



MOROCCAN TEACHERS TRAINEES' ATTITUDES TOWARDS TEACHER LEADERSHIP

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Abstract:

Teacher leadership has become an important aspect of the modern education system. Teacher leadership involves teachers assuming leadership roles and responsibilities, with the aim to drive improvement and positively impact student's learning outcomes. Effective teacher leaders possess a combination of instructional expertise, collaboration skills, vision and initiative, communication ability, adaptability, advocacy, and ethical and professional dispositions. This qualitative study aims at examining teachers' trainees' perspective on teacher leadership. The study employed online semi-structured interviews of 37 teacher trainees from three teacher colleges in Morocco. The findings indicated that though most participants could not define teacher leadership in a broader manner, they are still super-conscious that teacher attitude is the most influential factor in teacher leadership practice. Regardless of those lopsided findings, there is a need for further investment in this field as teacher leadership is becoming increasingly important for teachers to contribute to driving change and making a positive impact on the education system as a whole.

Keywords: teacher leadership, teacher education, professional development, teachers as agents of change, Moroccan Education

1. Introduction

In the course of economic, cultural, political, technological and ideological revolutions at all society levels, institutions revisit their agenda and policies, with efforts to adapt to changing situations (Araskal and Kiliç, 2019) and the education system is not an exception. Schooling enterprises towards teaching excellent branding have embraced a new paradigm, targeting in particular teachers' role (Murphy, 2007). This paradigm shift in the teacher's role has been named 'teacher leadership' (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson,

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& Hann, 2002; Little, 2003) with the potential to place teachers at the core of the school, with the aim to increase students learning outcomes (Muijs and Harris, 2003) and drive positive change.

Teacher education is a critical respect of the education system in Morocco and is regarded as a key factor in enhancing education quality. Morocco with the hope of establishing a reputable organism of initial teacher training has placed a strong emphasis on ongoing professional development for teachers. This is to expand teachers' skills, dispositions and knowledge and keep them updated with the latest educational practices and research in the field. However, teacher leadership in Morocco is still in its infancy stage lacking in-depth comprehension of the concept and its wide practices.

Certainly, teacher leadership has become an inspiring field for cultivating positive change, particularly in developing countries which are in urgent need of a pool of teachers armed with the necessary tools and knowledge to disrupt the status quo and heal the school community and beyond. Despite the progress made in teacher education, Morocco still faces significant challenges, namely in areas related to training and ongoing professional development. Thus, this paper will look into teacher leadership by exploring Moroccan teacher trainees' perspectives. The study would stand on the concept of teacher leadership by looking into its insights and challenges, with the goal of finding better implications of this novel educational terminology, influencing teacher dynamics and education pulses. The paper will contribute to the recognition of teacher leadership as a significant aspect of education in Morocco, with the needed recommendations to better enhance practices and teachers' capacities to transit from teachers to teachers leaders.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Teacher Leadership Definition

Though teacher leader, as a concept has been in the educational lexicon for at least the past 20 years (Lieberman & Miller, 2011; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), it is still difficult to point out the exact origin of the concept, with substantial debate about what "*teacher leadership*" means (Barth, 2007). The scholarship around teacher leadership is to some extent imprecise as a result of the lack of clarity on the concept itself and the scarcity of empirical research on teacher leadership (Jackson, Burns, Bassett, & Roberts, 2010). Though teacher leadership has been interpreted in various ways, scholars often fail to offer an explicit description of the concept (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). However, most of the literature about teacher leadership is about teachers' different contributions to enhancing school and learning. Wenner and Campbell (2017) teacher leaders are those teachers who keep classroom-based teaching responsibilities, along with taking on leadership responsibilities outside of their classrooms. Therefore, teacher leadership is not about formally assigned roles, but it is an influence manifested through specific actions (Danielson, 2006).

Teachers in this vein of influence possess a constellation of skills that not only allows them to excel in instructional activities but also lead for impact beyond their classroom. Teachers (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2009) are those who "*lead within and*

beyond the classroom; identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders; influence others toward improved educational practice; and accept responsibility for achieving the outcomes of that leadership" (p.6). York-Barr and Duke (2004) put forward that teacher leadership is a unique modality of leadership that borrows from multiple conceptions of leadership with a unique focus on collaboration rather than autocracy. Regardless of this, the concept of teacher leadership is still seen as an umbrella term comprising formal and informal roles such as professional development coordinator, trainer, head teacher, first teacher, and assessment coordinator (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Levin & Schrum, 2016; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Indeed, in this study, we would look into teacher leadership terminology as the tenacity of teachers to influence and guide their school and outside community.

2.2 Teacher Leadership Characteristics

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) affirm that every teacher harbours leadership capabilities that need to be unleashed for the benefit of students. Sabol et al. (2020) emphasized the emotional intelligence and life skills that need to be incorporated in the classroom, with the aim to help students reflect on social experiences and different life situations. Teacher leaders enjoy emotional intelligence, which according to (Goleman et al., 2002) is a key factor that determines personal and social competence, with the ability to manage oneself and one's relationships with others. Navickiene et al. (2019) accentuated the interconnection of communication and educational processes by referring to the personality of the teacher in shaping effective learning while contributing to the plodding, positive outlook of the learner's psyche.

Lieberman, Saxl, and Miles (1988) argued that teacher leaders (a) have a strong sense of purpose, (b) build up collegial relationships and excellent collaboration, (c) move beyond the constraint boundaries of their classrooms, and (d) influence colleagues without the employment of overt power. Rhodes and Brundrett (2006) presented that most head teachers showed a degree of empowerment, support, controlled risk and a high level of collegial collaboration. The feature of networking and peer collaboration was emphasized by the majority of head teachers as a significant factor in leadership development (Rhodes and Brundrett, 2006).

Jackson et al. (2010) stated that the roles of teacher leaders are often constructed around coaching and facilitation roles. Some of these skills might be more appropriately described as dispositions which may include work ethics, positive effect and professionalism. On the other hand, Smylie and Mayrowetz (2009) talked about other significant issues regarding teacher leadership that have implications for the way in which teachers become teacher leaders. They spoke of Institutional support and the development of added skills and dispositions required for teachers to move into teacher leadership roles. Angelle and DeHart (2011) further added that those in formal leadership positions at the administrative level can help in this transition. Without a doubt, teacher leaders can also be catalysts for change and visionaries who are "*never content with the status quo but rather always looking for a better way*" (Larner, 2004, p. 32) to bridge the gap.

Teachers in this uplifting obligation serve inside and outside classrooms, while inspiring their peers to cooperate in improving educational practices (Muijs & Harris, 2003).

Similarly, for a number of scholars (Freire, 2005; Tikly and Barret, 2013) the most important feature of teacher leaders is being as change agents, particularly in the global south. In various societies across the globe, teachers for instance are resources to refer to for bringing about positive changes to the lives of people. They are perceived as natural leaders who can offer help and consultation on a range of affairs in the community (Freire, 2005; Tikly and Barret, 2013). Teachers in such a context are incubators of social change and resources for fostering sustainable development. Hence, there is a need to lay emphasis on the influence of teachers as a central factor for teacher leadership, as some teachers occupy formal leadership roles, but have no mood for taking the lead or taking any action that fosters positive change (Grenda & Hackmann, 2014).

3. Barriers to Teacher Leadership

Teachers in the course of transition into agents of change face a number of nuisances. Wenner and Campbell (2016) noted that a change-resistant school environment is a major hindrance that can hold back teacher's influence at school. Wilson (2016) spoke of "*the school culture entails not only how things are done (systems, processes, and procedures), but also the mindset behind why things are done*" (p. 57). Poekert et al. (2016) argued that the teacher leader industry is alluding to the interaction between individual teachers and "*the responsiveness of their work setting*" (p. 315). In sum, both overly rigid and overly loose school cultures can discourage teachers to champion leadership roles.

Also, an inflexible school structure, characterized by centralized policies, disheartens teacher's positive vibes and innovation at school. For example, Nicolaidou (2010) found that teachers' participation in productive learning communities was often limited by system-wide norms and regulations, which dispirited teachers' genuine instructional innovations or their leadership talent. The top-down school culture limits teachers' actions and flexibility to exercise autonomy (Coleman et al., 2012; Wilson, 2016) which as a result increases teachers' frustration affecting their work effectiveness and productivity.

Research points out that building principals have a highly influential role in the transition from teacher to teacher leader (Hunzicker, 2017). Building principals, in one way or another, can hinder the progression from teacher to teacher leader, to the lack of competence and the know-how to champion this role. When the building principal is unaware of the concept or significance of teacher leadership, teachers have difficulty assuming their leadership roles and responsibilities, for the lack of resources, support and autonomy (Wenner & Campbell, 2016; Wilson, 2016). Teachers in this obstructive environment led by unsupportive principals feel unappreciated, resulting in weakening their rigor to fulfill extra voluntary leadership tasks.

Even when the building principal is supportive, resistant colleagues can present an obstacle to the transition from teacher to teacher leader (Hunzicker, 2017). By championing this role, teacher leaders' relationships with their peers may be affected.

This may refer to the changing character of the teacher leader who becomes more connected to feelings of confidence, empowerment, and professional satisfaction (Kilinc, Cemalaglu, & Savas, 2015; Wenner & Campbell, 2016). This collegial resistance is more exercised by old and experienced than by young and new teachers. For example, Donaldson (2007) found that teacher leaders with four to ten years of teaching experience often met with resistance from their more experienced colleagues.

Teacher leaders in another study reported that *"their colleagues with more years of experience often looked down on their work"* (Nicolaidou, 2010, p. 231). Simply put, Pankake and Moller (2006) observed, *"Teachers are, in most cases, not encouraged to lead, especially by their peers. To lead may be viewed as being the 'boss' and this would not help these teachers maintain relationships with their colleagues"* (p. 53). This form of professional peer pressure can discourage teachers from accepting or seeking teacher leadership roles and responsibilities and prevent them from viewing themselves as leaders, even when they are doing leadership work.

In addition to principals and colleagues, teachers themselves can create obstacles that prevent them from progressing toward teacher leadership (Hunzicker, 2017). For example, teachers may refuse leadership opportunities as they see they are not the right fit (Wade & Ferriter, 2007) or are hesitant that not enough support would be given to them to assume this responsibility (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007; Wade & Ferriter, 2007). Teachers sometimes may avoid leading because they feel uncomfortable engaging in open-ended, collaborative inquiry with their peers (Lattimer, 2007). Teachers may also lack self-confidence, experience, or the ability to see connections useful for taking the lead (Moller & Pankake, 2006).

4. Method

4.1 Research Design

This study adopted qualitative research. Qualitative study is the preferred methodological paradigm in research, as the data are to be examined in depth within their natural environment. Basic qualitative research focuses on how people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and make sense of their lives (Merriam, 2013, p.23). Maximum variation sampling was employed in order to reveal the common or different aspects and patterns between various situations which show alignment with the purpose of the study and research problems (Creswell, 2004). To represent diverse dimensions of the problem and clarify varying perspectives, the study group includes 37 teacher trainees from 3 teacher education schools in Morocco. They were randomly selected from three schools among those who volunteered to participate in the study. 17 of the teacher trainees who participated in the research in primary schools are female and 23 are male (75%) of the participants are from languages discipline while (25%) others are from social and human sciences.

4.2 Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What is Teacher Leadership?
- 2) What are the characteristics that teacher leaders should have according to teachers?
- 3) Are there any obstacles to becoming a leading teacher according to the teachers? If so, what are they?
- 4) What are the ways to enhance teachers' leadership in Moroccan classrooms and schools?

4.3 Data Collection

An online semi-structured interview protocol was used to obtain teacher trainees' views on teacher leadership. While forming the interview protocol, we aimed at locating an intentional and necessary variety of questions considering the research questions and the purpose of the study (Meriam, 2015). Indeed, 2 experts from teachers' college in Morocco were consulted to review the protocol in terms of its content and appropriateness for the aim of the study and research questions. A pilot interview was conducted with 4 teacher's trainees in order to test the validity of the interview questions and hence no problem was observed or reported. Teacher trainees who participated in the pilot interviews were not included in the main research.

For ethical considerations, the teacher trainees, prior to conducting the interviews were informed about the purpose and significance of the study and fully supported with the needed information concerning the confidentiality issues. Virtual interviews were conducted at the participant's convenience that lasted about 15 to 20 minutes. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed by the researchers. After reading the written opinions several times, they were grouped under certain codes, categories, and themes (Creswell, 2012).

4.4 Data Analysis

Content analysis was conducted to find relationships and explain the data in depth (Kalekin-Fishman, 2001). During the analysis of the data, the systematic procedure of content analysis was employed, which involves coding the data, finding the categories and then the themes, organizing and defining the data according to the themes for meaningful interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2012). In the next phase, the findings were described and interpreted by comparing them with the existing literature.

5. Findings

5.1 Leadership Definition

For the question about leadership definition, most participants (34 participants) indicated that it is the craft of influencing the students positively through the exhibition of some aspects which vary from attitude to skills and dispositions. A few participants (seven participants) had a broader image of this concept, as it is meant not only to influence or

inspire students, but also the school or the education system as a whole. Only three participants stressed the element of innovation while trying to conceptualize the term leadership, describing it as *"the implementation of innovation in instruction or in the teaching process."* However, only one participant connected leadership to community change. Nevertheless, it is noted that 5 participants used Google's definition of leadership as it is: *"It is a set of roles bundled with the motivation to inspire educational change and move beyond the status quo in collaborative ways."*

5.2 Characteristics

When the participants were asked about the characteristics of a teacher leader, they focused on skills, attitudes/personality and disposition. Most of the features received emphasized on attitude and personal aspects of the teacher like a motivator, helpful, adaptable, modest, patient, confident, critical, open-minded, forbearing and more which all reflect that the personal aspects of teachers play a significant role in building teacher leader profile. Those personal respects were followed by skills such as engaging, adaptability, creativity, collaboration, management, decision-making, problem-solving and active listening. It is also noted that only five participants mentioned the competence of the subject matter and the teacher's experience as influential factors in this craft. Dispositions received the lowest responses as this was not mentioned in most participants' responses except for three participants who stressed the notion of work ethics and professionalism in building a teacher's leader profile.

5.3 Barriers

Participants pointed out several challenges for teachers when they are transitioning to leadership roles. The major challenge found in the data is 'teachers themselves' (17 participants). Teachers may lack the confidence, passion or experience to champion leadership roles. Some teachers may not feel confident in their abilities to lead and may lack the self-esteem needed to pursue leadership opportunities. Some participants further elaborated on the absence of passion by connecting it to the lack of incentives, particularly the financial ones which undermine teachers' rigor to undertake any leadership role. One participant said, *"Moroccan teachers are poorly paid, thus my priority as a teacher is to finish classes and look for extra hours in private schools."* Hence, teacher's energy, time and thinking are oriented towards finding a part-time job or pursuing their studies for economic purposes.

A good number of participants (14 participants) talked about external factors such as the lack of support, resources and time constraints. Teachers may not have access to the resources and support they need to implement new ideas or lead initiatives in their schools. Large classes mainly in public schools make teachers outmoded for adopting any creative thinking or assuming any leadership role voluntarily at school. Time constraints are also found among the reasons that disrupt teachers' positive vibes at schools. For example, one participant said: *"teachers are often busy with their daily duties, such as lesson planning, grading, and classroom management. All such things limit the time they have to take on leadership roles either in school or outside."*

Five participants said that the lack of experience can also be a challenge for teachers to excel at leadership tasks. Numerous teachers have limited experience which can make it difficult to navigate the complexities of leadership. Also, the data detected a different factor which is 'resistance to change.' *"Teachers in their journey towards leadership may face resistance from colleagues or administrators who are not supportive of new ideas or initiatives, which can make it difficult for them to lead change in their schools,"* one participant put it this way.

6. Best Practices

For the question about promoting a culture of teacher leadership in Morocco, participants provided various responses. Most of the participants (70%) insisted on investing in professional development. *"One said the best way is to provide teachers with opportunities for professional development, and leadership-based training like workshops to deepen their understanding about this new teacher task."* Some participants (20%) focused on different types of support, namely financial and psychological aspects. For them, this can be manifested through words of appreciation and recognition and most importantly by rewarding teachers for their leadership efforts, chiefly through promotions, bonuses, public recognition and assigning fewer teaching hours. Besides, they reinforced motivating teachers to lead professional development communities and events.

A few participants (10%) highlighted the concept of engagement including collaborative decision-making and developing a culture of trust among all the key players in the schooling including parents. This engagement may be translated by involving teachers in the design and implementation of school-wide initiatives and policies. However, one participant called for a policy change and education reforms to establish a school culture that can anchor teacher leadership along with engaging teachers in those reforms and national education policy.

7. Discussion

This study provides evidence about teacher trainee's perspectives toward teacher leadership and its practices. Findings regarding the definition of teacher leadership are in line with previous studies (Navickiene et al., 2019; Muijs & Harris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) displaying different conceptualizations of the term. Besides, most of the definitions are related to personal aspects and skills that are essentially important in teacher leadership (Jackson et al., 2010; Smylie and Mayrowetz, 2009). Indeed, most of the participants' definitions of leadership lack a broad sense of teacher leadership practice, namely the influence of the concept beyond the classroom or even the school territory or going further to link up the concept to questions of innovation. The lack of connecting leadership to innovation or recognizing its impact beyond the school territory, namely its influence on global citizenship development reflects the failure of the teacher's education curriculum in the country to address teacher leadership

terminology and unfold its characteristics that are deemed to transform novice teachers' practices.

Though the data detected some parsimonious responses tethering leadership to the larger community, yet the teacher trainees have no idea about how teacher leadership might be manifested beyond the classroom zone as they could not give further details about the best implications of this practice. Another critical remark observed in the participants' definition is that five participants used Google's definition as it is without any paraphrasing. This would not say that participants were not able to define teacher leadership but rather teacher leadership is a blurred concept to the participants which needs diligent examination if we are aiming at creating a cadre of teachers with the hope to transform their school and community.

For the findings regarding the characteristics of teacher leaders, most of those findings are in line with previous studies as most of the definitions are related to personal aspects and skills that are important in teacher leadership (Jackson et al., 2010; Smylie and Mayrowetz, 2009). Personal aspects are seen by participants as key factors in shaping teacher leader profiles. Exhibiting those personal facets is significantly important for building the first image of teachers leaders' character with the potential for establishing the basic foundation that can be enriched by different leadership aspects, specifically skills and dispositions with the aim to shine the teacher leader profile.

Aside from those personal features, the skills and competencies detected in the data vary from instructional to managerial and social skills. Participants by putting forward those skills show a good level of awareness about teacher leadership practice as the attitude alone would not be helpful to assuming this role which as it insists on personal traits, also makes a number of skills necessary to champion this task to advance quality educational practice.

For the barriers, participants had different responses varying from the teacher themselves, to principals, the school environment and the education system as a whole. Most participants focused on the attitude of the teacher as the major challenge to teacher leadership in school. Teachers may lack the confidence or passion to champion leadership roles. Some teachers may not feel confident in their abilities to lead and may lack the self-esteem needed to pursue leadership opportunities. Though those findings place teachers as a source of criticism, they, however, reveal the awareness and the mental and intellectual growth that the teachers' trainees have towards the major hindrance to teacher leadership quality practice in their communities. Though the participants are aware that the Moroccan schooling setting is not supportive of teachers transitioning from teacher to teacher leader, they place teachers at the heart of the school for any inspired change or transformation. By putting forward those shining ideas; participants are armed with an inner energy that would shine their journey to teacher leadership, particularly in a dim schooling environment where no support is given. Participants through such positive responses or rather affirmations are super-conscious that the first journey to incubate teacher leadership is self-awareness and self-discipline. Future teachers in Morocco have an overt outlook toward taking informal roles within their schools and communities even if not enough support is provided.

The findings in brief still echo the literature (Hunzicker, 2017; Wade & Ferriter, 2007; Johnson & Donaldson, 2007; Wade & Ferriter, 2007; Lattimer, 2007; Moller & Pankake, 2006) as teachers themselves may be a challenge to teacher leadership if they lack the passion of the intrinsic incentive and motivation. Yet, the attitude alone cannot build up the profile of the teacher leader and this was detected in the data as ongoing support and professional development were included as among the challenges which are compatible with the literature (Nicolaidou, 2010; Hunzicker, 2017). Hence, teachers may find it hard to fulfill leadership roles without guidance or support, particularly novice teachers who may lack the experience and the necessary tools to champion this role.

Thus, continuous training is critically needed to provide teachers with the skills and dispositions to lead and endorse informal roles with high efficiency. School support along with professional development guides teachers to better use their overt attitude and flexibility for the benefit of students and the school. Concerning the best implications of teacher leadership in Morocco, participants uttered various recommendations, especially professional development, support, and encouragement. The school principal and administration, as seen in the data, are also among the obstacles that the participants pointed out. If the school principal or school environment, in general, is not well supported, teachers would find it hard to unleash their leadership and creativity. All such practices still mirror most of the literature as school principals' character may also hinder a teacher's ability to display leadership roles (Hunzicker, 2017; Wenner & Campbell, 2016; Wilson, 2016).

8. Conclusion

This current study explored teacher trainees' perspectives toward teacher leadership and the best implementation of this craft. The findings are in line with previous studies, yet developing teachers' leadership skills is a challenging endeavor as most participants reported. Participants emphasized training and professional development to help transform teachers into agents of change. The findings of the first question should be taken into consideration to fill-in the gap by outlining a well-rounded curriculum that addresses teacher leadership in teachers' education schools in Morocco, if we aim to arm teachers with leaders' qualities. The focus on cognitive aspects alone in this ever-changing world would be insufficient to create a generation not only able to deal with global challenges but also to find new ways to solve them. Incorporating courses with the potential to build teacher leadership competence is significantly important in this era insisting on unique skills and boosting the quality and productivity of schooling (Whitaker, 2018).

The study simply contributes to the current literature by revealing the importance of initiating the development of teacher leaders. It raises awareness about the critical role for teachers that need to be fulfilled in school and beyond. It is also noted that teacher leadership in developing countries or countries that notice crises and troubles should have its own criteria that define this concept; developing countries or countries in crises may rely on teachers as intellectual individuals with the potential to influence the school

and the larger community as a whole. The ultimate goal of education is growth and prosperity at various levels; teacher leaders working in such a context should go beyond transforming the school to focus more on transforming the community, in its broad sense. Teachers may not be asked to take on such a role, but bearing the title of teacher leader without beyond-school leadership is only a mirage. Being a teacher leader in a troubling community needs to be reflected in teachers' actions by disrupting the status quo and taking the lead to inspire active citizenship and social change. In short, it would be far-sighted for schools to provide coaching and ongoing training in leadership for teachers. Yet budgets in schools cannot fulfill the need and less funding is available for the professional development of teachers by the ministry. However, for the lack of funding, Cascade-based Training-of-Trainers (Qasserras, 2023) can fulfill the need and serve as an alternative approach to achieve this objective.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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