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**Teacher Empowerment in Secondary Schools:
A Case Study in Malaysia**



Herbert Utz Verlag · München

Münchner Beiträge zur Bildungsforschung

herausgegeben von

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Zugl.: Diss., München, Univ., 2010

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek: Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

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ISBN 978-3-8316-0970-3

Printed in Germany
Herbert Utz Verlag GmbH, München
089-277791-00 · www.utzverlag.de

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

During the earlier days, empowerment concept has emerged as an important theme in the women's movement, in community organizing and in the progressive movements for peace and social justice. In the beginning empowerment can be seen as a way where the weaker individuals were trying to overcome their dominance and tight control of other powerful group of people on them. Therefore, it can be said that the idea of empowerment has resulted from the direct response of powerlessness and social forms that contributed to domination. Besides that, empowerment can also be viewed as the urge of understanding, identifying, and describing processes through which people create alternative ways to overcome domination through both personal and organizational change (Conger & Kanungo, 1988).

Empowerment includes organizational processes and structures that enhance member participation and improve goal achievement for the organization. In other words, empowerment can be seen as a process of boosting up the organizational outcomes and effectiveness (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). At present, the concept of empowerment has developed into many forms, evolving from the employee involvement and participative decision making concepts into the contemporary empowerment perspective. The idea behind the concept of empowerment involves the workforce being provided with a greater degree of flexibility and more freedom to make decisions relating to work. Through empowerment, people are encouraged to make certain decisions without consulting their superiors and to which organizational dynamics are initiated at the bottom (Greasley et al., 2004). Power is also said to be redistributed by those in higher position to the lower position.

When empowerment existed in organizations, the individuals within that organization tend to feel their own ownership on their work and they will transform their personal feelings towards their responsibilities and satisfaction to their jobs. These situations both from the side of the individuals and their organizations contribute to a win-win situation for both parties involved. Having this in mind, the concept of empowerment has also contributed to the emergence of a focus on research in the educational settings.

1.1 Teacher Empowerment

Similar to the concept of empowerment in organizational settings studies, teacher empowerment on the other hand has become a focus on educational

reform, leadership models, and teaching effectiveness in schools. Responding to the lead of business and industry, educational planners and policy makers assumed that the same situation can be also applied to the educational settings. They assumed that the commercial productivity issues are applicable also to educational productivity (Short & Johnson, 1994). Therefore, those involved have tried to increased productivity concerns and cost constraints by exploring empowerment strategies for their staffs in schools.

Based on the literature available, the concept of teacher empowerment has evolved also in many forms. From teacher autonomy, side based management (SBM) to decision making and collaborative leadership and so on. There is no doubt that teacher empowerment is an excellent concept and the basic idea behind it is of course to give teachers an added sense of ownership and connectedness to their teaching profession where teachers must feel control over their profession (Goynne et al., 1999). In order to fully achieved teacher empowerment in schools, teachers must come together sharing ideas to solve practical problems and they should also be given the support from their superiors through opportunity to develop and express their thoughts through the ongoing process of teaching and learning in school. When teacher empowerment occurred in school, then it can contribute to higher job satisfaction, motivation, commitment, better communication and efficient decision making among the teachers. The situation is almost the same as in the organizational setting behaviour in the business industry. Apart from that, teacher empowerment can also be seen as an indirect weapon that can be used to combat teacher alienation and segregation in their profession.

Teacher empowerment can be achieved in schools with teachers entering into a process of personal and institutional change that will lead to the transformation of both the structure of schools within which they work in and their relationships toward their colleagues and their students (Short & Greer, 1997). These will provide the teachers with ongoing opportunities to develop a critical awareness of their own lives and experiences, of the meaning and impact of their teaching and their students' learning experiences in schools. In order to achieve fully the positive outcomes of teacher empowerment, teachers should always be in the centre of any change or implementation and their voice and participation should be accounted.

However, in reality it is sad that not all teachers are given this empowerment chance in schools. According to Romanish (1991) teachers have always been subjected to a steady stream of accountability initiatives and strings of school reforms but their position has always been one best characterized as obedient, acquiescent and passive and there were no involvement in the reforms of whatsoever. They have been cowed into this stance by the incredible power differentials between themselves and the forces that levy each generation of

reform. In other words, teachers have not been in a position to determine the direction of the educational undertaking even though they are the most important people who should determine the critical decision makings in schools for their students.

1.2 Study Context

Empowerment is viewed as an individualistic approach to the individual and also a certain society in an organization. Malaysia with its heterogeneous society with different races (Malay, Chinese and Indians) has a collectivist culture like any other part of Asia and South East Asian Countries. On the other hand, most of the studies on teacher empowerment have been done mainly in the west. The instruments were also developed by the western researchers and they were being measured on the local teachers with a western background. Hence, this particular study that has been done in Malaysia is in the context of a different culture in a developing country.

Furthermore, a closer look at the literatures on empowerment, we can see that it is predominantly western oriented and concerned on how to optimize employees' relationship with their organization to improve its efficiency. Most of the writings often lose sight of a broader societal concern for the context where these management approaches are applied. We have to be concerned about certain preferential features, practices and constructs that form a specific system, which differs from similar systems in other national socio-cultural and organizational contexts. Therefore, this study will evaluate if the school reform being made by the Ministry of Education by adopting the decentralization of decision making and teacher empowerment concept from the west contributed to a positive outcome for the teachers in the country.

1.3 The Importance of the Topic

The Ministry of Education in Malaysia has been emphasizing decentralization of decision making and also teacher empowerment as part of their school reform agenda since 1992. Steps were taken for this school reform such as sending future principals to participate in leadership programs, teachers were given opportunities for further studies and schools were upgraded for the reason of boosting up and elevating the teaching profession image in the country. Teachers are given more choices and freedom to decide on their own and they are not tied down to the conservative bureaucracy type of educational organization. This has been described by the Ministry in 1992 regarding decentralization and teacher empowerment as part of the education reform in Malaysia.

Therefore this study is important in the sense that it will show if the teachers in Malaysia are truly empowered in their profession through the steps that were taken in the school reforms. This study also seeks the answer if there is a relationship between teacher empowerment and teacher outcomes such as satisfaction and commitment of the teachers to their schools and profession through their perception of empowerment. Therefore, teachers, principals and also school administrators can have a better understanding on teacher empowerment and further steps can be taken to improve the current situation of teacher empowerment.

Teachers matter the most to the teaching and learning process of the younger generations in the country. That is a fact and therefore, this study is important because it emphasized the importance of teachers as professionals in schools and at the same time making teacher understand of their own need as professionals taking charge of their own lives. As Fraser and Conley (1994) stated in their book, teachers have more and more chores in school and it becomes more gigantic each day particularly in schools where teachers were burdened with more work and extra responsibilities. As demands on teachers multiplied, support from parents and social agencies have declined. New teachers and experienced teachers' number one goal in school is to educate students successfully. For teachers to achieve this goal, the educational system must view teachers and students as internal customers. Teachers educate students and this happens in classrooms, not in superintendents' or principals' offices. Central office administrators must look downstream to principals and serve them, instead of viewing principals as their servants. In turn, principals must view teachers as customers, and determine how they can best help teachers do the job of teaching.

Besides that, only empowered teachers will empower their students in the teaching and learning processes and this will eventually create better creativity outcomes for the students. Indirectly, it means better student performance and higher productivity in schools too. For example according to Clune and White (1988) with empowerment of teachers in the school, will also mean that they will be increased of teacher's job satisfaction and even their commitment and a sense of collegiality that will improve the pedagogical quality and eventually student performance will also benefit. Through authentic pedagogy where students are seen as active learners will motivate them to take charge and control of their own learning. This of course will produce good and healthy environment for students to learn in a creative way. Therefore, this study will also indirectly contribute to performance of the students in Malaysia.

1.4 Purpose of the Research

This study is done to explore the relationship of teacher empowerment, teacher commitment and their satisfaction towards their teaching profession. The main purpose of this study is to examine whether or not teachers' perceptions of their dimension of empowerment in the governmental schools are related to how satisfied and committed they are to their jobs.

Apart from that, this study will also explore if the teachers in Malaysia, after the decentralization of decision making and teacher empowerment as part of the education reform in Malaysia (as was mentioned by the Ministry of Education in 1992) truly perceive that they have some sort of empowerment in their profession. It examines if the teachers' and school characteristics effect their perceptions towards empowerment according to the six teacher empowerment subscales. Hence, this study evaluates whether or not from all the steps and emphasized taken on teacher empowerment have been fully successful on their mission of boosting up empowerment of teachers in the schools.

Finally, the results of the study will contribute to the Ministry of Education in Malaysia with their restructuring program (involving teacher empowerment as part of the reform), the principals in secondary schools with their current leadership styles, and teachers in Malaysia as teaching professionals to evaluate further their current situation in the Malaysian school system. Through the evaluation on all sides of the parties involved with the school system, it is hoped that it will contribute directly to the teacher effectiveness in Malaysia.

1.5 Research questions

There are four research questions being generated for this particular study on teacher empowerment in secondary schools in Malaysia. These questions are:

- After the School Reform in 1992, what is the level of empowerment among the secondary school teachers in Malaysia on the following empowerment subscales: decision making, professional growth, status, self-efficacy, autonomy, and impact?
- Is there a difference in the level of empowerment for the six empowerment subscales among the secondary school teachers based on the following teacher and school characteristics: school location, gender, age groups, race, education level, experience and years in schools, and post of teachers?
- Is there a relation between teacher empowerment and performance namely the commitment and satisfaction of the teachers in Malaysia?
- Which dimension of teacher empowerment level related to how committed and satisfied the teachers were to their jobs?

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