

Empowering EFL Teachers through Distributed Leadership: A Critical Perspective on Leadership Practices in an Educational Institution

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Abstract

There is a serious lack of literature on teacher empowerment and the effectiveness of educational leadership within a TESOL framework in Saudi Arabia. This small-scale critical study reports the findings on EFL teachers' perceptions of their empowerment and the effectiveness of leadership style adopted at a Saudi Arabian university. As positioned within the critical paradigm, this study attempts to raise EFL teachers' awareness and empower them to have voice and become a part of the decision-making processes in a language institute. As a result of five semi-structured interviews with five purposively chosen participants, qualitative data was gathered. Thematic analysis of the data led to five major themes, which are the absence of appreciation and celebration, lack of collaboration and interpersonal trust, the foundations of ineffective leadership style, the oppressive nature of the policies, and teachers' empowerment through distributed leadership. Participants have unequivocally challenged the status quo of the top-down management and hierarchical leadership style, which gives space to oppression, lack of teachers' voice, teachers' disempowerment and organisational failure. Therefore, it is suggested that distributed leadership will allow EFL teachers to have a sense of responsibility, ownership, collegiality and fulfillment by involving in the decision-making processes and building collaborative relationship between supervisors, teachers and other stakeholders in the organisation.

Keywords: Critical pedagogy, Teacher empowerment, Distributed leadership

Introduction

There is an increasing pressure on language teachers to deliver high quality language teaching in various EFL/ESL contexts, specifically in the Middle East. As there is a growing demand for qualified language teachers, the aspect of 'good leadership', which can play a crucial role in the success of a language programme and institution, is largely ignored. In the context of Saudi Arabia, the structure and character of educational institutions are based on top-down leadership model, in line with hierarchical leadership practices which do not suit the global complexity and change in the field of language teaching and thus compromises on students' achievement, academic freedom and autonomy of teachers (Bento, 2011).

To determine the progress of students and teachers, educational leaders often have a vision to lead their institutions in right directions by devising best possible policies. However, the realization of these policies may not be realistic in the presence of ineffective leadership at school or university levels. Bennis and Nanus (1997) state that 'this is an era marked by rapid and spastic change. The problems of organisations are increasingly complex. There are too many ironies, polarities, dichotomies, dualities, ambivalences, paradoxes, confusions, contradictions, contraries and messes for any organisation to deal with' (p. 8). In order to reduce the impact of these ironies, the role of educational leadership becomes crucial in creating a conducive environment to achieve educational humanitarian relations between all stakeholders; teachers, students, and parents (Buchel & Hoberg, 2006; Harris, 2003), and realise the teaching and learning goals (Witziers, Bosker & Kruger, 2003).

The realisation of educational goals requires effective leadership (Coles & Southworth, 2005). Inspiring a shared vision, modelling a way, encouraging the heart, enabling others to act and challenging the process are the characteristics of effective leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 1995) that transforms and changes the traditional and taken for granted leadership practices. However, such effective leadership is usually replaced by educational administration, which often serves to justify control patterns in educational institutions that both mirror and reinforce the dominant structures of inequality in the society (Foster, 1989).

Owing to these control structures, a large number of critical leadership studies paint a negative picture of leadership that associates it closely with domination (e.g. Alvesson, 2010; Collinson, 2011; Gemmill & Oakley, 1992; Tourish & Pinnington, 2002). For example, Moller (2006) perceives it the monopoly of individual role holders or a few actors who are strategically positioned in organisations, leading to inequality and unbalanced relationship between the leaders and followers. From a critical perspective, it is important to explore how power and identity are enacted in overt, subtle and sometimes invisible ways within leadership dynamics (Collinson, 2011). This could be achieved by challenging hegemonic views in the mainstream literature which take for granted that leaders are the people in charge who make decisions whilst followers are those who merely carry out orders from above (Ospina & Su 2009; Sinclair, 2011).

In a bid to promote equality and power balance, this critical study suggests the concept of distributed leadership as a substitute for top-down hierarchical leadership model that reduces EFL teacher autonomy in the institute. Stephenson (2008) suggests that distributed leadership can be a good choice for ELT leaders and teachers. According to her, the same issues that make principalship more complicated apply to ELT professionals. She (ibid) argues that individuals who share a common purpose, work in teams, and have mutual respect for one another can create change and that collective phenomenon refers to distributed leadership. Harris (2003) asserts that 'Leadership is a shared and collective endeavour that engages all members of the organisation' (p. 75) and 'this mode of leadership challenges the conventional orthodoxy of the single, individualistic leader' (p. 2–3). In line with Harris's stance, this critical study does not consider leadership an influence of individuals, but a social property. The concept of distributed leadership will serve the purpose of this study to liberate the EFL teachers from the hegemony of solo leadership at a Saudi Arabian university. The aims of this research are to empower EFL teachers by making them part of the mainstream leadership and to reveal the existence of contradictions in leadership practices that halt teacher empowerment (Gunter, 2001).

This paper is structured in five sections. First, the background and context of the study are explained. Second section reviews literature on leadership theories and approaches. Third section provides an overview of the methods used to collect and analyse the interview data. Section four highlights the key themes pertaining to leadership practices that lead to the teacher disempowerment while highlighting the ineffectiveness of top-down management style. Last section concludes the study while underlining a need to distribute leadership in the institute at all levels.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do EFL teachers feel empowered or disempowered in the presence of leadership practices at the ELI? What practices do lead to the empowerment or disempowerment of EFL teachers at the ELI?
2. How do EFL teachers perceive the effectiveness of the current leadership style at the ELI? What is the preferred leadership style of EFL teachers at the ELI?

Context of the Study

The Saudi Government has invested SR 11.8 billion into *King Abdullah Project for the Development of Public Education*, focusing mainly on the development of the existing curriculum and the training of teachers. However, there is little emphasis on developing educational leadership at university level, due to which the educational institutions are far from being satisfactory. The investment is evident in the form of *Preparatory Year Programme (PYP)* at the university level where students study English as a foreign language for one year as a mandatory subject. The PYP is a specimen of modern and western education system in which teachers, teaching and learning materials and even management are exported from English speaking countries. However, the style and practices of leadership are typical of their own Saudi culture.

Bernstein (1977) considers the structure of society the origins of power and control in educational systems. Hence, it is important to see how the class structure, which reflects society's power distribution, is imposed on organisational relationships and hierarchies of control (Watkins, 2005). Power, a dominant phenomenon in Saudi society that exemplifies the Islamic way of life, is manifested as status quo in educational domains allowing a top-down educational management system that unfortunately leads to inequality within the workplace of EFL teachers (Mullick, 2014). As Saudi society is based around a tribal Bedouin culture that promotes a homogeneous society, there is a similitude between the tribal and organisational hierarchy (Mullick, 2014).

Leadership studies in the Middle East in general and Saudi Arabia in particular are scarce due to the inherent difficulty of conducting organisational research there (Dorfman & House, 2004). Much of the research on leadership effectiveness in Saudi Arabia reflects the perspective of Ministry of Education and there is a serious lack of literature on the teachers' perspective on the leadership practices in Saudi context as most of the teachers, especially EFL teachers who have no voice in educational affairs (Mullick, 2014).

This critical study is carried out in the English Language Institute (ELI) of a Saudi Arabian university where more than 7000 EFL learners enroll on a Preparatory Year Programme each year. The language learning needs are catered by more than 250 EFL teachers mainly expats. In top leadership positions such as deans and vice deans, there are only Saudi nationals whereas the middle managers (Academic Coordinators) and heads of various units are largely non-Saudis. The role of the academic coordinators and heads of units is crucial as they are responsible for envisioning academic change, teacher evaluation, quality assurance, students' assessment, organising training sessions or workshops, and many more administrative affairs. However, the role of the dean and vice deans is minimised to either approve or disapprove certain plans. In terms of teachers, their classroom is their only territory where they can move with certain limitations. There is an utter lack of leadership and management studies on the most popular programme of PYP. Therefore, this research will highlight the leadership practices at a Saudi Arabian university and will explore the perceptions of EFL teachers who have been restricted to their classrooms, directed by the management to work as robotic technicians and got adapted to mundane administrative duties. This study aligns with Gunter's (2001) position of critical studies in leadership which is 'providing practitioners with opportunities to reflect on what they do, are told to do, and would like to do' (p. 96).

Literature Review

This section presents a concise review of literature on leadership theories and approaches. It begins with a definition of leadership and follows on discussing theories and approaches in educational leadership. While highlighting the shortcomings of traditional leadership models, this section advocates the emerging view of distributed leadership that leads to teacher empowerment.

The Definition of Leadership

Although there is a lack of consensus on the definition of 'leadership' in the literature (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012), Yukl (2002) believes that while structuring activities most definitions consider the possibility of leadership by groups or by individuals, assuming a process of social influence that is intentionally exerted by one individual or a group over other people. Other definitions emphasise the creative aspects of organizations more and undermine the power relations. For instance, Fineman, Sims and Yannis (2005) state that 'leadership is imagining, willing and driving and thereby making something happen which was not going to happen otherwise' (p. 85). For Spillane (2005), leadership refers to the organisational tasks that are designed by organisational members to influence the motivation, knowledge, affect, and practices of other organisational members. A brief review of the literature about leadership approaches and theories illustrates a process of shift in importance from individual leaders' attributes to the perception of leadership as a social property.

Approaches and Theories of Leadership

Literature on leadership can be divided into three broad approaches, i.e. universalist, behavioural, and situational. Universalist approaches encompass personality theories, psychoanalytic theories and visionary leadership models such as transformational, charismatic and transactional. In contrast, behavioural and contingency-situational models incorporate shared and collaborative leadership approaches, for example, participatory and distributed leadership models, which emphasise the difference between effective and less effective leadership (Stephenson, 2008).

The *Trait Theory* approach that dominated until the 1940s was mainly concerned with leadership traits and characteristics differentiating between leaders and followers. While identifying characteristics of successful leaders based on leadership traits would assume individuals to be designated and placed in leadership positions. Due to inconsistency in identifying leadership traits, this approach was often deemed inconclusive (Bolden et al., 2003). In response to the Trait Theory, the Behavioural approaches shifted their focus from personal characteristics to the leaders' actions that increased awareness of leadership development (Azevedo, 2002).

This approach aimed at observing and categorizing leadership styles (Bolden et al., 2003) and helped managers to develop particular leadership behaviours. Owing to its limited results as an effective leadership approach, ‘contingency-situational theories were developed to indicate that the style to be used is contingent upon such factors as the situation, the people, the task, the organisation and other environmental variables’ (Bolden et al., 2003).

Since 1980s, leadership research has moved its focus from personality traits towards the importance of leader-followers relationship and interdependency of roles (Bento, 2011). Bolden et al. (2003) believe that the hero or the solo leader concept does not always work, rather the team leader who has the capacity to follow and work not as a master, but a servant. Although this approach gained popularity, this shift in focus raised questions about the symbolic or institutional feature of organisations and leaders’ role in the process of consolidation of shared values (Bryman et al., 1996). Based on the work of Downton (1973) and Burns (1978), this approach embraces the concept of transformational leadership in which the leader defines the organisational reality, articulates his vision and his sense of mission and highlights change by envisioning and implementing transformation (Bento, 2011).

There is another central concept of leadership that focuses on leader-followers relationship, called transactional leadership that involves an exchange of valued things (Stephenson, 2008). Influencing others by deriving power and using rewards and punishment, transactional leadership focuses on a form of contract by which leaders recognise the followers’ commitment or loyalty (Bolden et al., 2003). Although transactional and transformational perspectives have attracted many researchers, these approaches towards leadership have been criticised for presenting often a heroic and visionary image of the managers by focusing on their success stories (Azevedo, 2002). Regarding transactional leadership, Bennis and Nanus (1997) argue that in constantly changing complex conditions, traditional linear approaches to controlling the situations are no longer effective. Thus, distributed leadership as a novel concept emerged as a reaction to transformational and traditional leadership, which promotes a less formalised model of leadership dissociating leaders from the organisational hierarchy and making them team members.

Distributed Leadership

Literature on the role of educational leadership considers it a context-specific phenomenon and a shared property of social groups that represents a more constructive framework to understand the dynamics of educational institutions (Bento, 2011). This consideration rules out the heroic and visionary leadership practices that are deemed unrealistic, impractical and unsuitable in various educational organisations (Timperley, 2005). Moreover, the traditional model of leadership has been criticised for the reason that ‘it gives undue emphasis to the formal authority delegated from above on the basis of position, whereas the authority in professional organizations typically depends on a much more complex range of factors, not least perceptions held by professional colleagues of the expertise and performance exhibited by those holding the roles’ (Simkins, 2005, p. 17). Therefore, the model of distributed leadership is understood as a paradigm shift in leadership theories, which is derived from the emerging view of leadership that contrasts with the traditional concept of leadership as illustrated in Figure 1.

The Traditional View of Leadership	An Emerging View
Leadership resides in individuals	Leadership is a property of social systems
Leadership is hierarchically based and linked to the office	Leadership can occur anywhere
Leadership occurs when leaders do things to followers	Leadership is a complex process of mutual influence
Leadership is different from and more important than management	The leadership management/ distinction is unhelpful
Leaders are different	Anyone can be a leader
Leaders make a crucial difference to organizational performance	Leadership is one of many factors that may influence organizational performance
Effective leadership is generalizable	The context of leadership is crucial

Figure 1. An Emerging View of Leadership (Simkins, 2005 p. 12)

The concept of distributed leadership has dominated the theory and practice of educational leadership over the past 10 years. At the outset, it was Gronn’s (2002a) taxonomy of distributed leadership that turned into a rigorous social movement.

Harris (2007) proposes that ‘distributed leadership is, without question, the latest fashionable idea to capture the imagination of those in the educational leadership field’ (p.15). Although, there is a lack of consensus on the definition of distributed leadership, most definitions often use it as a synonym for shared, collaborative, facilitative and participative leadership (Bennett, Harvey, Wise & Woods, 2003).

Hartley (2007) found two explanations for the emergence of distributed leadership: first, the failure of the ‘charismatic hero’ linked with transformational leadership; and second, the greater complexity of the tasks set by the leaders (p. 206). In school contexts, due to the excessive workload and its complex and intensive nature, head teachers are dependent on their colleagues to implement mandated reforms and thus, the ‘heroic leadership’ and hierarchical models of the past have failed to cope, with the new challenges (Gronn, 2003). In March’s (2003) critique of heroic leaders, it is not the heroic leader who makes an organisation effective, in fact, it is a ‘mundane’ matter and depends on the competence of its members.

The attraction of distributed leadership is that it opens up leadership gates to everyone implying equal opportunities. Various formal and informal roles are performed by the leaders where all members share their expertise and work collaboratively in an interactive way for a common goal that makes the leadership functions an emergent property of a group (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006). Moreover, a consensus on the school goals and vision are easily achieved by operating under participative and collaborative arrangements involving various individuals in the decision-making process (Macbeath, 2005; Mayrowetz, Murphy, Louis, & Smylie, 2007). Engaging teachers in the decision-making process at the top-level results into the empowerment of individuals, which enhances their morale and motivation, increases levels of job satisfaction and promotes a sense of responsibility and commitment to organisational effectiveness and improvement (Sarafidou & Chatziioannidis, 2012).

Despite the widespread acceptance of distributed leadership, Lumby (2013) believes that in a context where giving power to another reduces one’s own authority may create an uneasy situation. Moreover, while negotiating an individual’s role, it can be difficult to make the line of authority clear which may cause confusion for the administrators and teachers alike (Smith & Piele, 1997). Last but not the least, the distribution of leadership to various individuals may lead to the distribution of incompetence and ignore certain leadership responsibilities (Timperley, 2005).

Teacher Empowerment

Teacher empowerment is often considered as teacher autonomy in the decisions making process (McGraw, 1992), making professional judgments vis-à-vis teaching (Bolin, 1989), and having a professional voice (Simon, 1987). For teachers to be empowered, they require certain levels of autonomy, professionalism, and intellectual stimulation (Webb et al., 2009). According to Stacy (2013), empowered teachers are professionals who possess powers to create curricula, administer their lessons and have the ability to effectively teach their students. However, a number of barriers affect teacher empowerment in an educational setting, such as standardised testing, scripted curricula, hierarchical school structures, teacher isolation, and reliance on professional experts from outside of the schools providing professional development (Stacy, 2013). These roadblocks are evident in Saudi context where teachers’ voice in the affairs of their institute is restricted to classrooms (Mullick, 2014).

In recent times, school reforms have focused on students’ achievement and teachers’ accountability, which have signified the role of educational leadership. Considering accountability as a driving force of success, educational leaders have concentrated on instruction and instructional outcomes. However, they have overlooked the key element of educational change in schools — teachers, by applying top-down corrective measures that are ineffective (Wall, 2012). Since reforms may not be achieved without an active participation of teachers, therefore, educational leaders should empower teachers through their values, ethics, and long-term goals, while developing individual relationship to obtain outcomes, prevent dysfunctional behaviour and increase effectiveness of schools (Mulford, 2003). Hemric et al. (2010) believe that ‘the rationale of implementing empowerment structures in school operations is to promote greater achievement through granting authority to those who know content and students well — the teachers’ (p.38).

While implementing reforms, the principals’ role becomes vital as researchers argue that principals can influence teachers (Manders, 2008). Literature on educational leadership illustrates a relation between teacher empowerment and principals’ use of power (Coble, 2011; Hemric et al., 2010; Lintner, 2008).

It explicates that principals should involve teachers in decision-making processes and treat them as professionals so they develop a sense of empowerment (Coble 2011; Lintner, 2008; Terry, 1995). Hobbs and Moreland (2009) found six dimensions of empowerment, i.e. decision making, professional growth, status, self-efficacy, autonomy, and impact; all contributing to the effectiveness of schools and learners' performances.

Generally, educational organisations claim teacher empowerment and equality among their staff members. However, Hatcher (2010) finds a contradiction between the proclaimed intention of teacher autonomy and the use of stricter apparatus of centralised control over teachers. Alexander (2004) calls it 'the strategy's doublespeak on professional autonomy': an 'ambiguity of intent—a desire to be seen to be offering freedom while in reality maintaining control' (p. 15). In an attempt to separate management hierarchies from those of leadership, Hopkins and Jackson (2003) assert that 'leadership cannot be imposed, the conflation of power (managerial relationships) and empowerment (leadership relationships) proves problematic' (p. 98). Thus, Hatcher (2010) suggests that the opportunity to exercise leadership can be made available to the teachers by creating a non-hierarchical network of collaborative learning and thawing hierarchical structure of power within a school.

Methodology

This small-scale critical study adopts a critical approach to the leadership practices at a Saudi Arabian university. This study is informed by theoretical framework of critical theory. Critical methodological approach helps in manipulating practice through ideology critique and action research. In line with critical paradigm, this inquiry adopts the ideology critique methodology that aims to uncover the vested interests and illegitimate actions of those in authority and to raise the awareness of marginalised people about an unjust social system. Likewise, it attempts to emancipate the subjects from deception, misleading consciousness and fallacious manoeuvres. Hence, there exists a crucial relationship between theory, data, research questions and interpretation (Talmy, 2010).

Critical methodology aims to interrogate values and assumptions, to expose hegemony and injustice, to challenge conventional social structures, to transform ignorance and misapprehension and to engage in social actions (Crotty, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A critical stance offers researchers the opportunity to explore factors such as disparity, desire, power, access and difference rather than simply considering relationship between language and social context (Pennycook, 2010). Since critical theorists adopt dialogic, dialectical and transformative methodologies, the transactional nature of this inquiry involves the researcher and the participants in the dialectical nature of dialogues to expose the covert leadership practices at a Saudi Arabian university. As a transformative pedagogy (Pennycook, 2004), teaching assumes to bring a positive change in a society as advocated in Critical Applied Linguistics (CALx), this study investigates some oppressive, bureaucratic, dominating and disempowering leadership practices that hinder teachers' pedagogical practices and violate basic human and social rights. With a critical agenda, it challenges powerful groups that promote and legitimise their actions and vested interests at the expense of marginalisation of others (Cohen et al., 2007). Moreover, it seeks teachers' views on taken for granted practices of leadership and offers them an opportunity to speak their minds, raise their voices and challenge the power bases, which will ultimately lead to a change in their conditions.

Method of Data Collection

This critical study utilises open-ended semi-structured interview technique as data collection instrument, which is considered a suitable tool when seeking people's perceptions of an issue in qualitative research (Coleman & Briggs, 2007). Troudi (2014) asserts that the often use of qualitative research instruments by critical researchers should not imply any similarities at the level of methods. He (ibid) clarifies that important distinction of the interpretive and critical research agendas as the former aims at understanding a particular teaching or learning process from teachers or learners' perspective whereas the latter aims at challenging and changing certain problematic practices.

The choice of employing semi-structured interviews was made due to their flexible structure, which offer the interviewees more freedom to express their viewpoint (Flick, 2002; Coleman & Briggs, 2007; Plowright, 2011) and allow the researcher to develop unexpected themes and issues which emerge during the conversation (Cohen et al., 2007; Mason, 2002). The interview questions were developed based on the guidelines given by Lorelle and Lawley (2000) and Sudman et al. (1996).

For the interviews, open-ended questions and probes were mainly written in the light of the literature reviewed on the topic; however, some questions were framed while drawing on my personal experience and observation of the target phenomena.

The interviews were conducted in English language with five EFL teachers. Each interview took approximately 50 to 60 minutes. All the five interviews were audio recorded, transferred to and saved on a password-protected laptop. For each interview, a separate MS-Word file was created with the participants' pseudonyms.

Before the interviews, the permission of the Vice Dean of Research Unit at the ELI to carry out the project on the site was sought. Later, the participants' informed consent was obtained and they were communicated their right to withdraw from the research at any time (BERA, 2004). In addition, the anonymity and confidentiality of their views were guaranteed by allowing them to choose their pseudonyms to be cited in the study (Neuman, 2006).

Participants

I used *Purposive Sampling* strategy (Patton, 2002), particularly critical case sampling in order to access teachers who could understand the significance of the study. Purposive sampling fitted the nature of this study and allowed me to seek in-depth information from experienced teachers who were in a strong position to give it (Cohen et al., 2007). The participants had a minimum 5 years of ELT experience in Saudi EFL context. As it is particularly important to be clear on informants' qualifications when using purposive sampling (Allen, 1971), which saves much time and effort that can be brought about by misunderstanding (Allen, 1971; Bernard *et al.* 1986). Therefore, for this study I interviewed qualified teachers with recognised teaching qualifications (CELTA, TESOL/TEFL diploma, MA TESOL/Applied Linguistics).

Participants' Profile						
#	Teacher's Pseudonyms	Nationality	Qualification	Country of Education	Overall Teaching Experience	EFL Teaching Experience in KSA
1.	Sandip	South African	MA in Education & CELTA	South Africa	10	5
2.	Rahul	Pakistani	MA in Applied Linguistics & CELTA & PTLLs	UK	17	7
3.	Russell	British	MA TESOL	UK	13	5
4.	Guptill	New Zealand	MA in TEFL & CELTA	New Zealand & UK	11	6
5.	Morris	USA	MA TESL	USA	19	5

Figure: 2

Data Analysis

Data was analysed with the purpose to discover patterns, concepts, critical themes and meanings that were generated from the interviews. Through thematic analysis, open codes were generated (Miles & Huberman, 1994, Creswell, 2008) which were later grouped into several categories (Smith et al., 1999). For this purpose, I used Nvivo software to organise and examine the interview data more efficiently. After entering the interview data in Nvivo software, I read the interviewees' responses and assigned them 43 initial open codes. Later, I merged the identical codes and reduced them to 14. I then re-examined the codes multiple times in the light of the data to ascertain that the assigned codes matched the content. Throughout the coding process, I kept looking for additional codes and remained focused on the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Newby 2010). Later, the codes were collapsed into seven categories and various sub-categories as Rubin and Rubin (2005) propose that all the data collected from interviews that are linked to one theme should be positioned in one group. As I incessantly examined the generated codes and categories, consequently five over-arching themes were drawn.

The Findings section below contains a description and critical discussion of these five major themes, which are linked to the two research questions.

Findings

This critical study attempted to explore teachers' perceptions of their empowerment in the wake of current leadership style and practices. Informing the two research questions, this section gives a detailed account of teachers' perceptions of leadership practices in a language institute.

The Absence of Appreciation and Celebration

Participants have unanimously agreed with Bailey's (2008) views that providing encouragement is the most important leadership skill and it has an important role in ELT. One of the recurring themes is a lack of appreciation and encouragement on the part of leadership for teachers who invest in their professional development or give any other extraordinary services to the institute. On the contrary, minor human errors may cause serious repercussions for the teachers. Moreover, lack of encouragement leads to the teachers' marginalisation and job burnout that 'culminates in a build-up of negative feelings about students, colleagues, and administration' (Barduhn, 1989, p. 2). In a professional context, encouragement coupled with appropriate administrative actions and self-help can reduce job burnout among ELT professionals (Bailey, 2008). Thus, the role of a leader as a supervisor, a mentor, a head teacher, dean, director in offering support and encouragement can be instrumental in empowering teachers and increasing their sense of ownership. The quotes below summarise the whole scenario.

There is no appreciation for your good work; however, a minor human error can result into termination. There is no reward, no compensation (Guptill).

Teachers are not appreciated for their hard work. Just look at the case of accreditation. Before the accreditation, all the teachers went through such difficult phase and a lot of paper work was done, but once that was obtained, there was not a single instance of celebration at any level (Morris).

The above quotes highlight the accreditation of the institute from an international organisation that is deemed a landmark achievement and could have been impossible without the support of the faculty. However, to the teachers' disbelief, the leadership neither thanked the faculty nor did it celebrate this success. Kouzes and Posner (1995) believe in leaders' celebrating values and victories. These celebrations help build a strong sense of collective identity and community spirit. Since, 'leadership really is the enabling art' (Covey, 2004, p. 100), it is important to 'celebrate what you want to see more of. It will instill a more can-do attitude in the minds of those you work with' (Murphey & Brogan, 2008, p. 83). Sandip and Rahul express their displeasure with the leadership policy of not celebrating any achievements at the institute.

The current leadership does not celebrate successes. I have not seen any celebrations at all (Sandip).

There is no concept of celebration. Successes are not celebrated. They are not even acknowledged (Rahul).

Lack of Collaboration and Interpersonal Trust

In Kouzes and Posner's (1995) words, great leaders enable others to act by fostering collaboration and building trust. Similarly, Gamson (1994) considers collaboration a key skill required in effective leadership and team learning. This approach breeds teamwork and self-confidence and enhances teachers' performance. However, in this context, the leadership has consistently failed in empowering teachers to act to their potential. Kouzes and Posner (1995) state that effective leaders proudly discuss teamwork, trust and empowerment and never make their team members weak, dependent or alienated. Further, they encourage team learning in which 'groups of people work and learn collaboratively and, as a result, create new knowledge together as well as the capacity for collaborative action' (Watkins & Marsick, 1999, p. 81). Such organisations establish cooperative systems, which require sharing learning and empowering people toward a collective goal.

There is no opportunity created for the teachers to work collaboratively. It is not a myth because there is no staff room where all the teachers could meet and discuss their professional issues (Russell).

Teachers experiencing trust building environment in the school administration, put in more effort and support the administration (Shapiro et al., 1992). As leadership does not encourage the heart, teachers lose faith in the system due to which there is a serious dearth of collaboration between the teachers. Consequently, the community of practice (CoP) that extends the potential of individuals, groups, teams, and organisations, does not flourish (Senge, 1990) due to which teachers find it difficult to share their weaknesses or problems with their colleagues.

I never heard of community of practice here. Basically, everybody is striving for their own survival. People do not care what happens to others. Mostly people do not want to share certain ideas and things due to mistrust (Russell).

The absence of interpersonal trust has crippled the whole system, which is not limited to the teachers only as there is a complete disconnect between the leadership and the teachers due to a sheer lack of trust. Trust in the leadership determines the faculty's approach towards the administrative initiatives (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). For Chiaburu and Lim (2008), trustworthiness signals that the environment is secure and employees can trust their leaders and vice versa. Since the absence of trust threatens commitment to the organisation (Lencioni, 2002), to the disadvantage of the institute, trust deficit prevails in the institute and various units work in rivalry blaming one another for administrative failures. Sandip, Morris and Russell explain how the lack of interpersonal trust prevails in the institute.

There is always a fear that if the coordinator catches your weakness, you never know where he will take it and he might manipulate it. You always try to hide your weaknesses and cannot even trust all the colleagues (Sandip).

The middle manager, i.e. observers and coordinators and various other position holders also do not trust each other and that comes out of insecurity (Morris).

There is a sheer lack of trust all around. Different units are just like rivals, i.e. PDU (professional development unit) and ACU (academic coordinators unit) which often blame each other for various failures (Russell).

The Foundations of Ineffective Leadership Style

Watkins (2005) states that senior administrators in various school contexts often lack qualifications, interests and predilections which require them to be up to the task in ever-changing organisational life of a school. It is unfortunate that the top leadership mostly hails from non-TESOL backgrounds lacking certain abilities to have a vision for a language institute. Since leaders lack basic knowledge of ELT/TESOL due to their irrelevant professional fields such as engineering and economics, they often rely on self-projected individuals. The advice they receive from their handpicked personal advisors may not be precise and appropriate that often complicates professional matters. Christison and Murray (2009) suggest that leaders should have the ability to put right person in the right job as 'attracting the instructors and staff that have the right fit is important in developing and maintaining strong English Language and teaching programme' (p. 31). The findings are consistent with those of Al-Abbas (2010) that in Saudi Arabia, there are no standards for the selection of leaders and leadership positions are filled in an unsystematic way in educational institutions based on friendship and mediation (Al-Aref & Al-Juhani, 2008). There is a consensus among the participants on these individuals as they are considered wrong people for the right job.

If a leader lacks basic knowledge of the field, he will have no argument to counter the plans put forward by others and he will fail to assess their practicality and feasibility (Sandip).

Those involved in the decision making process are chosen as middle managers often lack the required skills and qualifications. They are handpicked individuals whose only qualification is friendship with their bosses (Rahul).

Christison and Murray (2009) emphasise that educational leaders in ELT require sophisticated skills in strategic planning in order to make precise and flexible predictions about the future. It is important for leaders to use strategic planning to ensure that the organisation or the programme does not derail from its main course. Similarly, Anderson (2008) states that effective leadership possesses the ability to do SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis in the light of the mission statement that leads to the development of a strategic planning. In the context of this research however, leadership does not possess the skills of strategic planning which often results into inconsistent and rapid changes. Morris and Guptill spotlight the fallouts of such changes who also discern misalignment between the proposed actions and classroom practices.

The changes are so rapid and inconsistency is so dominant that teachers find it difficult to understand them (Morris).

Often the whole team is toppled up sometimes in no time and one group of people is replaced with another. These sudden changes are extremely frequent. It is so unprofessional that there is no mechanism to start a unit or a programme and there is no proper procedure to dismantle it either (Guptill).

Bush (2008) expects leaders to ground their actions in clear personal and professional values, which underpin the contemporary interest in moral leadership (Leithwood et al., 1999, p. 10). According to Fullan (2001), moral purpose means ‘acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers and society as a whole’ (p. 5). While reflecting on the leadership goals and priorities related to the dealings of academic and administrative affairs, participants displayed utter disappointment at trivial issues, which are often considered very important by the management. Morris and Russell debunk the leadership’s covert aim to impress the top management at the university, appease the government officials and fulfil the accreditation criteria. As a result, quality teaching struggles against administration and paperwork constraints (Quirke & Allison, 2008).

This top-down management while deciding on a policy considers irrelevant factors. They aim to appease their higher-ups rather than take care of the students’ learning (Morris).

The administration focuses on paper work more than actual learners’ learning outcomes. They want to see everything neatly presented in files, which is also to meet the accreditation criteria or to show it as a proof to the accreditation team or the president of the university (Russell).

The Oppressive Nature of Policies

Giroux (1988) argues that ‘voice’ is the focal point of critical theory of education that represents self-expression. The ultimate goal of critical pedagogy is linked to the vision of a more inclusive social democracy, a pedagogy of inclusion and emancipation (Kanpol, 1997). The findings are consistent with those of Mullick (2014) and Carl (2002) that teachers’ voices are dumped to the point of their disempowerment. Like other interviewees, Guptil and Russell believe that decisions are made without seeking teachers’ feedback on various issues which result in their marginalisation and disempowerment.

The sweet will of the manager plays a vital role in all kinds of decision-making (Guptil).

The top management might consider the classroom realities, but at the operational level. They rarely listen to the teachers’ concerns and voices. In fact, teaching is different from what is imposed on teachers by the management (Russell).

Organisational policies and standards can influence employees’ motivation and performance, their self-perceptions, success expectations, interpersonal relationship, trust, efficacy, risk-taking and innovation and organisational commitment (Swanson & Holton, 2001; Latham, 2007). Previous studies note a variety of explanations focusing on poorly formulated policies that fail to take into account the reality of practitioners’ lives and constraints on their practice (Hargreaves, 2002; Mintrop, 2003). The interviewees brought three main policies into light that cause frustration, job burnout, marginalisation, demotivation and disempowerment. Since teachers are never taken into confidence on policy issues, which often bear irregularities, their implementation becomes difficult. This lackluster approach is evident in **the attendance policy** in particular, which sounds perfect only on paper. Teachers lack autonomy to implement the attendance policy and often face resistance from the students if they attempted to implement it (Shah et al., 2013). Consequently, student-teacher relationship as well as classroom teaching and learning are affected as explained by Rahul and Morris.

Most of the policies are strongly shown on paper, but not in reality. For example, attendance is one big issue. It is a source of demotivation (Rahul).

If a student knows that attendance does not matter and it is only a formality then he doesn’t care. It can badly affect teacher’s esteem and authority in the classroom and it affects classroom management (Morris).

Discriminatory practices are observed in the wake of **the recruitment policy**. The participants have pointed out certain preferential practices while recruiting teachers from different countries of outer, expanded and inner circle with varied perks and privileges (Mahboob, 2009). Moreover, the nature of one-year renewable contract keeps teachers in uncertainty. Like other participants, Rahul and Russell raise their voices against discriminatory practices in the institution.

The discrimination of nationalities is conspicuous. In addition, teachers usually survive on yearly basis due to which they cannot deliver with full potential (Rahul). The basic problem lies in the recruitment. Teachers’ selection should be very strict and on merit which is not, and there is always room for those who lack experience and qualification (Russell).

The above quotes unveil the downside of the recruitment policy. Appointing people who do not have the right knowledge, skills, experience and professional attitude can be costly in terms of money, outcomes and department morale. Nonetheless, the world of TESOL is still not fully cognisant of this phenomenon, as the lack of professionally trained recruiters remains a key issue facing this profession (Currie & Gilroy, 2008, p.168). Currie and Gilroy (2008) argue that recruitment should be a team effort involving the whole organisation, which will ensure that poor recruiting does not take place. If the administration is unwilling to involve teachers in the process, this could be detrimental to the goal of quality recruitment. 'Terminating teachers can create camps among teachers with knock-on effects in terms of team morale, productivity, the reputation of the institution, and the dissatisfaction from the students and community stakeholders (Currie & Gilroy, 2008, p. 196).

In developing countries unsystematic evaluation schemes with externally imposed models, have long flourished based on incorrect or insufficient data (Odhiambo, 2005). In relation to autonomous professional, robust teacher evaluationschemes improve teaching and learning (Danielson & McGreal, 2000), increase personal development, and bring feelings of empowerment and autonomy (Stronge, 1997). However, teachers in this context consider *the evaluation policy* an oppressive and hegemonic one. There is a feeling of suppression and alienation among the teachers. They lack ownership to the institute as their jobs are always at stake. It is revealed through the teachers' interviews that the management uses various pressure tactics to keep teachers in control.

The evaluation scheme is very intimidating and frustrating. Because you prepare and deliver a lesson once a year and the renewal of your contract and your relationship with the management or your position at the institution depend on that one lesson. Your good performances depend on the level of your students and the observer as well (Russell).

As the teachers' jobs are insecure, their voices are suppressed and they are marginalised through oppressive policies, they lose job commitment and motivation. Consequently, faculty retention becomes difficult due to which recruitment continues throughout the academic year. Morris and Russell explicate the upshots of such policies.

Due to these policies, qualified and competent teachers are difficult to retain, the reason why faculty retention is a big issue here, something the management is least bothered about (Morris).

Teachers are preoccupied with the idea of being fired any moment any time. In such a workplace, professional dishonesty flourishes and teachers loses job commitments (Russell).

Teachers' Empowerment through Distributed Leadership

Leithwood et al. (2006: 12) argue that 'school leadership has a greater influence on schools and pupils when it is distributed'. Anderson (2005) considers leadership the responsibility of all TESOL professionals in an organisation and Stephenson (2008) suggests a 'leading from behind' strategy that considers all language teachers as leaders. Stephenson (2008) points out that many leaders often focus on workflow to bring about change; however, effective change and learning only occur when the individuals' needs, interests and relationships are considered. For this purpose, successful leaders understand the importance of relationship and recognise the significance of reciprocal learning processes that result into shared purposes (Harris, 2005). Thus, leaders who adhere to distributed leadership models are more connected to people than those who stick to traditional forms of leadership (Stephenson, 2008).

Bryman (2009) states that a leader needs to create an environment 'for academics and others to fulfil their potential and interest in their work' (p. 66). He believes that teachers want their leaders to ensure autonomy, consult, foster collegiality and fight for their rights. There is a consensus among the participants on the point of collaboration between teachers and management to improve the effectiveness of the institute. Like other participants, Guptill and Sandip have demanded opportunities for collaboration and involvement in the decision-making process, since participation in decision-making process has a positive impact on the job commitment and job satisfaction (Bogler, 2001; Byrne, 1999).

There is no doubt that nobody works 100% on their own. No one works better as those who are always part of a team. Therefore, teachers and leaders must be well connected if they want to achieve maximum results (Guptill).

Teachers should be given autonomy to practice and experiment in class. There should be more opportunities for the teachers to work in professional communities, which will flourish trust among the colleagues and will help them improve their professional competence (Sandip).

In creating and sustaining excellence in education today, university administrators are required to collaborate and work together with their subordinates if they want to be successful leaders (SitiAsiah, 2011). Collaboration among teachers and leadership will offer both the parties to frequently interact with one another and develop a relationship based on trust. For this purpose, there is a serious need for a change in policy. As Biggart (1989) concludes that organisations can no longer control their employees through rational-legal or bureaucratic structures: 'Independent work that relies on solidarity, respect, or mutual trust, is poorly served by bureaucratic structures that create authority differences' (pp. 169–170). Therefore, considering leadership 'a property of groups of people, not of individuals' (Woods et al., 2004, p. 449), leaders will address the tension between control and autonomy in education and will resolve issues by adhering to a hybrid form of leadership where distributed leadership exists alongside formal leadership. This approach will give teachers the opportunity to lead school improvement initiatives and contribute directly to organisational effectiveness (Muijs et al., 2013). Besides, they will link organisational vision to educational practice by remaining classroom practitioners first and foremost (Spillane & Healey, 2010). Furthermore, teachers have knowledge, experience and understanding of the classroom realities and their input on various professional issues, i.e. curriculum development, professional development, pacing guides can benefit the organisation. Morris and Rahul's comments summarise the above point.

Teachers need to be given confidence, they should be actively involved in decision-making process and their feedback should be valued (Morris).

The ideal is bottom-up approach to leadership where teachers are fully involved in pedagogical decisions and their feedback is given more importance. Since, teachers possess practical knowledge of classroom teaching their expertise should be utilised while devising policies (Rahul).

Conclusion

This study has presented the findings of a small-scale exploratory research study underpinned by a critical agenda, focusing on the effectiveness of leadership practices and teacher empowerment. As positioned within the critical approach, this study has attempted to raise awareness and empower teachers to 'raise their voice' and become a part of the decision-making processes that directly influence their pedagogical practices. In five major themes, teachers have echoed their voices against unfavorable leadership practices, which include the absence of appreciation and celebration, lack of collaboration and interpersonal trust, the foundations of ineffective leadership style, and the oppressive nature of the policies. The participants believe that top-down management and hierarchal leadership style do not meet the challenges of the institute and thus leadership distribution is the only way to overcome issues such as power, representation, empowerment, voice, cultural prejudice and oppression. Through distributed leadership, teachers can be given a sense of responsibility, ownership, collegueship and fulfillment while building a cordial and collaborative relationship between supervisors, teachers and other leaders at the institute (Blumberg, 1980). To conclude, Bennis and Nanus (1997) propose that 'Leaders can provide the proper setting for innovative learning by designing open organisations in which participation and anticipation work together to extend the time horizons and values and facilitate the development and use of new approaches' (p. 198).

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