

Leadership Practices Among National Primary School Teacher Leaders

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This study aims to identify the level of leadership practices among teacher leaders in national primary schools. This study employs a descriptive quantitative method using an online questionnaire (Google Form) with a Likert scale. The questionnaire was adapted from the Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment (TLSA), consisting of 42 items representing seven dimensions of the Teacher Leadership Development Model (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). The respondents comprised 420 teacher leaders as the study sample, involving 60 national primary schools in Malaysia. Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23.0. The findings indicate that the highest dimension of leadership practice among teacher leaders is Instructional Skills, with a mean of 4.43 and a standard deviation of 0.886. Two dimensions recorded the lowest mean values, namely Effective Communication and Continuous Improvement, both with a mean of 4.38. However, Effective Communication recorded a standard deviation of 0.894, while the Working Environment recorded a standard deviation of 0.923. The implications of the study's findings are expected to serve as a shield against the negative perceptions of society and school communities that doubt the role and effectiveness of teacher leadership in enhancing school performance and student outcomes.

Keywords: Teacher leadership, teacher leaders, self-awareness, change leaders, effective communication, diversity, instructional skills, continuous improvement, self-organizing

1. Introduction

According to Helterbran (2010), the "just a teacher" syndrome has spread among teachers due to a lack of exposure to the concept of teacher leadership, which indirectly leads to a waste of expertise, energy, and a strong influence on the school community. Javadi, Bush, and Ng (2017) state that the perceptions of teacher leaders need to change, as most teacher leaders do not see themselves as "leaders" of the department they lead, but merely as regular teachers burdened with administrative tasks. The situation has worsened as teacher leaders are also said to be reluctant to take on leadership commitments (Teh, Faridah, Jamilah, Rusli, and Kalidass, 2020).

According to Tay et al. (2020), the role of teacher leaders is complex. As a result, role conflicts are often faced by teacher leaders due to being overloaded with overlapping job tasks (Mohd Faizal, Hamidah & Ghazali, 2018; Banda & Mutambo, 2016; Anwar et al., 2014). Teacher leaders in educational institutions have different roles and responsibilities compared to regular teachers (Gurr, 2018) as they need to carry out management and teaching duties simultaneously (Gurr, 2018; Wei, 2018; Abd. Razak, 2017; Bassett & Shaw, 2017). Teacher leaders must comply with directives from higher authorities while simultaneously guiding their subordinates (National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), 2019; Mohd Faizal et al., 2018; Maqsood et al., 2017) and maintain relationships with colleagues (Tay et al., 2019; Thorpe & Garside, 2017; Ekaterini, 2011). However, according to Tuan and Seth (2018), teacher leaders experience pressure in maintaining relationships with colleagues and begin to perceive that they are losing their primary identity as teachers.

2. Literature Review

According to Norashdimah et al. (2019), statistical analysis results based on the perceptions of 169 teachers at MARA College show that the level of teacher leadership at MARA College is moderate. Among the dimensions that can impact the development of leadership capabilities among teachers and can promote the construction of exemplary teacher leaders is the practice of teachers with a high level of self-awareness. Additionally, the study found that teachers at MARA College struggled to implement effective strategies, particularly in encouraging fellow teachers to engage in positive changes. Teachers were also found to be unable to build or plan effective strategies, even though they recognized that leadership would be more prominent if effective approaches or actions were successfully implemented to achieve the college's goals.

However, a survey study by Khalip and Rofidah (2018) involving 108 teachers from nine national primary and type schools in Bagan Datuk, Perak, showed that the level of teacher leadership is high. This study applied a quantitative method using a questionnaire as a data collection tool, with descriptive and inferential statistics used to analyze the data.

The findings of Khalip and Rofidah (2018) supported the findings of Azhar et al. (2016), which demonstrated that teacher leadership practices in secondary schools in the eastern zone of Peninsular Malaysia are at a high level. Additionally, the findings of Khalip and Rofidah (2018) showed that the level of teacher leadership is high and identified three sub-constructs of teacher leadership values: leading the teaching and learning process, fostering a culture of collaboration, and being a reference expert.

These findings are also in line with the study by Norashikin, Ramli, and Foo (2015), which utilized a questionnaire and the Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment (TLSA) Survey to investigate the level of teacher leadership practices. Their findings, involving 40 daily secondary schools in Johor and 387 teachers, demonstrated that the level of teacher leadership practices is high. All six dimensions studied—self-assessment and making changes, diversity, teaching skills, self-organization, continuous improvement, and communication—were at a high level, though the continuous improvement dimension showed the weakest correlation compared to the others.

3. Problem Statement

Leadership among teachers is currently said to be at a moderate to weak level, and this issue is quite critical (Nortamziah & Mua azam, 2019). Therefore, studies on teacher leadership should be conducted within a broader scope and context (Gumus et al., 2018). Furthermore, the concept of teacher leadership has yet to be developed, especially in Asian countries, including Malaysia, despite being discussed and studied internationally for a long time (Norashikin et al., 2015).

Based on previous studies, teacher leaders are said to face difficulties in leading effectively because they are more often managing than leading (Javadi et al., 2017). According to Farchi and Tubin (2019), teacher leaders face a dilemma of role ambiguity, where questions often arise about their actual functions, whether they lean more towards management or pedagogy. Teacher leaders are said to encounter limitations in their authority and ambiguity while performing their duties as teacher leaders (Wei, 2018; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; Belasen & Belasen, 2016; Leander & Osborne, 2008; Smylie & Denny, 1990). This finding is also supported by Teh et al. (2020), which states that teacher leaders are burdened with dilemmas regarding role ambiguity and task overload, as well as time constraints. Furthermore, teacher leaders also experience limited access to human and financial resources (McKenzie & Varney, 2018).

Research on teacher leadership has not gained much attention among researchers, even though studies on teacher leaders have been initiated for over two decades (Grootenboer, 2018; & Jones, 2019). In Malaysia, the focus on teacher leadership issues is still lacking and is considered new (Amirah & Mohamed Yusoff, 2018; Norashikin, 2016). Although some studies on teacher leadership have been

conducted by local researchers, their number is still small (Khalip & Rofidah, 2018). According to the study by Puspanathan and Mahaliza (2020), research on teacher leadership is less carried out by researchers compared to instructional leadership by principals. A review of past studies related to teacher leadership also found that studies conducted in primary schools are far fewer compared to those in secondary schools (Khalip & Rofidah, 2018; Lokman et al., 2017; Azhar et al., 2016; Zuraidah et al., 2016; Usman, 2016; Norashikin et al., 2015; Rosnarizah, 2015; Rosnah et al., 2014; and Siva, 2014).

Research Objectives

The objectives to be achieved in this study are as follows:

1. To identify the level of leadership practices among teacher leaders in national primary schools based on the dimension of Self-Awareness.
2. To identify the level of leadership practices among teacher leaders in national primary schools based on the dimension of Change Leaders.
3. To identify the level of leadership practices among teacher leaders in national primary schools based on the dimension of Effective Communication.
4. To identify the level of leadership practices among teacher leaders in national primary schools based on the dimension of Diversity.
5. To identify the level of leadership practices among teacher leaders in national primary schools based on the dimension of Instructional Skills.
6. To identify the level of leadership practices among teacher leaders in national primary schools based on the dimension of Continuous Improvement.
7. To identify the level of leadership practices among teacher leaders in national primary schools based on the dimension of Self-Organization.

Research Questions

Based on the above objectives, seven research questions have been formulated to help address the research problem.

1. What is the level of leadership practices among teacher leaders in national primary schools based on the dimension of Self-Awareness?
2. What is the level of leadership practices among teacher leaders in national primary schools based on the dimension of Change Leaders?
3. What is the level of leadership practices among teacher leaders in national primary schools based on the dimension of Effective Communication?
4. What is the level of leadership practices among teacher leaders in national primary schools based on the dimension of Diversity?
5. What is the level of leadership practices among teacher leaders in national primary schools based on the dimension of Instructional Skills?
6. What is the level of leadership practices among teacher leaders in national primary schools based on the dimension of Continuous Improvement?
7. What is the level of leadership practices among teacher leaders in national primary schools based on the dimension of Self-Organization?

Theoretical Framework

The Path Goal Theory (House, 1971) influences the Teacher Leadership Development Model (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001) based on several aspects related to the seven dimensions present in the model (Norashdimah et al., 2019; Khalip & Rofidah, 2018). These seven dimensions are: i) Self-

Awareness; ii) Change Leaders; iii) Effective Communication; iv) Diversity; v) Instructional Skills; vi) Continuous Improvement; and vii) Self-Organization (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

The fourth and fifth dimensions, Diversity and Instructional Skills, align with the first leadership style, which is directive leadership, where capable leaders ensure employees adhere to rules and procedures. In the school context, teacher leaders have the authority to supervise and monitor teachers' instruction, coordinate curriculum-related matters, and monitor students' academic and personal development.

Next, the second and sixth dimensions, Change Leaders and Continuous Improvement, correspond to the second leadership style, which is achievement-oriented, where leaders emphasize excellence in each employee. Thus, leaders need to establish goals and work alongside employees to achieve these goals. Meanwhile, the first and seventh dimensions, Self-Awareness and Self-Organization, align with the third leadership style, which is supportive leadership. The responsibility of teacher leaders in providing various incentives to teachers and students clearly indicates that such leaders adopt a supportive leadership style that considers teachers and students, fostering friendly relationships among them and the entire school community (Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Robiah, 2003; Zaidatol, 2001). Lastly, the third dimension, Effective Communication, corresponds to the fourth leadership style, which is participative leadership, allowing teachers to contribute ideas in shaping school goals or anything that benefits the school.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive quantitative design. The method for collecting quantitative data involves using an online questionnaire (Google Form), with 400 teacher leaders as the study sample. These samples involve 60 national primary schools in Malaysia, categorized by zone and state.

A total of 42 items were developed to measure the Leadership Practices of Teacher Leaders using an instrument adapted from the dimensions within the Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment (TLSA) created by Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001). All instruments were modified to fit the Malaysian education system and the study's requirements. The seven main dimensions were framed based on the Teacher Leadership Development Model (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001), which addresses the seven dimensions of Teacher Leadership Practices: Self-Awareness (6 items); Change Leaders (6 items); Effective Communication (6 items); Diversity (6 items); Instructional Skills (6 items); Continuous Improvement (6 items); and Self-Organization (6 items).

Findings

The findings are based on the perspectives of 400 teacher leaders representing 60 national primary schools in Malaysia to identify the level of teacher leadership practices. The online questionnaire (Google Form) using a Likert scale, containing 42 items adapted from the Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment (TLSA), represents the seven dimensions of the Teacher Leadership Development Model (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001), namely Self-Awareness, Change Leaders, Effective Communication, Diversity, Instructional Skills, Continuous Improvement, and Self-Organization. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23.0.

Dimention 1: SELF-AWARENESS		Min	SD	Level
1.	I reflect on the things I do well so I can improve as a teacher in the classroom.	4.30	1.008	High
2.	I understand that my strengths and needs for growth will impact my new role as a leader in the school.	4.24	0.936	
3.	I am clear about what I know in teaching and learning.	4.18	0.966	
4.	I align my values and philosophy when interacting with students and colleagues.	4.28	0.941	

5. I seek feedback so I can make improvements to the tasks assigned.	4.20	0.993	
6. I am ethical and meet high expectations in my professional performance at work.	4.27	0.961	
Total	4.39	0.882	High

Based on the table, the overall mean for the dimension of SELF-AWARENESS is 4.39, indicating a high level of practice. The self-awareness dimension with the highest mean value is "I reflect on the things I do well so I can improve as a teacher in the classroom" (M=4.30). Meanwhile, the self-awareness dimension that recorded the lowest mean value is "I am clear about what I know in teaching and learning" (M=4.18). Overall, the findings suggest that teachers agree that the leadership practices of teacher leaders in terms of SELF-AWARENESS while performing their duties are at a high level

Dimention 2: CHANGE LEADERSHIP	Min	SD	Level
7. I encourage colleagues to work towards achieving the school's vision and mission.	4.27	0.988	
8. I lead others to complete assignments.	4.23	0.974	
9. I involve colleagues when planning changes.	4.15	0.975	
10. I understand the importance of the school in enhancing student success.	4.24	0.947	
11. I work to promote the school culture.	4.26	0.980	
12. I am willing to invest time and effort to build a team to advance my school.	4.24	1.012	
Total	4.39	0.895	High

Based on the table, the overall mean for the dimension of CHANGE LEADERSHIP is 4.39, indicating a high level of practice. The CHANGE LEADERSHIP dimension with the highest mean is "I encourage colleagues to work towards achieving the school's vision and mission" (M=4.27). Meanwhile, the CHANGE LEADERSHIP dimension with the lowest mean is "I involve colleagues when planning changes" (M=4.15). Overall, the findings indicate that teachers agree that the leadership practices of teacher leaders in terms of CHANGE LEADERSHIP during their duties are at a high level.

Dimention 3 : EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION	Min	SD	Level
13. I listen attentively to others.	4.36	0.949	High
14. I adjust my presentation based on the individuals in front of me.	4.25	0.990	
15. I seek others' perspectives to accurately reflect their thoughts.	4.12	0.989	
16. I ensure that the communication network between the school and parents is clear for them to connect.	4.20	0.977	
17. When leading meetings, I strive to ensure participation from nearly every member.	4.26	0.992	
18. I effectively use electronic technology to communicate with individuals or groups.	4.23	0.954	
Total	4.38	0.894	High

Based on the table, the overall mean for the dimension of EFFECTIVE

COMMUNICATION is 4.38, indicating a high level of practice. The dimension of EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION with the highest mean value is "I listen attentively to others" (M=4.38). In contrast, the dimension of EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION with the lowest mean value is "I seek others' perspectives to accurately reflect their thoughts" (M=4.12). Overall, teachers agree that the leadership practices of teacher leaders in terms of EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION are being carried out at a high level.

Dimension 4: DIVERSITY	Min	SD	Level
19. I understand that differences in opinion arise from individuals' cultural, religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity.	4.35	0.962	High
20. I respect others' values and beliefs.	4.23	0.973	
21. I enjoy working with various groups of colleagues at school.	4.27	0.950	
22. I work effectively with non-educators who have specific interests.	4.24	0.953	
23. I make a concerted effort to understand the beliefs and values of others.	4.26	0.969	
24. I am willing to share my beliefs even if they differ from others.	4.23	1.028	
Total	4.41	0.887	High

Based on the table, the overall mean for the dimension of DIVERSITY is 4.41, indicating a high level of practice. The DIVERSITY dimension with the highest mean is "I understand that differences in opinion arise from individuals' cultural, religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity" (M=4.35). Meanwhile, the DIVERSITY dimension that recorded the lowest mean is "I respect others' values and beliefs" and "I am willing to share my beliefs even if they differ from others," both at (M=4.23). Based on these overall findings, the teachers agree that the leadership practices of teacher leaders in terms of DIVERSITY are being performed at a high level.

Dimension 5: INSTRUCTIONAL SKILLS	Min	SD	Level
25. I encourage a positive environment in the classroom.	4.38	0.941	High
26. I practice research-based teaching methods.	4.23	0.972	
27. I strive to ensure that all students succeed.	4.19	0.985	
28. I have the potential to be an effective teacher in the classroom.	4.25	0.925	
29. I am approachable and open to sharing with colleagues.	4.28	0.948	
30. I act with integrity and fairness when working with all parties.	4.25	1.010	High
Total	4.43	0.886	High

Based on the table, the overall mean for the dimension of INSTRUCTIONAL SKILLS is 4.43, indicating a high level of practice. The INSTRUCTIONAL SKILLS dimension with the highest mean value is "I promote a positive environment in the classroom" (M=4.38). Meanwhile, the INSTRUCTIONAL SKILLS dimension with the lowest mean value is "I strive to ensure that all students succeed" (M=4.19). Based on these findings, the teachers agree that the leadership practices of teacher leaders regarding INSTRUCTIONAL SKILLS have been carried out at a high level.

Dimension 6: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT	Min	SD	Level
31. I seek all relevant information from various sources before making decisions or taking action.	4.34	0.965	High
32. I set goals and monitor progress towards achieving them.	4.24	0.947	
33. I analyze and use assessment information when making plans.	4.17	0.998	
34. I participate in professional development and learning.	4.20	0.995	

35. I am proactive in identifying problems and working to solve them.	4.25	0.981	
36. I work collaboratively with colleagues, parents, and/or others to make improvements in the school or district.	4.23	0.985	
Total	4.38	0.923	High

Based on the table, the overall mean for the dimension of CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT is 4.38, indicating a high level of practice. The dimension of CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT with the highest mean value is "I seek all relevant information from various sources before making decisions or taking action" (M=4.34). Meanwhile, the dimension of CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT with the lowest mean value is "I analyze and use assessment information when making plans" (M=4.17). Overall, the findings suggest that teachers agree that the practice of leadership among teacher leaders in the aspect of CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT is being carried out at a high level.

Dimention 7: SELF-ORGANIZATION	Min	SD	Level
37. I plan and schedule carefully so that I can complete tasks and goals.	4.35	0.946	
38. I demonstrate confidence in myself when under pressure or in difficult situations.	4.25	0.942	
39. I work effectively as a team member.	4.20	1.020	
40. I show initiative and contribute the necessary effort to achieve desired results.	4.27	0.951	High
41. I prioritize certain tasks to ensure I have time for more important assignments.	4.24	0.975	
42. I create a balanced satisfaction between professional and personal aspects of my life.	4.25	1.012	
Total	4.39	0.906	High

Based on the table, the overall mean for the dimension of SELF-ORGANIZATION is 4.39, indicating a high level of practice. The SELF-ORGANIZATION dimension with the highest mean is "I plan and schedule carefully so that I can complete assignments and goals" (M=4.35). Meanwhile, the SELF-ORGANIZATION dimension with the lowest mean is "I work effectively as a team member" (M=4.20). Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the teachers agree that the leadership practices of teacher leaders in the aspect of SELF-ORGANIZATION are performed at a high level.

5. Discussion

Teacher leaders exhibit a high level of self-awareness (M=4.39), particularly in reflective practices for improvement (M=4.30). Their actions align with their personal values and philosophy in dealing with students and colleagues. Teacher leaders demonstrate proactive leadership in mobilizing their peers to achieve the school's vision (M=4.39), with the highest practice being the encouragement of colleagues to reach the school's mission (M=4.27), although slightly lower in involving colleagues in planning changes (M=4.15).

Teacher leaders also practice effective communication (M=4.38), especially in attentive listening (M=4.36). Effective communication among teachers, students, and parents helps strengthen relationships within the school community. In terms of diversity, teacher leaders show a high level of acceptance of cultural, religious, and socioeconomic differences (M=4.41). They appreciate diversity among colleagues and students, with the understanding of cultural diversity recording the

highest mean (M=4.35).

Instructional skills practices are also at a high level (M=4.43). Teacher leaders prioritize a positive classroom environment (M=4.38) and are committed to ensuring the success of every student (M=4.19). Furthermore, teacher leaders continually strive to improve performance and work quality through ongoing improvement (M=4.38). Seeking information from various sources before making decisions is the highest practice in this dimension (M=4.34). Finally, regarding the dimension of Self-Organization, teacher leaders demonstrate the ability to organize tasks efficiently and maintain a balance between professional and personal life (M=4.39). Careful planning to complete assignments records the highest value (M=4.35).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study indicates that the leadership practices of teacher leaders are at a high level across all seven key dimensions assessed. Each dimension significantly contributes to the quality of teacher leadership, as evidenced by the high mean values in each aspect.

These findings do not support the conclusions of Norashdimah et al. (2019), who stated that the level of teacher leadership is at a moderate level. This assertion is further supported by Nortamziah and Mua Azam (2019), who claim that teacher leadership is currently at a moderate and weak level. Conversely, the findings of this study support the conclusions of Khalip and Rofidah (2018), Azhar et al. (2016), and Norashikin et al. (2015), which demonstrate that teacher leadership practices in schools are at a high level.

Overall, the level of leadership practice among teacher leaders in national primary schools in Malaysia shows a high level based on the seven dimensions of leadership practices. It can thus be concluded that teacher leaders perform their duties with high leadership practices across all dimensions. This indicates that teacher leaders have cultivated leadership practices excellently and efficiently in their daily tasks and are committed to the development of the school and the educational community as a whole. The findings of this study also imply that teacher leaders are highly prepared to assume roles and responsibilities as competitive leaders capable of mobilizing efforts toward school excellence.

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