COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS ON MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effectiveness of collective leadership on school culture in secondary schools of the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. With the constant expanding role of teachers in schools, it is a worthy effort to propagate collective leadership that encourages collaborative efforts that is key to increased efficacy and better performance. In addition, studying this leadership form in metropolitan schools such as those in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia which are in high-accountability conditions, is a worthy effort which can, in turn inform policy and practice that is essential in the establishment of collective leadership practices. Redesigning leadership roles through collective leadership allows teachers the space to feel empowered and supported which is what is needed in this highly demanding, technologically fast-paced era. To that effect, the purpose of this phenomenological study is to confirm the effectuality of collective leadership practices for a sustained positive school culture and to encourage sanguine teacher behaviours in proliferated capacities. The theoretical underpinnings of this study were established from Friedrich et. al.'s (2014) Collectivistic Leadership Theory and Bolman and Deal's (2003) Culture Theory. And through all these, the qualitative nature of this study revealed perceptions of six teachers through interviews and observations in order to discover emerging patterns that conformed to the research questions. The findings of this research revealed five domains which are recognition and acknowledgement, collaboration and teamwork, decision-making and responsibility, empowerment and shared goals and trust. These domains result in, teachers being open to accepting collective leadership as part of their school culture as distributing responsibilities based on teachers' abilities and strengths could contribute to a more positive work environment. Hence the proposition of 'Teach with CLass' framework – the novelty of this research, which encourages everyone in the school to work together as a team, championing every individual's expertise that enables the best possible outcome in a given situation. The implication here is that when teachers feel appreciated for expertise and contribution, the positive impact on their motivation reflects on their job satisfaction and commitment, creative a conducive environment for all stakeholders to thrive.

Keywords: Collective leadership, school culture, secondary school, teachers

APPROVAL

This is to certify that this thesis conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, for the fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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I hereby declare that the thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

AeU   Asia e University

EPRD   Education Planning and Research Division

ETUC   European Trade Union Committee for Education

GTP   Government Transformation Programme

MOE   Ministry of Education

NKRA   National Key Results Area

PTO   Parent-Teacher Organizations

WHO   World Health Organisation

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter addressed the research background by offering an overview of the study in general. The study explored collective leadership perspectives for teachers and their role in school culture. It illustrated the problem statement that was addressed and the research questions and goals were answered and accomplished. This chapter also outlined the reasoning, theoretical contribution in terms of practicality and methodological dimensions, the hypotheses based on the scope of the research indicating its delimitation and relevance. Finally, the variables and key terms explored in this research were described and operationalized in view of the study.

1.1 The Decussating Domain of Research

The decussating domain of research in this study described the ability for teachers to take more control in the decision-making process of the school, working collectively with principals. It also entailed examining school culture as the avenue for convergence where educators could work as a team, regardless of roles.

This study examined the insights that gave relative influence on the effect of culture and its impacting influence on collective leadership. The authority of collective leadership among teachers was discovered through research done by Leithwood & Louis (2012) and a variety of research was undertaken to explore collective leadership and culture (Sivalingam, 2018; Eckert, 2019, 2022, 2023; Raelin, 2019; Azeem & Mataruna, 2019; Cavilga-Harris et al., 2021; DeWitt, 2021; Docherty, 2021; Koundyannan, 2021; Shonk, 2022; Cooper, 2022; Eckert et al., 2022; Stine, 2022; Watzek et. al, 2022).

Studies have shown that collective leadership is also linked to improved school productivity and student achievement (Leithwood, 2005; Leithwood & Day, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Eckert, 2019, 2022; Sivalingam, 2018; Hermann, 2016; Ni et al., 2018). Successful school leaders must incorporate accountability measures and create conditions for the success of diverse student populations (Robinson & Gray, 2019). While there are numerous leadership theories and approaches, leadership has the strongest impact on student achievement, with specific leadership behaviours being the most influential, and many behaviours are common across leadership models (Hamstra et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 2015; Sun & Leithwood, 2015; Day et al., 2016; Juma et al., 2017; McAuliffe et al., 2017; Leithwood et al., 2020; Gerber et al., 2020).

Important information emerges when the concept of leadership is broken down into the qualities, characteristics, and behaviours of school leaders and applied to systems where school leaders share leadership and decision-making responsibilities (Azeem & Mataruna, 2019). Effective leadership almost always involved a team of adults sharing decision-making processes and leadership responsibilities (Shonk, 2022). In organizations where improvement processes are successful and sustainable, teachers impact how schools operate beyond their classrooms (Cooper, 2018; Raelin, 2018; Mendez et al., 2015; Shonk, 2022; Eckert, 2023). Collective leadership concerns the practices through which teachers and administrators' prompt colleagues, policymakers and team players, to improve teaching and learning (Eckert, 2018, 2022, 2023)

Therefore, coordinated results into the emergent properties of collective leadership and school culture provided the foundation for this study to identify collective leadership as it is perceived by teachers and how it is practised in schools.

Further, school culture provided the context to nurture the teachers' leadership abilities.

1.2 The Malaysian Education Context

Malaysia was projected to become a high-income nation by 2020 (Mid-Term Review of the 11th Malaysia Plan 2016-2020). However, the declaration of the Covid-19 pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) plunged the global economy, resulting in Malaysia's per capita income breaching the developed nation threshold by 2024 (The Edge Market, 2020). The inclination to become a developed nation calls for headway in various other capacities which include the field of education. This is further bolstered by the introduction of the 'MADANI' concept which is a framework that transposes capacities in post normal times. MADANI boasts sustainability which is what collective leadership models are built upon (Caviglia-Harris et al., 2021; Manolis et al., 2019).

To this effect, the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) advocates 'a shift towards a management culture that emphasises performance and accountability for results' (Siddiquee, 2014). The GTP prompted the proliferation of the National Key Results Area (NKRA) which would be the catalyst for positive development in the field of education. The goals of the NKRA are to increase pre-school enrolment, ensure basic literacy and numeracy skills – after three years of primary education, develop high performing schools and significantly improve the performance of head teachers and principals through performance management. New initiatives were also implemented by the Education NKRA and MADANI that improved overall administrative function of the education system.

One of this was the TS25 School Transformation Programme (Program Transformasi Sekolah 2025) which was the initiative the came about in 2015. TS25 is

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focused on improving school management, leadership and teaching practices with the goal of creating a favourable learning environment and encouraging student success (Ministry of Education, 2013). Currently expanded to over 600 schools across Malaysia, its target is to encompass all schools in Malaysia to promote student competencies such as critical thinking, leadership and ethical values, aligning with the broader Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education, 2013).

This corroboration with the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 clearly promotes teamwork as it states that 'top performing school systems are moving away from the idea of one 'heroic' leader to one of 'distributed leadership' where assistant principals and other members of the middle management such as subject heads have greater share in decision making in the school' (Ministry of Education, 2013). Principals in the current trend of education leadership are no longer seen as the single person who bears the obligations, as they are now required to build a culture in accountability and learning and thus improving the potential of school leadership (Harris, 2003 as cited in Rosnarizah & Hussein, 2015; Mogaji & Newton (2020); Horwood et al., 2021; Qiu, 2023; McNamara, 2024). It supports Rosnarizah & Zulkifli (2009) and Kaudyannan (2021) who discovered the existence of collective leadership among teachers in secondary and primary schools in Malaysia. They further validated their finding through Ospina (2017) and Rabindarang, Khuan & Khoo (2015) whose results documented the persistence of group collective leadership in technical, vocational and primary school teachers (Heenan et al., 2024).

1.3 The Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025)

Over the past few decades, the Malaysian education system has grown tremendously. The system has made significant gains in student enrolment yet some fluctuations are

observed in recent trends. In 2018, 282 193 male students and 406 761 female students were enrolled in public higher institutions (Hirschmann, 2020). Meanwhile the Bumiputera student enrolment in national schools rose from 93.81% in 2014 to 95.12% in 2024 and non-Bumiputera went from 6.19% in 2014 to 4.88% in 2024. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) students, charted 50.83% in 2024, up from 41.84% in 2019 (Gimino et al., 2024). All these set the scenario for teachers to prepare for onset of demands from Key Performance Indexes set by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia.

Nevertheless, the Ministry of Education (MOE) recognises that to keep up with if not ahead of global trends, the system will need to continue to evolve. The Ministry drew on multiple sources of input over the course of some years ranging from educationists, stakeholders, parents and students. The end product is a blueprint developed by Malaysians for Malaysians. What is astounding is the findings pertaining the education transformation agenda which saw suggestions such as the pertinence in training teachers of a certain standard and the selection and appointment of worthy school leaders. Such is the expectation set upon teachers together towards a common goal is assumed to be greater than the amount of the power of a leader, since collective decision-making appears to be more compatible with employees' interests and values in a public society (Sivalingam, 2018; Raelin, 2019; Azeem & Mataruna, 2019; DeWitt, 2021; Docherty, 2021; Koundyannan, 2021; Shonk, 2022; Cooper, 2022; Eckert et al., 2022; Stine, 2022; Watzek et al., 2022; Eckert, 2023). Depending on the leadership structure, such patterns of distributed influence among stakeholders may have a positive impact on organizational change and growth that could improve the effectiveness of the school over the long term (Muslim & Aziz, 2019; Liljenberg, 2016; Sivalingam, 2018; Jamil & Hamzah, 2019; Raelin, 2019; Azeem & Mataruna,

2019; Cavilga-Harris et.al., 2021; DeWitt, 2021; Docherty, 2021; Koundyannan, 2021; Shonk, 2022; Cooper, 2022). Restricted empirical research has shown that collective leadership among teachers has a larger impact than individual leadership on student achievement (Desio, 2022; Caviglia- Harris et. al., 2021; Welborn 2019; Donohoo, 2018; Demir, 2015).

Bearing all these aspects, the Ministry of Education (2013) proposed the criteria that would form the fundamentals of the National Education Blueprint (2013- 2025). These would include the vision and aspiration for education, current performance, student learning, teachers and school leaders, ministry transformation and the structure of the system. The criteria paved the way for eleven shifts in the blueprint (Ministry of Education, 2013).

Shift 1: Provide equal access to quality education of international standard.

Shift 2: Ensure every child is proficient in the National language and English language and is encouraged to learn additional languages.

Shift 3: Develop Malaysians who are value-driven.

Shift 4: Transform teaching into the profession of choice.

Shift 5: Ensure high-performing principals in schools.

Shift 6: Empower the State Education Departments, District Education Offices and schools to customize solutions based on needs.

Shift 7: Support ICT to upscale quality learning across the country.

Shift 8: Transform the capability and capacity of the ministry to deliver.

Shift 9: Work hand in hand with stakeholders – parents, the community and private sector.

Shift 10: For every ringgit spent on students, the outcomes are maximized.

Shift 11: Transparency for public accountability is increased.

The journey to the success of this blueprint lies in the laying of the foundation for a revamped structure. This structure lies stalwart on the principal and teachers. Principals who make more concerted efforts to engage teachers in critical school improvement decisions and who provide an environment that supports them as individuals are also more likely to have strong professional relationships with their peers and colleagues (Louis & Lee, in press; Louis, Murphy, & Smylie, 2014; Waha, & Smylie, 2014). The pivotal substratum that holds this blueprint through principals and teachers should see the success of this plan materialize. This calls for the nuanced rebranding of leadership.

1.4 The Amelioration of Leadership

Anchoring the nebulous concept of leadership is Yukl (2012) and Alsaedi (2022) who advocated that leadership is process of social influence from a collective perspective in which a person (or group) influences others for school change. Yammarino's (2013) field of vision is that leadership is a process of interaction of multilevel leader-followers (person, group, collective) that takes place in a specific context in which a leader and the followers share a collective vision and work together to achieve defined objectives (Demir, 2015; Kalkan et. al., 2020; Haug & Wasonga, 2021). The idea of leadership behaviour that acknowledges that there are many leaders with a focus on social interactions rather than the actions of specific roles is shaped by this collective perspective, as it primarily concerns how leadership affects social interactions among individuals for educational and organisational improvements (Diamond and Spillane, 2016; Harris and Harris, 2016; Kliewer & Priest, 2019; Dochert, 2021). Harris (2003)

in Harris and Harris (2016) further explains that the concept of teacher leadership focuses on collective action, empowerment and collective agency, which is largely mirrored in distributed leadership styles.

The authority of collective leadership among teachers is discovered through research done by Leithwood & Louis (2012), along with a variety of research undertaken to explore collective leadership and culture (Sivalingam, 2018; Eckert, 2019; Raelin, 2019; Azeem & Mataruna, 2019; Cavilga-Harris et al., 2021; DeWitt, 2021; Docherty, 2021; Koundyannan, 2021; Shonk, 2022; Cooper, 2022; Eckert et. al., 2022; Stine, 2022; Watzek et al., 2022; Eckert, 2023). In literature referring to collective leadership, various definitions of a similar nature can be identified - shared leadership (Covey et al., 2014), transformational leadership (Hamstra et. al., 2014), distributed leadership (Mendez et al., 2015), team leadership, shared decision-making, for instance, democratic leadership, leadership of transition, leadership of partnerships and positive leadership (Wei et al., 2016; Sebastian et al., 2017; Liu, 2015, Acton, 2021).

As a member of a team sharing shared interests and working collaboratively to accomplish organisational goals, individual leaders are in their own position, where they engage together in the distributed leadership role. The style of leadership is very individual and can arise from the transformative and dispersed forms of school leadership. When leadership is shared, employee habits begin to shift and ultimately bring a lasting change in their attitudes. Distribution of the duties of leadership (Covey et al., 2014) stated that collective leadership is a shared leadership and, with mutual agreement, distributes tasks among the participants as an element of strategic emphasis in the modern organisation. Teacher leadership is widely considered to be practiced through both formal roles (e.g. coach, mentor, master teacher) and informal means that

do not require a formal position (Fairhurst 2020; Cheng & Szeto 2016; Sebastian et al., 2017; Liu, 2015). Regardless of structure or role, the most effective approaches to this leadership work lends its focus to improving teaching and learning (Donohoo, 2018; Liljenberg, 2016; Sivalingam, 2018; Jamil & Hamzah, 2019, Koundyannan, 2021) and some roles specific to educational improvement, namely training coach, (Liljenberg, 2016; Sivalingam, 2018; Jamil & Hamzah, 2019; Koundyannan, 2021).

Studies have shown that collective leadership is also linked to improved school productivity and student achievement (Eckert, 2019; Hattie, 2012; Harris, 2004; Marzano, 2003; Robinson et al., 2008), rendering importance to the culture of schools (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996; Hallinger, 2018 & 2020; Fisher, 2021; Jabonillo, 2022; Torres, 2022). Successful school leaders must incorporate accountability measures and create conditions for the success of diverse student populations (Robinson & Gray, 2019). This is due to the fact that while there are numerous leadership theories and approaches, leadership itself as an independent concept, has the strongest impact on student achievement with specific leadership behaviours being the most influential, and many of such behaviours are common across leadership models (Liljenberg, 2016; Sivalingam, 2018; Jamil & Hamzah, 2019; Koundyannan, 2021).

Important information then transpires when the concept of leadership is broken down into the qualities, characteristics and behaviours of school leaders and applied to systems where school leaders share leadership and decision-making responsibilities (Malloy & Leithwood, 2017). Effective leadership almost always involves a team of adults sharing the decision-making processes and leadership responsibilities. In organizations where improvement processes are successful and sustainable, teachers impact how schools operate beyond their classrooms (Mendez et al., 2015; Lv & Zhang, 2017; Raelin, 2018; Cooper, 2022; Desio, 2022).

Collective leadership encompasses the practices through which teachers and administrators' influence colleagues, policymakers and team players, to improve teaching and learning (Eckert, 2018, 2022, 2023). Either constructive, instructive, or both, collective leadership is a valuable construct since it incorporates the shared setting of objectives and the strategic employment of such targets in the context of schools' primary purpose—teaching and learning. In addition, it was found that collective leadership has a greater impact on student results than individual leadership (Browne-Ferrigno, 2016). When this form of leadership can increase the efficacy of collaborative staff, the belief is that the faculty can have a positive impact on students and inadvertently, the student outcomes improve. Collective leadership paves the way for educational institutions to collaborate effectively as teams, in line with the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, which promotes teamwork. Over the past few decades, the Malaysian system of education has grown tremendously. The system has made significant gains in student enrolment over the last ten years alone, increased international recognition on important components such as published research, intellectual property rights, and quality of institutions, and has become a top destination for international students. Such accomplishments represent a testament to the Malaysian academic community's drive and innovation, the support of the private sector, as well as the profound investment made by the government (Ospina, 2017; Sivalingam et al., 2017; Sivalingam & Siow, 2023).

1.5   Collective Leadership and The Teachers

The very nature of collective leadership among teachers encourages them to be personally active and to allow them more control in the decision-making process of the school. To be successful in achieving collective leadership, it will influence what teachers do regularly, such as making instructive decisions and also, making efficacy