

DESIGN OF A TEACHER LEADERSHIP INSTRUMENT: A NEED ANALYSIS STUDY BASED ON MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

Saiful Adli Ab Rahim^{a*}, Norhanida Samsudin^b, Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani^c, Harris Shah Abd. Hamid^d
^{a*bcd} University of Malaya

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, e- mail: Saifuladli.ab@gmail.com

Abstract

Today's education challenges require teachers to be leaders. However, some teachers are still unaware of their leadership qualities and practices, much less the feasibility of polishing said leadership. A guideline should be developed to enlighten teachers not only on the concept of teacher leadership but also on how to build teacher leadership qualities realistically. This study was conducted using the qualitative method involving an interview with eight (8) school leaders and teacher leaders for their perspectives on the need for designing a teacher leadership instrument. Five themes were identified in consequence; (i) improving current instruments, (ii) benchmarking effective teacher leadership practices, (iii) increasing awareness of teacher leadership, (iv) developing guidelines to improve teacher leadership competency, and, (v) building self-leadership as teacher leaders in the local context. Designing a teacher leadership instrument would be more cost-effective and save time compared to developing a prototype product. Future studies should focus on developing a teacher leadership instrument suited for 21st century learning needs, while considering different leadership categories including distributed leadership, instructional leadership, and learning-centred leadership. The instrument should be developed according to correct procedures with content and statistical assessment so that it can be widely used.

Keywords: Needs Analysis, style, Teacher Leadership, Thematic Analysis

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I. INTRODUCTION

The teacher's role changes to suit the needs of current education demands. For the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) assessments, the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 targets Malaysia for the top one-third ranking in the world. This target is achievable with an education system led by high-quality teachers. Nizam & Rosli (2020) believes that Malaysia's goal will be realised if school improvements are focussed on increasing teachers' knowledge and competency as well as encouraging teamwork. Recognising and

developing teacher leadership could be the answer to this.

Undoubtedly, misconceptions and traditional views of leadership as a one-man show would still be evident. Thus, transforming school leadership organisational views needs to be done, changing from leader of an organisation to teacher leadership (Tahir, Musah, Al-Hudawi & Daud, 2020). A school's success no longer depends on hierarchical leadership with individual workers (Weiner & Woulfin, 2018) but on a team-based workforce that focusses on collaboration and collective effort by the school community such as through a Professional Learning Community (PLC)

(Salleh, 2017. Aliakbari & Sadeghi 2014. Ghani & Grow, 2013)

While this realisation may be true, a suitable guideline for developing teacher leadership according to the needs of different cultures and education contexts has yet to be made. This is related to the insufficient studies on teacher leadership for local contexts. For instance, Nguyen, Harris & D. Ng (2019) found that North American studies on teacher leadership dominated Scopus/SSCI Indexed literature with 77 out of 152 publications in the years 2003-2017. This may imply that the realisation and effort at developing teacher leadership is more prominent in North America compared to developing countries like Malaysia that still depend on non-local studies as benchmarks to measure teacher leadership.

At present, local researchers tend to refer to non-local instruments such as Katzenmeyer & Moller (2009) as benchmarks to measure teacher leadership effectiveness as evident in studies by Misdi, Sumintono & Abdullah (2019), Rashid & Mansor (2018) and Harun, Basri, Akmaliah, Pihie & Asimiran (2016). Different probabilities of teacher leadership understanding and measurement can thus occur due to the different perceptions of the instruments as they are used in a different cultural context (Shultz & Whitney, 2005). This amplifies the need to develop a teacher leadership instrument suited to Malaysia.

A contextual instrument would be able to gauge teacher leadership levels and their improvement in stages. Relevant authorities should thus make the effort to design teacher leadership programs to build teachers' competency. The development of a Malaysian teacher leadership instrument would hopefully lead to improvement of teaching and learning. Teachers would be able to reflect on their own leadership, which in turn would affect their teaching and leadership abilities.

Assessment standards such as TIMSS and PISA aim to help countries improve education systems to compete with other countries. The educational trend of competence-based curricula forces teachers to increase

competency to ensure students achieve an acceptable level of competence (Sigurðardóttir & Sigþórsson, 2016). Leadership researchers realise that developing teacher leadership is an element that needs to be spotlighted as what teachers do affects students learning, their colleagues and the school community (Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017).

However, the concept of teacher leadership is still vaguely understood. Cheung, Reinhardt, Stone & Little (2018) states that teachers do not understand how teacher leadership can help them as teachers, especially as they believe that their core task does not leading. Nonetheless, as Fullan & Coherence (2016) observed situational change inevitably demands a change in knowledge, including understanding, skills and values. Teachers must then develop their capacity in leadership to undertake various functions, be it in the school (such as classroom management and school leadership roles) or in the community (community leader).

Teacher leadership researchers have been making efforts to introduce the concept of teacher leadership through various studies. Gumus, Bellibas, Esen & Gumus (2016) Found an increase of teacher leadership publications, which reflects the interest in teacher leadership amongst researchers using varied methods of analysis including quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. Figure 1 illustrates the number of published teacher leadership articles according to method of research.

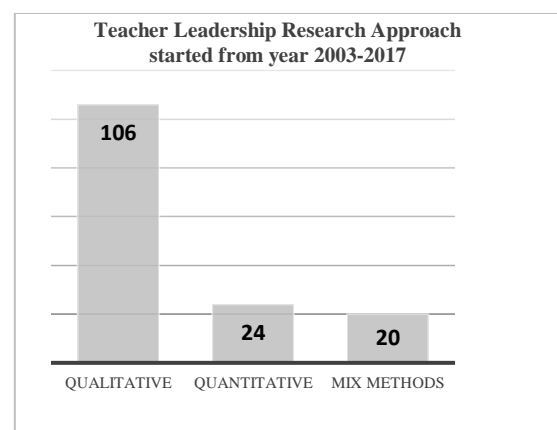


Figure 1: Number of articles published in Scopus/SSCI Indexed platform by different research method, quantitative, qualitative and

mixed method. Adapted from Nguyen, Harris & D. Ng (2019)

Figure 1 shows that qualitative research is more widely used in teacher leadership. Thus, Nguyen, Harris & D. Ng (2019) suggests that more quantitative and cross-national research on teacher leadership should be conducted. Gumus, Bellibas, Esen & Gumus (2016) believes that teacher leadership practices can be improved by more focussed research and the teacher leadership model should expand to include new ideas from new perspectives and practices of teacher leadership. Empirical evidence would no doubt increase understanding and knowledge of teacher leadership that suits different contexts and cultures (Harris, Jones, Ismail & Nguyen, 2019).

The concepts pertaining to teacher leadership are still arguable, albeit many researchers have agreed on the basic concept of teacher leadership having varied functions (York-barr & Duke, 2004. Harris, 2005. Wang & Xia, (2020). Hanuscin, Cheng, Rebello, Sinha & Muslu (2014) advocate the needs and challenges in labelling the roles and functions that relate to the identity of teacher leadership, especially as it might overlap with concepts about other aspects of leadership such as distributed leadership (Harris & Muijs, 2003. Anthony, Gimbert, Luke & Hurt, 2019), professional development (Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster & Cobb, 1995), teaching professionalism (Murphy, 2005) and professional learning community (York-barr & Duke, 2004).

Literature review shows clear evidence that teacher leadership is dynamic and could bring about positive changes to the teaching practices and school improvement. Thus, studies that are done on teacher leadership would help close the gaps in research on the subject as well as provide opportunities to measure and assess teacher leadership. In this context, the ensuing study was done to determine the feasibility of a teacher leadership instrument to fit current needs. Views from school leaders and teacher leaders are thus taken into consideration.

This article can be used as a reference by researchers to conduct future studies on designing teacher leadership instrument to suit the local context. This effort should be done as non-local instruments on teacher leadership would not fulfil the needs of Malaysian teachers.

II. METHOD

The research methodology of the study follows qualitative method research procedures through semi-structured interviews. Respondents in the study were chosen by purposive sampling. Respondents were chosen based on their expertise and experience that fulfilled research needs (Patton, 2015. Quinn & Patton, 2005) thus eight (8) school leaders and teacher leaders were chosen. The criteria for choosing the respondents were: (i) experience in their position for more than three (3) years, (ii) possesses an official assignment letter to their current position, (iii) voluntarily agrees to participate in the study.

This study used a semi-structured interview protocol. The purpose of the interview was to gather respondent perspectives on the study. The content validity of the interview protocol was validated by two (2) experts. Meuser & Nagel (2009) expressed the view that to identify an expert in their field, it is necessary to look at individuals who are professionally or voluntarily active in the field. The content expert is a professional development officer working with the Johor State Education Office while the language expert is an academician from University Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. The protocol was reviewed for content validity and comprehension.

The data compiled followed the ethical procedures of research. Official consent was given by the Ministry of Education Malaysia's Educational Planning and Research Division (Ref. No: KPM.600-3/2/3-eras (4878) dated 19th August 2019) to conduct this study in schools. Following this, the researcher identified suitable individuals that fit the research criteria. Respondents were contacted personally to set a suitable date for interviews.

During the interviews, ethical principals of research were observed.

The researcher considered the rigor issue of the study to balance a possible bias issue during data collection. The researcher is also an instrument in conducting the study, with a background as a teacher and education officer, so the study's credibility is enhanced. The researcher is fully immersed in state-level teacher leadership management and conducts data collection, interpretation and analysis with prior knowledge. Data collected were transcribed and coded. Themes were discussed with experts. Confirmability and dependability of the coded data were enhanced by ensuring the audio recording was clear for uninterrupted transcription. Aside from detailed explanations on the process of research and findings to the respondents, their experience of more than three (3) years in leadership contributed to the study's transferability.

The interview data analysis was done using the Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014) analysis procedure. The first step was transcription of interview data. The second step was reduction and thematic analysis. This was followed by data organisation, coding of themes and categories, rereading the transcriptions, identifying themes, categorizing, identifying main points, interpreting data for summarizing and writing the analysis report.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Theme 1. Improving Current Instruments

Local contextualised teacher leadership instruments are scarce. Thus, teachers and school leaders are more familiar with leadership instruments designed specifically for school leaders. This observation is made by most informants. An informant mentions this as follows: *"the leadership instrument is more focussed on Principals"* [I2:92-95]

This is agreed to by another informant who noted that there is a leadership instrument prepared by an education agency.

"the Ministry of Education Inspectorate Division prepared a Principal leadership instrument but there is no teacher leadership instrument" [I5:135-139]

The absence of a teacher leadership instrument designed by the education agency that focusses on school effectiveness is reflective of the lack of awareness in developing teacher leadership. Although the same division has designed a school effectiveness instrument called the SKPMg2, which has an element called Standard 4 to assess teachers' competency, the standard focusses more on the competency for teaching and learning. The instrument itself is deemed quite challenging. This noted by an informant who says as follows:

"the SKPMg2 instrument is difficult. Teachers need to give evidence, which we already have in our files...but we have to prepare it twice...it's repetition of work" [I5:121-125]

This reflects that the instrument may overlap with other documentation systems already in place and is adding work. In addition, another informant states that the wording in the instrument should be straightforward as can be seen in the following statement:

"should be direct, forward, clearly stated...some can be understood, and some can not. We want it clear... understandable at first glance" [I6:127-128]

As the SKPMg2 instrument is meant to aid self-assessment, it should be accessible and easily understood by the people it is meant for. Thus, teachers might not have effectively understood or able to assess their own teaching and learning using the instrument. Informants were also exposed to teacher leadership research and observed that the research is usually academic in nature. An actual usable instrument should make use of what we already have, as mentioned by an informant as follows:

"a teacher leadership instrument should be designed based on the current instruments available" [I1:101-102]

The instrument should be refined with students' learning needs, as suggested by an informant as follows:

"taking into account student's needs in teaching and learning" [I2:76-77]

The teacher leadership instrument designed should also consider the dynamic of education, as stated by an informant as follows:

"improving current instruments in line with...educational changes and...21st Century learning" [I3:88-89]

It is evident that informants believe the current instruments should be improved and to fulfil the needs of teacher leadership self-assessment, elements of teacher leadership could be added to the current instrument with necessary additions.

Theme 2. Benchmarking Effective Teacher Leadership Practices

A teacher leadership instrument suited to the local context would serve as a benchmark in gauging the standard of teacher leadership effectiveness in Malaysia. Current instruments are based on developed countries' standards which do not fully complement or reflect the local situation. Informants are agreed that a teacher leadership instrument would be beneficial, as mentioned by an informant as follows:

"it would increase effectiveness of leadership practices" [I4:76-78]

The instrument would help a clearer assessment of teacher leadership, as mentioned by an informant as follows:

"measuring teacher's leadership" [I5:128-129]

It can also be used to allow reflection, as stated by an informant as follows:

"provide feedback on what is lacking in a teacher's leadership" [I7:78-79]

Incidentally, the instrument can provide data for formative assessment by school leaders to evaluate teachers and give them the support they need, as mentioned by an informant as follows:

"there has to be an instrument to see teacher's leadership so school leaders can assess the teachers who have achieved and push the ones who are wanting" [I5:148-150]

Currently, teacher leadership is largely assessed in a subjective manner through observations by school leaders, as mentioned by an informant as follows:

"at the moment teachers' leadership is evaluated subjectively based on our observation, their noticeable achievements, interviews from meetings" [I5:158-163]

The same informant noted that the present annual assessment of PBPPP does not cover aspect relating to teacher leadership, as seen as follows:

"PBPPP...does not have a large scope...a teacher leadership instrument will make it easier. We can measure...teachers' leadership" [I5:158-163]

The data from a teacher leadership instrument can help schools prepare intervention programs to support teachers in preparing them to be middle leaders, as mentioned by an informant as follows:

"teachers who can be leaders middle...can be supported further" [I5:134-135]

The instrument would also allow for unbiased assessment of a teacher's performance overall and not just classroom performance, as mentioned by an informant as follows:

"to evaluate teachers, we have SPKMg2 standard 4 which only assesses teachers for teaching and learning in the classroom" [I1:102-103]

A teacher leadership instrument would cover aspects including teacher's service in other

educational professional programs. It would also help in teachers' future opportunities as teachers' competency can be encouraged and directed correctly to take on more roles, as mentioned by an informant as follows:

"to become an expert teacher easier for MOE to develop programs for these teachers to go further as mentors, coaches to national and state trainers" [I5:163-165]

The instrument can thus be used both by educational agencies as well as the teachers' themselves. With clear indications, teachers would be able to improve their own performance and abilities.

Theme 3. Increase Awareness of Teacher Leadership

Knowledge of teacher leadership is essential especially for school improvement. However, current instruments that relates to teacher assessment are focused mainly on teaching and learning competencies in the classroom without consideration of leadership aspects outside of the class. Even the informants of this study have been found to lack knowledge and awareness of the concept of teacher leadership. Nonetheless, a teacher leadership instrument is welcomed as mentioned by an informant as follows

"if we can have a more detailed leadership instrument, why not try it" [I1:104-105]

Informants also agree that the teacher leadership instrument would change the misconception about leadership as stated as follows:

"teachers often believe leadership is only for school leaders...without realising they too are leaders. When someone is assigned to lead a program but does not know his role then the job will not be done much less improve his self-leadership" [I8:73-77]

The informants also agree that as there is no clear teacher leadership instrument then it is yet

to be measured properly as mentioned by an informant as follows:

"teacher leadership exists but we do not know it in practice...as there is no tool to measure" [I8:88-90]

Nonetheless, the possibility of the instrument to support teachers' leadership is not in doubt as mentioned by an informant as follows:

"the instrument would help teachers without leadership traits to build it" [I3:130]

The instrument should consist of necessary elements to aid teachers, as mentioned by an informant as follows:

"I suggest the instrument to be made by studying more what is said about teacher leadership dimensions to help improve skills that are still lacking" [I7:127-129]

The instrument would also encourage teachers to reflect on their own competency, as mentioned by an informant as follows:

"not only students learn but teachers should learn from mistakes too" [I2:78-79]

Through self-reflection and clear indications of achievable targets, the instrument would encourage motivation, as stated by an informant as follows:

"improvement of teaching and indirectly motivating teachers...motivates us to make the effort...challenges us" [I3:92-94]

D. Theme 4. Guideline to Improve Teacher Leadership Competency

A competency guideline refers to knowledge, skills and values that should be mastered by teachers. Competent teachers would undoubtedly be able to execute assigned tasks effectively. A teacher leadership instrument that contains the criteria to improve competency would help this. An informant believes teachers would continuously learn, as mentioned as follows:

“teachers should learn and understand pedagogy” especially when “there is new input” [I2:88-90]

Thus, the instrument would be used to guide teachers, as mentioned by an informant as follows:

“a guideline to accomplish tasks well” [I4:89-90]

The lack of a guideline deprives teachers of the way to improve as they need to rely on what they know, as mentioned by an informant as follows:

“to depend solely on their experience” [I6:108-110]

Instead, a guideline would guide teachers to be better, as mentioned by an informant as follows:

“we can help teachers to reach a higher level; especially if in a school there is a majority of teacher leaders then the school will be developed” [I5:150-152]

Informants also believe that designing the instrument using expert knowledge from senior teachers would benefit everyone, as mentioned as follows:

“Please design the instrument as a guideline. We need to maximise senior teachers’ expertise and experience but since they are in the comfort zone, they need motivation to move. This instrument would do this” [I6:199-202]

Thus, informants are receptive to the idea of designing a teacher leadership instrument as the possible benefits of the instruments would encourage school improvement.

Theme 5. Building Self-Leadership as Teacher Leaders in Local Context

Good leaders should learn to lead themselves first. Teachers need to develop their leadership to allow them to guide others around them. Teachers may be able to develop self-leadership using the teacher leadership instrument as a guideline. The instrument that

would be designed would consider best practices of teacher leadership from instruments of developed countries and suited to the needs of the Malaysian context.

The elements in the instrument should include current needs for teachers’ development, as mentioned by an informant as follows:

“skills for current needs as well as for life-long learning” [I1:77]

The instrument would help teachers realise their role as models to their students, as mentioned by an informant as follows:

“teachers should be models to their students in various aspects, for instance discipline with time by heeding instructional time” [I2:82-85]

This is echoed by another informant who says that students pay attention to teachers’ actions as follows:

“students would look at how we dress, talk, use language with them and how we approach them” [I2:85-88]

Informants also noted that although teachers are given formal leadership roles, some teachers face difficulty fulfilling the task, as mentioned as follows:

“some are seen as a leader but are unable to perform leadership tasks despite having the designation, instead they are more of what we call a manager, only giving orders” [I8:91-93]

Another informant agrees that developing a local context-based teacher leadership instrument could enhance quality of education especially in international arenas, as mentioned by an informant as follows:

“the instrument could improve education quality suited to changing times...Malaysia has yet to perform well in international assessments compared to neighbouring countries” [I3:152-156]

For teachers to improve their capabilities, systematic efforts must be made. Thus, the a

teacher leadership instrument that is tailored to the needs of teachers in the nation would help teachers' build self-leadership in areas that directly and indirectly contribute to the good of the nation.

DISCUSSION

The study has managed to illustrate that the concept of teacher leadership has yet to be fully understood. This could be attributed to the varied definitions of teacher leadership and to the fact that the term is still relatively unknown in Malaysia compared to more developed nations (Rahim, Hamid, Samsudin & Ghani, 2020. Ariffin, Bush & Nordin, 2018). Programs directed at developing teacher leadership have yet to be effected, especially for in-service teachers (Chi, Cheung, Pui, Keung, Yu & Kwan, 2018). Yet teachers are given leadership roles routinely which they in turn are unable to fulfill effectively due to lack of leadership awareness. This study has found that there is a great need to develop a teacher leadership instrument suited to the local context. It must be designed and developed to streamline best practices of teacher leadership for teachers to use it effectively and sustainably. The needs as analysed were illuminated through the five (5) themes.

First is improving current instruments. Findings of this study show that currently in education, instruments for leadership are mainly directed to principals and instruments for teachers mainly focus on teaching and learning abilities. Thus, teacher leadership is not highlighted in any of the current instruments used in schools. Respondents however agree that current instruments can be improved on to include teacher leadership elements.

The second theme is benchmarking effective teacher leadership practices. Findings show that there are senior teachers with experience and expertise whose knowledge, skills and values should be imparted to other teachers. However, there is no specific orderly way to streamline their best practices. Thus, a teacher leadership instrument that is designed for Malaysian teachers that considers the best

practices of Malaysian teacher leaders would be valuable.

The third theme is to increase awareness of teacher leadership. The study found that teacher leadership is not a term that is well-known and understood. Therefore, it is understandable that it has not been highlighted in schools. If a teacher leadership instrument is used alongside instruments such SKPMg2, the awareness of teacher leadership would improve. Having an established instrument that is used uniformly for all teachers would help educational agencies to keep track of teacher competency and provide suitable programs to support teacher development.

The fourth theme is a guideline to improve teacher leadership competency. The study has found that a teacher leadership instrument developed that is true to the context of Malaysian teachers would be welcomed. Respondents acknowledged that although leadership roles have been given to teachers in educational organizations yet there are not enough guidelines to help them improve their leadership. Therefore, the instrument would serve as a guideline for teachers to identify and measure their leadership skills, knowledge, and practices.

The fifth theme is building self-leadership as teacher leaders in the local context. Teachers cannot expect to be supported solely by the higher echelon. Instead, as leaders they need to be aware of the leadership traits they should possess and make efforts to improve their practices. Therefore, a teacher leadership instrument could serve as a clear guide for teachers on what to do and how to improve themselves.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study gives a valuable perspective to agencies involved in teacher development as well as to researchers of teacher leadership particularly in raising awareness of the need to develop a contextual teacher leadership instrument. It is noted that there are still gaps in the study that can be researched. Future studies could focus on

developing a teacher leadership instrument using theoretical concepts and empirical findings. This would ensure that the instrument includes relevant items and domains of teacher leadership that are validated apart from abundant literature and panels of experts. Teacher leadership has great potential for development and it would be beneficial for school improvement, and national education at large, if a teacher leadership instrument is developed accordingly.

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