

Understanding language teacher leadership from the learners' perspective

What this research was about and why it is important

Teacher leadership has been widely discussed in general education but has just started to receive attention in the field of second/foreign language teaching. Surprisingly, the majority of teacher leadership studies have focused more on the administrative and management aspects than what happens in classrooms. The purpose of this study was to look at leadership through the eyes of language learners to better understand what language teacher leadership entails because they are the ones who are able to experience firsthand what it means to be around a great teacher leader. The researchers collected data from 20 Korean university students, all of whom were studying English, in guided interviews that asked them to share the most important practices and characteristics of teacher leaders. The results show that language teacher leadership is more than a teacher having good classroom practices. Rather, it is something that is the result of a combination of a teacher's practices, their personal characteristics, how they handle themselves around students, and ultimately how students view them.

What the researchers did

- The researchers interviewed 20 Korean undergraduate English language learners from 3 universities in Korea one-on-one.
- The researchers transcribed each of the interviews.
- The researchers looked for similarities in students' interview responses in regard to what language teacher leadership entails and categorized them.

What the researchers found

- Learners gave a lot of attention to teachers' personal attributes and teachers' ability to inspire, motivate, and engage learners in the learning process.
- For students it seems that leadership has less to do teachers' ability to meet learning objectives, and more to do with their ability to create positive relationships and foster interpersonal and intellectual development.
- According to students, a good language teacher leader helps students to develop positive feelings toward their learning, motivates them to develop their L2, and positively contributes towards their overall personal development.

Things to consider

- Language teacher leadership cannot be given a one-size-fits-all definition since views of leadership can differ from person to person.
- Language teacher leadership goes beyond just teaching practices and should be viewed as something which is the result of the combination of a teacher's actions and/ or traits displayed in relation to students.
- Language teacher leadership is dynamic; meaning that what students see as leadership can differ from time to time and situation to situation. In other words, the same leadership trait at one point in time may be seen as a non-leadership trait in others.
- Students recognize the differences between good teachers and good teachers who are also good leaders.

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