# Collective Leadership among Secondary School Teachers

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**Abstract**
To date the increasing trend in the teaching fraternity is moving towards one where members of an educational institution play a managerial role. The term given to this style of leading is collective leadership and it is given immense importance in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 which states that the system is moving towards having every participating member in a school to have greater share in decision making. This paper studies collective leadership by demography on Malaysian secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur. The results show that there is no significant difference between gender as well as subjects and collective leadership, nonetheless, teachers with higher education and those who taught lower secondary levels had higher efficacy in collective leadership.
**Keywords**: Collective Leadership, Demography, Secondary School, Teachers

**Introduction**
The notion of multiple leaders gives the idea of delegated responsibilities among all members of an educational institution for the benefit of student growth. Whether it is shared leadership, distributed leadership or team leadership, the idea is similar. The key point is the interaction of all members of the institution towards achieving the same goal. To facilitate this idea, collective leadership is espoused to promote group effort in order to achieve the goals set. According to Leithwood and Jantzi (2012) in Leithwood and Louis (2012), collective leadership is the combined effects of all sources of leadership in the contribution made by each of these sources, for example administrators, teachers, students and parents. The ascendancy of collective leadership is revealed through research done by Leithwood and Louis (2012) who suggest that a strong influence exists between teachers and students who engage in learner centered practice with their students. To that effect, the capability of teachers in the classroom and the environment that the students are exposed to, play an important role in the determinant of suppositions set upon them.

There are two core functions for leadership. The first being providing direction and the second is to exercise influence. Leadership is about direction and influence (Leithwood and Louis, 2012). Direction and influence have a complementary relationship that contributes to stability

of the organization. This is the foundation of the organization itself. Both elements provide the stability that necessitates management, which in turn churn out goals, vision, mission and objectives of the organization.

Leadership forms have been studied from the advent of the twentieth century. And over the years, the shift seems to be towards a more horizontal and collective approach to leadership (Freiedrich, Vessey, Schuelke, Ruark & Mumford, 2009; Gronn, 2002). Collective in this sense gives the idea of collaboration and the term "collective" encompasses not only shared leadership but also a variety of similar concepts, which include distributed or rotated leadership (Contractor et. al., 2012). Yammarino, Salas, Serban, Shirreffs and Shuffler (2012) describe the collectivistic phenomena of leadership as involving multiple individuals, participating in and divesting themselves of leadership roles over time as constituted by both formal and informal roles. To adopt Yammarino et. al.'s (2012) definition of collective leadership – it is a dynamic leadership process in which a defined or focal leader, or set of leaders, selectively utilize skills and expertise within a network and across levels of analysis and hierarchical levels, effectively distributing elements of leadership role as the situation or problem at hand requires. Seers, Keller, Wilkinson (2003) and Hiller, Day and Vance (2006) have emphasized the fact that collective leadership is a property of the group rooted in social exchange based roles, where the interaction of team members is by sharing in leadership responsibilities. Mayo et. al. (2003) describe collective leadership as multiple members of the group engaging in contingent reward, charisma, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation behaviours. Leithwood and Mascall (2008) used the term collective leadership to signify the relatively narrow preoccupation with the combined effects of all sources of leadership and the possible differences in the contributions to such effects by administrators, teachers, students and parents. The idea is simply to intensify opportunities to benefit an organization, by including all its members to maximize their capacities, gaining advantage from their strengths to develop the organization as a whole. Hence, the involvement of all stakeholders.

Researches from past studies have revealed the impact of sharing of responsibilities among organizational members and stakeholders. Leithwood and Mascall (2008) noted that collective leadership permits members to capitalize on the range of their individual strengths. Contractor et.al. (2012) related collective leadership to work being organized among teams, knowledge distributed up and down organizational hierarchies as workers become increasingly specialized, global(ized) and digit(ized).

Available literature also indicates that pertinent theories are located in the collective leadership compositions. Friedrich et. al. (2009) prescribed an integrative review of the collective leadership framework, including the individual, team, network and organizational factors that may influence the emergence of collective leadership. This framework established collective leadership to be one that defined a leader or a set of leaders, using skills and expertise within a network as the need arises. It is an overview of the multilevel factors such as individual leader's skills, team cohesion or organizational culture that may influence the emergence of collective leadership. The authors of this idea assert that leader character determines how capable they are in building the network and communication conditions that facilitate the emergence of collective leadership.

The other team that worked on collective leadership would be Pounder, Ogawa and Adams (1995) who examined leadership provided by school administrators, teachers, secretaries and parents. Their work in testing a model regarding the influence of principals, teachers, parents, and secretaries on a number of mediating variables, as well as on a range of school outcomes, provided a useful model from a decade earlier. Leithwood and Mascall (2008) based their findings on this model to calculate the impact of collective leadership on key teacher variables and student achievement.

To date, most studies on collective leadership is focused in the context outside Asia and its development in this region is fairly recent. Rahimah and Ghavifekr (2014) in their research, found that in the current era, leadership is all about vitality, flexibility and innovativeness. In addition, it is regarding collaborative, innovativeness and distributive, sharing of power and authority, enhancing leadership capacity of all stakeholders. This is clearly in line with Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, which encourages teamwork, thus paving the way for collective leadership, which can enhance work effectively. Rabindarang, Khuan and Khoo (2015) in their study emphasized that good relationships among leaders and workers give positive impacts for the organization's effectiveness. Rosnarizah and Hussein (2015) quote Harris (2002) who stated, trends in educational leadership now no longer see the principal shoulder all responsibilities (as) it is more focused on how to create a culture of accountability and learning as well developing school leadership capabilities. This is in support of research carried out by Rosnarizah and Zulkifli (2009), which found the collective leadership, prevailed in high schools in Malaysia. Further, this finding was supported by other researchers in technical and vocational schools (Rabindarang, Khuan and Khoo, 2015) and primary schools (Jamalulail et.al. 2013). Thus, collective leadership creates a collectivistic belief about capability among followers.

The execution of the collectivistic belief in this study utilizes the instrument by Leithwood (2012). It sets out to learn how leadership contributes to efficacy and how it affects teacher motivation for everyday duties and responsibilities. Louis and Wahlstrom in Leithwood and Louis (2012) found that collective leadership emphasizes expanding the sphere of responsibility and creativity to meet pressing school needs. To this effect, the three dimensions of core leadership practices identified through prior research, is utilized in Leithwood's instrument. They are: *setting directions, developing people and redesigning the organization.*

| Core Leadership Practices | Expansion of the Practices | Helpful identified practices |
|---|---|---|
| (i) Setting Diretions | • Building a shared vision | Focusing the teachers on goals for overall sense of purpose |
| | • Fostering the acceptance of group goals | Focusing teachers' attention on goals for teamwork |
| | • Creating high performance expectations | Focusing teachers' attention on expectation for teamwork |
| | • Communicating the direction | Staying current |
| (ii) Developing People | • Providing individualized support and consideration | Keeping track of teachers' needs Providing general support/open door policy Providing backup for teachers for e.g. student discipline with parents |
| | • Offering intellectual stimulation | Giving mentoring opportunities for new teachers |
| | • Modeling appropriate values and practices | |
| (iii) Redesigning the Organization | • Building collaborative cultures | |
| | • Modifying organizational structures to nurture collaboration | Creating structures and opportunities for teachers to collaborate |
| | • Building productive relations with families and communities | |
| | • Connecting the school to the wider community | |

(Source: Leithwood and Louis, 2012, p.65)

Collective leadership sets the stage for leadership to be practiced in a collaborated form. It is an opportunity to create an atmosphere where stakeholders work together with the leader to achieve collaborative intents (Wepner & Hopkins, 2011). In this study, the core leadership practices that are setting directions, developing people and redesigning the organization, comprise from three to five specific constructs. This instrument assumes that leadership is distributed within schools without identifying who is enacting such leadership. It then asks the teacher to think about all sources of leadership and identify the extent to which those people as a whole enact each of the practices.

**Objectives of this Study**
The objectives of this research are as follows,
1. To determine the level of collective leadership practices among secondary school teachers.
2. To compare the collective leadership practices between male and female teachers.
3. To compare the collective leadership practices based on subjects taught.
4. To compare the collective leadership practices based on education level.
5. To identify the association between level of collective leadership with selected demographic variables.

## Methodology and Data Analysis

This study utilizes the survey method. The target population for this study is secondary government school teachers while the accessible population would be secondary school teachers in chosen locations, by zone, in Kuala Lumpur. A total of 160 secondary school teachers participated in this study. To determine the population for this study, several past studies were referred to. In the study of Kuala Lumpur teachers carried out by Iyer (2008), collegiality and cooperation were the third and fourth choices reflected in the perception of teamwork as a reflection of efficacy in effective schools. This study and a few others more, stirred an interest to study the relationship between sources of efficacy in leadership within Kuala Lumpur schools, and additionally, the consideration of accessibility, economic factors and determination of sufficient respondent availability; pointed to the selection of population for this study to be teachers in Kuala Lumpur. Since the population of teachers for this study is spread across Kuala Lumpur, a random cluster sampling method was used to select the samples for this particular study. This study was carried out among 10 government secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur. The schools selected were spread across three zones, namely Bangsar/Pudu, Keramat and Sentul.

The instrument used in this survey was adapted from Leithwood (2012). The constructs were translated to Bahasa Melayu for better understanding of the subjects and were measured using the 5-point Likert scale. There were 6 items for the collective leadership survey and 8 items for the sources of efficacy survey, both using scales ranging from (1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Moderately Disagree (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree.  The following section synthesizes the findings of this study.

## Research Finding

The research findings were based on five formulated research objectives. The level of collective leadership practices among secondary school teachers can be determined by examining the frequency and mean value which is also known as descriptive analysis. The next three objectives which involve comparison were tested with parametric tools such T-test for comparing the gender and ANOVA for comparing the subjects taught and education level. Finally, cross tabulations were carried out with nominal variables, thus the chi-square test was performed (Pallant, 2013).

## Background of Respondents

Table 1 charts a total of 160 respondents who were involved in this study. The analysis was categorized into gender, designation, subject, education and level of experience. From the total of 160 respondents, there were 85 female respondents 53.1% and 75 male respondents 46.9%. Female respondents superseded male responded by quite a close margin of 6.2%. In the category of designation, it was found that 107 respondents or 66.9% were teaching the lower secondary forms while 53 respondents or 33.1% were teaching the upper secondary forms. Regardless of whether the respondents were teaching the lower or upper secondary, their education background comprised of 12 who were diploma holders (7.5%), the majority who were degree holders with a number charting 141 (88.1%) and 7 respondents who were Masters holders (4.4%). A total of 70 respondents were teaching the Science/Mathematics subjects (43.8%), 44 respondents were teaching the language subjects (27.5%) and 46 respondents were teaching the social science subjects (28.7%).

Table 1 Demography

| Demographic Factors | | No | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Male | 75 | 46.9 |
| | Female | 85 | 53.1 |
| | *TOTAL* | 160 | 100.0 |
| **Designation** | Lower secondary | 107 | 66.9 |
| | Upper secondary | 53 | 33.1 |
| | *TOTAL* | 160 | 100.0 |
| **Subject** | Science/Mathematics | 70 | 43.8 |
| | Language | 44 | 27.5 |
| | Social Science | 46 | 28.7 |
| | *TOTAL* | 160 | 100.0 |
| **Education** | Diploma | 12 | 7.5 |
| | Degree | 141 | 88.1 |
| | Masters | 7 | 4.4 |
| | *TOTAL* | 160 | 100.0 |
| **Level of Experience** | 1-10 years | 110 | 68.8 |
| | 11-20 years | 38 | 23.8 |
| | 21-30 years | 12 | 7.5 |
| | *TOTAL* | 160 | 100.0 |

**Collective Leadership among Secondary School Teachers in Kuala Lumpur**

Table 2
*Collective Leadership*

| | ITEM | MEAN | Standard Deviation | SD | D | MD | A | SA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I take the time to clarify the reasons for my school's improvement initiatives. | 3.88 | .58 | - | 2 1.3% | 32 20.0% | 110 68.8% | 16 10.0% |
| 2 | I provide useful assistance to colleagues in setting goals for teaching and learning. | 3.84 | .54 | - | 3 1.9% | 29 18.1% | 118 73.8% | 10 6.3% |
| 3 | I demonstrate high expectations for my work with students. | 3.99 | .59 | - | 2 1.3% | 23 14.4% | 110 68.8% | 25 15.6% |
| 4 | I create an atmosphere of caring and trust for my peers. | 3.90 | .61 | - | 4 2.5% | 26 16.3% | 112 70.0% | 18 11.3% |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | I share the responsibility to promote leadership development. | 3.85 | .62 | 2 1.3% | 1 0.6% | 29 18.1% | 115 71.9% | 13 8.1% |
| 6 | I encourage collaborative work among staff. | 4.20 | .54 | - | - | 11 6.9% | 107 66.9% | 42 26.3% |
| | OVERALL | M = 3.94, (SD = 0.397) | | | | | | |

KEY: Strongly Disagree (SD) Disagree (D) Moderately Disagree (MD) Agree (A) Strongly Agree (SA)

In this section, collective leadership is measured based on the dimensions of setting directions, developing other people and redesigning the organization (Leithwood, 2012). All items in this section are positively constructed. The overall mean for collective leadership reads 3.94 with a standard deviation of 0.397. This reflects that collective leadership is very resonant among secondary school teachers in Kuala Lumpur. Item 6 records the highest mean (M=4.20, SD= .54) which reflects that teachers are very happy to work collaboratively with their colleagues. The majority of respondents (107) agree with this statement at 66.9%, strongly agree (42) at 26.3% and only 11 seem unsure with slight disagreement at 6.9%. None of the respondents strongly disagree or disagree with the statement.

The next item with a relatively high mean is item 3 with 110 respondents agreeing (68.8%), 25 respondents strongly agreeing (15.6%) and mean of 3.99 while standard deviation is .59. The item is about demonstrating high expectations pertaining work with students of which it is obvious that teachers do agree with. This shows that teachers expend effort in their duties, of which they expect positive results. Working collectively would only enhance the expectations further and make it easier for teachers to work, especially with the right support from people around them. This corroborates with the results of item 4 of which the mean reading comes closely after at 3.90 and standard deviation .61. For this item, a total of 112 respondents agreed (70.0%) and 18 strongly agreed (11.3%). It can be deduced that to expect high expectations from work with students, teachers need the atmosphere of caring and trust with their peers to work with passion and confidence.

Item 1 where teachers take time to clarify reasons for their school's improvement initiatives (M=3.88, SD=.58) shows that teachers do take part in school reform and take responsibility for the betterment of the institution. 110 respondents agreed with this item (68.8%) and 16 strongly agreed (10.0%). Teachers also similarly take responsibility for promoting leadership development (M=3.85, SD=.62) with 115 agreeing (71.9%) and 13 strongly agreeing (8.1%). This is a clear reflection that teamwork is important in leadership as the respondents do not lose sight of the matter at hand and take effort in school improvement through leadership development. Item 2 where teachers provide useful assistance to colleagues in setting goals for teaching and learning (M=3.84, SD=.54) is reflective of respondents need to give help to those around them, reiterating the need for collective leadership. This item had the highest number of respondents agreeing with a total of 118 (73.8%) and strongly agreeing at 6.3% (10 respondents). It can be concluded that the level of collective leadership among secondary school teachers in Kuala Lumpur is high.

Table 3
*Independent Samples t-test for Collective Leadership Based on Gender*

| GROUP | N | MEAN | SD | t  VALUE | SIG. |
|-------|-----|------|-----|---------|------|
| MALE | 75 | 3.92 | .45 | | |
| | | | | -.713 | .477 |
| FEMALE | 85 | 3.96 | .35 | | |

*Gender Differences in Collective Leadership between the Respondents*
The independent samples t-test was conducted to compare collective leadership between male and female teachers in secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur. There was no significant difference in collective leadership among male (M=3.92, SD=.45) and female (M=3.96, SD=.35; t (158) = -.713, p= .477 > .05)

**Difference in Collective Leadership among the Subjects taught by Teachers**
The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine the difference in collective leadership based on language, science/mathematics and social science teachers in secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur. There is no significant difference between the language, science/mathematics and social science teachers [F (2,159) = 1.941, p = .147 > .05].

Table 4
*ANOVA test for Collective Leadership among teachers (subject)*

| | SUM OF SQUARES | DEGREE OF FREEDOM | MEAN SQUARE | F | SIG. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BETWEEN GROUPS | .500 | 2 | .250 | 1.941 | .147 |
| WITHIN GROUPS | 20.223 | 157 | .129 | | |
| TOTAL | 20.723 | 159 | | | |

**Difference in Collective Leadership among the Education Levels**
The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine the difference in collective leadership based on their educational backgrounds, if they had a diploma, degree or masters qualification. It was discovered that there is a significant difference between those who had a diploma, degree or masters [F (2,159) = 4.862, p = .009 < .05].

The teachers with degree qualification (M=3.83, SD=.35) has a significant difference with teachers with masters qualification (M=4.21, SD=.41), revealing that teachers with masters qualification had higher leadership levels than teachers with degree qualification.

Table 5

*ANOVA test for Collective Leadership of Teacher Education Background*

|  | SUM OF SQUARES | DEGREE OF FREEDOM | MEAN SQUARE | F | SIG. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BETWEEN GROUPS | 1.209 | 2 | .604 | 4.862 | .009 |
| WITHIN GROUPS | 19.514 | 157 | .124 |  |  |
| TOTAL | 20.723 | 159 |  |  |  |

Table 6

*Mean reading for ANOVA test on collective leadership of teacher education background*

|  | N | MEAN | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| DIPLOMA | 12 | 3.99 | .28 |
| DEGREE | 141 | 3.83 | .35 |
| MASTERS | 7 | 4.21 | .41 |
| TOTAL | 160 | 3.86 | .36 |

**Association between Level of Collective Leadership and Designation**

The chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the association between all nominal variables in this study. However, only designation variable associated with collective leadership displayed significance. The relation between these variables was significant, $X^2$ (2, N = 160) = 12.267, p=0.000).

This shows that teachers at the lower secondary level displayed higher level of leadership with as many as 69 at the level of high whereas teachers at the upper secondary level charted 48 at the level of high. In terms of overall percentage, it translates to 43% of lower secondary school teachers displayed higher level of collective leadership compared to 30% of the upper secondary school teachers.

Table 7

*Reading for Chi-square test on Collective Leadership and Teacher Designation*

|  | Level of Collective Leadership | | Chi-Square value | p- value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Moderate | High |  |  |
| LOWER SECONDARY | 38 | 69 | 12.267 | 0.000 |
| UPPER SECONDARY | 5 | 48 |  |  |
| TOTAL | 43 | 117 |  |  |

## Discussion

Collective leadership in this study was based on Leithwood's (2012) components of the leader's repertoire. This involves the categories of leadership practices namely setting direction, developing people and redesigning the organization. This study confirms that collective leadership is resonant among secondary school teachers in Kuala Lumpur, which indicates that these teachers do create high performance expectations, provide support and consideration to one another and build collaborative cultures within their work domain. With the cultivation of these elements within the work environment, teachers are able to display a higher level of confidence in their leadership capability as they feel valued in their work and are professionally satisfied. This finding is further reciprocated by Walumba et.al. (2004) who found a positive effect of interaction between leadership and confidence, which can greatly contribute to employee productivity.

An interesting finding in this study supports the notion that gender equality is somewhat present in educational institutions. Collective leadership holds ground on the conviction that mutual understanding between participating members facilitates a constant, fluid and smooth transference of leadership between group members and is likely to have greater need of communal roles than traditional forms of leadership (Mendez & Busenbark, 2015). In many areas of society, men have long dominated leadership positions and women have been stereotyped as the dependent, submissive and conforming one (Chhabra & Yuvika, 2014). Hence women have been seen as lacking in leadership qualities. However, in this study, there was no significant difference in collective leadership among secondary school teachers in Kuala Lumpur, based on gender. Both male and female teachers possess high level of collective leadership. This was mainly because the research is set based on collective leadership, which emphasized on delegating responsibilities among all members in an institution and all members should contribute in leading an institution. This clearly infers that collective leadership can be practiced irrespective of gender. It also seems likely that as more women assume leadership roles and as sex role stereotypes fade away, the very notion of gender differences in leadership style where men should take control and women should follow orders will also disappear (Chhabra & Yuvika, 2014). Evidently, majority of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that they help their colleagues in the decision-making process and share responsibilities to promote leadership development.

Teachers with higher education have a higher level of leadership as seen in this study which supports past research that discovered, teachers with higher education, typically reflect on their experiences more adaptively, plan and organize more effectively and are more resilient when faced by obstacles (Tschannen-Moran et.al., 1998, Woolfolk Hoy & Davies, 2006). Key leader traits include drive, motivation, integrity and self-confidence (Kirkpatick & Locke, 1991), all of which are displayed by teachers with higher leadership. Past studies have found that academic qualification does have a relationship with confidence (Moore & Esselman (1992) and Milson (2001). The study by Moore & Esselman (1992) discovered that academic qualification is a significant variable for teachers' confidence. The study by Milson (2001) concluded that academic qualification is a factor that affects confidence.

Teachers who teach the lower secondary were also found to have higher leadership levels in this study which mirrors past research by Louis, Marks & Kruse (1996) who found that primary school environments are easier to handle, hence primary school teachers develop better and

higher confidence and lead superior. Students in the lower secondary level are just coming out of primary school and are adjusting to new routines and an alternative lifestyle from their previous schools, which can make them vulnerable. Teachers handling lower secondary students have higher leadership, as these students would adhere to every rule and instruction as they did in their primary schools and are uncertain as they adjust themselves to their new educational environment. Battistich, Schaps & Wilson (2004) found that there was a need to have intervention programmes in elementary school to enhance students' 'connectedness' as they enter new educational environments.

Another way of looking the reason for teachers at the lower secondary level having higher leadership levels is the fact that students at the higher secondary level are encouraged to practice leadership skills. In this respect, teachers are encouraged to take a step back to allow for these more mature students to helm duties and responsibilities of the school to give them a platform to practice and expand their abilities and capabilities. A case study in Finland found that at upper secondary schools, the distributed leadership also encompassed students where they have a greater autonomy to learn to be responsible themselves. Leadership, these confident yet quietly spoken students said - was "shared"; they "always cooperate," "can be relaxed and calm," find the principal "easy to talk to" and regard some teachers "like friends" in a community where there is "always someone who can help you" (Hargreaves, Halász and Pont, 2007). This points to the encouragement to students to assume charge in various duties and responsibilities that encourage the onset of leadership.

Leadership is practiced daily in school as teachers are tasked with multidimensional duties. Without collaborative effort, there is an increase in the challenge faced by teachers. Collective leadership serves to utilize every teacher's expertise and specialty to promote the essential ingredients for successful leadership. The dimension of setting directions charts a clear course that all teachers understand, establishing expectations and tracking progress and performance. The dimension for developing people provides teachers and the others in the system with the necessary support and training to succeed. As a result, with shared responsibilities, everyone is encouraged to support and motivate one another for the benefit of the institution.

This study is also hoped to cultivate awareness and intensify the involvement of Principal and teachers in the management of the educational institution. The District Education Office, Department of Education, Institut Aminuddin Baki, Institute of Malaysian Teachers Education and other relevant organizations should take heed to provide awareness and knowledge of the importance to build teachers' esteem to school administrators and teachers alike.

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