

Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of How Teachers Lead in the Classroom

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Abstract

This study examines the perception of teacher leadership among preservice teachers and how this affects their understanding and teaching practice in an educational setting. The findings of this study indicate that preservice teachers construct their concepts of teacher leadership by observing and actively participating in the practice of teaching with their clinical teachers that include a myriad of tasks necessary for effective teaching. Initially, many preservice teachers do not realize that successful teachers are also strong leaders, and that teacher leadership exists in at different levels depending on the setting in the teaching profession. Preservice teachers' responsibility towards teacher leadership varies. It appears that the need for reflective practice to merge their ideals of leadership with the realities is the greatest obligation they have. The level of teacher leadership education given to preservice teachers and society's level of value for teacher leadership determine the barriers or inhibitors to preservice teachers' development of teacher leadership competencies.

Keywords: Preservice teachers; Teacher leadership; Inservice Teachers; Teacher Perceptions

INTRODUCTION

Preservice teachers are often judged by the fact that they are new to pedagogical competencies. As such, most of their training focuses on these technical skills (Van Driel & Berry, 2010). This includes knowledge about learners, developing learners, and teaching the curriculum through complex patterns of interaction. These activities ultimately culminate in the fact that preservice teachers become change agents who influence students and help them learn content they are taught (Beudert, 2010). Furthermore, significant preservice teachers' learning, and growth occurs in clinical classroom under the supervision of inservice teachers. This experience in the clinical classroom is invaluable in that it helps preservice teachers to learn, practice, and contribute to the advancement of their students (Hamilton & Margot, 2019).

Leadership is woven into the entire practice of teaching (Muijs & Harris, 2003; Retallick & Fink, 2010; York-Barr & Duke, 2016). This comes naturally with the role teachers play in teaching content to their students through interactions within their classrooms. Inservice teachers set an example for the next generation of teachers while engaging with various stakeholders in the community to define their leadership practices in educational settings and society.

However, a gap exists between preparing teacher trainees for the inherent leadership roles that come with teaching and the realities of influencing others within the parameters of the competing demands of teacher leadership. There is no universal model or approach that can be used to transmit leadership skills this to preservice teachers. Where do leadership skills develop for preservice teachers and what are their perceptions of it?

The common trend involves a responsive process where an instructor or mentor builds on the knowledge and perspectives of preservice teachers to prepare them for leadership in the classroom (Acton, 2022). In this process, the preservice teachers are interviewed, and their inputs are taken so that their strengths can be consolidated while their weaknesses are ameliorated with the view of steering them to develop leadership skills necessary for effective teaching (Scales & Rogers, 2017). This involves diagnosis and understanding of the experience levels of preservice teachers to help steer them in ways that make them better leaders.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study is to analyze critically the nature of teacher leadership and how it is developed among preservice teachers. In attaining this end, the following objectives will be pursued:

1. An analysis of how preservice teachers conceptualize 'teacher leadership'.
2. A review of the roles, responsibilities, and tasks of preservice teachers as leaders, and
3. An evaluation of the facilitators and inhibitors of preservice teachers as leaders in the classroom setting.

A review of the literature on preservice teachers' perceptions of how teachers lead in the classroom and in the profession of education will be conducted.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A thorough review of literature of research studies that focuses on the perceptions of teacher leadership among preservice teachers was conducted. Included were what the identifying common patterns of thought are among preservice teachers on what leadership is and how it is discharged by teachers in the classroom. A review was also conducted that examined the roles, responsibilities, and tasks of teachers as leaders as perceived by preservice teachers. Finally, preservice teachers' perceptions on what facilitates and inhibits teacher leadership being enacted in the classroom.

Preservice Teachers' Conceptualization of Teacher Leadership

This section involved a review of how preservice teachers think about the role of the teacher in moving people from one point to another. This drew on several studies conducted on the subject to ascertain the way preservice teachers understand their future obligations in leading students and the community at large.

York-Barr and Duke (2016) identified that the standard expectations of leadership among teachers revolve around the need to take charge and influence others at (1) the instructional level and (2) the organizational level of practice. This comes with (a) leadership characteristics, (b) leadership conditions, and (c) leadership challenges that require the development of competencies in leading and influencing learners (York-Barr & Duke, 2016).

The traditional notion of teacher leadership also involves disciplining, standardization of efficient study patterns, and competitive preparations for examinations and other activities (Saban, Kocbeker, & Saban, 2007). In this context, students are presented as some kind of "raw material" that the teacher, as a leader, must "manufacture" into a superior and more efficient person fit for society at large. These are mental models that different people interpret and internalize in their notion of viewing the teacher as a leader (Saban, Kocbeker, & Saban, 2007).

Preservice teachers generally view "teaching" and "leading" as two separate spheres (Rogers & Scales, 2013, p. 17). In this context, they view "teaching" as a performance or outcome-based activity steeped in the technicalities of pedagogy. On the other hand, may view "leadership" in teaching as a responsive activity that a teacher must engage in to achieve specific ends (Rogers & Scales, 2013). Thus, many teacher candidates think of leadership as the removal of obstacles to achieve the essential targets of teaching and developing competent students for the next stages of their studies.

A study identified that many preservice teachers think of "leadership" in the field of teaching in the context of the "ideal principal" (Oplatka, 2010). This is premised on the fact that the principal is often viewed as the epitome of educational leadership who must be emulated. Such ideal leaders appear to preservice teachers as "open-minded, attentive, responsive, trustworthy, emotional and supportive ... [as well as] ... strong persons who maintain discipline in schools" (Oplatka, 2010, p. 37).

In effect, many preservice teachers look up to the principal as an ideal candidate for leadership, and this becomes the standard for many to model their perception of leadership and to lead as they go through their careers. Sheppard, Wolfinger, and Talbert (2021) studied a series of graduate-level preservice teachers to ascertain what they believed the scope of leadership was. They identified that their view of leadership was to address socioeconomic inequalities through educational change. Many viewed the barriers to teacher education as problems with administrators and policymakers. Therefore, a more proactive view of teacher leadership requires engaging these authorities.

Another comprehensive view of teacher leadership identified that preservice teachers viewed it across a continuum that varied along the lines of technical skills relating to communication and organization (Scales & Rogers, 2017). This was infused with a wide array of subjective views and perceptions on leadership that varied across the personalities and competencies of individual preservice teachers. This involved a wide range of awareness levels, with many showing they had no concrete view of what the teacher actually needed to do to lead appropriately.

Social justice remains a major driver of leadership in steering organizations in our time. This is because it helps people to construe their level of obligation and mobilize action to change situations for the best. Hence, this model was tested in research by Ali (2015), who interviewed five preservice teachers on their conception of leadership obligations that pertain to teachers in practice. The findings indicated that three main themes are outlets for the infusion of contingent leadership driven by social justice, namely:

1. Critical pedagogy
2. Transformative learning and

3. The nature of taking action in social justice (Ali, 2015).

This is steeped in the fact that preservice teachers view change as the principal element of leading, and it is shaped by recent conceptions of work and activities based on critical perspectives. To this end, social justice is seen as a vehicle through which the teacher influences people and trains learners to understand and appreciate the elements of the changing world.

Critical pedagogy is based on the fact that we live in a generation where most information and data are generated by technology. As such, the essence of education is to train people on how to analyze this information and apply it (Sheppard, Wolfinger, & Talbert, 2021). Such paths of thinking guide today's preservice teachers, who believe the essence of education is to help learners to think thoroughly about situations and form perspectives that are constructive and promote fairer and better societies.

Transformative learning is viewed by many preservice teachers as a means of the teacher going beyond the rules to empower or uplift learners (Ali, 2015). This involves an attempt to tie the development and advancement of the teacher with that of their students to help them achieve greater results and become better people – this is besides the standards and expectations set by principals and curriculums, which dictate what must be studied at any given point in time.

Furthermore, social justice is seen by many preservice teachers in our times as an end in itself that must be pursued by all (Ali, 2015). While this has been criticized by some conservative thinkers as an ideological leadership process, many preservice teachers of our time were educated to accept social justice as an essential way of changing the world for the better (Sheppard, Wolfinger, & Talbert, 2021). Therefore, they believe this must also be infused into the curriculum and leadership processes of schools to ensure that learners grow and develop appropriately.

The key findings of these perceptions on teacher leadership among preservice teachers are summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Summary of the Perceptions of Teacher Leadership among Preservice Teachers

Authors	Topic	Key Findings
York-Barr and Duke (2016)	Generally accepted view of teacher leadership	-Instructional leadership -Organizational leadership Driven by -Leadership characteristics -Leadership conditions & -Leadership challenges
Saban et al. (2007).	Traditional notions of teacher leadership	- Students are the raw material, and the teacher “manufactures” them into competent citizens -Disciplining -Standardization of efficient teaching practices -Preparation of learners for competitive exams
Rogers & Scales (2013)	Preservice teachers’ view about how the teacher leaders	-Many view “teaching” and “leading” as separate spheres -They think teaching is an outcome-based activity based on pedagogy -They construe leadership as a contingent problem-solving activity
Oplatka, 2010	How do preservice teachers imagine the ideal leader in teaching	-Many think the “ideal principal” is the epitome of teacher leadership. -Roles of the “ideal leader” includes open-mindedness, attentiveness, responsiveness, emotional intelligence, trustworthiness, and supportiveness -Other roles include being a strong person who maintains discipline
Sheppard, Wolfinger & Talbert, 2021	Interview on graduate-level preservice teachers’ view of teacher leadership.	-Many viewed teacher leaderships as a quest to address socioeconomic inequalities through proactive activities. -They identified that administrators and policymakers were the cause of most problems in the teaching field.
Scales & Rogers, 2017	An analysis of the level of awareness of leadership among preservice teachers.	-There was a broad framework of awareness relating to leadership that varied across the subjective experiences and exposures of each individual candidate teacher. -Many had no practical insight into their actual responsibility and what was expected of them.
Ali (2015)	How do preservice teachers view the integration of social justice into teacher leadership	-Three main fields are seen as outlets for the discharge of social justice among preservice teachers -Critical pedagogy -Transformative learning and -Taking social justice action

These pointers hint at how a large section of teachers construe leadership. The first two points by York-Barr and Duke (2016), as well as Saban et al. (2007), show the traditional view of teacher leadership. However, this has changed significantly to one that is based on proactive engagement. This proactive view of seeking change through social justice and other forms of critical perspective is common among preservice teachers.

Roles, Responsibilities & Tasks of Preservice Teachers as Leaders

At the most basic level, preservice teachers are called to lead with their existing level of knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Bond, 2011). They do not need to wait till they have completed training and education. Thus, a contingent approach to teacher leadership is required of preservice teachers who are required to pursue service learning, reflection, and involvement to learn on the job (Bond, 2011).

Hence, it can be inferred that the role of the preservice teacher is required to work and pursue the greatest and best results within their sets of skills to meet the organizational and circumstantial needs expected of them. The standard for achieving this is through the state policy and standards, which for most years in the past two decades has been the "No Child Left Behind Act" (Ado, 2016). Based on this, the preservice teacher has an obligation to ensure that they follow the basic principles and rules necessary to work within the educational climate to uplift students and benefit students while steering away from challenges and issues.

Thus, the essence of teacher leadership is utilitarian and based on the achievement of optimal results while doing what is necessary within the rules to bring out the best. Thus, the preservice teacher has a duty to apply the knowledge they have to operate within the existing rules and standards to achieve optimal results within the circumstances they are operating in (Ado, 2016).

The preservice teacher has to streamline their competencies across five key areas, including:

1. Streamline their ideals with reality
2. Emotions and assumptions
3. Transition to new leadership roles
4. Transitions as transformative experiences and
5. Tunnel vision (McDonough & Brandenburg, 2012).

What this means is that the preservice leader has to streamline their ideals with the realities to achieve the results necessary. This way, the preservice teacher will be able to pursue goals and ends that are actually useful to learners and the institution they serve. Also, the preservice teacher has a responsibility of being flexible enough to adjust their emotions and change assumptions to meet the essential goals. Through that, they can gradually transition to leadership roles and learn in ways that will enable them to apply their visions in the best forms for the achievement of core organizational results and goals.

Preservice teachers, therefore, have to grow into their professional identity as they learn new things in order to work with the organization and tune their abilities to the requirements at any given point in time (McDonough & Brandenburg, 2012). This comes with a requirement for preservice teachers to pursue a high level of reflection on circumstances they might find themselves in (Wang, Ko, & Qian, 2022).

Reflection involves careful thinking and analysis of circumstances and situations among future teachers so that they can internalize the best practices and discard assumptions that are not applicable. This creates a series of obligations that are premised on the need to stay flexible and open-minded to help the preservice teacher internalize information and ideas about how best to pursue projects.

Quinn, Haggard & Ford (2006), on the other hand, identify that the preservice teacher is responsible for three key tasks that relate to:

1. Student learning
2. Site-based effectiveness and
3. Renewal of the profession (Quinn, Haggard, & Ford, 2006).

The preservice teacher is primarily disposed to provide education to students, and this is in itself a leadership role. In doing this, they have to be willing to contribute to others in the school setting to ensure effectiveness in operations and activities. Aside from that, the preservice teacher is a change agent who needs to contribute to better ways of doing things and enhance the way teaching services are delivered.

Other scholars view the duties and responsibilities of the preservice teacher in a conflicted context. These thinkers argue that they are “novices with expertise” (Aitkin, 2008, p. 127). As such, their leadership should be programmed into the spaces they operate within. Hence, some argue that the preservice teacher must be considered as a “learner” who needs guidance to build their leadership acumen and competencies. Others argue that this is not possible because the preservice teacher has a wide array of activities they must undertake, thereby prompting a high level of autonomy powered by personal reflection to formulate their own unique conception of teacher leadership and develop it through practice (Aitkin, 2008).

Education policy remains a vital aspect that shapes the school environment. There is a question about the role of the preservice teacher in engaging in such policy formulations. Obviously, the preservice teacher has little to no connection with the formulation of education policy. Bond(2) identifies that in the area of education policy advocacy, preservice teachers must be taught how to engage explicitly by their superiors (2016). This is because such advocacy requires tact and independent leadership skills that have some technicalities. As such, the preservice teacher needs to be oriented and prepared for such engagement (Bond(2), 2016). This is the best way the preservice teacher can develop a career strongly steeped in leadership competencies that are meaningful.

Educational policies are fast evolving to encompass unsupervised and increased performance requirements from teachers and schools (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2010). This is due to digression from the traditional mechanism of helping teachers develop a one-size-fits-all model of teaching and learning. As such, the preservice teacher's role is also broadened to include many different activities that cannot be taught or imposed. This gives the preservice teacher a higher level of autonomy and discretion, which requires self-education and self-development from the preservice teacher (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2010).

The findings of this section are summarized in Table 2 below:

Table 2: The Roles, Responsibilities & Tasks of the Preservice Teacher as a Leader

Authors	Topic	Key Findings
Bond, 2011	What is the preservice teacher required to do as a teacher leader though they have no experience?	-They are called upon to pursue tasks, and they must discharge them with their current level of leadership skills -However, they have to use the best practices to achieve the required results to steer and deliver teaching services as required.
Ado, 2016	What is the legal obligation of the preservice teacher	-Work within the existing educational laws to deliver the best outcomes. -The No Child Left Behind policy requires teachers to uplift learners and benefit them while reducing the risks and issues.
McDnough & Brandenburg 2012	The preservice teacher's responsibility in growing into the organizational frame	-Flexibility in conforming ideals to realities and being ready to change their fundamental assumptions where needed -Transition gradually into a leadership role before introducing transformational leadership styles -Tunneling visions into reality as they progress in their teaching careers
Quinn, Haggard & Ford, 2006	Traditional duty of the preservice teacher	Identified in three components -Student learning -Site-based effectiveness and -Renewal of the profession
Aitkin, 2008	The preservice teacher is construed as a "novice with expertise", so how can they be prepared into leaders?	-Some argue they should be considered learners who will be given care and guidance. -Others argue they must be given autonomy to work with the reflective practice to attain their own distinct approach to leadership.
Bond (2), 2016	Ascertainment of the role of the preservice teacher in policy advocacy	-Educational policy advocacy requires tact and technicalities. -The preservice teacher must be taught about the basics of advocacy. -Once the basics are taught, the preservice teacher will grow to develop their own competencies in advocacy
Mangin & Stoelinga, 2010	What is the role of the preservice teacher in today's era of autonomy and high performance?	-The preservice teacher is required to develop themselves -The preservice teacher must be mindful of the needs and move towards attaining them.

These pointers identify that there is a multidimensional requirement and expectation placed on the preservice teacher. On the one hand, the preservice teacher must be trained and

supervised closely. On the other, modern requirements demand a high level of autonomy. All in all, the reflective abilities of the preservice teacher are important in getting them to internalize new skills and competencies expected of them.

Facilitators & Inhibitors of Preservice Teachers' Leadership Abilities in The Classroom

In the quest for actual functionality on the field, preservice teachers face various levels of circumstances that can either improve the development of their leadership abilities or hinder it. One of the main elements that affect candidate teachers' leadership abilities are:

1. Their self-confidence
2. Actual competency and
3. Students' behavior (Peters, 2012).

Peters argues that the level of confidence a teacher has affects their ability to influence others and steer them to a desired end (2012). However, in reality, the level of actual competencies they have plays a role in how well they will work with students on the field. Furthermore, the behavior of students and the ability of a teacher to manage this behavior appropriately affects their leadership ability and its development.

Educational equity is a major indicator of candidate teachers' development and leadership competency formation. Preservice teachers from minority backgrounds have various leadership support needs, which can only be achieved through educational equity (Jacobs, Beck, & Crowell, 2014). Thus, in a setting where a preservice teacher from a minority background is not given the proper orientation on leadership during their training and/or lacks support in leading during actual learning, the state of their leadership ability development will be affected in a commensurate manner.

Harris (2005) identifies that preservice teachers' leadership success is influenced by one primary factor – the way the training institute and school the preservice teacher works supports teacher leadership skill development. This is premised on the arrangements that are consciously made to support this. Hence, in a case where the school or training institution has no leadership development programs, a trainee teacher will lack such skills, and the reverse is true.

The nature of the accountability standards in preservice teachers' development and/or the schools they teach in plays a major role in developing their leadership abilities (Hoaglund, Birkenfeld, & Box, 2014). In settings where accountability standards exclude leadership competency development, trainee teachers tend to develop without these leadership abilities. The reverse is true for institutions where leadership is seen as an important element of teacher development and the teaching career at large.

Another angle of view of these facilitators and barriers is the level of value attached to teacher leadership in a given area – where these are undervalued or underutilized, and preservice teachers do not develop a sense of teacher leadership (Acton, 2022). This is backed by empirical evidence, which shows that a teaching jurisdiction where there is an informal focus on leadership as a vital aspect of teaching has a higher propensity to develop preservice teachers who value leadership. The reverse is found to be true in the study.

Incentivization and rewards for teacher leadership were also found to play a major role in prompting preservice teachers to pursue teacher leadership as an end (Muijs & Harris, 2003). When teacher leadership is portrayed as a beneficial approach for the improvement of the school environment and teachers are rewarded for it, preservice teachers are identified to link this to motivation and retention, thereby moving to accept it as important and vital (Muijs & Harris, 2003). The representation of teacher leadership in the emotions, politics, structure, and culture of the teaching environment affects preservice teachers significantly (Retallick & Fink, 2010).

Classroom management training, or the lack thereof, is seen by some researchers as the foundation of teacher leadership skill development (Freeman, Simonsen, & MacSuga-Gage, 2013). This is because the ability of a teacher to manage students in the classroom sets the tone for other related teaching processes that ultimately end with teacher leadership skill development. Thus, the extent to which a preservice teacher is oriented to manage classroom settings and circumstances leads to effective management that spans across different aspects of the preservice teacher's development.

Castro (2010) concluded from a study that cultural diversity is a major indicator of teachers' leadership abilities and their development in the classroom. This is because cultural management and diversity are fundamental in our modern times, and when a preservice teacher gets it right, they will be able to manage a wide array of leadership issues with ease.

Table 3: Facilitators and Barriers to Leadership Competency Development among Preservice Teachers

Authors	Topic	Key Findings
Peters, 2012	What are the main factors that affect preservice teachers' competency development	-Self-confidence -Actual competency -Behavior of students
Jacobs, Beck & Crowell, 2014	Educational equity and preservice teachers' leadership ability development.	-Preservice teachers of a minority background need more help and support -The level of educational equity in training and actual teaching by preservice teachers affects their ability to develop appropriate leadership competencies in teaching -The lack of such educational equity becomes a barrier to competency development among preservice teachers
Harris, 2005	What are the key factors that determine preservice teachers' leadership skill development	-The leadership development programs during training. -The development programs for preservice teachers in schools.

		-The lack of such programs leads to poor leadership development skills among trainee teachers.
Hoagland, Birkenfeld & Box 2014	Examination of the importance of leadership accountability standards in training preservice teachers	-Accountability standards premised on leadership plays a major role in preservice teacher leadership skill development -When the accountability standards focus on leadership, teachers develop this competency and build it -When the accountability standards do not include leadership, many preservice teachers have limited leadership ability.
Acton, 2022	The role of formal and informal values placed on teacher leadership in a jurisdiction	-Where a community values teacher leadership, they develop informal mechanisms of promoting it. -Where these informal mechanisms of promoting teacher leadership exist, preservice teachers are likely to be more tuned to teacher leadership – the reverse is true
Muijs and Harris (2003)	Examined the importance of incentivization and reward for teacher leadership and its impact on preservice teachers	-Preservice teachers are more likely to increase their quest for teacher leadership competencies if it is properly recognized and reward
Retallick & Fink, 2010	The key risks to teacher leadership development among preservice teachers	-The integration of teacher leadership in the social, emotional, political, and structural elements of teacher education is key.
Freeman, Simonsen, & MacSuga-Gage, 2013	A hypothesis testing the assertion that classroom management is the foundation of teacher training	-Findings indicate that proper classroom management is at the core of the development of teacher leadership skills among preservice teachers -The presence, or lack thereof, plays a role in the level of leadership skill development a preservice teacher can attain.
Castro, 2010	Cultural diversity as a foundation of preservice teachers' development of leadership skills	-Cultural diversity is key in all leadership endeavors in our time -When preservice teachers develop this competency, they facilitate their leadership acumen development

This section has shown that many of the leadership competencies develop among preservice teachers. Thus, the elements in the training of preservice teachers, as well as pointers relating

to their integration into the school environment or its norms, play a role in facilitating or inhibiting their leadership ability development. In relation to the actual development, the values of the community, classroom management skill development as well as diversity management competencies influence and affect the ability of preservice teachers to develop leadership abilities.

CONCLUSION

This research has identified that preservice teachers view teacher leadership in the context of the ideal principal, and this indicates that many believe it is about certain ideal qualities. Despite that, the view of teacher leadership is moving towards one where the teacher is seen as an agent of change who has to engage to ensure an ideal situation where all stakeholders can thrive.

Preservice teachers have a role of working within the existing rules and standards of the place and time to achieve the goals required of them. The biggest obligation of the preservice teacher is to develop a high level of reflectiveness to link their ideals with the realities and work with other stakeholders to achieve core goals and ends. Over time, they can develop their own unique perspectives on teacher leadership.

The main inhibitors and facilitators to preservice teachers' teacher leadership skills are the kind of training they are given, the extent to which the community values teacher leadership, and the leadership accountability standards placed on them. The extent to which these pointers are present effects and influence preservice teachers' leadership skill development.

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