A STUDY OF ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES OF TEACHERS IN A SELECTED NO. 2 BASIC EDUCATION HIGH SCHOOL IN MYANMAR

Mary Jacqueline¹
Kanog-on Rungrojngarmcharoen²

Abstract: This is a study of academic leadership capabilities perceived by teachers in a selected No.2 Basic Education High School in Myanmar. 45 teachers participated in this school. This study is aimed at determining the expectations from the current academic leadership capabilities demonstrated by the teachers in a selected school. This study is a descriptive study and a survey questionnaire based. To study academic leadership capabilities, this research mainly focuses on three interlocked core elements: personal, interpersonal and cognitive capabilities. The findings show that there were significant academic leadership capabilities that were expected from the teachers, such as maintaining a good work/life balance, keeping things in perspective and being bound by a school’s code of ethics. In contrast, the least significant ones were having an ability to engage their peers in analyzing and using information to strengthen instructors, working constructively with people who are resisters or are over-enthusiastic and willing to take a hard decision. On the other hand, the academic leadership capabilities that the teachers believed that they had were having energy, passion, enthusiasm for learning and teaching, maintaining a good work/life balance and keeping things in perspective, and being bound by a school’s code of ethics while the least ones were willing to take a hard decision, having ability to serve as a mentor for novice teachers, and understanding the curriculum of the subjects that they teach and use them in planning instruction and assessment. Nevertheless, there remain some interesting findings on differences between expected qualities and current academic leadership capabilities practiced by the teachers. In personal capabilities, the highest different level between expected and current personal capabilities was having energy while the least ones were willing to take a hard decision which differences level is at .98. In interpersonal capabilities, the highest differences between expected and current interpersonal capabilities were having ability to serve as a mentor for novice teachers. The different level was at 1.22. About cognitive capabilities, the highest difference between expected and current capabilities was learning from experiences. The different level was at 1.78. While teachers’ expectation was too high on these capabilities, the capabilities that they perceived currently were the least ones. Taking into account these interesting differences between expected and current academic leadership capabilities perceived by the teachers, a school leader should pay close attention of how to bridge the gap. This study provides fruitful solutions to improve teachers’ leadership capabilities. This study could also be useful for deans, administrators, department heads, principles and head masters who could help enhance academic leadership capabilities of their teachers.

Keywords: Personal, Interpersonal, Cognitive Capability, Academic Leadership, Teacher Leadership, No. 2 Basic Education High School, Myanmar.

Introduction

In the 21st century, leadership capabilities are inevitably crucial for any future leader who meets intense challenges and wishes to lead effectively. In an education circle, academic leaders need helpful and flourishing practices, not just in familiar contexts, but in unfamiliar, complex and dynamic circumstances as well. The incredible growth of a country depends significantly on the role of the teachers, since the quality of the nation’s manpower depends on education.

Academic leaders do not refer only to principals, presidents, head teachers, superintendents and deans, but also school teachers including their leadership capabilities. Rowley (1997) reminds that academic leadership is unquestionably a central component in striving for excellence and should not be viewed as the sole preserve of senior managers. The future of academic institutions depends on the development of effective leadership skills at all levels of the institution (p78).

It means that academic leadership is very important for every position in academic institution. It is not only concerned with senior management position. In this research, the researcher mainly discusses leadership capabilities perceived by teachers because they are students’ first role models, facilitators, mentors, teachers, coaches in the 21st century education (Fry E., Ketteridge S. & Marshall S., 1999). So their academic capabilities are so crucial that teachers have to develop and improve their capabilities in order to enable effective teaching and learning.

Research Objectives

There are two research objectives

1) What are the expected academic leadership capabilities perceived by teachers in a selected No.2 BEHS in Myanmar?

¹ M.Ed. Candidate in Educational Administration, Graduate School of Education, Assumption University, Thailand kayahmalay83@gmail.com
² Ph.D., Lecturer, Master of Education in Educational Administration, Graduate School of Education, Assumption University, Thailand. drkanogon@gmail.com
2) What are the current academic leadership capabilities perceived by teachers in a selected No.2 BEHS in Myanmar?

Review of Literature

Defining of academic Leadership

Academic leadership literally relates to professors, deans, heads of department and chair person in majority. However, Rowley (1997, p78) defined that academic leadership is unquestionably a central component in striving for excellence and should not be viewed as the sole preserve of senior managers. The future of academic institutions depends on the development of effective leadership skills at all levels of the institution. Marshall et al. (2000) defined that all academics are considered to be academic leaders as they are assumed to be at the forefront of their discipline and active in the definition of future directions and strategies within their academic program (p2). Cowan & Heywood (2001) stated that “leadership is the transformation of expertise and vision into actions that are judged effective by the led” (p16). Such a definition inevitably requires the role holder to use a wide range of both cognitive and affective skills. Gmelch & Wolverton (2002) explained that “academic leadership is the act of building a community of scholars to set direction and achieve common purpose through the empowerment of faculty and staff” (p3). Ramsden (1998, p161) stated that a good academic leader:

- Know when and how to compromise
- Manage resources
- Question methods
- Have planning skills and a sense of direction
- Acknowledge good work
- Learn from mistakes

Moreover, Ramsden (1998) noted that academic leaders help people to grow and survive in a constructive and adaptive change while all leaders just produce change. According to Barnett and Coate (2005) described that the need for academic leaders is to engage colleagues, not only in an issue of teaching and learning, but also in curriculum matters like a preparation to play the long game. Moreover, they added that academic leadership is the art of imagination: imagination of conception (of curriculum), imagination of communication and imagination of engagement (p161-2).

Debowski and Blake (2004) also described that teaching leadership in academic content is:

- to support organizational outcomes by aligning with goals and values
- to encourage all members to participate by collaborating and supporting
- to give feedback, mentorship and reflective practice in an environment of trust
- to be effective management of teaching, planning and decision making by clearly explaining all the members about their role
- to pay respect of the diversity of the group

- to have opportunities of sharing knowledge and expertise by being a mentor
- to identify problems, solutions and emerging concerns by reviewing

In the discussion of Cindy Harrison and Joellen Killion (2007), on the roles of teacher leaders in academic leadership, teachers exhibit in multiple ways because they are assumed or assigned a wide range of roles to support school and student success formally or informally. They have to play a role as a resources provider, instructional specialist, curriculum specialist, classroom supporter, learning facilitator, mentor, school leader, data coach, and catalyst for change and learner.

By playing a variety of roles, teachers can find ways to lead that fit their talents and interest. The roles they play in the academic content can shape the culture of their school, improve student learning, as well as influence the practice among their peers.

But there are some differences from academic leadership in other contexts. Marshall et al. (2001) stated that academics are reluctant to be subject to authority. This is compounded by the fact that some academic disciplines require academics to act as individuals, leading their own fields in new directions. Balancing this are traditional notions of collegiality which, presuming a collaborative style of working, do not support the idea of being led or requiring academic leadership (p7).

Moreover, Sathye (2004, p5) discussed that academic leadership poses problems that are distinctly different from leadership in business or government agencies. Private organizations are guided solely by considerations of maximizing shareholder value. Moreover, he emphasized on teaching and learning that “academic leaders need to stay close to teaching, learning, research and scholarship to bring out the best among academics. Issues of academic freedom are of great importance and relevance in this context”.

Distinctions between academic leadership and leadership in other contexts were conveyed comparatively in the existing research which is beyond the general points made in the quotes above. Disciplinary, pedagogical and institutional or sectorial expertise would be required according to this assumption but the fact is relatively unexamined. One of the possibilities is that the particular knowledge may not be required or otherwise, that it may be inadequate.

Academic leadership capabilities

Scott et al. (2008) concluded in their study that capability is the point of talent; gift or capacity requires producing lively result and distributing uniqueness under tough, indecisive, continually changing human and industrial situations. Having this plane of talent and capacity is essential to function effectively with others to attain continuous enhancement and originality.

There are some requirements of capabilities which are the possession of attributes such as being able to work productively, tranquilly, influentially and deftly with
Teacher Roles in Academic Leadership

Williams-Boyd (2002) stated in his study, teachers are at the heart of school change, student success, and educational leadership. It means that they can influence others through their creativity, commitment, and dynamic energy. They can also implement new instructional strategies that reflect a deep understanding of the diversity of student needs and talent. Nowadays, teachers can seek great opportunities to exercise their professional talents, leadership capabilities and professional skills beyond their single classroom. Those talent, capabilities and skills are limited within their classroom.

However, schools have understood the width of teacher-leader talent (William-Boyd, 2002). They started to provide opportunities for teacher to participate in a variety of leadership role. These opportunities are

- To give a chance to comprise of parents, teachers, and administrator
- To give a chance to assist in making curricular and program decisions
- To give a chance to be chair person or coordinator or member of the school’s leadership council or district discipline committee
- To give a chance to represent the faculty on issues of curriculum and instruction and
- To give a chance to be staff developer, team leader, curriculum specialist, conference speaker, and policy participant and so on.

In a less structured format, teachers are considered as leaders because of their expertise, wisdom, support, or willingness to engage in a critical dialogue and to reflect, enhancing growth of the school. Often, they used to be respected by their colleagues, students, parent, and committee members because they are used to emerge in faculty meetings, in content area meetings, or especially when there is a crisis in school. Teacher-leaders have the ability to build their role based upon the trust of colleagues and student by using the relationship, even though they do not have position power.

Teacher Capability in Myanmar

Myanmar is principally a Buddhist country. Most of the teaching philosophies and teaching methods are dominated by Buddhism and Confucianism. Tin (2007, p5) stated that “teachers have traditionally been regarded as one of the ‘five gems’ and measured on the same plane as the Buddha (who himself was a teacher), the Scriptures, monks and parents”.

Teachers are paid respect and devotion by students because of the influence of religious teaching and culture. They assume the role of substituted parents in school. The relationship between teacher and student is strict as same as that of the military and the monasteries. The commands or orders of a teacher are almost never questioned or challenged. Traditionally, Myanmar people are not used to raising any question in any classroom even though they do not much clear or understand. They are not much very familiar with this system at any level. It means that neither primary education nor middle education nor higher education even if in the higher education system, they are used to obeying to their teacher or instructor and follow their instructions whether they are right or wrong. Teacher is one of the most influential people on the learning of students (Tin, 2004).

However, the teacher in reality has life-influencing effects on students not only inside but also outside of the classroom. For instance, most of Myanmar students after high school often took advice from their teacher to choose their career. Moreover, Tin (2004) stated that many individuals who have succeeded in life always attribute their success to one or more of their teachers, who are remembered with much respect, affection and gratitude. Teachers take up a unique and influential role in Myanmar society and have the potential to act as agents of social change. (p5)
Basic Education in Myanmar

In a basic education sub-sector, a lower primary level takes three years, upper primary level which takes two years; lower secondary level takes four years and upper secondary level takes only two years. Ministry of Education in Higher Education, there is 156 institutions and universities. Only 64 institutions are under control of the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2004). The rest of the 92 institutions are under other 11 ministries.

In Myanmar, basic education council, basic education curriculum, syllabus and textbook committee, and teacher education supervisory committee are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of This Study

Method

Population
The population of this research was teachers of a selected No.2 BEHS in Myanmar. The researcher included all the 50 teachers in this school as the targeted population of this study.

Instrumentation
The questionnaire was based on an adopted academic leadership capabilities framework of Scott et al., (2008). The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part of this questionnaire was personal information of teachers. It consisted of categorized questions to collect information about the selected personal information (demographic) variables. The structure of the personal information questionnaire is 1) Sex (2 Categories) 2) Age (5 Categories) 3) Education Background (6 Categories) 4) Teaching Grade Level (4 Categories) 5) Work Experience (5 Categories)

The second part of this questionnaire contained three sections to ascertain current and expected academic leadership capabilities perceived by teachers of a selected No.2 BEHS in Myanmar: personal capabilities, interpersonal and cognitive capabilities. The whole questionnaire contained totally about 44 items. To determine personal capabilities (15 items), to find out interpersonal capabilities (11 items) and to verify Cognitive (or) Cognitive capabilities, (18 items) were involved in this second part questionnaire. These key factors were adopted from the academic leadership capability of Scott et al., (2008). The items were calculated to determine the mean and standard deviation based on the following criteria according to Likert scale. Likert scale is a method of ascribing quantitative value to qualitative data, to make it amenable to statistical analysis. It has usually five potential choices. According to (Likert, Roslow, & Murpehy (1934), there are:

- Mean score (1) 4.51-5.00 = very high
- Mean score (2) 3.51-4.50 = high
- Mean score (3) 2.51-3.50 = moderate
- Mean score (4) 1.51-2.50 = low
- Mean score (5) 1.00-1.50 = very low

Procedure
Descriptive statistical analysis was undertaken for both objectives through means and standard deviation of questions. For questionnaire, a statistical package was utilized to analyze the data collected. In April, 50 sets of questionnaire were prepared for distribution in a selected No. 2 BEHS in Myanmar. The questionnaire was hand-delivered to teachers in a selected school in Myanmar. 45 set of the questionnaires (90% of the total launched questionnaires) returned. The researcher was informed by head master in the selected school that some teachers were on advance teacher training, some were on holiday and some took leave.

Finding

Personal Information
The result of descriptive statistic revealed that, with regard to gender, all of respondents were female. In terms of percentage, they all were 100% female respondents. With regard to age, it shows that most of the respondents are at the age of between 36 to 45 years (40%) and above 46 years (40%). With regard to education background, most respondents completed Bachelor degree in Education program (B.Ed) which constituted about (35.6%) of the total respondents. With regard to teaching grade, most respondents completed Bachelor degree in Education program (B.Ed) which constituted about
(35.6%) of the total respondents. According to the work experience, most of the participants have work experience more than 16 years (71.1%).

**Expected Academic Leadership Capabilities perceived by teachers**

**Expected personal capabilities**
The responses in the expected personal capabilities, the highest expectations of the respondents are maintaining a good work/life balance and keeping things in perspective (mean of 4.73) and being bound by a school’s code of ethics (mean of 4.73). The second highest expectation is on having energy, passion and enthusiasm for learning and teaching (4.69). The following expectations are on willing to learn from the mistakes (4.67), understanding their strengths and weaknesses very well (4.67), being confident to take risks (4.60), handling menial tasks when needed (4.58), and persevering when things do not work out as anticipated (4.53) respectively. The total mean of expected personal capabilities is 4.53 which mean that teachers in this school’s expectation in personal capabilities are very high.

**Expected interpersonal capabilities**
For the expected interpersonal capabilities in table 16, the highest expectation of the respondents is on working productively with staff and other key players from a wide range of backgrounds (mean of 4.67). The second highest expectations are on listening to different points of view before coming to a decision (4.62) and being transparent and honest in dealing with others (4.62). The following expectations are on giving and receiving constructive feedback to/from work colleagues and others (4.56) and motivating others to behave in a positive manner (4.56). The total mean of expected interpersonal capabilities is 4.47 which mean that teachers in this school’s expectation in interpersonal capabilities are high.

**Expected cognitive capabilities**
For the expected cognitive capabilities (ECC) in table 17, the highest expectation of the respondents is on learning from experience (mean of 4.71). The second highest expectations are on using previous experience to figure out what is going on (4.64) and setting priorities for their daily work (4.60). The following expectation is having a clear justified and achievable direction in their area of responsibility (4.51). The total mean of expected cognitive capabilities is 4.38 which mean that teachers in this school’s expectation in cognitive capabilities are very high. The overall mean of the expected academic leadership capabilities perceived by the respondents is 4.46 which mean that respondents’ expectation is high.

**Current personal capabilities**
The responses in the current personal capabilities, the highest current personal capability of the respondents is on having energy, passion and enthusiasm for learning and teaching (mean of 4.22). The second highest current personal capability is on maintaining a good work/life balance and keeping things in perspective (4.31) and being bound by a school’s code of ethics (4.36). The following current personal capabilities are on handling menial tasks when needed (4.27), being determined to achieve the best outcome possible (4.20), being confident to take risks (4.20). The total mean of current personal capabilities is 3.98 which can interpret that their current personal capabilities are high.

**Current interpersonal capabilities**
For the current interpersonal capabilities (CIC) in table 19, the highest current interpersonal capability of the respondents is on listening to different points of view before coming to a decision (mean of 4.02). The second highest current interpersonal capabilities are on giving and receiving constructive feedback to/from work colleagues and others (3.98), working productively with students from a wide range of backgrounds (3.96) and being transparent and honest in dealing with others (3.98). The following current interpersonal capabilities are on giving and receiving constructive feedback to/from work colleagues and others (3.96) and being transparent and honest in dealing with others (3.96). The total mean of current interpersonal capabilities is 3.72 which mean that respondent’s current interpersonal capability is also high.

**Current cognitive capabilities**
For the current cognitive capabilities (CCC) in table 20, the highest current cognitive capability of the respondents is on learning from experience (mean of 4.27). The second highest current cognitive capability is setting priorities for their daily work (3.96). The third highest current cognitive capabilities are on giving and receiving constructive feedback to/from work colleagues and others (3.89) and being transparent and honest in dealing with others (3.84). The following current cognitive capabilities are on giving and receiving constructive feedback to/from work colleagues and others (3.84) and being transparent and honest in dealing with others (3.84). The total current cognitive capabilities are 3.46 which interprets that their current cognitive capabilities are moderate. The overall mean of the current academic leadership capabilities perceived by the respondents is 3.73 which mean that the current academic leadership capabilities perceived by teacher in this school is moderate.

**Differences between Expected and Current Personal Leadership Capabilities**
The highest differences between expected and current personal capabilities are being willing to take a hard decision and understanding their strength and weakness
very well are the highest differences between expected and current personal capabilities. Different level is at .98 and .93.

**Differences between Expected and Current Interpersonal Leadership Capabilities**
Among the differences between expected and current interpersonal capabilities, the highest differences are having ability to serve as a mentor for novice teachers, it’s different level is at 1.22, being willing to contribute positively when they work in a team, its different level is .87, and being willing to support their colleagues with care in order for team to develop and grow, its different level is at .82.

**Differences between Expected and Current Cognitive Leadership Capabilities**
Among the differences between expected and current cognitive capabilities, the highest differences are learning from experience, understanding the curriculum of the subject that they teach and use it in planning instruction and assessment and having an ability to lead school such as a school improvement team. The different level is 1.78, 1.40 and 1.27.

**Discussion**
According to the research findings, the most expected personal capabilities perceived by teachers were maintaining a good work/life balance, keeping things in perspective, being bound by a school’s code of ethics, on having energy, passion and enthusiasm for learning and teaching. The findings of maintaining a good work/life balance were supported by Williams-Boyd (2002)’s discussion. He discussed that the purpose of education is to establish common understanding, defining, and living quality and for shaping and achieving a progressive future for the individual and the nation. The facts showed the importance of maintaining a good work/life balance.

Moreover, the findings on keeping in perspective agreed to West-Burnham & O’Sullivan (1998). They explained that an academic leader must have a vision, an awareness of the importance of recognition because the capability of academic leader must be proven and internalized to get things done, to make things happen and to bring outcomes which are in line with the vision and moral purpose. The facts on having energy, passion and enthusiasm for learning and teaching were supported by Barnett and Coate (2005)’s research findings. In their literature, teaching and learning are the art of imagination: imagination of curriculum, imagination of communication and imagination engagement in the need of academic leadership. These above findings were agreed to Williams-Boyd (2002), Burnham & O’Sullivan (1998) and Barnett and Coate (2005)’s findings.

The current personal capabilities that the teacher perceived they had the least were willingness to take a hard decision, taking responsibility for program activities and outcome, and understanding their strengths and weaknesses very well. These were in agreement with Cindy Harrison and Joellen Killion (2007)’s findings. They discussed that if teachers cannot assume or be assigned to play in multiple ways to support school or student success formally and informally, they can’t find ways to lead that fit their talents and interest. The Cindy Harrison and Joellen Killion (2007) pointed out that if teachers have full responsibilities to support school, to lead school and to assess student success formally and formally, it will automatically solve the problem of the teacher perceived they had the least capabilities.

The most expected interpersonal capabilities perceived by teachers were on working productively with staff and other key players from a wide range of backgrounds, on listening to different points of view before coming to a decision, being transparent and honest in dealing with others, relying on networks of colleagues to solve key workplace problems, giving and receiving constructive feedback to/from work colleagues and others and motivating others to behave in a positive manner. Barnett and coate (2005) stated that academic leaders must engage colleagues, staff and students, not only in the subject of teaching and learning, but also in curriculum matters like a preparation to play a long game. Moreover, Debowski and Blake (2004) discussed that teaching leadership was to support organizational outcomes, to encourage all members to participate, to give feedback, mentorship and reflective practice, to be effective management of teaching, planning, and decision making, to pay respect of the diversity group, to have opportunities of sharing knowledge, and to identify problems, solutions and emerging concerns by reviewing. The findings of the most expected interpersonal capabilities perceived by teachers were supported by Barnett and Coate (2005) and Debowski and Blake (2004).

The current interpersonal capabilities of teachers perceived they had the least were having ability to serve as a mentor for novice teachers, working constructively with people who are resistors or are over-enthusiastic and motivating others to behave in a positive manner. The whole education system in Myanmar is under the supervision of Ministry of Education such as teacher education supervisory committee MOE (2004), and instability of nation situation especially in boarder area Tin (2004). Due to the facts, teachers have less opportunity to serve as a mentor for novice teachers and working constructively with people, and less motivation to behave in a positive manner. But Williams-Boyd (2002) stated that academic leadership started to replace a top-down approach with a community oriented approach. These findings were also supported by MOE (2004), Tin (2004) and Williams-Boyd (2002) respectively.

The most expected cognitive capabilities perceived by teachers were learning from experience. These findings were supported by Ramsden (1998). He found that learning from mistakes was the most important thing to be a good academic leader. ACEL (2012) discussed that the important ace of learning for leadership capability
leadership talents are also key development priority for academic leaders. And also considering these findings, administrators, head teachers or principals know exactly what kinds of leadership development program or training are required to enhance for teachers’ capabilities. In interpersonal capabilities, the highest difference between expected and current interpersonal capability was having ability to serve as a mentor for novice teachers. The different level was at 1.22. As teachers, while they are expecting too much on this capability, they currently perceived it as the least one they had. It can be assumed that they don’t have enough ability to be a mentor or a leader for novice teachers. According to previous research of Debowski & Blake (2004) and Harrison and Killon (2007), they literally stated that there were many researches pointing out how much mentorship was significant in either academic content or teacher leadership. This assures to some extent that teaching and leadership capabilities are more vital than interpersonal capabilities. Based on this finding, school leaders should be well aware of the importance of facilitating their teachers to enhance their capabilities to become better teachers.

About cognitive capabilities, the highest difference between expected and current capabilities was learning from experiences. Different point level was at 1.78. While teachers’ expectation was too high in this capability, the current capability teachers demonstrated was the least in a selected school. Learning was also the most significant capability in developing academic content. ACEL (2012) described the importance of learning for leadership capabilities. Learn to lead by self, learn to lead by others and learn to lead by organization. Moreover, Scott et al. (2008, p102) recommended in their paper, every institution needs to develop a learning organizational culture. In addition, they pointed out that “leaders are seeking opportunities to learn from others and share experiences in informal rather than formal ways”. They all found out how much learning is important in previous study.

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