

EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR LEADERSHIP ROLES AT PRE-PRIMARY LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the level and manner of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), teachers' leadership roles in ECCE settings and to evaluate the teacher leaders' support in ECCE settings as per prescribed teacher leadership dimensions: (a) developmental focus, (b) recognition, (c) autonomy, (d) collegiality, (e) participation, (f) open communication, and (g) a positive environment). A survey research was conducted in Karachi from ECCE teachers to collect the data. The researcher used purposive sampling from private sector schools. The data were analyzed and presented in the form descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean. Inferential statistics included the use of multiple linear regression. Correlation among all the predictors was computed and the hypothesis was tested through SPSS 20. The p value of all dimension in coefficient table is lower than P value= 0.05 and thus rejects the null hypothesis. The findings suggested that all teacher leadership dimensions contribute significantly towards maintaining positive environment in ECCE settings.

Keywords: *Distributive Leadership, ECCE, Teacher Leadership, TL Dimensions*

INTRODUCTION

The notion of leadership has been an area of discussion in multi-disciplinary perspective and with various dimensions since the last two decades. Leadership has been adopted in various contexts, namely, education, business and government. The traditional view of leadership in organizations is to select one person or few over subordinates to lead them from top to bottom. More recently, however, this concept of leading by or few has been converted into shared or collaborative leadership or with more clarity it is described as the change of concept wave from transactional to transformational type of leadership or distributive leadership. No matter

what the recent term is used, the real functional concept of modern leadership is collective efforts of formal leadership and all other members functioning as informal leaders for the development of organization.

In addition to this, the modern view of leadership is not hierarchical, but based on decentralization, collaboration and shared leadership approach. This approach is both tight in value but loose in providing freedom to act, and to experiment the latest techniques of ECCE teaching, while questioning the traditional views. The four dimensions proposed by Hairon and Goh (2015) demand the administrator of school to extend the distribution of instructional leadership from senior leaders to middle leaders and stretch it to teacher leaders. These dimensions include bounded empowerment, developing leadership, shared decision and collection engagement. Moreover, in order to implement this instructional leadership, ECCE teacher leaders need to be well aware of the scope or boundary of their influence over various decisions taken at school. This is closely linked to the dimensions of teachers' empowerment in making decision while delegating powers to the middle management to develop the innovation, performance, and dedication of teachers.

More recently, the model of distributive leadership and teacher leadership is a dominate approach in ECCE settings, which needs to be implemented for maximum learning outcomes. This means that ECCE teachers also have the prime role to play in curriculum implementation along with the roles of principals, deputy principals and other school staff. The importance of leadership lies in the fact that it is responsible to motivate all the members to play their role in ECCE setting to make contribution in bringing about the real and dynamic change in the lives of children for a productive society (Scott & Kivunja, 2015).

The teachers' role as a leader contributes to achieve organizational roles. According to Muijs and Harris (2003), teacher leadership focuses upon improving learning based on collaboration, development and growth. Teacher leadership requires a consistent courage and motivation level to face the obstacles and challenges to meet the vision and mission of the schools and to implement ECCE teacher's ideal pedagogy. Moreover, Katzenmeyer & Moller (2009) claim that a potential teacher leader possesses the characteristics of competency, credibility, and approachability. Various leadership dimensions and different approaches are required for a teacher leader to achieve the vision and mission of the organization. Teacher leadership can involve different initiatives such as implementing innovations to introduce a change. For instance, by providing pedagogical support to colleagues at ECCE

teachers, while boosting the skillfulness of the teachers to achieve maximum learning outcomes. Teacher leadership also functions productively when the environment or culture of school is favorable for teacher leaders to express and implement their ideal pedagogy to their principals, colleagues, and parents. The boundary of influence for pre-primary teachers is usually not as per the ideal views of teachers' philosophy to influence the decision making, curriculum and policy making at school.

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) propose seven-dimension-model of school culture. These dimensions are core areas of teacher leadership, which indicate the true leadership style and tool of teacher leadership proposed by Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) to assess school culture and ECCE teachers' perceptions of their teacher leadership level at school.

The research problem of this study is imbedded in the roots of Pakistani educational system, both in government and private sectors. The contribution of teacher leadership in implementing developmentally appropriate practices in ECCE pedagogy is evident through ECCE teachers' communication and informal leadership of sharing their ideal pedagogy to colleagues and school leaders. The lack of pedagogical harmony, interaction with curriculum, cultural and administrative influence and much more restrict the teachers to express their ideal pedagogy whether they are trained or not. The significance of this study is well connected with globalization, industrialization and the global market to the requirements, which indicate the importance of growing ECCE teachers' leadership role to achieve the international standard and 21st century skills required (Hognestad & Boe, 2015; OECD, 2012; Ord et al., 2013; Waniganayake et al., in press). Similarly, Pakistani ECCE system is currently in the reform phase. Pakistani Early Childhood Care Education curriculum developed in 2002 (revised in 2007) reveals a shift while emphasizing on constructivist learning practices, which demands the learning process to be based on critical thinking, creative, collaboration, as well as independent discovery.

The main idea of the teacher leaders, which has been the focus point of contemporary analysis is considering them as the instigator of change at the school level (Harris, Jones, & Huffman, 2018; Lieberman, Campbell, & Yashkina, 2017) and as a strong catalyst to bring change in schools (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009) and to cope with the challenges faced by the present education system. It has been observed that pre-primary teachers' do not find supporting and favorable school culture and ideal leadership style to implement their idyllic ECCE pedagogy. Their influence is usually low and

converted to the dominant and hierarchical leadership style of schools.

Its study aims to explore preprimary teachers' views about their role with regard to leadership in the early childhood setting. The study also aims to investigate the ideal leadership model, which the teachers need to implement, and their pedagogical philosophy based on their ideal views. The second research question aims to explore the connection between leadership models proposed by the literature review with the expectations of pre-primary teachers' expected leadership model.

The traditional bureaucratic structure of schools is a significant factor which becomes an obstacle in the development of teacher leaders. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) suggest schoolteacher leadership dimensions to implement in schools to provide a favorable environment to teacher leaders. They also propose implementation of change process, development focus, approaches to take decision, method and skills of effective communication, and a motivating system to accelerate the efforts of teacher leaders, which need to be addressed to strengthen their role to lead and share their ideal pedagogy and vision within and beyond their classrooms practices.

Schools are complex, evolving and consistently changing organizations aiming to achieve social, economic and global needs. The excessive integration of information technology in education system, learner diversity, and needs of global market maximizes these complexities. The purpose of this study was to investigate level of teacher leadership support and influence in ECCE schools, which is a possible means for continuous improvement by collective and shared leadership. The study aimed to investigate the dimensions and specific teachers' leadership functions that need to be maintained to support or inhibit the development of ECCE teacher leaders. The study also examined the relationship and interdependence of various dimensions required for teachers' leadership implementation and the positive environment it needs. The study had the following objectives:

1. To investigate the level of ECCE teachers' leadership roles in ECCE settings.
2. To evaluate the teacher leaders' support in ECCE settings as per prescribed teacher leadership dimensions.

Literature Review

The theoretical framework of this study can be aligned with distributed leadership theory (Gronn, 2000; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004).

This theory can be traced back to mid-1920s (Harris, 2009), which is also understood as fluid and emergent, rather than a fixed phenomenon (Gronn, 2000). Here, leadership is viewed more as a “Collective phenomenon where leadership is present in the flow of activities in which a set of organization members find themselves involved” (Gronn, 2002, p. 445).

Spillane (2006) defines distributed leadership as a practice rather than focusing on leaders or their roles, functions, routines and structures. It is viewed as the interaction between people rather than considering it as product, knowledge and skills. The interaction more specifically clarifies leadership as a practice. Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond (2004), further recognized distributed leadership falling theoretically into ‘distributed cognition’ and ‘activity theory’ and consider them as the conceptual foundations of distributed leadership.

Moreover, Woods, Bennett, & Harvey (2014) propose characteristics of distributed leadership in similar way which includes emergent property, openness of boundaries and leadership according to expertise. Emergent property considers the concept of leadership as an individual rather than a phenomenon. It suggests the interaction of leaders in various situations as a characteristic of distributed leadership. Openness of boundaries relates distributed leadership as a process of shared and collective function in the organization, which extends the scope of teacher leadership. These characteristics are a source of understanding and clarity about true teacher leadership theoretical background, which is helpful in providing conceptual clarity regarding teacher leadership.

The study has adopted the conceptual framework, which also gives guidelines and directions to frame an action. There are four core components in this framework. The first component is the foundational part, required to enable teacher leadership in various school cultures. This component suggests dimensions, which have been drawn from the literature review of Katzenmeyer & Moller (2009). The dimensions of teacher leadership are support drivers to help increase the level of teacher leadership and maintain a productive influence of the teachers on existing or traditional practices at ECCE setting. Similarly, these norms of teacher practice support teacher leaders and maximize the level of collaboration. The implementation of school culture dimensions is supported by adopting the distributed leadership style at schools to maintain collaborative school culture, which enable teachers to become leaders.

These characteristics of school culture are mandatory for collaborative

teacher leadership, which include developmental focus, positive environment, participation, autonomy, collegiality, open communication and recognition. In the third component, teacher leaders become an active part of learning and professional development communities and instructional leadership teams. As a result of proposed school culture, engagement and freedom provide sufficient autonomy to bring significant changes in their instructional and leadership practices to maximize student learning outcomes. According to the theory of action, school culture based on proposed dimensions increase the support and influence level of teacher leadership, which indirectly influences and improves student learning. The nature of the framework clearly describes the relations of all these four components that how each individually or collectively supports student learning and teacher practice.

Teacher Leadership as a Paradigm Shift

The definition of leadership in education has evolved over the years. The term ‘teacher leadership’ first appeared in 1916 in John Dewey’s writing, in which he proposed teachers’ active role in school governance. However, in recent times it emanated from the 1980s educational reform movement in the USA (Rackley, 2006). These three waves of teacher leadership (see Table 1) presents the different conceptual meanings and role of leadership expected from teacher leaders to perform in various educational contexts around the world.

Table 1: The historical evolution of teacher leadership

Teacher leadership evolution	Focus of Wave
First wave	Administrative leaders, i.e. head teachers, master teachers, department heads
Second wave	Instructional leaders, i.e. PD specialists, curriculum experts, mentors
Third wave	Team leaders, change agents, advocates of collaborative and shared leadership practices

Adapted from Silva et al. (2000, p. 1-3, cited by Shah, S. R. (2017).

The three waves of teacher leadership in different times of history have been described by Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) in this way that the first wave of teacher leadership was found in practice more than five decades ago with the conceptual meaning of managerial position. Teacher with formal positions were considered teacher leaders, that is, department chairs or school supervisors. This role was only specified to the top formal positions of school and only school principal and upper management were regarded as leaders of schools.

The second wave of teacher leadership was emerged as a response of the

first wave to witness the other roles of teacher leadership beyond the school administrative roles (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000) where instruction was not necessarily regarded as a defining criterion for teacher leadership. Teachers' role was upgraded to curriculum designing, and some other administrative roles. The new teacher leadership positions meant that teachers were given autonomy to take positions school-wide (Levin & Schrum, 2016, p.3).

The third wave of teacher leadership emerged in 1990s characterized with focus on more collegial support roles rather than administrative and authoritative roles of teachers. The third wave drew a clear line between formal and informal roles (Kelly, 2011, p.7). A teacher can be a mentor, advisor and part of curriculum review committee, while giving their input to school administration and remain as he classroom teacher.

As a development of this third wave, some researchers have defined teacher leadership with different terms to describe this paradigm shift. Berry, Byrd, and Wieder (2013) call teacher leaders of the last wave as "teacherpreneurs". These are teachers who take on a hybrid of leadership roles both inside and outside the classroom. A teacherpreneur is defined by Quaglia and Lande (2016) as "A classroom expert, who still teaches while finding time, space, and (ideally) much deserved reward for spreading both sound pedagogical practices and policy ideas" (p.70). Teacher leaders in this definition are teachers who have taken leadership roles to excel their leadership skills and dedicate time for their classroom responsibilities simultaneously.

Leadership is considered a context-specific phenomenon, where teacher leaders' roles may differ in various contexts based on school culture and environment. For example, the way ECCE teachers perform their leadership roles in Australia, may be difficult to imagine in Pakistani schools, largely due to cultural dissimilarities.

ECCE setting has two-way influences from teachers to ECCE setting during the learning process (McCrea, 2015). Teachers associated with ECCE setting tend to be involved in multiple roles simultaneously (Scott & Kivunja, 2015). McCrea (2015) depicted a clear picture of leadership in ECCE and characterized it as four roles for all the members to get involved in. This role involves a pedagogy creator, policy designer, team leader, and a rights advocate.

The focus of this study is not only on the need of an effective leadership, but it is vital for the success of an ECE setting as well (Silins, Mulford, & Kivunja, 2015). An ECCE setting leader not only needs to plan, organize, lead and control the processes in a setting, but they also required to be visionary,

pedagogy creator, team stakeholder, policy designer, and rights' advocates. The people, place and practices which they have to lead involve diverse structural and cultural dynamics and are different from ECCE context (p. 1712).

This creates a sense of difference between ECCE setting and other school settings. ECCE setting functions differently in terms of roles and the leadership styles from those in a primary level, or on secondary school, or higher secondary institution. To specify, leadership styles in an ECE settings apply in functioning a transformative vision and maintaining managerial role, but also become an active part of the educational policy making at schools, identifying educational outcomes, and performing pedagogical leadership roles to support and achieve young children in the ECE setting.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive and multiple linear regression was used to investigate teacher leadership in ECCE settings. Descriptive approach is used to investigate the existing phenomenon in an accurate manner. The phenomena observed in this descriptive research design are already available. However, this study research collected data through the use of a survey questionnaire. The main goal of this study is to describe the existing phenomena of teacher leadership dimensions in ECCE settings in Karachi region.

This study also intended to investigate the relationship between seven dimensions of teacher leadership and the contribution of each dimension to support others and to investigate the influence of these dimensions on the positive environment of ECCE settings for practicing teacher leadership roles. By adapting the Teacher Leadership School Survey (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009) in this study, the researcher explored the seven dimensions measured by the instrument taking them as independent variable while considering teacher leadership and school positive environment as a dependent variable and continuous variable.

The population of the study is approximately 1000 private school early childhood educators of Karachi, who were teachers of ECCE. The population is the teachers' performing as full-time faculty members with a contract or temporary status, in schools with school fees ranging between PKR 1500 to 2500.

Purposive convenience sampling was used for data collection. Due to limited time and level of research, the actual number of ECCE teachers was reduced to 210 teachers in schools of Karachi with a fee structure ranging from PKR 1500 to PKR 2500.

A survey is a tool conveniently used to collect research data on a large scale to cover a large number of people and is relatively economical as compared to other methods. Teacher Leadership School Survey (TLSS) has been developed by Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) and is widely used to measure teachers' perceptions about the level of teacher leadership in their context and how it is modeled. These teacher leadership dimensions and roles to support teacher leadership includes (a) a positive environment (b) developmental focus, (c) collegiality (b) recognition, (c) autonomy, (e) participation, (f) open communication, and (g) positive environment.

After finalizing the questionnaire, descriptive statistics along with inferential statistics were run for analyzing the data collected. Descriptive statistics was used to interpret the data of all variables through mean, frequency, percentage, rate of response and standard deviation of each variable and the proposed dimensions of teacher leadership. Keeping the level of mean, the survey items were presented with collective mean from the highest to lowest. The support was considered higher based on high mean of teacher responses and it was perceived lower when the rating was low in teacher leadership support level. To provide answer to the second research question, multiple linear regressions was run to investigate the relation of other dimensions with positive environment dimension of TLSS. Multiple linear regression was computed to respond to the second research question.

TLSS was adopted to collect the quantitative data, operationally to measure the level of seven Teacher Leadership Dimensions defined by Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009). The data were not only used to analyze the individual perceptions of teachers, but the data was summarized to compare the variance in ECCE teachers' perceptions about the presence of Teacher Leadership Dimensions (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009).

Descriptive and inferential statistics were analyzed through SPSS version 20. The data analysis of section B presented the perceived teacher leadership of ECCE teachers mainly in terms of pedagogical proficiency, effective collaboration, and school environment among themselves. ECCE teachers viewed their collaboration, developmental support, and collegial interaction as more important in finding the level and influence of teacher leadership support at ECCE level.

RESULTS

The data of section A intended to develop for the demographic information of the respondents. This section revealed that around 94% of the respondents

were females while only 11 (6%) respondents were male. Moreover, 48% percent ECCE teachers had experience between 2 to 3 years and 18% had between 4 to 5 years. 34% ECCE had experience above 5 years. The table also illustrated that 93% respondents were ECCE teachers, while 3% and 4% were senior ECCE teacher and ECCE coordinators respectively.

Table 2: Hypothesis Testing

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.988 ^a	.976	.976	.175

The table shows the multiple linear regression model summary and overall fit statistics. It can be seen that the adjusted R² of our model is .976 with the R² = .976. This means that the linear regression explains 97.6% of the variance in the data.

Table 3: Multiple Regression

ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	1159.617	6	193.270	6319.525	.000 ^b
	Residual	28.228	923	.031		
	Total	1187.845	929			

a. Dependent Variable: Positive Environment

b. Predictors: (Constant), Open Communication, Participation, Collegiality, Recognition, Autonomy, Developmental Focus

Table 4: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
1	(Constant)	.215	.022		9.839	.000	.173	.258
	Developmental Focus	.469	.033	.480	14.118	.000	.404	.534
	Recognition	-.123	.034	-.129	-3.603	.000	-.190	-.056
	Autonomy	.142	.033	.147	4.332	.000	.078	.206
	Collegiality	-.061	.019	-.060	-3.295	.001	-.098	-.025
	Participation	.448	.028	.469	16.207	.000	.394	.502
	Open Communication	.076	.019	.087	4.060	.000	.039	.113

a. Dependent Variable: Positive Environment

A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict the relation and dependency of positive environment on other independent variables. A significant regression equation was found (F(6, 923) = 6319.525, p < .000), with an R² of .976. Participants’ predicted leadership to 0.215+

0.469 (Developmental Focus) -0.123 (Recognition) + 0.142 (Autonomy)-0.061(Collegiality)+ 0.448 (Participation)+ 0.076. All the predictors have significantly contributed to maintain positive environment in ECCE schools.

The next output table is the F-test. The linear regression's F-test has the null hypothesis that the model explains zero variance in the dependent variable (in other words $R^2 = 0$). The F-test is highly significant; thus we can assume that the model explains a statistically significant correlation between School Positive Environment and other dimensions of teacher leaders.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the ECCE teachers have the satisfactory level of teacher leader leadership and the positive environment is supporting the leadership dimensions to be functioned with high frequency. The study also explored the correlation among schoolteacher leadership dimensions proposed by Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009). The need of this study was considered by the interest of researchers, sorted out in the literature review on teacher leadership as it is a core area requires updated school improvement strategies.

Level of Teacher Leadership Dimensions

Analysis of the data suggests many teachers revealed a stronger presence of Developmental Focus (Mean 3.74), Positive Environment (Mean 3.79), and Participation (Mean 3.78). However, data also suggest that responses vary from context to context as high level of standard deviation was found almost in each item of all teacher leadership dimensions. The overall result of dimensions also reveals that ECCE teachers collectively perceive Collegiality (Mean 3.53) and Open Communication (Mean 3.52) on the lowest level in their schools.

When teachers work with collaboration in less formal or informal settings, the uniqueness and individual difference with divorced experiences and ideas create an exclusive panel. In addition, the survey rating suggests that teachers believe the proposed dimensions of teacher leadership have not reached its perceived desirable potential within the schools surveyed. Every dimension should be present to maximum frequency for assuring high level teacher leadership roles in schools. Each dimension in TLSS was not rated to a high frequency therefore, the findings of each dimension are presented separately.

The data suggests that ECCE teachers perceive the existence of Developmental Focus in their school to an average frequency, which is not a surprising result as Berry, Byrd, and Wieder (2013) call such teacher leaders in

this last wave as teacherpreneurs. These are teachers who take this leadership role even without leadership support. ECCE teacher leaders revealed through the survey rating that school administration and teachers try hard to help new teachers be successful (Mean= 4.00) and to a satisfactory level. They also believe that they have sufficient freedom to make choice, but the level of variance shows great differences in individual responses. Moreover, the teachers expect the freedom of celebrating short successes in schools.

While rating the level of autonomy at ECCE setting with high frequency, the ECCE teachers revealed that they can make judgments about what is best for their students (Mean= 4.00., SD=1.204), but there is still great variation in individual perceptions of teachers. They also believe that a majority of the teachers cannot perform their leadership role at their schools. The data suggests the there is an average level of collegiality among the ECCE teachers while unlike importance of collaboration highlighted by Slater (2008) that effective collaboration is essential for developing leadership capacity within schools.

School Environment and Leadership Dimensions

This study also aims to investigate the relation of all the variables of this research with school environment. It was hypothesized that school environment is dependent on collaboration, collegiality, recognition developmental focus, autonomy, open communication.

The multiple linear regression was computed to test the hypotheses and the data revealed that each of the dimensions contributes to maintain positive environment for teacher leadership at ECCE School with different frequencies.

The ANOVA table reveals the R2 is significant testing the model summary. The F-test is highly significant, and the p value= 0.000 meets the significant value. Thus, we can assume that the model explains a statistically significant correlation between school positive environment and other dimensions of teacher leaders. Teacher leadership is a sleeping giant and the ECCE needs to practice its role in this dimension in ECCE setting and to meet the global challenges. The true shared and collective leadership needs to be built by specifying the areas in implementation, which lead to teacher leadership.

FINDINGS

The findings revealed the practice of teachers' leadership in ECCE settings, which lies somewhere between sometimes and often as far as frequency is concerned. The findings can be promising, as it describes the freedom with average frequency where the teachers' ideas are respected and welcomed to

some extent. However, it seems to go in opposition to the hierarchical and bureaucratic structure of present government schools and most of private schools of Pakistan, which can never achieve the set standards of modern approach in curriculum.

The result of inferential statistics shows that gender, teaching experience and qualification as a variable indicate that there is no significant influence of these variables on ECCE teacher's perception with regards to teacher leadership practice and school positive environment. As predicative variables, these factors cannot be much influencing in teacher leadership implications in school. Therefore, the researcher should not rely a lot on these criteria in order to select teachers for leadership roles. On the other hand, the teacher is consistently motivated to take leadership roles by defining the role of leadership to them and teacher leadership training should be organized for widening the vision of teachers. The data also revealed that there is significant and strong correlation and interdependence among all the predictors.

Generally, this result and finding of the study shift the focus towards the fact that even though there may be some determination and contextual pressure for teacher leadership, there is still a long way to go to develop a culture where the power may be systematically distributed among all the members.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study can be implemented for generalizing the concept of teacher leadership in Pakistani perspective. More specifically, findings of this study are a source for policy makers to know the real status of teacher leadership at Pakistani schools. These findings of ECCE teachers' perceptions also inform the school administrators about differing beliefs and roles of teachers. Additionally, the findings give an insight to policy makers to consider the factors which can be influential or not while practicing the teacher leadership at ECCE settings. To sum up, these findings can be taken as a core school development area and can be expanded into the vision and approach set for the school's system.

The findings drawn from the data may be beneficial for ECCE teachers as the modern trend of teaching, namely co-teaching and team teaching with a collaborative nature, which is dominant in modern education system. The study can further lead to the need of shared leadership and its importance in ECCE development.

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