Early Childhood Leadership

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Early Childhood Leadership

**Introduction**

Leadership is a common phenomenon in all the professions. In the past, its role in teaching was limited to the offices of the school administrators (Kagan, 2008). Currently, academic teachers exercise authority as they participate in the teams and even assume the roles of association leaders, department chairs, or curriculum developers (Malone, 2008). The advocacy for teachers has expanded leadership roles based on the fact that they have daily contact with the learners (Heller, 2007). They are also the best positioned to make any important decisions on instruction and curriculum for effective teaching roles. Furthermore, these educators are also better placed to implement any changes needed in the continuous and comprehensive manner. The move to expand the leadership roles of the educator in early childhood setting is motivated by the need to retain and attract more qualified personnel with better capabilities to provide the correct direction. Leadership in early childhood is an important element in the field of education today. It aligns the aspects of effective teaching and monitoring of activities to allow for the learning amongst the students (Malone, 2008). In, Singapore, there is great emphasis on the instructor which should assume the leader’s role in the early education sector.

This study evaluates the respondent’s feedback on the role of instructors in leadership in the early childhood setting. The survey was conducted, and individuals evaluated the instructors and their impact on the education environment. It was a qualitative research study conducted through the survey. Data was then analysed to establish dominant component relationships.

**Research Questions**

The questions which were addressed in this essay include the following:

1. What is teacher leadership?
2. What does teaching leadership entail?
3. What are the lessons learnt from teachers in leadership?

**Research Aims and Objectives**

The research aims to conduct the analysis of the way effective leadership roles of the teachers enable children to understand concepts that are important for their education. It includes the development of proper frameworks that can be used in the evaluation of the learning and education of all the students in an early childhood setting.

The study objectives include:

* Use of evidence in research survey data to identify relevant trends in teaching leadership roles and the nature of change in their professional field.
* Clear outline of the issues which arises from the role of teachers in leadership.
* Appraise and reflection of the responses taken from the study in relation to how the teachers view leadership.

**Methodology**

The study used the qualitative method to collect information from the selected number of participants that would be the part of the sample group. The survey study was done, and it was time saving and feasible within the limited frame of the report while still availing a broad selection of respondents. In this research, the questionnaire was chosen as the best tool for the study because it captured more information from the respondents. Besides, it was a cheaper option for the study. The questionnaire for the research contained 16 questions which were divided in four categories which were based on the study related question. Five grouped factors of leadership components of the study were included in the questionnaire. Each of them had a set of statements to be responded by the participants. The components included: My Group, Team Leader, Skills, Influence, and Autonomy. All the participants were divided into five groups, and 20 members in each group were selected in the randomized manner.

The participants were individuals who worked in the teaching leadership positions. The sample size of 100 participants was selected with the help of random method. All the respondents of the study were provided with consent forms to fill and sign. They were also informed of the purpose of the survey and their need to volunteer. Ethical principles that were used in guidelines of the research would be addressed fully before starting the research and included the protection of autonomy and privacy. Those ideas were achieved by maintaining anonymity throughout the survey and limiting any personal information in the research without reproduction in any other forum.

**Participants**

The research sample size included 100 participants. The inclusion criterion was engagement in the early childhood setting. Additionally, in order to qualify the selection of the sample, individuals also had to work on any leadership position within the early childhood setting. The target sample was issued with questionnaires to scan and aid in the sample selection. The questions are attached in the appendix section. Appendix I is the questionnaire that aims to assess respondents’ familiarity and their experience in the early childhood education setting the target sample had a positive response concerning familiarity with early childhood education instruction. In Appendix II, the target population was scanned for leadership experience. This selection criterion would ensure that the sample would be able to give relevant answers.

The other factors taken into account in the sample selection included diversity in gender, age, and the duration of working in the early childhood setting. Longer duration was more preferable as the respondents gave more reliable information based on experience. Questionnaires were mailed to all the participants in order to save the costs of conducting the study. It also allowed members to have time to respond to all the statements (Kivunja, 2015).

**Procedure**

Researchers firstly delivered a set of instruction guides to the respondents on how to fill out the questionnaire. A thorough descriptive analysis of the information collected from the survey was conducted. All the members were expected to respond to all the statements given in the categories. All information was collated after the study was finished and was checked for the final analysis and errors to determine validity of data (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2013).

**Data Analysis**

Research data was compiled into the single spreadsheet and was analysed using statistical software. Component analysis of the data was conducted using VARIMAX rotation to establish the predominant relationships between the variables and components.



*Figure 1:Participants Data*

Figure 1 indicates the total population of the participants and their responses to the questionnaire. 90% of the respondents were female while 10% were male. The data results were derived from SPSS data collected from the number of participants.

Table 2: Group Statistics Data

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|   | Ineffective teaching (%) |
| Agree | 5 |
| Uncertain | 18.3 |
| Disagree | 50 |
| Strongly disagree | 26.7 |

Table 2 demonstrates the participants’ response to the statement on how ineffective teacher leadership roles are in the early childhood education setting. The results indicate that 50% of the individuals disagree with the statement. 26.7% of the respondents strongly disagree.

Table 3: Team Leader Survey Component Analysis Data

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Team Leader Component Statements | Average Mean |
| [My team leader expresses confidence that goals will be achieved.] | 0.522 |
| [My team leader talks about the importance of team values.] | 0.744 |
| [My team leader talks optimistically about the future.] | 0.687 |
| [My team leader sets high standards.] | 0.784 |
| [My team leader specifies the importance of having a strong sense of purpose.] | 0.701 |
| [My team leader spends time teaching and coaching team members.] | 0.693 |
| [My team leader goes beyond self-interest for the good of the team.] | 0.71 |
| [My team leader emphasizes the importance of having a collective sense of mission.] | 0.825 |

Table 3 demonstrates the responses of the Team Leader. Based on the data above, the most of the respondents agreed upon statement: “My team leader emphasizes the importance of having a collective sense of mission,” which equalled to 0.825 average mean of the total participants. The statement least agreed is “My team leader expresses confidence that goals will be achieved,” with 0.522 average score.

Table 4: My Group Team Component Factor

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| My Group Component Statements | Average Means |
| [I felt that the people in my group had high problem-solving skills.] | 0.476 |
| [I felt that my group was focused on completing the task.] | 0.509 |
| [My group can find solutions to problems with its performance.] | 0.682 |
| [This group can pull itself out of a slump.] | 0.539 |
| [I believe that failure will make our group try harder.] | 0.435 |
| [My group members go above and beyond the call of duty.] | 0.785 |
| [My group members work hard to fulfil the group’s overall responsibilities.] | 0.837 |
| [My group is effective in getting things done.] | 0.813 |
| [My group does a great job in getting things done.] | 0.799 |
| [My group is effective in meeting task requirements.] | 0.812 |
| [My group accomplishes its goals successfully.] | 0.841 |
| [My group completes its task successfully.] | 0.828 |

Table 4 indicates that the statement that was most agreed upon by the respondents in the group survey is “My group members work hard to fulfil the group’s overall responsibilities,” with an average mean of 0.837. The statement that was least agreed upon the individuals was that “I felt that the people in my group had high problem-solving skills,” with an average mean of 0.476.

Table 5: Autonomy Group Component Factor Analysis

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Autonomous Group Component Statements | Average Mean |
| [I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.] | 0.856 |
| [I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work.] | 0.843 |
| [I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job.] | 0.8 |

Table 5 presents the autonomy group component factor. All the participants gave their responses to the different questions in this group. As indicated in *Table 5* above, there was a higher degree of agreement to the statements presented in the table. Many respondents felt that they had significant autonomy in determining the execution of their job, as it has the correlation of 0.856 to the component. Still, the general conclusion is that due tothe high indices, autonomy is the common factor in this education environment.

Table 6: Skills Component Factor Analysis

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Skills Component Factor Statements | Average Mean |
| [I felt that the people in my group had high social skills.] | 0.616 |
| [I felt that the people in my group had high problem-solving skills.] | 0.549 |
| [I felt that my group was focused on completing the task.] | 0.485 |
| [My group can find solutions to problems with its performance.] | 0.482 |
| [This group can pull itself out of a slump.] | 0.584 |
| [I believe that failure will make our group try harder.] | 0.557 |

Table 6 shows the results from the skill component factor analysis. The data indicated in the table reflects different correlation indices of the group component. According to the data analysis, the statement that was most agreed is “I felt that the people in my group had high social skills,” and it received a mean score of 0.616. Very few people agreed with: “My group can find solutions to problems with its performance.”

**Results**

Figure 2 summarizes the responses that were given in the questionnaire on the category of ineffective pedagogy. It was delivered to participants to rate the level of teaching and offered an idea of what they thought about their teacher’s methods of instruction, and whether they were ineffective in the early childhood setting. There were four response categories used: ‘Agree’, ‘Uncertain’, ‘Disagree’ and ‘Strongly Disagree’.



**Figure 2**: Response to Ineffective Teaching Leadership

There was strong disagreement to ineffective teaching. 50% of the participants gave the ‘Disagree’ answer in the survey in relation to ineffective teaching at an early childhood setting. 26.7% of the respondents chose ‘Strongly Disagree’ which indicated a positive direction of the study.

Figure 3 demonstrates two variables that are considered as key to teaching in relation to the responses given by the participants.



**Figure 3**: Responses to Compare Effective Monitoring of Activities and Effective Teaching of Concepts

A high number of participants disagreed with not having effective monitoring activities at the early childhood setting, but agreed that there was effective studying of concepts. There was equal number of participants that strongly chose both facets of early childhood education.

**Discussion**

Ineffectiveness of leadership in pedagogy is the undesired element in the early childhood education. In an effort to find ways in which teachers take up leadership roles, the study was conducted, and data was taken from different participants working in leadership positions in the field of education. The findings used factors of leadership components categorized in five groups in the questionnaires. Each group had a different set of statements that were presented to the members of the survey. My Group, Skills, Autonomy, Influence, and Team Leader were the components that were taken into consideration for the study. The research results indicate that most of the teachers in the early childhood setting disagree to the role of ineffective teaching in leadership, as shown in Table 2 Group Statistics Data by 50% of the respondents. Early childhood education is considered as the stage that requires additional attention and effectiveness from the practitioners and leaders. Rodd (1996) suggests that training of teachers ensures that the children’s’ eagerness to learn is met with the same passion as to teach and assimilate ideas or outcomes that relate to this learning stage.

The results from Table 3 under the Team Leader Factor of leadership indicate that most of the members that have participated in the survey agreed to the statement “My team leader emphasizes the importance of having a collective sense of mission,” which associated leadership with the purpose to see their assigned tasks completed. Any teacher or leader has an obligation to their (Johnson, 2009). Such cases require training which should be instituted for the teachers and leading practitioners to provide them with knowledge resources to increase effectiveness in curriculum completion in time (Grint, 2000).

Basing on the analysis of the descriptive data collected from the participants in the principle component analysis, the members of the study agree that the most important element of leadership is change. Transformation has been described by numerous studies to involve the ability to develop and implement solutions for issues and problems faced in the early childhood setting. The response from the factor component analysis shows that a significant number of survey members concur to the fact that failure or success is realized in the institution and depends on the kind of leadership that is present and visible in the workplace. Hutchins (2011) argues that management has to address the resource challenges that are faced by the organization and utilizing the limited resources to meet the business objectives.

In Table 6 the component addressed was skill. In the survey, the statement that was favoured by the participants is “I felt that the people in my group had high social skills,” and it clearly suggests that leadership requires high social skills. This factor however does not match with the importance of group dynamics and autonomy of thought as a factor of leadership as demonstrated in Table 5. Skills require training for teachers to be able to adopt any form of leadership role. Appendix I demonstrates that head teachers operating in Singapore are lacking in the area of specialty training in relation to early childhood leadership learning (Heller, 2007). Correspondingly, the table indicates that the early childhood educators do not have on-the-job training schedules and therefore lack experience and knowledge required to impart on children in the early childhood setting (Heller, 2007).

In the group survey, most of the participants agree to have autonomy in the way they do their jobs. Autonomy in teaching roles is considered to be an important element in leadership. As much as these attributes do not rank quite highly in this study, they are emphasized greatly in the transactional theory of leadership which is more refined approach to defining the direction and its function (Crawford, 2008). According to this theory, a leader is an individual that can recognize and reward followers. A leader is also more appealing to the supporters.

Findings from this survey correspond with scholarly opinion. The results as shown in Table 3 in the ‘Team Leader’ factor category survey, indicate that an individual in this position who possesses a high standard and a strong sense of purpose is more likely to excel (Wang, 2010). Raelin (2003) suggests that a leader who is willing to go beyond self- interest for the betterment of the team is more likely to produce better outcomes than the individual who does not. In the results from Table 3, information suggests that a good leader should focus on teamwork and building bonds within the group (Siemens, 2004). All these factors work in tandem with the trait theory where the particular attributes of the individual qualify them to be titled good leader (Rodd, 1996). In Singapore, leadership in early childhood setting encourages the use of trait theory as it considers the person’s attributes before being placed in the leadership role. Appendix II shows the results of responses to leadership roles given to teachers in relation to findings in Singapore based on a report generated from the questionnaire data. Singapore has different cultures and religions, and children come from diverse backgrounds. A good leader has to be adaptive and has suitable attributes to deal with the diversity of students (Wiechel, 2004).

Leadership in a childhood setting considers how efficient the delivery of service is. If leaders can utilize available resources optimally then, this can bring out maximal output in the students (Hägglund, 2009). The ability of teachers to achieve organizational goals should also be considered (Koralek, 2005). In order to meet the stakeholder's expectations, those two aspects should be thoroughly taken into account. Creating reciprocal partnerships is essential to achieve results. It is imperative that the service givers show equity to all the children and consider the diversity among them (McCrea, 2015). Different businesses have taken an opportunity to reward efforts of solo leadership behaviour through promoting people to leadership and management positions (Bolden, Gosling, Marturano, & Dennison, 2003).

**LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Although the nature of the study was an online survey, only a small number of participants were included in the research. The limited sample size may have impacted negatively on the reliability of the results given in the research study.

**Reflection**

All the respondents had to be involved and work in synchrony to realize accurate study results. Leadership should utilize the resources and structures set in place to guide the group towards the vision. A successful leader displays attributes such as the ability to be a team player (Positive interdependence), accountability to themselves and others and justice and equity in dealing with the group. Leadership in early childhood setting also requires additional skills in problem-solving and critical thinking. Instructors should be creative in executing tasks and be able to collaborate and communicate with the team members.

The institutions, as well as the staff, have to be child-friendly for any form of learning to happen. To maximize on the children’s potential, all stakeholders in the education sector have to recognize that their priority is to consider every child’s interests. The idea of revolution concerning technology was also introduced by a strategist who worked for Siemens Technology. He postulated to enhance children’s digital ability networking will come in handy so that they can collaborate with their peers in this era of digital technology.

**CONCLUSION**

The study addressed the research questions of defining leadership in the early childhood education setting and assessing its impact. The research has examined the key areas of monitoring activities and effectiveness of leadership in early childhood. It has also focused on vital components of management and how it responds to different statements attributed to the workplace. The primary objective of the study involved analysing whether children are taught adequately by the practitioners. Information on how monitoring of activities is done and received was also reviewed and analysed as part of the key findings of the overall study. The coordinate and manage the roles given to them in early childhood leadership setting.

In addressing the research question, the research established that efficient administration regarding early childhood leadership environment at the workplace relies on how well the staff is trained and how well they are equipped to handle their work (Bush,2012). Autonomy also has a high correlation with leadership at the workplace, with the majority of the respondents agreeing to its necessity. The participation of members of the Singaporean community in the fostering of early childhood leadership to coordinate effective teaching and monitor activities in the workplace is important. Therefore, there is a large implication for having real leadership and developing capacity in Singapore’s early childhood education. More research has to be conducted to establish newer challenges and propose innovative solutions. Such findings will promote the effectiveness of leadership in early childhood in the workplace as part of a sustainable future for the children of Singapore.

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