

Teacher Leadership and Its Relationship with Students' Academic Achievement

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the teacher leadership practices of Under-enrolled Primary School teachers and its influence on students' academic achievement. The level of leadership practices are observed through teachers' degree of knowledge, values and skills. A total of 103 respondents participated in this study and a set of questionnaire was used as the instrument. The data are analysed by using descriptive statistics analyses and Pearson correlation test was used to detect the relationship between teacher leadership and the students' academic achievement. The results showed that the level of teachers' leadership practice is relatively high while the level of academic achievement of the students is relatively moderate. The findings showed that teacher leadership factor is significantly related to students' academic achievement. As the implication, of the study shows that schools with teacher leadership manage to increase the students' academic achievement.

Keywords: Teacher Leadership, Academic Achievement, Under-enrolled Schools

Teacher's Role as Leader

Hallinger and Murphy (2005) stated that teacher leadership is often associated with the school's performance. Teacher leadership practice is essential to mobilize the students' commitment in order to achieve excellent results in examinations and also adopting noble values. This statement is in line with Abd. Ghafur Mahmud's message which says, *"the absolute critical success factors to realise the national transformation agenda is the brilliant human capital in education machinery, namely education managers and teachers whose intellect, commitment and professional ethos are focussed on delivering educational services, the quality teaching and learning for students outcomes that meet the description of the National Education Philosophy"* (Ministry of Education (MOE), 2012: x).

According to Katzenmeyer & Moller (2009), three types of leadership skills that are needed by the teachers are; i) teachers with leadership must have high knowledge and interpersonal ability; ii) teachers with leadership must be wise in influencing their students and colleagues and also can serve as mentors, facilitators, curriculum specialists as well as making innovations in teaching and learning groups; iii) teachers with leadership will have a high self-value. Teachers with these leadership qualities will not wait for the instructions but will act to achieve the goals by themselves. The teachers with leadership also must have good interaction values in social relationships by always taking part in the duties of school operations.

Thus, based on the above description we may define teacher leadership as the skill to positively influence students' behaviour and also a process to help increase schools' performance. This is consistent with the Cabinet Committee Report 1979 which suggested that the school's leadership need to pay attention to the existence of favorable environment; and teachers are individuals that show exemplary behaviour in the school. *"It is recommended that the teachers should set a good example so that the students can always emulate them. Headmasters must play their parts to improve the attitudes of the teachers who are less contributing towards the formation of a good educational environment in the schools"* (Ministry of Education, 1979: 236-237).

Educational Development Plan 2006, has designed and implemented various continuous efforts to produce quality teachers in the education system (MOE, 2006). Therefore, in the context of school as an organization of service and student learning, teachers are seen to play the main function in boosting the quality of educational excellence. According to Smith (2012), changes are needed if education is to meet the changing and rapid needs of today's society. Hence; teachers are responsible and need to function as agents of change from ordinary teachers to instructional and learning designers, or in other words as leaders to improve student achievement.

Teachers and school leaders are prime movers in schools. As drivers of change they must understand why they need to change. To experience change; teachers need to have moral purpose, which is associated with the final goals (ends) and as well as ways (means) (Fullan, 2001). According to Fullan (2001), *"In education an important end is to make a difference in the lives of student". But the means of getting to that end are also crucial"*. This means, teachers

need to implement changes with the aim that the changes will give positive impact on students' life.

Mohamad and Hassan (2008) stated that leaders are also said to be the person who initiates changes, new culture and new values. Teacher leadership refers to the individual who is capable in stimulating other people to achieve the best level of excellence. Teacher leadership will determine the direction and goals that must be achieved by students whom are led by them. Teacher leadership is an essential component for ensuring excellence in school because the teachers have direct influence on school attendees and on the effectiveness of teaching and learning (Leithwood, 2002).

In the legal context, teachers are seen as '*loco parentis*' to the students by carrying a great responsibility to educate and exhibit good behaviours to them (Othman, 2008). Southworth (2002) stated that teachers as instructional leaders are much related to teaching and learning as well as students' development that aims to maintain and encourage the students to learn. The biggest challenge of the teachers as instructional leaders is to ensure the quality of students' academic achievement is up to the standard which is set equal to other foreign countries at the international level (MOE, 2013).

Teacher Leadership and Academic Achievement

At present, the quality of school achievement is often questioned by the people who seem to have lack of confidence in school authority. This is because the teaching process is given too much focus on the examination and less guidance for the students. The situation shows that teachers are currently not capable of being a credible and quality leader (Samad & Jamaluddin, 2005). The Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM) describes the country in TIMMS and PISA assessments, in the position of at least 100 points below regional countries such as Singapore, Japan, Korea and Hong Kong in all three dimensions. This achievement shows as if a 15-year-old student in Malaysia dropped out almost three years of schooling compared to the peers in the other four regional countries (MOE, 2013). This shows the performance of pupils in Malaysia is dropping and is lagged behind in international competitions. Therefore, frontline leaders and teachers in schools should play a more effective role in ensuring that students reach a high level internationally as expressed in PPPM (MOE, 2013).

The academic achievement of students is a measure of excellence for a school and is the goal of all school leaders and teachers (Silva, White & Yoshida, 2011). Excellent students will be in competitive workforce in the mission to achieve the nation's vision and will be an outcome to school effectiveness (Stronge et al., 2011). School leadership is identified as an important factor in determining school's success (Mahmood, 2008).

In Malaysia, primary academic achievement is measured from the School Average Grade (GPS) in the UPSR examination while school rankings is given through Operational School Ratings (SKPM) which refers to the scale set out in the ratings by Inspectorate and Quality Division (JNJK), Ministry of Education. School performance is classified by the ratings in the SKPM system according to the Schools' Band groups throughout Malaysia (MOE, 2011a).

Realizing this situation, a continuous effort should be undertaken by the leaders of the frontline as well as the leaders at the implementation stage so that teacher leadership could find the source of weaknesses in order to trigger students' performance and also to find effective measures to solve this problem. Information from the review of the education system has found two key elements that need to be taken seriously by the academicians; the effectiveness of the school leaders and the quality of teachers' teaching and learning (MOE, 2013). Thus, in parallel with the development of leadership issues in education, there have been numerous studies conducted on principals' leadership but very little research has been done on the leadership of teachers in schools. Therefore, the researcher considers that the study of teacher leadership is crucial in resolving the problems relating to deterioration of student performance and its relationship with the weak teacher leadership in the school organization.

In performing routine teaching and learning activities at school, it is a fact that a regular teacher is functioning as a teaching leader to the students. Academicians and scholars claim that this situation creates the relevance of teacher leadership studies as one of the transformational efforts and a culture of educators in the school. (MOE, 2013). In relating to this, the researcher wishes to investigate the subject matter in detail, specifically focusing on the level of leadership behavioural practices adopted by teachers in carrying out their duties at the school and their impact on academic achievement.

Teacher leadership demonstrates the ability to influence others, especially other teachers to achieve the school goals. Yahya, Mohamad and Abdullah (2007) presented leadership as; "...an interpersonal influence exercised in a situation and directed through the communication process in pursuing specific goals or objectives". Teacher leadership can also be defined as the influence, teachers' dynamics and all the activities that are designed to move the organisation so that all the people who were led will be motivated and high spirited to achieve the common goals that have been set (Abdullah, Abd. Aziz & Ahmad, 2008).

Teacher leadership is usually exhibited during the teaching and learning process that occurs in the classroom. Teaching and learning means everything which is related to teaching and learning techniques such as curriculum, system and teacher aspects. Learning on the other hand means a response to stimuli that will lead to a change. Learning is assumed to have taken place when achieving the level from do not know to know in the aspects of teaching methods, classroom management, learning activities, lesson planning and discipline control by the teachers. Therefore, teacher leadership is teacher's professionalism characteristics while in the classroom, with the mission to produce and improve the students' learning outcomes effectively (Murphy, 2005; Gabriel, 2005).

Teacher leaders should have pedagogical knowledge and be able to help students to understand the main idea of a subject, and have deep knowledge of the subject matter (Grossman & Schoenfeld (2005) Teachers need to transform their knowledge to other forms of knowledge for teaching purposes (MOE, 2011b). Teachers need to be proficient in teaching, mastering pedagogical knowledge, and mastering the content of the lesson to be delivered to students. The knowledge of a teacher includes the achievement, creation, storage, distribution and application of knowledge into living practices. Whereas teacher skills are defined as professional skills of a teacher with expertise and expertise in the field (Marzuki &

Ahmad, 2010). In addition, teachers are able to manage the classroom, use computer efficiently, communicate with all stakeholders effectively and actively involved in co-curriculum to develop students' self-identity (MOE, 2012). In terms of values, the teacher is bound by Ethics and Teacher's Teaching Profession where teachers should performs tasks on a timely basis, sincere in working, hiring colleagues and students, diligent and skilled (MOE, 2012).

Teacher leadership is the teachers' activities to improve teaching and learning practices in order to improve students' achievement. This activity can be conducted by the teachers individually or collectively to influence fellow teachers, school administrators and the community for the purpose to improve schools' achievement. Leadership is important factor as it is capable to differentiate between successful and unsuccessful schools (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Traversi, 2007; Singh & Esa, 2008).

The Ministry of Education Malaysia (2012) outlines leadership as a general competence of teachers covering knowledge, skills, personal characteristics, leadership and communication in their services and specialized competencies covering knowledge, skills, and personal characteristics related to the duties of officers. Teachers' competencies can be improved if teachers have interpersonal and intrapersonal skills as well as effective teacher leadership skill, in which the combination of all will have a positive impact on student academic achievement (Marzuki, 2002).

The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between teacher leadership and the academic achievement of the students. The academic achievement is measured using Average Grade of the Subjects. These findings are also expected to be used by the leaders of the learning organizations in order to review and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of teacher leadership are practiced. This study is also important as a source of reference in effective leadership style practice and concentration focused on teaching and learning rather than much on other tasks.

Methodology

In this study the respondents were comprised of 103 teachers and they were randomly selected from 11 under-enrolled school (schools with total enrolment less than 150 students). Out of total, 64 (62.1%) female teachers and 39 (37.9%) male teachers. A set of questionnaire which was set up based on Teacher Leadership instrument from Sultan Idris Education University (Yusof, et al., 2014) was used in order to collect data from the respondents. This study chose Average Grade of the Subjects to determine the students' academic performances which were evaluated based on the composite score points by the students. The observed reliability score is relatively high (0.927) and the data were analysed using descriptive statistics and correlation.

The Findings

Teacher Leadership

Table 1 shows the findings of the teacher leadership analysis in the dimensions of knowledge, skill and value. The overall mean score value for the teacher leadership practises is relatively high (M=3.83, SD=0.610). The dimension with the highest mean score is the teachers' value

(M=3.95, SD=0.570), followed by the dimension of skills (M=3.79, SD=0.620) and the dimension of teachers' knowledge (M=3.75, SD=0.650).

The detail findings of the teacher leadership practises are reported in Table 1. Focusing on the knowledge dimension, it is clearly understood that there are still teachers who are less knowledgeable in being a consultant, serves as a mentor and coach on current educational policies and programmes as well as having knowledge in goal planning and implementation of educational programmes. The teachers are also not capable to the optimum in leading the workshops, working groups, instructional leadership and management. In terms of skills, the teachers' skill on applying the curriculum management, entrepreneurial skills, skills to be a role model, make decisions and provide expertise appears to be relatively low. In terms of values, the teachers are willing to take risk, face challenges, pursuing lifelong learning and to motivate students and teachers to strive success.

Table 1
Knowledge, Skills and Leadership Values of Teachers

Teacher Leadership	Mean Scores	Standard Deviation
Teachers' Knowledge	3.75	0.650
Have knowledge on the subject and teaching.	3.49	0.790
Involved in assessing the development of the organisation.	3.47	0.790
Play the role of mentor and coach for best practices.	3.54	0.751
Have knowledge on current educational policies and programmes.	3.50	0.640
Have knowledge on objectives of a policy related to the planning and implementation of the educational programmes.	3.60	0.632
Have knowledge to lead group works	3.65	0.750
Expert in instructional and management.	3.42	0.665
Teachers' Skill	3.79	0.620
Able to apply a variety of curriculum management skills.	3.63	0.700
Able to practice appropriate entrepreneurial skills in educational context.	3.53	0.725
Able to demonstrate exemplary practices related to "organisational changes and innovations."	3.57	0.736
Able to participate in decision making	3.56	0.667
Strive to provide expert services needed by the schools	3.53	0.654
Teachers' Value	3.95	0.570
Willing to take risk.	3.80	0.662
Ready to face challenges	3.90	0.634
Pursue lifelong learning	3.90	0.569
Willing to motivate students and teachers to strive success	3.95	0.549

The Relationship between Teacher Leadership and Academic Achievement

The level of students' academic achievement in the under-enrolled schools is relatively moderate ($M=3.16$, $SD=1.410$). These scores give an indication that the students' academic achievement needs to be further improved.

Based on the results displayed in Table 2, the overall findings provide indication that there was a weak but significant correlation relationship between teacher leadership and the students' academic achievement ($r= 0.163$, $p<0.05$).

Table 2

The Relationship between Teacher Leadership and Students' Academic Achievement

Relationship	Students' Academic Achievement	
	r	Sig.
Knowledge	0.193	0.025
Skill	0.102	0.035
Value	0.131	0.030
Teacher Leadership	0.163	0.050

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings showed that teacher leadership is an element that has a relationship with students' academic achievement. Although the findings do not show a strong correlation, the practice of teacher leadership is still relevant to be given a due attention as the findings also give a reaffirmation on the importance of teacher leadership factor in improving student academic achievement in schools (Berry, Daughtrey & Wieder 2010; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Foster, 2004). The findings also provide a support to Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) who claimed teacher leadership has three dimensions namely knowledge, skills and values. Each dimension analysed in this study is considered as important in making a teacher as a leader in school. The leading role in school has now shifted towards a positive change and does not focused on the leadership of the school only.

Other than that, teacher leadership practices are widely exposed to teachers through serious effort by the education ministry in generating leadership policies as stated in the Malaysian Education Development Plan (MOE, 2013). This plan has firmly stated that the leadership in schools will be extended to the teachers who hold leadership positions in the school. This means, instead of headmasters, school leadership is also contributed by the assistant teachers or ordinary teachers (Gunter, 2011). The teachers today are responsible and act as agents of change from the usual teachers to the leaders in order to improve students' academic achievement (Smith, 2012). The teachers also play role as leaders in order to encourage the students to emphasize on academics as their primary focus is to be successful (Othman, 2008).

To be successful, a teacher should put continuous effort to gain knowledge based on the current developments and demands. Through this way, the students' excellence will be assured and the teachers can also improve the schools' performance. The knowledge gained will improve teachers' ability in becoming instructional leaders (Hallinger & Murphy, 2005). The findings of this study provide evidence that the dimension of skills is a key factor in determining the level of teacher leadership. This finding also reaffirmed Barth (2001) who

stated that teaching skill is the important dimension in teacher leadership; in which the higher the teaching skill, teachers' leadership capacity also shows further improvement. According to Norashikin et al. (2015), through the dimensions of teaching skills, teachers can ensure the students' success and promote a positive learning environment in the classroom. Under this environment, teachers are also more approachable and willing to share their knowledge with their students and teachers.

In terms of value, the findings of this study also supported the findings of Abu Bakar et al. (2015). Teacher leadership value is important in order to ensure the teachers to review their weaknesses and continue to strive to increase their capacity in the aspects of personality and behaviour. The characteristics of a teacher with good manners are also included in the teacher leadership practices (Marzuki, 2010). As a leader, the teacher should also show good personality because the teachers are always considered as role model by the students. This finding is also consistent with a study conducted by Noor Azam (2012 in Abu Bakar et al., 2015) on teacher leadership that affecting students' attitude.

The high mean scores observed in all three dimensions (knowledge, skill, value) provide indication the level of teacher leadership practice in schools is relatively high. These findings also provide a confirmation to the study by Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009). The results for the correlation analysis provide indication that there was a weak, but positive and significant correlation relationship between teacher leadership and the students' academic achievement. This information reveals, when teacher leadership improved, students' academic achievement will also improve. The results obtained in the correlation analyses appear to be consistent with the findings of Berry, Daughtrey and Wieder (2010). Berry et al. claimed, the support from the colleagues whom are more experienced encouraged the less experienced teachers to produce the students who excel in academic. Similarly, the study of Foster (2004) showed that teacher leadership contribute to school success, especially towards the students' academic achievement. In line to these studies; Stronge, Ward & Grant (2011) and Musa & Abd Halim (2015) made assertions that, an effective teacher is the teacher who has the knowledge, expertise in the subject that they teach and also high interpersonal values

The development and innovation in education demanding changes among teachers and school leaders. There are a range of policies related to academic and extracurricular of the education system which is constantly changed and modified according to the national needs and demands of the society. The willingness of teachers to become the agents of change is very crucial in the education system in the effort to strengthen the existing leadership level and thus making the organization more improved and effective. Hence, it is not surprising that today the practice of teacher leadership become an important issue in nation's education arena. Therefore, these findings fulfil the theories, methods and ways of practicing teacher leadership in schools

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