

# Teacher Leadership Models:

## A Directed Analysis of Content

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**Abstract**—Teacher leadership researches have continuously expanded and progressed in lieu with innovative and dynamic changes in education. This study aims to analyze the content of three current teacher leadership models and synthesis relevant dimensions in developing teacher leadership. The models showcases the: (1) teacher leadership skill framework; (2) teacher leadership for student learning framework; and (3) sphere of teacher leadership action for learning framework. The models are synthesized through a directed analysis of content through which eight distinctive dimensions were identified. The dimensions are i.e; (1) Role Model; (2) Expert; (3) Collaborative Culture; (4) Self Development; (5) Conducive Environment; (6) Communication; (7) Data-Enriched; and (8) Diversity. This finding can guide teachers in enhancing their leadership and assist stakeholders especially agencies sentimental to the development of improving teacher leadership practices to enhance student learning.

**Keywords**—*teacher leadership models; domains; teacher; leadership*

### I. INTRODUCTION

School improvement is a global education agenda, be it academically or politically. Teacher leadership is seen as the innovative platform that could enhance pupil academic performance as well as affect the school culture. Leadership in this context does not refer exclusively to power from designation, but regarding teachers' ability to lead in and out of the classroom, contribute to the learning community, influence others to improve education practices and accept responsibilities [1] that as a result promotes a culture of learning and self-improvement.

Teacher leadership has a significant impact on school improvement [2] and through actions such as reflection, collaboration, sharing of best practices, working in teams, and collective decision-making, teachers are able to share relevant knowledge that contributes to school excellence [3-5].

Teacher leadership can be seen to have evolved in four phases: (1) 1970s, where the focus was on managing or leading the organization: teachers are given formal roles, (2) 1980s, with focus on teaching leadership where teachers are given special teacher designation with focus on evaluating teaching or the curriculum, (3) 1990s, with distributed leadership where

elements of teacher collaboration, team work and life-long learning are given emphasis, and (4) 2000s, focusing on transformational leadership where teachers are actively involved in decision-making of the schools' vision and mission, and is instrumental to school improvement [6].

As yet, studies have found that teacher leadership has yet to be fully recognized in schools and there are many issues that prevent it from being implemented properly. The concept of teacher leadership is still unclear particularly to the roles and responsibilities involved [7] and often misinterpreted as taking on leadership roles in a common school hierarchy [8] putting them in power over other teachers. This misconception causes teachers to be given quasi-administrative functions [9] supposedly to encourage distributive leadership in the school. Consequently, true teacher leadership culture is smeared by teachers burdened by additional administrative roles as it is thought to be a formal designation, instead of leadership attributes which should be developed by all teachers [10].

Developing teacher leadership is of course not an easy task, as just as there has yet to be a grand theory of leadership [11], there is no particular model of teacher leadership that can be considered as the ultimate model. This may be due to the consistent studies that still surrounds teacher leadership as it progresses. In consequence, assessing teacher leadership and developing it is still not formally exercised as can be seen in Malaysia.

In Malaysia, there has yet to be a standardized model for Malaysian teachers. This is not surprising considering that the concept of teacher leadership in Malaysia is not as popular as in developed countries [12]. Although, there have studies on teacher leadership in Malaysia, teacher leadership has yet to be widely recognized, acknowledged nor does its' actual practices can be truly assessed.

A few of the researches on teacher leadership in Malaysia focused on the instruments by Katzenmeyer and Moller [1]. These researches have adapted the Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment and Teacher Leadership Readiness Instrument [1] to the Malaysian context. From these researches its' been found that the additional items can be introduced in the Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment instrument to suit the Malaysian context [13], while items in the Teacher Leadership Readiness

Instrument is valid as is, and the teachers studied showed high teacher leadership readiness [14].

Another study focused on the comparison of four teacher leadership models and synthesized six domains [15] but suggested the most formidable model to be the Teacher Leader Model Standards [16] and did not suggest a tailor-made Malaysian model. Interestingly, although there is no Malaysian model for teacher leadership, a teacher leadership module for Malaysian teachers [16] have been prepared independently. It is based on the current concepts and models of teacher leadership but has yet to be adopted by Malaysian teachers or used formally for teacher leadership development, so it cannot be ascertained if the teacher leadership module would be workable in context. Thus, it is clear that at present there is not enough teacher leadership researches done on establishing the true level of teacher leadership practices in Malaysia, much less a tailor-made model that can be utilized and adopted as a module.

Therefore, this study aims to suggest a workable model tailored for Malaysia through a directed content analysis of three recognized teacher leadership models; (1) teacher leadership for student learning [2], (2) Spheres of Teacher Leadership Action for Learning [17], and (3) Teacher Leadership Skills Framework [18]. In this paper, however, *only the domains from the synthesis of these models will be discussed*. The domains synthesized from these models will become the basis of a future teacher leadership model suited to Malaysia and hopefully can be further used as reference for further development of a teacher leadership standard for Malaysia.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### A. Research Design

This study uses qualitative method, specifically directed analysis of content on three teacher leadership models; (1) Teacher Leadership for Student Learning [2], (2) Spheres of Teacher Leadership Action for Learning [17], and (3) Teacher Leadership Skills Framework [18].

The directed analysis of content method is suitable as it can be used to validate, as well as extend the concepts on a theoretical framework or theory [19]. The content of the models is compared and analyzed for recurring themes, as well as to identify core consistencies and meanings [20].

The Teacher Leadership for Student Learning [2], and Spheres of Teacher Leadership Action for Learning [17] models are chosen as they were ranked highly in Q1 journals. The Teacher Leadership for Student Learning was published in Review of Education Research while Spheres of Teacher Leadership Action for Learning was published in Professional Development in Education journal. The Teacher Leadership Skills Framework was chosen as it is a standard that was established since 2003 and has evolved to become a model that is referred to for the past 16 years for developing teacher leadership in America.

The models are synthesized using a table where the domains of each model is listed. The models are arranged

according to year. The Teacher Leadership for Student Learning model is listed first, followed by Spheres of Teacher Leadership Action for Learning and finally the Teacher Leadership Skills Framework as it has the latest model. The domain listing is ranked following the first model in the list and not in order of importance.

The synthesis is done by identifying recurrent themes present in the aspects of each domain of every model. From the similarities and differences in the domains of the three models, a set of domains are listed. The domains are the basis for a future teacher leadership model catered for Malaysia.

## III. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The directed analysis of content synthesis on the chosen teacher leadership models; (1) Teacher Leadership for Student Learning [2], (2) Spheres of Teacher Leadership Action for Learning [17], and (3) Teacher Leadership Skills Framework [18] found eight domains; (1) role model, (2) expert, (3) collaborative culture, (4) self-development, (5) conducive environment, (6) communication, (7) data-enriched, and (8) diversity. Out of the three models, although the Teacher Leadership Skills Framework came into conception in 2003, is the most recently updated with an additional domain introduced in 2018 where as the other two models have not been updated recently.

### A. Role Model

A teachers' actions becomes a strategy in influencing those around her. All three models agree that a teacher leader is one who becomes a role model to her peers. Her actions and attitude is admired [2] and, symbolically a leader would be an exemplary figure to others around her. A teacher leader would not only share knowledge and modelling best practices, but also help other teachers to be innovative and go beyond their comfort zone through positive influence and demonstration of self-leadership [10].

A role model can impact the school culture and build strong community learning through both formal and informal interactions [21]. For this reason, a teacher with teacher leadership role model attributes would be influential in the school and help foster a positive culture of change. This domain is seen as a significant element in teacher leadership development for Malaysia as it emphasizes on the importance of teachers becoming role models not only for pupils, but other teachers and the school community.

### B. Expert

The second domain is expertise which is also agreed upon by all three models. A teacher leader would build expertise in her respective area usually in a particular subject. An expert teacher will be able to improve upon her own teaching practices as well as give critical feedback to improve on teaching strategies for other teachers [22].

In Malaysia, the role of "Guru Cemerlang" or Excellent Teacher is an acknowledgement for a teacher who excels in his subject [23]. These Excellent Teachers are expected to share knowledge, mentor other teachers in their district, and become

the agent of change for the subjects according to their expertise, particularly to improve on academic achievements [23]. Incidentally, the teachers' expertise makes them a leader in their subject matter. Accordingly, this domain is suited for the Malaysian model as it emphasizes the need for teachers' expertise to be recognized and developed to support their teacher leadership.

### *C. Collaborative Culture*

Building a collaborative culture is a common theme in all models. Collaborative culture requires teachers working together with their peers to build rapport [10], trust [2] and a support system [24] leading to an effective community of learning to improve on the quality of teaching and learning practices [25]. A focused collaborative effort through this partnership [18] would not only promote a culture of mentoring and learning from one another but incidentally develop teacher leadership [26].

A collaborative culture in education nonetheless should not only be limited to teachers but also involving the administration of the school, the education agencies, pupils, parents and the community at large. Building a collaboration with everyone through establishing good relationships, will also give shared responsibility in improving education [27]. This is particularly relevant for Malaysia as it wishes to grow into a nation of not only highly-skilled, educated people but also maintaining balance and moral ethics [28]. This is akin to the saying it takes a village to raise a child. Thus, teacher leaders' ability to encourage and take part in collaboration would impact education as a whole.

### *D. Self-Development*

Teacher leadership requires development. This believe is shared by all three models. In this domain, self-development refers to the personal decision taken by the teacher to improve his own potential professionally, be it through taking part in professional learning communities or actively learning on his own [10].

Undoubtedly, teacher leadership is a process that all teachers undergo as it begins in the classroom and impacts the organizational quality of the school [29]. To develop teacher leadership, teachers must practice life-long learning to improve their leadership capacity [30-32]. A teacher leader would take charge of his own learning and make decisions to change what needs changing to improve teaching and learning [2,17].

This domain is indispensable for teacher leadership development in Malaysia as teachers are encouraged to practice life-long learning and teachers would be most aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, subsequently with self-development they can reflect and actively improve on the aspects that need most attention on their own.

### *E. Conducive Environment*

All three models agree that a conducive environment is also fundamental in developing teacher leadership. Teacher leadership can be developed when teachers are given opportunities to realize their potential, improve their practices through sharing and mentoring, and build positive working

relationships in a conducive setting, especially for newer teachers [33].

Creating a conducive environment for teacher leadership includes allowing teachers to take part in decision making that impacts the organization operation [2] as teachers' perspective would give insight and portray the reality of teaching and learning. Teachers feel they can contribute to the school better in a safe environment that encourages their input [10] and the collaboration with other teachers, educational agencies, parents and the community further contributes to the conducive environment.

This domain is influential to teacher leadership development in Malaysia, as when teachers feel their voices are heard, appreciated and supported, they will feel motivated and engage more in improving the school overall.

### *F. Communication*

Communication is a vital aspect prevalent in all three models. The ability to communicate is critical in a teacher leader as it is instrumental in the success of a collaborative partnership and this practice can be exercised in daily school routine [2]. Interestingly, out of the three models, Teacher Leadership for Student Learning [2] model did not place communication as a domain but is an aspect in other domains in the model.

The Spheres of Teacher Leadership Action for Learning [17] see communication as a stand-alone domain which through professional learning communities encourages teachers to exercise communication through discussion, freedom of expression, critical thinking, give honest feedback and make group decisions [17].

This view is supported in the Teacher Leadership Skills Framework [18] model that sees the ability to communicate helps teachers to distinguish formal and informal dialogues and discussions. Teachers are able to voice out opinions and use communication strategies to synthesize, summarize and direct discussions [18].

It should be noted that the lack of communication skills can hinder teacher leadership and the task teachers are responsible for due to a breakdown in communication with teachers and others including principals [34]. On that account, a solid progress relies heavily on effective communication which also helps build work structure and interpersonal relationships [2].

### *G. Data-Enriched*

A teacher leader should be able to manipulate data appropriately to improve on teaching and learning. All three models concurred that data is an important aspect to enhance pupil achievement. Data that needs to be manipulated include academic results, socio-economic background as well as observational data from classroom activities to be used as a foundation for action and feedback on teaching and learning [2].

The data analysis and interpretation should be made by teachers expertly through collaborative engagement with other teachers [10]. The data would then serve its' purpose for

reformatory and reparative action when shared consistently for continuous improvement [2].

In Malaysia, this domain is prevalent as the culture of action-research is undertaken by teachers in an effort to improve teaching and learning. Findings from the researches are shared through writings and in presentations [23].

#### *H. Diversity*

Teacher leadership requires the ability to recognize the diversity of many aspects, be it from learning abilities and styles or socioeconomic and cultural background, and other differences that makes humans unique. Teacher Leadership Skills Framework [18] introduced the domain equity lens which is incorporated in other domains in the other two models indirectly. The diversity domain incorporates the equity lens as well.

In a multicultural society like Malaysia, diversity comes in many forms. The sensitivity of each groups and individuals affect the effectiveness of their learning, ergo a teacher leader must be aware and take into account the needs of every learner, teacher and stakeholders [1,18]. The task of the teacher leader in this area is to provide the platform for pupils to have their own voice and choose materials suited to their learning.

Interestingly, only 9 percent of researches have focused on equity and diversity in teacher leadership [35]. A Malaysian research on special education found that teacher leadership has a positive impact on special needs especially for pupils learning issues [36].

#### IV. CONCLUSION

A comprehensive teacher leadership model is crucial in building a standard for teacher leadership. This study has synthesized three models of teacher leadership (1) Teacher Leadership for Student Learning [2], (2) Spheres of Teacher Leadership Action for Learning [17], and (3) Teacher Leadership Skills Framework [18]. Eight domains are proposed from the synthesis; (1) role model, (2) expert, (3) collaborative culture, (4) self-development, (5) conducive environment, (6) communication, (7) data-enriched, and (8) diversity.

Thus, a proposed model for a Malaysia would consists of eight domains derived from the synthesis of the three models. Two domains that are suggested to stand on its' own, in addition to the current domains are conducive environment and data-enriched. These domains will be used to conceptualize a model for Malaysian teacher leadership. This would then hopefully make way for the exploration and development of a Malaysian standard for teacher leadership. Hence, further research should be made to ascertain the current practices of teacher leadership among teachers in Malaysian schools as well as development programs that may impact teacher leadership either directly or indirectly.

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