THE ROLES OF TEACHER
LEADERSHIP IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

Abdulaziz Aldahmashi[i]
PhD Student,
School of Education,
University of Glasgow,
United Kingdom

Abstract:

The main motivation behind this study was the gap between strong theoretical support for teacher leadership and the low-levels of practice in schools. The purpose was to explore the perceptions of teachers on teacher leadership in primary schools. This was significant for understanding teachers' perceptions and in helping to come up with practical approaches to promote and encourage teacher leadership, which has been associated with improved school effectiveness and educational achievement. The study found that primary school teachers support teacher leadership roles, as well as that support is greater among female teachers and teachers with 5-10 years' experience, female teachers also have a stronger support for roles that influence fellow teachers, and that teacher-leadership training programmes improve the effectiveness of leadership by preparing teachers for leadership roles, equipping them with essential knowledge and skills on all aspects of leadership. The implications of these findings indicate a greater emphasis on encouraging and motivating teachers and increasing their support and participation in teacher leadership. The main limitation was the focus on a single research site, which limited statistical support of the findings beyond the study population.

Keywords: teacher leadership, school leadership, teacher learning

1. Introduction

Although the concept of teacher leadership began in the 1980s, following educational reforms aimed at improving the professional status of teachers (Smylie and Denny, 1990), many schools still grapple with the practice of teacher leadership, suggesting barriers in the current distributed teacher leadership model. One of the key barriers is the implicit assumption that teachers understand their leadership roles and are able to execute them even in the absence of this understanding (Smylie and Denny, 1990). However, many

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[i] Correspondence: email a.aldahmashi.1@research.gla.ac.uk; abdulaziz-2030@outlook.com

teachers do not possess the interpersonal, teamwork and communication skills necessary for effective leadership. Organisational structures that provide support and opportunities for teacher leadership have also been lacking in many schools (Frost and Durrant, 2003). Drawing from the discrepancy between strong theoretical support for teacher leadership and the low-levels of actual practice in schools, this study seeks to understand the roles to the current teacher leadership model from the perspective of teachers and to recommend initiatives to improve the participation of teachers in school leadership. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to determine whether teachers' perceptions vary with gender and teaching experience and the perceived drivers and barriers to teacher leadership in primary schools.

2. Literature Review

Research suggests that traditionally, teacher leadership was practiced on a limited scope, particularly at the department level but in the current, it also involves imposed school reformation (Lee-Piggott, 2015). According to relevant literature, teacher leadership roles are divided into three categories, including formal, less formal and informal (Wasley, 1992; Bascia, 1997; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000; Reid *et al.,* 2004; Strong-Rhoads, 2011). A formal role carries with it a recognised titled status or legal power (Birky *et al.,* 2006) while those occupying less formal roles are delegated responsibility from a head teacher or a principal (Reid *et al.,* 2004). In contrast, informal teacher leadership includes roles without position or delegation (Bascia, 1997 cited in Lee-Piggott, 2015).

In this section, teacher leadership roles are described in three stages. According to Pounder (2005), the first stage of teacher leadership is the functioning of leadership with the formal school hierarchy, in a similar fashion to teaching. In this way, teacher leadership is used in the management of teachers through implementation of the principal's decisions.

During the first stage, teachers function as grade level chairs, union representatives or department heads (Silva *et al.,* 2000). In addition, teacher leaders perform managerial roles that have been created to achieve efficiency. The second stage in attaining teacher leadership is to emphasise the instructional dimension (Pounder, 2005). This stage also invests teacher leadership in the formally established organisational hierarchies. Nonetheless, this stage separates teacher leadership from teaching and includes control from the developers of the curriculum and the designers of the instruction.

Consequently, the second stage of teacher leadership creates pre-packaged instructions to aid teachers with the implementation. During this wave, teacher leaders take instructional roles with the aim of assisting with implementation of the mandated curriculum (e.g. Development Officers). They also lead in staff development and recruit monitoring (Silva *et al.,* 2000). The third stage is an integration of leadership and teaching notions. During said stage, opportunities among teachers are recognised as important in the carrying out of their duties. This stage permits teachers to freely express their leadership abilities in the school.

3. Materials and Methods

This research had two phases: first quantitative data by online questionnaires, and afterwards qualitative data by telephone interviews. Therefore, explanatory sequential design was the best method. Explanatory design is most useful when the researcher conducts the research in two steps, has limited resources and the research is more quantitatively oriented (Creswell and Clark, 2007).

The questionnaire was developed by the researcher and distributed among a sample size of 50 participants consisting of primary school teachers. All participants who agreed to become involved in a questionnaire received an invitation email for a potential telephone interview, which required informed consent as well. There were four agreements for doing the interview, but there were no male teachers. The purpose was to interpret questionnaire results which need more details, such as teacher leader roles and the effects of teacher leadership training programmes in universities.

3.1 Research Questions
The following research questions were instrumental in guiding this study:
    RQn 1.   What are the roles of teacher leaders in primary school?
    RQn 2.   What is the link between teacher leadership and student achievements?
    RQn 3.   Do teacher leaders play a role in influencing their colleagues?
    RQn 4.   What are the effects of teacher-leadership training programmes in primary schools?

3.2 Results and Discussion
The questionnaire sought to measure teachers' perceptions regarding 25 teacher leadership roles.

Table 1 presents a summary of findings of mean and standard deviation analysis of all the questionnaire responses rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (1), agree (2), neutral (3), disagree (4) to strongly disagree (5). Lower values of mean indicate a strong agreement. On the other hand, qualitative data was divided into two parts: open-ended questions as part of questionnaire and interviews.

Table 1: Findings of Mean Analysis of All Responses

	Teacher Leadership Roles	Mean	SD
1.	Selecting teaching strategies	1.75	0.95
2.	Influence other teachers	1.92	0.91
3.	Innovative in the classroom	1.94	1.01
4.	Meeting educational goals	1.96	1.06
5.	Provide feedback to colleagues	1.71	0.84
6.	Sharing values and beliefs about teaching	1.96	1.06
7.	Respected by administrators and colleagues	1.69	1.06
8.	Helping colleagues	1.54	0.96
9.	Share points of view of others	1.90	0.94
10.	Help select new faculty members	2.52	1.29
11.	Facilitate students in the classroom.	1.98	0.97

12.	Collaboratively influence school practices	1.83	1.01
13.	Double as a teacher and leader	2.13	0.99
14.	Cooperate with the colleagues	1.65	0.95
15.	Working with parents and the community	2.08	1.20
16.	Help improve school programmes	1.96	0.87
17.	Mentoring new teachers	2.21	1.14
18.	Collaboration with colleagues	2.25	1.11
19.	Participate on decision making	1.81	0.90
20.	Help students succeed	1.65	0.92
21.	Accept different view points	1.83	0.72
22.	Effective in working with colleagues	1.92	0.89
23.	Recognised and valued as a professional	1.73	1.04
24.	Teacher leadership is widespread	2.69	1.00
25.	Plan school improvement	2.10	1.07

In Table 1, all participant teachers support all the 25 teacher leadership roles. The mean values of their responses range from 1.54 to 2.69, indicating a strong agreement. Teacher leadership roles with a stronger support indicated by very low mean values were helping colleagues (M=1.54; SD=0.96), cooperating with colleagues and helping students succeed (M=1.65; SD=0.95, 0.92) and respected by administrators and colleagues (M=1.69; SD=1.06). However, there was an almost neutral agreement on the view that teacher leadership is widespread, indicated by the highest mean value (M=2.69; SD=1.00).

3.3 Findings by Gender
Table 2 summarises statistically significant T-tests findings (p<0.05) between female and male teachers' responses on teacher leadership roles (see Appendix 6 for the complete results). Out of the 25 teacher leadership roles (Table 4.1), only eight roles have statistically significant differences between female and male teachers' responses (Table 2).

Table 2: T-Test Analysis of Mean Differences by Gender

	Teacher Leadership Roles	Mean (Female)	Mean (Male)	P-Value
1	Selecting teaching strategies	1.458	2.042	0.029
14	Cooperate with the colleagues	1.375	2.040	0.032
16	Help improve school programmes	1.708	2.292	0.027
17	Mentoring new teachers	1.792	2.750	0.004
19	Participate on decision making	1.583	2.250	0.015
21	Accept different view points	1.625	2.042	0.045
22	Effective in working with colleagues	1.708	2.330	0.019
25	Plan school improvement	1.792	2.540	0.015

In Table 2, both female teachers (M=1.375 to 1.792) and male teachers (M=2.040 to 2.750) report higher levels of support for all eight leadership roles. However, there is a statistically significant difference (p<0.05) between the level of support for female teachers in all eight leadership roles compared to male teachers. Female teachers had a

statistically stronger agreement (lower mean values) in these roles (M=1.375 to 1.792) compared to males (M=2.040 to 2.750).

Overall, the study finds that all teachers support teacher leadership. However, female teachers indicate a much stronger support than their male counterparts do with respect to a number of dimensions of teacher leadership. The study also finds that teachers with 5-10 years' experience have a stronger support compared to teachers with more experience (10-20 years). Female teachers also have a stronger support for leadership roles that influence colleagues because they are more cooperative, enjoy sharing and discussing their issues and are kind natured, assisting new teachers so they do not undergo similar experiences to theirs. However, it should be considered that there were no male interviewees to rebut these claims.

Finally, teacher-leadership training programmes improve teacher leadership effectiveness through equipping teachers with knowledge and skills on all aspects of leadership. All in all, these findings are comparable to those of reviewed literature, which demonstrate that teacher leadership supports school effectiveness and educational achievement. However, there are significant structural (organisational), personal and professional barriers inhibiting its practice in schools.

4. Recommendations

This study produces two important recommendations for school management, teachers and policy makers aimed to encourage, promote and improve the practice of teacher leadership in schools.

First, teachers should understand that teacher leadership is not confined to formal roles. Teacher leaders can exhibit leadership informally through influencing students and peers using collaboration, cooperation and mentorship, especially of new teachers or those having difficulties with their duties and responsibilities. Teachers can also show leadership through greater participation in school improvement programmes and in research on new modalities in teaching and learning to inform and improve the current instruction delivery in class.

Second, school management should understand the importance of a conducive and enabling organisational structure and a school environment that promotes and encourages teacher leadership. Bureaucratic leadership, which imposes the views and vision of a few individuals holding formal management positions, misses valuable teacher leadership capital residing in their expertise and the many opportunities they have leading students, influencing fellow teachers and understanding the curriculum. A distributed form of leadership that gives opportunities to teachers to be site leaders and participants to decision-making will go a long way to improve school management and the attainment of a shared school vision.

5. Conclusion

To improve teacher leadership, teachers point out that they need supportive school management and an enabling environment, improved cooperation and collaboration between teachers, continuous professional development and leadership opportunities, and positive personal attitudes. However, teachers cannot execute the desired leadership roles because of a lack of knowledge and experience, resource constraints, inadequate management support, disabling organisational structures, and poor working relationship with colleagues. Teacher-leadership programmes improve teacher leadership by equipping them with leadership skills, helping them understand different leadership styles and preparing them for leadership roles. The next chapter discusses these findings, underpinned by findings from literature review.

Acknowledgements

About the Author

Abdulaziz Aldahmashi studied teaching at the School of Education Collage in Kuwait, he has had a 15-year career as a teacher, school deputy head, school principal, he is interested in teachers professional training and leadership. He believes that a leadership plays a key role in successful school. Therefore, he enrolled at the University of Glasgow where he obtained Med in Education (teacher leadership) and currently in the final year in his PhD study (leadership development for school principal.

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