

REVIEW ON IMPACT OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Teacher leadership is commonly discussed in educational research and practice. Yet, the relationship between teacher leadership and student achievement has not been soundly established by empirical evidence. The purpose of this review was to examine the extent to which teacher leadership was related to students' academic achievement. The results revealed that teacher leadership was positively related to student achievement. Among seven dimensions of teacher leadership which were all positively associated with student achievement, facilitating improvements in curriculum, instruction, and assessment has shown strongest relationship. However, published studies reported larger effect sizes than un-published studies. The implications and limitations are discussed.

Keywords: Teacher leadership, student achievement, academic, curriculum, instruction.

I INTRODUCTION

Teacher leadership is “the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” [1]. Teacher leaders are teachers who seek to accomplish the goal of school improvement not only by continuing teaching students, but also through influencing others within their schools and elsewhere [2,3]. Teacher leadership has received increasing attention over the past 40 years from both educational practitioners and researchers [4,3,1]. Calls for greater focus on teacher leadership are grounded primarily in two reasons. First, the era of school and educator accountability has intensified expectations for improved student achievement and increased the pressure on schools to improve student results. School improvement is complex work, and principals, alone, are not able to achieve and sustain the expected levels of school improvement. Teachers also play a crucial role in bridging school level decisions and classroom level practices[5,1]. The increasing pressure on school improvement and the crucial role of teachers create both rooms and needs for teacher leadership. Second, in response to the increased demands for improved school results, teachers are taking more leadership roles as principals discover the benefit of sharing the leadership responsibility. A survey carried out by [6] Inc. showed that, among 1000 U.S. K-12 public school teachers, 51% are playing leadership roles (e.g., department chair, teacher mentor) in schools.

II LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher leadership is a common term in educational practice. There is also an immense body of literature on teacher leadership. Within that body of literature, teacher leadership is often promoted and discussed as a normative condition; yet there is still much to learn about how teacher leadership and student achievement are related, among other issues. [1] argued that, although the claims of potential desired effects of teacher leadership are compelling, empirical research about the relationship between teacher leadership and school improvement in general, and student achievement in particular, remains rare. [3] also highlighted this knowledge gap. The development of the concept and practice of teacher leadership. Teacher leadership has evolved over time. Initially, teacher leadership referred to teachers designated as “manager” in certain formal roles (e.g., department chair, headteacher, member of advisory, and union representative) [7, 8]. Since the 1980s, however, the educational reform movement opened discussion concerning the value of professionalism and collegiality and brought about new opportunities for the exercise of teacher leadership (9; 8). Both education reform policy and practice began to recognize teachers as central to the process of restructuring schools in numerous ways. Teacher leadership became less about sharing managerial responsibilities and more about sharing responsibility for making change. These opened up opportunities for teachers to “help redesign schools, mentor colleagues, engage in problem solving at the school level, and provide professional growth activities for colleagues.” (11). The arrival of the era of accountability in the early 2000s has markedly promoted teacher leadership as a lever for improving student outcomes (9, 3). In the United States, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015) emphasized the importance of teacher leadership by directly addressing teacher leadership in creating new funding, performance-based compensation systems, and programming opportunities. Many states have also committed to investing in teacher leadership [11]. The development of teacher leadership in educational practice has led to a proliferation of related research. To date, there are three well-known literature reviews of research on teacher leadership, which track the historical development of the field [12,13,14]. Looking across these reviews, we found that the field has gained in understanding the theoretical questions such as (a) how is teacher leadership defined and related or different from other conceptions of leadership and (b) what are the elements of teacher leadership. However, empirical studies to assess the contribution of teacher leadership are still somewhat limited. [1] claimed that “much more empirical evidence is required if policy-makers, researchers and practitioners are to be convinced of the merits of teacher leadership in principle and practice” [1] literature review further confirmed this point. Thirteen years later, [3] provided an updated review focusing on teacher leadership within the context of accountability based on literature from January 2004 through December 2013. Surprisingly, this review suggested there were still a few empirical studies with robust data collection measures in the field.

III THE DEFINITION OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Even though researchers acknowledged teacher leadership as a unique form of leadership and many efforts have been invested in clarifying the definition of teacher leadership (13,14), a generally accepted definition and commonly used term or theory to frame teacher leadership research is still lacking [15,16,17]. Several theories are used when researchers frame their research surrounding teacher leadership. These theories are generally represented by such terms as, teacher leadership, teacher empowerment, and distributed leadership [18]. Although those three terms conceptualize teacher leadership in slightly unique ways, all of them reflect the notion that leadership encompasses empowerment and collective agency [19] and teacher leadership involves “teacher influence over key school-wide decision-making process” [1]. The following sections briefly reviewed the central idea of each theory that researchers used to frame their study.

IV TEACHER LEADERSHIP

The concept of teacher leadership is generally understood to mean “teacher agency through establishing relationships, breaking down barriers, and marshalling resources throughout the organization in an effort to improve students’ educational experiences and outcomes” [12]. In the same vein, [3] suggested that there are a number of general themes to highlight about teacher leadership in the literature: (a) teacher leadership goes beyond classroom

walls, (b) teacher leadership includes promoting professional learning, (c) teacher leadership involves shared policy and decision making, (d) the goal of teacher leadership is improving student learning, and (e) teacher leadership is a process of facilitation of whole school change and improvement.

V TEACHER EMPOWERMENT

Most studies conceptualize teacher empowerment from two perspectives: social structural and psychological [11]. The social structural perspective considers teacher empowerment as teachers' power to influence school decisions [12,13,14] identified four domains of empowerment: (a) school operations and management, (b) students' school experiences, (c) teachers' work life, and (d) control over classroom instruction. The psychological perspective defines teacher empowerment as "an individual's psychological state" [17] which includes self-efficacy, autonomy, and impact, etc. [19,20].

VI DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

Rather than focusing exclusively on either one formal individual leader or certain designated teacher leaders, distributed leadership implies that leadership is a group-level phenomenon [21], which requires "the conjoint agency of multiple actors" [23]. According to [24], distributed leadership refers to "a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation" (p. 144). Thus, distributed leadership shows a sign of being a broader concept, which includes teacher leadership and teacher empowerment [26]. Distributed leadership is often used interchangeably with other terms, such as "shared leadership," "collaborative leadership" (Spillane, 2005).

VII THE DIMENSIONS OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Over the past decades, there have been considerable efforts aimed at delineating the leadership roles for teachers. For instance, by reviewing 140 studies from 1980 to 2004, York-Barr and Duke (2004) summarized seven dimensions of teacher leadership practices: (a) coordination and management, (b) school or district curriculum work, (c) professional development of colleagues, (d) participation in school change/improvement, (e) parent and community involvement, (f) contributions to the profession, and (g) preservice teacher education. However, these dimensions are somewhat fluid (e.g., dimensions c, f, and g) and do not represent a consensus in the field. An alternative option for framing teacher leadership is offered by The Teacher Leader Model Standards which were developed by the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (2011) which is "a broad array of education organizations, state education agencies, teacher leaders, principals, superintendents, and institutions of higher education" (p. 3). The teacher leader standards suggested by this body of work consists of seven domains: (a) fostering a collaborative culture to support educator development and student learning, (b) accessing and using research to improve practice and student achievement, (c) promoting professional learning for continuous improvement, (d) improvements in instruction and student learning, (e) promoting the use of assessments and data for school and district improvement, (f) improving outreach and collaboration with families and community, and (g) advocating for student learning and the profession. These seven dimensions are much more specific and nuanced than those extracted by York-Barr and Duke (2004) from their analysis of studies.

We looked further into existing literature to get to an even finer level of delineation. then, synthesized and developed our inclusive, yet parsimonious framework of teacher leadership: (a) promoting a shared school vision, mission and goals of student learning, (b) coordinating and managing beyond the classroom such as organizing and leading peer reviews of school practice, managing programs, and coordinating the school's daily schedules, (c) facilitating improvements in curriculum, instruction, and assessment such as using authentic assessments, developing district-level curricular programs, and developing curricular/instructional materials, (d) promoting teachers' professional development such as mentoring, facilitating learning communities, promoting pre-service teacher education, and developing capacities of peers, (e) engaging in policy and school decision making which includes policy making, policy engagement, policy implementation, and policy advocacy, (f) improving outreach and

collaboration with families and communities such as advocacy for students, schools, and the profession and parent and community engagement, and (g) fostering a collaborative culture in school. These seven dimensions became part of the coding system for this meta-analysis.

VIII TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND STUDENT OUTCOME

Teacher leadership is essential for school effectiveness and improvement. Regardless of decades of literature on this issue and continuous calls for further examination of teacher leadership as a strategy for improving schools and student learning, until recently, there has been a lack of quantitative empirical studies. As a result, the relationship between teacher leadership and student achievement is far from clear or established [29]. Previous literature reviews regarding teacher leadership have all pointed out the urgency for this type of solid empirical research[30]. Fortunately, in recent years, a growing number of empirical studies have emerged in sufficient quantity to set a stage for this meta-analysis. For example, on the basis of a sample of 24,645 schools from five years of the Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) survey (from 2011 to 2015), [31] found that holding constant school background characteristics (poverty level, size, etc.), the higher rank of overall teacher leadership was directly associated with the higher percentile rank of student proficiency in both math and reading. school climate [31,32,33]. Based on a sample of 198 elementary schools in a western state in the US, Hallinger and Heck examined the direct, mediated, and reciprocal effect that distributed leadership has on student learning growth in math and reading [34]. They found that distributed leadership boosts student learning by building the school capacity for academic improvement. Additional studies also showed that there were statistically indirect pathways from principal leadership to teacher leadership, to learning climate and student achievement growth in both primary schools [37] and high schools [36] Our search for similar empirical investigations of teacher leadership yielded a sufficient body of empirical studies to support the conduct of our meta-analysis to inquire into the relationship between teacher leadership and student achievement.

IX CONCLUSION

Teacher leadership is a promising construct for school improvement. During our study, we found that much of the literature on teacher leadership is normative; thus, there is a need for more empirical studies on this topic, particularly those focusing on indirect relationships from teacher leadership to school capacity and to student achievement. Additionally, an intriguing line of inquiry will be to follow the indirect pathways from principal leadership to teacher leadership to student achievement. Much work needs to be done in these promising and crucial areas.

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