

# Distributed Leadership Study of Taiwan's High School Principals

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**Abstract**—The main purpose of this study is to explore the leadership style, distributed leaderships in particular, used by principals of high schools in Taiwan. Questionnaires were given to principals and teachers from 70 public senior high and vocational school in Taiwan to investigate the relationship between the distributed leadership of the principals and teacher morale. Results revealed that principals and teachers held different perspectives on the extent of distributed leadership. The two types of schools also perceived the extent of implementing the two elements of distributed leadership differently. Teachers of different positions manifested different teacher morale. There were significant differences in teacher morale between different school types. A positive correlation was observed between the extent of principals implementing distributed leadership and teacher morale. The results have deeply educational implication for school leaders and managers.

**Keywords**—Distributed leadership, teacher morale

## I. Introduction

Senior high and vocational schools are currently experiencing the effects of low birth rates, with some schools already reducing the number of classes offered because of low enrollment. These problems pose significant challenges to Taiwanese teachers. When schools are forced to close as a result of low enrollment, teachers would lose their jobs and their livelihoods would be affected. Under such circumstances, various schools have started to focus on identifying a leadership approach capable of improving teacher morale and transform challenges into opportunities, encouraging teachers to focus on their tasks of teaching and achieving a sustainable development of the institution. Senior high and vocational schools are educational institutions with two distinct educational functions. Senior high schools are mainly a continuation of the public education program with the purposes of helping students achieve improved levels of general education, robust physical and mental health, comprehensive developments in ethics and technical knowledge, and knowledge in the five disciplines considered important for the modern citizen. Vocational high schools, on the other hand, mainly focus on technical education and training of professionals required for industrial development.

### A. Distributed leadership

When compared with other forms of leadership, distributed leadership focus more on social inter-action, democratic

participation, teachers' influence, integration of diverse opinions, professional dialogue, and teamwork abilities.

Any teacher could be a hero, unleash his/her teaching potential, and achieve targets by working together. Such leadership styles have become a major trend in recent years. Distributed leadership is comparable to giving teachers authority and skills. Under such a leadership model, schools would authorize teachers to be more open and eager to express their opinions and concerns about school policies, making it an emerging topic in the research of pedagogical leadership and can provide a new field of investigation for leadership theories and practical applications[1][8][10]. Distributed leadership includes the principal's confidence and humility, the ability to clarify organizational structure and take responsibility for school performance, investment of leadership energies, establishment of a culture of trust, and the selection of adequate turning points[9]. Although the most common forms of school leadership currently would be charismatic and transformational leadership models, these models have their own inadequacies. Future developments of academic institutions are tending towards a diamond shaped leadership model where every teacher is empowered to unleash their potential. Leadership processes will place greater emphasis on social interaction, democratic participation, teacher influences, integrating diverse opinions, professional dialogue and teamwork abilities to achieve common goals. Distributed leadership represents a unique departure from conventional power relationships as it gives teachers various opportunities to lead. The results of combined efforts will be far larger than the sum of individual contributions, thus ensuring that future developments will tend towards distributed leadership models [6][7]. The concept of distributed leadership is slowly changing the decision-making models in schools. Concentrated power will be gradually distributed and shared amongst the school leadership as well as the members of the new organizational framework. The same shall apply to authorities and responsibilities as well[11].

### B. Teacher Morale

Morale is an internal state of mind and defines an individual's identity towards his or her work and organization. External manifestations of morale would be work commitment and achievement of organizational targets during the interaction processes between the person and the organization. Work morale includes an employee's mental state towards his or her work, the manifested team spirit and the result of interactions between the individual and the organization. During the inter-actions, a harmonious consensus would be generated when personal requirements are satisfied and when the individual identifies with the organizational objectives. This

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harmony will make the individual willing to work with other members of the organization, contribute wholeheartedly and achieve organizational objectives. Teacher morale is both a mental and emotional state, and exerts a significant impact on teaching and student learning performances. Teacher morale includes the aspects of organizational identity, team cohesiveness and work commitment[5].

The main purpose of this study is to explore the leadership style, distributed leaderships in particular, is to evaluate the link between distributed leadership of principals and teacher morale in senior high and vocational school. Other objectives include identifying differences between the principals' and teachers' perspectives on the extent of implementing distributed leadership as well as differences in work morale between teachers in different positions or at different schools. The Teachers' Act of Taiwan has clearly stipulated the rights and responsibilities of teachers and provides public school teachers with a guarantee. This study thus targets the teachers of public senior high and vocational schools.

### C. *Distributed leadership and work morale*

Some studies have shown that the leadership model adopted by the principal is linked with the morale of the teaching staff[3]. have provided evidence in their study that distributed leadership could exert positive effects on personal performance and work morale of the teachers. A significant relationship would exist between the principal's leadership and teacher morale. By adopting distributed leadership, teachers could begin to participate in the discussion of various administrative affairs in the school and share their personal opinions and beliefs which can subsequently transform the conventional model characterized by the teachers' passive participation in school affairs. Thus, the transformation of teachers into leaders would be an important basis of distributed leadership[12][14]. Studies that focus on a school's administrative staff (principal and vice principals), lead teachers, parents and community leaders have found that distributed leadership could exert a positive effect on teacher morale and passion[15]. Current distributed leadership models will establish teacher leadership skills through their participation in school administration while improving their work morale and pro-activeness. Teachers also believe that distributed leadership could exert positive influences on their work satisfaction. Factors that affect teacher morale would also severely reduce the motivation for distributed leadership [2][13][4]. These results prove the presence of correlations between distributed leadership and teacher morale.

The principal's distributed leadership has been defined in this study as the principal providing a clear organizational structure, setting clear objectives for performance responsibilities and goals, and choosing suitable opportunities to carry out reforms. By empowering and improving the skills of the school faculty, giving members leadership opportunities in accordance with their abilities, and sharing responsibilities and leadership roles, the school would be jointly managed by the teaching staff in an atmosphere based on trust. Real responsibilities in individual or group leadership roles will

generate an effective leadership organization that achieves the school's objectives and sustainable development. Elements of distributed leadership would be based upon the opinions offered by[9], which adopted a five element model: (1) a confident and humble principal who does not focus on personal authority and treats the formal leadership role as one based on service, empowering other teachers, granting new skills and being dedicated to establish his or her influences. (2) Setting clear organizational structures and responsibilities: a clear organization, division of responsibilities and authorization of various members will ensure that everyone knows their part to help in the smooth operation of school affairs. (3) Invest in leadership energy: help all members gain leadership skills and energy to establish effective leadership principles, characteristics, and value, giving everyone the courage to take on leadership roles. (4) Creating a culture based on trust: the leader and those being led must be able to appreciate and accept leadership potentials in each other to jointly establish an organizational culture based on trust, unleash the full potential of leadership influence, and create highly dedicated members with a strong sense of mission. (5) Suitable opportunities for reform: leaders and members of the organization should find adequate opportunities for analysis and make decisions for reform directives in the face of future challenges and to carry them out where appropriate.

Teacher morale is defined as an expression of a dedicated, passionate and self-motivated work spirit achieved through the satisfaction of personal needs and achievement of school objectives as the teacher interacts with the school and participates in teaching activities. Morale helps the teacher identify with the objectives of the school organization, makes her willing to commit completely to the profession of teaching, and improves team cohesiveness in order to accomplish personal and school objectives. Elements of teacher morale would be based on the description and considerations of the teaching environments in Taiwanese public schools provided by Evans and would be divided into the two elements of organizational identity and team cohesion. (1) Organizational identity: The teacher identifies and supports the school's vision, objectives and operating methods, internalizing school objectives and values as their own. Identity is regarded as a psychological process where the teacher is dedicated to the pursuit and realization of the school's objectives. (2) Team cohesion: Teachers trust and support each other, actively participating in various school activities and working together to achieve school objectives.

A research framework has been formulated in this investigation in accordance with our research objectives. The main topic investigated in this study is the relationship between the principal's distributed leadership (which includes the five elements of the principal's confidence and humility, setting of clear organizational structure and performance responsibilities, investing in leadership energy, creating a culture of trust and selecting suitable reform opportunities) and teacher morale (which includes the two elements of organizational identity and team cohesion).

Summarizing the above, the following hypotheses were then proposed for this study:

- H1: There are differences in the perspectives of principals and teachers on the extent of implementing distributed leadership in both types of schools.
- H2: There are differences in the perspective on the extent of implementing distributed leadership in the two types of schools.
- H3: There are differences in teacher morale between teachers of different subjects in both types of schools.
- H4: There are differences in teacher morale in the two types of schools.
- H5: Teachers perceive a positive correlation between distributed leadership and teachers morale.

## II. Methodology

### A. Participants

This investigation targeted public school principals and teachers. Stratified random sampling was used to select principals and teachers, with the school type used for stratification. In order to improve the representation of the research samples, stratified sampling was first used by the classes of senior high schools and vocational high schools. We then implemented questionnaire investigations, targeting the four positions of school principals, part-time administrative teachers, part-time home-room teachers and full-time teachers. Combined sampling was carried out. A total of 70 principals and 980 teachers were sampled from 70 public senior high and vocational schools in Taiwan for a total of 1050 questionnaires.

### B. Measures

A Questionnaire on the Principal's Distributed Leadership and Teacher Morale (with a total of 65 questions) were compiled in this investigation as the questionnaire investigation tool. The questionnaire content is divided into 4 parts: basic information, definitions of key terms, the principal's distributed leadership questionnaire (questions 1-49) and teacher morale questionnaire (questions 50-65). Principals were asked to complete questions 1 to 49, while teachers were asked to complete questions 1 to 65.

Basic information to be provided by the subject is divided into four sections: gender (male, female), role in school (principal or teacher), current position (part-time administrative teacher, part-time home-room teacher or full-time teacher) and school category (senior high school or vocational high school). In this case, full-time teachers refer to teachers not engaged in any administrative tasks or home-room management besides teaching.

This study sampled 70 public senior high schools and vocational high schools around Taiwan, and distributed 1050 questionnaires with stamped envelopes to 70 principals and 980 teachers. A total of 667 questionnaires were sent back, giving a return rate of 63.52%, of which 21 questionnaires were regarded as ineffective (3.15%), resulting in an effective

recovery rate of 61.52% with 646 questionnaires or 96.85% of the returned questionnaires. Of these effective questionnaires, 334 came from senior high schools (51.7%), and 312 from vocational high schools (48.3%); 49 questionnaires (7.6%) were completed by principals, while 597 were completed by teachers (259) from part-time administrative teachers (40.1%), 207 from part-time home-room teachers (32.0%) and 131 from full-time teachers (20.3%); 315 questionnaires (48.8%) were completed by men while 331 (51.2%) were completed by women.

All questionnaire items were scored along a 7 point Likert scale. Subjects would select an answer from the options of Extremely Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Normal, Somewhat Agree, Agree, and Extremely Agree according to their own opinions and experiences, with these options corresponding to a score of 1 to 7 points, respectively. The total score was calculated for each questionnaire. Position codes are used in the following tables, with 1 used for principals, 2 for part-time administrative teachers, 3 for part-time home-room teachers and 4 for full-time teachers.

### C. Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was then carried out. Results are described as follows:

#### 1. Principal's distributed leadership

(1) The perspectives of different positions on the extent of implementing distributed leadership were analyzed using the ANOVA and Scheffe's Method of Multiple Comparisons.

Results indicate that 0.001 and 0.01 levels of significance have been reached for all the five elements, indicating significant differences in the perspectives of the different positions. The analysis using Scheffe's Method showed that principals gave higher scores for the elements of Principal's confidence and humility and Setting clear organizational structures and performance responsibilities when compared to part-time administrative teachers, part-time home-room teachers, and full-time teachers. Part-time administrative teachers also gave higher scores when compared to part-time home-room teachers and full-time teachers. Principals gave higher scores for Investing in leadership energy compared to part-time home-room teachers and full-time teachers. Part-time administrative teachers also gave higher scores than part-time home-room teachers. Principals gave higher scores for Creating a culture of trust compared to part-time home-room teachers and full-time teachers. Part-time administrative teachers also gave higher scores than part-time home-room teachers and full-time teachers. Principals gave higher scores for Selecting suitable opportunities for reform compared to part-time administrative teachers, part-time home-room teachers and full-time teachers. Part-time administrative teachers also gave higher scores than part-time home-room teachers. Results revealed that principals, in general, tend to be self-assured about their own performance, giving higher scores when compared to teachers in all positions for all of the five elements. Meanwhile, part-time administrative teachers gave higher scores compared to part-time home-room teachers, who in turn gave higher scores than full-time teachers.

(2) We then carried out t-tests for each of the principal's distributed leadership elements for the different school categories.

Results revealed significant differences for the two elements of Principal's confidence and humility and Investing in leadership energy with levels of significance at 0.01 and 0.05, respectively. Comparison of averages also showed that senior high schools gave higher scores than vocational high schools. No significant differences have been observed for the other three elements. Results thus showed that senior high schools perceived the principal's distributed leadership elements of Principal's confidence and humility and Investing in leadership energy to be higher than that of vocational high schools.

## 2. Teacher morale

(1) Perception of teacher morale by teachers from different positions was analyzed via ANOVA.

Results indicate that both elements of teacher morale, namely Organizational identity and Team cohesion, reached a 0.001 level of significance, indicating that significant differences do exist among teachers from different positions. After Scheffe's Method of Multiple Comparisons, results showed that for both elements of Organizational identity and Team cohesion, part-time administrative teacher gave higher scores than part-time home-room teachers and full-time teachers. Hence, part-time administrative teachers exhibited a higher morale than part-time home-room teachers and full-time teachers.

(2) We then carried out t-tests for teacher morale in different school categories.

Results indicated that both teacher morale elements of Organizational identity and Team cohesion attained 0.001 levels of significance, indicating that significant differences in the perception of teacher morale exist between senior high schools and vocational high schools. The average score comparisons of the two elements revealed that senior high schools gave higher scores than vocational high schools for both elements of Organizational identity and Team cohesion, showing that senior high school teachers have a higher morale than those from vocational high schools.

3. Product-moment correlation of the extent of principals implementing distributed leadership and teacher morale.

The product-moment correlation analysis was used to understand the relationship between the teachers' perception of the extent of principals implementing distributed leadership and teacher morale.

Results indicate that the relationships between the five elements of the principal's distributed leadership and the two elements of teacher morale have all reached a 0.01 level of significance. This showed that a positive correlation exists between the principal's distributed leadership and teacher morale. The correlation between the total scores of teacher morale and principal's distributed leadership also reached a 0.01 level of significance and revealed that principals could help improve teacher morale by implementing distributed leadership in schools.

## III. Results

### A. *Principals' and teachers' perceptions on the extent of the principal implementing distributed leadership*

(1) The perceptions of the principals, part-time administrative teachers, part-time home-room teachers and full-time teachers on the extent of implementing distributed leadership was analyzed using the ANOVA and Scheffe's Method of Multiple Comparisons. Among the five elements of the principal's distributed leadership, the element of Principal's confidence and humility reached a 0.001 level of significance and the four other elements of Investing in leadership energy, Setting clear organizational structures and performance responsibilities, Creating a culture of trust and Selecting suitable opportunities of reform also reached 0.01 levels of significance.

(2) Results of t-tests on the principal's distributed leadership between the two school categories of senior high schools and vocational high schools indicated that the element of Principal's confidence and humility reached a 0.01 level of significance, while the element of Setting clear organizational structures and performance responsibilities reached a 0.05 level of significance. No significant differences were observed for the other three elements of Investing in leadership energy, Creating a culture of trust and Selecting suitable opportunities.

### B. *Teachers' perception on morale*

(1) The perception of teacher morale by teachers from different positions was analyzed using ANOVA, with results showing that differences in the perception of teacher morale among the different positions reached a 0.001 level of significance. Scheffe's Method then revealed that part-time administrative teachers exhibited higher morale compared to part-time home-room teachers and full-time teachers.

(2) Results of the t-test on teacher morale in different school categories revealed that both elements of Organizational identity and Team cohesion reached a 0.001 level of significance.

### C. *Relationship between the extent of principals implementing distributed leadership and teacher morale*

A product-moment correlation analysis was carried out for the teachers' perception of the principal's distributed leadership and teacher morale. Results indicated that correlations between all five elements of the principal's distributed leadership and the two elements of teacher morale reached a 0.01 level of significance.

## IV. Discussion

Research results are summarized as follows : (1) Principals and teachers from both types of schools perceived the extent

of implementing distributed leadership differently. Principals gave a higher score than teachers from any position, while part-time administrative teachers gave higher scores compared to part-time home-room teachers who in turn gave higher scores when compared to full-time teachers. (2) There were differences in the perception on the two elements of the principal's distributed leadership of Principal's confidence and humility and Setting clear organizational structures and performance responsibilities between the two types of schools. Of these, senior high schools perceived better distributed leadership when compared to vocational high schools. (3) Teachers from different positions also expressed different levels of morale. Results indicated that part-time administrative teachers had higher morale than part-time home-room teachers and full-time teachers. (4) There were differences in teacher morale in the two types of schools. Of these, senior high school teachers had a higher morale than vocational high school teachers. (5) According to the teachers' perspective, there is a positive correlation between principals implementing distributed leadership and teacher morale.

Principals tend to be self-assured on their implementation of distributed leadership when compared to what the teachers perceived, showing that there were differences in perception between the principals and teachers. Such gaps would pose a challenge if the schools wish to make its staff work harmoniously together and achieve greater performance. Results showed that senior high schools perceived two elements of Principal's confidence and humility and Investing in leadership energy in the principal's distributed leadership to be higher than that of vocational high schools. Meanwhile, senior high school teachers also exhibited a higher morale. This showed that the principal's distributed leadership was less perceivable in vocational high schools where the teachers exhibited lower morale. Senior high schools focus on developing both technical knowledge and civil ethics and the five ways of life important for a modern citizen. Vocational high schools, on the other hand, focus on the training of professionals required for industrial development. As a result, high school students tend to focus on continuing their education, giving teachers clear objectives and responsibilities. Vocational high school principals, however, should still quickly identify methods to help teachers sense their commitment to distributed leadership and improve teacher morale. In terms of teacher morale, part-time administrative teachers exhibited the highest morale while full-time teachers showed the lowest. This seemed to be consistent with the current state of school administration. However, educational performance would be dependent on the efforts of the entire teaching staff and everyone has a part to play. Thus, there would be a need to quickly identify methods to improve the morale of full-time teachers. Results showed positive correlation between the principal's distributed leadership and teacher morale, which is consistent with that of previous studies (Bruce, Noel and David, 2010; Sheppard, Hurley and Dibbon, 2010; Naicker and Suraiya, 2011). In other words, teachers believe that implementing the principal's distributed

leadership would help improve teacher morale. Thus, schools facing pressures of reduced classes and enrollment could attempt distributed leadership to boost morale and achieve greater educational performance to attract more students.

## V. Limitations and Future Research

This investigation targeted 1050 principals and regular teachers from 70 public senior high and vocational schools in Taiwan. Conclusions of this investigation would therefore be restricted to these schools and their staff. Whether or not the same conclusions could be reached for other public or private senior high and vocational schools or even junior high or elementary schools will require further research. Additionally, many schools have refrained from hiring regular teachers due to fears of poor enrollment. Instead, more and more substitute teachers have been employed to share teaching responsibilities. At the same time, schools also employ a number of administrative staff. Their perception and response to the principal's distributed leadership also warrant future research.

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