective teaching and learning system.

Vallace (2000) highlighted four main characteristics of quality teacher namely good classroom management, continuous teachers' commitments with self-improvement, having the sense of protecting, loving and committed to the students. The above view is also supported by Durr (2008) who coupled with the feature with knowledge in the subject content, and supervising the students and constantly reflect the teaching. Besides having academic qualifications and strong pedagogy, New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI, 2008) also outlines other features as standard of quality teachers such as teachers' need to understand students'-learning as well as to identify and to optimize the power of students. Teachers also

need to be capable in in-depth learning, practicing reflection, care about their students and always have high professional and ethical manner.

According to Malaysian School Inspectorate's the characteristics of excellent teachers include the following aspects; personal excellence, knowledge and skills, work excellence, communication and potential. Childs-Bowen et al. (2000) also believe, teachers become leaders when they play their roles in professional learning community. Teacher's role is to give impacts or effects on students' learning. In addition, the role of a teacher is also contribute to increase the level of school's excellence as well motivate the practice of expertise in the school. Finally, the teacher is able to affect all the parties involved (school and community) to contribute and play roles in improving education.

Leadership has a close relationship with power. According to York-Barr and Duke (2004: 287-288), teacher leadership is a process undertaken by teachers individually or in teams to influence colleagues, principals and school staffs to carry out improvements towards teaching and learning process. Hence, the teacher leadership development involves three stages namely individual development, group development and organisational development. Charismatic teachers see leadership as an important requirement that must be shouldered by all parties within the school community and the public. In addition, the guidance factor of school culture and support from school management can also be alternative factors for school's development and excellence teachers also have the potential to help school's development by achieving overall success with the aid of their knowledge and skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

At present, many changes are made in order to improve and increase the school's performance and educational system. In line with this, all parties associated with school community, especially the teachers and the management, need to make changes in terms of functions and patterns of school's leadership. This is proven by studies of Elmore (2000) and Harris (2004) who both proclaimed that school's effectiveness which shows the pattern of leadership lays a key role in the success of a school. The role of school leadership is often perceived by most teachers as the responsibility placed on the shoulders of headmasters and principals only. This perception needs to be corrected as the teachers are also responsible for ensuring the success of a school together with them. Perceptions and attitudes of teachers which are put lesser emphasis on leadership may also be caused by the regular teachers training programmes, the workload, teaching non option subjects, time constraints, attitudes or approach from the administrators. Helterbran's (2000) study found that a few syndrome existed among teachers such as "I'm just an ordinary teacher; I just follow the principal's instructions and order as he is the head and leader of the school organisation; He is the leader." In simple words, bilateral relations do not exist. Helterbran also added that an effective school improvement requires leadership practices which are given space to wide spread among teachers, especially to co-manage and lead the school organisation together with principal for the sake of self-development and students' achievement. To ensure this happens the school leaders need to change the leadership style that can be shared with teachers.

As a visionary educator, teachers need to be prepared with a range of knowledge and latest information in line with the transformation of the country and also in accordance with the era of information and communication technology. Pont, Nusche, and Hopkins (2008: 11) contended that "*Teachers are the main agents of change, and the classroom will not show any significant change for better learning unless teachers' mind sets are changed and they have the necessary knowledge and skills to manage the learning environment for students*". Therefore, it is important to know the level of teacher leadership in leading the learning in school. In relation to this, the current research will give emphasis to the study on the level of teachers' leadership and also factors affecting teacher leadership by putting the teacher at the fore front of learning in the school. Generally, a lot of meaning that can be given in assessing the level of teacher leadership.

According to Hook and Vass (2000), teacher leadership in the classroom is a process for teachers who are competent and can communicate well. Southworth (2002) says that teacher leadership is closely related to teaching and learning, learning of teaching profession and also the development of teachers. Apart from that, school's cultural factor also contribute to the formation and development of teacher leadership level (Nordin & Othman, 2003). Ford (1992) reaffirmed it by proclaiming that each school has its own culture and the success of the school is the result of the cooperation of all members.

Teacher leadership may also be influenced by the work culture of the school. An effective working environment can ensure the existence of motivation, collaborative elements and accountability (Schutz, 1994). Hence, human relationship should exist in three conditions namely: i) inclusion; feeling that they are recognised, included and accepted; ii) control; the sense of responsibility for getting things done and feelings to influence; iii) affection; the feeling to be honoured, support and try to approach a friend in the group. This is to ensure to optimise the teachers' commitment. According to Turan and Bektas (2013), the administrators can use school's cultural factors in order to influence and direct all the parties or to build healthy relationships between all the subordinates. Thus, the discussion in the paragraph denotes there exists the possibility that school's cultural factors contribute to the teacher leadership.

The factors of teachers' attitude and personality also play an important role in shaping the teacher leadership. Personality and the ways of handling the classrooms can reflect the personality of a teacher. From time to time, teachers need to learn to ensure the teaching methods are enhanced and the teaching and learning process are done effectively (Leach, 2006). Teachers also need to be good listeners, able to communicate with eye contact, verbally and non-verbally and have a good vocabulary that can be understood by the students (Hassan & Mohd., 2005; Yahaya & Abdul, 2011). A successful teaching comes from a quality, committed and dedicated teacher.

The three main features in forming teacher leadership are roles, responsibilities and working together (Muijs & Harris, 2006). The roles and responsibilities of teachers are not limited in the classrooms only but also need to ensure that the mission and vision of the school

as a whole is successful. In the aspect of cooperation, teachers need to move along with the other members of the school to ensure the tasks are carried out successfully and have a high awareness of the organisation. They must also have sense of respect to their colleagues and school management (Goleman, 2006). In order to manage the changing process, the teachers must have the leadership values (Busher & Harris, 2000). Teachers as charismatic leaders are able to motivate their colleagues to create innovation and to carry out the activities properly and effectively. The situation will become much easier with the support of the management which gives trust and confidence to the teachers (Sergiovanni, 2007). Successful schools are the schools that have leaders who work towards a common goal (Abdullah & Kuppan, 2009).

In relation to the discussion elaborated above, the existing study is interested to investigate the topic of teacher leadership further. The general objective of existing study is to examine the factors that affect teacher leadership. The affecting factors considered in this study are school culture, attitude and personality of the teachers and the level of school management's support. The studies on teacher leadership is important because such studies are meagre conducted in Malaysia and the results of this study can provide input to the teachers, administrators and policy makers to glorify the teachers, schools and education system.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in 25 primary schools involving 250 teachers who were randomly selected. A set of questionnaire containing questions on teacher leadership, school culture, attitude and personality and management support; measured by using a five-point Likert scale, was used as the instrument of this study. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested and the results reported the Cronbach's Alpha values between 0.765 and 0.937. Therefore, the validity and reliability of the questionnaires are considered high and acceptable. The respondents consisted of 119 (47.6%) males and 131 (52.4%) females.

THE FINDINGS

TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Table 1 shows that the overall level of teacher leadership is moderate ($M = 3.45$, $S.D = 0.842$). Three aspects that explain this finding; teachers are less participating in schools' decision making ($M = 3.10$, $S.D = 0.868$); teachers are less involving in creating new teaching programmes ($M = 3.26$, $S.P = 0.873$) and finally, teachers put less effort in becoming role models ($M = 3.34$, $S.D = 0.874$).

Table 1: The Level of Teacher Leadership

Teacher Leadership	Mean	SD
I give impact in my area of expertise.	3.59	.808
I am ready to shoulder the responsibility in the community.	3.56	.830
I have the initiative to work with diverse communities.	3.56	.816
I am willing to contribute beyond my assigned duties.	3.55	.786
I foster a culture of lifelong learning and reflective practice.	3.54	.807

Teacher Leadership	Mean	SD
I take advantage the opportunity to achieve the vision.	3.53	.817
I proactively anticipate future needs and challenges.	3.52	.837
I have ethical standards that guide other people to follow.	3.52	.851
I show exemplary practices related to “organisational change and innovation.”	3.50	.897
I access and use research to improve best practices.	3.46	.846
I involve in creating students’ standard behaviour and classroom management policies.	3.41	.879
I become a role model through leadership skills.	3.38	.848
I involve in developing school capacity strategically (vision and mission, professional development, infrastructure, finance, students’ activities and students’ achievement).	3.38	.848
I become a role model through leadership values.	3.34	.874
I lead the new teaching programmes.	3.26	.873
I take part in decision making for the curriculum establishment in school.	3.10	.868
Teacher Leadership	3.45	0.842

1.0-2.33=low; 2.34-3.66=moderate; 3.67-5.00 =high

SCHOOL CULTURE

The finding showed that the level of school culture is relatively high ($M = 3.77, S.D = 0.846$). However, the mean scores are relatively the lowest for items that says; teachers playing their roles as mentor and coach to influence other teachers ($M = 3.71, S.D = 0.858$) and teachers’ sharing with colleagues on effective teaching methods ($M = 3.72, S.D = 0.846$).

Table 2: School Culture

School Culture	Mean	SD
I adopt the practice of teamwork to achieve the goal.	3.84	.824
I always encourage my colleagues to achieve excellence in teaching.	3.80	.852
I try to apply the values to be adopted for the success of teamwork.	3.78	.843
I always involve with colleagues in school’s development programmes.	3.77	.836
I try to involve learning through interactions with friends, community and external organisations.	3.76	.868
I always share the effective teaching methods that I use with my colleagues.	3.72	.846
I serve as a mentor and coach to influence other teachers on best practices.	3.71	.858
School Culture	3.77	.846

1.0-2.33=low; 2.34-3.66=moderate; 3.67-5.00 =high

TEACHERS' ATTITUDE AND PERSONALITY

Teachers' attitude and personality level in this study is relatively high ($M = 3.86, S.D = 0.880$); whereas the lowest mean score is identified in the 5th item which implies teachers are less in disseminating the best practices of teaching through lectures, writing articles and journals ($M = 3.76, S.D = 0.992$).

Table 3: Teachers' Attitude and Personality

Teachers' Attitude and Personality	Mean	SD
I aspire students to become leaders.	3.94	.817
I encourage students to think of new ideas in dealing with the current situation.	3.88	.854
I boost students' confidence to contribute ideas on various aspects of leadership.	3.88	.908
I provide the foundations for students to become leaders.	3.85	.859
I disseminate the best practices of teaching through lectures, writing articles and journals.	3.76	.992
Teachers' Attitude and Personality	3.86	.880

1.0-2.33=low; 2.34-3.66=moderate; 3.67-5.00 =high

SCHOOL'S MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

The finding showed that the mean score for support from school's management is relatively high ($M = 4.08, S.D = 0.97$); while the lowest mean score is documented in item 7 which implies school leaders are less concerned about sharing the successes, challenges and best practices ($M = 3.93, S.D = 1.103$).

Table 4: School's Management's Support

School Management's Support	Mean	SD
Principals give credibility, public recognition and power to be a leader.	4.24	.942
Principals identify criteria and performance indicators of excellence for Teacher Leadership.	4.20	.968
Principals match the expertise with the workload and prioritize according to resource limitations.	4.11	.889
Principals provide examples of job description, job contract, expectations and commitment of agreement to describe the task.	4.11	.910
Principals spread the learning culture to support the Teacher Leadership development.	4.08	1.04
Principals build blending and continuity across systems that can be adapted for use according to the ability of the teachers and schools' needs.	4.07	.887
Principals always invite teacher leaders to share their successes, challenges and best practices in the community.	3.93	.969
Principals give a clear vision, rational and moral concern for Teacher Leadership.	4.01	1.10
School Management's Support	4.08	0.97

1.0-2.33=low; 2.34-3.66=moderate; 3.67-5.00 =high

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL CULTURE, ATTITUDE AND PERSONALITY AND MANAGEMENT’S SUPPORT WITH TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Table 5 shows that the correlation coefficient value between the school culture and teacher leadership factors is relatively weak but significant ($r = 0.279$, $p = 0.000$). Similar significant result, and a relatively low correlation coefficient value is observed in the analysis between attitude and personality with the teacher leadership factors ($r = 0.245$, $p = .000$). However, the management’s support factor does not show any significant relationship with teacher leadership ($r = 0.003$, $p = 0.960$).

Table 5: The Relationship between School Culture, Attitude and Personality and Management’s Support with Teacher Leadership

Factors	Teacher Leadership	Sig.
School Culture	.279	.000
Attitude and Personality	.245	.000
Management’s support	.003	.096

** significance level $p < 0.01$

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

Overall, the results showed that there is no significant relationship between the management support factor and the teacher leadership factor. However, there is a significant relationship between the school culture and the teachers’ attitude and personality factors with the teacher leadership factor. Muijs and Harris (2006) advocate that a collaborative school culture, and a leadership practising school will positively affect the school system; where teachers who are involved in the system are inclined to be more committed and more likely to remain employed at the same school. Yukl (2006) states that the implementation of teacher leadership in school is through establishing the school culture in which teachers feel that their contribution and participation is very important and necessary in school’s achievement. The situation is able to generate a widespread alternative and at the same time can reduce personal bias. The involvement of teachers also will enhance their morale and confidence. In fact, the increment of working motivation of the subordinates will contribute more to the organisation in the forms of abilities and job satisfaction (Sinclair et al., 1992 in Sancar, 2009). Sergiovanni (2003: 14) said that “culture is involving value system, beliefs and customary practices for the members of the organisation. If the culture of the organisation is positive, then the behaviour of the members of the organisation will be synchronized and bonded and as a team.”

The attitude of a teacher refers to the value, character and self-confidence that the teacher has. This attitude will indirectly catalyze the leadership value not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom. This finding is supported by Frost and Harris's (2003) who's study is concerning on the methods in developing leadership capacity among teachers. One of the important aspects of this study is interpersonal skill. According to them, the teacher's skills and personality are able to produce capable and confident leaders when interacting with the environment. This opinion is supported by Abd. Rahman (2010) who found that there is a high correlation between teacher's personality and learning style with students' achievement in Mathematics. The finding also revealed that the most dominant teacher's personality dimension is being an extrovert and practicing teacher's personal model as his/her teaching style.

York-Barr and Duke (2004) said that the level of teacher leadership is high when the teachers are involved in organisation's decision making. This is because the teachers who are involved either directly or indirectly in decision makings process at school will also have the feeling being part of the system. The results of the existing study however showed that the level of teacher leadership is moderate and the findings also showed that the teachers are less involved in decision making, creating new programmes and in being role models. The findings of Duke, Shower and Imber (1980) stated that the teachers who involved in decision making process will show higher interest and inclination to be involved with the organisation. However, this opinion is contradicted with the findings of Conley (1991) who stated that the teachers are more likely to make decision at the classroom level only compared to management. This is because the teachers feel themselves are under pressure because the organisation decision making involves a much larger scope.

To foster teacher leadership, competency and leadership courses should be provided to the teachers and to the management. Competency courses are able to change the mind set and attitudes of the teachers towards the advancement and improvement of teachers' soft skills especially in improving the teachers' role as leaders such as mentors, coaches, role models and in information sharing through lectures, articles and journals writing. Besides that, the management also should put effort in identifying the skills and abilities of the teachers to be channelled for the school's development and excellence. A teacher with leadership skill is capable to try a variety of new alternatives as a method to solve the students' learning problem. Danielson (2006) outlined several aspects of teacher leadership skills namely the usage of evident and data in making decisions, looking for opportunities and take initiatives, mobilize people to achieve shared goals, organise resources and take action, monitor progress and modify the approach as circumstances of changes, maintain the commitment of others and contribute to organisational learning.

Teacher leadership can be enhanced if the attitude and personality of the teachers are constantly polished and exposed to the development of the education. These strategies include the ability of the teachers to practice Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in leading students' learning. Other than that, the innovative and technology literacy of the teachers is capable to demonstrate the teacher leadership aspect in teaching and learning. Teachers with leadership skill will always aware of the changes that take place around them. Teachers of this type are

likely involved in the decision making process within the school organisation. The involvement of these type of teachers will increase the level of teachers' commitments towards their profession while striving to achieve the goals of the school.

The teacher leadership value will avoid hands-off attitude among the teachers in the effort to build school's excellence. Teachers who have the leadership value will be able to create a harmonious working environment and establish a culture of strong cooperation. As a leader, the teacher will be a role model to the students, classroom, teachers, school and community. Teacher leadership provides professional learning opportunities that affect changes in the classroom and school and also can change and build the direction of the school from the existing level to the higher standard.

The principal who is intelligent and charismatic are normally capable to take full advantage of teachers' ability in order to achieve the objective as an excellent school. Yahya, Mohamed and Abdullah (2007) said that the teacher leadership is based on the principles that all teachers-have skills, abilities and capacity to lead. Besides that, the management will decide the extent of the effectiveness of a programme implemented in the school. Support and assistance provided by the management will ensure the success of the programme.

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