

THE IMPACT OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES AND VIEWS OF SCHOOL LEADERS AND TEACHERS IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN SHARJAH

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Abstract

The research study investigates the impact of teacher leadership on school improvement by exploring the experiences and views of school leaders and teachers in two private schools in Sharjah. And it investigates the strategies adapted by school leaders to promote teacher leadership. The study adopted a mixed-method research approach utilizing two closed-ended surveys (quantitative data) shared with school leaders and teachers and a semi-structured interview with school leaders (qualitative data). The school leaders' survey was sent to 21 school leaders, while the teachers' survey was sent to 128 teachers. Six school leaders were interviewed in this study to explore their views of teacher leaders and investigate the strategies they applied to promote teacher leadership in their schools. The study shows that teacher leadership has a vital impact on school improvement through collaboration between teachers and sharing good practices through professional development sessions and initiatives. Lead teachers act as a bridge between teachers and school leaders; they help communicate teachers' voices and have them take a better role in decision-making at school. Teacher leadership can enhance parents' involvement in the school by utilizing the parent-teacher association. The study revealed some roadblocks to teacher leadership, such as a lack of resources, time, and some school policies. At the end of the study, the researcher highlighted some possible limitations and recommendations that future researchers can utilize in planning their study.

Keywords: Teacher Leaders, School Improvement, Empowerment, Leadership.

Introduction

Teacher leadership plays an essential in school improvement in today's educational communities. Teachers possess the expertise and unique insights that positively impact student attainment by enhancing teaching practices, which leads to overall school improvement. In this study, the researcher explores the concept of teacher leadership and its impact on school improvement. Furthermore, the study uncovers valuable strategies and best practices to help school leaders empower teachers and encourage them to take leadership roles that positively enhance the school community. The findings of this study yield practical insights and guidance for school leaders, teachers, and policymakers, ultimately leading to effective teacher leadership programs, a collaborative school community, and better student achievement. In their study, Muijis and Harris (2003) affirmed the movement toward teacher leadership and the limitation of theories of leadership that focus on the 'charismatic head.' They stated that teacher leadership allows educators to develop their expertise by collaborating. They concluded that to empower teachers and improve school performance, school leaders must put policies and implement the right strategies to achieve that.

In the UAE context described earlier, promoting teacher leadership in the school community will have a good impact on school improvement. Akert and Martin (2012), conducted a study on the effect of teacher leadership on school improvement; they stated that a successful school improvement can be achieved by redefining the role of teachers and school leaders. They also clarified that empowering teachers is always affected by the actions of the school's principal. Principals should motivate teachers to explore the opportunities in the school environment and identify the obstacles and barriers that prevent them from taking a better role in school that enhances student achievement and school performance. The main research question of this study is; what are the impacts of teacher leadership on school improvement as experienced and perceived by teachers and school leaders in two private schools in Sharjah? And the sub-research questions are; how do teachers view the efforts of their school leaders in empowering teachers and

promoting teacher leadership? what strategies do school leaders apply to empower teachers and promote teacher leadership? what are the impacts of promoting teacher leadership on school improvement according to teachers? what impacts according to school leaders does promoting teacher leadership have on school improvement?

The main educational goal of the UAE Vision 2021 is to offer The U.A.E. citizens and residents a first-rate education that helps them develop well-rounded individuals, enhance their academic achievements, and support them in reaching their potential, allowing them to contribute better to their community. (The UAE Vision 2021). A study on Teacher leadership and its impacts on school performance clarified that teacher leadership positively affects student learning. The empowerment of teachers can improve the instructional strategies and the learning outcomes. Teacher leadership helps teachers understand the outcome of the learning process concerning students. Teacher leadership enhances teachers' commitment to student learning by sharing best practices and guiding professional development initiatives (Wise, Cartwright & Bradshaw 2012, cited in AlSuwaidi & Schoepp 2015). The purpose of the study is to explore school leaders' and teacher's opinions and views on the impacts of teacher leadership on school improvement. This study will highlight the positive impact of teacher leadership on student achievement, where teacher leadership initiatives positively influence the student academic performance of students. The study will also help school leaders enhance their school culture and climate, as teacher leadership is associated with improving students' and educators' performance. Furthermore, promoting teacher leadership will increase teacher job satisfaction, which results in enhanced retention rates in the school. Promoting teacher leadership will provide better opportunities for professional growth through sharing best instructional practices and leadership skills among educators. Teacher leadership will positively impact school improvement initiatives implementation along with the school educational reforms. Teacher leadership can lead to collaborative decision-making amongst the school community and, simultaneously, can enhance parent

and community engagement in the schools' events, initiatives, and school improvement efforts.

Literature Review

Leadership is a process of leading that aims at achieving the desired purposes. In a school context, successful leaders formulate the school vision based on their professional values. They continue to articulate the school vision and influence the teaching staff and all stakeholders to share this vision (Bush & Glover 2003). Teacher Leaders can be defined as teachers who maintain their classroom teaching duties and responsibilities while taking on extra leadership duties in the school. Teacher leaders are considered collaborators who share good instructional practices among the school (Wenner & Campbell 2017). Empirical studies on school improvement and leadership affirm that successful school leadership facilitates possible conditions that can effectively enhance teaching and learning in school and support the school in improving teaching and learning for school improvement. School can elevate their capacity for improvement through leadership efforts that focus on teacher practices and student learning (Fullan 2001 cited in Hallinger & Heck 2010).

Teacher leadership can be seen as having three primary leadership of students or colleagues where the lead teacher works as a facilitator, coach, mentor, and curriculum specialist where they can create new appropriate leading group. The leadership of operational tasks in the school to help move towards school goals through different roles such as head of department and member of task forces. Leadership through decision-making or partnership through being a member of school improvement teams and school committees (Katzenmeyer & Moller 2001 cited in Muijs & Harris 2003). When teachers energize and empower colleagues in the school community teaching and learning, this is considered the heart of teacher leadership. Moreover, developing interpersonal skills and communication skills to motivate other teachers eventually leads to achieving excellence. (York-Barr & Duke 2004 cited in Pineda-Báez, C., Bauman, C. & Andrews, D. 2020).

Figure 1: The Teacher As Leaders Framework (Pineda-Báez, Bauman & Andrews 2020)

Teacher leaders...	
Convey convictions about a 'better world' by	• Articulating a positive future for students • Showing a genuine interest in students' lives
Strive for authenticity in their teaching, learning and assessment practices, by	• Showing genuine interest in students' needs and well-being
Facilitate communities of learning by	• Encouraging a shared, school wide approach to professional learning • Synthesizing new ideas out of colleagues' dialogue and activities
Confront barriers in the school's culture and structures by	• Standing up for children, especially marginalized or disadvantaged individuals or groups • Working with administrators to find solutions to issues of equity, fairness and justice
Translate ideas into sustainable systems of action by	• Maintaining focus on issues of importance • Nurturing networks of support
Nurture a culture of success by	• Acting on opportunities for others to gain success and recognition • Creating a sense of community identity and pride

Hunzicker (2012) claimed that teacher leadership is a facet of distributed leadership that accumulates over time and does not occur suddenly. It takes a lot of professional experience to develop the self-efficacy of teachers. Leadership is defined as a process of social influence where the leader is considered a person who can guide and support others in the organization to accomplish a common task or achieve a certain goal (Chemers 2014). Leadership is the most critical component of management in any organization. Good leadership will have a better chance to survive and excel in competitive environments nowadays. (Abdolmaleki et al. 2013)

Bush and Glover (2014) affirmed that Instructional leadership is leadership for learning that focuses mainly on the purpose of leaders' influence targeted at student achievement and learning with less emphasis on the influence process itself. Nevertheless, other leadership models focus strongly on leadership processes.

According to great man theory of leadership, great leaders are born and not made. Ololube 2013 (cited in Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube 2015) stated that Great Man theory assumes that leadership capacity is inherent and that great leaders are born and raised as leaders. This theory considers leaders' heroic and mythic. In transformational leadership, a leader improves the performance of the organization by inspiring and empowering followers to reach their potential. According to this theory, transformational leaders encourage innovation and drive positive organizational change (Díaz-Sáenz 2011). Transformational leaders possess many good behaviors and characteristics, such as vision,

charisma, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation. Khan (2017) clarified that Transactional Leadership Theory applies to educational organizations and institutes. It is based on exchanging rewards. This theory focuses on the relationship between the leader and their followers, just like the teacher and their students, where the students work on an assignment or a task, and the teacher will award the quality work. In summary, a variety of Leadership Theories explain the relationship between the leader and the followers; some of these theories are applicable in a particular situation or a context, while other theories are not. Autocratic leadership is considered a form of transactional leadership. In the Autocratic leadership style, leaders have complete power over the employees. Team members barely have a role in the decision-making process, even if the decision can be in the best interest of the staff or the organization. Autocratic leadership can be beneficial in crises where the leader must decide quickly without delay (Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube 2015). Charismatic leadership is a style of leadership where the leader utilizes their communication skills and charm to influence the followers. Charismatic leaders can connect well with employees or people and help them move forward in achieving common goals. Charismatic leaders can be considered adequate if they are in harmony with the values of their followers; this harmony will help charismatic leaders to internalize the goals of their followers (Mhatre & Riggio, 2014, cited in Ozgenel 2020). Transactional Leadership Style is an exchange between the follower and the leader, where rewards are given for the employee's effort. This behavior involves some forms of negative feedback, such as criticism and

punishment, especially when the employee's performance is poor (Mahdinezhad et al., 2013). The literature review resulted in many theories underpinning the concept of teacher leadership; one of the famous theories is York-Barr and Duke Teacher Leadership for Student Learning. In 2004, York-Barr and Duke reviewed 140 studies of teacher leadership over 20 years. And came up with their theory, Teacher Leadership for Student Learning. This theory affirmed that teacher leadership comes

from the teachers themselves through the tasks they engage in within the school context. Teacher leaders have different roles with individual teams in the school while focusing on improving teaching and learning for students. According to the York-Barr and Duke model, teachers elaborate in many ways to improve the school performance, especially teaching and learning. The figure below describes the York-Barr and Duke model (York-Barr and Duke 2004).

Figure 2: Spheres of Teacher Leadership Action for Learning (Fairman & Mackenzie 2012)



UAE undergoes rapid and ongoing development in many sectors with a great effort to reform the education sector. According to this developmental plan, the education sector must prepare innovative teachers and teacher leaders to help learners and professional teachers achieve higher standards and enhance the UAE education system to align with international best practices (Harold & Stephenson 2010).

Suwaiddi and Schoepp (2015) conducted a study on the Knowledge and promotion of teacher leadership in public schools in Abu Dhabi. The finding of this study showed that teachers' focus and preference was teacher leadership as it related to enhancing classroom practices through professional development. Nevertheless, they believed teacher leadership was typically demonstrated by teachers taking on extra administrative responsibilities. The study recommended that institutions should offer opportunities for professional development to help faculty-both Emirati and foreign-emerge as teacher leaders and have a beneficial impact on educational change and student learning.

Altaneiji and Ibrahim (2017) studied practices and roadblocks to teacher leadership in UAE schools. They conducted mixed-method research that explores teachers' leadership practices. The study addressed the factors that either helped or hindered teachers from taking a teacher leader role in public schools in the Abu Dhabi emirate. In the conclusion of their study, they stated a few recommendations that can help empower teachers and promote teacher leadership. The recommendations include Reviewing the educational policies, training teachers on leadership, distributing leadership roles fairly among teachers, consulting teachers on forming school committees, and enhancing the collaboration among school departments. Altaneiji and Ibrahim (2017) recommended that future studies collect qualitative data by interviewing school principals and school leaders to explore their perceptions of teachers' leadership to get more credible data as their study shows discrepancies between quantitative and qualitative data collected in their study because respondents sometimes they choose the most socially accepted answer. Alahbabi (2018) researched Key stakeholders' perceptions of

school improvement strategies in the UAE. Alahbabi suggested many strategies that can be implemented to move the school forward in its developmental plan; among the proposed strategies, the following strategies can help promote teacher leadership as part of the school improvement plan:

- Establishing strategies for effective communication with all members of the school community;
- Establishing strategies that enable focused professional development for teachers;
- Encouraging teamwork and establishing professional learning communities;
- Encouraging teachers, parents, and students to be part of the decision-making process concerning school development.

The study also suggested that participative leadership involves teachers, students, and parents in evaluating the improvement and promotion of schools to make them more beneficial and effective. Phogat (2022) studied the Role of School Leaders in Facilitating Continuous Professional Development to Empower Teachers in Private Schools in Dubai. The study's main objective is to explore the role of school leadership in empowering teachers through the implementation of CPD. The study explained that the role of school leadership is to bring out positive changes in the professional enhancement of teachers by performing and organizing CPD programs. Another study about the impact of teacher leadership on Teachers' performance and students' development for School Improvement in a private Kindergarten in Dubai. The study was conducted by Alshizawi (2023); the purpose is to investigate the impact of effective teacher leadership in schools on teachers' performance and students' achievement. The study showed a positive relationship between the effectiveness of the teachers and the motivation of teachers at work, which will affect their productivity. The study showed a good impact on the teaching and learning process as well. Lead teachers make an excellent contribution to the professional development of their colleagues, which will improve the school's performance.

In another study on Teacher leadership potential and teachers' perceptions in the UAE, Eltanahy (2018) affirmed that it is essential to enhance teachers' abilities, skills, and practices through beneficial professional development programs. Eltanahy argued that the participating teachers in the study are willing to attend professional structures to improve the educational reform in their schools. Radhwan (2020) studied The Influence of 'Teachers' Leadership Style' on Primary Students' Learning Outcomes in a Private School in Sharjah, UAE. The study explores the influence of teachers' leadership styles on students' learning outcomes and the factors that can enhance teachers' leadership. The study

confirmed that when teachers act as leaders, they will have a good impact on the school. The study highlighted the effectiveness of a transformational leadership style that enhances teachers' commitment to the school community and to the school's mission and vision, which will directly have a positive impact on student achievement. In a study on the impact of teachers' leadership styles on the student's academic achievement and behavior in a private school in Fujairah City in UAE. The researcher listed the findings of the study as follows:

- The impact of teacher leadership does not only affect the academic performance of students but also impacts their behavior, which has a positive impact on the school's performance.
- When teachers are given a role in the decision-making process in the school, especially concerning instructional material, resources, assessment tools, and policies, the school's performance will be enhanced (Elshabrawy 2021).

Subri (2018) explored the challenges lead teachers face in a private school in Dubai. The main findings of the study are:

- The effective lead teachers have a positive influence on the teachers' work motivation.
- The effective lead teachers have a good impact on the teaching and learning process
- Lead teachers face many challenges, such as shortages of time and resources, high workloads, and teachers' reluctance.

The researcher recommended future studies to investigate the factors that may enhance the performance of lead teachers and to explore how school leadership can deal with obstacles and difficulties faced by lead teachers. Poekert, Alexandrou, and Shannon (2016) researched how teachers become leaders and suggested a model of teacher leadership development in the UK. The findings of their study claimed that when teachers work in a supportive environment, provided by a beneficial professional development program, and allowed to lead, they can play a vital role in school improvement, including improving teacher quality and student outcomes.

Another study conducted in Australia, Canada, and Colombia aimed to explore and report teachers' experiences of empowering and practicing Teacher leadership in their schools. The researchers clarified that to empower leadership in the school and drive school improvement, a growth mindset is needed, along with fostering the teacher's agency. Another factor that can promote teacher leadership is the nature of relationships between teachers and

principals. In the three school systems examined in the study, there was a need for an increased understanding of shared leadership (Pineda-Báez, Bauman & Andrews, 2020).

Relevant understanding of the context (of the UAE) may provide necessary background to the study as the study was done in a private school in Sharjah, UAE. Education has been expanding in the UAE (David, 2017a) steadily, addressing both expansion and excellence (David, 2017b), making the UAE an educational hub in the region (David, et.al, 2017). The UAE constantly tries to innovate curriculum (David & Hill, 2020) and instruction (David & Hill, 2021) at all fronts of education. Eltanahy and David (2018) showcase that curriculum enhancement is a key factor to influence teaching strategies. Al Hussein and David (2017) suggest that instructional leadership support teacher's professional. Daraghmeh and David (2017) highlight that technology integration is supportive for school improvement. David and Abukari (2019) observe that leaders must ensure to contextualize education. Albasha and David (2019) indicate that involving teachers in curriculum design is essential for effective instruction. Mansour and David (2021) highlight that teacher's organizational commitment is key for school improvement. Abbasi and David (2021) insist that professional development of teachers helps to optimize learning. Haque and David (2022) recommend effective curriculum implementation to achieve instructional outcome. Yahya and David (2022) suggest that leaders' support is crucial for teachers. Alzarouni and David (2023) highlight the impact of value education in nurturing students' positive behaviour. These and other local studies inform the general trends on the role of leadership for school improvement in the UAE.

Research Methodology

The research design for this study employs a mixed-method approach, emphasizing primarily the qualitative research dimension, with a secondary focus on quantitative data derived from surveying school leaders and teachers. As defined by Creswell (2014), a mixed-method approach entails the simultaneous or sequential collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data. For this research, the exploratory sequential design was preferred. Quantitative research, characterized by its structured and numerical approach, offers distinct advantages for examining the impact of teacher leadership on school improvement, particularly within Sharjah's private schools. This approach boasts several vital benefits: Firstly, its larger sample sizes and systematic methodologies enable the generalizability of findings to a broader population, making it valuable for identifying trends and patterns in teacher leadership across multiple schools (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Secondly,

quantitative research permits sophisticated statistical analyses, facilitating identifying significant relationships, trends, and differences among variables related to teacher leadership and its effects on school improvement (Field, 2013). Thirdly, it employs standardized instruments like surveys or questionnaires to provide consistent and objective measures of school leaders' and teachers' perspectives, minimizing researcher bias (Muijs, 2010).

The study used interviews as one data source since interviews provide School Principals with real experience, how they see the experience and interpret it, and their perspective of the whole process. Interviews give participants a broad space to explain and interpret the process and include their assessment of the interviews, which were audio recorded with the consent of the participants (Polit & Beck, 2010). Later, they were written in precise transcripts to be able to code and analyze the data collected from the interviews (Merriam, 2015). The method used to select participants for this study was based on selective or purposive sampling (for schools and interviews with school principals and leaders) and the random (for surveys) methods. The sampling method is practical in a reasonable context (Suri 2011). Selective sampling is a research method that involves the intentional selection of participants based on specific criteria, as opposed to random selection. For the two surveys, 128 teachers and 21 school leaders were chosen randomly from the two schools following the American curriculum in Sharjah.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data collected from interviews with school principals regarding the impact of teacher leadership on school improvement in Sharjah's private schools entails a systematic process guided by established qualitative research methodologies. SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) analyzes quantitative data collected through surveys. Utilizing SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to analyze quantitative data collected through surveys administered to school principals and teachers regarding the influence of teacher leadership on school improvement within Sharjah's private schools involves a systematic series of steps. Reliability and validity are two critical aspects of scholarly papers and studies. Reliability and validity are necessary to ensure the quality of rigorous qualitative research. (Cypres 2017). Validity of research can be defined as determining the fidelity of research, which reflects the accuracy of the findings according to the researcher, the participants, and the readers. (Creswell & Miller 2000). Trustworthiness can be described in many ways, according to different researchers. Trustworthiness can be seen as authenticity, trustfulness, and the quality of the

findings of a qualitative study. It can be related to what degree the research can be trusted by readers (Schmidt & Brown 2017).

Result and Discussion

By analyzing the quantitative data, the School Leader's survey, the researcher assured that many strategies can be implemented by school leaders to foster teacher leadership such as emphasizes the importance of teachers collaborating and sharing expertise and can result in collaborative school environment. Another beneficial strategy is creating professional development opportunities to enhance professional growth. Mentoring and coaching programs are vital strategies as well. With regards to school leaders' perceptions of the impact of teacher leadership in school enhancement, the results of the school leaders survey affirmed that teacher leadership greatly benefits school improvement through fostering positive school culture. Teacher leaders motivate peers and bridge communication between staff and administration. The results of the Teacher's survey results clarified that school leaders can nurture teacher leadership by encouraging teacher involvement in critical educational decision-making. Conversely, teachers did not agree that school leaders allocate resources and time for leadership opportunities and that they seek teacher input in impactful school decisions. Nonetheless, the overall results affirm the school leaders' pivotal role in advancing teacher leadership.

The interviews with school leaders highlighted many facts. There are several vital qualities of an effective teacher leader such as communication skills with active listening. School leaders stressed on the importance of teacher leadership in driving school improvement. All interviewees rated the significance of teacher leadership as an "extremely important rating of 5 on a scale of 1 to 5. School leaders also highlighted the pivotal role of teacher leadership in spearheading impactful school improvement initiatives. Teacher leaders employ diverse methods to bolster colleagues' professional development. Teacher leaders are found to significantly influence shared decision-making in schools. Interviewees varied engagement of teacher leaders with external stakeholders, including parents and community members, to bolster school improvement.

The Interview Responses also pointed out potential obstacles that teacher leaders might encounter when striving for school improvement. School leaders affirmed the need for additional support or resources that could benefit teacher leaders in driving school improvement. Both data collected through the qualitative interview questions and the quantitative surveys shared with teachers and school leaders answered the research questions and supported the fact that teacher leadership has a positive impact on

the school improvement. School leaders and teachers agreed upon the strategies that can promote teacher leadership such as professional development opportunities that enhance the collaboration among the teachers and help them share best practices that impact the quality of teaching and learning in the school and lead eventually to an overall school improvement. The results also highlighted the importance of involving teacher leaders in the decision-making process and have their voice heard. The results listed some of the obstacles for teacher leadership such as the lack of resources, time, and high workloads.

The interview includes nine questions to answer the research questions that help the researcher explore strategies applied by school leaders to promote teacher leadership and to explore school leaders' views and perceptions on the impact of teacher leadership on school improvement. The analysis of each question is discussed in the following parts. Question one: In your opinion, what are the key qualities or characteristics of an effective teacher leader? Please list at least three. Based on the diverse opinions of all interviewees, the consensus identifies several vital qualities of an effective teacher leader (TL). Communication skills stand out prominently; the principal 2 values clear, concise communication with active listening. *"The three key qualities of an effective teacher leader are: firstly, the ability to communicate clearly and concisely with colleagues and students is essential for teacher leaders. They must carry their ideas, provide feedback, and listen actively. To promote collaboration and understanding. Secondly, that teacher leaders possess a deep understanding of teaching methodologies, curriculum development, and assessment methods. They can use this knowledge to effectively guide their peers in improving their instruction. Thirdly, collaborative, and supportive nature is essential for teacher leaders. They support their colleagues, provide constructive feedback, and create a nurturing and inclusive learning environment."* Principal 2 replied.

Question Two: On a scale of 1-5, with one being "not important beings' Extremely important," how important do you believe teacher leadership is in driving school improvement? Based on the responses of the participants, there is a unanimous agreement among the interviewees regarding the importance of teacher leadership in driving school improvement. All interviewees, irrespective of their positions and years of experience, rated the significance of teacher leadership as an "extremely important rating of 5 on a scale of 1 to 5. The male Principal 2, 50-59 years of age, elaborated further by emphasizing the role of teacher leaders in fostering professional development, promoting innovative teaching practices, and enhancing the overall educational experience within a school. This

consensus underscores the pivotal role that teacher leaders play in advancing educational outcomes and fostering school improvement. Those in various leadership roles recognize the impact of empowered and engaged teacher leaders on the broader educational ecosystem.

Question Three: Have you witnessed any specific initiatives or projects by teacher leaders that positively impacted school improvement? If yes, please provide a brief description. The interview responses regarding Question three highlight the pivotal role of teacher leadership in spearheading impactful school improvement initiatives. The male Principal 2, 50-59 years old, highlighted a mentoring program that bolstered teacher retention and a tech initiative enhancing student engagement. The vice principal pointed to a student-led Model United Nations activity as a significant achievement. Math clubs focusing on mental math and data literacy, along with Professional Learning Communities, were cited by Department Heads as transformative.

Question four: How do teacher leaders support professional development among their colleagues? Please share any specific strategies or practices you have observed or experienced. Teacher leaders employ diverse methods to bolster colleagues' professional development, as discerned from the interview feedback. The male Principal 2 (50-59 years) advocates for workshops, peer observations, and personalized coaching, aiding teachers in refining skills and pedagogy. Surveys and on-ground observations, as highlighted by the female vice principal, inform session topics, often led by teachers themselves. Department head 1 (30-39 years) underscores weekly exchanges of best practices and teacher-led workshops emphasizing the importance of shared knowledge. Department head 2 (40-49 years) mentions mentoring, resource-sharing, and continuous feedback.

Question five: In what ways do teacher leaders contribute to shared decision-making processes within the school? How does their involvement influence the outcomes of decisions made? Teacher leaders significantly influence shared decision-making in schools. The male Principal 2 (50-59 years) highlighted their role in representing colleagues, ensuring decisions align with the school's vision. A cascading feedback system described by the vice principal (female, 50-59 years) provides holistic decision-making by consulting all department viewpoints. While involvement levels differ, with Department head 1 (30-39 years) noting minimal teacher input, another department head (40-49 years) emphasized their critical roles in committees and consensus-building. According to another department head (female, 40-49 years), the value of teacher leaders' contributions is contingent

on senior leadership's responsiveness and external directives.

Question 6: How do you believe teacher leadership promotes a positive school culture and enhances collaboration among staff members? Please provide any examples or observations. The male Principal 2 (50-59 years) underscores that teacher leaders, through active involvement in committees and curriculum development, set a benchmark of professionalism and dedication, fostering a culture of collective accountability and continuous growth. The vice principal (female, 50-59 years) emphasizes the importance of professional development and the sharing of best practices. Department head 1 (female, 30-39 years) cites a practical example where a teacher's workshop on questioning techniques for Mathematics spurred collaborative efforts post-workshop, with educators teaming up to implement and observe these strategies whereas Department head 2 (female, 40-49 years) points out the vital role of teacher leaders in establishing trust, facilitating open dialogue, sharing best practices, and promoting common goals. *"You are building trust and relationships, encouraging open communication, modeling and sharing best practices, promoting shared vision and goals, and creating opportunities for reflection and feedback."* Department Head 2 affirmed.

Question Seven: Have teacher leaders engaged with parents, community members, or external stakeholders to support school improvement efforts? If yes, please share any specific examples or approaches. Interviewees varied engagement of teacher leaders with external stakeholders, including parents and community members, to bolster school improvement. While the male Principal 2 (50-59 years) emphasizes teacher leaders' roles in enhancing school-community relations through activities like parent-teacher conferences and community events, the vice principal (female, 50-59 years) mentions the structured involvement via the Parent Teacher Association.

Question Eight: What potential challenges or barriers may teacher leaders face when trying to drive school improvement? Please list at least three. Interviewees pointed out potential obstacles that teacher leaders might encounter when striving for school improvement. Several common threads emerge from the interviewees' perspectives. One predominant challenge highlighted by many, including the male Principal 2 (50-59 years), the Department Head 1 (female, 30-39 years), and Department Head 2 (female, 40-49 years), is the resistance to change and new ideas from other staff members. This resistance often stems from a fixed mindset and poses a considerable barrier to implementing new strategies and practices. Another frequently cited challenge is the overload of

responsibilities. Teacher leaders, while playing an active role in leadership, still maintain their teaching duties. This dual role can be overwhelming, leading to time constraints, as pointed out by the male Principal 2 (50-59 years), the vice principal (female, 50-59 years), and the Department head 1 (female, 30-39 years).

Question Nine: What additional support or resources do you believe would be beneficial to teacher leaders in their efforts to promote school improvement? Please share any suggestions or ideas. Interviewees presented the additional support or resources that could benefit teacher leaders in driving school improvement. The male Principal 2 (50-59 years) emphasizes tailored training, mentorship programs, dedicated time and compensation, clear career pathways, and feedback mechanisms. The vice principal (female, 50-59 years) underscores the importance of nurturing teacher well-being and aligning purpose and goals. Department heads advocate for external professional development, dedicated collaboration time, senior leadership support, and networking and coaching platforms. A highlighted point from one Department Head 3 (female, 40-49 years, with over 20 years of teaching experience) is the need for a long-term, standards-based school improvement plan and adequate time for staff to internalize and implement it.

“Teacher leaders would benefit from an overall school improvement plan that is put in place by senior leaders after discussions with all staff. Senior leaders are often given a time frame by higher management they don't feel they have enough time to go through the proper process to implement a school improvement plan. For a school improvement plan to work, it needs to be based on a set of internationally recognized standards that have been tried and tested. Those standards need resources or a learning platform that helps staff familiarize themselves. It needs to be in place for five or more years to give all members of staff time to get acquainted with it and to discuss it in informal ways. That's when real improvement happens.” Head of department 3 clarified. The following are the key findings of the study:

Teachers' Perception about the Role of School Leaders in Empowering Teacher Leadership

- School leaders support and encourage teachers to share their ideas and opinions on important decisions related to teaching and learning.
- School leaders recognize and celebrate the contributions of teacher leaders within the school community.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Teacher Leadership on School Improvement

- The recognition and support of teacher leaders by school administrators positively impact school improvement efforts.
- Teacher leadership plays a crucial role in driving school improvement.
- Overall, teacher leadership significantly contributes to the improvement of schools.

Strategies Applied by School Leaders for Promoting Teacher Leadership

- School leaders provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate and share their expertise.
- School leaders offer professional development opportunities that focus on building leadership skills.
- School leaders encourage teachers to take on leadership roles within their departments/grade levels.

School Leaders' Perception about the Impact of Teacher Leadership in School Improvement

- The involvement of teacher leaders improves instructional practices throughout the school.
- Teacher leadership leads to a positive and supportive school culture.

Conclusion

Many strategies can be utilized in promoting teacher leadership. With regards to teacher leaders and contribution to decision making that is one strategy of empowering teacher leaders, teacher leaders represent the perspectives and needs of their colleagues and ensure that decisions taken do align with the school's mission and goals. This can be accomplished by facilitating the communication and collaboration between teacher leaders and school leaders building consensus and influencing outcomes. School principals play a vital role in empowering teacher leadership through different actions specially in engaging teacher leaders in the school improvement efforts and plans (Pineda-Báez & Bauman 2020). Teacher leaders can be engaged with parents, community members and external stakeholders to support school improvement efforts through many strategies or approaches. For example, conduction of teacher-parent conferences, and leading community events to enhance school-community relationship. Parent-teacher associations are very effective in empowering teachers and parents in school improvement efforts that leads eventually to better outcomes. Teacher leadership has an impact on organizational capacity of educational institution, and it exceeds the boundaries of school to reach the community (Reeves & Lowenhaupt 2016).

The interview with school leaders highlighted different additional resources that can be beneficial in empowering teachers for school improvement. Providing training and professional development tailored to teacher leaders to enhance their leadership skills and allocating time and compensation for teacher leader roles to acknowledge and reward their contributions and establishing mentorship programs for teacher leaders, where experienced leaders guide and support those in emerging leadership roles and implementing regular feedback mechanisms to gather input from both teacher leaders and their colleagues, ensuring their needs and contributions are recognized and valued. The Access to data and assessment can be also beneficial for school improvement efforts as it provides insights to teacher leaders and school leaders to work collaboratively towards fulfilling school goals. School leaders and principal's leadership practices must be driven by the vision and goals of school rather than being driven by their positions and titles (Komives, Lucas & McMahon 2013). The third domain in the interview questions is Teacher leadership and school improvement. This domain was dominant in questions two, three, four, six, seven, eight, and nine.

Teacher leaders have a vital role in initiating programs that positively impact school improvement according to school leaders. These initiatives may include mentoring program for new teachers that significantly reducing turnover rates and improving teacher retention. Teacher leader can also spearhead technology integration projects to enhance digital literacy and student engagement throughout the school. PLCs' (Professional Learning Communities) are very effective in sharing best practice among educators to enhance the school performance and student attainment. School leaders mentioned many initiatives led by lead teachers and have a great impact on school improvement like Global Goals initiatives, School-wide PD initiatives. Other initiatives aim to train students to perform better in student councils and were beneficial in improving schools as well. In general, teacher leaders' initiatives enhance Collaboration between teachers and positively impact school culture. Different styles of leadership like distributed leadership can enhance the relationships in school community with the focus on the shared goals and purpose that promote teacher leadership and help improve the learning process for school improvement (Gronn 2002). School principals listed many challenges and roadblocks that can hinder the efforts of promoting teacher leadership. The challenges or obstacles may include:

- Teacher resistance for changes or new initiatives

- Teacher leaders often have additional responsibilities on top of their teaching duties, which can be time-consuming.
- Teacher leaders may not receive the formal recognition or compensation they deserve for their efforts, which can be demotivating.
- School policies
- Lack of authority
- Cultural and contextual factors
- Lack of experience in management
- Lack of resources

Based on the findings of the research listed above, many recommendations can be adopted and implemented to promote teacher leadership to enhance school performance. It is highly recommended for school leadership to allocate resources and time to help empower teachers and let them reach their potential. It is also recommended that school leaders along with lead teachers set a school-wide plan for professional development which will help educators share their best practices specially concerning teaching and learning. Moreover, school leaders can support school initiatives that can foster the relationships among the teachers, school administrators and the community, this can be achieved by enhancing the role of teacher-parent associations and foster the role of school committees. Creating school policies that can promote teacher leadership is highly recommended as policies can be more efficient in sitting roles and expectations. Based on the feedback of School Leaders interviews, professional development opportunities and training sessions must focus on building effective communications skills and time and resources management that can enhance the leadership abilities of teachers and help teachers collaborate and create a positive school community. Teaching and learning is at the heart of teaching profession, teachers have a lot to share with their colleagues, every teacher has his/ her own talent. Sharing pedagogies and classroom strategies will enhance the teaching and learning. The study has many implications for school leaders, educators, and policy makers. The study focuses on the importance of empowering teachers and utilizing the expertise and knowledge to improve teaching and learning practices that can lead to enhancing student attainment. The study affirmed that distributed leadership plays an important role in empowering teachers through involving them in decision - making in school community. Another implication of the study is the vital role of professional development opportunities in the school on empowering teachers and improving their leadership skills. School leaders cab also benefit from the implications of the study in developing their school policies, especially policies related to allocating resources and providing the support needed to empower teachers.

The limitations of the study can include the limited number of schools participating in the survey (two schools) and the limited number of participants, 128 teachers responded to Teacher Survey and 21 school leaders responded to School Leaders Survey. Both limited number of participants and schools participating make the generalization of the findings of the study not possible. The randomness of the samples can also limit the findings of the study, this might affect the authenticity of the data collected (quantitative and qualitative data). Another limitation is that the study was conducted in Sharjah only and that the study did not include other emirates. The last possible limitation is the bias, the researcher is a lead teacher in the emirates of Ajman, which may cause a possible unintentional bias in writing the research findings but not in collecting or analyzing the data. The recommendations for future studies are to conduct the research in many schools in UAE including more emirates to be able to generalize the results of the research and have a larger sample size. Increasing the sample size will help get more reliable data related to strategies to empower teachers and promote teacher leadership for school improvement. Another recommendation is to conduct the research over a longer period so the data can be collected over a period of an academic year so the research can include data from inspection bodies that reflect on school performance.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest by the authors in this manuscript.

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