

Exploring the Conceptualization of Teacher Leadership in Namibia

Ferdinand Nghifikepunye Kamati*, Hileni Silohenda Amuthenu

International University of Management, Namibia

*Corresponding Author: ferdinandkamati@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the conceptualization of teacher leadership in Namibia. A case study design was used within the qualitative approach. A sample of 45 participants was selected purposively from three (3) secondary schools. An interview guide, observation schedule, and document analysis were used to collect data from the participants. Data were analyzed using a thematic approach. The literature and the theoretical framework were used to compare and contrast the study findings. The literature and the theoretical framework were used to compare and contrast the study findings. The findings revealed that teacher leadership can be understood in terms of involvement and participation, empowerment, motivation and influence, collaboration, and leading and influence. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture should develop and promote leadership development programs for teachers to understand and practice leadership and review contemporary policies to allow for democratic leadership practices.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher leadership is extensively regarded as significant to the success of school improvement (Lowery-Moore et al., 2016). Teachers' efficacy, didactic practices, and teacher leadership practices have a strong effect on school radical transformations and students' achievement (Adnot et al., 2016; Evans & Popova, 2016; Hitt & Tucker, 2016). There is a need for a radical transformation of the education system in Namibia that is significant, systematic, and can sustain change to secure the success of all students in their settings. This radical transformation can only be achieved through maximizing the practice of teacher leadership in schools. Teacher leadership is defined as a process by which teachers influence their colleagues and other staff members to improve teaching and learning and increase students learning and achievements (York-Barr & Duke, cited in Shur et al., 2021). Studies divulge that teacher leadership is key to a radical transformation of the education system because it promotes a positive culture and climate in schools (Nguyen et al., 2019), improves and maintains school performance and students' achievement (Datnow & Park, 2018; Harris et al., 2017; Webber, 2021).

Globally, countries have taken initiatives to improve education quality and increase stakeholders' participation in school affairs. Consequently, several states have signed agreements such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals [UNSDG 4] and the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Measuring Education Quality [SACMEQ] (MOEAC, 2017). Teachers are the keys to the achievement of SDG 4 and SACMEQ objectives, so teacher leadership practices could act as a catalyst to achieve the objectives of these policies. Despite that teacher leadership practices in schools remain minimal. No study has been undertaken to explore the conceptualization of teacher leadership in the three selected senior secondary schools in the Ohangwena region, thus this study intends to fill up the gap.

The purpose of the study was to explore the conceptualization of teacher leadership in three selected secondary schools in the Ohangwena region. This study sought to answer the following question: how is the concept of teacher leadership understood in senior secondary schools? Integral to this, the paper also discussed the methodology and findings and discussions. Finally, the paper made conclusions and recommendations from the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is no clear definition of teacher leadership (Cosenza, 2015; Cheng & Szeto, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2017; Pangan & Lupton, 2015; Scott et al., 2015; Webber, 2018; Webber & Campbell, 2017). Nguyen et al. (2020) understand teacher leadership in terms of collaboration and trust engagement in and outside the classroom to enhance teaching and learning. Cheng and Szeto (2016) define teacher leadership as a process of influencing others to improve the quality of teaching and learning beyond their classrooms. Besides, Liberman (2014) terms teacher leadership as a way of organizing learning and understanding the link between knowledge and practice to develop teachers' abilities and capacity. Gul et al. (2019) view teacher leadership as individual empowerment for organizational development.

Webber and Campbell (2017) define teacher leadership as an approach in which teachers take leadership responsibilities outside the classroom. Numerous authors viewed teacher leadership differently, it is viewed as an influence rather than a role or formal authority (Smith et al. 2017; Snoek, et al. 2017); a process of change where teachers are key change agents and sources of innovation (Chew & Snoek 2017); a way of sharing practices and initiating changes (Backer-Doyle, 2017) and daily interactions, sharing and communications with other teachers (Nolan & Palazzolo, 2011). The researcher agrees with Sterrett (2015), that teacher leadership is the involvement of teachers in the school initiatives and giving direction to teachers to achieve the school objectives. Arguably, Petersen (2015) narrates that teacher leadership is not more about involvement but more about collaboration with colleagues in developing and maintaining professional school cultures. Like Angelle and Dehart (2016) the researcher narrates that teacher leadership includes dispersing and sharing leadership roles with all school staff. Besides, Nguyen et al. (2020) agree with earlier studies that teacher leadership includes influences, reciprocal collaboration, and trust engagement within and beyond the classroom aiming to improve teaching and learning. In a nutshell, the researcher condenses that teacher leadership entails themes such as teacher leadership going beyond classroom environments, teacher leadership involves promoting professional learning, teacher leadership involves shared policy and decision making, the goal of teacher leadership in improving student learning and teacher leadership is a process of facilitating school change and improvement.

METHODOLOGY

A case study design was used within the qualitative approach. A sample of 45 participants was selected purposively from three (3) secondary schools. An interview guide, observation schedule, and document analysis were used to collect data from the participants. Data were analyzed using a thematic approach. The literature and the theoretical framework were used to compare and contrast the study findings. The researcher first obtained permission from the education regional director in the Ohangwena region to conduct the study. The researcher further distributed the consent forms to the research participants and information sheet respectively. The researcher then explained the aim of the study, participants' rights, how the results would be handled and used, and how confidentiality would be ensured and maintained. The participants were requested to be free to ask any question if they wanted further

information. The participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary and were asked to sign the consent forms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. The conceptualization of teacher leadership in the three selected senior secondary schools in the Ohangwena region.

Themes	Sub-themes
Theme 1: Conceptualisation of teacher leadership at the three selected senior secondary schools in the Ohangwena region.	Sub-theme1.1: Teacher leadership is defined in terms of participation and involvement Sub-theme 1.2: Teacher leadership is defined in terms of empowerment Sub-theme 1.3: Teacher leadership is viewed in terms of motivation and influence Sub-theme 1.4: Teacher leadership is defined as leading and collaboration Sub-theme 1.5: Teacher leadership is defined in terms of control

Theme 1: Conceptualisation of teacher leadership at the three selected senior secondary schools in the Ohangwena region.

Teacher leadership is defined in terms of participation and involvement

Participants viewed teacher leadership via the lens of the distributed leadership perspective of participatory leadership. Participants defined the concept of teacher leadership in terms of teachers' participation in the organization's affairs to achieve its objectives. Participant 6 defined teacher leadership; *"as a process in which teachers voluntarily participate in the school decision-making process and take the lead in the school's affairs"*. She further indicated that *"for teacher leadership to emerge, teachers should be given opportunities to participate in the school activities regardless of prior experience to allow them to accumulate a pool of knowledge, skills and experience"*. It is believed that teacher leadership entails teachers participating in school leadership. The above definition substantiates the earlier definition by Szeto and Cheng (2017) which understands teacher leadership as part of the distributed models of leadership that enable teachers to participate in school leadership through delegated roles by the principal.

Participants also defined teacher leadership in terms of involvement. They believed that teacher leadership is about involving teachers in the leadership and management of the school. Participant 13 defined the concept of teacher leadership; *"as a process when teachers are involved in decision making at school level"*. Furthermore, he went on to say that; *"teacher leadership can also be referred to when teachers are engaged in the leadership and management of activities and aspects in the school, for example, classroom management"*. The idea was also advocated by Participant 9 who referred to teacher leadership; *"as the process when the teachers get involved or managing, leading other colleagues at the school"*. Similarly, participant 1 describes teacher leadership; *"as the method of involving teachers in framing school and classroom rules and implementing them"*. He further stated that; *"this approach drives teachers to be in the forefront in implementing school's program and initiatives"*. It can be condensed that teacher leadership entails accountability, advocacy, cultural responsiveness, inclusiveness, openness to change, professionalism, reflection, risk-taking, shared vision, stability, and teamwork. The participants' definition corroborates with the definition earlier provided by Sterrett (2015), which defines teacher leadership as the involvement of teachers in school initiatives and giving direction to teachers to achieve the common goal.

Participants believed that teacher leadership is about participating in leadership tasks outside their daily classroom work. This was confirmed by, participant 17 defined teacher leadership as; *"a process when educators teach but also take on additional roles outside the classroom to improve school's performance"*. She went on to say; *"teacher leadership is about taking on leadership roles and additional professional responsibilities"*. With that, participant 16 defines teacher leadership that it implies; *"an educator who simultaneously takes on administrative roles outside of their classroom to assist in functions of the whole school. It is all about teacher managing teaching, learning, and resource allocation"*. It is believed that teacher leadership entails teachers participating actively and relevantly in the process of defining school goals and contributing through their classes to carry out and develop the value with which the school is identified as well as managing and harmonizing the complex and multiple interpersonal relationships inside and outside the classroom. As supported by data from document analysis, these findings correlate with the view of Webber and Campbell (2017) define teacher leadership as an approach in which teachers take leadership responsibilities outside the classroom. Some participants regard teacher leadership as the process of involvement and participation of teachers in the school's leadership.

Teacher leadership is defined in terms of empowerment

Teacher leadership is defined by participants as an approach to empowering teachers to assume leadership roles. To strengthen the above assertion, one of the participants (P3) described teacher leadership; *"as an approach of empowering teachers to take charge of the school activities and programs"*. She further narrated that; *"teacher leadership is a concept of capacitating teachers to lead in the leadership of the school and this can be done through delegating leadership roles to teachers by the school management"*. Participants believed that teacher leadership is an approach that provides an opportunity for empowerment and shared responsibility

Moreover, participant 18 described teacher leadership as; *"all about empowering teachers to take part in the school decision-making process through delegating them with leadership tasks"*. She went on to say; *"leadership tasks can be both formal and informal. So if teachers are performing leadership tasks beyond their normal classroom they get empowered in terms of experiences and knowledge"*. Contrary to the above findings, participant 25 narrated that; *"teacher leadership has to do with empowering teachers to model good behaviors to learners and fellow teachers to bring about positive educational change. This can be done through the decision-making process"*. It is viewed that teacher leadership is practiced via redistribution of power and realignment of authority, leading to educational leadership gaining momentum, thus, enabling a new likelihood for the classroom teacher to be teacher leaders. These findings corroborate the view of Sinha and Hanuscin (2017) which delineate teacher leadership as a didactic understanding of empowering teachers to implement projects that would provide opportunities to display their leadership skills. It is evident from observation data, these participants only view teacher leadership as empowering teachers to assume leadership roles in the school.

Teacher leadership is viewed in terms of motivation and influence

Participants viewed teacher leadership as motivation, while others regarded it as an influence. Participant 2 refers to teacher leadership; *"as the ability of the teachers to enthuse, guide and persuade learners to perform exceptionally well in the school programs within the school environment and surrounding areas"*. The same idea was proved by Participant 15 who expounded that teacher leadership means; *"the ability of a teacher to inspire, influence and motivate learners to achieve good academic results through the teaching and learning process"*. He further said; *"it also involves influencing teachers to lead in other activities beyond the classroom such as sports, culture, etc"*. About the above findings, participant 4 conceptualizes teacher leadership as, *"the ability of the teacher to lead, manage, motivate, inspire and influence the learners"*

and colleagues positively". Moreover, participant 8 designated that teacher leadership; *"is a technique when teachers are motivated to take the lead on the school activities and other extra-curricular activities"*. She further narrated that; *"teacher leadership is about teachers taking roles to encourage learners to perform well in their school work"*. Several teachers viewed teacher leadership as influencing to encourage teachers to do more to attain the school goal. Thus, participant 5 understands teacher leadership; *"as the skills showed by teachers who continue to teach learners but also have an influence beyond their won classrooms to others through extra-mural activities within their schools or elsewhere"*.

Expressing similar sentiments participant 6 narrated that teacher leadership; *"is the process in which teachers act as a leader by trying to influence others positively for the school to operate smoothly"*. These definitions are strongly in agreement with the earlier definition given by Pineda-Baez, (2020) who referred to teacher leadership as a process by which teachers, individual or collective influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices to increase student achievement. Meanwhile, other participants conceptualize teacher leadership in terms of leading by example. Thus, participant 9 narrated that teacher leadership is defined as; *"the ability of a teacher to lead learners and make them better students to act as a role model, exemplary to the learners, to be able to lead other colleagues in the school, show the maturity to everyone in the school and the community"*. Besides, participant 12 understand teacher leadership as; *"is the process of leading by example and showing direction holistically to both colleagues and learners"*. These findings correlate with the views of Cheng and Szeto (2016) who designates that teacher leadership is characterized by leading by example to influence others to follow suit. Moreover, participant 11 described teacher leadership as; *"the ability of a teacher to lead his or her class and make his/her learners understand the importance of leading a class. He/she can make them better people by being a role model to them"*. She went on to say; *"such teacher can participate in all school activities as he/she fully understands the notion of being the owner of his/her class and the school at large"*. Furthermore, participant 10 indicated that; *"teacher leadership is all about leading by examples and showing the direction to learners and other teachers"*. She further alluded that teacher leadership; *"is about inspiring the willingness and interest of teachers to complete something through leading by example"*. These findings concur with the definition given by Cheng and Szeto (2016) which defines teacher leadership as a process of leading by example to influence others to improve the quality of teaching and learning within and beyond their classrooms.

The findings revealed that some participants understand teacher leadership as a concept that focuses on motivation and influence. Participant 24 described teacher leadership as; *"a process when the teacher apart from teaching only, also demonstrates skills, e.g motivating and inspiring learners and other teachers on educational changes and beyond"*. Similarly, participant 20 refers to teacher leadership as; *"how a teacher guides and directs learners to do the right things in the school and at classroom level so that teaching and learning will take place in the environment that is conducive"*. She went on to say that; *"teacher leadership would also refer to leading by example in terms of being punctual, dressing according to the dressing codes of teachers and giving a good picture to learners"*. With the above view, participant 25 describes teacher leadership as; *"a way of leading by example, through the way they conduct themselves, speak and behave among learners and colleagues and even outside the school environment"*. Also, participant 30 defined teacher leadership by stating that; *"it means exception of being an educator in the classroom, the educator carries out other administrative roles outside the classroom which influences the whole operations or functioning of the school"*. He went on to say; *"such leadership tasks may include managing teaching, learning and resources allocation"*. The participants believed the manifestation of teacher leadership is influence. Thus, in defining teacher leadership participant 16 narrated *"This is the concept that indicates that a teacher has a set of skills and knowledge to teach learners but at the same time this person has an influence that*

extends beyond their classrooms which allows learning to make informed decisions". In addition, participant 17 maintained that; *"teacher leadership includes an approach to carry out a set of roles to inspire educational change"*.

Moreover, a similar understanding was depicted in participants 8, 22, and 27 responses who referred to teacher leadership as; a set of skills demonstrated by teachers who continue to teach students but also have an influence that extends beyond their classrooms to others within their school and elsewhere. Meanwhile, participant 26 describes teacher leadership; *"as a way of influencing the educational stakeholders specifically, learners, teachers (colleagues) and the entire staff to do what is perceived right. This is not done by force but by setting the best examples that others can follow. This is, for instance, working hard and producing visible and quality products"*. The participants believed that teacher leadership is about simultaneously integrating roles, performing extra-curricular activities, and influencing others. These findings substantiate with the data from observation and also the view of Cheng and Szeto (2016) describe teacher leadership as a process of influencing others to improve the quality of teaching and learning beyond their classrooms. This was also emphasized by other authors who viewed teacher leadership as an influence rather than a role or formal authority (Smith et al. 2017; Snoek, et al. 2017).

With this, participant 32 described teacher leadership; *"as the process of bringing up changes and new skills in schools for the benefit of all learners. Teacher leadership requires someone competent and skillful, a person who can lead exemplary and is ready to face challenges"*. Sharing a similar sentiment, participant 37 defined teacher leadership; *"as the ability to listen and prioritize, step out outside their classroom and accept challenges to improve their practice through working with others"*. Participants believed that teacher leadership is the process by which teachers individually or collectively influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices to increase student achievement. These findings correspond with data from document analysis and also the views of Sebastian, et al (2017) which define teacher leadership as involving teacher influences over key school-wide decision-making processes.

Teacher leadership is defined as collaboration

The findings revealed that some teachers perceived teacher leadership in terms of collaboration. Participant 5 described teacher leadership as; *"the process when teachers collaborate with other teachers to lead change in their school for the benefit of all learners"*. She further said; *"Teacher leadership is about working together with learners and staff members to undertake a certain function"*. Moreover, participant 11 refers to teacher leadership as; *"a process when staff members work together to accomplish an organization's objectives"*. From the participant's definition, it is clear that the fundamental focus of teacher leadership is collaboration to achieve a certain goal. This definition substantiates the definition of other authors that understood teacher leadership as a set of conduct and acts that are performed collectively by all members of the school (Daniel et al., 2019; Gumus et al., 2018; Smylie & Erkert, 2018; Webber, 2021).

Other participants defined teacher leadership in terms of leading. Participant 33 indicated that; *"the term teacher leadership in my opinion means leading-learners in the right direction through teaching and learning as they attend school"*. She went on to say; *"it can also be referred to as the collaboration of teachers in the performance of their duties"*. With the above remarks, participant 16 viewed teacher leadership in terms of; *"facilitating, coordinating, taking on a leadership role and other professional responsibilities"*. He went on to say; *"teacher leadership is about teachers working together to accomplish a task. When a task is delegated to a certain teacher, he or she needs to interact with others to perform the task"*. This definition corresponds to the definition of Wenner and Campbell (2017) maintain that teacher leadership goes beyond the classroom walls to support professional learning in their schools, involves teachers in policy and/or decision-making, improves student learning and access, and improves and changes the entire school

organization. Besides, participant 26 referred to teacher leadership; *"as a way to lead and others to follow, in a classroom, the teacher behaves well for the learner to do the same, do tasks such as marking on time for learners to also take their work seriously and always do them on time accordingly"*. It can be condensed from observation data that participants' teacher leadership is a term referring to the collaboration of school management and teaching staff to achieve organizational goals. The above findings harmonize the earlier definition of Wills (2015) which describes teacher leadership as the practice of leadership in three main domains namely excellence in teaching, collaboration with colleagues, and participation in decision-making.

Teacher leadership is defined in terms of leading and control

The findings divulged that teacher leadership was conceptualized as a way of leading and controlling the organization's operations. To strengthen this assertion, participant 45 defined teacher leadership; *"as a process of taking the lead in changes within the school community that benefit the learning and teaching process"*. In addition, participant 44 states that; *"it is a concept that refers to the impact in terms of changes a teacher has in the school as well as the community at large"*. With the above views, participant 38 described teacher leadership by referring to; *"when the teacher has to be a facilitator of the leaders be it in the classroom during lesson presentation or as a class teacher leading his/her class"*. Besides, teacher leadership may be also considered when he/she is the head of a committee for the school. *It is when the teacher is a facilitator, class head, and manager. Teacher leadership is when the teacher leading/facilitating the learners, community people and group of other teachers has to do with leading of committees"*.

Similarly, participant 40 said teacher leadership; *"is about leading alongside others, managing and maintaining discipline in the classes"*. Participants believed that teacher leadership involves taking control and guiding others to achieve the intended objectives. This was observed in the explanation given by Participant 43 who defined teacher leadership as; *"It has to do with the teacher taking control of his/her class. By so doing he/she is taking ownership of what is happening in and around his/her classroom"*. With that, participant 35 defined teacher leadership; *"as the process of learning and experiencing changes in the school for the benefit of the learners. This will enable the school to produce future leaders who will develop the country"*. In addition, participant 42 defined teacher leadership as; *"when the teacher is at the center of facilitating learners' learning process during lesson presentations or through normal classroom management"*. As document analysis data indicated, participants view teacher leadership as leading and controlling the learning process. These definitions harmonize with the earlier definition provided by Webber (2018) which proclaims that teacher leadership involves leadership in and outside the classroom and collaboration with other staff members as reflective practitioners through collegial learning.

CONCLUSION

The study divulged that participants understand the concept of teacher leadership in terms of involvement and participation, empowerment, motivation and influence, and collaboration. Teacher leadership is used to describe the process when teachers take on administrative roles outside of their classrooms to help in the functions of the school system. Lastly, teacher leadership entails facilitating teacher participation, improving the professional work environment, promoting school growth, and providing benefits for the students. The study also recommends that the MOEAC should create opportunities for teacher participation in discourses and policy development, as they are the specialists in contemporary challenges, difficulties, potential barricades, and the actualities of their schools and recognize, embrace, and invest in teacher leadership as a leadership model for school transformation. Furthermore, the study recommends that the MOEAC should recognize the high level of readiness of teachers for teacher leadership and explore opportunities for teacher leadership as an approach to show commitment to the practice of teacher leadership.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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