

Distributed leadership among teachers education essay



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Distributed leadership stretches and shares the leadership practice to form collection leadership so that those not in formal authoritative position such as classroom teachers could be valued and have a voice in leadership. It disassociates from the vertical, bureaucratic and organizational hierarchy to enable collaboration and wide spread sharing of information and power to sustain improvement in teaching and learning. Distributed leadership is effective as it is an open and democratic model of principle equipped with both vertical and lateral communication. This leadership is associated with concepts such as empowerment, teamwork, capacity building, teacher leadership and professional development. The theoretical framework of distributed leadership is Theory Y as the leadership considers diverse contribution to the process of subtleties of leadership to shape collective action instead of the traditional vertical leadership process which separates leaders from followers as mutually exclusive categories. The purpose of this research proposal is to explore the perceptions of head teachers, teachers and students about distributed leadership, how it is practiced in schools and the perceived effects on teaching and learning in three high performing urban secondary schools in Klang Valley. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are proposed in this study as semi-structured interviews with four head teachers to capture their perceptions on distributed leadership and what it means to them, while questionnaires to be administered on teachers and students to investigate on the level of distributed leadership practiced by head teachers and its effects on teaching and learning.

Keywords: Distributed leadership, collaboration, empowerment, teamwork, and capacity building.

Introduction

Distributed leadership, I believe, presents a powerful concept of leadership in the educational arena of 21st century as it enables a collaborative and sharing approach among teachers and students and treats every person as a leader at the entry level, rather than leadership understood individually. It acknowledges various stakeholders and provides them with a voice about their situations to positively impact the teaching and learning outcome (Flowers, 2007).

According to Leithwood and Mascall (2008), meaningfully leading schools requires collective leadership and interactions of people and their situation, and not centred on a single formal leader, so that they can specify and perform the tasks involved in leadership by identifying, acquiring, allocating, coordinating, and use the social, material and cultural resources necessary to establish the conducive conditions for teaching and learning in order to be powerful enough to have significant effect on students.

This active and purposeful involvement of multiple individuals in school leadership enhances instructional innovations as distributed leadership considers teachers and students as partners in school leadership, rather than as followers to engage them as collaborative leaders with their colleagues to learn from one another and empowering others to lead, participation in shared decision-making, and development of a shared vision for their school (Sheppard and Brown, 2009). A widely distributed school leadership at all levels and the greater partnerships are important as it enables sharing of ideas and insights and therefore has great influence on the school and student outcomes (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007). Distributed leadership <https://assignbuster.com/distributed-leadership-among-teachers-education-essay/>

enhances student outcome as it creates a culture for learning by promoting instructional leadership, leadership for learning, team work, capacity building, collective interaction and good communication among leaders, followers and their situations thus, creating trust and accountability among them.

It is against this backdrop that this study proposes to explore the perceptions of head teachers, teachers and students of selected high performing schools in Klang Valley about distributed leadership and its effects on teaching and learning. These perceptions are essential to gain a deeper understanding of distributed leadership and its impact on teaching and learning and to yield lessons regarding the ways high performing schools can effectively lead and operate with their workforce of headteachers and teachers.

Background of the study

There is growing empirical evidence that distributed leadership causes a positive difference to student outcome as it has greater density of instructional leadership (Harris & Spillane, 2008). This leadership identifies, develops and utilizes the pedagogical expertise and talent of teachers so that they are knowledgeable and responsible of the educational outcomes to positively impact the teaching and learning (Robinson, 2008).

According to Chan and Sidhu (2009), excellent principals in Malaysia had deliberately chosen distributed leadership to move the school forward by empowering others to lead so that there is collaborative, cooperative, participative, democratic teacher leadership throughout the school.

Distributed leadership which engages teachers as leaders with wider distribution of tasks rather than hierarchical distributions enables shared vision based on trust and a collective endeavour within the school which builds a broad capacity base is fast replacing the charismatic hero or the heroic leader in school leadership. Thus, the decision making processes are widely shared and school development becomes the responsibility of team of teachers to enhance student achievement rather than the senior management group.

Although distributed leadership involves various stakeholders including principals, local education authorities, parents and community, the researcher proposes to explore the perceptions from those directly involved, that is, the headteachers, teachers and students who are the participants in this study, in moving forward the teaching and learning agenda by investigating their perceptions of the term distributed leadership, how it is practiced and what they perceive as its effect on teaching and learning as it is not possible to conduct a study that incorporates the perceptions of all the stakeholders within the scope of this study at this time.

The study would involve three urban, high performing secondary schools in Klang Valley. The first school is a large secondary school with an enrolment of 1, 200 students and 105 teachers and 5 head teachers. The second school also has an enrolment of 1, 100 and the third school with an enrolment of 1, 090 pupils. Pupils in these schools come from the wider community and are often sent by private vehicles. The students have no learning difficulties as they are the excellent students.

Problem Statement

There is a growing recognition of the need to study distributed leadership in the field of education especially in high performing schools as there has been powerful effects on student outcomes and there has been growing dissatisfaction with the traditional vertical leader-centred leadership (Caskey, 2010). Leadership vested in one position has become obsolete as it is not the single and heroic individualistic leader who makes an organisation function but leadership should be broadly distributed throughout the school to take into consideration of the competences of its members. According to Richard Elmore, distributed leadership is linked to school's fundamental task of helping students learn. However, the concept is new and lacks the definition and empirical knowledge about how or to what extent the high performing schools actually use distributed leadership as well as evidence that firmly links distributed leadership to students achievement is still far in the future as there is little empirical data to support the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. I believe distributed leadership can only be judged by the evidence of its impact on teaching and learning.

Objective of the study

Firstly, the study aims to explore the perceptions of headteachers of distributed leadership and what it means to them. Secondly, to investigate on the level of distributed leadership practiced or how it is practiced by headteachers as perceived by teachers and students. Thirdly, it seeks to find out the contribution of distributed leadership to teaching and learning as perceived by teachers and students at each school.

These objectives are in line with tentative conclusions from various studies which indicate that leadership that is distributed among the wider school staff is likely to have an effect on students' academic performance than that of exclusively top-down approach (Muijs and Harris 2007; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007). However, to-date, there has not been any empirical data to support the effect of distributed leadership on student outcomes as studies have also confirmed that the effect of leadership on student outcomes is largely indirect (Hartley, 2007; Rhodes and Brundrett, 2010). This study therefore proposes to contribute to knowledge about the impact of distribute leadership on teaching and learning by providing some empirical evidence from teachers and students and to integrate to previous findings of studies on distributed leadership.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study with the aforementioned objectives include:

1. What are the perceptions of head teachers on distributed leadership and what it means to them?
2. What are the perceptions of teachers and students on the level of distributed leadership practiced by head teachers?
3. To what extent does distributed leadership contribute to effective teaching and learning?

Significance of the Study

This emerging approach to leadership will be potentially useful to national and international policy makers, practitioners, trainers and researchers in education as they are more directly connected to student learning. Policy makers could utilize the study to devise new leadership approaches based on distributed leadership while practitioners may assist in creating professional learning communities and for continued professional development for school improvement and effective leadership. Trainers could formulate training needs for stakeholders based on leadership distribution while researchers may use it to set future agenda for research.

Besides that, there is little empirical data to support the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning in high performing schools (Mayr, 2008). By investigating the perceptions of teachers and students, the study will highlight how distributed leadership is practiced in these selected urban schools in Malaysia. The researcher also finds the study important so as to reflect on past practices of leadership and to seek new ideas on effective school leadership and teaching and further to contribute to knowledge by adding some knowledge base to distributed leadership.

Literature review

Distributed leadership

Distributed leadership stretches and shares the leadership practice among multiple formal and informal groups whereby the leadership responsibility is disassociated from the vertical, bureaucratic and organizational hierarchy so that there is interaction and wide spread sharing of information and power to

sustain improvement in teaching and learning (Robinson, 2008). For example, when teachers, parents and support staff work together to solve certain problems, they are involved in developmental space and collective capacity building within the school as they utilise multiple sources of guidance, direction and expertise of these stakeholders and as such by their actions, they are engaged in distributed leadership.

This leadership practice is the result of interactions between different members of the team or organization to contribute to the life of the school and maximize the human capacity and enhance self-worth of others by energizing others for tasks within the organization to contribute to broad and deep learning for all students. Distributed leadership is a way of thinking about leadership and being involved in a common task or clear goal improvement of instruction and common frame of values in executing the particular leadership task rather than another technique.

Distributed leadership is linked to the notion of collaboration, shared, distributive, dispersed and democratic as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Terminologies associated with distributed leadership (Moyo, 2010)

Thus, distributed leadership is effective as it is an open and democratic model equipped with both vertical and lateral communication.

Distributed leadership among teachers

The authorities to lead is no longer centered around one man theory as distribution is not monopolized by the headteacher's initiative but is a collective leadership and dispersed within the school and among teachers

through the cultivation of relationship and networks as classroom teachers are in direct contact with learners in the majority of cases and hence influence their learning.

(Ameijde, et al., 2009).

The school leadership adopts power equalization and inspires teachers to participate in leadership by developing a school culture which values the sorts of learning that enhance the capacity of individuals to lead and conducive to building norms of building trust to enhance openness, respect, appreciation and autonomy for the teachers to conduct their activities in collaboration, to procure and distribute resources, support teacher growth for both individual and collective development, to provide both summative and formative monitoring of instruction and innovation so that teachers could develop skills and expertise by working together and have a sense of ownership to influence the quality of teaching which subsequently affect student outcome.

(Ameijde, et al., 2009).

Distributed leadership which emphasizes collaboration of teachers with their colleagues in other schools facilitates teacher learning and enhances self-confidence as they engage in action research by trying new teaching approaches and disseminating their findings to colleagues, thereby minimizing teacher isolation but rather challenging teachers to promote personal and professional development so that they contribute to optimal student learning and achievement.

The collective endeavour of efforts enables team based work and forms leadership community that share meaningful contexts and creates opportunities for learning as it integrates differing viewpoints and interests in approaching a highly complex and interdependent task. In this regard, teachers have clearly defined responsibilities which are linked to their area of expertise so that they could contribute effectively to leadership process. By doing so, teachers are not confined to the classroom but are rather transcended to contribute to the community of learners beyond the classroom to lead to improved practice and higher performance (Ameijde, et al., 2009).

Distributed leadership is associated with a number of concepts and themes such as empowerment, teamwork, staff motivation, capacity building, teacher leadership and to a lesser extent professional development.

(Ameijde, et al., 2009).

Distributed cognition

Distributed cognition views thinking as social rather than individual activity. Teachers are no longer passive and isolated but are connected through dialogue and reflection so that they are active and weaved in the fabric of the school for a common task and shared common values. They become more knowledgeable and take responsibility about the task of teaching as more of the pedagogical expertise and talent of teachers will be identified, developed and utilized than a more hierarchical pattern of leadership to impact on learning and student outcome. This creates unity and instructional innovations rather than micromanaging instruction.

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(Ameijde, et al., 2009).

Teaching and Learning

According to PricewaterhouseCoopers (2007), the behaviour of school leaders impact pupil performance. By distributing leadership to teachers that emphasise collaboration and distribution of power and authority which is central to learning, they exert their influence on pupil performance by empowering pupils and creating a favourable condition for learning by applying learner centred approach to teaching and learning in classrooms and across the school which has the potential to effect learner inclusion, engagement and improved achievement. With collaboration which is effective in widening student learning opportunities and raising expectations, teachers could also help to resolve immediate problems through dialogue and establishment of a shared sense of accountability. Pupils are not treated as passive recipients and as such, good communication is ensured so that the students know what is going on and has a hand in shaping this.

high performing schools

High performing schools (HPS) or cluster schools act as models for other institutions within the same cluster and becomes the premise for pioneering new approaches and innovations in the education system. Students of these excellent institutions excel in academic and co-curricular activities and possess outstanding personality, leadership skills, high team spirit, creative thinking skills, and are patriotic, globally oriented and competitive. These schools are acknowledged to have ethos, character and own identity and unique in all aspects of education. The high performing secondary schools in Klang Valley are either regular day schools or residential schools, premier <https://assignbuster.com/distributed-leadership-among-teachers-education-essay/>

schools and 100-year schools and the Ministry of Education Malaysia uses the HPS as markers to point towards excellence in education and as special model schools to other schools in Malaysia (MOE, 2008).

Safe and orderly learning environments are created in these schools with clear instructional objectives in which the head teachers expect high performance from teachers and students through increased time on task and develop positive relations

All students are required to show excellent performance comparable to benchmark standards such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) with proficiency in Math, Science and English. Besides that, the students should also master higher-order thinking skills such as applications, problem-solving, participation in co-curriculum activities, and personal development or soft-skills (The Malaysian Insider, 2012). In order to maintain the school's high performance, leadership is distributed throughout the school and its community and when teachers are empowered in areas they believe are important (Jacobson, 2010).

According to Muhyiddin, Malaysian Education Minister, the objective of HPS is to ensure that all students regardless of stream, medium, or urban or rural locations would attain continuous excellence (The Malaysian Insider, 2012).

The principal and teachers from these schools are expected to set examples and share their experiences with counterparts in other institutions. Their accountability is outlined by a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

relating to human resource development, physical development, financial
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management, professionalism among staff member, and school achievements (academic, co-curricular activities and aptitude) (MOE, 2008).

According to MOE (2008), high performing schools are expected to bring about positive impact to the national education system through excellence in co-curricular activities programmes; exemplary career guidance programmes; outstanding all-rounded students that is 5.8% of 5.2 million students; acceptance of students from high performing schools at world renowned universities; government and private sector sponsorships; international acknowledgements; as benchmarks for other schools, both local and foreign; quality leadership; and excellent teachers.

Theoretical and Conceptual underpinning

Distributed leadership in which the leadership functions are shared, employs Theory Y as the leadership enables diverse individuals to contribute to the process of subtleties of leadership to shape collective action instead of the traditional vertical leadership process which separates leaders from followers as mutually exclusive categories.

Conceptually, distributed leadership refers to democratic style of leadership to allow voices of influence beyond just one and increases participation of stakeholders. It de-monopolizes concentrated leadership and enhances delegation of authority, collective decision-making, power, influence and coordination to enable plurality of analyses and boundarylessness so that the organizational phenomena such as information systems, knowledge, cognition, learning systems and work can be distributed. As leadership expands to multiple players, it displays holistic framework and allows

flexibility, open-endedness with overlapping expertise to complement and reinforce one another, and strengthened decision making commitment and quality, and further utilizes fully the resources of the schools to collaborate and collectively devise strategies to improve students' progress. It eliminates the tightly drawn lines, borders, commands and control associated with a Weberian bureaucratic paradigm (Gronn, 2008).

Conceptually, distributed leadership is associated with notions of empowerment, teamwork, collegiality, staff motivation, capacity building, teacher leadership, professional autonomy and professional development (Muijs and Harris, 2007). According to Moyo (2010), collegiality results in strong professional culture in the school as it includes collaboration among teachers, mutual respect, shared work values, cooperation and specific conversation about teaching and learning.

According to Ameijde et al. (2009), distributed leadership underpins is a shared influence process to which several individuals contribute; and leadership arises from the interactions of diverse individuals which together form a group of network in which essential expertise is a dispersed quality.

Empowerment

Empowerment of teachers is an essential component of distributed leadership. Distributed leadership disassociates from control and dominance but rather creates opportunity, support, space, capacity and growth among teachers by encouraging them to have the power to decide how to do the defined tasks and to get involved vigorously in school policies, curriculum and educational practices and voice their views openly without fear of

retribution to experience a greater sense of efficacy. With empowerment, teachers are more motivated to take risks and committed to work with surprising ability as it cultivates teacher leadership which extends beyond their own classrooms to others within and across schools, and further enhances teacher involvement in collective and collaborative process of school decision-making that promote teacher learning to contribute widely to teaching and learning.

The empowerment elevates teachers' expertise, confidence and self-esteem as they have control over resources, methods and decision making and further to experiment with novel, cutting-edge teaching methods, and to evaluate their colleagues' teaching performance through team work, selection of instructional materials and textbooks, curriculum development, school policies and plans, coordination of programmes, professional development, organizing visits to other schools, collaborating with colleagues, leading study groups and coaching and mentoring students which impacts positively on their effectiveness as teachers and to have a positive effect on students.

Teamwork

Teamwork which refers to setting up of teams by the headteachers with the need to work together on a common purpose is crucial for distributed leadership. This implies that the headteacher is willing to distribute leadership. The team must be equipped with clear goals and results driven, competency, unified commitment, collaboration climate based on trust to develop honest openness and respect, clear standards of excellence, and external support and recognition to achieve an optimum degree of synergy.

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With these characteristics, the team will have comprehensive knowledge and responsibility of student learning and outcomes. They further become role models for students to emulate.

Capacity building

Capacity building through collaboration and trusting relationship for mutual learning can be achieved with distributed leadership in order for teachers to become professional communities and to focus on teaching and learning as they participate in decision-making and have a shared sense of purpose so as to have a joint responsibility for the outcomes of their work. The capacity may be built by reviewing the performance of teachers, adding more resources, materials or technology and by restructuring the tasks so that teachers can work together, experiment, reflect and explore with colleagues to acquire new skills and practice of the profession. Capacity building enables continuous learning of teachers to enhance pupil learning. According to Harris (2002), the conditions for capacity building to create a learning culture may include commitment to teachers' development, inclusion of teachers and students in school policies and decisions and collaborative planning with effective coordination strategies.

Teacher leadership

research methodology