

Democratic School Leadership and Personnel Self-Efficacy: A Correlational Study towards a Management Framework

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Abstract: *This quantitative study investigated democratic school leadership and self-efficacy of teaching and non-teaching personnel in a selected university in China. In this study, democratic school leadership was assessed as a construct of holistic meaning, transforming dialogue, power sharing, and holistic well-being. On the other hand, self-efficacy was treated as a composite of occupational self-efficacy, social self-efficacy and emotional self-efficacy. The study revealed that democratic school leadership is at a moderate level. It also showed that the self-efficacy of the teaching and non-teaching personnel is also at a moderate level. The study also determined whether there was a significant difference in the assessments of democratic school leadership and self-efficacy between the teaching and non-teaching personnel. Correlational test between democratic leadership and self-efficacy was also done. As output of the study, a management framework anchored on democratic leadership was developed.*

Keywords: *Democratic School Leadership; Personnel Self-Efficacy; Management Framework*

1. Introduction and Research Significance

1.1. Introduction

Quality education is a continuing quest and school administrators are at the forefront of this endeavor. They have to steer both the teaching and non-teaching personnel to be productive and effective towards the goals of the school.

How to do it is a matter of leadership style. One of the leadership styles that they may embrace is democratic leadership. It is characterized by the following domains: holistic meaning, power sharing, transforming dialogue, and holistic well-being. In schools where democratic approaches are embraced, the school community engages to work collectively in the decision making, implementation or monitoring processes with a sense of ownership (Kilicoglu, 2018)^[1]. This kind of leadership is often viewed as one of the most effective leadership styles in education (McDonald, 2021)^[2].

Aside from leadership, the teaching and non-teaching personnel on their own has an important personal resource for productivity and effectiveness in their self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief one has in their abilities and competencies. It determines how individuals think and feel about themselves and has an impact on our thoughts, emotions, actions, and motivation. It is also one's ability to manage to solve difficult problems, deal efficiently with unexpected events, remain calm when facing difficulties, and find several solutions to a particular problem (Miller, 2019)^[3]. Without authentic self-efficacy, school employees will find it difficult to attain goals, complete tasks and overcome challenges in the work place. It is an important asset than skill, knowledge, or even experience (Khalique & Singh, 2019)^[4].

Studying school leadership is important because it is tied up to the performance of the school in relation to its goals. This is the reason why school leadership is constantly investigated by researchers around the world. Even self-efficacy is continuously studied because like school leadership, it is not a static entity (Wilde & Hsu, 2019)^[5]. Self-efficacy varies from time to time as work experiences in the school vary. This constant need to study school leadership and self-efficacy led the researcher to investigate democratic leadership and self-efficacy in particular in a selected higher educational institution (HEI) in China.

1.2. Research Significance

The result of this study has implications on the management of the school and may expectedly benefit the following:

School Administrators. The result of the study will provide insight on the extent of democratic leadership demonstrated by school administrator. It will also inform the administrators about the self-efficacy of their personnel which is an important resource of effectiveness and productivity. The possible association between democratic leadership and self-efficacy can provide the administrators a concrete basis how to move forward with their school leadership.

School Personnel. Awareness of the level of self-efficacy can be the outright benefit of teachers and non-teaching personnel from the study. This can lead to their conscious effort to improve their self-efficacy in some ways. The result of the study may also compel administrators to lean, if not to fully embrace, democratic leadership. This kind of leadership will favor the teachers and non-teaching personnel because it gives them voice in the affairs concerning the school.

Human Resource Development. The human resource development (HRD) office is primarily tasked to monitor the well-being of the school's personnel in relation to the school operations. Given the established association between self-efficacy and work performance, the result of the study can provide the HRD needed information on how to keep the school personnel productive and effective. The result of the study may also provide the HRD rationale to train their administrators in democratic leadership.

Students. In the long run, all the improvements regarding school leadership and self-efficacy that maybe derived from the result of the study will trickle down to the students. Students will learn more in a school that is operating smoothly because of good leadership of the administrators and the high self-efficacy the teachers.

Scope and Delimitation. This study involved the teaching and non-teaching personnel in Shaoyang University during the SY 2021-2022. With the total population of 766 for the teaching and 330 for non-teaching personnel, the study involved 256 teaching personnel and 178 non-teaching personnel. This study primarily determined the extent of democratic leadership in a school according to teaching and non-teaching personnel in terms of holistic meaning, power sharing, transforming dialogue, and holistic well-being. It also determined the level of self-efficacy at work among the teaching and non-teaching personnel in terms of occupational self-efficacy, social self-efficacy, and emotional self-efficacy. The assessed democratic leadership and self-efficacy were correlated. In determining the correlation, only the composite level of democratic leadership and self-efficacy were compared. No correlational test was run on the individual domains of democratic leadership and self-efficacy.

The study also looked into the challenges met by school administrators related to democratic leadership. For this purpose, interviews were conducted with selected administrators who have at least five years of experience in their positions. The data from the interview were thematically analyzed to provide an organized quantitative presentation of the problems and challenges.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study utilized the quantitative-correlative research design. This was done to assess the extent of democratic leadership in schools and school personnel's self-efficacy at work by describing them in numerical values based on a particular setting and running suitable statistical measurements using these values. The analysis in the study utilized mathematical or computation techniques to make observations and come up with evidences regarding the association between democratic leadership and self-efficacy.

2.2. Research Locale and Research Participants

The respondents of the study were the faculty members and non-teaching personnel at Shaoyang University in Hunan Province, China. The decision to conduct the study in one university only was heavily influenced by the continuing health restrictions in Hunan.

2.3. Sampling Method

The study used random sampling. In Shaoyang University, there are 766 faculty members and 330 non-teaching personnel. Based from SPSS computation, the minimum sample needed for the study is 256 for faculty members and 178 for non-teaching personnel. For the interview, six school administrators were purposively selected as participants. They should have at least five years of administrative experience in the school.

2.4. Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher first sought the approval of Shaoyang University to conduct the study. Once the approval was given, the researcher coordinated with the human resource office for the list of employees. From the list, the respondents for the study were randomly drawn. Prior to administering the survey, the respondents' permission was sought also. The purpose of the study were explained to them through a letter. Data gathering proceeded once the respondents' have given their consents. For the interview, the invited participants were oriented as well on the nature and purpose of the study through formal letters. Prior to the interview, the participants permissions were sought through the use of interview consent forms. The interview were conducted through virtual platforms and were recorded.

2.5. Research Instrument

This research utilized a self-made questionnaire designed to measure the extent of democratic leadership and self-efficacy. The questionnaire for democratic leadership featured school administrators' broad practices in interacting with school personnel organized under the domains of holistic meaning, power sharing, transforming dialogue and holistic well-being. For the self-efficacy questionnaire, items were organized under the subconstructs of occupational, social and emotional self-efficacies at workplace. The said questionnaire was validated by five experts in educational leadership. After validation, the questionnaire was pilot tested to forty teachers and forty non-teaching personnel in other schools. Its reliability was determined by Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha for the democratic leadership questionnaire was 0.81 and 0.82 for the self-efficacy. The reliability of both questionnaires was acceptable because it is within the range of 0.70-0.90; the basis for accepting reliability results.

2.6. Data Analysis Procedure

The researcher used different statistical tools in providing a systematic way of organizing the analyzed data to answer the question depicted in the study. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. SPSS is a Windows based program that can be used to perform data entry and analysis to create tables and graphs. It can perform highly complex data manipulation and analysis with simple instructions. The means of the variables in the study were interpreted using the following scale.

| Range | Interpretation |
|------------|----------------|
| 3.51 -4.00 | High |
| 2.51 -3.50 | Moderate |
| 1.51- 1.50 | Low |
| 1.00 -1.50 | Very low |

To determine the significant difference in the democratic leadership and self-efficacy assessments between teaching and non-teaching personnel, t-test for independent means was used. To determine whether a correlation exist between democratic management and self-efficacy, Pearson r was utilized. Here, the actual means of the variables and not the interpreted levels were used in the computation. The correlation was evaluated at 0.05 level of significance.

The data from the interview was analyzed through a simple abstraction. The emergent concepts from the abstraction were used to organize the qualitative data. In this way, a trend related to the data gathered was seen clearly.

3. Results, Interpretation and Discussions

3.1. Results

This study assessed the democratic leadership and the self-efficacy of the school's teaching and non-teaching personnel. It also analyzed differences in the assessments of the teaching and non-teaching personnel. And determined the possible correlation between democratic leadership and self-efficacy. It revealed the following:

(1)The respondents assessed democratic leadership in terms of holistic meaning, power sharing, transforming dialogue, and holistic well-being. The democratic leadership at school is at moderate level as assessed by the teaching and non-teaching personnel.

(2)There is a significant difference in the assessment of democratic leadership. The significantly higher rating given by the teaching personnel can be explained in the context of the following insights from different studies: democratic leadership centered on Chinese students' having a voice in their learning, conception of democratic practice is intertwined with teaching stories, democratic education is all about promoting students' all-around development. Since it is the teaching personnel who are more engaged with students, they were able to experience more the democratic practices compared to the non-teaching personnel. This is the reason why the teaching personnel's assessment of democratic leadership is significantly higher than the non-teaching personnel.

(3)The teaching and non-teaching personnel also assessed their self-efficacy at work. The assessments were done on each of the three domains of self-efficacy at work which are occupational self-efficacy, social self-efficacy and emotional self-efficacy. The self-efficacy of the teaching and non-teaching personnel is at moderate level.

(4)There is no significant relationship between the assessment of democratic leadership and self-efficacy for them. This finding is in contrast with the related observation of DeMarco (2018)^[6] which says that distributed leadership is significantly related to teacher self-efficacy. It does not conform with Arbabi & Mehdi-zhad's (2016)^[7] related findings that collaborative leadership is associated to self-efficacy. The nonconformity of the findings of the study to the results of the mentioned related studies maybe due to the difference in constructs of the variables themselves. While this study involves some aspects of distributed and collaborative leaderships, the whole construct of democratic leadership was totally different. The same is true with the variable self-efficacy. It could be that the mentioned related studies simply used the general measures of self-efficacy while in this study it is a composite of occupational, social and emotional self-efficacies.

(5)Managing consensus towards decision making is a problem encountered by administrators about democratic leadership. The analysis of the interviews with six school administrators regarding their democratic leadership experiences yielded three themes: bringing about, changing course, and confronting drawbacks. The school administrators said that they have experienced democratic school leadership, they have adequate understanding of it and they are actually practicing it. The interviews have shown that democratic leadership is actually emerging in Chinese schools as claimed by Yu (2020)^[8]. The interviews also support the assessment of democratic leadership by the teaching and non-teaching personnel that it is evident but at a moderate level. Furthermore, the interviews revealed only minimal challenge to the adoption of democratic leadership in the part of its administration. The school itself is embracing it already. What has been identified as "drawbacks" of democratic leadership may simply be unfamiliarity of administrators to manage differing opinions leading to consensus.

3.2. Research Output

The assessments of democratic leadership by the teaching and non-teaching personnel have shown that it is at a moderate level and the actual democratic practices are still mostly confined around teacher and student engagements. On the part of the administrators, democratic leadership is now considered as the way to go. To hasten up the full practice democratic leadership in schools, it must be incorporated in the different stages of school management. A framework for school management anchored on democratic leadership is being presented.

The management framework was designed based on the context of educational improvement. The main reason for the introduction of democratic leadership in Chinese schools was educational improvement. Managing for improvement is a cycle which usually involves the general steps of plan, do, check, and act (PCDA). The educational improvement cycle was composed of steps related to PCDA.

These steps are: goal setting, planning, implementation, evaluation, and management review. The whole management cycle is then tied up to the concept of democratic school leadership.

Goal setting should incorporate the practices under holistic well-being which promotes collaboration and participation in formulating the institutional goals. More importantly, a statement policy institutionalizing democratic management as the means of goal realization should be formulated.

Planning should be collaborative and participative as well. There must be a genuine consultation among the different levels of the school community. Authorities and responsibilities over the different goals should be distributed among the stakeholders. Power sharing should be recognized already at the planning stage and documented in every action plan.

The implementation stage should display in full the power sharing, transforming dialogue and holistic well-being aspect of democratic leadership. This stage should become an opportunity for the different school community members to develop as they participate in implementing various action plans. This stage should also see the empowerment of the different school personnel as they take on responsibilities delegated to them. Furthermore, the promotion of harmony and sense of belongingness should take a center stage during the implementation.

In the evaluation and management review, fewer people will understandably get involved as this is a practice based on expertise. This is where transparency becomes most important though. Management should provide access to information regarding findings related to the evaluation and the subsequent management decisions made. While high level decisions still rests on the top management, there must be a platform where the school personnel, and the students can actually communicate their opinions related to evaluation and management review.

4. Summary of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1. Summary of Findings

This study assessed the democratic leadership in a selected school and the self-efficacy of its teaching and non-teaching personnel. It also analyzed differences in the assessments of the teaching and non-teaching personnel. This study also determined the possible correlation between democratic leadership and self-efficacy. The study revealed the following:

- (1) The democratic leadership at school is at moderate level as assessed by the teaching and non-teaching personnel.
- (2) There is a significant difference in the assessment of democratic leadership between the teaching and non-teaching personnel.
- (3) The self-efficacy of the teaching and non-teaching personnel is at moderate level.
- (4) There is no significant difference in the self-efficacy assessment between teaching and non-teaching personnel.
- (5) There is no significant relationship between the assessment of democratic leadership and self-efficacy for both teaching and non-teaching personnel.
- (6) Managing consensus towards decision making is a problem encountered by administrators with regards to democratic leadership.
- (7) A framework of school management anchored on democratic leadership was designed.

4.2. Conclusions

Based on the quantitative findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn.

- (1) Democratic school leadership is becoming evident.
- (2) Democratic leadership is more evident to teaching personnel compared to non-teaching personnel.
- (3) The self-efficacy of the school personnel is moderate.
- (4) The teaching and non-teaching personnel have the same self-efficacies.
- (5) Democratic leadership has nothing to do with self-efficacy.

4.3. Recommendations

In the light of the conclusions drawn in the study, the following are recommended:

- (1) The school should continue improving its democratic leadership. The assessments in the study show that there is still much room for its improvement.
- (2) Administrators in non-academic offices and the non-teaching personnel should be oriented more on democratic leadership. This will enhance democratic practices in the school.
- (3) Democratic principles should be incorporated in school policies to hasten its institutionalization.
- (4) Further studies be conducted on self-efficacy leading to conceptualization of culturally and democratic oriented constructs.

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