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Abstract
This article, first, examines how Egyptian teachers and senior teachers (formal leaders) define leadership and whether the length of their teaching experience has an effect on their views. Second, it explores their perspectives on the relationship between teacher leadership and decision making. The research sample is a mixed group of 20 Egyptian teachers of English language, three of them are senior teachers. The length of their teaching experience varies from 2 to 13 years. The findings show that the group defines teacher leadership in terms of characteristics of leaders; styles of leadership and what teacher leaders do both inside and outside classroom. Almost all of them see a link between leadership and decision making. In general, length of experience does not seem to have a major impact on their views. This is a key finding because it raises questions about the Ministry of Education’s (MoE) selection of teachers for leadership responsibilities, which is based on the length of their teaching experience. The implications of these findings are examined in relation to the proposal of the MoE for decentralizing education in Egypt.

Keywords
decision making, length of teaching experience, relationship between teacher leadership and decision making, teacher leadership

Egyptian Education System
Education in Egypt is considered to be every individual’s right and therefore, at all state educational institutions, education is free. It is also compulsory during the first six years of primary
education, followed by three years in preparatory stage (NCERD, 2001). There is another three-year stage (secondary stage), which students have to take before they go to university. The education system in Egypt can be described as having two structures: the main stream (secular) and the religious stream of Al-Azhar. The Ministry of Education (MoE) is responsible for running the former while the Ministry of Al-Azhar Affairs takes responsibility for the latter. This structure is part of a bigger system characterized by its authoritarian and centralized policies in decision-making, top-down contact and leader–follower dependence (Mayfield, 1996; Kienle, 2001). However, centralization is not something new to Egypt.

**Roots of Centralization in Egypt**

The roots of centralization in Egypt go back to the pharaohs in ancient times, whose power was unlimited and which allowed little autonomy for the people (Mayfield, 1996). However, centralization is not limited to Egypt. In the USA, for example, there seems to be a tendency towards more centralization (Whitman, 1999). This rooted centralization in Egypt might reflect what is happening in modern Egyptian society. Apart from the Egyptian president, Mubarak, according to Mayfield, even the members of the regime who constantly seek centralization of power are in most cases powerless themselves. Mubarak’s central government is not very different from those of his predecessors Nasser and Sadat (Kienle, 2001). Managers and administrators in today’s Egypt may not be very different from the powerless members of these successive regimes. In general, they conform to the present centralized system, which may be the result of the social norms of respect and reliance that are manifest throughout Egyptian society (Mayfield, 1996). These social norms do not encourage, or even allow, people’s voices to be heard, which is likely to raise tension between the needs of individuals and those of the system in which they work. Jarrar and Massialas (1992) consider the communication between the MoE, which is at the top of the hierarchy, and other levels to be sufficiently inadequate for the bottom of the hierarchy properly implement MoE’s decisions. The system is criticized as being undemocratic since it is almost impossible for parents, students and teachers to get their voices heard (Gahin, 2001). How does one reform such a system?

**Educational Reform and the Shift from Centralization to Decentralization**

The major shortcoming of the education system in Egypt is its centralization, which has hindered attempts at reform (Jarrar and Massialas, 1992), this centralization is still very much evident, despite attempts at decentralization. However, there are some possible advantages of centralization (Whitman, 1999; Fitz and Lee, 2000; Southworth, 2000). It should be noted that the MoE is proposing a fractional elimination of centralization in its policies, which will allow parents, teachers and other interested parties to be engaged in this process (NCERD, 2001). This article argues that reforming education requires not only a shift from centralization to decentralization, but also a parallel shift from teacher followership to teacher leadership. Leadership may influence the process of educational reform. For example, top-down hierarchical leadership styles and centralized policies not only clash with traditions within teaching, they also contradict the nature of the teaching profession (Hart, 1995). Bottom-up leadership models, on the other hand, play a significant role in the process of developing schools (Murgatroyd and Reynolds, 1984). What must be examined, according to Fitz and Lee (2000), is the extent to which centralized policies produce pressure on
individuals and organizations, put restriction on innovation in classrooms and schools, and work against teachers’ professional autonomy. One suggestion is that a balance should be sought between the advantages and disadvantages of centralization, and that centralization may not be the only obstacle to reforming education in Egypt. In fact, it is argued that neither centralization nor decentralization will be a panacea for all education problems and that achieving a balance between them may be both advantageous and feasible (Devron, 2003). Therefore, this article argues for a parallel shift in teachers’ role from being followers to leaders in order to equip them to cope with the proposed partial decentralized educational system. The facilitation of this shift will require the application of bottom-up leadership models.

Ribbins (1999) describes the process of changing values in a given society as a political act, which might result in conflict. There are already two opposing trends represented by the central role of the MoE, despite the proposal of partial removal of centralization, and teachers’ lack of power. Egyptians in general, but particularly teachers, are already aware of their lack of power within the educational system and their inability to participate in the decision-making process (Mayfield, 1996). In order to facilitate this shift, teachers’ views about leadership and participation in decision making should be studied, which is one of the aims of this research. Most of previous studies on leadership in Egypt focus on principals and/or those who hold leadership positions, the lack of previous literature that considers teacher leadership from teachers’ perspectives illustrates how important it is that this area be studied. Also, teacher leadership is relatively an uncharted territory in the Egyptian literature, compared to the Western literature where this term is well established. This highlights the importance of studying this concept in a non-Western context.

**Conceptual Framework**

Most of the styles of leadership mentioned by Goddard (2003) revolve around leaders and create a distinction between leaders and followers. Although a couple of the styles on the list, collaborative and transformational leadership, might call for a loosening of the leader–follower division and encourage teacher participation, each of them seems to adopt a single perspective towards achieving this aim. They stress leaders’ roles and suggest how they may make use of their situations and/or their followers to achieve their aims. Top-down styles of leadership will impede the engagement of teachers in leadership (Harris and Muijs, 2003). Therefore, such theories are not likely to be helpful in changing teachers’ role from one of follower to leader. Hence, there is a need for theories that do not privilege the leadership of particular school members over others (Gronn, 2002). According to Harris and Muijs (2003), there is a shift towards more shared forms of leadership in schools. These forms of leadership, for example, distributive, participative and teacher leadership, place more emphasis on going beyond the traditional heroic styles of leadership and on appreciating the input of school members in leadership.

The principles of distributed and participative leadership shape how leadership is understood and defined in this article. This understanding of leadership takes a different standpoint from the traditional styles of leadership, which adopt a single perspective and overlook the contribution of school members (Harris and Muijs, 2003). Yet, the problem with distributed leadership is the assumption that not only is there a collective agreement among leaders and followers on school goal, but also on how they are understood (Martinez et al., 2005). The fact that the main focus of participative leadership is the collective decision making (Leithwood et al., 2003) might not always be welcome as not all teachers are willing to take leadership responsibilities and participate
in decision making (Hart, 1995). The research framework, therefore, shares some of the principles of distributed and participative leadership. It also acknowledges that:

1. Leadership is not about leaders’ position (Harris and Muijs, 2002), or the length of teaching/leading experience (Usher, 1993). Nor does it draw a distinction between leaders and followers (Gronn, 2002, 2003).
2. Leadership is neither bounded to certain situations/areas in schools nor detached from society (Shahin and Wright, 2004).
3. It encourages collaboration, sharing of authority and the collective participation in decision making (Leithwood et al., 2003; Mastrangelo et al., 2004).
4. It appreciates individuals’ autonomous professional role (Law and Glover, 2000), self-expression (Wasley, 1991) and morals (Fullan, 2001).
5. It creates an encouraging atmosphere (Sherrill, 1999; Fullan, 2001) for working, learning, participation and development (Anderson, 2002; Krovetz and Arriaza, 2006).

The reason for defining leadership in this way is to promote teachers’ sense of leadership while eliminating their powerlessness. This is likely to assist the shift towards a decentralized education system in Egypt. Teachers’ powerlessness and followership might be evident in the literature on leadership focuses in most cases on those who are in formal leadership positions, such as the school principal (Spillane et al., 2004; Van Vugt et al., in press). This article therefore focuses on teachers and their leadership in order to allow them to have their voices heard. Because the conceptual framework acknowledges that leadership should appreciate teachers’ autonomy and promote the values of self expression, it is essential that this is reflected in the research methodology and questions so that teachers and senior teachers define teacher leadership from their perspectives (see methodology and methods of data collection sections). The initial rationale behind this research was to examine how teachers and senior teachers understand their role and whether or not they should be engaged in leadership and decision making. This rationale was modified after reading the literature; it is noted that the relationship between teacher leadership and decision making is often described indirectly and it does not seem to highlight the type(s) of relationship(s) that might be found between the two. A question about studying this relationship was added because it is likely to create a better understanding of teachers’ roles and identify their potential for leadership and decision making.

**Teacher Leadership**

As mentioned above, the research framework shares some of the principles of distributed and participative leadership. Although distributed and teacher leadership seek to empower teachers, distributed leadership does not mean that everybody is a leader (Morrison, 2002) or even should be, but it simply argues for the opportunity for further democratic and collective leadership (Harris and Muijs, 2003). The focal idea of teacher leadership, conversely, according to Harris and Muijs (2003), concerns the capability and input of teachers and all school members in leadership. According to Lord and Miller (2000) there is a lack of a broad view of what teacher leadership means and how it works. When teachers become teacher leaders, they often think of leadership roles from a view that is distinct from that of formal leaders (Spillane et al., 2004). Teacher leadership has to do more with concepts of collaboration in comparison with the managerial focus of administrative forms of leadership (Urbanski and Nickolaou, 1997). In fact, collaboration is at the
centre of teacher leadership (Harris and Muijs, 2002). Yet, teachers do not always associate teacher leadership with collaboration or participation in leadership (Moore, 2001). Additionally, teacher leaders who work as full-time classroom teachers and others whose work is not based in classrooms define teacher leadership roles differently (Conley and Muncey, 1999). In this article, the concept of teacher leadership is studied from teachers’ and senior teachers’ perspectives. Teachers and senior teachers in Egypt teach in classrooms but the latter have a reduced teaching load, formal leadership responsibilities and they establish a liaison between their colleagues and the school administration.

Teacher Leadership: Why?

There is an expectation for teachers to develop professionally (Conley, 1993). Teacher leadership is an essential aspect in developing teachers’ professionalism; it has become synonymous for teachers’ professionalism (McCay et al., 2001). More importantly, it elevates teachers from being deliverers of service to leaders (Schlechty, 1990) and gives them more power in their profession (Gunter, 2003). Consequently, teachers need to know that teacher leadership is possible and that it can have a complementary role with other sources of leadership (Heller and Firestone, 1995). If they do not take leadership roles, educational outcomes, which educators aspire to, are unlikely to be achieved (Moore, 2001, Harris and Muijs, 2003).

Types of Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership can be split into two types, formal and informal. While formal teacher leadership practices, such as motivating other colleagues, are expressed by those who are positional leaders: senior teachers, subject department heads, and so on, informal teacher leadership practices include taking the initiative for making new suggestions and thoughts as well as communicating their experiences with others (Wasley, 1991, Law and Glover, 2000). In the current research, the participants are a mixed group of teachers and senior teachers. While the former might exercise informal leadership, senior teachers in Egypt are positional (formal) leaders who perform leadership practices as part of their job, such as supervising their colleagues, mentoring novice teachers, collaborating with teachers and attending senior teachers’ school meetings. These two types of teacher leadership can be combined and described in terms of what teacher leaders do.

Leaders and Teacher Leaders. According to Bennis and Goldsmith (1997), leaders have a vision, clear values, goals and morals. MacBeath and Myers (1999) identify five categories for effective leadership: (1) considering the human aspect of school members; (2) empowering others; (3) being a role model; (4) playing a role in decision making; and (5) encouraging collaborative work. With similar attention to the relationship between leaders and other school members, Day et al. (2000) describe successful leaders as those who respect the professional autonomy of teachers. In contrast, the term teacher leader may refer to three types of teachers according to the teaching load, if any. It may refer to teachers who: are free from teaching at classrooms to fully exercise leadership; have full-time teaching jobs in addition to their leadership responsibilities; or have a reduced amount of teaching in order to perform additional leadership tasks (Lord and Miller, 2000). Lemlech and Hertzog (1998) describe teacher leaders as being those who work in collaboration, participate in school decision making; participate in additional and voluntary school activities, and develop themselves professionally. Similarly, Lord and Miller (2000) categorize the practices of teacher
leaders in four broad categories, which show that teacher leaders: (1) give support to their colleagues in classrooms (be it materially or mentally); (2) devise tasks to develop teachers professionally in the form of workshops; (3) work as a link between their schools and the wider community; and (4) take an immediate action to solve problems.

The reason for comparing the practices of leaders and teacher leaders is to show that there are similarities between both groups’ practices and to emphasize that teachers are capable of becoming leaders. Although Gardner (1993) differentiates between leading and teaching, he believes they overlap and can be performed by the same person. For Leithwood (2003), the term leadership remains ambiguous when it is associated with teachers. However, regardless of the production of new meanings, other writers, such as Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) and Heller and Firestone (1995), believe that leadership can come from everywhere in the school. This might imply there is need for an environment in which these forms of leadership may function and support each other. Teacher leadership is at its best when supported by school principals, who are in a position to facilitate or hinder teachers’ role as leaders (Huerta et al., 2008). Therefore, principals have to acknowledge the contribution of teacher leadership and the role it could play in the professional development of school members (Harris and Day, 2003; Huerta et al., 2008).

Decision Making
Decision making, according to Hodgkinson (1978), is a process through which a choice is made. It is argued that there are different areas or levels for teacher participation in decision making: ranging from the classroom level to much higher, and general levels at which decisions affect the school as a whole (Hargreaves, 1979). Examples of decisions at the school level may include those related to curriculum, staff development, assigning teacher responsibilities, providing material and mental support, planning schedules for teachers and students (Conley, 1991). The current research does not confine teachers’ participation in decision making to a particular level or area, but to their level of importance (important or not) from teachers’ point of view. Teachers’ perspectives on their participation in decision making are likely to vary, according to whether they believe these areas are important or not. For example, it is argued that there are areas of decision making, which lie beyond the classroom, that may or may not capture teachers’ interest, but teachers will unquestionably accept them. Such decisions fall in what Barnard (1938) calls the zone of indifference, which is part of the bigger zone of acceptance (Kunz and Hoy, 1976). The assumption that teachers and administrators have different decision making domains, so to speak, has led to the emergence of the contested zone, which describes decisions that are traditionally assigned to a particular group and aim to cross the border of another group’s domain (Conley, 1991). However, the aim of the current research is not to fit teachers’ perspectives in any of these zones. The aim is to allow teachers to participate in education as many decisions are intertwined and affect both classrooms and schools (Conley, 1991). Teachers constantly need to make decisions, which the educational process requires are taken at all levels (Al-Hoot and Al-Mahrooky, 1989). It is a misleading argument, therefore, to draw a line between classroom level and school level decisions.

Methodology
Methodology is defined by Wellington (2000: 22) as the ‘activity or business of choosing, reflecting upon, evaluating and justifying the methods [researchers] use’. To refer to research ‘paradigms’ is a convenient way of referring to certain clusters of ideas associated with particular
methodologies and methods. This article follows the interpretive paradigm and deals mainly with qualitative data. This is believed to be more suitable for studying the concept of teacher leadership in Egypt, which is almost an uncharted territory at the time of the study. The main goal of the interpretivists is to find out about people’s understanding (Mason, 2002). Indeed ‘to understand other people, requires understanding the interpretations which they give of what they are doing’ says Pring (2000: 96). Unlike the scientific paradigm, which is likely to impose particular view(s), the interpretive paradigm allows individuals to generate their own meaning and understanding of what teacher leadership is. Yet there will be constraints during the interpretive research process. For example, the conviction that interpretivists look at a subject’s understandings from the subject’s point of view and put their meanings aside does need careful examination; it is very difficult to be an ‘insider and outsider at the same time’ and the ‘conclusions of the research cannot be about the situation as it is originally to be investigated’ (Pring, 2000: 108). However, this should not devalue interpretive research because its primary goal is to understand those interpretations that are formed by individuals in that very situation. As a result the research findings cannot be generalized to the wider population.

**Methods of Data Collection**

Two methods were used, questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire was administered to the 20 participants (teachers and senior teachers) and was piloted in two stages to a similar group. Semi-structured interviews were used as a second tool to get a deeper understanding of their perspectives. Using open ended questionnaires is more likely to allow the respondents to express and describe their views in depth regarding the questions raised, which conforms to the characteristics of interpretive research (Flick et al., 2004). Interpretive research gives attention to the diverse perspectives of individuals and understanding rather than explanation of cause-and-effect relationships. Prompts and probes were used and field notes were taken during the interviews. A sub-sample of teachers and senior teachers from the main research sample were interviewed face-to-face and individually, except for one female teacher who wished to be interviewed in the presence of one of her female friends (see ethical issues in this research below). Interviewing enables researchers to have access to ‘what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)’ (Tuckman, 1978: 197). The interview guide was revised in the light of the participants’ responses to the questionnaires. The interview guide provide a few themes with some suggested questions that had to be covered during the interview. Each interview lasted for about 30 minutes. Arrangements were made in advance, such as contacting each interviewee and getting their permission to record the interviews.

**Sampling and the Research Sample**

Maximum variation, a non-probability sampling method, was used. Maximum variation is the ‘process of deliberately selecting a heterogeneous sample and observing commonalities in their experiences’, which is most suitable when studying ‘abstract concepts’ and selecting participants from different backgrounds (Morse, 1998: 73). In this research, the plan was to have a maximum variety between the research participants in terms of their role (position) in schools and the length of their teaching experience when studying their perspectives on teacher leadership and participation in decision making. It should be noted that the length of teaching experience is a key criterion in the selection of teachers for leadership roles in Egypt. One of the advantages of using this sampling method is that is generates data that may ‘explore processes, similarities and differences’ and
to develop ‘explanation’ to account for them (Mason, 2002: 135). Yet, the aim is not to make any generalizations or comparisons using statistics. By doing so, it is hoped that the research sample will result in rich data that will answer the research questions about teacher leadership and find out whether or not the length of experience has an effect on their views. Such data would give valuable insights about whether teacher roles (without/with formal leadership responsibilities) and the length of teaching experience should/should not be taken into account when engaging them in the process of decision making and expanding their leadership.

The selection of the research sample was carried out with the assistance, permission and access of the director of higher education studies in the School of Education at one of the universities in Cairo in September 2005. It should be noted that this group of teachers and senior teachers was not the only available sample to be chosen for this research. This group was selected for three reasons. First, it consists of teachers and senior teachers, that is, participants who have formal leadership responsibilities as part of their job (senior teachers) and other teachers who have not. Second, they vary in their teaching experience. Third, doing a postgraduate study is likely to broaden teachers’ understanding of their role and the complex concept of teacher leadership. In that sense, the sample might have achieved maximum variation because it identifies ‘characteristics or criteria for constructing the sample’ (Patton, 1990: 172). Conversely, the fact that all the teachers and senior teachers in the sample are committed to seek professional development, that is, doing professional diploma, might question the maximum variation nature of this sample. Moreover, no teachers of subjects other than English language were included in the sample. Having said that, however, it should be noted that ‘it is not possible to capture everything’ as ‘fieldwork often involves on-the-spot decisions about sampling to take advantage of new opportunities during actual data collection ... which is a primary strength of qualitative strategies in research’ (Patton, 1990: 179).

The sample consists of nine male and 11 female, qualified teachers. Three of them are senior teachers. Their teaching experience varies from 2 to 13 years. All of them were doing a postgraduate diploma and teaching English language in different Egyptian schools in Cairo during the research study. Field study began in Egypt in October 2005 and lasted for six months. Cairo has few universities offering such educational courses, and in order to maintain the anonymity of the teachers, no further details about the university and its setting shall be given. It is worth repeating here that the length of teaching experience is a significant factor for the selection of teachers for leadership roles in Egypt, and therefore, experience will be used as a key element in the analysis of the research data and understanding their views on leadership.

Limitations

The small size of the research sample suggests that generalizations cannot be made to the wider population. More research, therefore, is required on a large scale in this area to explore further the term teacher leadership from teachers’ and other school members’ point of view. The research sample is selected because it includes teachers and senior teachers (the latter exercise formal leadership as part of their role) who vary in their teaching experience. Although they were asked in the questionnaires if they perceive themselves to be leaders, they were not asked to nominate other informal teacher leaders, that is, those whom they perceive as being leaders without being in a formal position. The small scale of the research and time restriction did not allow for the inclusion of such (informal) teacher leaders and/or others who were studying in other universities; who live in different cities in Egypt; who teach subjects other than English language or even those who are not
committed to develop themselves professionally. These points, for example, might be the focus for future researchers.

**Ethical Issues**

Consent to participate in this research was obtained from 20 out of the 30 teachers who were doing that course. They were informed about the research purposes, their rights of withdrawal at any stage and confidentiality and anonymity. The only incident encountered prior to conducting the interviews was the refusal of one female teacher to be interviewed individually without being accompanied with another colleague. This is formed on a religious and cultural basis that does not allow a man and a woman to sit together privately unless they are related to each other by marriage or blood. She was later interviewed in the presence of one of her friends, who was not among the research participants. The interviewee’s friend was not engaged in the conversation.

**Reliability**

Research reliability concerns the trustworthiness of the data and the extent to which another researcher may get similar results, if the research study is replicated (Lewis and Ritchie, 2003). Among the ways of improving the research reliability is to check, throughout the field study, the research data with other researchers (Silverman, 2001). For example, the categories, which were set after interpreting the questionnaire data, were given to two researchers to check the researcher’s understanding of the teachers’ responses and ‘balance out’ his influence as a researcher (Flick, 2004). Moreover, each interview was followed by a period of reflection and sometimes participants were contacted shortly after the interviews to clarify some of their points (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This is crucial for enhancing and checking the quality of the data collected in the interviews (Patton, 1990). This was done by checking some of their answers either by direct questioning in person or on the telephone. Other ways of checking research reliability included comparing the findings of the questionnaires with those of the interviews. This method of cross-checking the findings (triangulation) was used to improve the research validity.

**Validity**

Validity refers to the extent to which ‘a method, test or a research tool actually measures what it is supposed to measure’ (Wellington, 2000: 30). In this research, triangulations were applied in different ways, such as using more than a research method (questionnaires and semi-structured interviews) and validating the research findings with other researchers to see if they would arrive at similar understanding of the researcher’s interpretation of the data and they did. Also, the data were looked at from different angles. For instance, the participants in their responses to the questionnaires were initially divided into three groups according to length of teaching experience, but later in the analysis of the interviews, the group was looked at as a whole. In both cases, similar conclusions were made, that is, experience and the teachers’ post held are not likely to influence their perspective on leadership and decision making. In spite of the possible advantages of checking the data with other researchers, it could ‘violates the process of induction, because the first investigator has a bank of knowledge . . . that the second researcher does not have’ (Morse, 1998: 77). Therefore, other ways for validating this research were used, such as analysing deviant/negative cases by applying a method of constant comparative to all pieces of data (Silverman, 2001). Initially, the
Data were classified into three groups according to the length of experience: 1–5, 6–10 and 11+ years. However, it was found out that some of the categories of teacher leadership and decision making did not fit into this classification. This might be due to individual differences and/or their small number. Therefore, in the light of this information, the original classification was revisited and the respondents were divided into two groups instead (<5 years and >5 years teaching experience). A second check of the data showed no negative or deviant cases. The importance of triangulation was not its combining of different types of data, but its linking of them together to ‘counteract the threats of validity’ (Fielding and Fielding, 1987: 31) and to contribute to a satisfactory level of ‘authenticity’ (Bush, 2002).

Data Analysis

The data were given a reference code and identified in order to have easy access for the stored data (Denscombe, 1998). The data were presented in the form of A4 pages with enough space (margin) on the right-hand side for the addition of any comments. The data were collected and broken into units for the purpose of analysis. Similar units were grouped together to seek patterns or relations among them. Yet, this should not imply that researchers ignore data that do not match their codes. Coding, in this way, means breaking the data into small analysable units, which would be categorized and put together again at a later stage in order to reach a better understanding of what the big picture looks like (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). The categories, which were used in this research, were formed after the research data collection. Two approaches for organizing the data were used: non-cross-sectional data organization and the use of charts. Throughout the findings of the questionnaires teachers and senior teachers are referred to as respondents. In the findings of the interviews, they will be referred to as participants. The use of italicized words between inverted commas denotes their actual words. Teachers’ responses to the questionnaires are divided into two groups according to the length of their teaching experience: 10 teachers with experience of <5 years and another 10 teachers with experience of >5 years. Teacher responses to the interviews are also dealt with in the same way, albeit with small number of participants. This should help in developing the argument about whether or not the length of teaching experience is related to teachers’ views about teacher leadership and its relationship with participation in decision making.

Findings and Discussion

Differences were found in previous studies between more and less experienced teachers regarding their perceptions about teacher leaders and what characteristics they should possess. In this research, the findings show that there are many similarities among the participants’ (teachers and senior teachers) responses to the questionnaires regardless of the length of their teaching experience. Further similarities are also found among the interviewees’ (teachers and senior teachers) responses in the second stage of this research. However, some differences are found between the views of the interviewees in terms of the length of their teaching experience. Despite these few differences, the findings show that, in general, the length of time participants has been teaching does not have a major impact on their views. This is a key finding of this research. The findings are addressed through the following research questions and linked with the literature.
‘How Do the Respondents and the Participants Define Teacher Leadership?’

The findings of the questionnaires and interviews show that teachers and senior teachers in the sample think of teacher leadership in terms of characteristics of leaders; styles of leadership and what teacher leaders do both inside and outside classroom.

**Leader Characteristics.** All the respondents, including the three senior teachers, point in the questionnaires to certain characteristics that leaders should possess. These characteristics support and contradict the findings of previous studies. The characteristics of leaders mentioned include: ‘ability to deal with problems/crises with objectivity/tranquility’; ‘knowledgeability/ongoing learning/subject competent’; ‘ability to make decisions’ (see also the relationship between teacher leadership and decision making below); ‘likeability/relationship with others’; ‘strong personality/convincing/efficient/able to take responsibility’; ‘collaboration’; ‘confident/positive’; and ‘vision/experience’.

Most of these characteristics confirm the participants’ views in Hsieh’ and Shen’s (1998) study about good educational leaders who are described as problem solvers; calm; fair; ongoing learners; have sense of humour; responsible; collaborators; and with positive attitude. Several of the characteristics in the research also match the description of Day et al. (2000) of successful leaders. The mention of leaders’ ‘ability to make decisions’ resonates with Yukl’s (1989) power-influence approach, which regards decision making as a ‘source’ of leaders’ power. Leaders’ ‘positive’ attitude supports the findings of Huang (2000) who shows that the majority of the participants in his study believe that leaders in their school provide them with positive leadership.

It should be noted that most of these characteristics are mentioned almost equally by the respondents, including all the senior teachers in both groups. Although not all the characteristics are mentioned by all of them, they all mentioned, at least, one of the above characteristics. The fact that some of these characteristics, such as leaders’ ‘ability to make decisions’ as well as their ‘experience’ are clearly emphasized more by one group of respondents than the other might show their importance for that particular group. In other words, it is more important for some of the respondents with teaching experience less than five years than their more experienced counterparts that leaders participate in decision making. Similarly, it is some of the respondents with more teaching experience only who believe that leaders should be experienced. The mention of leaders’ experience by a few respondents contradicts the findings of Stone et al. (1997) and those of Suranna and Moss (2000), which show that experience should be a common characteristic of teacher leaders. The finding shows that there is a tendency for the research respondents not to associate the length of teaching experience with leaders as the sole criteria for evaluating their leadership. The fact that nearly three-quarters of the respondents do not consider leaders’ ‘ability to make decisions’ implies that they have other priorities as decision making is not their first priority in the characteristics that leaders should have. What is more, with the exception of the ‘ability to make decisions’ and ‘experience’, the length of respondents’ teaching experience or position does not affect their views on the above mentioned characteristics. This finding contradicts the view of Day (1999) who believes that there are clear differences between teachers who are novice, experienced and expert.

**Leadership Styles.** In addition to the above characteristics, the respondents, including two of the three senior teachers, also define their leadership in terms of specific styles of leadership. These styles, which are mentioned by several of them in the questionnaires, could be placed under the following headings: ‘morals/values’; ‘participative’; and ‘art’. These relate to and confirm what other authors have identified. For example, Fullan (2001) emphasizes the establishment of a moral
dimension in leadership. Goddard (2003) also stresses the importance of leaders’ values and beliefs. The mention of participative leadership by some respondents supports the views of Mastrangelo et al. (2004) about its importance. “Art” refers to leaders’ skill in managing their relationship with their followers. This style might be linked with the leadership style of influencing (Goddard, 2003) in which influence is exercised by those who are not positional leaders. This is part of Yukl’s power-influence approach (1989).

Most of these styles of leadership are emphasized almost equally by the more and less experienced respondents, although not all of them equally stress the three styles. In fact, comparing the number of respondents who describe leadership as ‘participative’ (five respondents including one senior teacher) and ‘art’ (three respondents including one senior teacher) is much less than those who do not mention them. Thus, 15 respondents do not view leadership to be participative and 17 respondents do not describe leadership as an art. In contrast, linking leadership with ‘morals’ and values is seen as more important than the other two styles of leadership. More than half of the respondents relate leadership to morals and values, such as founding ‘leadership on a religious basis’, ‘respect’, ‘setting oneself as model to others’ and ‘democracy’. This actually means that more respondents believe that teacher leadership is more about morals and values than participation. It is the respondents with less teaching experience (excluding senior teachers) who mention moral leadership more than the more experienced counterparts. Apart from this point, respondents’ length of teaching experience or position does not seem to considerably influence their views about their preferred styles of leadership. Again, this finding contradicts the models developed by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) and Bolam (1990), which describe the levels of competence that professionals go through in their career like novice, competent and so on. It also contradicts Day’s (1999) belief in the clear differences between experienced and inexperienced teachers. The fact that experience does not seem to influence the respondents’ views echoes Usher’s (1993) view about the incoherence of experience and the difficulty of fitting it into such ‘neat’ divisions.

What Teacher Leaders Do Inside Classrooms. The respondents also believe that teacher leadership is represented by what they do in or outside classrooms. Although more than one-half (including the senior teachers) believe that teacher leadership will take place inside and outside their classroom boundaries, most of the respondents (including two of the three senior teachers) emphasize their own leadership within their classrooms. They believe that teacher leadership is much more about classroom management in terms of managing the teaching process. This point is mentioned by the more and less experienced respondents alike. This might reflect the MoE’s view of teacher leadership, which confines it to the control which teachers exercise on their students (NDP, 2002). This view is likely to exclude teachers from a wider engagement in leadership and maintain the status quo of their ‘followership’. This culture of ‘followership’ might be the result of the social norms of respect and reliance which are manifest throughout Egyptian society (Mayfield, 1996). This confirms the findings of Inglehart (2006), which show that societies like Egypt give importance to values like high esteem to authority, parent–child relationship and family values.

The practices that reflect the respondents’ view of teacher leadership in classrooms include: ‘controlling students in classrooms’; ‘creating a suitable classroom atmosphere’; ‘setting themselves as models’; and ‘problem solving’. Apart from the second practice (creating a suitable classroom atmosphere), all the practices are mentioned almost equally by all the respondents regardless of the length of their experience. What really matters here is that these practices show that the respondents (including two of the three senior teachers) believe that leadership could occur inside classrooms as well. It should be noted here that in the literature the practices of teacher leaders
often tend to describe and be concerned more with what teacher leaders would do outside their classes—as in the studies of O’Connor (1992), Lemleh and Hertzog (1998) and Lord and Miller (2000)—and less with what teacher leaders do inside classrooms (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2001). These data show that almost all the respondents, regardless of the length of their teaching experience or position, believe in the relevance of leadership to what they do in their classrooms. Thus, the findings seem to contradict the above studies which associate teacher leadership often with what teacher leaders do beyond their classrooms.

What Teacher Leaders Do Outside Classrooms. However, the respondents, including the senior teachers, also define and extend teacher leadership beyond what they do in classrooms. Examples of this definition include one or more of the following: ‘performing additional tasks’; ‘ongoing learning/establishing wider knowledge’; and ‘problem solving’. These examples confirm the findings of previous studies. According to O’Connor (1992), teacher leaders develop themselves professionally by ongoing learning. Teacher leaders, as described by Lord and Miller (2000), help and take an immediate action to solve problems on the spot. These examples of what teacher leaders do outside classrooms are mentioned by the respondents who have teaching experience of more and less than five years. This means that teaching experience or position does not influence respondents’ views about what leaders do beyond classrooms.

Similar and additional examples of what teacher leaders do are also mentioned in the interviews. This means that the findings of the interviews confirm and expand respondents’ views about this point. In the interviews, when describing their ideal role, the participants suggest several examples of what teacher leaders do such as: ‘collaboration/establishing good relationships’; ‘having more autonomy and authority/performing additional tasks’; ‘having a vision/understanding their role’; ‘paying attention to morals/conscience’; ‘ongoing learning’; and ‘collective participation in decision making/raising teachers’ social and financial status’. These examples support and add to the findings of previous studies. All the six participants in the interviews, including the two senior teachers who were interviewed, suggest that they should collaborate or establish good relationships with school members and parents (see also teachers’ professional relationship below). The fact that most of them mention collaboration supports previous studies of Lemleh and Hertzog (1998) and Lord and Miller (2000) which point to the importance of collaboration and giving support to colleagues by teacher leaders. The need for having more autonomy and authority in participants’ work and performing additional activities resonates with O’Connor’s (1992) description of what teacher leaders do. This suggests that the participants, regardless of position or how many years of experience they have, are pointing to the insufficient autonomy that they exercise in their work. However, by the same token, it might also imply something else. Despite the restrictions imposed by the MoE on the teaching profession, the participants seem to have managed to be autonomous in their work to some extent.

Most of the participants’ suggestions in the interviews about the ideal role of teachers, which match their perception of themselves as leaders, confirm but also add to the categories of teacher leaders’ practices by Lemleh and Hertzog (1998). Moreover, these suggestions together with their views about what teacher leaders do outside classroom, which are mentioned above, might suggest that what teacher leaders do may not differ from those of leaders. This supports the views of Gardner (1993) and Sirronik and Kimball (1996) that teaching and leading overlap. The above examples of teachers’ ideal role confirm previous studies (Hyde, 1978; Anis, 1995; MacBeath and Myers, 1999; Lord and Miller, 2000). By referring to having more autonomy and authority, morals as well as vision and the other points, the interviewees add to and widen the scope of what teacher
leaders do which are mentioned in the literature. More importantly for this study, they also reflect what they require for the shift towards a decentralized education in Egypt. The fact that not every participant in the interviews has expressed all these points indicates that they might have had other priorities when thinking about their ideal role. It seems that participants’ desire for collaboration and more authority, which might be an indirect way of reducing centralization, might be more important than focusing entirely on participation in decision making. The desire to engage all teachers in the process of making decisions is expressed by two out of the six participants and both are senior teachers. On the whole, most of the six participants, including the two senior teachers, wish that schools should provide teachers with enough autonomy and more authority and that they should perform additional tasks. The implication is that the participants seem to be aware of the need to expand their role and attain more authority, and regard this as more important than to focus entirely on their participation in decision making. This might be the case because (1) teachers’ participation in decision making might have disadvantages (Emira, forthcoming) (2) and also the expansion of their role might be attained by other means like the abolition of bureaucracy and participation in additional activities (see what teacher leaders do outside classroom above). Their views imply that decision making might be a means to an end rather than the other way around. It might not be the only way for approaching teachers’ autonomy and exercising more authority.

To sum up this section, interpreting the respondents’ concepts of the term teacher leadership suggests that it is (1) about the characteristics that leaders should have; (2) more about morals and values than participation; (3) more within than beyond classrooms; and (4) also about what happens beyond classrooms. In these four points, the length of teaching experience and position do not seem to influence their views about teacher leadership. These points confirm the research view of leadership. For example, these points imply that leadership is not confined to a particular person or role in schools; it is not bounded to certain situations/areas in schools; it should pay attention to morals and values; and that it should encourage teachers’ participation and collaboration. In fact, not only do these points confirm, but they also expand on existing studies. In other words, although the respondents acknowledge that leadership could be reflected in what teachers do in and outside their classrooms, they give more emphasis to leadership within classrooms. They also give more emphasis on morals and values than on participation in their views on leadership.

‘Is Decision Making an Aspect of Teacher Leadership?’

The aim of this research question is to find out whether or not teachers and senior teachers in the sample consider decision making as an aspect of teacher leadership. Answers to this question are expressed in the findings of the questionnaires and the interviews about participation in decision making in terms of how important it is to them and the areas of interest in which they would like to participate. The findings of this research question show agreement and disagreement with the literature.

Respondents’ Interest in Decision Making. All the research respondents, including the senior teachers, express their wish to be engaged in this process whether in decisions that affect their students and classroom practices (this is categorized as inside classroom decisions) or other administrative/organizational decisions (this is categorized as outside classrooms decisions) or even in both cases. This might imply that they desire to have more opportunities. The findings seem to contradict the results of Hart (1995) who finds that teachers have little interest in this process. The findings support the findings of Taylor and Bogotch (1994) which show that teachers are looking for more
opportunities in decision making. This might suggest that there is a tendency that teachers want to participate more in the process of decision making than is the case previously.

The findings also show that there is more interest in participation in both types of decisions (inside and outside classroom). Inside classroom related decisions are concerned with teachers’ classroom practice: teaching their subject (how and what should be taught), student assessment, punishment and reward, and examinations. On the other hand, administrative (outside) classroom decisions include admission and enrolment of new students, designing school timetable, school finance, assigning responsibilities to school members and the development of school as an organization. More than half of the respondents, including the senior teachers, believe that their participation in both inside and outside classroom decisions is important. This confirms Hargreaves’ (1979) belief that teacher participation in decision making is of different levels. This interest in inside and outside classroom decisions is shown by the respondents with less and more teaching experience almost equally. This means that the length of teaching experience or position might not influence participants’ interest in which decisions they like to participate. This might also show that many decisions are intertwined and affect both classrooms and schools. This finding supports Conley’s view (1991) about the emergence of the ‘contested zone’ and the fact that many school decisions are related.

However, the findings also show that inside classroom decisions seem to come second in their importance for the respondents. Less than half of them focus entirely or more on decision making in issues related to their inside classroom decisions. Linking this point with their views about what teacher leaders do in classrooms might suggest that there might not be a concomitant relationship between what the respondents do and their desire to participate in classroom related decision making. In other words, despite the fact that most of them have pointed to what teacher leaders do in classrooms, less than half of them focus on the inside classroom decisions. In fact, the respondents who focus on the inside classroom decisions are less than those who are interested in participating in both inside and outside classroom decisions. This finding contradicts the views of Eggleston (1979) and Taylor and Bogotch (1994) which show that teachers are least concerned with decisions beyond the teaching and learning process.

It should be noted that focusing on inside classroom decisions is not influenced by the length of respondents’ teaching experience or position. The same thing applies to the respondents’ opportunities to participate in school decision making. It is found that more than half of them have personal experiences in school decision making. Regardless of the length of their teaching experience or position, the respondents are equally able to participate in this process. Likewise, the other respondents who do not have past experiences in this process are divided equally in terms of their teaching experience. This might suggest that their chances to participate in decision making might not be influenced by their experience or even position which contradicts the findings of Harling (1984). Having said that, however, the length of teaching experience seems to influence the participants’ opportunities to participate in outside school decision making. It is worth repeating that all the respondents, including the senior teachers, express their wish to engage teachers in the process of decision making inside and outside schools. However, only two of the six participants with the more experience, one of them is a senior teacher, have participated in such process outside schools but entirely related to educational issues. This means that participants, who had five years teaching experience or more and/or are senior teachers, are likely to have participated in decision making beyond their schools. Investigating the reasons which hinder participants’ participation in decisions beyond their schools is beyond the scope of this research. However, what really matters here is that participants’ past experiences in decision making in schools, whether in inside or outside
classroom related decisions, seem to suggest that the opportunities and interest to participate in this process are equal and might not be affected by the length of teaching experience or position.

‘What Are the views of the Respondents and Participants about the Relationship between Teacher Leadership and Decision Making?’

Very few studies in the literature have examined the relationship between teacher leadership and decision making and have aimed to give descriptions of it. The questionnaire findings of this research show that the respondents have different descriptions for the relationship between teacher leadership and decision making. This relationship, in the respondents’ own words, can be: ‘developmental’, ‘evaluative’, ‘complementary’ and ‘neutral’. In developmental relationship, the respondents believe that participation in decision making will ‘develop’ their leadership or vice versa. A similar description of this developmental relationship is found in Anderson (2002) in which decision making is believed to foster teacher leadership. In evaluative relationship, participation in decision making is seen by the respondents as a way to ‘evaluate’ and consider a person as a leader. This is consistent with the respondents’ belief that the ‘ability to make decisions’ is one of the characteristics that leaders should possess. A complementary relationship between teacher leadership and decision making is one in which the former is ‘complemented’ by the latter. A complementary relationship might be similar to the findings of Anderson (2002) and Bogner (2002) in which teacher leadership and decision making are found to have facilitated the function of each other. In neutral relationship, there ‘might or might not be a relationship between teacher leadership and decision making’, as described by one respondent.

However, it should be noted that not all the respondents have mentioned the above forms of relationship. While developmental relationship is the most mentioned by the respondents, neutral relationship is the least mentioned relationship (only one respondent has mentioned the latter). These forms of the relationships show that most of the research respondents, regardless of their experience or position, believe that leadership and decision making are linked one way or another. However, despite this clear relationship between teacher leadership and decision making, later in the interviews, a few contradictory points are noted. These points are related to the advantages of being a leader; the advantages of participation in decision making and teachers’ ideal role (Emira, forthcoming). The first point is that the advantages of being a leader are more comprehensive and not just about enabling participants’ participation in decision making. The advantages of being a leader, according to the participants’ views, might be about their role and schools and how they benefit from teacher leadership. It is found out that five of the six participants, including two senior teachers, have not linked decision making to the advantages of being a leader. In other words, very few participants are likely to see a relationship between decision making and teacher leadership when referring to the advantages of being a leader. The second point is that the participants believe that their ideal role is more about collaboration and having more autonomy and opportunities to perform additional activities than participation in decision making. In other words, despite the above forms of relationship between teacher leadership and decision making, decision making might not be seen as an advantage of being a leader nor their first priority when describing their ideal role. The third point is that the advantages of teachers’ participation in this process, from the participants’ perspectives, are more about the professional development of teachers’ role (being a leader). This shows that decision making is important and considered as an aspect of teacher leadership. Their views suggest that decision making might not be seen as an end in itself nor an advantage of being a leader. In fact, teacher leadership and participation in decision making ‘might not
be necessarily’ seen as an advantage to one another in order to be ‘related’ as one of the participants believes.

**Conclusion**

The Egyptian Ministry of Education restricts teachers’ work and emphasizes a single form of teacher leadership, that is, leading and controlling students in classrooms (NDP, 2002). Despite this, the teachers and senior teachers in this study show that they have an understanding and awareness of the requirements for their role and the teaching profession in the future. Their understanding points to the necessity for redefining the MoE’s narrow concept of teacher leadership. This concept is likely to deprive teachers from a wider engagement in leadership and maintain their status quo as ‘followers’. According to Mayfield (1996), ‘followership’ may be the result of the social norms of respect and reliance which are clear in the Egyptian society. The effect of this narrow concept might be clear in part of the respondents’ concept of teacher leadership which shows that it is more within than beyond their classrooms. However, having said that, they have formed their own concepts. The main practical implication, therefore, is that the MoE might need to be aware that decentralization is just one step among others towards reforming education and that other points should be considered before this one is put into practice. Reform will require more than a shift from centralization to decentralization in education: it is likely to need a parallel shift in teachers’ roles from ‘followership’ to ‘leadership’. If decentralized systems require the devolution of ‘significant powers’ beyond the centre (Bush, 2003: 11), then the MoE’s interpretation of teacher’s role as one in which, teachers are merely expected to lead and control students in classrooms (NDP, 2002) might not be helpful in this shift. As Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) argue, producing more effective change in reform policies requires that teachers should re-define their role and extend it beyond their classrooms. It also suggests that the MoE may need to redefine and expand the role of effective teachers who are currently viewed simply as deliverers and implementers of the curriculum. Sergiovanni (1992: 35) argues that teachers ‘cannot become effective by following scripts’ and the present study indicates similarly that teachers’ roles could usefully be expanded by engaging them in leadership which is likely to allow them to share power, participate in decision making and thus promote their role as well as the teaching profession. The study suggests that this approach to teacher participation in education and leadership may be a necessary precursor to decentralizing education in Egypt. The call for this shift in teachers’ role is not confined to Egyptian teachers only; there have been many calls for bringing about changes in teachers’ role (Moore, 2001; Anderson, 2002; Harris and Day, 2003).

The findings show that the length of teaching experience of teachers and senior teachers and position might not affect their views on many issues. Jarrar and Massialas (1992) describe the Egyptian education system as being driven by position and rank rather than merit, which is likely to influence the selection of teachers’ for leadership responsibilities. The findings resonate with the views of Jarrar and Massialas and imply that teaching experience should not be seen as crucial for giving teachers leadership responsibilities and engaging them in decision making. However, experience seems to affect participants’ views on few issues like their experiences in decision making beyond schools. Despite these few differences between the findings of the questionnaires and interviews, the findings show that the length of teaching experience might not influence the views of the group as a whole. Moreover, it should be stressed that these few differences are based on a small number of participants with wide range of experience, which might be just individual differences and not the result of the length of their experience. However, in spite of this limitation, it is worth...
repeating here that it was important for the purpose of this research to achieve maximum variety in terms of teaching experience and teacher’ role.

The fact that the teachers and senior teachers desire more autonomy in their work and more opportunities in decision making may raise questions about how autonomous their actual autonomous role is and the available opportunities for them to participate in school decision making. Teachers’ participation in decision making is important for all the respondents and their leadership. Most of them see a clear relationship between teacher leadership and decision making. Yet, they might not see participation in decision making as an end in itself nor an advantage of being a leader. Gupton (1995: 77) suggests that teachers should become responsible and shift from being a ‘decision receiver’ to being a ‘decision maker’. The MoE, therefore, might need to further encourage teachers to participate in this process and give them more opportunities and necessary training to do so. Understanding teachers’ perspectives on leadership and decision making, however, might not solve all the problems which the Egyptian educational system is having. Anis (1995: 102) concludes that an educational reform in Egypt is a ‘fractional part of the general social and economic framework which is affected seriously and continuously by other parts within this framework such as the sectors of health, media, and salaries as well as the prevailing positive and negative values in society’. This might imply that these problems should not be viewed in isolation because these reflect the culture of the wider society. Studying teachers’ views, in general, is important to understand how to develop their profession, train would-be teachers and assist the MoE’s proposal for a decentralized education system. Although the findings might illuminate some ideas, it should be stressed that the research does not aim to make any generalization as the findings are based on the views of a small sample of teachers and senior teachers. Hence, there is a need for future research on a large scale in this area in Egypt.

References


Emira M (forthcoming) The pros and cons of engaging teachers in decision making and leadership.


**Biographical Note**

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