



Teacher Leadership and Its Influence on School Performance

Mahnoor Iftikhar

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ABSTRACT

Teacher leadership has emerged as an important approach to improving school performance by extending leadership responsibilities beyond formally appointed principals and administrators. Teacher leaders contribute to instructional improvement, professional collaboration, curriculum development, mentoring, innovation, and institutional decision-making. This article examines the relationship between teacher leadership and school performance, with particular attention to its relevance for developing education systems such as Pakistan. It argues that teachers who participate meaningfully in leadership processes can improve instructional quality, strengthen professional learning communities, support organizational change, and contribute to higher levels of student achievement. The article is based on a conceptual review of educational leadership literature and examines five major areas: the conceptual foundations of teacher leadership, its principal dimensions, and the mechanisms through which it affects school performance, implementation challenges, and strategies for institutionalizing teacher leadership. The analysis suggests that teacher leadership influences school performance indirectly by improving teaching practices, teacher motivation, collective responsibility, professional trust, and the capacity of schools to solve educational problems. However, rigid administrative structures, limited professional autonomy, insufficient training, unclear leadership roles, and resistance to shared decision-making can restrict its effectiveness. The article concludes that teacher leadership should not be treated merely as the assignment of additional administrative duties. Instead, it should be developed as a structured, collaborative, and professionally supported process. School systems can strengthen teacher leadership through professional development, mentoring arrangements, distributed decision-making, recognition mechanisms, and supportive principal leadership.

Independent Researcher in Educational Leadership, Lahore, Pakistan

Email: mahnoor.iftikhar@example.com

Introduction:

Educational institutions are increasingly expected to improve student achievement, respond to technological and social changes, promote inclusive learning, and maintain high standards of accountability. These expectations cannot be met solely through the efforts of school principals and senior administrators. Schools are complex organizations in which instructional expertise is distributed among teachers, coordinators, mentors, and subject specialists. Consequently, the idea of teacher leadership has gained considerable importance in contemporary educational research. Teacher leadership refers to the process through which teachers influence their colleagues, school policies, instructional practices, and organizational development while continuing to perform their classroom responsibilities. Teacher leaders may occupy formal positions, such as subject coordinators, department heads, mentors, or professional-development facilitators. They may also exercise informal leadership by sharing teaching practices, supporting colleagues, initiating school projects, contributing to curriculum reform, and promoting collaborative problem-solving. Unlike traditional leadership models that concentrate authority at the top of the school hierarchy, teacher leadership is closely associated with distributed and shared leadership. Distributed leadership recognizes that leadership is not limited to one person or position. Instead, it is produced through interactions among school leaders, teachers, students, and community stakeholders. Spillane (2006) explains that leadership practice is distributed across individuals, organizational routines, and institutional situations. From this perspective, teachers can exercise leadership whenever their professional knowledge influences the practices and decisions of others. The growing interest in teacher leadership is also connected to the recognition that teachers are closest to classroom instruction. They understand student needs, curriculum challenges, assessment practices, and classroom-level barriers more directly than many external policymakers. Their participation in school leadership can therefore make institutional decisions more relevant to classroom realities. York-Barr and Duke (2004) argue that teacher leadership contributes to school improvement when teachers influence colleagues, principals, and members of the broader school community for the purpose of improving teaching and learning. School performance is a multidimensional concept. It includes student academic achievement, attendance, retention, teacher effectiveness, institutional climate, parental satisfaction, resource management, and the capacity of a school to achieve its educational goals. Teacher leadership can influence these dimensions by strengthening instructional practices, improving professional collaboration, and supporting organizational learning. Nevertheless, the relationship is not automatic. Teacher leadership produces positive outcomes only when schools provide appropriate authority, professional trust, resources, and supportive administrative structures.

Conceptual Foundations of Teacher Leadership:

Teacher leadership is based on the belief that teachers are not merely implementers of educational policies but are also capable of shaping teaching practices, institutional decisions, and school improvement processes. Traditional school leadership models place the principal at the center of decision-making. In contrast, teacher leadership emphasizes the contribution of multiple professionals whose knowledge can improve organizational performance. Teacher leadership can be formal or informal. Formal teacher leaders may be appointed as department heads, grade coordinators, curriculum specialists, mentors, examination coordinators, or professional-development leaders. Their responsibilities are officially recognized by the institution. Informal teacher leaders do not necessarily possess administrative titles. They gain influence through professional competence, experience, interpersonal skills, credibility, and their willingness to support colleagues. Harris (2003) connects teacher leadership with distributed leadership by arguing that leadership should be understood as a shared organizational activity. Teachers become leaders when they initiate improvement, influence teaching practices, and contribute to decisions that extend beyond their individual classrooms. This approach does not eliminate the principal's role. Instead, it changes the principal's responsibility from exercising complete control to creating the conditions in which leadership

can be shared productively. Teacher leadership is also closely related to professional capital. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) define professional capital as the combination of human, social, and decisional resources required for high-quality teaching. Human capital refers to teachers' knowledge and skills. Social capital concerns professional relationships and collaboration. Decisional capital involves the ability to make informed judgments. Teacher leadership can strengthen all three forms of capital by encouraging teachers to share expertise, solve problems collectively, and participate in educational decision-making. Another important foundation is teacher agency. Agency refers to the capacity of teachers to make purposeful choices and influence their professional environment. When teachers have no voice in school decisions, they may become passive implementers of externally designed reforms. Teacher leadership increases agency by allowing teachers to contribute to curriculum planning, instructional design, student-support systems, and school-development priorities. However, teacher leadership should not be confused with simply assigning teachers more administrative work. Additional responsibilities without authority, recognition, time, or professional support can increase workload without improving performance. Genuine teacher leadership involves meaningful influence, professional autonomy, collaboration, and accountability.

Major Dimensions of Teacher Leadership:

Teacher leadership operates through several interrelated dimensions. The first is instructional leadership. Teacher leaders help improve classroom instruction by demonstrating effective teaching strategies, developing instructional materials, supporting assessment practices, and assisting colleagues in responding to diverse student needs. Because they remain connected to classroom practice, teacher leaders can translate educational policies into practical instructional approaches. The second dimension is professional collaboration. Effective schools depend on teachers' ability to exchange knowledge and coordinate their work. Teacher leaders can organize professional-learning communities, subject-group meetings, lesson-planning sessions, peer observations, and action-research activities. Such collaboration reduces professional isolation and enables teachers to learn from one another. The third dimension is mentoring and professional development. Experienced teachers can guide newly appointed or less experienced colleagues by helping them understand curriculum requirements, classroom-management strategies, student-assessment procedures, and institutional expectations. Mentoring is especially important in schools where formal professional-development opportunities are limited. The fourth dimension is participation in decision-making. Teacher leaders can contribute to decisions related to school improvement plans, assessment policies, curriculum implementation, resource allocation, discipline procedures, student welfare, and professional learning. Participation increases the likelihood that institutional decisions will reflect actual classroom conditions. The fifth dimension is innovation and organizational change. Teacher leaders frequently introduce new teaching methods, digital-learning tools, assessment techniques, and student-support initiatives. They can help colleagues understand the purpose of reforms and adapt them to local circumstances. Teachers are more likely to accept organizational change when it is supported by respected colleagues rather than imposed entirely through administrative instructions. Teacher leadership also includes advocacy for students and teachers. Teacher leaders may identify learning barriers; communicate student needs to administrators, support inclusive education, and advocate for appropriate teaching resources. They can create stronger connections among classrooms, school administration, parents, and the community. These dimensions are mutually reinforcing. Instructional improvement becomes more sustainable when it is supported by collaboration, mentoring, shared decision-making, and professional trust. Schools that restrict teacher leadership to isolated administrative duties are unlikely to gain its full benefits.

Influence of Teacher Leadership on School Performance:

Teacher leadership influences school performance through both direct and indirect mechanisms. Its most immediate contribution concerns instructional quality. Teacher leaders can help colleagues adopt effective

teaching strategies, use assessment data, differentiate instruction, and respond to learning difficulties. Improved instructional practices can subsequently contribute to better student achievement. A second mechanism is the development of professional learning communities. When teachers regularly discuss curriculum, assessment, student progress, and instructional challenges, professional knowledge becomes a shared institutional resource. Muses and Harris (2006) found that teacher-led school improvement can build organizational capacity by increasing collaboration and professional learning. Schools become less dependent on isolated individuals because knowledge is shared across departments and grade levels. Teacher leadership also strengthens teacher motivation and professional commitment. Teachers who are trusted to contribute to decisions may develop a stronger sense of ownership regarding school goals. Participation can increase job satisfaction because teachers feel that their knowledge and experience are respected. Higher levels of professional commitment may contribute to improved attendance, reduced turnover, and greater willingness to participate in school-improvement activities. Another important mechanism is collective responsibility. In schools with strong teacher leadership, student achievement is not viewed as the responsibility of individual classroom teachers alone. Teachers work collectively to identify learning gaps, support struggling students, and coordinate instructional interventions. Collective responsibility encourages teachers to examine school-wide performance instead of focusing exclusively on their own classes. Teacher leadership can also improve the quality of organizational decisions. Teachers possess direct knowledge of student behavior, classroom conditions, curriculum demands, and assessment difficulties. Their participation can help administrators avoid decisions that are disconnected from instructional realities. This does not mean that every decision should be made collectively. Rather, relevant teachers should be included when their professional knowledge can improve the decision-making process. Professional trust is another important factor. Teacher leadership requires administrators to trust teachers' professional judgment, while teachers must trust one another enough to share practices and discuss difficulties. A culture of trust makes it easier to conduct peer observations, exchange feedback, and admit areas requiring improvement. In low-trust environments, teachers may interpret observation and evaluation as punishment rather than professional learning. The influence of teacher leadership on student outcomes is generally indirect. Teacher leaders do not improve student achievement simply because they hold leadership titles. Their influence occurs when leadership improves teaching quality, professional collaboration, school climate, and organizational capacity. Sup Ovitiz, Serenades, and May (2010) demonstrate that principals and peers can influence instruction through professional interaction and shared norms.

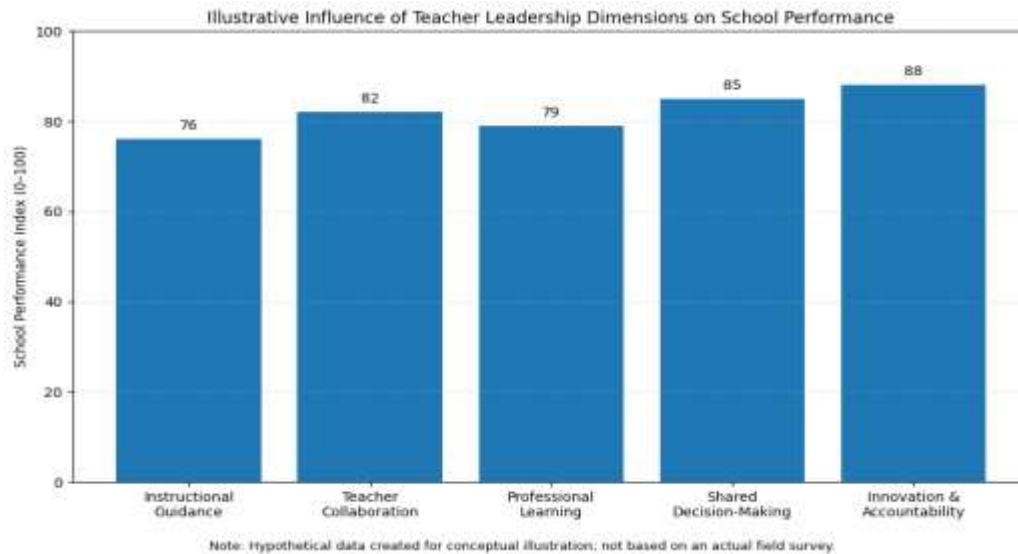
Challenges Affecting Teacher Leadership:

Despite its potential benefits, teacher leadership can be difficult to implement. One major challenge is the persistence of hierarchical school cultures. In highly centralized institutions, principals and administrators may regard leadership as their exclusive responsibility. Teachers who attempt to influence decisions may be perceived as challenging administrative authority. A second challenge is the absence of clearly defined roles. Teacher leaders may be given additional tasks without receiving sufficient authority, time, or resources. When responsibilities are unclear, conflicts can develop between teacher leaders, administrators, and other staff members. Clear job descriptions and communication mechanisms are therefore essential. Workload is another important barrier. Teachers already manage lesson planning, classroom instruction, assessment, student records, meetings, and extracurricular responsibilities. Adding leadership activities without adjusting teaching schedules can lead to stress and professional burnout. Schools must provide protected time for mentoring, collaborative planning, and improvement projects. Limited professional development may also weaken teacher leadership. Effective leadership requires communication, conflict management, mentoring, data analysis, curriculum planning, and organizational problem-solving skills. Excellent classroom teachers may require additional preparation before taking on broader leadership responsibilities. Resistance among colleagues can also occur. Some teachers may interpret teacher-leader

positions as evidence of favoritism or administrative control. Others may be unwilling to receive guidance from colleagues at the same professional level. Transparent selection procedures and collaborative role definitions can reduce such tensions. Gender and seniority expectations may influence leadership opportunities in some educational settings. Younger teachers and women may possess strong professional capabilities but remain underrepresented in influential roles. Leadership opportunities should therefore be based on competence, professional commitment, and relevant expertise rather than informal status alone. The Pakistani educational context includes additional challenges, such as differences between public and private schools, urban-rural inequalities, limited resources, uneven professional-development opportunities, and centralized administrative procedures. In some schools, teachers may have limited access to digital tools, professional networks, or research-based teaching materials. Teacher leadership models must therefore be adapted to local institutional conditions rather than copied directly from other education systems. Teacher leadership may also become symbolic rather than substantive. Schools may establish committees or appoint coordinators without allowing them to influence important decisions. Such arrangements create the appearance of participation while maintaining centralized control. Authentic teacher leadership requires meaningful professional influence and shared accountability.

Strategies for Strengthening Teacher Leadership:

Schools should begin by establishing a clear institutional framework for teacher leadership. Leadership roles, responsibilities, authority, accountability, and selection procedures should be documented. Teachers should understand whether a role involves mentoring, curriculum coordination, professional development, student support, assessment, or school-improvement planning. Principals play a central role in creating the conditions for teacher leadership. Supportive principals provide teachers with professional autonomy, invite meaningful participation, recognize expertise, and create opportunities for collaboration. They also protect teacher leaders from unnecessary administrative burdens and ensure that shared leadership remains aligned with school goals. Professional development should be provided before and during leadership assignments. Training can cover instructional coaching, mentoring, communication, conflict resolution, data interpretation, action research, technology integration, and project management. Professional development should be practical and connected to actual school challenges. Schools should establish professional-learning communities in which teachers meet regularly to examine student work, analyses assessment information, plan lessons, and discuss instructional problems. These communities should focus on evidence-based improvement rather than routine administrative announcements. Mentoring arrangements can strengthen both teacher leadership and teacher retention. Experienced teachers can support newly appointed teachers during their transition into the profession. Mentoring should be developmental rather than evaluative, allowing new teachers to discuss difficulties without fear of punishment. Teacher leaders should be provided with adequate time and recognition. Schools can reduce teaching loads, schedule collaborative planning periods, offer professional certificates, provide career-progression opportunities, or recognize leadership contributions during performance reviews. Financial incentives may be appropriate where teachers assume substantial additional responsibilities. Selection processes should be transparent and inclusive. Leadership opportunities should not be limited to the most senior teachers. Schools should identify individuals with instructional expertise, communication skills, ethical credibility, creativity, and a willingness to support others. Data should be used to evaluate teacher-leadership initiatives. Schools can examine changes in teacher collaboration, instructional practices, student achievement, attendance, retention, professional satisfaction, and school climate. Evaluation should focus on improvement rather than punishment.



Summary:

Teacher leadership represents a significant shift from the traditional assumption that school leadership belongs exclusively to principals and administrators. It recognizes that teachers possess valuable professional knowledge and can contribute meaningfully to instructional improvement, institutional decision-making, professional development, and organizational change. The article has shown that teacher leadership includes instructional guidance, collaboration, mentoring, shared decision-making, innovation, advocacy, and professional learning. These activities can improve school performance by strengthening teaching quality, teacher motivation, professional trust, collective responsibility, and organizational capacity. Teacher leadership does not usually affect student achievement through a single direct process. Its influence is produced through improvements in the conditions of teaching and learning. When teachers collaborate effectively, use evidence to improve instruction, mentor colleagues, and participate in school decisions, the institution becomes more capable of addressing student needs. However, assigning leadership titles to teachers is not sufficient. Teacher leadership can fail when roles are unclear, workloads are excessive, administrators resist shared authority, and professional development is unavailable. Symbolic participation may create committees and positions without providing genuine influence. In Pakistan and other developing educational contexts, teacher leadership can support school improvement by connecting administrative decisions with classroom realities. Its implementation must nevertheless account for centralized governance, resource limitations, institutional hierarchies, and unequal professional-development opportunities. Sustainable teacher leadership requires supportive principals, clearly defined roles, protected professional time, appropriate training, transparent selection, recognition, and systematic evaluation. School leaders should view teachers as partners in improvement rather than simply as recipients of instructions.

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