



Title

Leadership in EFL: Time for Change?

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Bio

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Abstract:

There continues to be a large discrepancy between what EFL teachers teach in the classroom and what they learn outside of it, which in turn affects our learners' ability to study English. This paper takes a look at how this problem can be solved by increasing the roles of leaders in the field. The role of leaders is discussed, as is what these leaders and

teachers must do to improve the state of EFL teaching today in Asia. A specific example of the lack of credible leadership in the Japanese private language school system is outlined, as well as what needs to be changed to better suit the needs of Japanese EFL students.

Introduction and Purpose.

Leadership is an immensely ubiquitous task that requires people with great minds and even greater ambitions to achieve their goals. Every field must have leaders because those who are in a particular discipline constantly rely on leaders to direct them toward a goal that will enhance their work and objectives. The field of English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching is no different. There is an overwhelming need for leadership in the field, seeing as there are few great leaders who make palpable decisions for the immense amount of EFL teachers that exist throughout Asia. The amount of teachers is, however, disproportionate to the knowledge that exists. Many teachers are unaware of how to teach effectively and follow the research done by the leaders in the field.

It is vital that more teachers take the initiative and become leaders, because it is imperative for teachers and students alike to have a guided path to follow. A great disparity exists between the knowledge teachers have and the knowledge they should acquire in order to successfully educate students on how to effectively speak the English language. Many teachers merely wander aimlessly through their work with no dedication or purpose. The problem is rampant in many Asian settings where teachers are paid good salaries to teach, regardless of their experience or familiarity with the subject matter. Research has demonstrated that knowledge both of subject matter and of teaching and learning acquired in teacher education is strongly correlated with teacher performance in the classroom (Berry, 2001). Hence, it makes sense for teachers to have a sound knowledge of subject matter and the pedagogical implications of their teaching.

The leaders who currently exist in EFL are strong and make themselves known through their writings and research. The goal of these leaders is to assist teachers and give them a fuller understanding of the EFL field and the results of their work is manifested on the

students who gain the full benefits of new teaching methods, styles and materials in the classes they take. However, it seems the pervading problem is that teachers do not actively seek to read the materials generated by those in a position to write them, because they are unmotivated, or generally not interested in improving their teaching style. There is no incentive given to teachers to be knowledgeable of current ideas and teaching methods, and therefore, they merely use the same methods and beliefs throughout their careers. As a result, students suffer, due to a lack of innovation on the part of teachers and the schools who employ them.

Leadership affects everyone involved in EFL in dramatic ways. Supervisors, managers, teacher trainers, administrators, head teachers, teachers and students all need effective leaders to facilitate correct instruction and flow of ideas in the classroom. What happens at the leadership level needs to trickle down to the classroom and be reflected in the students who are attempting to gain a sound knowledge of how to communicate in English. However, there seems to be a communication breakdown somewhere between those in a leadership role and the common teacher in universities, junior and senior high schools, and private language schools. The only way this problem of lack of leadership can be solved is by changing the system from within and replacing the problems with tangible solutions. This paper will deal with these questions and problems and offer some solutions that can be applied to solve them.

Leadership skills

Some view leadership as the innate characteristics of the great men and women of history, others as the personal relationships between the individual and the group, whilst others still view it as the process of striving towards common goals and values. Other views of leadership consider aspects of behavior, whether desired and in control of the individual, or driven by a mass of forces in the environment. Leaders in the field of EFL must recognize these skills and strive to continuously evolve and be responsive to context, while working in close conjunction with colleagues, and adjusting their skills to fit the needs of others. The role of leaders is to involve people who have the skills to transform the thinking of

others and direct an organization or profession on its desired course. With the cooperation of others in a team, and those who are bound to be affected by the changes implemented by leaders, the tasks of the leaders are made much easier.

A person demonstrating strong leadership skills in education is one who takes the needs of teachers into consideration when formulating new ideas, activities and materials. A leader who is capable of doing these things will undoubtedly gain the attention and respect of his or her colleagues, who will be willing to work toward a common goal with them. A good leader finds ways to "compromise, cross-reference and find consistency and economy in their work" (Ur, 1988, p. 2). Further, a leader must assume that people can be changed; a tenet that includes teachers and students. A leader possessing the above skills will have the motivation and intensity required to build positive relationships with others and generate change among them: a change which allows teachers to see the need to endeavor to higher goals and ambitions.

One of the most salient qualities a leader must have is to have the courage to "swim upstream on behalf of their beliefs" (Goldberg, 2001, p. 757). This attribute applies to all leaders, and is definitely applicable to teachers, who must struggle to teach in a manner which best suits their students' needs, while following curriculum guidelines set out by administrators. However, teachers who are determined to make a difference in their field will find ways to follow their beliefs and implement new and inventive programs that benefit their students and help the overall advancement of the curriculum and teaching profession in general.

Teachers should strive to develop lessons which are learning-rich, varied and interesting in the main components of each lesson (Ur, 1992). They must also be able to respond to student needs by adjusting their strategies to fit the different learning styles that exist in all individuals. Abilities leaders possess and should instill in teachers include having a dynamic, enthusiastic style, high intrinsic motivation, authenticity, thoughtfulness, emotional integrity, accountability, and be capable of balancing inquiry and advocacy, as well as being able to lead by mandate (Larrivee, 2000; Goldberg, 2001). These are all

essential skills that leaders in EFL should own, pass down to teachers at all levels, and implement regularly so they can be employed in teaching, thus enabling students to reap the benefits of superior methods of instruction.

Educational leaders must have the inherent belief that what they are doing can actually help people. It is a worthwhile skill to realize that under all of the misgivings teachers may have about what they do there is a bedrock belief that what they are doing is good and important and eminently worthwhile (Goldberg, 2001). Not all teachers have to be revolutionaries, trying to change the whole system, but a long journey must start with a single step. The skills a leader possesses are invaluable to the entire field because they give teachers new observations and outlooks on how to cope in the classroom, which is sometimes an arduous task given the contradictory forces at play in any situation, such as differing learning needs and styles. So, the average teacher in a university, junior or senior high school or language school must adopt these skills to improve the situation in which they find themselves.

Leaders need to instill intrinsic motivation in their charges, whether they are teachers or students. Motivation has been proven a key component for teaching second languages successfully (Noels, Clement & Pelletier, 1999). Noels et al. further asserted that the manner in which teachers interrelate with students might be connected with the students' motivation. Hence, if teachers sustain high levels of vigor in the classroom, and provide appropriate information and feedback to learners, then the student is more likely to take an active part in their own learning. Sustaining interest in activities is an essential element of teaching, because learners who are bored find it hard to concentrate (Ur, 1988). Therefore, leaders have to impress on teachers and students the need for motivation both in the classroom and outside of it.

Leaders realize that the learning time for a foreign language in adults is longer than when learning a first language. As a result, learning time has to be organized for optimum efficiency. Programs of study must be organized so that the parts of the "total corpus of knowledge are presented one after the other for gradual, systematic acquisition" (Ur, 1988, p. 5). Conversely, learning a foreign language is similar to learning a first language,

because at first, it is incomprehensible to the listener, but eventually becomes recognizable, and the learner becomes conversant in the language. In order for an individual to successfully learn a foreign language, they must have conscious awareness of learning (Leow, 2001) and "notice" that it is happening (Schmidt, 1990, 1993). These are points that all teachers should be aware of and make use of in their research, materials, and subsequently, the techniques used in the classroom.

Leadership and Decision Making.

Leaders are needed to direct the discipline in the right direction because many teachers are unaware of what is necessary to become a good leader and teacher. These teachers are in need of advice and help in order to fully understand the pedagogic effects on students. Without capable decision makers, teachers and the state of teaching remain stagnant, with no new materials being produced, and no novel ideas and materials being brought to the fore.

Effective leadership involves the correct mix of good judgment and good decision making (Garcia & Stewart, 2000) along with successful dialogue that creates answers to problems. Dialogue is compulsory if effective decisions are to be made in any discipline. This dialogue must exist and run on a continuum from the leadership level down to the teacher. It is only through effective dialogue that decisions will be made which will affect the teaching methods and practices of everyone involved.

What is needed, and what is largely unrecognized by the majority of teachers, are people who can not only conceive of new ideas, but also implement them at a basic level, so all teachers can benefit from their work, which usually comes in the form of new teaching materials or publications. Decisions must be a shared responsibility, made by those who have a direct hand in teaching. Consequently, teachers at all levels must be given the opportunity to make the decisions that will affect their work. Rod Ellis and Penny Ur are good examples of leaders who constantly seek new ways to motivate teachers and provide new ideas for teachers to invigorate their teaching methods, activities and classes.

However, regardless of the amount of literature and activities produced by these people, the problem remains that the average teacher who works in a language school (and Japanese language schools, in particular) does not have access to these materials or publications. This lack of access may be simply because of little interest on the teachers' part, or because they are not provided the time and opportunity in their positions to seek new information. Therefore, decisions must be made by the teacher trainers, managers, and administrators in language schools to give teachers equal access and ample time to these materials, as they are sure to improve the overall level of teaching in such schools.

Leadership and Change

Change is inevitable in any organization or person. Change is important for all organizations because the world is constantly evolving. With change come certain rules that must be observed to successfully deal with that change. First, leaders who know change is inevitable must learn how to disperse power in an orderly, non-chaotic basis. This must be done at the leadership level and observed throughout the system, down to teachers at all ranks. Organizational learning is pivotal in providing teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to adapt to multiple changes (Palmer & Watkins, 2000). Learning among leaders and teachers is important, thus, change among the infrastructure of the teaching profession in an Asian setting is needed in order to better serve the students in our classes. Learning must not be left to chance, as it is the fundamental component of what teachers do.

A further rule of change is that it must always begin with the individual (Clark, 2001), and must begin by developing the leadership skills of everyone involved in an organized, intentional way (Clark, 2001). In a similar fashion, leaders in EFL must inspire change in the masses of teachers in order for them to be effective. In Japan, even the teachers who are in supervisory positions do not exemplify leadership skills. The majority of the time, their jobs involve too much for them to be concerned with directing change and making adjustments in the workplace. Some supervisors and head teachers feel that the exertion of

authority over others makes them a leader. However, true leaders strive to fully explain their ideas, plans, policies and strategies to others in meaningful and evocative ways. Leaders must generate change among supervisors, managers, administrators, head teachers and teachers by promoting the good it will do for institutions and students.

The private language school system in Japan

Similar to as in most Asian settings, the private language school system in Japan is first and foremost a business, with the impetus being on making a profit. Consequently, the more students a language school can recruit, the better. The upshot of this is a watering-down effect of teaching practices, which eventually affects the learners. Most language schools in Japan have a notorious reputation for providing quick, epigrammatic lessons. In order for students to benefit from such a system, they must purchase countless lessons and hope they learn something from them. The majority of the language schools in Japan specialize in providing students with short lessons (thirty to forty-five minutes in length) in which teachers use textbooks they have not been trained to use properly. In these schools, teachers are faced with too many lessons (up to eight a day), with little or no paid preparation time, resulting in poor lesson quality and poor student outcomes.

Nevertheless, private English language schools have become immensely popular in Japan, with schools appearing in all parts of the country. Due to their encounters with English in junior and senior high school, Japanese learners of EFL have undoubtedly had much exposure to English by the time they enter an English language school. The Japanese school system is designed to give students English language education from the beginning of junior high school until the end of high school. Essentially, this entails six years of English language education geared toward preparing students toward a university entrance examination which focuses on the grammatical aspect of English. There have been increasing debates within the country for English language junior high school and high school education to include a communicative element to it, and changes toward this goal are now starting to slowly creep into the system.

The objective of a private foreign language school in Japan is to offer instruction on how to communicate effectively in English. Private language schools in Japan attempt to teach language learners about the English language and the cultural elements that accompany it. However, many teachers in the private language system are not trained or capable to teach in a manner that will facilitate such learning. It is imperative that Japanese learners are conversant in the English language, are able to learn new knowledge structures and aptitudes, and are capable of utilizing correct grammar and the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). The problem overriding students' ability to learn is that student needs are supplanted by the need to earn a profit. The only way out of wasting not only teacher talent, but also student ability, is for teachers to attempt to change the system from within. Thus, a new generation of leaders is needed at the grassroots level: a level at which teachers can affect change within their own organizations.

Leadership: It's Future in EFL

The future of EFL depends on what has occurred in the past and what is currently happening in the field. There have been great advances made in teaching methods and styles in the past, and there continue to be new innovations which profoundly affect the profession. However, in order for the field to continue moving in the right direction, some changes need to be made that will allow teachers to perform their jobs more successfully and function within the system more smoothly. The private language school in Japan and the rest of Asia is one major form of providing English teaching services to the public, and is a system in dire need of change if the quality of education provided is to be improved.

In spite of their many failures, private language schools in Japan can be successful ventures if the right attitudes and methods are used in these organizations. The role of leaders in formulating and implementing policies that will affect everyone involved in language teaching is pivotal. Although it is understandable that private language schools are intent on making a profit, there can be compromise within the system. Teaching and learning do not have to be sacrificed for revenue. The needs of our learners should surely take precedence over all other factors. At the core of the problem and the solution are school

owners, administrators, supervisors and head teachers, who must make conscious decisions to alleviate the negative images and practices which take place on a daily basis throughout Japan.

If one or all of these important people make cognizant declarations that the system is in dire need of change from the grass-roots level, the rest are bound to listen. Leadership requires courageous decision-making and decisive actions. It is the task of teachers to themselves become leaders to initiate these actions. With collective and courageous decision-making processes in place, and each individual knowing his or her position in the field, it is possible to work towards common goals and ensure that the best possible education is provided to students. Teachers must enjoy teaching English, and should also take pride in their work, making every effort to constantly improve their approaches to teaching, as well as their attitudes towards it and their students.

Working towards a brighter future

In order to start solving the problems that exist in the language school system in Japan, there needs to be a concerted effort to attempt to make a difference. Teachers need to be made more aware of the ongoing changes in the field of EFL. This can be achieved through allowing and encouraging head teachers, managers, supervisors, administrators and teachers at all levels to attend the conferences and workshops that are held on a semi-regular basis. As it currently stands, there is very little representation from most language schools at these events, due to the cost of sending personnel to different cities within Japan.

As a result, most schools remain stagnant and are unaware of the new ideas, materials and methods that are constantly being produced. However, if substantial change is to take place, there must be some sacrifices made. Internal workshops held within a school may be helpful for beginner teachers, but do not provide enough information for all teachers to substantially gain from them. It is only through learning from the experts in the field can

everyone learn fruitfully, and eventually improve their teaching skills, with noticeable results seen in student behavior and performance in the classroom.

In any profession, an outlook to the future is imperative. EFL is no different, and in light of the drastic need for leaders and concrete action among them, the sooner the better. Clearly identifying expectations for teacher leadership roles and determining how educators will acquire the knowledge and skills needed to assume those roles successfully are critical steps in the continuous reform efforts to improve English language education. A true leader is one who has an implicit vision of the future and believes in shared decision making and power. This shared decision-making and power must be done with all of those willing to take charge of their situation and make a better future for themselves and the positions they are in.

A leader is not a person who stands by idly while others make the decisions, or worse, while the system breaks down in front of them. Leaders must undertake the action to move forward while preserving relationships. Teachers need to be aware of the need to constantly move forward in their profession. By doing so, there can be significant differences made in the field by adding onto the knowledge that already exists.

Making continuous improvement is an elemental part of transforming any profession, and will lead to innovation, new processes and fundamental change. Fundamental change is important for teachers to successfully adapt their teaching styles to the needs of their students and the ever-evolving state of the nature of teaching English. If continuous improvement is achieved, it will lead to genuine innovation. Planting the seeds of thought and observing these basic ideas will bring about the necessary changes. However, those who are in leadership positions must step up to the forefront and make their beliefs known to everyone, or else there will be no change for the better, and we will be forced to constantly live the mistakes of our past over and over again. Thus, we will not be able to improve our methods in the classroom.

Teacher leaders must possess the rhetoric of reform and the realities of practice and realize that their job and responsibility is to encourage their colleagues to change and to do things they would not ordinarily consider without the influence of a leader (Wasley, 1991). The problem lies therein. For teachers to have the intrinsic motivation to want to take charge and motivate their colleagues to do the same takes a lot of courage. It is difficult to stimulate people to do something they might not feel is worthwhile. However, those who have true vision are capable of doing so. Additionally, teachers who do not see themselves in leadership roles must be full participants in any discussion about leadership because without their cooperation, the roots of change and adjustment cannot be made. Therefore, trust must exist between those who exhibit leadership qualities and teachers who do not, so that frank discussions about the needs of students and institutions can be brought out into the open and dealt with in a forthright manner.

Leaders in EFL must also strive to invigorate others to take steps of their own to lead at their own level. A leaders' task is to create new leaders at all levels. With the appropriate leadership in place at all levels, leaders who understand the needs and wants of students and their colleagues in the field can create a system that works efficiently and appeases everyone involved. This can be achieved by instilling a disposition toward inquiry, which is an essential quality for all leaders to have. The ability to constantly question our approach to teaching is a pervasive trait that will help teachers fully understand the nature of the practice of teaching itself and their role within it.

Because of the increasing need of Asian people to learn and speak English, the nature of the curriculum and the quality of teachers must be constantly upgraded in order to stay current and improve on the methods used in the classroom. To ensure that this happens, the leaders in the field need to continually reevaluate the needs of teachers and the discipline in general. There is no cause too small or unworthy, no plan undeserving of consideration, and no idea so trivial that it should not be at least considered, if it has the needs of students and the field as a whole in mind. Pragmatic thinking is needed by leaders and teachers alike: thinking which allows for realistic solutions to the problems that exist.

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