

Effect of teacher empowerment on student learning outcomes



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The question that faces educational leaders in Pakistan is how to select and implement appropriate educational reforms that will move schools toward greater effectiveness and provide enhanced learning and work environments for both students and teachers. A vast literature addresses the importance of leadership in school organizations. (Leithwood, 1992; Pounder, 2006; Merideth, 2007). However this leadership has to be distributed not only to the principal but to the other stakeholders that are the students and the teachers above all. Although these arguments have been largely mounted in western countries, they also have significance in the Pakistani setting. A supportive school organization typically is not present in Pakistani schools, where internal politics, lack of resources, disinterest in pupil learning and school improvement by management result in demotivating and ignoring the teachers. (UNESCO: Situation Analysis of Teacher Education in Pakistan)

According to Pounder (2006), research on the subject of leadership has focused mainly on administrators, principals and district superintendents. Only recently the research focus has moved towards leadership of individuals in other roles, namely teachers. Research indicates that teacher quality, and supportive school organization and management, significantly influence school improvement, and eventually pupil learning. The bottom line, however, is that school improvement is about school learning. Student learning is the most important part of schooling (Harris, 2004)

“ Teacher empowerment” has become a popular term widely seen in many discussions on school restructuring or educational reform. Research on teachers’ professional growth, school organization, school leadership, or

educational innovation all consider “ teacher empowerment” as the term which is considered to be synonym and compatible to teacher leadership.

According to Viviane et al (2008) the leadership dimension which is strongly associated with the positive outcomes is that of promoting and participating in teacher learning and development-that is empowering teachers, for enhancing students learning outcomes.

This literature review will consider an important issue within the focus area: what impact teachers have on the students learning outcomes when they are empowered?

The questions guiding this research are;

1. Why is teacher empowerment emphasized upon in recent educational innovation?
2. What does teacher empowerment mean?
3. What is the role of administrators in empowering teachers?
4. How can students benefit from the idea of teacher empowerment?

WHAT DOES TEACHER ENPOWERMENT MEAN?

Teachers are established as instrumental stakeholders in planning, implementing, and assessing curriculum. They may benefit from undertaking leadership roles.(Stone, Sandra J. (1995) Though faced with an enormous pressure of high level of expectations and demands, they can successfully integrate their knowledge and understanding with new leadership vision, and eventually into the learning experiences of their students.(Blase, J. and Blasé, J. 2001)

Sheppard, B; Hurley, N; Dibbon, D,(2010) recognize a very positive impact of school leaders on student learning however they establish an indirect link between, the effects of school leadership and students. Their research is directed at identifying the leadership variables that influence student learning, teacher morale and enthusiasm being one of them.. Grant, C. et al (2010), discusses the restricted role of teacher leadership. He believes that although teachers possess the ability and vision of shared leadership, they are rarely involved in activities beyond their classrooms. Some collaboration with other teachers in curricular and extra-curricular activities is seen but there was substantially less teacher leadership in relation to school-wide as well as community issues.

Paula M. Short (1994) defines empowerment as “ a process whereby school participants develop the competence to take charge of their own growth and resolve their own problems”. Empowered individuals believe they have the skills and knowledge to act on a situation and improve it. Empowered schools are organizations that create opportunities for competence to be developed and displayed. She adds:

“ Teacher empowerment is a complex construct. While empowerment generally is associated with site-based management and shared decision making Involvement in decision making, teacher impact, teacher status, autonomy, opportunities for professional development, and teacher self-efficacy.”

School improvement is not possible without the empowerment of teachers. Teachers who are empowered have ‘ the power to make decisions about

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curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, they become risk takers by experimenting with new ideas, reading new books, and attending and planning professional development activities. (McCarty, 1993). Heads and school leaders must provide assistance to provide sovereignty and freedom of movement to the teachers They also need to develop ways that promote teacher participation in the decision- and policy-making activities of the school.

Empowerment is considered to be as important an attribute as are mutual trust, support and recognition to bring about a sense of professionalism, leading to the development of leadership qualities in teachers. (Mujis & Harris, 2003). She suggested that teachers can develop into transformational leaders in their schools if all aspects of the system are re-aligned and re-examined. The responsibility of the administration and superintendent has been highlighted by many researchers' in order to bring about this transformation. (Pounder, 2006)

The leadership of the principal is necessary but not sufficient. Teachers make a big difference. How can teachers' skills be developed? What professional difference will they make? Teachers need to work together and trust each other. It is very important that leadership is shared.

(Harris, 2006)

Teachers have an extraordinary opportunity to exercise leadership because they are the most powerful influence, next to students, on other teachers' practice (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

York-Barr and Duke (2004) reported, " In this day of high accountability, the need and potential for teacher leadership as well as the press for results, has probably never been greater". Because teacher leaders work within a system that either supports or acts as a barrier to its success, the roles of administrators are important to review" According to these researchers, teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement. Such team leadership work involves three intentional development foci: individual development, collaboration or team development, and organizational development. Empowered teachers and children become risk-takers, collaborators and self-evaluators.(Stone and Sandra, 1995) They emerge as intrinsically motivated, responsible and independent individuals.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PRINCIPALS IN ENPOWERING TEACHERS?

A variety of research articles and their findings are present in the field of education in USA and UK. Most of them agree on the key leadership roles assumed by the school principals to help teachers to develop as professionals who are confident and committed, possess specialized knowledge and expertise, collaborate with colleagues and undertake leadership roles both within and outside their classes.(Harris, A. and Lambert, L. 2003) Principals are the promoters of a environment which results in a paradigm shift of powers from those at the top of pyramid to those who are working in close collaboration with the learners- that is the teachers. This mode of shifting responsibilities and power to teachers results

in shared decision-making, which is essential to school reform and to the changing demands in a global world.

Results of various studies indicate that teacher empowerment is most closely related to principal's social attractiveness (perceived similarity to teachers) and trustworthiness (perceived willingness to suppress one's own self-interest for the benefit of the school (Blase, J. and Blasé, J. 2001).

The role of the leaders is to facilitate the development of teachers so that they will have the power and ability to determine important things about their work and schools. As indicated above, recent development on school reform, organizational studies, teachers' professional development, and school leadership all point to the importance of teacher empowerment. Empowerment is not easy and it can not be accomplished in a short span of time. However, it can invoke real thinking and learning as well as meaningful action.

If teachers are directly involved in leading the improvement effort they, would act as leaders without occupying any formal leadership roles. (Ghamrawi N. 2010,). Schools need to cultivate this largely untapped resource for change and improvement in schools by providing teachers with leadership opportunities, appropriate training, and professional support – empowerment in short. (Rizvi M., 2008) . An active and effective teacher leader can directly impact the school, its teachers and most importantly the students.

There seems little doubt that both district and school leadership provides a critical bridge between most educational-reform initiatives, and having those

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reforms make a genuine difference for all students. Such leadership comes from many sources, not just superintendents and principals. But those in formal positions of authority in school systems are likely still the most influential. Efforts to improve their recruitment, training, evaluation and ongoing development should be considered highly cost-effective approaches to successful school improvement.

School principals have an important role to play in building teacher leadership capacity by promoting teacher leadership learning teams, helping them clarify their vision, and encouraging them to develop habits that will enable them to make the most of their collaborative efforts. Many researchers have tried to develop a link between the distributed leadership of school heads and principals and consider it an important step towards empowering the staff. (Harris, 2003). They consider that the leadership of the principal is necessary but not sufficient.

The principal is also more likely to be seen by staff as a source of instructional advice, which suggests that they are both more accessible and more knowledgeable about instructional matters than their counterparts in otherwise similar lower achieving schools Ash and Persall (2000) also in agreement to the view that principals must create an environment that supports collaboration among teachers; provides time for teachers' professional development; and recognizes, rewards, and celebrates the concept of the teacher as leader

The crucial role of principal is evident from the survey reports of The American Teacher: An Examination of School Leadership (2009) which

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reports that many teachers fear their chances to influence decisions about their profession are eroding. Teachers believe that principals spend more time on reporting and compliance than on guiding and motivating teachers, but principals report that the reverse is true. Principals must change this perception so that teachers feel empowered as school leaders.

IMPACT OF TEACHER EMPOWERMENT ON STUDENTS

Empowerment is important for children, as well. If empowerment changes how teachers view their work, empowering children should improve their view of learning. The foundations needed for empowering teachers and children include respect, validation and success. Once empowered, the individual changes.

Research confirms the important influence of the classroom teacher on student achievement (Leithwood et al, 2010). A key issue, then, is how the quality of teaching and learning within individual classrooms can be influenced and improved. They argue that educational leadership has a key influence on the quality of teaching and learning and thus student achievement

Motivated, engaged students are central to lasting school improvement. It is a mistake to think that reform done to students by well meaning adults will be successful, since in the end it is students who must do the learning. Students can play an important role in school improvement when they are asked to do so and conditions created to allow them to do so.

Until 1960s it was widely believed that schools made little difference to student achievement, which was believed to be largely predetermined due <https://assignbuster.com/effect-of-teacher-empowerment-on-student-learning-outcomes/>

to heredity, family background and socioeconomic context. Opinion on the effect that schools, teachers and educational leaders can have on student outcomes has also fluctuated.

The influence of educational leadership on teacher and student performance has generally been underestimated, and that measured direct effects of leadership, which some researchers have found to be very low, are outweighed by indirect and antecedent effects such as school history, context and organization, with school climate acting as an intermediate variable between leadership and classroom achievement (De Maeyer et al., 2007). As noted, school leadership traditionally focused on the principal but today it is recognized that there can be many leaders in a school, including deputy principals, heads of department, program and committee chairs and teachers; it is agreed and seen as desirable that leadership is distributed. Student and community leadership also need to be recognized.

Studies show school leaders can improve student learning by enhancing the conditions or status of selected variables on the 'four paths', i. e., rational, emotions, organizational and family. Leithwood (2010) points out that school leaders and leadership researchers should be guided directly by existing evidences about school, classroom and family variables with powerful effect on student learning, when taking decisions about school improvement.

In America endeavors are being made towards developing educators professionally with programmes like 'learning forward by National Staff Development Council with slogans like 'every educator engages ineffective professional learning every day so every student achieves' Students are

considered important ultimate stakeholders . While doing research on the effect of teacher control on series of outcomes Ingeroll (2007) concluded that these outcomes are directly connected to the distribution of power and control in schools. Schools fostering empowerment have fewer student misbehavior problems, show more teacher collegiality and co-operation among teachers and administrators.

Donaldson (2006) views teacher leadership cultivates the will and the ability to improve practice by ‘ three streams’ . i. e. by attending to the quality of relationships, by keeping purposes and goals in mind and by focusing on improving children learning. This is how a close bond is established between the empowerment of self and its impact on students’ learning.

CONCLUSION

The pendulum has swung for teachers as ‘ change agents’ from the days of “ relative powerlessness” when teachers were cast not only in a passive role but frequently in the role of active obstructionists (Charles, 1971). The educational research has come a long way in establishing theories through evidences and findings.

Contrary to the discussions so far, most teachers are known to become disengaged from leadership roles. (Gronn, 2003) discusses the disengagement of school leaders-the shunning of leadership roles by potential candidates (i. e. teachers). He argues that the main cause is the amplification of professional work, describing the new work orders of educational leadership as ‘ long hours, endless demands, punishing pace and continual frustration’-hardly an attractive proposition for those considering

taking up leadership roles. The positive role of principals in fostering the transformation of teachers to participants in decision making ventures cannot be ignored.

Similar observations have been recorded by Gokçe (2009) in Turkish schools, where a significant difference was found between the opinions of teachers and school principals. Teachers expect principals to show more effective behaviour in the change process.

Bush (2008) in an editorial quotes Leithwood et al.'s (2006) assessment that leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning leading to the inevitable conclusion that head teachers, principals and senior staff should undertake specific preparation for the distinctive role of educational leadership and management., then, and only then can the teachers feel empowered to exercise control over the different domains in and outside the classroom.

In a study conducted by Rhodes and Brundrett (2008) emerging from the focus group phase, empowerment, support and controlled risk taking, were endorsed by heads to contribute towards effective ' in-house' leadership development .. A culture of trust and collaboration is essential, as is a shared vision of where the school needs to go.. In the developed and emergent teacher leadership schools, barriers to teacher leadership were mainly external to the school (Daniel Muijs and Alma Harris2007). They suggest that developing teacher leadership is not an easy process. It is closely related to re-culturing as it means a fundamental shift in the purposes and practices of the school

Literature in favour of the role of teacher as a change agent in transforming learners includes James S. Ponder (2006), according to whom the third wave emphasizes that teacher leadership is a process rather than a positional concept. A fourth wave of teacher leadership could include transformational classroom leadership as one of the defining qualities of a teacher leader and could embrace both school and university contexts.

According to Leithwood, K., et al (2004):

“ There seems little doubt that both district and school leadership provides a critical bridge between most educational-reform initiatives, and having those reforms make a genuine difference for all students. Such leadership comes from many sources, not just superintendents and principals. But those in formal positions of authority in school systems are likely still the most influential. Efforts to improve their recruitment, training, evaluation and ongoing development should be considered highly cost-effective approaches to successful school improvement.”

In contradiction to the various theories put forward by the renowned researchers like Leithwood et al (2004) and Gronn (2003), and beliefs adopted by agencies like the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in England, David Hartley (2009) in the book *Distributed Leadership According to the Evidence*, suggests a casual relationship between distributed leadership and pupil outcomes. He suggests two outcomes of distributed leadership which we assume form the predecessor of empowerment of teachers; one being the organizational variable, the other effect is that upon pupils' achievement. According to the co-authors of the

book, there is no 'clear correlation between the pattern of leadership distribution in the qualitative data and the student test results evidence'. This is a notoriously difficult matter to measure, for it is not easy to isolate the direct effect of distributed leadership as an independent variable as the policy-makers have been ahead of the evidence in their endorsement of distributed leadership as a means to bring about the effective school. The optimistic views presented by the renowned authors opens many a venues for further researches in this context..

Teacher leadership research is well established in the USA and Canada and, in the last decade, it has become a focus of research activity in the UK. However, in Pakistan teacher leadership is relatively unknown as an area of research although, UNESCO and the World Bank are funding studies to develop strategies for teacher education and professional development. We have still to go a long way to recognize and change the mind-set of our school heads and principals to empower the teachers and include them in decision making and policy making activities.

Muijs and Harris (2003), summaries the concept of teacher leadership, empowerment, and its governing factors as below, and accept that there is still a need for research in the UK.

In summary, teacher leadership is centrally concerned with forms of empowerment and agency which are also at the core of distributed leadership theory. It is concluded that teacher leadership could have beneficial effects on school improvement, school and teacher effectiveness and teacher motivation and retention, but that the right conditions need to

be in place in order for teacher leadership to flourish. The lack of research on teacher leadership in the UK is noted.

More than a decade ago, findings by Pounder, D. G. et al.(1995), pointed towards the lack of obvious leadership relations between levels-school district, school, and classroom-and their effect upon multiple measures of school performance. Much research has been undertaken since then, still the latest review of literature shows that there is a need to fill the void existing between a direct impact of teacher empowerment and the enhancement of students learning. We have to look further for measurable success indicators in order to produce quantitative results in support of the myriad of qualitative results that establish the positive association between teachers empowerment and student achievement.