SHARED LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES AND COMMUNICATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract:
Leadership for learning has recently become one of the most important issues and research area in the field of education sciences and pedagogies. This strong linkage between effective leadership and school improvement as well as students' learning and success is well documented in the literature on educational theory, research, and practice. This connection between leadership and education holds that effective leadership can boost quality education and make the difference in the lives of children and youth. Shared leadership is a practice and attitude that requires some personal commitment and some social and linguistic interactional competencies and skills. These include the abilities to change one's behavior, attitudes and actions as well as those of others, that is, to be open to change and to play the role of a change agent through open structures of communication, power, social organization and interaction in an affectionate and social environment positive for all members to fully express and be themselves. The present paper addresses the issue of how foreign language classrooms can best contribute to the development of learners' shared leadership competencies and skills with a particular emphasis on the importance of their classroom communicative competence and the nature of the classroom environment and communication. To this end, it provides a brief overview of some of the major defining principles of shared leadership theory and practice. Then, it presents some of the major competencies for effective and successful practice of shared leadership. Finally, it suggests and discusses some implications of shared leadership for language classroom communication. In this respect, it highlights the importance of open classroom communication and environment, and students' classroom communicative competence for enhancing their active and creative participation in interactive classroom communication and practicing and promoting their interactional and social leadership competencies and skills, necessary for them to handle

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successful communication in different multi-cultural and multi-functional interactions and contexts.

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1. Introduction

The present paper addresses the issue of how foreign language classrooms can best contribute to the development of learners' shared leadership competencies and skills with a particular emphasis on the importance of their classroom communicative competence and the nature of the classroom environment and communication. To this end, it will provide a brief overview of some of the major defining principles of shared leadership theory and practice. Then, it will present some of the major competencies for effective and successful practice of shared leadership. Finally, it will present and discuss some implications of shared leadership for language classroom communication. In this respect, it highlights the importance of open classroom communication and environment, and students' classroom communicative competence for enhancing their active and creative participation in interactive classroom communication and practicing and promoting their interactional and social leadership competencies and skills, necessary for them to handle successful communication in different multi-cultural and multi-functional interactions and contexts.

2. Shared Leadership: Definition and Principles

In the history of leadership, various models have been developed to describe and explain this work organization and performance phenomenon. These models differ with respect to their theoretical assumptions about the nature of management, communication, and influence processes and patterns. They also differ with respect to their implications for how work is or should be organized and performed, as well as the role of individuals in an organisation or group and the patterns of relationships that are or should be established and maintained between them, namely the role and power relationships and the nature of the social interaction. Overall, in the literature on leadership theory and research (e.g. Northhouse, 2001; Pearce and Conger, 2003; Yukle, 1998, etc.) a distinction is generally made between the traditional command-and-control and the shared models of leadership.

2.1 The Command-and-Control Model of Leadership
By definition, within this perspective command and control are the essence of management and leadership in that organizations tend to be too structured, that is, all the power is given to the formally appointed leader, who tends to control things too much and whose rights as a legitimate leader have direct influence on his subordinates, who are consequently subject to some strictly defined obligations. In other words, members of an organisation or group are either leaders, whose role is to "*make strategic decisions*

effectively"(Northhouse,2001), or followers, who are broken away from the process of making decisions and who must adjust to their behaviours and practice to strictly execute the decisions and orders imparted from above by the formally appointed leader. This relationship of followship is established and maintained through a rigid hierarchical and vertical distribution of power particularly its concentration in the hands of the legitimate leader, and through restricted one-way structure of communication. This pattern of leadership has long been established and deep-rooted in organizations and organizational and institutional practice. In this respect, Pearce and Conger (2003:2), for example, state that "*historically, leadership has been conceived around a single individual – the leader – and the relationship of that to subordinates or followers. This relationship between the leader and the led has been a vertical one of top-down influence*".

However, this approach to leadership has recently been questioned and challenged for its neglect of different situational factors that may come into play to influence the effectiveness of work organisation and performance. Additionally, this focus on a single individual leader does not respond to the growing need for multi-functional and cross-cultural team-work and small-group work as an organizational unit of effective work organisation and performance. Therefore, a new form of leadership emerged reflecting the need for leadership to be shared or distributed among members of organizations and small groups. This form of leadership is widely referred to as shared leadership, mutual leadership, or distributed leadership. Below, this model of leadership is generally defined and some of its principles are presented and discussed.

2.2 Shared Leadership

Shared leadership is a recently emerging form of leadership that stands in sharp contrast to the command-and-control style of leadership. It is generally defined as a recent conceptualization of leadership as "*a dynamic interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both*" (Pearce and Conger, 2003:2).This approach to leadership is based on the principles that

1) leadership is an activity that can be shared and distributed among members of a group or organisation,
2) small-group work and team-work is the basic and most effective unit of work organisation and performance,
3) diversity among individual members with respect to their socio-cultural and functional backgrounds is a resource to be used rather than a problem to be overcome,
4) coordinated actions and closer relationships among the group members lead to effective performance.
5) openness to change and openness of power, communication, and social organization and interaction patterns, whereby all members of a group or organisation are engaged in making decisions, setting common goals and priorities is likely to enhance successful and effective organization and performance of team-work and group-work tasks.

These are some of the major defining principles of shared leadership and which constitute the elements most frequently referred to by advocates of this approach to leadership (e.g., Pearce and Conger, 2003; Pearce, Conger and Perry, 2003; Yukle, 1998; Fletcher and Kaufer, 2003; Owen, 1997, etc.). For example, Pearce, Conger and Perry (2003: 48) explain that "*shared leadership is a different perspective on leadership which relies on a dynamic exchange of lateral influence among peers rather than simply relying on vertical, downward influence by an appointed leader*". The elements of this definition point to the collaborative relationship and two-way influence and communication between members of a group who are considered as peers and partners including the formally appointed leader, whose role is to support other peers, facilitate communication between them and coordinates their efforts. This interest in the group dynamics including the social context of interaction and the complex nature of communication and influence networks is also emphasized by Fletcher and Kaufer (2003:21) who point out that leadership within this perspective is conceived of as "*a more relational process, a shared or distributed phenomenon at different levels and dependent on social interaction and networks of influence*".

Within the perspective of shared leadership, effective and successful practice of shared leadership depends on the ability of the self-management and self-organisation of the group and the self-responsibility of the individual. Shared leadership is then a search for ways to enhance the performance levels of the group and its members which depends on the type of formal leader and his style of leadership. Shared leadership practice tends to promote the potential of members' performance and change in that it provides ample opportunities for members to fully express themselves and give the best they can. In this respect, Owen (1997: 149) explains that "*the varieties of advanced human performance desired appear under many titles including empowerment, self-managed work teams, shared leadership, management of ambiguity and diversity, and of course change management*".

This focus on leadership as a group level phenomenon and consequently the growing interest in the group communication dynamics suggest that shared leadership is not only a call for the redistribution of power among members of a group or organization, but also a different perspective on communication as an integrated process of give and take between all members of a group, a process shaped by different contextual factors including the socio-cultural backgrounds of participants, their type and degree of motivation, personality characteristics, levels of task ability, their expectations and perceptions, and their functional backgrounds, etc. So, shared leadership is a shift of focus from one-way communication, whereby the formally appointed leader exercises rigid control over the structure of interaction and the flow of information to "*the interactional nature of dialogue, one of the coordinating practices of shared leadership*" (Yukle, 1998). As a result, the focus is no longer on the single leader, his individual vision, and his ability to make strategic decisions effectively and set the goals and priorities to the exclusion of his subordinates or followers. Moreover, the observation of the behaviors, actions, and mind-sets of distinguished leaders is no longer an excellent and sufficient way to develop leadership competencies.

Within shared leadership perspective, emphasis is rather placed on the social organization and performance of the group and on the social and linguistic interactional

competencies and skills. In other words, the focus is placed on the abilities to build and work with groups or teams, to build and maintain relationships appropriate to foster positive environmental conditions, to promote the group effective organization and performance and to enhance individual members' self-motivated, self-responsible, free and deliberate, creative and productive engagement in the process of decision making, setting goals and priorities, effective accomplishment and evaluation of group-work tasks. These are some shared leadership competencies and skills presented and discussed below.

2.3 Shared Leadership Competencies

In the literature on leadership theory and research (e.g. Connerley and Pedersen, 2005; Guggenheimer and Szulc 1998; and Owen 1997) there is a general agreement on the close interrelationship between leadership and communication processes. Therefore, the most widely distinguished leadership competencies which have been used as guiding standards in leadership training and education are closely related to effective communication in a variety of multicultural and multifunctional business contexts. This particular emphasis on effective cross-cultural communication has been motivated by the increasing need for human resources qualified enough to operate in different multicultural contexts and able to deal with business partners from different socio-cultural and functional backgrounds in an increasingly interdependent global economic environment. These abilities are generally referred to as global leadership competencies the most widely referred to in the literature are summarised by Aycan (1997) as follows:

- in-depth business and technical knowledge,
- willingness and commitment to succeed,
- ability and willingness to learn from experience,
- ability to cope with uncertainties and conflict,
- managerial competencies,
- willingness and ability to enhance integrated multiple perspectives,
- communication effectiveness,
- competence in developing and maintaining interpersonal relations,
- ability to motivate and develop people potential, and
- competence in playing the role of a change agent. (Quoted in Connerley and Pedersen, 2005: 70)

These competencies are interdependent and interrelated and they focus essentially on cross-cultural awareness, knowledge, and communication, as well as the expertise necessary to operate effectively and successfully in different global business organisations. These competencies are also referred to as global literacy, which means *"seeing, thinking, acting, and mobilizing in culturally mindful way. It is the sum of the attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for success in today's multicultural, global economy"* (Rosen and Digh, 2001: 74). In this context, Rosen et. al. (2000) argue that effective communication, management, and leadership in various multicultural and multifunctional business organisations and contexts requires the following literacy competencies:

- personal literacy (understanding and valuing oneself);
- social literacy (engaging and challenging other people);
- business literacy (focusing and mobilizing one's organization);
- cultural literacy (valuing and leveraging cultural differences). (Quoted in Connerley and Pedersen, 2005: 71)

In addition to these competencies required to handle successful multicultural interaction, particularly in the context of business and management, shared leadership places more emphasis on the abilities and traits of character not only to manage business organisations, including effective human resources management, but also the abilities and qualities necessary to operate as a member of the group. As previously discussed, within the perspective of shared leadership team-work and small-group work has become the most effective unit of work organization and performance. This focus on leadership as a group level phenomenon has motivated an increasing interest in understanding the dynamics of communication in small groups. For example, Fletcher and Kaufer (2003:21) state that the "*recognition of leadership as a group phenomenon would suggest an important theoretical and practical link between leadership research and research on group processes and team work*". To this end the focus has come to be placed on what can be referred to as Group participatory membership competencies. These competencies are generally the knowledge, skills, and personal characteristics that help members of a group, team, or organization to lead one another and cooperate to make decisions, set common goals and priorities, accomplish and perform the group tasks, and achieve the goals of the group. Following Guggenheimer and Szulc (1998), Owen (1997), and Owen and Stadler (1999) these competencies can be summed up as follows:

2.4 Group participatory membership competencies
1) openness to change and change management;
2) ability to cope with uncertainties and conflict;
3) setting common goals and priorities;
4) vision and passion;
5) humor and courage;
6) energy, vitality, and enthusiasm;
7) building a team, integrity and trust;
8) motivation and creativity;
9) appreciation of diversity and tolerance.

These competencies highlight the ability and willingness to be open to change, that is, readiness to change one's practices and help others to deliberately join change efforts. However, change introduces uncertainty, ambiguity, confusion, conflict, and fear. Therefore, shared leadership practice requires that members of the group are able to overcome these situations of conflict and uncertainty that may result from their differing interests, expectations, types and degrees of motivation, and their ability levels, as well as the complexity of the group-work task itself. In this respect, a sense of humour on the part of members of the group may help to release tension and create a stress-free atmosphere. It may help to solve communication breakdowns and problems. It also helps

to break different barriers that may hinder group members' full expression of themselves. This sense of humour is therefore an important group membership competency for it helps to set the ground for open patterns of communication and social organisation necessary for a supportive and motivating group climate. Moreover, motivation is another contributing factor to successful shared leadership practice. Being self-motivated is then a prime prerequisite for full expression of passion and self-responsibility. To be motivated and able to motivate one's peers would likely help innovation and creativity for unmotivated people are unlikely to be creative and productive. Adequate levels of motivation among members of the group are important for their practical and playful involvement and necessary for effective group organization and performance.

Furthermore, the ability to accept and appreciate diversity among members of the group with respect to their socio-cultural and functional backgrounds is a prerequisite for members to work together and participate in the process of making decisions, setting goals and priorities, and collaborative implementation and evaluation of the group-work tasks. This collaborative effort may reduce the degree of uncertainty, confusion, and conflict and would therefore make expectations clearer and would increase members' self-motivated and self-responsible engagement in the achievement of group common objectives. It is the ability to bring a very diverse set of functional backgrounds and efforts together.

3. Implications for Language Classrooms Communications

3.1 Learner-centeredness
Shared leadership practice in second and foreign language classrooms implies a redefinition of teachers' and students' roles in terms of power, participation, communication, and social organization patterns established and maintained in these classrooms. In other words, it implies that leadership and responsibility for the organization, management, and accomplishment of classroom communication tasks and events should be distributed among and shared between students and teachers, as well as between students themselves. Within this perspective, the teacher's role is to act as a peer, whose formal and legitimate leadership is extended beyond explicit control to cover the implicit roles of assisting, supporting, enabling, and facilitating students' successful and effective engagement in classroom experiences, whereby they could practice and develop the competencies and traits of self-organization and self-leadership, which would, in turn, help them develop a variety of organizational and interactional skills, as well as the personality traits associated with them, such as tolerance, mutual leadership and appreciation of diversity. The practice of shared leadership on the part of students requires them to assume an active, participatory, creative, and productive role in classroom communication and organization. This successful engagement in shared leadership practice would certainly contribute to teachers' professional development and would help students to develop lifelong learning abilities, that is, "*the ability to continue learning after the end of their formal education*" (Littlewood, 1999: 71). It would also help them to grow as "*authentic persons [who] know what they are doing, and attend in relaxed or*

focused ways, in accordance with the demands of the situation, [who] are also autonomous, in the sense of feeling responsible for their own actions, and able to deal with choices" (Vanlier, 1996: 144).

3.2 Two-way Communication

In the literature on classroom communication (e.g. Johnson, 1995 and Lynch, 1996, etc.) two types of communication have been distinguished. The first type is one-way communication where the initiative-response-evaluation/feedback interactional sequence is the dominant structure of communication. This structure allows the teacher to control the structure and content of communication which becomes a process of top-down influence and allows leadership to be centralized in the hands of a single participant, the teacher, the formally appointed leader, who leaves little space for other participants/students to practice the interactional competencies recommended by advocates of shared leadership. This pattern of participation reflects the traditional vertical approaches to leadership which is closely related to teacher-centred approaches to second and foreign language teaching and learning.

Shared leadership education for suggests a view of communication as an integrated and complex process which is achieved through interactive language use, collaborative and cooperative negotiation of meaning, and shared understanding between participants in communication in general and classroom communication in particular in order to sort out misunderstanding and communication problems and breakdowns. It is a two-way communication which stresses the centrality of interactive communication or "*the interactional nature of dialogue, of the coordinating practices of shared leadership*" (Yukle, 1998). Within the perspective of this type of communication, the emphasis is placed on students' active and motivated participation in open and free communication whereby they could exchange opinions, share ideas, chair discussions, and practice different interactional skills and various speech acts and exercise a great deal of control over the structure and content of communication. In brief, as previously pointed out there is a close interrelationship between shared leadership and open patters of communication, one of the major defining elements and innovations brought about by shared leadership and communicative language teaching, on the one hand and between the traditional command-and-control models of leadership and traditional teacher-centred approaches to second and foreign language teaching and learning. Therefore, shared leadership provides further arguments for the need to implement more and communicative approaches, which would be recommended here for successful practice of shared leadership in foreign and second language classrooms.

3.3 Small-Group Work and Teamwork

The patterns of communication in general and classroom communication in particular which have been distinguished to foster participants' active, productive, and creative participation and leadership sharing in interactive communication are generally student-students interaction in problem solving, information-gap, and role-play activities in pair-work, small-group work, team-work, and whole class discussion. These activities and

patterns of organization are recommended for they are student-engaging and student-led in that their "*major characteristic in terms of participation is that the student is primary speaker*" (Vanlier, 1988: 173). Student-student(s) communication in small-group work activities provides an interactional environment in which they could practice various speech acts, a communicative environment in which they could share a great deal of ideas, initiate discourse, exchange opinions, give and ask for information, give instructions, interrupt and be interrupted, and correct other peers and be corrected. Students' self-motivated involvement in such patterns of organization would help them to develop their confidence in speaking in public, develop personal characteristics, develop the skills of logical and creative thinking, develop the skills of chairing and many other shared leadership and group management abilities, develop the skills and traits of efficient and cooperative group work, and would also help them to develop the abilities to organize information, ideas, and priorities, to develop problem solving strategies and the ability to cope with stress and complexity and to manage time. In brief, students' engagement in such kind of interaction would help them practice various skills and competencies of shared leadership, which are essentially interactional, managerial, and communicational in nature at the linguistic and social levels.

3.4 Classroom Communicative Competence

As previously discussed, shared leadership education suggests a view of communication as an integrated, complex, and rich two-way process, shaped by a variety of variables, namely the participants' expectations and perceptions, which are, in turn, shaped by their socio-cultural and functional backgrounds, or are the result of the immediate contest of communication including the setting and the nature of interaction itself. Therefore, shared leadership practice depends not only on global leadership competencies, emphasizing the knowledge and abilities to handle cross-cultural and interpersonal communication with people from diverse socio-cultural and functional backgrounds, but also the competencies and skills to cope with the demands of interaction resulting from the emerging complexities of the immediate situation including those that may result from the interaction itself and its different stages. Consequently, emphasis has been placed on the knowledge and competencies needed to handle cross-cultural and cross-functional communication, as well as small-group and team-work interactional skills necessary for effective shared leadership practice. This would apply to second and foreign language communication, which is consequently shaped by teachers' and students' perceptions and expectation and the classroom environment, as well as the nature of communication, participation, power and social organization patterns established and the activities designed in a specific classroom. These variables, among many others, are usually referred to as the dynamics of classroom communication, which is the variety of forces that may come into play to shape the nature on classroom interaction, including what Karen; E. Johnson (1995) refers to as classroom communicative competence, and which she considers as a prerequisite for students' successful and effective participation in classroom interactive communication and events.

Classroom communicative competence is then considered as another contributing factor to the dynamics of classroom communication, which is defined in terms of *"students' knowledge of and competence in the structural, functional, social, and interactional norms that govern classroom communication"* (Johnson, 1995:161). This suggests that the classroom needs to be treated as a specific socio-institutional setting where some particular interactional and socio-cultural conventions are at work. Accordingly, Johnson assumes that students' awareness and understanding of these interactional conventions would enhance their participation in interactive classroom communication. Moreover, she argues that in order to motivate students' successful involvement in interactive communication patterns they need to establish their classroom communicative competence. To this end, she suggests that teachers need:

"…to identify the prerequisite knowledge and competencies that their students will need in order to participate in specific classroom events, and be cognizant of the contextual issues surrounding classrooms, [which] enable teachers to adjust the patterns of communication so as to maximize students' linguistic and interactional competencies and create opportunities for students to begin to acquire a repertoire of competencies that they can successfully participate in a wide range of classroom events" (1995: 163).

This clearly would suggest the need for explicit statement of the pedagogical purposes of the language classroom and of each lesson or lecture at the levels of objectives, content and methodology of classroom communication and evaluation. In other words, the course descriptions and objectives should be made clear and be explicitly and concretely explained to students at the beginning of the academic year. I n addition to this, patterns of classroom participation and organization need to be explained, that is, the necessary participative linguistic and interactional competencies need to be presented and explained to students in order to facilitate their creative and productive engagement in classroom interactive communication; otherwise, they could become confused about what is expected of them, or how they are expected to participate. In this regard, Johnson (1995) suggests that for teachers to establish their students' classroom communicative competence they would need to:

- Make the norms that govern classroom communication both explicit and predictable;
- Create opportunities for students to practice instructional tasks using more exploratory language before being expected to perform in front of the entire class;
- Use of the class meeting to teach small group interaction skills. (op.cit:163)

3.5 The Classroom Environment

Shared leadership practice in language teaching classrooms depends on the ability to create a relaxed and safe atmosphere in the classroom to make it as open a space as possible where students could feel self-confident and self-dependent an where they could share responsibility and assume some responsibility for conducting classroom interaction and class management. This would be of great importance with groups of students whose

general conceptions of their roles and that of their teachers are rather traditional and conservative, groups of students who generally expect the teachers to assume a total responsibility and leadership for their learning, their achievement and class management. More importantly, such conceptions are generally shaped by their socio-cultural backgrounds and previous learning experiences. The creation of an atmosphere of familiarity, friendship and mutual trust and respect in the classroom through the establishment of free and open communication in small-group work activities and whole class discussion would be of great value for students to practice and develop shared leadership competencies and values, particularly in contexts, characterized by rigid disciplinary routines, highly ritualized patterns of social participation and pre-distribution of power and role relationships. It would also promote the students' linguistic and interactional competencies recommended by shared leadership as well as the values associated with them such as cooperation and collaboration through communication.

In this respect, Cartwright (1970:325) states that "*to change the behavior of individuals, it may be necessary to change the standards of the group, its style of leadership, and its emotional atmosphere*". This suggests the importance of changing the structures of power, communication, and social organization, whereby power, responsibility, and leadership is equally distributed among the members of the group, open and free communication, whereby all members have shares to contribute, and the two-way flow of information is allowed, and a relaxed atmosphere of familiarity, friendship, whereby more proximity is maintained and closer relationships are built to create a group climate which would facilitate students' self-motivated, and affectionate engagement in the effective accomplishment of classroom interactional events and small-group tasks.

According to Owen (1997) and Owen and Stadler (1999) the creation of an open space environment is very important for effective meetings to take place, including the classroom meeting, for this kind of environment allows:

- breakthrough learning (self-organization, teamwork, take responsibility, self-awareness, improve communication);
- appropriate situation;
- spirited performance;
- playful involvement;
- high productivity;
- growth from within;
- powerful tool for creation and environment for innovation, problem solving, creativity, reenergizing, and rapid change.

In brief, an open space environment would help to break with the rigid structures of communication and social interaction and could help to create the conditions for maximum and effective results for the individual and the group, for it fosters participants' full expression of themselves

4. Conclusion

To sum up, these are some of the major ingredients for the successful practice of shared leadership and for effective and productive group-work and team-work organization and performance. So, shared leadership is a practice and attitude that requires some personal commitment and some social and linguistic interactional competencies and skills, the most important of which are the abilities to change one's behavior, attitudes and actions as well as those of others, that is, to be open to change and to play the role of a change agent through open structures of communication, power, social organization and interaction in an affectionate and social environment positive for all members to fully express and be themselves, to change, and to promote their performance and organization.

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