Teacher Leadership Development in Secondary Schools of Bangladesh

G M Rakibul Islam

The University of Manchester, Manchester, M13 9PL, UK.
Lecturer of Education, Ministry of Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Abstract: The notion of teacher leadership gains momentum and it brings the teachers into the central position, at both instructional and organizational level of practice, in schools. This review article aims to analyze the notion of teacher leadership, its importance and ways of development in secondary schools of Bangladesh. In this article, it is argued that teacher leadership development has to be at the heart of development initiatives in the field of education to ensure quality teaching-learning practices in schools. The study is mainly supported by literature, and policy documents and guidelines. However, there is a lack of research in the context of Bangladesh; therefore most of the literatures reviewed for this study are from the developed world, largely from a small number of countries. Although, many of the research show the optimistic implications of teacher leadership and its consequences in schools, few of them provide empirical evidence. Considering the transferability of the research findings, special attention has given to contextualize the implications for teacher leadership development in Bangladeshi secondary schools.

Keywords: Teacher Leadership, School Leadership, Leadership development, Secondary School, Bangladesh

1. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This article, a critical descriptive review of research articles, policy documents and reform initiatives, has presented an analysis of the importance of teacher leadership in schools and the ways of developing this skill among teachers. In doing so, a systematic review approach has been employed to scrutinize the impact of teacher leadership on students, classroom and school. Subsequently, the article examines the educational development initiatives of the Government of Bangladesh in light of the teacher leadership, though the concept of the teacher leadership is quite infrequent in the country. It analyses the Bangladeshi education context, investigates the development challenges and tests the appropriateness of teacher leadership to counter-attack those challenges. Therefore, along with national education policy 2010, this review study emphasizes the teacher leadership development initiatives of different projects, have been implemented in recent years. This review article has come up with some suggestions from different contexts that might work in the context of Bangladesh to lead and manage changes in schools.

2. INTRODUCTION

Schools are *multifaceted* and *complex* organizations, where students' needs are significantly important and changing with time. Thus, to run these schools, leadership role cannot be concentrated in the hands of few people (Bond, 2011), whereas "all teachers can lead! …And schools badly need their ideas, invention, energy, and leadership" (Barth, 2001, p. 449) at both instructional and organizational level of practice. Therefore, over the years, the concept and practice of teacher leadership have gained momentum to the practitioners and researchers (see York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Muijs & Harris, 2007) and has become well established. Evidences from a significant number of researches show that teacher leadership is a key vehicle for school improvement, students learning and to improving the effectiveness of the teachers themselves (Barth, 2001; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Muijs et al., 2013; Crowther et al., 2002; Leithwood et al., 1999). However, there is an orthodoxy of leadership that highlights a hierarchical relationship between leaders and followers (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008), which Bangladesh is still struggling with, where teacher leadership is a very new concept among the

E-mail address: gmrakibul.islam@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk; rakib19.du@gmail.com

teachers (Thornton, 2006; Salahuddin, 2011, 2012; Salam & Islam 2013). Considering the interest of improving teacher leadership for secondary schools, despite some debates and discourses (Gunter, 2003; Leithwood, 2003), this review study aims to explain the notion of teacher leadership and its importance in schools. Then, this article analyzes the ways in which teacher leadership can be developed in secondary schools of Bangladesh. There is a lack of research in the context of Bangladesh; therefore most of the literature has been reviewed for this study is from the developed countries. Considering the transferability of this research finding, special attention has been given to contextualize the implications for teacher leadership development in Bangladeshi secondary schools.

3. CONCEPTUALIZING TEACHER LEADERSHIP

To define teacher leadership, most of the literatures explain the importance and the various roles of teacher leaders for the improvement of students and schools instead of defining it. However, very few literatures defines teacher leadership as a unique form of leadership in schools (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), whilst numerous literatures relate teacher leadership to other recent conceptions of school leadership (e.g. distributed leadership, transformational leadership, shared leadership). Emphasizing the improvement of teaching-learning, York-Barr and Duke (2004) defines teacher leadership as leading among colleagues in schools to improve teaching and learning using material resources and with a focus on instructional practices. Similarly, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) state that teacher leaders lead within and beyond classroom and motivate others towards improved educational practice by creating a community of teacher learners and leaders. Besides, teacher leadership means developing an environment where people learn and lead together to shared vision (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Emphasizing the relationship between community and school, Crowther et al. (2002) define teacher leadership as transformative action of teaching and learning, which will enhance the life quality and ensure sustainable society. Muijs and Harris (2006) define teacher leadership as empowering teachers within the school formally and informally for school improvement and spreading the good practice and initiatives generated by teachers. However, Gunter (2005) observes teacher leadership from a completely different perspective; according to her, the idea of teachers as leaders in their classroom is externally imposed on the teachers by a hierarchical superior of central governments and its' policy agencies, who do not teach but lead on how school should be led. Similarly, Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) argue, the concept of leadership remains *murky* whereas teaching is relatively *clear* and honourable practice, and 'grafting leadership

onto the concept of teaching actually devalues the status of teaching in the long run' (p. 430, my emphasis).

The notion of teacher leadership has swept through different reformations over the years; even four decades ago it was commonly viewed as a singular leadership of the people at the apex of the educational organization rather than a collective endeavor. However, this notion of singular leadership has been challenged by researchers and practitioners of UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Smylie, 1995; Gronn, 2000; Court, 2002; cited in Muijs & Harris, 2007, p. 112), thus teacher leadership has received the momentum that brings the teachers to the central position (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). As mentioned above, leadership needs to be distributed between and among people within the school to influence others to action (Bond, 2011; Harris, 2002). Therefore, the nature of teacher leadership is *fluid and emergent rather than a fixed phenomenon* in schools (Muijs & Harris, 2006, p. 962, original emphasis). Comprising all conceptions, it can be concluded that teacher leadership is about empowering teachers to lead, formally and informally, to improve instructional and organizational practice within and beyond schools. Nevertheless, teacher leadership is not or cannot be panacea in every kind of challenging circumstances. The consequences will depend how it is enacted in schools, not how it is prescribed or conceptualized. Therefore, the following section explains the Bangladeshi secondary education context before embarking on the critical analysis.

4. OVERVIEW OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF BANGLADESH

In general there are two types of secondary schools in Bangladesh, in terms of administration and finance: government schools and private schools. Whilst, majority of secondary schools are run privately and only 327 out of 19684 schools are fully run by government funding (Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), 2014). The teachers of these secondary schools are mainly graduates, but many hold third class degrees (Thornton, 2006) especially of rural secondary schools; however, they are not satisfied with their salary and seek ways to supplement it through private tuition outside of school hours (Latif & Johanson, 2000). The ministry of education is the highest authority in the administrative hierarchy, whereas headteachers are the field-level authority of school management. In addition, there is school managing committee (SMC) for secondary school and governing body (GB) for higher secondary school as local authority that consist of teachers, local political leaders, parents and representatives from local administration (Salahuddin, 2011). These SMC and GB play an important role in teacher recruitment, student enrolment, settling tuition

fees, financial benefits for teachers and overall supervision of the institutions. There are two key leadership positions in school: headteacher and assistant headteacher, where the headteacher is 'accountable for government policy at local level' with formal leadership authority and the assistant headteacher is to assist him/her (Gunter, 2005, p. 4; Salahuddin, 2011). These headteachers are "first generation leaders" who are basically "administrative managers" (Bond, 2011, p. 286). However, leadership is seen as a position, not as an action, in the secondary schools of Bangladesh, where the headteacher practices managerial leadership without considering the potential talents and expertise of other teachers (Salahuddin, 2011, 2012; Salam & Islam, 2013). The possible reason might be that the authority can easily control the schools by controlling headteachers; therefore, leadership of headteachers is preferred to teacher leadership by the authority. It is worth mentioning here that Bangladesh government initiates leadership development training for headteachers from last decade through teaching quality improvement in secondary education project (TQI-SEP), though there is no leadership training for general teachers has been reported by any government project and/or policy documents.

5. WHY TEACHER LEADERSHIP?

Advocates of teacher leadership in their studies demonstrate a strong and consistent association between teacher leadership and educational development, though many criticize the consistency of the conception of teacher leadership. For instance, existing research is abundant with reasons for practicing teacher leadership in schools, though the concept did not remain static over time (York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Bond, 2011). The reasons of practicing teacher leadership are (according to the functional normative researchers) categorized into three allied aspects: teacher leadership for students' achievement, school improvement and teachers' professional development. Findings from literatures related to each aspect are analyzed afterwards.

a) Teacher Leadership and Student achievement

One of the distinguishing implications of practicing teacher leadership in schools is improvement of student achievement, yet very few of them have empirical evidence. However, the quality of teaching in the classroom directly or indirectly influences student motivation and achievement (Muijs & Harris, 2007), and findings from distinguished research illustrate a strong relationship between effective leadership and quality teaching in the classrooms (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). As Barth (2001) points out, when teachers practice leadership they take their school from dictatorship to democracy that improves student learning and students

learn democratic practice from teachers as well. Besides, classroom teachers who act like change agent become the center of educational reform that enhances student learning and achievement (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

b) Teacher Leadership and School Improvement

The evidence from numerous studies of school improvement claims that teacher leadership practice influences school improvement directly and indirectly. Similarly, Muijs and Harris (2007, p. 111) argue that effective leadership in school is a basic element in "securing and sustaining school improvement", whilst teacher leadership is a central contributing factor (Muijs & Harris 2006). Furthermore, they point out that the quality of a school is significantly connected with the quality of decisions; meanwhile, quality decisions intend to come from the collaboration of teachers. Barth (2001, p. 445) highlights this collective endeavor and mentions "when many lead, the school wins." In addition, teachers' responsibility can affect the school improvement; though it is not generalizable always as most of the research evidences are from a small number of countries almost entirely from the developed world (Muijs & Harris, 2003; Leithwood & Levin, 2008).

c) Teacher Leadership and Teachers' Professional Development

Practicing teacher leadership improves teachers' self-efficiency in relation to student learning (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Muijs & Harris, 2003). Moreover, it is importantly connected both to school improvement and to upgrading the efficacy of themselves (Muijs et al., 2013). It boosts teachers' motivation and intellectual stimulation, enhances their professional knowledge (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), and ensures their active participation in instructional and organizational practice (Barth, 2001). Furthermore, it encourages them to apply innovative teaching learning methods, which has a positive effect on their confidence building. Therefore, every success works as an encouragement that motivates teachers to continuous learning and excellence in teaching, consequently, ensures continuous professional development of the teachers.

When teachers get an environment, where they can exercise leadership roles formally and informally, enhances students learning, school improvement and professional development of themselves. Nevertheless, the equation is not that plain and simple always, particularly in Bangladesh. There are various barriers for teacher leadership practice and development in schools which is discussed in the following section.

6. BARRIERRS TO TEACHER LEADERSHIP PRACTICE AND DEVELOPMENT

Enormous work load, pressure of standardized tests, obstacles from colleagues and traditional mindset of headteacher are four key barriers to teacher leadership practice in schools (Barth, 2001; Muijs & Harris, 2006). Furthermore, Crowther et al. (2002) reveal two more barriers through their case study: traditional belief and system, and inadequate preservice education. These factors are considered as key barriers in the secondary schools of Bangladesh as well, though the severity of these factors varies. In addition to these, inadequate education policy, traditional curriculum, lack of experience, and financial constraints are fundamental barriers for creating collaborative leadership culture in secondary schools of Bangladesh (Hoque et al., 2011; Thornton, 2006). Moreover, Salahuddin (2011) asserts that headteachers in Bangladeshi secondary schools face problems to build a collective leadership culture due to their lack of confidence. Alongside, the extreme involvement of local political leaders in the school managing committee, who control the teachers, is another crucial constraint to initiate any kind of changes in these schools (Salahuddin, 2012). Taking these issues into attention, thereafter, this article reveals the possible ways on how to overcome these barriers to develop teacher leadership in light of the national and international literatures.

7. TEACHER LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: GLOBAL PRACTICE AND LESSONS FOR BANGLADESH

Teacher leadership is widely accepted by practitioners and researchers in the developed parts of the world, for example in the USA, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Italy (Muijs & Harris, 2003; Ross et al., 2011). The relevance of teacher leadership development programmes 'developed in western contexts can be questioned and need to be treated with caution in the developing country context' (Thornton, 2006, p. 183). This final section analyses the worldwide teacher leadership development programmes and brings together the lessons from literatures for Bangladesh.

i) Teacher Leadership Development in Schools

Teachers need extra care for developing their knowledge and skills for practicing teacher leadership in schools; because they do not come into schools with all expertise they need (Muijs et al., 2013). Furthermore, school is a complex organization for headteacher to lead alone (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), and "the most reliable, useful, proximate, and professional help resides under the same roof of the schoolhouse with the teaching staff itself" for the headteacher to lead this organization effectively (Barth, 2001, p. 445). Muijs and Harris (2006) from their case study explore some important factors that enhance the development of teacher leadership in schools: supportive structure and culture, strong leadership of headteacher or school management team, commitment to action, professional development, teacher participation and involvement, collective creativity, shared professional practice, and recognition and reward. Similarly, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) highlight the culture that makes teacher leadership available to all and they find the headteacher responsible to shape the culture. Moreover, York-Barr and Duke (2004) emphasize the importance of sharing effective practices with colleagues and allowing teachers to practice leadership; which increases job satisfaction among teachers (Harris & Muijs, 2001) that strengthens teacher leadership development in schools (Bond, 2001).

Among various factors that influence teacher leadership development three are responsible collectively: headteacher, colleagues and the teacher herself/himself. These three factors altogether create culture and structure of teacher leadership development (Anderson, 2004), where not only the headteacher is a prominent factor to create a culture of trust, honesty and professionalism that enhances the scope for teacher leadership but teachers themselves also are responsible to establish leadership culture in schools (Barth, 2001; Mullen & Jones, 2008). However, teacher leadership is effectively addressed in the literature but the headteachers' role for teacher leadership development among teachers in schools is seldom examined through empirical study.

Bond (2011) argues that professional development training for teachers is effective because, after realizing the theories and significance of teacher leadership, they can explore various ways to practice leadership in school. Nevertheless, Ovington et al. (2002) report that university-based teacher leadership programmes increase confidence of student-teachers and they become more comfortable accepting leadership roles (cited in Ross et al., 2011, p. 1214) which will be helpful for them in schools. Therefore, teacher educators should consider the complex role of teachers within and beyond the classroom for teacher leadership development (Bond, 2011) in the teachers' training colleges of Bangladesh.

ii) Implications for developing teacher leadership in Bangladesh

To date, far too little attention has been paid to teacher leadership in secondary schools of Bangladesh, where traditional managerial leadership is still being practiced, teachers are being 'brought under control, and this is being done by cleansing the profession' in various ways (Gunter, 2003, p. 119). Salahuddin (2012) argues that inadequate theoretical leadership knowledge of

headteachers and teachers' mindset, as they do not get formal leadership training, are basic constraints for the development of teacher leadership in Bangladesh. However, research suggests that there are various ways to overcome the above mentioned barriers such as encouraging and rewarding potential teachers, empowering teachers to lead, creating collaboration, identifying issues to lead, encouraging professional development in the workplace, clarifying the concept of teacher leadership, and dispelling the notions of traditional positional leadership (Crowther et al., 2002). Considering the practice of formal and informal leadership, Leithwood et al. (1999) identify six implications for teacher leaders: clarification of roles and responsibilities of teacher leaders, gaining a realistic perspective on time, creating training opportunities, providing support for challenging leadership assignments, building a culture of collaboration, and selecting teacher leaders.

Evaluating the Teach First programme, which combines leadership development training, coaching and mentoring, and a range of networking and internship opportunities for preservice teachers, Muijs et al. (2013) argue that initial teacher education is effective to prepare preservice teachers for teacher leadership roles. In this way, Teach for Bangladesh which is contextualized for Bangladeshi primary schools from Teach for America might be a good lesson for Bangladesh (Teach for Bangladesh, 2015). Continuous professional development for teachers is another important suggestion to improve their instructional skills (Muijs & Harris, 2003; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Leithwood & Levin, 2005), as teachers' educational background is another significant issue that makes teachers afraid to initiate change in Bangladesh (Thornton, 2006). Similarly, teacher education and leadership development in schools should enhance opportunities to practice teacher leadership roles, create culture of trust and collaboration, and initiate democratic environment for fellow teachers who can unlock one another's leadership potential (Barth, 2001; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Muijs & Harris, 2003, 2007; Mullen & Jones, 2008; Ross et al., 2011; Salahuddin, 2011, 2012). In most cases of Bangladesh, teachers do not enjoy the freedom of decision making in reaching their school goals as they are controlled by the central administration (Salahuddin, 2011, 2012). This traditional bureaucratic education system, which prevents the teachers' autonomy to practice leadership, should be changed through policy reformation (Salahuddin, 2012; Thornton, 2006). Along with all these initiatives, headteachers and other teachers, nevertheless, have to play a key role to initiate and sustain the teacher leadership practice in schools.

8. CONCLUSION

The evidence from international literature reveals that, to date, teacher leadership is a well-debated concept in most of the developed countries. A growing body of qualitative literature highlights the positive influence of teacher leadership upon schools, students and teachers themselves with very little empirical research evidence, especially in the context of developing countries like Bangladesh. In many cases, literature presents an optimistic picture of teacher leadership practice and its consequences rather than offering empirical evidence. In addition to this, a significant number of researches investigate the importance, the role of teacher leaders, and some of them explain the nature of teacher leadership, rather than identifying ways to develop it. On the contrary, some distinguished researchers (for example Gunter, 2005; Leithwood & Levin, 2008) shed the light upon this issue from a different angle that challenges the optimistic view of teacher leadership.

However, preparedness and practices of teachers are two crucial things to consider getting positive consequences from teacher leadership in secondary schools. In fact, teacher leadership development is not an easy task for Bangladesh, where "teachers are led by others both organizationally and systematically by those in central government and its' policy agencies who lead on how schools should be led" (Gunter, 2005, p. 3). Hence, a paradigm shift is urgently needed in purposes and practices of overall education system of Bangladesh. The mindsets of people in the field of education and traditional top-down leadership, which are embedded in the school culture for centuries, are two fundamental barriers to develop teacher leadership in the secondary schools of Bangladesh. Implications from global evidence for teacher leadership development would be applicable for Bangladesh, but it is essential to contextualize before implementation. Consequently, further research is required to collect the empirical evidence of the beneficial effects of teacher leadership and the ways of its development in the context of developing countries like Bangladesh.

REFERENCES

Anderson, K.D. (2004). The Nature of Teacher Leadership in Schools as Reciprocal Influences between Teacher Leaders and Principals. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *15*(1), 97-113.

Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS). (2014). *Bangladesh Education Statistics 2014*. Retrieved from http://banbeis.gov.bd/data/index.php

Barth, R.S. (2001). Teacher leader. *Phi Delta Kappan 82*(6), 443–49.

Bond, N. (2011). Preparing Preservice Teachers to Become Teacher Leaders. *The Educational Forum, 75*(4), 280-297.

Crowther, F., Kaagan, S.S., Ferguson, M., & Hann, L. (2002). *Developing Teacher Leaders*, Thousand Oaks. CA: Corwin Press Inc.

Fitzgerald, T., & Gunter, H.M. (2008). Contesting the orthodoxy of teacher leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*. *11*(4), 331-340.

Gunter, H.M. (2003). Teacher leadership: prospects and possibilities. In: Brundrett, M., Burton, N., & Smith, R. (eds) *Leadership in Education* (pp. 118-131). London: Sage.

Gunter, H.M. (2005). *Leading Teachers*. London: Continuum.

Harris, A. (2002). *School Improvement: What's in it for Schools?*. London: Falmer Press

Harris, A., & Muijs, D. (2001). *Teacher Leadership: A review of research.* London: General Teaching Council.

Hoque, K.E., Alam, G.M., & Abdullah, A.G.K. (2011). Impact of teachers' professional development on school improvement-an analysis at Bangladesh standpoint. *Asia Pacific Education Review. 12*, 337-348.

Katzenmeyer, M., & Moller G (2001). *Awakening the Sleeping Giant. Helping Teachers Develop as Leaders*, (2nd edn). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Latif, M.S., & Johanson, R. (2000). Bangladesh Secondary and Higher Secondary Education. *Bangladesh Education Sector Review*. Dhaka: University Press Ltd. 2, pp. 53-77. Retrieved from http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2003/01/07/000094946_02122004121922/Rendered/PDF/multi0page.pdf

Leithwood, K. (2003). Teacher leadership: its nature, development and impact on schools and students. In: Brundrett, M., Burton, N., & Smith, R. (eds), *Leadership in Education* (pp. 103-117). London: Sage.

Leithwood, K., &Levin, B. (2005). *Assessing School Leader and Leadership Programme Effects on Pupil Learning*. London: DfES.

Leithwood, K., & Levin, B. (2008). Understanding and Assessing the Impact of Leadership Development. In: Lumby, J., Crow, G., & Pashiardis, P. (eds), *International Handbook of the Preparation and Development of School Leaders* (pp. 280-300). New York: Routledge.

Leithwood, K., Jantzi, D., & Steinbach, R. (1999). *Changing Leadership for Changing Times*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2000). Principal and teacher leadership effects: a replication School. Leadership and Management, 20*(4), 415-434.*

Muijs, D., & Harris, A. (2003). Teacher Leadership: Improvement Through Empowerment? An Overview of Research. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 31*(4), 437–48.

Muijs, D., & Harris, A. (2006). Teacher led school improvement: teacher leadership in the UK. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 22*(8), 961–972.

Muijs, D., & Harris, A. (2007) Teacher leadership in (in)action: three case studies of contrasting schools. *Educational, Management, Administration and Leadership, 35*(1), 111–134.

Muijs, D., Chapman, C., & Armstrong, P. (2013). Can Early Teachers Be Teacher Leaders? A Study of Second-year Trainees in the Teach First Alternative Certification Programme. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 41*(6), 766-781.

Mullen, C.A., & Jones, R.J. (2008). Teacher leadership capacity-building: developing democratically accountable leaders in schools. *Teacher Development*, *12*(4), 329-340.

Ross, D., Adams, A., Bondy, E., Dana, N., Dodman, S., & Swain, C. (2011). Preparing teacher leaders: Perceptions of the impact of a cohort-based, job embedded, blended teacher leadership program. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 27*(8), 1213–1222.

Salahuddin, A.N.M. (2011). Distributed Leadership in Secondary Schools: Possibilities. *The Arts Faculty Journal, July 2010-June 2011*, 19-32.

Salahuddin, A.N.M. (2012). Challenges to effective leadership of urban secondary schools in Bangladesh: A critical study. *Critical Literacy: Theories and Practices*, *6*(2), 50-65.

Salam, M.A., & Islam, G.M.R. (2013). Teacher Leadership of Nonformal Primary Education in Bangladesh. In: Greenwood, J., Everatt, J., Kabir, A. H., & Alam, S. (eds), *Research and Educational Change in Bangladesh* (pp. 205-221). Dhaka: University of Dhaka.

Teach for Bangladesh (2015). *The Model and Theory of Change*. Retrieved from http://www.teachforbangladesh.org/about-us/the-model/

Thornton, H. (2006). Teachers talking: the role of collaboration in secondary schools in Bangladesh. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education. 36*(2), 181-196.

York-Barr, J., & Duke, K. (2004). What Do We Know about Teacher Leadership? Findings from Two Decades of Scholarship. *Review of Educational Research*, *74*(3), 255-316.