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Teachers' Readiness to be Leaders and its Relationship with Students' Engagement in the Classroom

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the relationship between teachers' to be leaders and pupils' engagement in the classroom. A total of 142 primary school teachers are chosen as respondents and questionnaire set is used as the instrument to collect data. The collected data are analysed by using descriptive statistics. The findings show that the level of teachers' readiness to become leaders and the pupils' engagement is relatively high with means score value for each is 4.02 and 4.05 respectively. The result of the t-test analysis provides indication that there is a significant mean difference of teachers' willingness to become leaders based on gender; whereby, female teachers are more willing to become leaders compare to the male teachers. The findings of the correlations test also show that there is a positive and significant relationship between the teachers' readiness to become leaders' factor and pupils' engagement in the classroom factor. In terms of implications, this study provides a suggestion that teachers should be prepared to be leaders to improve pupils' engagement in the classroom. Hence, teachers training session must embed leadership elements in the education structure in the effort to build knowledge, skill and confidence to lead while in teaching.

Keywords: Teacher Leader, Pupils' Engagement in the Classroom, Primary School

Introduction

Teacher leadership refers to principled actions held or practiced by teachers to achieve a complete school's success by applying his or her own power in teaching (Gardner, 1990; Marsh et al., 2014). This practice helps to shape quality students by giving long-term contribution to the life of the community. Currently, the task of the teacher is not limited to just teaching, but they are also expected to be role models to the students, colleagues and also to the local communities (Crowther et al., 2002). This view is supported by Gardner (1990) who explained that teachers will become leaders when they are able to contribute to school's reformation; specifically in

students' learning (in or outside of the classroom), colleagues' improvements in professional practices and also to community upbringing. In specific, the capabilities of teacher leadership to bring positive changes in school is approved in study by Rosenholtz (1989), improves students' achievement is approved in a study by McKeever, (2003), helping to make the school as a safe and conducive place for teaching and learning activities is approved in the study by Little in Hook (2006). Therefore, teachers should be encouraged to accept and practice leadership qualities.

However, encouraging teachers to accept the concept of the leadership should be handled with care (Moller & Katzenmeyer, 1996). Before the teachers act as leaders, they need to prepare themselves by understanding and accepting the role of a leader in order to avoid any misunderstandings within the organisations (Ibrahim & Abdul Wahab, 2012). Teacher leadership basically requires the powers and authority that allows them to influence others (Wasley, 1991), especially students. Furthermore, their role would be beneficial if it had an influence on the relationship that was created with the group being led (Wasley in Murphy, 2005). At the same time, knowledge, skills and values are among the most important aspects in developing the concept of teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). However, no one has these three aspects until given proper and complete disclosure (Gardner, 1990). Thus, developing and promoting teacher leadership is one of the ways to increase the number of quality teachers.

Teachers' Readiness to Become Leaders

According to Salamun et al. (2012), the most effective approach to expose teachers to leadership qualities is to encourage and provide opportunities for them to engage in matters related to school management and administration. At the same time, teachers should also be given opportunity to make decisions as well as participating in activities involving outsiders for the sake of school's wellness. This statement is supported by Webb et al. (2004) who suggesting to allow teachers to make decisions together. By this way, they feel more committed and responsible for the decisions that have made. In a nutshell, the willingness of a teacher to become a leader begins when he or she empowered to make decisions.

Besides that, according to Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001), work atmosphere, intrinsic rewards and professional development opportunities are among the factors that encourage the teachers to accept leadership tasks. These factors also increase the participation and commitment of the teachers who are interested in taking leadership tasks to achieve school's goals (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Meanwhile, Suranna & Moss (2000) also agreed with York-Barr & Duke, where leaders need to be involved in the process of professional development, enhancing the sharing of professionalism knowledge, having a stand on educational issues and acting as facilitators in order to pursuit school excellence. From this, it is understandable that the participation of teachers activities or matters related to the organisation is important in developing the concept of teacher leadership.

In order to improve the quality of leadership among teachers, the policy makers, researchers and stakeholders began to focus on leadership preparation programme so that the teachers can truly understand the real meaning of teacher leadership concept and the ways in which it is practised (Orphanos & Orr, 2014). However, teacher leadership can only be extended with a supportive

school culture such as encouragement and support from administrators and colleagues (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Birky et al, 2006). Therefore, teacher leaders are important at the school level either in terms of maximizing support or contributing to school and professional development such as creating a professional learning community (Swanson et al., 2011). Since teachers are able to provide inputs that help to change and improve the situation in the classroom and school culture, then they need to see themselves as a potential and responsible group to lead (Webb et al., 2004). According to Barth (2001), the excellence of the school relies heavily on the leadership of the teachers.

Pupils' Engagement

Pupils' engagement is a key aspect in determining effective teaching in the classroom (Marzano et al., 2011). If the pupils are less or do not engaged in teaching and learning activities in the classroom, then they will be left behind. Although this aspect of engagement has a clear significance in teaching and learning, but it is not a construct that can be easily defined, as said by Skinner et al. (2009). According to them, until now there is no exact definition to define the meaning of engagement and often overlap the meaning with other constructs such as motivation, participation, attention, interest, effort, spirit and so on.

The concept of student engagement has been introduced by Astin (1984). At that time, he proposed a development theory focusing on the concept of participation (Junco et al., 2010). However, Astin has later renamed the concept of participation as the concept of engagement. According to Astin (1984), the engagement of students refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy used by the students to gain academic experience. Finn & Rock (1997), Brewster & Fager (2000) and Marks (2000) have divided them into two main categories, namely psychological and behavioural characteristics. However, both divisions of this aspect carry the same meaning, which is the psychological involvement of the student resulting from the intrinsic motivation factor. As a result, pupils began to show their involvement through physical behaviour or activity.

Prince (2004) has defined student engagement as active learning because the activities of the students and their involvement in the learning process are among the core elements in active learning. Diemer et al. (2012), Willms et al. (2009) and Thomas (2012) has attributed the student engagement with positive and brilliant student learning outcomes. Handley et al. (2011) and Parkin et al. (2012) emphasized that student engagement has a close relationship with the feedback process including receiving, using and taking action on feedback. According to them, students are often involved in this process spontaneously which then helps to increase their engagement. Thus, it is concluded that pupils' engagement refers to the students' efforts to actively participate in teaching and learning activities in the classroom.

Chickering and Gamson (1987) has proposed seven fundamental principles to identify the pupils' engagement, namely the relationship between students and educational organisations, cooperation among students, active learning, instant feedback, emphasising time factor in assignments, expressing high hopes and respecting diversity. MacGregor (2007) stated that teacher can measure the pupils' engagement in the classroom through the aspects of teaching

preparation, teaching techniques, student engagement, assessment, behaviour management and student learning. Basically, teachers have a direct relationship with pupils in terms of learning (Sergiovanni, 1996) as well as responsible for shaping pupils with high personality (Don, 2009).

Teaching effectiveness studies show that positive teacher behaviour is the basis for achieving positive student engagement (Martinez & Martinez, 1999). Leadership practices that practised by teachers can have an impact on every student who are in the classroom which later helps them to determine and achieve the set goals (Lambert, 2010). For that reason, teachers need to inculcate students to actively participate in all the teaching and learning activities that take place in the classroom. In addition, MacGregor (2007) also supported the statement. According to him, teachers need to use positive behaviour management strategies to create conducive and appropriate environment for student learning. However, teachers need to clearly state their hope or expectations of student behaviour. This will allow the students to demonstrate positive behaviour as expected by their teachers.

Methodology

A total of 142 teachers from 12 selected primary schools are involved in this study. This study uses questionnaire set as the instrument for data collection. The dimensions for the teacher readiness construct are adapted from Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001) while the dimensions for the pupils' engagement construct are adapted from MacGregor (2007). The construct for teacher readiness is comprised of seven dimensions with the reliability value of .875, while the construct of pupils' engagement has six dimensions with reliability value of .943. The data are analysed by using descriptive statistics and the relationship analysis is conducted by using the correlation test.

The Findings

Teacher Readiness to Become a Leader

Table 1 summarizes the findings for teachers' level of readiness to become leader analysis. The overall mean score of teachers' perception on readiness to become leader is 4.02 (SD = .717). It is found that the dimension of Collegiality recorded the highest mean score of 4.19 (SD = .655). This is followed by dimensions of Autonomy (mean= 4.18, SD= .670), Positive Environment (mean= 4.16, SD= .685), Open Communication (mean= 4.09, SD= .618), Participation (mean= 3.88, SD= .773) and Developmental Focus (mean= 3.83, SD= .805). The lowest mean score is recorded in the Recognition dimension, 3.79 (SD=.810). Based on the findings, we may conclude the level of teachers' readiness to become leaders is relatively high.

Table 1: Teacher Readiness to Become a Leader

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation
Developmental Focus	3.83	.805
Recognition	3.79	.810
Autonomy	4.18	.670
Collegiality	4.19	.655
Open Communication	4.09	.618
Positive Environment	4.16	.685

Teacher Readiness To Become A Leader	4.02	.717
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Means difference on Teachers’ Readiness to Become Leader Based on Gender

This analysis is conducted by using the *t*-test analysis. The overall findings of the *t*-test analysis are portrayed in Table 2. The result shows that there is a significant difference on teacher readiness to become a leader between genders ($t = -.329$; $p=.002$). The mean score value documented for female teachers is 4.03 (SD=.352) while for the male teachers is 4.00 (SD=.667).

Table 2: Difference of Teacher Readiness to Become A Leader Based on the Gender

Matter	mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Difference	<i>t</i> value	<i>p</i>
Gender					
Male	4.00	.667	-.029	-.329	.002**
Female	4.03	.352			

**Significance at 0.05

Pupils’ Engagement in the Classroom Analysis

The findings of this analysis are displayed in Table 3. The overall mean score value documented for the pupils’ engagement in the classroom analysis is 4.05 (SD=.675), which can be considered as relatively high. The aspects of Teaching Preparation and Teaching Techniques have both recorded the highest and the same mean score value of 4.13 (SD respectively .670 and .619). The next highest score are documented in the Pupil Engagement (mean= 4.06, SD= .645), Behaviour Management (mean= 4.00, SD= .696) and Student Learning (mean= 3.99, SD= .718) dimensions. The assessment dimension recorded the lowest score value of 3.96 (SD=.701). In relating with the findings, we may conclude that the Teaching Preparation and Teaching Techniques dimensions are practised more often compared to other dimensions discussed above. This clearly shows, by characteristic and qualities, teachers are not only skilled but also able to provide and practice their teaching efficiently. It can also be concluded that; the level of pupils’ engagement in the classroom, as perceived by teachers, are at a relatively high level.

Table 3: Pupils’ Engagement in the Classroom

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation
Teaching Preparation	4.13	.670
Teaching Technique	4.13	.619
Pupil Engagement	4.06	.645
Assessment	3.96	.701
Behaviour Management	4.00	.696
Student Learning	3.99	.718
Pupils’ Engagement In The Classroom	4.05	.675

The Relationship between Teachers' Readiness to Become Leader and Pupils' Engagement in the Classroom

The result summary of this analysis is displayed in Table 4. The result of the correlation analysis provide indication that both variables are having a moderate and significant relationship ($r=.495$, $p=0.00$).

Table 4: Relationship between Teacher Readiness to Become a Leader and Pupils' Engagement in the Classroom

Teacher Readiness	Pupil Engagement	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Developmental Focus	.388	.000
Recognition	.263	.001
Autonomy	.338	.000
Collegiality	.358	.000
Participation	.401	.000
Open Communication	.437	.000
Positive Environment	.427	.000
Teacher Readiness To Become A Leader	.373	.000

Discussion and Conclusion

In summary, the findings show that the level of teachers' readiness to become leaders is relatively high. Among the dimension of teachers' readiness to become leaders; which are often practised by teachers, is the dimension of Collegiality. On the other hand, the dimension of Recognition is the dimension that is less practised among teachers. The findings of this study are parallel with Tang et al. (2010). Tang et al.'s (2010) study which examined the effect of teacher leadership on school effectiveness shows a significant relationship between the seven dimensions of teacher leadership and the effectiveness of schools in six schools in Male, Maldives. The findings of Ishak (2014) also show appear to have similarities with the current study. Whereas, the findings of Hanuscin (2012), Coward et al. (2012) and Salamun et al. (2012) showed that the practice of teacher leadership is relatively moderate. The findings of Hanuscin's (2012) found that teachers were less clear about the true meaning of teacher leadership, although in fact they were involved in leadership activities. Coward et al. (2012) argued that teachers feel more comfortable and confident in their role as classroom teachers as their power and influence as a leader at the school level is limited. However, the study by Hanapi (2014) revealed that school leaders do provide opportunities for teachers to become leaders but teachers are not willing to accept them.

The findings of the study on the level of pupils' engagement show that most teachers encourage the engagement of pupils in the classroom. The overall score for pupils' Engagement dimension is relatively high score. Among the aspects, the highest score are recorded in the aspects of teaching preparation and teaching techniques. Meanwhile, the least influential aspect in pupils' engagement in the classroom is the dimension of assessment. The findings of this study is in line

with the results of Hamzah's (2010) study which revealed that most teachers are able to plan their teaching well in order to increase pupils' engagement in the classroom. In addition, Dixson (2010) and Halm (2015) stressed that the interaction process in the classroom also affects the level of pupils' engagement in the classroom. Whereas, the findings of Hepplestone and Chikwa (2016) and Kearney and Perkins (2014) are similar to this study, where they suggested that the evaluation process that used by the teachers should be appropriate to increase the level of pupils' engagement in the classroom.

The results show that there is a moderate, positive and significant relationship between the dimensions of teachers' readiness to become leaders with the level of pupils' engagement in the classroom. This finding is consistent with the findings of Ishak (2014), Hanapi (2014), Rajeswari (2013), Lai and Cheung (2015), Micek (2014,) and Hamzah (2010). Healthy collaborative among teachers is the basis for planning, decision-making, reflection, problem-solving as well as sharing expertise and skills in school related matters, especially those involving students. Furthermore, collective cooperative attitude is fundamental in preparing teachers as leaders. Most of the teachers, especially the primary school teachers have positive outlook on teachers' readiness to become leaders and the importance of engaging the pupils actively in the classroom. This clearly shows that they are indirectly capable in practising the 21st century learning features in the teaching and learning process in the classroom.

It is widely accepted that teachers' becoming leaders is one of the important factors that must have in order to improve the pupils' engagement in the classroom which in return is foreseen will improves school excellence. In order to strengthen the readiness of teachers to become leaders, this study provides suggestion that efficient follow-up efforts need to be planned and implemented by the education ministry to improve leadership skills among the teachers. For example; give exposure to prospective teachers on the importance of leadership. As suggested by York-Barr and Duke (2004), whom asserted that teachers need to be exposed to leadership skills while undergoing teachers' training in the institutes itself. This is one of efficient step in order to produce competent teachers as well as has a crucial implication on nation's education system in line with global demands.

In addition, recognition of services and contributions are among the aspects that need to emphasize in order to improve the readiness to become leaders among the teachers. Teachers should always be appreciated for their efforts to make them always stay motivated and ready to become leaders as stated in the teacher leadership theory. Therefore, it is important for both the administrators and ministry to identify and recognise the skills and capabilities of the teachers to lead in order to improve students' success.

Meanwhile, teachers need to work and take their own initiative to develop their leadership skills. This can be done by forming partnerships with colleagues whether from the same school or other schools. With the establishment of this partnership, all views, opinions, skills and expertise that owned by teachers can be shared. This effort will then help teachers to find solutions for the problems that arise in schools, especially in the classroom as well as working together to overcome. In a nutshell, teachers' efforts to collaborate are an efficient step towards improving

the level of pupils' involvement and at the same time encouraging their engagement in the classroom.

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