

**Educators' constructions of informal teacher  
leadership in three Mauritian secondary schools: a  
phenomenological study.**

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## Dedication

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*Saraswati namastubhyam varadé kāmarūpiṇi /  
vidyārambham kariṣhyāmi, siddhirbhavatu mé sadā ||*

O Mother Saraswati, my humble prostrations to Thee who art the fulfiller of all my wishes. I start my studies with the request that Thou wilt bestow Thy blessings on me.

This work is dedicated to:

Goddess Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge in Hinduism.

My parents who blessed me enough for me to reach this stage in my academic career.

My lovely and caring wife, Sarita, who asked me to embark in this EdD journey and unconditionally supported and motivated me all the way through it.

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## Abstract

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This phenomenological study seeks to gain an informed understanding of informal teacher leadership in selected Mauritian secondary schools. Understanding how informal teacher leaders describe themselves, the duties they generally assume, and the way rectors and informal teacher leaders interact mutually provide insights in their contribution to school improvement. Eighteen educators from three secondary schools teaching in the north of the island participated in the research.

In order to understand the phenomenon under investigation, a constructivist approach was adopted to gather the lived experiences of the participants concerning different aspects of informal teacher leadership. This qualitative study relied upon semi-structured one-to-one and group interviews, as well as participants' electronic professional diaries in the collection of the data.

The research findings indicate that informal teacher leaders emerge notwithstanding the rectors' leadership style. Whilst factors such as support from rectors and colleagues, personal intrinsic motivation and positive school culture encourage the emergence of informal teacher leadership, other factors such as jealousy among colleagues, the dictatorial leadership style of some rectors, time constraints and a hostile school culture seriously impede it. The findings support the view that when leadership is judiciously shared and distributed by the rector, it can promote collegiality, reinforce team spirit, and strengthen the schools' resilience in facing crises. Mauritian informal teacher leaders currently make valuable contributions in such areas as: organising extra-curricular activities, managing internal exams, monitoring students' discipline, handling the parent- teachers' association and dealing with crises as and when they occur.

Its theoretical contributions are in its support, extension, and challenging of the ideas of educational and teacher leadership from a small island perspective. This research also highlights the importance of informal teacher leaders in capacity building and school management. The findings have important policy implications. There is an urgent need to review the whole notion of educational leadership, with rectors encouraged to adopt a more democratic leadership style, replacing a top-bottom management approach with a shared and distributed model which

encourages informal teacher leaders to play a more effective role. Rectors should also be encouraged to select informal teacher leaders judiciously based upon their identified leadership qualities in order to ensure or sustain school improvement. Rectors are cautioned to avoid biased and arbitrary selection of informal teacher leaders, especially those lacking in leadership qualities, so as to curtail frustration and demotivation among the deserving ones. The research also recommends for appropriate training be given to informal teacher leaders so that they can effectively provide their contributions in all attempts which are oriented towards school improvement.

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## Acronyms

HSC Higher School Certificate

MES Mauritius Examination Syndicate

MGI Mahatma Gandhi Institute

MIE Mauritius Institute of Education

MIEL Mauritius Institute of Educational Leadership

MEHR Ministry of Education and Human Resources

NYCBE Nine Year Continuous Basic Education

OUM Open University Mauritius

PGCE Post Graduate Certificate in Education

PGDEL Post Graduate Diploma in Educational Leadership

PSEA Private Secondary Education Authority

PSC Public Service Commission

PTA Parent Teachers Association

RTSS Rabindranath Tagore Secondary School

SC School Certificate

UTM University of Technology Mauritius

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## Acknowledgements

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I have to admit that working through my dissertation has been the toughest academic task undertaken by me so far on this EdD journey. It has been the toughest but yet the most fulfilling and stimulating as well. The period from 2014 and 2018 has been eventful in my life. Along with the EdD dissertation, I was also dealing with an unprecedented change in my life. In October 2014, I resigned from my post as a rector and I joined active politics. I stood as a candidate in the December 2014 general election and lost. In 2015, I had almost abandoned my studies. In spite of all the odds, today I have completed the dissertation.

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## Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

*Signed*



*Dated 23<sup>rd</sup> November.2018*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

When I embarked on this educational doctorate venture in 2012, I did not know that I would gradually become so fascinated by informal teacher leadership that ultimately, I would carry out my research on it for my dissertation. The EdD course can be interpreted as a journey of growth - my own growth as a researcher and this present dissertation is a medium for me to pursue my avowed interest in teacher leadership, more precisely informal teacher<sup>1</sup> leadership in Mauritian secondary schools.

The book that significantly influenced me is 'Awakening the Sleeping Giant: Helping Teachers Develop as Leaders', by Katzenmeyer & Moller, (2001). I agree with the authors (2001:102) who postulate that, *'when given opportunities to lead, teachers can influence school reform efforts. Waking this sleeping giant of teacher leadership has unlimited potential in making a real difference in the pace and depth of school change.'*

Another book which further expanded my insight on teacher leadership is 'Connecting Teacher Leadership and School Improvement' by Joseph Murphy (2005) and I draw a lot from it in this present study. I subscribe to what Murphy (2005:4) says, *'we are not a salesperson for teacher leadership. Rather, it is our intention to examine the teacher leadership phenomenon and explore how it can function as one-albeit an important-piece of equipment in the school improvement toolbox.'*

The pervasive view of the rector<sup>2</sup> as the sole leader in school is inadequate and increasingly difficult given the current demands for accountability and improved student learning results (Smylie, Conley & Marks, 2002). Like these researchers, I endorse the view that rectors alone cannot, and should not, be the only leaders in a school. The implication of

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<sup>1</sup> In Mauritius, secondary school teachers are officially called 'educators'. In this dissertation, teachers and educators will be used interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> Rector is used synonymously with principal and head teacher or head of school. In Mauritius, the head of a secondary school is called rector.

teacher leadership for schools exists around a shared and distributed leadership model within an empowered learning community. However, the absence of a clear concept of teacher leadership in Mauritius limits collective action to effectively change schools and improve student learning.

Successful educational leaders have learned to view their organizational environment in a holistic way. By deepening their understanding of school culture, these educational leaders will be better equipped to shape the values, beliefs and attitudes necessary to promote a stable and nurturing learning environment (Gungapersad, 2008). Most researchers (Harris & Muijs, 2005; Lambert, 2003; Kong Tin Lun, Zhang & Ramma, 2015) in studying the concept of teachers-as-leaders agree that it is different from administrative or managerial concepts of leadership. Various studies indicate that effective teacher leadership involves a move away from a hierarchical culture to shared decision-making, teamwork, and community building (Coyle, 1997) in the way school management is conceptualised.

However, in their research on ethical leadership for educational reform in Mauritius, Ah Teck & Hung (2014:378) noted that, *'none of these (six) principals appear to be taking on leadership as a systemic issue and their notions of social justice, equity, democracy and distributed leadership were very conservative.'* In fact, researchers who have investigated educational leadership in Mauritius (Ah Teck & Hung, 2014; Kong Tin Lun, Zhang & Ramma, 2015) have observed that it is still hierarchical and the top-down approach will take time to evolve into a more democratic leadership model in Mauritius where leadership is based on equity.

Today, more and more school leaders, policy makers and educational researchers around the globe are demonstrating an increased sense of urgency to realize dramatic school improvement (Chapman, 2002; Hassel & Steiner, 2003; Levin, 2006; Malen & Rice, 2004; Murphy, 2009; Wong & Shen, 2003). According to Berg et al., (2017: 2),

*....too many of our schools fall short of preparing all students to succeed in our 21st century world, as well as the concern that the schools that fall shortest are frequently those serving students experiencing the most disadvantages. One area that has emerged as a critical factor in school improvement efforts is expanding leadership capacity.*

Next to the quality of teaching, school leadership has been identified to be the most significant school-based influence on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004). From a distributed perspective, according to Spillane (2006), school leadership extends far beyond those holding formal administrative roles, to include any influences that are intended or perceived to be influencing the quality of the school's core work. This research tries to explore whether the support of informal teacher leadership can help in the quest for school improvement. Today's schools are fraught with numerous challenges and the concept of improvement is quite varied and complex.

When rectors have a reliable, competent and efficient pool of teacher leaders to lean on, then it becomes relatively easy for them to cope with different challenges that crop up such as an abrupt drop in academic performance, a decline in discipline, or pressure from parents and other stakeholders for educational reform or changes. School leaders who nurture leadership qualities in their teaching staff are more likely to benefit from their leadership potential whenever they vow to undertake school improvement. In small island states, where economic constraints and shortage of qualified, competent and effective educators are unavoidable, unlike developed and advanced countries, it is important to rely on the '*sleeping giants*' as Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001:102) call the teacher leaders.

As a former educator and rector, I have come across many educators who have displayed leadership qualities, albeit informally and unofficially. Another Mauritian rector, Chukowry (2018:13) who conducted her research on teacher leadership in six Mauritian secondary schools observes that,

*In Mauritius we are in the very early stage of gaining some insight in to the power of distributed leadership models of schools. Even if Mauritius has not yet reached the stage where teachers are characterised as leaders; teachers demonstrate leadership in many ways during their daily work.*

These teacher leaders may be called '*leaders without a title*' in Robin Sharma's words. Even though they do not hold any official or formal position, these teachers display leadership traits and characteristics in the way that they help to manage the affairs of their schools.

In Mauritius, teacher leadership has not yet gained official or formal recognition. This study does not claim to advance any such advocacy. It has to be borne in mind that conducting any research on informal teacher leadership, as this study attempts to do, is quite complex and daunting. For instance, defining informal teacher leadership is quite problematic because it is quite difficult to draw water-tight boundaries between what actually amounts to formal and informal teacher leadership. This phenomenological study aims to probe the intricacies of informal teacher leadership.

In the next section of this chapter, I briefly discuss what broadly constitutes informal teacher leadership.

## 1.2 INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP

While it has earlier been acknowledged that leadership itself is a slippery term, we can realize how the adjective '*informal*' further renders the task of examining informal teacher leadership complex. Informal refers to what is not formal or official; something which is not prescribed by official regulations. In Mauritius, informal teacher leadership is not just the opposite of formal teacher leadership. In the day-to-day running of a school, educators go beyond their official scheme of service to help the management. Given that teacher leadership is not officially or formally recognized in Mauritius, the task of interpreting informal teacher leadership becomes even more problematic.

A number of studies representing a range of understandings about the roles of teacher leaders indicate that in both formal and informal sense teachers engage in important leadership functions (Danielson, 2007; Palmer, 2011). Teacher leaders take part in school-wide decision - making (Hart, 1995; Paulu & Winters, 1998), mentor teachers (Fessler & Ungaretti, 1994; Hart, 1995), facilitate professional growth of teachers (Gabriel, 2005; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Smylie & Denny, 1990), foster more collaborative working arrangements (Blase & Anderson, 1995), and can potentially influence school change (Day & Harris, 2002). Teacher leadership helps and supports an educational institution to aim for greater school effectiveness (Fisher, 2007; Palmer, 2011; Harris & Muijs, 2005). Understandably, teacher leadership also helps in the capacity building of a school and ensures sustainable development and improvement of a school.

One of the benefits of empowering informal teachers through a distributed leadership model is that it can have an impact upon student performance as well as the teacher leader's own professional learning (Lieberman, Saxl, & Miles, 2000; Silins & Mulford, 2002; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004). Schools are often faced with unexpected crises and problems. On such occasions, it is mostly the collective capabilities of informal teacher teachers which are brought together to deal with these complex problems and manage these ambiguous tasks (Barth, 2001; Smylie, Brownlee & Conyers, 1992). From my own experience as a former rector, I can vouch that when problems related to students' indiscipline (for example, sexual offences, physical violence, drug issues) arise in Mauritian secondary schools or when major school functions or events (fund raising activities, organisation of Sports day or Cultural events) are planned, then the help and support of informal teacher leaders is sought by many rectors.

Understanding how rectors identify informal teacher leaders, how informal teacher leaders distinguish themselves and their roles, how rectors and informal teacher leaders collaborate mutually may provide valuable insights to help in school improvement (Palmer, 2011). However, developing a proper 'understanding' how these actually operate in schools is not an easy task. Identifying informal teacher leaders is as challenging as conceptualising informal teacher leadership.

The problem associated with informal teacher leadership is further exacerbated because there is a lack of consensus around a clear definition of teacher leadership (Boles & Troen, 1994; Dozier, 2007; Greenlee, 2007; Lieberman, 1987; Smith, 1999). Danielson (2006) suggests that teacher leadership is not about formally assigned roles, but emerges informally by earning it through specific actions. These teacher leaders possess a set of skills that not only allows them to be effective in the classroom but also permits them to exert influence beyond their classroom. York-Barr & Duke (2004) put forward that teacher leadership is a unique form of leadership that borrows from multiple conceptions of leadership that focus more on collaboration than on authority vested in one person.

Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001:5) assert that *'teachers, who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice'* and they propose that *'teachers are leaders when they function in professional learning communities*

*to affect student learning; contribute to school improvement; inspire excellence in practice; and empower stakeholders to participate in educational improvement'* (2001:28).

Moreover, Gabriel (2005) describes teacher leaders as those who influence school culture, build and maintain a successful team, and equip other potential teacher leaders to improve student achievement.

This study will also explore the contributions, if any, informal teacher leaders can make in school improvement in Mauritius. Informal teacher leadership manifests itself in different ways in diverse contexts. While literature shows the various contributions made and roles played by informal teacher leaders in mostly international contexts, this study will shed light on how it operates in the Mauritian context.

As a former rector myself, I have professionally witnessed many Mauritian secondary school educators displaying leadership qualities. Even if teacher leadership is neither formally nor officially recognized in Mauritius, there are many educators with leadership qualities who serve their respective schools in myriad ways. For example, whenever possible and wherever they are given the leeway to display their leadership skills, they engage in decision-making processes in collaboration with colleagues, they are ready to take up new challenges and are ready to bring innovative ideas and changes for the overall welfare of the school. They are reflective practitioners and are ready to share good practices with colleagues and support the rector to manage the school effectively. These educators with leadership qualities provide tremendous help in various activities of the school ranging from handling the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), organising fund raising activities, helping in disciplinary or pedagogical committees and so on.

While the vast international literature on teacher leadership, whether formal or informal, recognizes the benefits that teacher leadership can have in the management of schools, only scant attention has been given to its research in Mauritius. The aim of this dissertation is to investigate informal teacher leadership as a phenomenon and to gather informed insights on the issue which will contribute to the body of literature from a Mauritian perspective.

While the merits of informal teacher leadership may be numerous, we should draw a note of caution regarding its possible limitations and weaknesses as well. It is instructive to recognise

the potential critical or negative effects of informal leadership too. For instance, negative implications of teacher leadership have been uncovered by researchers such as Crow & Pounder (2000), LeBlanc & Shelton (1997) and Smylie (1996), at least in the form of opportunity costs associated with the exercise of teacher leadership (Little, 1987; Smylie, 1996). Scholars also caution that teacher leadership initiatives *'might make things worse by diverting teachers' attention, wasting their time, or creating divisive distinctions among them'* (Johnson, 1989: 109). It is important to take a critical stance in order to uncover and expose its possible flaws or limitations, if any, as well.

There are different factors which are responsible for teachers to assume informal leadership roles in schools. First of all, they are gifted with leadership qualities and act as leaders both inside and outside schools. Assuming leadership roles comes naturally to them. Normally, they volunteer at school to extend their support to the 'official leaders' of the school who are school rectors. Next, we have those who are identified and selected by the rectors. There is a group of teachers, in almost all schools, who demarcate from their peers on the basis of their charismatic leadership qualities. They are outspoken and have most of the qualities which are generally associated with leaders. Incidentally, we also have a considerable number of educators who refrain from assuming leadership roles for numerous reasons as well. Some of them shun the idea of assuming additional responsibilities and stress as teaching itself takes away most of their professional time.

Some rectors in Mauritius, who are conscious about the potential and capabilities of informal teacher leaders, identify them and solicit their assistance to carry out different tasks, like managing discipline, conducting school based exams or assessments, or organising major school events like sports day, fund raising, or to be members of various committees like the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Disciplinary Committee and so on. Rectors who encourage shared and distributed leadership are more likely to encourage informal teacher leadership.

The way an informal teacher leader is chosen is often subject to criticisms. In general, rectors intuitively identify and select these informal teacher leaders based upon their experience of working with them. This intuitive way of choosing informal teacher leaders opens up the doors of unprofessional practices in many schools where meritorious informal teacher leaders are excluded. Wrong and biased choices are made by some rectors because there is no official

guideline to do so. The lack of transparency in the way informal teacher leaders are selected gives rise to frustration and demotivation among those who feel neglected and unsolicited.

As a former rector, I have realised that leadership qualities are not necessarily determined by the gender, qualifications, and years of teaching experience or the ethnicity of the educators. Leadership qualities among educators, just like in any other fields, are often personal traits which are formally or informally developed in life by individuals. The pathway which leads to the development of formal or informal leaders is not always linear. There are also some educators who gradually develop their leadership qualities by actually assisting other informal teachers. While helping informal teacher leaders, they develop and refine their own leadership qualities until they become full-fledged informal teacher leaders themselves. This collaboration helps to increase the number of informal teacher leaders in the school.

Hence, there are many intrinsic and extrinsic factors which contribute in the making of a leader. Life experiences, personal background, formal education, interaction with leaders and opportunities to exercise one's leadership contribute significantly in the emergence of leaders in different spheres of life. In schools also, informal teacher leaders emerge in the same way.

This study explores the role played by informal teacher leaders in Mauritian secondary schools. This research attempts to fathom both the contributions as well as the possible weaknesses of informal teacher leadership.

### **1.3 RATIONALE**

As a teacher and as a former rector for the past 25 years, I have lived with informal teacher leaders and have interacted with them. For 12 years as a rector, I had to surround myself with a number of informal teacher leaders to run the Rabindranath Tagore Secondary School (RTSS). Often described as one of the most successful secondary schools in the country, the RTSS was the research context of a few of my own doctoral mini research (refer to Appendix 5). Most of my mini research was on informal teacher leadership (Gungapersad, 2008; 2014) and in most cases the findings mentioned the numerous contributions made by informal teacher leaders.

I am personally motivated to carry out this research for five distinct reasons. First of all, it answers to the research description of my EdD, whereby my research should deal with an area related to my professional context. Secondly, the findings of this research will further broaden my own understandings about teacher leaders and how their potential can be developed, even in an informal way, for the overall development and progress of the school. Thirdly, this research aims to fill a void in the field of research on informal teacher leadership in Mauritius because there is a dearth in its study. Fourthly, this study will help also contribute to the development of new knowledge and understanding on informal teacher leadership, especially in a small island state like Mauritius. And finally, the findings of this research will have implications for policy development in the area of effective school management and improved teaching and learning outcomes.

As someone who is politically active, this research will surely help me to develop evidence based policies for the welfare of the secondary schools in Mauritius in the eventuality that my party comes back to power. In fact, I am an active member of the Mauritius Labour Party, which is currently in the opposition, and I form part of the Education Commission of the party which has the responsibility to work on new educational policies for the shadow Minister of Education. I think that the future Minister of Education in a Labour Government will be able to take informed decision based on the findings and recommendations of this research.

I hope to meet these five objectives through this research.

#### **1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Leadership is recognized to be one of the main factors responsible for the success of any organization as stated by Kelley, Thornton, and Daugherty (2005:18), '*school climate, leadership, and quality instruction are frequently associated with effective schools*'. Considerable research has been carried out on the importance of leadership in diverse areas like business, commerce, politics, sports, charitable and non- governmental organisations, profit and non-profit-making institutions, social and religious fields, and in the educational sector as well.

Leadership permeates almost all spheres of life. Even at home, when the head of the family or the members of the family display leadership qualities, skills and traits, it benefits one and all.

The educational sector is no exception and educational leadership is now a favourite field of research in many countries. Studies in England (Harris & Chapman, 2002), Norway (Stugu, 2001; Moller et al, 2007) and Australia (Gurr et al, 2005) conclude that improvements in the schools' performance were achieved through the leadership of head teachers working through teams and involving a wide array of stakeholders in decision making. The existing model of leadership in Mauritian secondary schools is an autocratic style, with power concentrated within the school principal or rector (Ministry of Education and Human Resources, 2009). This model is increasingly being questioned and the democratic, shared and distributed style of leadership is being acclaimed.

Leadership in Mauritius has to be put into its proper historical perspective. Historically speaking, leadership has been a 'white man's' domain because the island was successively a French and British colony until 12<sup>th</sup> March 1968 when the island gained its independence. Political leadership is the most openly discussed and recognized leadership in the island as compared to other forms of leadership. Scant attention is given to leadership in religious, social, sports and business fields. Dr Maurice Curé, Gaetan Raynal, Emmanuel Anquetil, Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam, Basdeo Bissondoyal and Razack Mohamed are some of the most prominent and revered political leaders who are closely linked with the independence struggle of the island. Even today, the press gives wide coverage to political leadership and Paul Raymond Berenger, Sir Anerood Jugnauth and Dr Navin Ramgoolam are the models. However, leadership in the fields of the private and public sectors are now being acknowledged. While in the past, it was essentially a male's domain, leadership is gradually becoming gender neutral in Mauritius as more and more women are occupying leadership positions in different sectors.

It is also worth noting that in Mauritius rarely do people who have worked in other sectors join the teaching profession. However, many educators leave teaching in order to join other professions and even politics. The leadership qualities displayed by some educators sometimes is one of the factors which help them to join other professions or politics where their leadership is needed. Since its independence in 1968, Mauritius has had several former educators who have joined politics and subsequently some have even become Ministers and to a large extent this has been possible because of their leadership qualities. For instance two former educators, Mr Armoogum Parasuramen and Dr James Burty David served as Ministers of Education from 1983

to 1995 and from 1995 to 1997. In Britain, for example, some people join the teaching profession after working in other sectors. In Mauritius, many people leave the teaching profession to join business and politics but also to occupy leadership posts in religious institutions or sports. There are also some people with leadership qualities who abstain from assuming leadership positions and roles because they prefer to stay away from the pressures faced by leaders in general, more so in schools.

Leadership is increasingly being recognized as an important element which plays a determining role in the success of an organization because many benefits are linked to it. Gradually, more and more people are drawn towards leadership training courses to acquire leadership skills and tools which can help them perform better in their respective fields. Leadership gurus such as Robin Sharma and Shiv Khera visit the island on a regular basis to train more and more Mauritians in order to develop their leadership potential.

Fundamentally, the notion of leadership in the Mauritian educational sector is quite complex to articulate. There is no “*one size fits all*” mould which can be used to measure or assess leadership. Culturally speaking, in Mauritius, it is not deemed appropriate for anyone to claim that he or she is a leader or has leadership qualities. In the educational sector, where a person is supposed to show humility, talking about one's own leadership skills or prowess may amount to bragging or arrogance. That is why; it becomes contextually problematic to talk about the leadership of teachers. Leadership, by its very nature, is quite abstract and often eludes definitions and descriptions.

Rectors are supposedly the formal leaders in Mauritian secondary schools. However, many secondary schools suffer because they are run by rectors that neither have leadership qualities nor the notions of leadership. Some rectors misuse their position and adopt a master-servant relationship with their subordinates (their deputy, teachers, administrative staff, and others). Those who understand the responsibilities which accompany leadership roles are more careful while exercising their duties and lead the others with more confidence and success.

There is a growing nation-wide awareness about the merits of educational leadership (Ah Teck & Starr, 2012; Chukowry, 2018). At school, even students are now encouraged to assume leadership roles by joining different extra-curricular activities like the Duke of Edinburgh Award

or other school based programmes. Today, many teachers, heads of primary and secondary schools are following courses in Educational Leadership at the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), Open University Mauritius or other universities.

Mauritian secondary schools are fraught with numerous challenges such as growing indiscipline among students, different forms of violence and bullying inside and outside classrooms, decline in students' academic performance in exams because of their growing lack of interest in studies, teenage pregnancy, synthetic drugs and loss of values. Successful school leaders have realised that they need the support of educators who have the leadership qualities to manage these problems which plague schools today.

In the Mauritian written press, different retired pedagogues regularly draw our attention about the decline in students' discipline in schools. The alarming situation about indiscipline in schools is often highlighted by those who no longer hold official positions because of the fear of reprisal. Mr Santosh Kumar Mahadeo (2008), former director of Curriculum, Ministry of Education, described the breakdown of discipline in the following way

*Relationships between teachers and pupils are at the lowest ebb. Familiarity has gone to the extreme limit of pupils being able to express contempt for their teachers openly. Many young teachers without a dignified personality undergo the worst turpitudes in and out of class. Everybody is silent over this perversion of the teacher-pupil relationship which is the base for discipline. A great part of discipline lies in self-respecting discipleship. The class condones many obviations from discipline, which ultimately inflate into gross behaviour-patterns. Enter a class casually and you will be shocked to find chairs and desks helter-skelter, morsels of food littering the floor, litter punctuating a space which should have been clean. Pupils are allowed to move from one point to another for no pedagogical reason. Paper pellets may be found flying when the teacher gives his back to the class.*

The former director of the Mauritius Institute of Education and former officer-in-charge of the Private Secondary Schools Authority, Mr Prem Saddul (2005) wrote that,

*In Mauritius, violence and indiscipline in secondary schools have become a real cause for concern. There is enough anecdotal evidence that we have serious problems of*

*indiscipline and violence in schools. Previously, indiscipline in schools encompassed unruly behaviour in class, truancy, theft, damaging school property, bullying, extortion, rowdiness, use and writing of foul language on desks and in the toilets, etc. Now, our youngsters have graduated to smoking, assaulting teachers, consuming alcohol and drugs, and gang fighting.*

Informal teacher leaders play a significant role in the school where they work to tackle and handle these problems. By helping rector to manage these problems, effective informal teacher leaders contribute in the overall improvement of the schools where they are posted. This study discusses how informal teacher leaders may help in managing students' indiscipline and the host of other contributions they make to ensure school improvement.

## 1.5 AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

It is important to draw a parenthesis regarding my interest in leadership in general and informal teacher leadership in particular. Leaders in general will acknowledge that the domestic, educational, social and professional environments play a determining role in moulding and shaping the leadership skills and traits of individuals. My own conceptualization of leadership is that some people develop leadership qualities more easily than others. Leadership is dynamic and keeps on evolving.

I think my personal leadership journey started at home. As the eldest child of the family, I acquired the opportunities to handle my siblings and I had to help my parents in their business. I think the skills to communicate and work in teams developed while dealing with these tasks. At school and university, I was an active member of the Student Council, drama and debating clubs which further sharpened my leadership potential. I was the president of the youth wing of the temple in my village (Shree Kalianath Mandir) and of the Rotaract club of Grand Bay. When I was an educator at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI), I was an active member of the Staff Union and of the PTA.

As mentioned earlier, I have spent all the years of my professional journey in different secondary schools of the island as an educator, rector and deputy manager. From 1994 to 2002, I was an educator at the Mahatma Gandhi secondary school. Then from 2003 to 2014, I was the rector of

the Rabindranath Tagore Secondary School (RTSS) and currently I am managing one private secondary school.

Recognising my leadership qualities in the educational sector, the former prime minister of Mauritius invited me to join the Labour party in 2014. Since then, I have been an active member of the Mauritius Labour Party (MLP). I stood as candidate in the last general elections held in December 2014 and I will again stand as a candidate in the forthcoming general elections which will, most probably, be held in 2019. I form part of the education commission which is responsible to work on the policies to be implemented in case the party returns to power in the foreseeable future.

So, leadership is one area which is intricately linked with my life. That may explain why I naturally opted to delve deep into informal teacher leadership which is an offshoot of educational leadership.

## 1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In spite of a plethora of research on leadership in general and educational leadership in particular, there is no consensus as to what leadership exactly means in the educational sector. I realize that while it is still quite difficult to fully fathom educational leadership in Mauritius, I am stepping into a far more challenging domain when I venture to investigate informal teacher leadership.

While it can be asserted with certitude that formal teacher leadership does not exist in Mauritius, we cannot deny the fact that there are teachers with leadership qualities. Given that teacher leaders do not operate in a formal or official context, it becomes quite challenging to focus on the sphere of their influence and the qualities or roles of these informal teacher leaders. Teacher leadership, which is one branch of educational leadership, is a phenomenon which has only recently been the centre of research in Mauritius.

There is a close relationship between the leadership style of the rector and informal teacher leadership. For instance, the rector is responsible to choose the informal teacher leaders and determine the roles they will play in the school. Informal teacher leadership is also closely

associated with the school culture and context in which it is set. There are push and pull factors which either impede or encourage informal teacher leadership.

While we are looking at informal teacher leadership with so much of interest, it does not mean that we should ignore the possible limitations and shortcomings associated with it. Since teacher leadership is still rooted in its informal status, it is quite problematic to determine how informal teacher leaders are chosen in secondary schools. It is normally the rector who has the privilege to select the informal teacher leaders from among the educators of the school. While the main responsibility of educators is to undertake teaching and learning, informal leadership roles come as extra duties.

Today, a growing number of educators in Mauritius are following courses in educational leadership at the MIE, University of Technology Mauritius (UTM), Open University Mauritius (OUM) and other tertiary institutions. They are following courses in Post Graduate Diploma in Educational Leadership or MA in Educational Leadership as part of their professional growth. Many of these educators have inborn leadership qualities and some of them get the opportunity to put their leadership potential at the service of the school. However, there is always the risk that a few teachers may misuse informal teacher leadership as a pretext to abscond from the classrooms and neglect their teaching assignment in order to be involved in leadership roles outside the classrooms.

That is why this research makes room to analyse the policy implications of informal teacher leadership at school and national levels. Understanding informal teacher leadership is not a small undertaking. The research questions have been devised to unclasp the intricacies surrounding the 'informal' aspect of 'teacher leadership'. Grasping the 'informal' nature of teacher leadership is quite daunting and the dearth of research in that field further exasperates a researcher treading in this field. This study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1 How do the participants construct their notions of educational and informal teacher leadership and what skills and characteristics should informal teacher leaders have?

RQ2 What are the cultural and contextual factors that encourage or impede teachers from assuming informal teacher leadership role?

RQ3 What contributions, if any, can informal teacher leadership make to school improvement in Mauritius?

RQ4 What are the policy implications at school and national level for a greater role for informal teacher leadership?

Phenomenological researchers do not want to take the world for granted because things and events are not always what they seem to be; rather, they want to systematically understand how things come to be. The above research questions will help to solicit the participants' constructions of informal teacher leadership. This research does not claim or attempt to investigate everything related or pertaining to informal teacher leadership. It is going to be the launching pad for further probes and investigations by other researchers who are drawn by educational leadership and teacher leadership in Mauritius.

## 1.7 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

According to Miles & Huberman (1994:18), a conceptual framework explains graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied-the key factors, concepts and variables. Put in simple terms, the conceptual framework helps to piece together the important elements which will constitute the research work. It helps to plan and organize the research. Obviously, this plan can be reviewed as the research progresses and will be developed further in the literature review chapter.

Here, I use the term in a broader sense that includes the actual ideas and beliefs that I hold about the phenomenon to be studied, that is informal teacher leadership. This may also be called the 'theoretical framework' or 'idea context' for the study. Informal teacher leadership evolves best in an educational context where the head of school practises democratic leadership and believes in shared and distributed leadership. The head of school should be willing to accommodate the informal teacher leaders so that the latter can operate in an unimpeded way.

However, quite paradoxically, informal teacher leadership exists and evolves in autocratic school environments as well. Sometimes, even when the head of school does not create the conditions for informal teacher leadership to exist, still informal teacher leaders are not deterred. There are factors which both either encourage or impede informal teacher leadership from operating in a

secondary school. The second research question of this dissertation focuses on this pertinent issue.

Investigating teacher informal leadership is not easy in Mauritius. To begin with, there is almost no major research which has been carried out in this field. Secondly, informal teacher leadership is not officially recognized in Mauritius.

Teacher leadership has changed over the past three decades. Silva et al. (2000) described the evolution of teacher leadership as occurring in three waves. During the first wave in the early 1980s, teacher leadership was focused on formal roles such as department head or grade level chair (Little, 2003). During the second wave, that is, in the mid-1980s, teacher leadership roles sought to take advantage of the instructional knowledge of teachers, and positions such as curriculum developer and teacher mentor were established (Silva et al., 2000). These leadership positions were often tied to performance-based systems of evaluation such as career ladders or merit-pay systems (Hart, 1995; Little, 1990; Silva et al., 2000). The third wave of teacher leadership began in the late 1980s and early 1990s and continues today as an emphasis on collegiality, collaboration, and continuous learning (Silva et al., 2000). Teachers in these leadership roles share best practices with their colleagues, engage in administrative and organizational responsibilities along with the principal, participate in school-wide decision-making, and extend their own knowledge through action research or collaborative activities (Lieberman & Miller, 2005; Silva et al., 2000).

In Mauritius, informal teacher leadership best relates to the third wave mentioned above and in a few schools, teacher leaders generally share best practices and engage in assuming a few administrative responsibilities and help in the decision-making exercises .

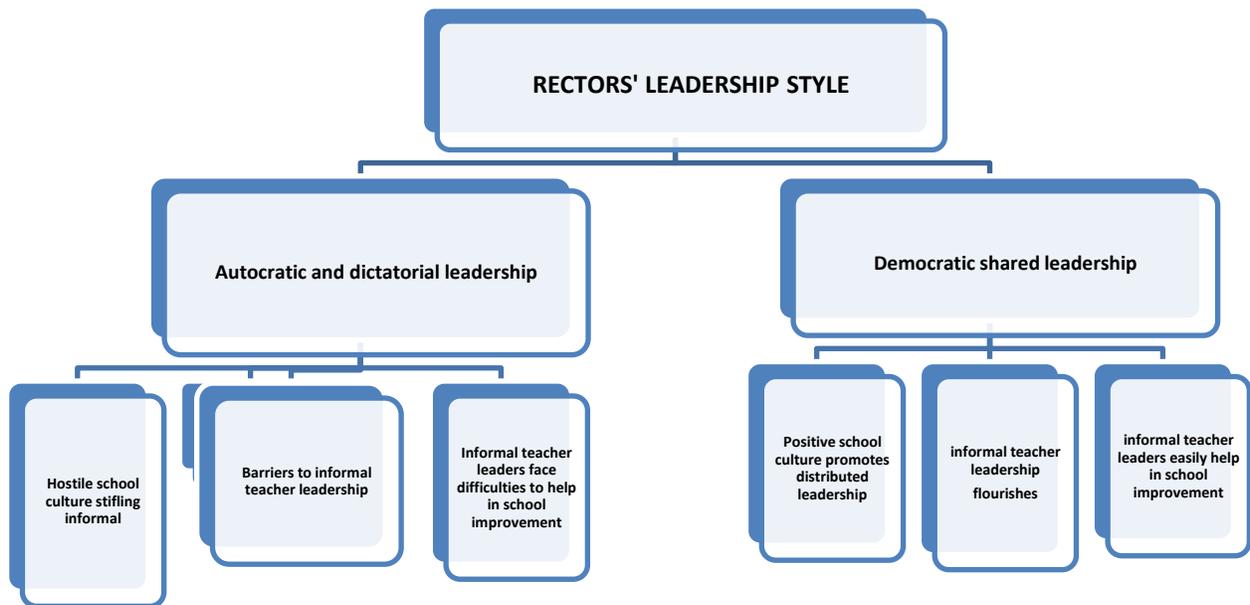
The conceptual framework for my research starts with the assumption that the leadership style of the rector determines the scope of informal teacher leadership in school. When a school is run by a democratic leader, then leadership is shared and distributed. Such a school has a positive school culture which promotes informal teacher leadership. Informal teacher leaders working under a democratic school leader are encouraged to contribute in the school development process.

Conversely, in a school run by an autocratic school leader, the school culture is hostile and toxic for informal teacher leaders to operate. Informal teacher leaders face a lot of impediments to assume leadership roles and have difficulties to contribute in any process geared towards school improvement.

When educators with leadership potential are encouraged to assume informal leadership roles by the school rector, then they contribute significantly in attempts which are made for school improvement (Harris & Muijs, 2005). On the other hand, when there are barriers to teacher leadership, then the whole school suffers as a lot of leadership potential is wasted (Zinn, 1997).

In figure 1, the conceptual framework is diagrammatically presented.

Figure 1 Conceptual framework of informal teacher leadership



All teacher leaders do not assume informal leadership roles for the same reasons and in the same ways. While a few teacher leaders assume informal leadership roles because they are identified

as such by their colleagues (Patterson & Patterson, 2004), others become leaders by default because of situations and circumstances which warrant their leadership skills (Danielson, 2007; Martin, 2007), or are motivated by particular issues (Lashway, 1998) and some are appointed by the head of school (Elmore, 2000).

## 1.8 INTERPRETATIONS OF TERMS

For the purpose of this study, it is appropriate to interpret the recurrent terms related to informal teacher leadership.

Capacity building for school improvement refers to extending the potential of teachers to lead and to work collaboratively (Leithwood, et al., 1997).

Leadership is interpreted as the mobilization of people to adapt a school's practice and beliefs so that it more fully achieves its mission with all children (Donaldson, 2001).

Distributed leadership signifies the varieties of expertise and decision making widely distributed across many people (Bennet, Wise, Woods & Harvey, 2003).

School Improvement denotes the '*strategy for educational change that enhances student outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change*' (Hopkins, 1996:32).

Educational leadership, in this research, refers to leadership exclusively in school organisation and focuses mostly on the leadership of rectors and educators.

Teacher leadership describes the leadership of those educators leaders '*who lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, influence others toward improved educational practice*' (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001:5).

Informal teacher leadership designates the leadership of educators who lead unofficially and informally in '*classroom-related functions as planning, communicating goals, regulating activities, created a pleasant workplace environment, supervising, motivating those supervised, and evaluating the performance of those supervised*' Harris (2003:314).

## 1.9 TERMS USED INTERCHANGEABLY

In this study there are a few terms which have been used interchangeably without any intentional bias and without really signifying that they are synonymous etymologically.

For instance, the terms 'rector', 'principal' and 'head of school' have been used interchangeably and they refer to the person who is officially in charge of a secondary school. In Mauritius, the term rector is used to refer to the head of a secondary school.

The terms 'teacher' and 'educator' have also been used interchangeably to refer to the one who teaches in a secondary school. In Mauritius, the term educator is used to refer to a teacher who works in secondary schools.

'Informal teacher leadership' and 'unofficial teacher leadership' have also been used to mean everything that is not formally or officially spelt out by the authorities.

'Perceptions', 'constructions', 'understanding', 'views', 'opinions' and 'interpretations' have been used to mean the way the participants understand the phenomenon and interpret the different issues being discussed in this research.

'Research', 'study' and 'investigation' refer to the exploration of informal teacher leadership being carried out.

## 1.10 ASSUMPTIONS

Several assumptions guided this research. To begin with, I assumed that all the participants had some grasp on informal teacher leadership. I expected them to be conversant with the nature, role and skills of informal teacher leaders. I also anticipated them to have some knowledge in educational leadership and school management in general.

As a former educator, and former rector, my personal experiences have influenced my ontological and epistemological assumptions and research approach. These may have influenced the way I have formulated and presented the findings of this research. I have regularly talked about the pertinence of informal teacher leadership in workshops organized for educators and I

have also contributed press articles on informal teacher leadership. These may have influenced the participants' constructions of informal teacher leadership.

### 1.11 LIMITATIONS

Limitations '*always exist about the extent to which you can generalize your findings*' (Heppner & Heppner, 2004: 340). It is imperative that a well-designed research study clearly defines the limitations of the study so that the reader is aware of the potential lack of generalization of findings to other potential studies.

I identified a few limitations in this study.

For instance, the first limitation was one of geographical location as the study was carried out in Zone 1 (refer to Appendix 6), which is a specific geographical and educational zone of Mauritius. The three secondary schools which were used in this study are from Zone 1 (refer to tables 1-4).

Rectors were not involved as participants in this research. In fact, rectors from the three secondary schools could have shared their experiences related to informal teacher leaders working with them. However, I opted not to involve them because the title and the main interest of my research were about educators' constructions of informal teacher leadership. Rectors' views and experiences related to the phenomenon might have further buttressed the depth of the investigations.

Still, research is always about the choices we make and the way we want to conduct it to the best of our abilities. For instance, pupils as well as other stake-holders who are directly linked to informal teacher leadership could have also been an integral part of this research as participants but I opted to use only educators and nobody else. I wanted the research to be exclusively oriented towards the eighteen selected educators from the three specific secondary schools.

The limitations will be further explored in the 'Conclusions and Recommendations' chapter of this research (refer to 6.6).

## 1.12 SUMMARY

This thesis comprises of six chapters which are as follows:

### Chapter One-Introduction

This chapter gives a general overview of the research which was carried out. It explains the reasons why I was keen to explore informal teacher leadership. The rationale as well as the conceptual and theoretical framework is discussed. It gives a broad guideline about the structure of the dissertation as a whole.

### Chapter two- Research background.

This chapter gives the reader the opportunity to have an understanding of the organisational context of the research. I provide details about the historical, political, economic, social and educational background of the research context. It was important for me to give anyone reading this thesis a clear idea about the places where the research was conducted. In a phenomenological research where data depend entirely on the experiences of the participants, it is important for the readers of this study to have an overview of the research background.

### Chapter Three- Literature Review.

This chapter presents a wide range of literature on informal teacher leadership and is related to the conceptual framework as outlined in the introduction. The chapter contains sections on leadership in general as well as distributed leadership in schools. The literature delves on school culture and the factors which encourage or impede teacher leadership. The benefits and the shortcomings of informal teacher leadership have also been reviewed and critically discussed. The contributions informal teacher leadership make to capacity building in schools and the policy implications of endorsing informal teacher leadership in the system have been reviewed as well.

### Chapter Four -Research Methodology.

This chapter presents the research methodology which has guided the research. It discusses the research approach and briefly reviews the ontological and epistemological assumptions. I

thoroughly discuss the research design. The research tools which were used have been discussed. There are also details about the participants. The limitations of this research and the ethical issues have also been discussed.

Chapter Five- Findings and Discussions.

In this chapter, the findings of the research are presented, discussed and analysed. Data from the one-to-one and group interviews as well as from the electronic professional diaries are presented thematically and critically discussed. The findings are discussed in relation to the literature.

Chapter six- Conclusions and Recommendations.

The final chapter of this dissertation is devoted to the concluding observations and the necessary recommendations. This chapter summarises the findings and also make recommendations at the level of policies and for future research.

## 2.0 RESEARCH CONTEXTS

### 2.1 BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

Research on teacher leadership is abundant but it is replete with experiences of teachers from countries such as USA (Lambert, 2002), UK (Harris, 2003), and Australia (Fisher, 2007) but also from Pakistan (Shamsi et al., 2010; Khan, 2011), Singapore (Wu Ven Yuen, 2006), Oman (Al Farsi, 2007), Morocco (Belhiah, 2007), South Africa (Grant et al., 2010) and elsewhere. The contexts of research are different from that of Mauritius.

The way leadership is conceptualized is sensitive to many succinct contextual and cultural factors and Day & Sammons (2013:13) rightly put them as follows:

*The concepts of leadership, management and administration overlap and have been accorded different emphases over time and in different contexts. Their usage varies across countries and professional cultures. In English speaking countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US, the role of leader is seen as of prime importance in raising standards and promoting school improvement, but this is not so in other countries, for example the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries. This difference in emphasis reflects variations in the functioning of education systems and their historical, national and regional policy contexts that will exert different degrees of influence on institutions' work and therefore on the role of leaders in schools.*

This study on informal teacher leadership was carried out in the Mauritian context. This study leans on Crossley (2008) who suggests that locally initiated and led research bridges the worlds of theory, policy and practice in ways that are inspired by the principles of modern and context sensitive research in education. In doing so, the author also makes a personal contribution to the strengthening of this form of educational research capacity in his own education system (Crossley, 2012).

It is important that readers of this dissertation gain a bird's eye view of the context where this qualitative phenomenological research was carried out. Understanding the historical, political, social, economic, cultural, demographic and educational backgrounds of the research context can provide better insight into the study. The readers will then have a better understanding of the researcher's epistemological assumptions and choice of research paradigm.

According to Stephens (2009:12), context is very important in a qualitative research because *'setting or context is not something to be pushed to the background but is integral to the holistic character of qualitative research providing the research process with a fabric from which meaning and interpretation can occur.'* In order to understand the significance of contexts in research, we have to refer to Dilley (1998) cited in Stephens (2009:14) who considers contexts as *'sets of connections construed as relevant to someone, to something or to a particular problem, this process, yielding an explanation, a sense, an interpretation for the object so connected.'* Thus, I concur that there is a close link and relationship between context and interpretation as Stephens (2009:14) argues because *'the process of interpretation occurs in context: research findings or 'new knowledge' being initially interpreted in the context from which they derive, the findings then allowing for a subsequent re-interpretation of that context in the light of the analysis of the data.'*

This phenomenological study occurs in Mauritius which has been an independent island state since 12<sup>th</sup> March 1968. Mauritius has a population of 1.3 million inhabitants and it is located in the Indian Ocean. The present system of education is a legacy of the British school system (Sunhaloo, Narsoo & Gopaul, 2009). For instance, the system of education still follows the British system and both the School Certificate (SC) and Higher School Certificate (HSC) examinations are held under the ambit and supervision of Cambridge University.

The aim of the research is to understand the participants' perceptions of informal teacher leadership. However, it is crucial to understand the historical factors surrounding leadership. For instance, the whole notion of leadership has evolved significantly after independence. Before independence, political and economic leadership was primarily a *'white man's affair'*. This means that it was racially the domain of the whites and the gender of men to display leadership.

It is only after independence that people of Indian and African origins started occupying leadership positions officially in politics, public sector, schools, governmental and non-governmental organisations, social and religious and other institutions. While men occupy leadership positions in almost all sectors, major breakthroughs have been noted in the past decades where a considerable number of women are also formally and officially invested with leadership roles. For example, the former President of the Republic of Mauritius was a lady.

In the Mauritian culture, we normally do not talk about somebody's leadership. If someone talks about himself as a leader, then this amounts to bragging. The Mauritian press may refer to people as leaders when articles about their achievements are written. Promotions to higher posts in the private or public sectors are not primarily based upon leadership acumen but on years of experience. Those who lead us may or may not have proven leadership track records.

In secondary schools, educators gain promotion to the post of deputy rectors and ultimately become rectors. Promotion to the post of deputy rector or rector in private or state secondary schools is not based on any proven leadership skills. It is believed that criteria such as caste, religion, social background and political affiliations matter a lot, apart from qualifications and experience. Only recently, educational leadership has drawn the attention of authorities and there are now formal courses in Educational Leadership at the Mauritius Institute of Education. There are different public and private universities which offer leadership courses to teachers and others who occupy key positions in the educational sector.

Education is free in Mauritius since 1977. However, we have numerous fee-paying pre-primary, primary and secondary schools. Recruitment of teachers in the public secondary schools (also known as state secondary schools) take place through the Public Service Commission while the managers (owners of the schools) have the privilege of selecting the staff of private secondary schools (whether they are fee-paying or non-fee paying). Working in state secondary schools is considered more prestigious than working in private secondary schools. It is relatively more difficult for an educator to get recruited in state secondary schools as compared to private secondary schools. The academic performance of state secondary schools is often better than that of private secondary schools. However, educational leaders, both in state and private secondary schools, have contributed in transforming their respective schools from poor performing institutions to effective schools. These educational leaders have successfully instilled the

required motivation among staff, pupils and parents to make the schools achieve academic success, high level of discipline and goodwill.

However, one of the main weaknesses of the Mauritian educational system which has been decried by many (Allybokus, 2015, Chukowry, 2018) as it is exam-oriented to such an extent that holistic education is often neglected at the expense of academic performance and success. Examinations, at the end of each level, regulate the flow of pupils to the next level. The pervasive influence of selection examinations constraining access from primary to secondary education is a problematic issue. Having access to the state secondary schools which have limited seats creates a '*rat race*'. The recent educational reform known as The Nine Year Continuous Basic Education (NYCBE) which was meant to do away with the fierce competition, ended up creating massive frustrations among parents and students because of the opaque way which was used to allocate secondary schools to students after they completed the PSAC (Primary School Achievement Certificate) which replaced the CPE (Certificate of Education). In each of the 4 educational zones in Mauritius, there are only a few secondary schools which are highly prestigious because of their academic performance (which is obvious as they recruit the best students) and their state of the art infrastructure.

In general, teachers also prefer to work in state secondary schools because of job security and the scope for promotion they enjoy as compared to working in private secondary schools where they have to adjust to the whims and caprices of the proprietors-cum-managers (who can recruit and fire their staff rather easily).

Thus, informal teacher leadership depends a lot on the leadership style of the head of school and the motivation teachers get to assume leadership roles informally. In cases where the rector is a leader who practices distributed and shared leadership, teachers find it easier to operate as informal teacher leaders. The participants will help to shed light on the link between the leadership style of the rector and informal teacher leadership.

## 2.2 MAURITIAN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

In this section, I am going to describe the Mauritian educational context in general and the contexts of the three secondary schools in particular which have been selected to conduct the

research. Stephens (2009:12) argues for the pertinence of setting or context in qualitative research and advises not to view it as just background because setting or context *'is integral to the holistic character of qualitative research, providing the research process with a fabric from which meaning and interpretation can occur.'* Crossley (2010) also insists that *'context does, indeed, matter...more than many policy-makers and educational researchers realize.'* This important research advice of giving 'context' proper consideration by both Stephens (2009) and Crossley (2010) has been scrupulously borne in mind.

There are 172 secondary schools in Mauritius, 6 in Rodrigues and 1 in Agalega. These 172 secondary schools are geographically distributed in four zones as follows:

Table 1 Distribution of secondary schools on a zonal basis

	Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4	Total
State Secondary schools (also referred as public secondary schools)	23	18	12	15	58
Private Secondary schools (funded by the government)	29	21	20	14	84
Private fee paying Secondary schools	4	6	11	3	24
MEDCO (Mauritius Educational Development Company Ltd)	3				3
State Vocational	2				2
GBS (Gandhian Basic school)		1			1
Total number of secondary schools					172

(Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_secondary\\_schools\\_in\\_Mauritius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_secondary_schools_in_Mauritius))

This research took place in three secondary schools found in Zone 1, that is, in the northern part of the island. I chose these 3 secondary schools from the North for convenience because I live in the north. Apart from proximity, the other advantage was that I personally knew the heads of the schools and the participants who were chosen for the research.

Two state secondary schools and one private secondary school were chosen for this research to look at the participants' conceptions of informal teacher leadership. I did not choose the schools

on the basis of their academic performance or their prestige in society. In fact, some secondary schools in Mauritius are high demand schools as compared to others. The demand of these schools is often based on the academic performance of their students in the SC and HSC examinations, the level of students' discipline and the scope for extra-curricular activities. Even though three secondary schools were chosen, my aim was not to make any comparison among them. I chose three secondary schools in order to have diverse views and conceptions about informal teacher leadership. For this research, I did not compare how far informal teacher leadership impacted positively or negatively on students' academic performance or the gender of informal teacher leaders. This may be taken up by another researcher willing to probe informal teacher leadership further.

### 2.3 THE RESEARCH CONTEXTS

The contexts of three secondary schools are also the professional contexts of the participants. Brief insights about the historical contexts of the schools have been given below. The school culture is largely determined by the leadership style of the rector. When rectors practise democratic and transformational leadership, then they encourage shared, distributed and informal teacher leadership.

For anonymity purposes, the three secondary schools have been called Rose Secondary School (RSS), Hibiscus Secondary School (HSS) and Lotus Secondary School (LSS).

Table 2 Profile of the three secondary schools

	Rose Secondary School (RSS),	Hibiscus Secondary School (HSS)	Lotus Secondary School (LSS)
Public/Private	State	State	Private
No of pupils	875	850	950
No of educators	85	85	90

### **ROSE SECONDARY SCHOOL (RSS)**

RSS is a State secondary school and it was set up in the wake of the Educational Reform initiated by former Minister of Education, Steve Obeegadoo in 2003. It started rather modestly but soon made a name in the educational sector. In spite of being a regional school, it produces outstanding academic results just like the national schools. RSS is among the ten best secondary schools in terms of academic performance and is a very high demand secondary school of Zone 1. It is often in the limelight for its performance in the academic and extra-curricular fields. It really practices holistic education. RSS promotes cultural values by encouraging the pupils to immerse in Mauritian culture through drama, music, dance and painting. It is believed that the rector who led it from 2003 to 2014 significantly helped in making RSS a reference at the national level. That is why the school is one of the most sought secondary schools in Zone 1. It means that it is a high demand school. It is known for its numerous extra-curricular activities which are held in a bid to provide holistic and quality education to its pupils. Parents lay a lot of emphasis on academic performance and extra-curricular activities.

However, after 2014, several rectors have worked in the school but none has been able to sustain the prestige the school enjoyed formerly. There have been regular changes in the leadership styles adopted by the different rectors who have been posted at the RSS after 2014 and these may have upset the school culture in many ways.

### **HIBISCUS SECONDARY SCHOOL (HSS)**

HSS is a State secondary school which was set up in 1979. Initially, it was a mixed secondary school but afterwards it was converted into a Girls' school. Students are recruited on a regional basis. Parents who are orthodox opt for this school for their daughters because they do not want them to travel far from their residence to receive secondary school education. The proximity of the school helps them to keep 'an eye' on their daughters. Most of the students are from middle and lower middle class. Some of the students are from poor families and broken homes. Students' discipline related problems are a major issue in this school.

Regular renovations take place in order to provide decent infrastructural facilities to the pupils and staff. The school does quite well academically. Parents are not very demanding in terms of academic performance as long as their daughters are disciplined.

Since its inception, HSS has seen many rectors running the school. Some of the rectors who managed the school have been respected democratic leaders and have contributed a lot towards improving students' discipline, staff motivation and academic performance. The school culture, however, evolves with time depending upon the leadership style of the rector.

### **LOTUS SECONDARY SCHOOL (LSS)**

LSS is more than 50 years old. It was set up in the colonial era and since then has essentially catered for children coming from economically and socially underprivileged families. Students who do not secure a seat in the public secondary schools have to seek admission in private schools like LSS. Since LSS is a private school, the manager (who is also the proprietor) selects and recruits the staff. The top management is often composed of the manager's family members or acquaintances. In Mauritius private secondary schools are run under the supervision of the PSEA (Private Secondary Education Authority). Being a private secondary school, the LSS receives grants from the PSEA. It is a private, non-fee paying school. It is the government of Mauritius which provides private secondary schools the funds through the PSEA.

There is considerable disparity between public and private secondary schools in terms of infrastructure. While public secondary schools have state of the art infrastructure, most private secondary schools have to be closely monitored so that they improve their infrastructure to meet the needs of the students. For instance, their specialist rooms are not as equipped as public secondary schools. In general, educators prefer to work in public secondary schools because of job security and better conditions of service rather than working in private secondary schools. While in the past, there was a marked disparity in the professional qualifications of educators working in public and private secondary schools, this has gradually disappeared today. The work of educators is tougher in private secondary schools as they are closely monitored as compared to state secondary schools where there is some laxity.

The leadership style of the different rectors has invariably been autocratic. These rectors who operate directly under the guidance of the school manager have no leeway to innovate or review their leadership style. Relationship between the administration and the educators is generally mired by conflicts and matters are often taken up by trade unionists.

## 2.4 POSITIONALITY

In this subsection, I will describe my positionality while undertaking the research. Sultana (2007:380) rightly asserts that it is important to *'pay attention to positionality, reflexivity, the production of knowledge and the power relations that are inherent in research processes in order to undertake ethical research...'*

The term 'positionality' both describes an individual's worldview and the position they have chosen to adopt in relation to a specific research (Foote and Bartell, 2011; Baden and Major, 2013). The individual's world view or *'where the researcher is coming from'* concerns ontological assumptions (the nature of social reality) and epistemological assumptions (the nature of knowledge) (Sikes, 2004). Positionality *'...reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study'* (Baden & Major, 2013; 71) and is normally identified by locating the researcher in relation to three areas: the subject, the participants and the research context and process.

My position regarding the subject is quite clear as I consider informal teacher leadership as an important aspect of effective school management. I am aware that my position as a qualitative researcher carries both its advantages and disadvantages. The participants are aware of my reputation as an educational leader who has successfully led one of the regional schools (RTSS) to the pinnacle of fame, and must have come across my writings on informal teacher leadership in the press (Gungapersad, 2008).

Conducting research in a small island state such as Mauritius inevitably brings such tensions which are unavoidable. Bray (1991: 21) points out that doing research in small countries can be quite daunting because they are invariably *'highly personalised societies in which people know each other in a multitude of settings, and in which relationships are long lasting'*.

As an insider researcher, it is important for me to put the participants at ease by stressing that it is the researcher who is conducting the research and not the former rector or the active politician. It is the approach and the way I talk and reassure them during the interviews that can help in encouraging the participants to be objective and unbiased in their constructions of informal teacher leadership. The second research method, that is the diary, will help to reduce any

disadvantage my positionality can cause. In the diary the participants will be able to write their views and opinions on informal teacher leadership more freely.

The use of a reflexive approach to inform positionality is a rejection of the idea that social research is separate from wider society and the individual researcher's biography (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). A reflexive approach suggests that researchers should acknowledge and disclose their selves in the research, aiming to understand their own influence on and in the process; rather than trying to eliminate their effect.

## 2.5 SUMMARY

When we refer to contexts in this study, it is imperative to mention that Mauritius, is the overarching context where the study was carried out. Mauritius is a small island state of 1.3 million people located in the Indian Ocean. Within the island, the research was carried out in three secondary schools found in the north of the country, known as Zone 1 (refer to Appendix 6) in the Mauritian educational system. When this study was being designed (I discuss this more elaborately in chapter four, under the section Research Design), I initially thought that it would be better to involve three separate secondary schools instead of only one. The rationale for focusing on three rather than one school was to widen and broaden my research perspective. I thought that the three different secondary schools with their different histories and cultures would help to garner data which would emphasise variance.

One of the criticisms which is levelled at phenomenological research is its small number of participants involved in the study. Surprisingly, I noted as the research progressed that the nature of the lived experiences of the participants from the three secondary schools was decidedly similar, so much so that there seemed little value in looking for differences between the schools. This led me to decide to use the individual participants as my unit of analysis.

In a small island state such as Mauritius, the possibility for major or stark differences in lived experiences regarding informal teacher leadership is quite minimal. This research has, revealed this. Research carried out on educational leadership and teacher leadership in Mauritius so far, irrespective of the secondary schools, by different researchers (Gungapersad, 2008; Ah-Teck & Starr, 2012; Kong Tin Lun, Zhang & Ramma, 2015; Chukowry, 2018) have yielded moreover

similar results proving that the location or background of the secondary school has had little impact on issues such as leadership, be it the leadership style of the rector or that of informal teacher leaders.

## 3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the literature that has been reviewed leans mostly on the West and a few Third World countries where researchers have investigated teacher leadership. As mentioned earlier, there is currently a dearth of literature on informal teacher leadership in Mauritius and in most small-island states because only scant research on teacher leadership in general and informal teacher leadership in particular has been carried out so far.

It is interesting to note that many countries such as the USA (Lambert, 2002), the UK (Harris, 2003), and Australia (Fisher, 2007) are showing a growing interest on teacher leadership, both formal and informal, though some research has been conducted in southern countries such as Pakistan (Shamsi et al., 2010; Khan, 2011), Singapore (Wu Ven Yuen, 2006), Oman (Al Farsi, 2007), Morocco (Belhiah, 2007) and South Africa (Grant et al., 2010). Research on school leaders or educational leadership has also been carried out in many small island states and Commonwealth countries such as Fiji (Lingam, 2011; Crossley, 2012), Seychelles (Confait, 2014), and Solomon Island (Lingam, 2011) but little or no attention has been given to formal or informal teacher leadership as such.

Like many small island states and Commonwealth countries, Mauritius has recently shown keen interest in educational leadership and a few researchers (Ah Teck & Hung, 2014; Chukowry, 2018) are engaged in exploring the multifaceted nature of various forms of leadership in schools. This study focuses on informal teacher leadership which is one of the many aspects of educational leadership.

The literature is reviewed in relation to the four main research questions of this phenomenological study.

RQ1 How do the participants construct their notions of educational and informal teacher leadership and what skills and characteristics should informal teacher leaders have?

RQ2 What are the cultural and contextual factors that encourage or impede teachers from assuming informal teacher leadership role?

RQ3 What contributions, if any, can informal teacher leadership make to school improvement in Mauritius?

RQ4 What are the policy implications at school and national level for a greater role for informal teacher leadership?

### 3.2 EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

It is pertinent to grasp the notion of leadership in general before reviewing educational leadership more specifically. As defined by Fullan (2007: 17), leadership is *'the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers'*. Effective leaders realize that in order to persuade others to follow, they must cultivate trustworthy relationships. *'Leaders establish an atmosphere of trust by their daily actions'* (Marzano, et al., 2005: 16). Rebore & Walmsley (2007: 22) described leadership as *'a way of life of dedication to the academic community and profession'*.

Donaldson (2001:5) believes that *'the times are ripe for widening the lens in search of a model of school leadership that is both more productive for schools and more sustainable for those who aspire to lead'* while Copland (2003:4) proposes that *'rethinking leadership in schools is a crucial first step in moving toward shared, on-going, and sustainable school improvement'*. The concept of leadership that buoys teacher leadership is one that is non-hierarchical in nature, that is neither predominantly position- or authority-based (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Sykes & Elmore, 1989)—one in which *'leadership is not . . . confused with official position or with exercise of authority'* (Foster, 1986: 177). In Mauritius, in many cases, leadership is still *'confused with official position or with exercise of authority.'*

Collectively, leadership bestows less emphasis *'upon formal role in the system'* (Copland, 2003: 2) and less stress on the notion of *'legitimate power'* (Crowther et al., 2002: 23). Elmore (2003:204) stipulates that *'leadership is more collective in nature than individual'*. That is why Copland (2003:5) adds that leadership is cast as a *'broad concept, separated from person, role,*

and a discrete set of individual behaviours' especially from those at the top of the organization. It is viewed 'as dispers[ed] . . . across education' (Silva et al., 2000: 782): 'school leadership practice is constituted in the dynamic interaction of multiple leaders . . . and their situation around particular leadership tasks' (Spillane et al., 2000: 6). In my earlier research (Gungapersad, 2014), I found that schools are places where the tough resistance against 'the dynamic interaction of multiple leaders' still prevails. While teachers in general want to play a more meaningful role as leaders (albeit informally), many rectors are quite unwilling to accommodate more leaders.

This recast conceptualization of leadership is based on research that 'suggests that people in many different roles can lead and thereby affect the performance of their schools' (Pounder et al., 1995: 586), 'that shared power strengthens the school as an organization' (Stone et al., 1997: 50, Heifetz & Laurie, 1997), and that 'the accomplishments of a proficient and well-organized group are widely considered to be greater than the accomplishments of isolated individuals' (Little, 1987: 495). Rectors who have realised that educators can bring different forms of leadership expertise in the management of schools are more likely to encourage and promote informal teacher leadership in Mauritius.

Research has shown that when leadership is viewed as a shared construct (Chenoweth & Everhart, 2002; Marks & Printy, 2003; Smylie & Hart, 1999), it replaces an overreliance on hierarchy and bureaucracy (Harrison & Lembeck, 1996) and acknowledges that multiple people 'have the opportunity to contribute in meaningful ways' (Wasley, 1991: 57). In fact, in the 'post-heroic era of leadership' (Hart, 1995: 10; Fullan, 2004), 'collective relationship is replacing the person as the kernel of leadership' (Donaldson, 2001: 42). Mauritian rectors need to realise that leadership 'depends more on connections with rather than authority over' (Uline & Berkowitz, 2000: 437) and that is why they should be encouraged to relinquish the hierarchical notions of leadership that they culturally carry with them.

There is a need to reconceptualise the rector-teacher relationship in a world which is increasingly influenced by egalitarian and democratic values. Theories and concepts surrounding educational leadership are changing and are increasingly focusing on distributed leadership as opposed to the former and traditional leadership concepts which relied on 'heroic' leaders in administrative roles (Spillane, 2006). Murphy (2002) reflects that this paradigm shift respects the underlying

logic of the new foundations of educational leadership as including school improvement, social justice, and a democratic community. Caldwell (1992:7) notes that '*Principals are now expected to consult and reach consensus with a wide range of individuals and groups in decision making*'. This research situates itself within this paradigm shift in Mauritius and encourages the setting up of '*new foundations of educational leadership as including school improvement, social justice, and a democratic community*' Caldwell (1992:7). The first step towards that paradigm shift is to change the '*traditional leadership concepts which heavily relied on 'heroic' leaders in administrative roles* (Spillane, 2006),' to different forms of leadership which are described as '*instructional,*' '*participative,*' '*democratic,*' '*transformational,*' '*transactional*' and the like.

While transactional leadership '*involves an economic, political or psychological exchange between the leader and the follower and involves the use of coercive power to penalise employees who do not perform as expected*' (Tucker et al., 1992: 402), transformational leadership occurs when '*leaders and followers motivate each other toward greater aspiration*' (Tucker-Ladd et al., 1992: 399). Transformational leadership is seen by Silins (1994: 274) as the '*bond (between) leader and followers within a collaborative change process and contributes to the performance of the whole organisation...(as against transactional leadership which) does not bind leaders and followers in any enduring way and results in a routinised, non-creative but stable environment.*' Collaboration between rectors and teaching staff does not occur automatically. For effective collaboration to take place there needs to be a culture of trust at the school level. The rector or others need to value the importance of creating a culture where '*the followers feel trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect toward the leader, and they are motivated to do more than they originally expected to do*' (Yukl, 2006: 262). This is more easily said than done in Mauritian secondary schools. Currently, there is no monitoring of rectors' leadership styles and there is no mechanism as such to influence rectors' autocratic or autocratic leadership styles. Rectors tend to use their authority and power in a coercive manner. Informal teacher leaders face difficulties to operate effectively in such conditions.

Effective educational leadership can benefit secondary schools in many ways (Leithwood et al, 2004; Spillane, 2006; Sergiovanni, 2007; Harris, 2001, 2003, 2005; Fullan, 2007; Petersen, 2016, Palmer, 2011). When educational leadership is based upon democratic, shared and distributed models as discussed in the literature, it creates a school culture which helps in the professional

context for educationists to harness the leadership potential of rectors and educators in order to ensure school improvement (Lieberman, Saxl & Miles, 2000; Harris, 2011; Murphy, 2009; Berg et al., 2017). For example, educational leadership may help to consolidate the trust between the rector and the educators. When trust permeates the school culture, then innovations, change management, capacity building, team work and healthy professional environment become increasingly feasible.

Likewise, when there is effective educational leadership at the helm of the school, especially when rectors practice transformational leadership and regard themselves as leaders of a culture of change (Fullan, 2007), then educators are both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated to collaborate and give their best so that effective teaching and learning can take place, school improvement can be achieved, challenges facing the school can be met collectively and the leadership potential of everyone is duly recognised and professionally valued. A rector who is a democratic educational leader and believes in shared and distributed leadership easily empowers his or her staff so that the latter can assume leadership roles inside and outside the classroom. In schools which are run by such educational leaders, we can expect to see the emergence of effective school management (Murphy, 2009; Palmer, 2011; Petersen; 2016; Berg et al., 2017).

The findings of this research will help to shed light on these stipulations, assumptions and opportunities.

### 3.3 INTERPRETATIONS OF INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Clearly the whole issue of defining teacher leadership is problematic (Wasley, 1991:147) and Murphy (2005:81) rightly points out that *'teacher leadership is a complex concept'*. Donaldson (2001:5) observes that as *'we seek to understand how leadership can function to improve schools, we are exploring what leadership means'*. Smylie, Conley, & Marks (2002: 162) assert that *'the subject of teacher leadership is cloaked in ambiguity'* because *'variance makes it difficult to precisely define what is meant by the term 'teacher leaders''* (Kowalski, 1995: 251). However, research reveals that very few teachers seem able to put a specific definition on the term *'teacher leadership'* (Anderson, 2004; Muijs & Harris, 2006) and even established researchers find it relatively daunting to define teacher leadership because, *'confusion about definitions . . . of teacher leaders abound'* (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001: 4–5) and that is why

*'the roles of teacher leaders are often ill defined and misunderstood'* (Johnson & Hynes, 1997: 107). The first research question will help to collate and analyse the participants' constructions of educational, formal and informal teacher leadership.

Boles & Troen (1994: 11) contrast teacher leadership to traditional notions of leadership, by characterising it as a form of *'collective leadership in which teachers develop expertise by working collaboratively'*. I concur with Harris (2003), for whom teacher leadership essentially refers to *'the exercise of leadership by teachers, regardless of position or designation.'* I have worked with teachers who have displayed leadership qualities both inside and outside the classrooms *'regardless of position or designation.'*

In fact, literature on teacher leadership is replete with references to formal and informal roles played by those teachers who lead. It is interesting to note that in countries such as Morocco, Oman, South Africa and Pakistan, teacher leadership exists essentially informally, however, it exists formally in the United States, Australia and Canada. According to Lambert (2003), the concept of 'teacher leadership' has emerged in England as a *'new way of looking at leadership'* (Frost & Durrant 2003; Day & Harris 2003; Harris 2003). Harris & Muijs (2005:23) assert that *'in England, in contrast to other countries (e.g, USA, Canada and Australia) little attention has been given to the concept of teacher leadership, in a broader sense. Indeed, the concept of teacher leadership is not one that finds ready recognition within the English education system'*. Mauritius which draws a lot from the English education system is affected by the same marginal importance given to teacher leadership. In Mauritius, however, as stated earlier in this research, teacher leadership does not exist in an official or formal manner, and so it is important that the distinctions between both formal and informal teacher leadership be reviewed so that they can be better understood and appreciated.

Formal teacher leaders are those who either are appointed or elevated to official positions (Martin, 2007), such as department head or Teacher of the Year. Most often, formal teacher leaders act as middle managers who assume responsibilities regarded as extensions of administrators' duties (Hannay & Ross, 1999). Due to the intermediary nature of their roles, formal teacher leaders need to juggle management and leadership (Hannay & Ross, 1999). They

need to ensure the completion of tasks for which they are responsible while building trust and earning the respect of peers (Donaldson, 2007).

Harris (2003:314) also distinguishes between the terms 'formal' and 'informal' in regard to leadership roles or responsibilities that teachers assume. She explains that

*Informal leadership constitutes (such) classroom-related functions as planning, communicating goals, regulating activities, creating a pleasant workplace environment, supervising, motivating those supervised, and evaluating the performance of those supervised. In contrast, formal leadership roles encompass responsibilities such as subject coordinator, head of department or head of year, often moving away from the classroom to achieve this.*

According to Akert (2009), many people in the education field still believe that a formal title is required to be a teacher leader. Birky et al. (2006: 88) declare that '*formal teacher leaders are those given familiar titles, and the positions are generally identified by the principal and compensated either by additional salary or in exchange for a lighter teaching load*'. Although such roles provided teachers with leadership opportunities, they were often viewed by fellow colleagues as '*quasi-administrators*' (Danielson, 2006: 19), thus losing their credibility with other instructional team members.

With informal teacher leaders '*the focus is more on the learning and improvement of school and student performance than on leading*' (Birky et al. 2006: 88). Moller & Pankake (2006: 28), when describing the importance of the informal teacher leader, stated:

*We believe that the most powerful influence for improved teaching and learning often comes from informal teacher leadership. In fact, when teachers are asked to identify teacher leaders based on who is competent, credible, and approachable, they frequently name those teachers in the school who do not have formal roles or titles.*

These researchers went on to argue that informal teacher leaders have a variety of undefined roles and are available for other teachers when they most need help for both professional and personal issues. Hatch, White, & Faigenbaum (2005) strongly believe that teacher leaders do not

wait to be appointed to a formal role that holds special authority before they offer their expertise, credibility, and influence to others in order to impact the educational experience of all students.

In Mauritius, formal teacher leadership does not exist in the system. Even the subject coordinators, heads of departments or even those who act middle managers are not officially or formally recognized as teacher leaders. Teacher leaders basically operate unofficially and informally. As a former teacher and rector, I subscribe to the findings made by Hatch, White & Faigenbaum, (2005) who claim that teacher leaders help direct fellow colleagues and the entire school toward higher standards of achievement and recognition of individual responsibility for school reform. They further add that teacher leaders do not wait to be appointed to a formal role that holds special authority before they offer their expertise, credibility, and influence to others in order to impact the educational experience of all students.

Danielson's (2007:14) interpretation comes closest to what is usually seen in Mauritius when she says that

*Informal teacher leaders emerge spontaneously and organically from the teacher ranks, instead of being selected, they take initiative to address a problem or institute a programme. They have no positional authority; their influence stems from the respect they command from their colleagues through their experience and practice.*

This study is primarily concerned with those informal teacher leaders who '*emerge spontaneously from the teacher ranks*' as a result of their pedagogical expertise, extensive content knowledge, or ability to establish collegial relationships (Danielson, 2007; Patterson & Patterson, 2004). They volunteer for new projects, share their expertise, bring fresh ideas to the forefront, and assist colleagues in carrying out their practice (Leithwood, 1997; Patterson & Patterson, 2004).

Essentially, informal teacher leaders are the '*foot soldiers*' who move their school forward (Whitaker, 1995). Understanding how educators construct informal teacher leadership may help to formulate school based and national policies on informal teacher leadership.

### 3.4 INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERS' SKILLS AND CHARACTERISTICS

According to Lieberman, Saxl, & Miles (2000), teacher leaders, whether they are acting formally or informally, are generally risk takers who display optimism about teaching and learning, and so are '*always volunteering*' and '*accept responsibility for their own professional growth*' and they are also involved in '*mentoring and supporting other teachers.*' In fact, informal teacher leaders leave their comfort zone and step into the school management arena and do more than what their scheme of service prescribes to them. For instance, they are respected for their own teaching capabilities by fellow teachers and administrators alike, as found by Danielson (2007), and are well-versed in subject content as identified by Nieto (2007) and Lieberman et al. (2000).

Danielson (2007) and Lieberman et al., (2000) consider that some of the skills which teacher leaders possess also include open-mindedness, ability to collaborate effectively, respect for the views of others, and flexibility; all of which are necessary when working with colleagues, who pose a very different set of challenges for teacher leaders than those posed when working with students (Danielson, 2007). Frost & Durrant (2002:151) recognize the nature of such work, and highlight the following qualities and skills that are observable in teacher leaders: '*considerable sensitivity in working with colleagues; the need for determination, patience and conviction; and gentleness, coupled with persistence*'.

Teacher leaders '*seek challenge, change, and growth*' (Wilson, 1993: 24); they are guided by the belief that they '*can make a difference in children's lives*' (Collinson & Sherrill, 1997: 59). These leaders are often distinguished by a set of qualities that make leadership by expertise rather than formal authority possible. They are authentic (Crowther et al., 2002), secure (Brownlee, 1979), open and confident (Smylie, 1996), self-actualized (Snell & Swanson, 2000), and trustworthy (Lieberman et al., 1988:153), spending personal resources '*gaining the trust of people in their buildings*' and '*building rapport*'. They tend toward collaboration and are often '*characterized by a high degree of collegiality and cooperation*' (Snell & Swanson, 2000) and a commitment to '*make themselves available to other teachers as a resource or an advocate*' (Wilson, 1993: 24).

Teacher leaders often demonstrate fluency in '*communicating with multiple constituents*' (Harrison & Lembeck, 1996: 113). Teacher leaders are also proficient at solving problems, resolving conflicts, negotiating rough terrain, and leading diverse participants to shared decisions (Yarger & Lee, 1994). Without effective communication skills and their caring and compassionate skills, it would be very difficult for educators to operate as informal teacher leaders in Mauritius. During my tenure as a rector, I have seen many informal teacher leaders with the skills mentioned above. This leads me to surmise that, irrespective of context, educators around the world display many of the same skills and characteristics.

Teacher leaders normally possess '*administrative skills*' (Boles & Troen, 1996: 55) because in Mauritius very they often help rectors to manage administrative matters. Lieberman et al. (1988:158) refer to the '*blend of skills, including managing time, setting priorities for work, delegating tasks and authority, taking initiative, monitoring progress, and coordinating the many strands of work taking place in their schools*' which teacher leaders possess. On the other side of the equation, a variety of analysts have addressed the skills found in the toolkits of teacher leaders. O'Connor and Boles (cited in Killion, 1996: 68) list seven key competencies:

- understanding of politics, power, and authority
- skill in managing interpersonal relationships
- communication skills
- understanding of group dynamics
- presentation skills
- organizational skills
- ability to change.

In fact, informal teacher leaders need to possess both professional as personal qualities to help them exercise the influence which they normally have among their colleagues. Hatfield et al. (1986:19) provide the following '*blend of professional/ personal attributes*':

- adept in dealing with people
- skilled in communications (oral and written)
- flexible, patient, objective
- competent in the subject field and respected by their peers
- organized

- committed to the role

The skills and characteristics mentioned above are normally leadership traits to be found in any person who has to lead others. Informal teacher leaders are no exception. These skills and characteristics help teacher leaders to distinguish themselves from the other teachers in a school. Rectors and other educators can easily identify these informal teacher leaders to solicit their support to accomplish a wide range of tasks which require leadership skills. Sometimes, these informal teacher leaders are empowered and valued when rectors who believe and practise democratic, shared and distributed leadership. These informal teacher leaders also help and contribute in school improvement. However, in Mauritius, it is quite surprising to note that even if many rectors do not practise democratic, shared and distributed leadership, still informal teacher leaders contribute enormously in the management of the school. These informal teacher leaders often display skills in confronting and overcoming troublesome barriers, both structural and human (Crowther, 1997; Miller et al., 2000) to contribute in all attempts which are geared towards school improvement.

### 3.5 INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP AS DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

In the earlier section, it has already been mentioned that teacher leadership is a form of distributed leadership. Informal teacher leadership depends a lot on the leadership style of the head of the school (Gungapersad, 2008). Danielson (2006) suggests that fostering teacher leadership requires a culture in which the rector understands and values the importance of teacher leadership, and building such a school culture determines the extent to which teachers will be able to acquire and exercise skills of leadership. The rector needs to be willing to relinquish power to establish a positive environment for teacher leaders to cultivate and grow (Akert, 2009). Rectors also need to be prepared to hold fast to their values while letting go of power and authority (Lambert, 2006), thus empowering teachers to explore their new leadership roles, allowing leadership to be distributed throughout the school rather than vested in solely one position.

While distributed leadership has roots in earlier concepts such as '*shared decision-making*,' current definitions are more far-reaching. The term '*distributed leadership*' means different

things to different people. However, as Bennett et al., (2003:2) point out, there seems to be '*little agreement as to the meaning of the term*' and interpretations vary. They suggest that it is more practical to think of distributed leadership as a '*way of thinking*' about leadership and Spillane (2006) suggests that distributed leadership is a framework for examining leadership.

Harris (2005) says that many attempts have been made to define distributed leadership, and broadly speaking it centres on the discussion about who can exert influence over colleagues and in what domains. Elaborating further, Leithwood et al. (2004:60) suggest that '*it entails the exercise of influence over the beliefs, actions and values of others . . . as is the case with leadership from any source*'. Still in contrast to traditional leadership norms, distributed leadership is characterized as a form of collective leadership in which teachers develop expertise by working together (Harris, 2005) and are provided greater opportunities to learn from one another (Leithwood et al. 2004).

For teacher leadership to find '*a fertile working environment in a school to grow, it is imperative for leadership to be shared and distributed. To put it simply, the rector has to be a leaders' leader*' (Gungapersad, 2014). But in Mauritian secondary schools, the model of school leadership is acknowledged as traditional and autocratic. Ah Teck & Starr (2012) and Chukowry (2018) have proposed that it is high time for Mauritian rectors to shift from autocratic to distributed leadership. In their research, however, Kong Tin Lun et al., (2015) assert that the rectors in Mauritius '*are not likely to distribute leadership to anyone except to only a few chosen ones, thus creating frustration and jealousy among staff, and reducing staff effectiveness.*' In her research, Chukowry (2018:13) reports that, '*even if Mauritius has not yet reached the stage where teachers are characterised as leaders; teachers demonstrate leadership in many ways during their daily work. Unconsciously, teachers apply their leadership skills that impact directly or indirectly on student achievement.*'

While the merits of distributed leadership have been discussed earlier, we should recognise also its possible limitations or weaknesses. For instance, if distributed leadership is not clearly articulated and conceptualised, it can cause more harm than good. Research by Kong Tin Lun et al., (2015) has demonstrated that the existing model of leadership in Mauritian secondary schools is based upon an autocratic style, with power concentrated within the school rector. This

leadership style has been challenged elsewhere in other countries, for example in the USA and Canada, as ineffective (Harris, 2011) and has been replaced by a distributed leadership model instead (Spillane, 2006). However, in their research, Ah Teck & Starr (2012) have found that distributed leadership is still at an infancy stage in Mauritius. Since, distributed leadership is at an infancy stage, it is presumed that informal teacher leadership does not have '*a fertile working environment...to grow*' currently and Chukowry (2018:16) says that '*the top-down school decision-making system in which the rector plays a dominant role has to be broken down as it impedes the success of teacher leadership in Mauritian schools.*'

This present study will explore how informal teacher leadership manages to operate in the schools under investigation. Apart from the rector's leadership style and willingness to relinquish power, informal teacher leadership is also heavily influenced by the school culture.

### 3.6 SCHOOL CULTURE AND INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP

The second research question attempts to explore the participants' experiences on how school culture and context influence teacher leadership. Like seeds, teacher leadership, whether conceptualized in a formal or informal way, needs a fertile ground and the necessary conditions to grow. Silva et al., (2000: 802) put it in very clear terms that, '*Until spaces are made for teacher leadership and the culture is created to support teacher leadership, there will be few stories of successful . . . teacher leadership*' and it is not very reassuring when Smyser, (1995: 131) nails it with '*The school culture is not conducive to the development of leadership skills of teachers, at least not outside the narrow confines of the individual classroom.*' Rectors can play a crucial role in creating the necessary school culture and the appropriate professional spaces for informal teacher leadership to develop effectively.

According to Barth (2001:81), every school has a culture and, '*a school culture hospitable to widespread leadership will be a school culture hospitable to widespread learning*'. Wilson (2007) believes that it is the power of this culture and vision that drives the passion for learning found in effective schools. Danielson (2006) insists that one must consider the culture of a school and the important influence it has on how the school operates and the extent to which it can achieve positive results for its students.

Fostering teacher leadership demands a culture in which teacher leadership is valued, and building such a school culture determines the extent to which teachers will be able to acquire and exercise skills of leadership (Danielson, 2006). Barth (2001:7) asserts that, '*ultimately, a school's culture has far more influence on life and learning in the schoolhouse than the state department of education, the superintendent, the school board, or even the principal can ever have*'. Wilson (2007) concluded that it is the culture in remarkable schools that inspires students and teachers to accomplish great things.

The onus on implementing teacher leadership depends to a large extent on the rector and '*the many-headed hydras of school culture*' so that '*teacher leadership can be encouraged or impeded depending on school culture and climate*' (Snell & Swanson, 2000: 2). Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001: 71) argue that '*each school's culture directly influences how willing its teachers will be to take on positive leadership roles.*' Durrant & Holden (2006:28) also highlight the importance of culture by stating, '*if school culture is an important determinant in how staff and students experience organizational life, then an important determinant of school culture is leadership*'. Thus, there is a direct link between leadership and school culture.

Rectors who have understood the value of shared, distributed and democratic leadership go a long way to create a positive school culture where more and more teachers are given the chance to contribute their leadership skills in the overall development of the school.

What is required is '*a school culture that is clearly committed to providing support for the learning of all its members*' (Silva et al., 2000: 802), '*a school culture in which classroom teachers are fully empowered partners in shaping policy, creating curriculum, managing budgets, improving practice, and bringing added value to the goal of improving education for children*' (Boles & Troen, 1996: 42); that is, '*settings in which teachers are encouraged to collaborate, to participate in school-site decision making, to engage in on-going learning, and to reflect upon their pedagogy are the school sites that best foster the leadership of classroom practitioners*' (Snell & Swanson, 2000: 2).

Teacher leadership is an idea whose time has come, but such leadership cannot reach its fullest capacity in Mauritius without the support and encouragement of the rector. The overall concept of teacher leadership is an important facet in school improvement (Andrews & Crowther, 2002;

Barth, 2001; Birky, et al.2006; Danielson, 2006), and ultimately the need to understand the perception of teacher leadership from the perspective of the teachers and rectors is necessary for substantial school reform to take place in more schools.

Akert (2009) asserts that concrete, planned improvement strategies alone do not ensure improvement occurs. Rather, it is the responsibility of a school leader to establish a successful culture of learning in the school setting which might promote effective informal teacher leadership. The hierarchical culture of leadership is the result of colonialism and it will take some time to be replaced by a more democratic one.

### 3.7 CONTEXT AND INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP

In this section, the literature linking school contexts and informal teacher leadership will be reviewed. It has to be borne in mind that in educational contexts which favour hierarchical organizations and define power and authority in ways that dampen the viability of shared and distributed leadership (Clark & Meloy, 1989; Sergiovanni, 1991; Sykes & Elmore, 1989), it is difficult for informal teacher leadership to find the type of soil to grow and develop.

The Mauritian educational system has long been encrusted in a hierarchical and top-down system where the power enjoyed by the rector is almost considered sacrosanct. Nobody, so far, in the system, has ever questioned the leadership style of rectors. Lucky are those few schools which are run by rectors who practise democratic, shared and distributed leadership. That is why in the Mauritian educational context; it becomes difficult for many educators to share power and authority with the rectors in most of the schools where they work (Kong Tin Lun et al., 2015; Ah Teck & Starr, 2012; Gungapersad, 2014).

As a result of colonialism, the traditional structure of many Mauritian schools '*simply does not support teacher decision making*' (Rallis, 1990:193). It leaves teachers '*with very limited power in making decisions outside their own classrooms*' (Smyser, 1995: 132) and makes it '*difficult for teacher leaders to emerge in schools*' (Boles & Troen, 1994:10). Thus, one of the main impediments which informal teacher leadership meets on its way is the resistant hierarchical power and authority which many reactors do not want to relinquish at any cost. This explicates why these rectors are refractors to the idea of sharing and distributing leadership at the level of

the school. Such attitudes, when held tightly, by rectors do not give teachers the chance to share leadership (Kong Tin Lun et al., 2015; Ah Teck & Starr, 2012, Gungapersad, 2014).

Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001:123-124) assert that *'supporting teacher leadership means understanding the concept, awakening the understanding of teachers themselves to their leadership potential, and then providing for the development of teacher leadership'*. We should also remember that factors that hinder informal teacher leadership include *'a lack of time, unsatisfactory relationships with teachers and administrators, and a lack of money to get the job done'* (Pellicer & Anderson, 1995: 8).

The organizational context also plays a crucial role in the development or hindrance of informal teacher leadership (Conley, 1997). Wasley (1991:145), for example, in her case studies, found that,

*the context in which each of the people worked had a significant impact on the teacher leader's ability to influence the practice of others—one role could not easily be transported to another place without giving careful thought to the impact of the place and its culture.*

A necessary change will be for rectors to understand the enormity of their responsibility in so far as the implementation of informal teacher leadership is concerned. The Ministry of Education must change too by encouraging educational leaders to develop a culture of sharing and distributing leadership.

In the next section, we will critically review factors which encourage or support informal teacher leadership. In reality, these factors are inter related and intertwined and make sense when the rector manages to distribute and share leadership by keeping in mind the overall development of the school.

Rectors who have understood how to awaken *'the sleeping giant of informal teacher leadership'* and how to garner the help of these informal teacher leaders have seen improvement in students' examination results. Students' discipline also has been enhanced and educators are professionally more committed.

### 3.8 FACTORS SUPPORTING INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Earlier, in this chapter, we have seen that effective informal teacher leadership depends a lot on push and pull factors, which either hinder or encourage its development in schools. In this section, we are going to review supportive factors which '*enable [teachers] to engage in collaborative relationships*' (Wasley, 1991: 136). According to Little (1987: 508), they include (1) '*symbolic endorsements and rewards that place value on cooperative work and make the sources of inter-dependence clear*'; (2) '*school-level organization of staff assignments and leadership*'; (3) '*latitude for influence on crucial matters of curriculum and instruction*'; (4) '*time*'; (5) '*training and assistance*'; and material support'. For Hart & Baptist (1996:97), supportive conditions cluster into three categories: (1) '*interpersonal support*,' (2) '*tangible support*,' and (3) '*enlarged opportunities*' and they describe support for teacher leadership under six broad dimensions: (1) values and expectations, (2) structures, (3) training, (4) resources, (5) incentives and recognition, and (6) role clarity.

Ash & Persall (2000) argue that heads will need to become leaders of leaders, striving to develop a relationship of trust with staff, and encouraging leadership and autonomy throughout the school. For teacher leadership to develop, heads should also be willing to allow leadership from those who are not part of their '*inner circle*', and might not necessarily agree with them (Barth 1999). Stone et al (1997) found that teachers are also more likely to take on leadership roles if there is already '*a culture of shared decision making in the school*'. Wasley (1991) found that teachers need to be involved in the process of deciding on what roles, if any they wish to take on, and must then feel supported by the school's administration in doing so.

Black (1998) & Harris (2001) suggest that teacher leadership will not occur unless it is underpinned by shared values. They argue that these shared values are developed first and foremost through shared (pedagogical) discussion, observation and team teaching. Hence, it is crucial that teacher leaders work in collaborative teams in order for them to make a difference to the school. Research confirms that teacher leadership not only flourishes most in collaborative school contexts, but one of the tasks of the teacher leader should be to encourage the creation of collaborative cultures in school, and to develop common learning in schools (Caine & Caine, 2000, Little, 2000; Griffin, 1995).

Informal roles for teacher leaders have been the tradition in the profession, creating dilemmas for teachers when they are included in leadership that pulls them away from their classrooms. Many informal roles such as curriculum planning have classroom related functions, and yet become a burden on the scarcest of resources in schools: time (Livingstone, 1992). Teacher leaders are often removed from the classroom and are frequently placed in quasi-administrative roles with limited power, authority and resources (Livingstone, 1992). These situations create tensions that can easily lead to collegial opposition.

On the other hand, principals who inspire a culture of teacher leadership behave differently. According to Barth (2001:448), *'principals who support teacher leadership believe in it as a central purpose of the school'*. It becomes an expectation that the rector overtly articulates a vision for the school. Secondly, rectors willingly relinquish some of their authority and share the responsibility with teachers. Rectors have learned that by giving teachers some of the power to make decisions, they release the *'creative powers of the faculty in the service of the school'* (Barth, 2001: 448).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that rectors who foster teacher leadership are careful not to share power with only a select few, but rather look for ways to align leadership opportunities with the most qualified educators in a particular area such as curriculum, scheduling, and facilitation. This means finding ways for all teachers to participate in leadership opportunities. Educators should not only be recognized for their successes, but also take responsibility for their failures. The rector should not take the blame to protect the educators; in fact, looking for blame is not consistent with a culture of teacher leadership (Rutledge: 2009).

Harris & Muijs, (2003: 15) believe that the possibility of teacher leadership in any school will be dependent upon whether the head within the school relinquishes power to teachers and the extent to which teachers accept the influence of colleagues who have been designated as leaders in a particular area. In order for teacher leadership to become embedded, heads will therefore need to become *'leaders of leaders'* striving to develop a relationship of trust with staff, and encouraging leadership and autonomy throughout the school. According to Darling-Hammond (2003: 13), *'Great school leaders create nurturing school environments in which accomplished teaching can flourish and grow.'*

### 3.9 BARRIERS TO TEACHER LEADERSHIP

A number of studies have identified a series of barriers to teacher leadership. Katzenmeyer & Moller, (2000) suggest that teachers taking on leadership roles can sometimes be ostracised by their colleagues. Lieberman et al (2000) found that one of the main barriers to teacher leadership was often a feeling of being isolated from colleagues and Troen & Boles (1992) found that sometimes teachers felt less connected to peers when engaging in teacher leadership activities. Little (2002) found that while teachers were happy to acknowledge a hypothetical 'master teacher' or highly effective teacher they were less inclined to accept their colleagues in leadership positions. From my own experience as a teacher and rector, I agree with the findings of Lieberman et al (2000) and Little (2002).

There are '*crippling impediments*' (Barth, 2001: 444), '*barriers*' (Mitchell, 1997: 2), and '*myriad difficulties and obstacles confront the institutionalization of teacher leadership*' (Boles & Troen, 1996: 61), and that these '*barriers . . . exist at all levels*' (Manthei, 1992: 17). These obstructions can be clustered into the broad categories of '*structural conditions in schools*' (Mitchell, 1997: 1) and more specifically '*the culture and organization of many schools does not readily foster the spirit of collaboration*' (Snell & Swanson, 2000: 13) or as Katzenmeyer & Moller, formulate it (2001: 53) '*a hostile school environment can be an obstacle or can even prevent this growth and development.*' There are many factors which can be enlisted as contributing to '*a hostile school environment*' and they are discussed below.

Turning specifically to the dynamics of hierarchy, reviewers have observed that the '*organizational structure makes it inappropriate for a teacher to assume leadership*' (Troen & Boles, 1994: 276), that '*the school's bureaucratic structure makes it difficult for teachers to define and legitimate forms of leadership that are fully consistent with teaching's egalitarian culture*' (Little, 1995: 55). Especially problematic for teacher leadership are the following ideas embedded in hierarchical structures: '*the notion of a single leader*' (Moller & Katzenmeyer, 1996: 6); '*traditional patterns of relationships*' (Conley, 1989: 2) featuring a boss and subordinates; the idea that the leader is '*synonymous with boss*' (Moller & Katzenmeyer, 1996: 4); and the metaphor of leader as supervisor (Myers, 1970).

Another major barrier that informal teacher leaders generally face is a lack of support from their rectors. Barth (2001) describes several reasons why a rector might not embrace the personal initiative taken by teacher leaders. Many rectors may hold onto power for themselves due to jealousy. In the Mauritian culture, sharing of power or authority does not occur spontaneously. In schools also, leadership is conceptualised in a hierarchical way and the top-bottom approach is favoured. They have worked hard for their position and enjoy being on centre stage. Others see teacher leadership as risky and time consuming. Like educators, rectors also are overwhelmed with the responsibilities of their job and would rather make quick decisions on their own rather than go to the trouble of forming a committee of teachers to gather input. From my experience, a rector's willingness to encourage teacher leadership is very often related to a personal sense of security and efficacy.

Apart from cultural and contextual barriers, there are also other barriers to teacher leadership. Among them we have professional barriers, where teachers feel taking up leadership will separate them from colleagues and teachers who are more resistant to change. Apart from rectors' unwillingness to share leadership, the hierarchical structure of schools also serve as barriers to teacher leadership. Informal teacher leaders also suffer from '*the feeling of being isolated from colleagues*' and of being '*less connected to peers when engaging in teacher leadership activities*' (Harris & Muijs, 2003).

Danielson (2007:19) describes as the '*tall poppy syndrome*,' an Australian expression meaning '*those who stick their heads up risk being cut down to size*'. The teacher leader is the tall poppy who may be hindered by other teachers. Similarly, Hart (1994) reported that in the schools she studied, a growing consensus of '*animosity and jealousy*' toward teacher leaders resulted in the formation of opposition groups that worked actively to undermine teacher leaders. Informal teacher leaders themselves explained that they frequently were rebuffed when they offered to observe colleagues' classrooms or make suggestions about their colleagues' instructional practices (Palmer 2011: 96). Ackerman & MacKenzie (2006) mentioned the '*loneliness*' of teacher leadership when they explained how colleagues can act as barriers to teacher leadership. According to Gabriel (2005: 21), '*leadership breeds envy*' and expressed amusement when he explained that teacher leaders usually work for nothing more than job satisfaction, which hardly

should evoke envy or worse, maliciousness. Simply, some colleagues just do not respect teacher leaders and therefore may militate against them.

Fullan (1991) and Lieberman et al. (2000) also note this alienation of the teacher leader whose recognition, whether real or perceived, may aggrieve some teachers. According to Anderson (2004), these aggrieved teachers may see the teacher leader as the principal's pet and teacher leadership as having the potential to create hierarchies amongst teachers in terms of closeness to the principal, which can result in some teachers having no influence in decisions made in relation to the school.

In Mauritius, many prefer to stay away from leadership position because they are afraid of being tagged '*the stooges of the rector*' and some '*really come forward to help just to win favours*' (Gungapersad, 2008). That is why it is not easy for some potential teacher leaders to assume leadership position in their schools.

Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001:123-124) assert that '*supporting teacher leadership means understanding the concept, awakening the understanding of teachers themselves to their leadership potential, and then providing for the development of teacher leadership*' and factors that hinder development include '*a lack of time, unsatisfactory relationships with teachers and administrators, and a lack of money to get the job done*' (Pellicer & Anderson, 1995: 8).

Palmer (2011:6) summarises the factors that hinder teacher leadership as follows-negative and adverse school culture, rector's unwilling to distribute leadership, lack of training and lack of time, lack of confidence, undefined roles for informal teacher leaders and unsupportive colleagues.

### **3.10 INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

The third research question revolves around the role informal teacher leadership might play in school improvement. Studies have found that teachers participating in decision making and collaborative teacher-principal leadership can contribute to school improvement (Glover et al., 1999; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

Educational leaders understand the importance of establishing a culture of trust, thus creating opportunities for collaborative learning (Bruffee, 1999). One of the most important facets of collaborative learning is *'the interaction between individuals and collaborative learning activities which are opportunities for school improvement'* (Akert, 2009:20).

The evidence from the school improvement literature consistently highlights that effective leaders exercise an indirect influence on schools' capacity to improve and upon the achievement of students, though this influence does not necessarily derive from senior managers, but can also at least partly lie in strengths of middle level leaders and teachers (Leithwood et al, 1999). Whilst the quality of teaching most strongly influences levels of pupil motivation and achievement, it has been demonstrated that the quality of leadership matters in determining the motivation of teachers and the quality of teaching in the classroom (Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 1999).

Research by Muijs et al. (2007) has shown the potential for teacher leadership to contribute in school improvement and they argue that effective or purposeful leadership is generally accepted as being a central component in securing and sustaining school improvement. My interest in teacher leadership is premised upon a personal opinion that if rightly channelled, informal teacher leadership can prove to be beneficial to the overall school improvement. However, this phenomenological study is less about my own views but more about the participants' constructions of informal teacher leadership and its relationship to their school improvement and this is what this research aims at uncovering.

There is a growing belief that *'the times are ripe for widening the lens in search of a model of school leadership that is both more productive for schools and more sustainable for those who aspire to lead'* (Donaldson, 2001: 5). It is important to initiate a profound *'rethinking of leadership in schools'* as it *'is a crucial first step in moving toward shared, on-going, and sustainable school improvement'* (Copland, 2003: 4). There is an acknowledgment that *'increasing professionalism, redistributing authority, and increasing collegial interaction redefine school leadership'* (Keedy, 1999: 787). There is recognition that emerging conceptions of leadership *'stress the need to enable, entrust, and empower personnel'* (Bishop et al., 1997: 77) and that *'successful organizations depend on multiple sources of leadership'* (Childs-Bowen et al., 2000: 28; Marks & Printy, 2003). As discussed in previous chapters, Mauritius is still grappling with the notion of educational leadership. Rethinking educational leadership in order

to seek multiple sources of leadership in schools and in the educational system can be salutary in recasting a new model of leadership which is premised on democratic ideals which acknowledge and empower leaders.

Donaldson (2001:102) offers reasons to embrace teachers as leaders when embarking on school improvement. '*Teacher leaders, by virtue of their membership in the teacherhood, can have vast informal influence with a faculty, staff, and community*'. As 'one of us,' their opinions, proposals, and practices carry significant power with co-workers. This is particularly true if a teacher's leadership is informal, the product of his or her naturally earned authority and credibility among peers. Teachers in this situation often continue to teach while supporting the school improvement efforts both in formal and informal situations (Rutledge 2009:18)

At this point, we are simply identifying the supposed benefits of teacher leadership and welding them together into a coherent framework. To begin with, while '*the ultimate value of teacher leadership is improvement of practice and increasing student performance*' (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001: 34; Wynne, 2001) and while '*the prospects for teacher leadership remain dim if no one can distinguish the gains made for students*' (Little, 1988: 100), empirical evidence on these crucial issues is '*limited in quantity*' (Leithwood et al., 1997: 4) and '*equivocal*' (Smylie, 1996: 554): '*more teacher leadership has been advocated over the last decade for several reasons but without much evidence that it has the potential its advocates claim*' (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1998: 25–26). In the findings and conclusion chapters, the link between informal teacher leadership and school improvement will be discussed.

In fact, school improvement depends on a series of factors and one of them is school leadership which enables a maximum number of people to play an active role in the school improvement plan. The school culture and context should contribute towards '*improved teacher performance*' (Smylie et al., 2002: 165) by providing teachers '*leadership opportunities*' which will help to '*bring out the very best in teachers; and the very best from teachers will bring out the very best in their students*' (Barth, 1988: 134). And one way to achieve this is to ensure that informal teacher leadership helps in capacity building which will be discussed in the next section

### 3.11 INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND CAPACITY BUILDING

This research is of the view that informal teacher leadership must focus on building school and teacher capacity to undertake challenging tasks (Darling-Hammond, 1993; Leithwood, et al., 1997). The capacity-building approach requires policy, tools and different ways to producing, sharing, and using knowledge, more than previously used traditional approaches (Harris, 2001; Harris & Lambert, 2003). Classroom teachers should assume greater roles of responsibility and leadership in this process of change (Darling-Hammond, 1993).

Building the capacity for school improvement necessitates paying careful attention to how collaborative processes in schools are fostered and developed. Research suggests that where educators '*feel confident in their own capacity, in the capacity of their colleagues and in the capacity of the school to promote professional development*' (Mitchell & Sackney 2000:78), school improvement is more likely to occur. Capacity-building for school improvement means extending the potential of teachers to lead and to work collaboratively (Leithwood, et al., 1997). Leithwood, Tomlinson & Genge (1996: 811-812) provide the descriptions of how school leaders provide opportunities for teachers to participate in decision-making and taking the lead in school development in the following structuring behaviours:

- *distributing the responsibility and power for leadership widely throughout the school;*
- *sharing decision making power with staff;*
- *allowing staff to manage their own decision making committees;*
- *taking staff opinion into account;*
- *ensuring effective group problem solving during meetings of staff;*
- *providing autonomy for teachers;*
- *altering working conditions so that staff have collaborative planning time;*
- *ensuring adequate involvement in decision making related to new initiatives in the school;*
- *creating opportunities for staff development.*

Earlier in this literature review, the role of the rector has been recognized to be among the most important in supporting teacher leadership at school level. Given that '*most teachers, like most*

*principals, need assistance in becoming successful school leaders'* (Barth, 1988: 139), developing the skills and knowledge of teacher leaders is a central strategy in the portfolio of ideas to foster teacher leadership (Blasé & Blase, 2001).

Rectors must not only facilitate the '*professional development of leadership learning opportunities*' (Doyle, 2000: 39–40), but '*they must also participate in teaching teachers how to be leaders*' (Boles & Troen, 1996: 60). Indeed, while an assortment of colleagues can assist in the education of teacher leaders (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001), '*the principal has primary responsibility for developing the leadership skills of . . . teacher leaders*' (Feiler et al., 2000: 69).

From my experience as a former rector, I can say that I have rarely come across rectors who have undertaken such a responsibility of training teacher leaders. It is obvious that only those rectors who are themselves leaders can undertake the responsibility of training teacher leaders. Unfortunately, those rectors who suffer from a leadership deficiency may not be personally involved in the leadership development and training of educators. Manthei (1992: 9) argues that, '*in-service and pre-service programs, as well as the work site, do not promote experiences that enable teachers to develop in some areas that are basic to leadership.*' It is important for educational leaders to focus on developing people, which broadly refers to the '*development of human resources in their schools*' (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003: 6). Research carried out by Congo-Pottaren & Beebeejaun-Rojee (2017: 176) have concluded that Mauritian '*rectors do not invest much in human resource development, educators are left on their own to take care of their own professional development. The latter have to take upon themselves to enhance their own learning.*'

In Mauritius, the capacity building approach will take time to become a reality. It is important for research to inform practitioners about the pertinence of using informal teacher leadership for capacity building in schools. However, this will not happen until and unless there is a reconceptualization of educational leadership and rectors ensure that informal teacher leaders are given opportunities to develop in an environment where the school culture and context positively encourage shared and distributed leadership.

In the next section, the challenges to implement informal teacher leadership are discussed.

### 3.12 CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENT INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP

The success or otherwise of teacher leadership within a school can also be influenced by a number of interpersonal factors, such as relationships with other teachers and school management (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). The importance of these is evident, both with respect to teachers' ability to influence colleagues and with respect to developing productive relations with school management, who may in some cases feel threatened by teachers taking on leadership roles. There may also be conflicts between groups of teachers, such as those who take and those who do not take on leadership roles, which can lead to estrangement among teachers (Clemson-Ingram & Fessler, 1997). Berry & Ginsberg (1990: 619) suggest that '*the peers of these teacher leaders will also need to be socialized to accept leadership from one of their own*'. Overcoming these difficulties will require a combination of strong interpersonal skills on the part of the teacher leader and a school culture that encourages change and leadership from teachers (LeBlanc & Shelton, 1997).

Research by Ainscow & Southworth (1996: 243) on shared leadership exposes the fact that '*the work of teachers acting as leaders . . . creates a number of potential difficulties*.' Hart (1995: 12) believes that '*role ambiguity, conflict, and overload are broadly reported negative side effects of teacher work redesign*' and advises that '*the first piece of the problem that support is needed to address is the role ambiguity and conflict teachers almost always experience when they assume school-wide leadership responsibilities*.'

According to Smylie (1996: 548), one dimension of this ambiguity emanates from confusion between the established role as classroom teacher and the new role as leader at the school level, over the question of '*whether they are instructors of students or leaders of teachers*'. Or, as Wasley (1991: 144) found, '*trying to both teach and lead creates its own tensions*'. Conflicts are especially likely to arise when teacher leaders themselves, or their peers, believe that school-wide leadership responsibilities prevent teacher leaders from '*fulfilling classroom obligations*' (Clift et al., 1992: 901) and '*interfere with teaching*' (Crowther et al., 2002: 35).

Added to these there is the '*perception that the responsibilities of teacher leaders remove them too frequently from the classroom*' (Smylie & Denny, 1989: 11) which may '*deter excellence in*

*teachers' practices'* (Crowther et al., 2002: 35) in classrooms and *'delegitimize the roles of teacher leaders from the perspective of other classroom teachers'* (Smylie, 1996: 548). The result has been that *'left to define their roles for themselves, ... teacher leaders have had difficulty separating their conventional classroom teacher roles from their extra-classroom teacher leadership roles'* (Odell, 1997: 120). This research will help to understand the *'tensions'* and *'conflicts'* that might occur because of informal teacher leadership in Mauritian secondary schools.

Researchers have regularly found that peer teachers are unclear about the roles of teacher leaders (Smylie & Denny, 1989). They often hold teacher leaders *'suspect'* (Walters & Guthro, 1992: 144) *'and sometimes harbour resentment against them'* (Odell, 1997: 120). It will be interesting to find out whether informal teacher leaders are held as *'suspect'* and are treated with similar *'resentment'* in the Mauritian context.

Locating and defining *'the boundary between administration and teaching'* (Hart, 1990: 518) only adds to role conflict for teacher leaders—and for other teachers and administrators (Little, 1988; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992). In a real sense, most teacher leaders experience *'a netherworld that [is] neither that of the administrator nor that of the teacher'* (Datnow & Castellano, 2002: 204). They enter *'uncharted ground, not plain faculty, nor pure administration'* (Wasley, 1991: 142) and as Ainscow & Southworth, (1996: 243) put it,

*a kind of 'no man's land' between their colleagues in the staff room and the senior management team. In acting in the interests of the whole school they may, on the one hand, be seen as agents of authority, whilst on the other hand, they want to be perceived as acting on behalf of the staff.*

Of particular importance here are the findings that *'suggest that ambiguities and uncertainties associated with new teacher leadership roles have significant implications for the development of new working relationships between teachers who assume those roles and their principals'* (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992: 179). The consequences of role ambiguity and *'role confusion'* (LeBlanc & Shelton, 1997: 34) lead to personal identities are often blurred (Smylie, 1996). Mistrust sometimes emerges (Whitaker, 1997), confusion forms (Hart, 1994), and friendships are subject to *'considerable strain'* (Little, 1990: 513). As traditional norms and

understandings change with the influx of teacher leadership roles, '*conflicts increase*' (LeBlanc & Shelton, 1997: 34), tensions rise (Collinson & Sherrill, 1997; Smylie & Denny, 1989), congeniality declines, and jealousies increase (Smyser, 1995). For teacher leaders, feelings of loneliness and isolation often result. These factors seriously deter many teachers with leadership potential to volunteer to leadership roles in schools.

Teacher leaders have to negotiate the role conflicts which arise when they undertake leadership roles in schools. Studies in this area conclude that '*teacher-leaders essentially have two jobs*' (Whitaker, 1997: 12), and because '*the natural tendency of administrators, and even the teacher leaders themselves, is to expect . . . teacher leaders to take on additional roles, usually without eliminating other responsibilities*' (Hart & Baptist, 1996: 97) or '*compensating for the added demands made by engaging in school leadership*' (Griffin, 1995: 44), it is not surprising that teachers assuming school-wide leadership responsibilities often begin '*experiencing overload*' (Clift et al., 1992: 903) '*associated with [these] new responsibilities*' (Smylie, 1996: 550). While related to role ambiguity and conflict, role overload differs from these ideas '*in that expectations do not clash; rather, they proliferate to the point at which the school runs out of time, energy, and resources*' (Clift et al., 1992: 902).

Thus the implementation of informal teacher leadership faces a series of challenges and difficulties in schools. These have to be taken into due consideration when policies will be made.

The next section discusses the policy implications of implementing informal teacher leadership.

### **3.13 INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

While this research aims at understanding the participants' constructions of informal teacher leadership in three schools, it also acknowledges that it is high time to revisit its policy implications both at school and national levels.

Many countries such as Oman (Al Farsi, 2007), South Africa (Grant, et al., 2010), Morocco (Belhiah, 2007) and Pakistan (Shamsi, et al., 2010, Khan, 2011) are bringing changes at the level of policy to empower teachers so that they can play a more active and crucial role in managerial positions if they show they possess leadership qualities. A major step forward in the South

African education system post-1994 has been its move, at a policy level, towards more participation and collaboration in the practice of school leadership and management (see for example the South African Schools' Act, 1996 and the Task Team Report on Education Management Development, 1996). Thus the field of Education Leadership and Management in South Africa, determined by the Department of Education, stresses '*participative, 'democratic' management, collegiality, collaboration, schools as open systems and learning organisations, and, importantly, site based management*' (Van der Mescht, 2008:14). At the heart of this democratising process, is the decentralisation of decision-making in schools (Department of Education, 1996). This policy shift towards a more democratic and participatory decision-making process in schools offers the possibility of and opens up the space for the emergence of teacher leadership which in turn is seen as a boost to social justice.

Even though this shift is most welcome, it nonetheless brings with it a number of new problems. Many rectors may find it difficult to accommodate informal teacher leaders who are their subordinates and this may lead to role and responsibilities related conflicts. Policies will have to consider the possible problems and propose measures to address them as well. Flattening the top-down, hierarchical model which has existed since independence will take time and a lot of good will on behalf of policy makers and practitioners (rectors, educators and all other stake-holders of the system).

According to Little (1988:102), prospects for teacher leadership will be directly influenced by '*enabling policies*' (Lieberman & Miller, 1999: 28). Bishop and his colleagues (1997: 78) outline the case as follows:

*Since policies usually guide the course of action of an organization, and their statements include objectives that guide the actions of a substantial portion of the total organization, teachers will believe that they are empowered when they feel that their actions are undergirded and protected by such formalized policy statements.*

Teacher leadership automatically brings important changes in the professional set up of individuals and essential transformations in relationships in schools. In addition to new structures, it requires a web of supporting conditions to take root and blossom (Frost & Durrant, 2003)—'*support for individual teacher's roles*' (Hart, 1994: 495) and a reconceptualization of

'the context in which they work' (Moller & Katzenmeyer, 1996: 7), that is, careful attention to 'the organizational conditions necessary to function effectively' (Smylie et al., 2002: 166) is needed.

It is also important to reflect on what Crossley et, al. (2009:4) caution us

*Professionals in small states may also need to be more multifunctional than their counterparts in larger states who are more easily able to specialise, e.g. in aspects of curriculum, financing and aid negotiation. Small states may be more responsive to reform since a single actor can have a greater proportionate influence than would be the case in a larger state; but this may bring challenges of volatility. Planners in small states may also face stronger issues of dependency than their counterparts in larger states. These and other issues need further investigation in a range of contexts to identify commonalities across small states while also recognising the diversity arising from specific economic, cultural and socio-political contexts.*

For a small island state like Mauritius, it is important at this present junction to bear in mind the many and emerging challenges facing the Mauritian educational system. In a press article, former professor of University of Mauritius, Uttam Callikan (2018:8), writes

*There was little evidence of a real intent and urgency to help front-line school administrators and educators grapple with rampant indiscipline, rowdiness, bullying, racketeering, violence and parental intrusions, and the blistering reported rise in consumption of unwanted substances within school premises or by school-age youngsters.*

It is important that policies related to school improvement give due consideration to the new roles and responsibilities educators will have to play in an increasingly changing school environment. The rector alone will be unable to handle the many problems faced by the Mauritian schools. That is why it makes sense to rope in the support of those educators who are endowed with leadership potentials to help, albeit as informal teacher leaders to tackle these gruelling challenges inside and outside the classrooms.

According to Day et al., (2011:3) effective school leaders are those who are able to '*respond to those problems in ways that are productive in context not in general*'. They need to consider the organisational context when implementing solutions.

In fact, the policy implications of informal teacher leadership can be situated at different levels as follows:

- the possible contributions it can make in enlarging the space for leadership, moving from the head of school to the teachers by increased distributed and shared leadership in a democratic set up
- teachers can benefit from continuous professional development at school level or by following teacher leadership training programmes designed for them
- informal teacher leaders can have greater visibility and they can be considered for promotions to higher positions where leadership skills are important
- rectors may rely on a greater support from a pool of informal teacher leaders while targeting school development plans by adopting a democratic and transformational style of leadership
- the school culture can become more democratic by allowing potential informal teacher leaders to play a more prominent role
- the school context can benefit from a community of professionals
- the country may benefit by encouraging teacher leaders to play a more active role in the development of their respective schools

This study proposes to contribute to the field of research devoted to informal teacher leadership in the Mauritian context. It also aims to propose guide lines to prepare the necessary policies in order to acknowledge and implement informal teacher leadership in the island's secondary schools.

Strengthened local research capacity is also vital if small states are to develop more genuine partnerships and engage more effectively and critically in mediating, adapting or, where appropriate, challenging global agendas (Holmes & Crossley 2004; Crossley 2008).

### 3.14 THE DANGERS OF UNCRITICAL TRANSFER OF WESTERN LITERATURE MODELS AND RESEARCH TO MAURITIUS

It is worth mentioning that the literature which has been reviewed is essentially Western-centric and as such its context is different from that of Mauritius. Obviously, transferring the Western leadership models and research uncritically poses some problems in the Mauritian context. Context is often critical to change and implementation (Luke, 2011). Contextual theory makes use of indigenous knowledge and identifies specific constructs related to the context in focus.

Education change is often influenced strongly by the political, social, economic and historical context and this must be considered in constructing change theory (Hirosata & Kitamura, 2009; London, 1993; De Lisle, 2012). Small state theory is also especially useful in explaining system reform because it accommodates smallness as one of the unique features of several commonwealth countries (Crossley, Bray, & Packer, 2011). The term 'small state' has been applied to nation states with population below 1.5 million (De Lisle, 2012).

In fact, leadership here is conceptualized by keeping the succinct contextual and cultural factors into consideration (Day & Sammons, 2013). In Australia, UK, USA, New Zealand and Canada, the role of the leader is seen as primordial in raising the standards of teaching and learning and promoting school improvement (Glover et al., 1999; Sergiovanni, 1999; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Harris & Lambert, 2003; Murphy, 2005; Muijs et al., 2007; Akert, 2009; Palmer, 2011; Petersen, 2016; Berg et al., 2017).

Perry & Tor (2008: 2) argue that, '*social institutions, including educational systems, do not exist or operate in isolation, but rather interact with other institutions and larger social forces. National educational systems are influenced by not only domestic and internal but also foreign and external forces. As information communication technology develops, policy makers, researchers and educators have increasing access and exposure to ideas and practices from a variety of local, national and international sources. They may also experience increasing pressure to adopt or adapt practices and structures from elsewhere.*' Thus they believe that policy makers should show discernment while adopting or adapting good practices from foreign countries.

Crossley (2019:4) cautions researchers that *'the nature and significance of research on policy transfer has changed, and increased, in our times of intensified globalisation.'* Elaborating further on this issue, Perry & Tor (2008) note how the notion of 'educational transfer' is broader than policy borrowing and encompasses ideas, ideology, practices and institutions, involving multiple actors within and across systems. They also refer to what they call a 'neo-institutionalist or social positivist' framework for transfer, and its association with the pursuit and promotion of one-size-fits-all 'best practice'.

In the light of such trends, Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal (2003) are concerned that much comparative work is already being used to legitimise policy positioning, suggesting that this threatens academic integrity and criticality and represents a major challenge for the field.

While such literature can be instrumental in deepening our insights about how teacher leadership is conceptualised and practiced in the West, every attempt should be made to avoid an uncritical transfer of Western leadership models. That is why, established researchers in comparative educational policy transfers such as Stephens (2019) and Crossley (2019) are very explicit about the dangers of uncritical transfer of western leadership or educational policy models.

According to Crossley (2019:5), *'The influence of globalisation has thus played a part in both generating new forms of policy transfer and in stimulating a resurgence of interest in the analysis of such processes.'* Stephens (2019: 29 ) argues that *'In many ways the education narrative is predicated upon neo-liberal models of schooling which in turn echo the familiar discourse and practices of a western-educated urban elite...no room for indigenous knowledge...'* Leadership in the educational field, be it a rector's or an educators' leadership, is lived and experienced in a cultural and contextual backdrop which is unique.

In section 1.3, among the aims of this research, it has been said that the findings of this study will help to contribute to new knowledge and understanding of informal teacher leadership in a small island state like Mauritius which will have implications for policy development in the area of effective school management and improved teaching and learning outcomes. Thus due diligence has been exercised to avoid the pitfall of making an uncritical transfer of western centric literature to the Mauritian educational context.

### 3.15 SUMMARY

In this chapter the vast Western-centric literature on educational, formal and informal teacher leadership has been critically reviewed. The complexities and challenges of leadership in general, and of school leadership and informal teacher leadership in particular, have been presented. The roles that school culture and context play in encouraging or impeding the implementation of informal teacher leadership have been discussed. The challenges to implement informal teacher leadership in schools have been discussed. The link between the possible contributions informal teacher leadership can make to school improvement and capacity building have also been analysed. The dangers of uncritical transfer of Western literature models and research to Mauritius have also been examined. Finally, the policy implications of the implementation of informal teacher leadership have been discussed.

## 4.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore how educators construct their notions of informal teacher leadership in three Mauritian secondary schools. In this chapter, I will discuss my ontological and epistemological assumptions, phenomenology in general and why I chose phenomenology in particular to conduct this research. I also give an overview of my research design. Moreover, I describe the field work and justify the selection of participants and how I analysed the data. The ethical considerations and the limitations of the research are also discussed.

In order to explore how the participants construct their notions of informal teacher leadership in their professional contexts, the following research questions guided this study:

- How do the participants construct their notions of educational and informal teacher leadership and what skills and characteristics should informal teacher leaders have?
- What are the cultural and contextual factors that encourage or impede teachers from assuming informal teacher leadership role?
- What contributions, if any, can informal teacher leadership make to school improvement in Mauritius?
- What are the policy implications at school and national level for a greater role for informal teacher leadership?

These four research questions were used to formulate further questions during the one-to-one and group interviews and were also used to give the guidelines to the participants for their entries in the electronic professional diaries.

The above questions were used to collect qualitative data from the participants. Later in this chapter, I discuss these in more details. As a phenomenologist, I am interested in the analytical

and descriptive experience of informal teacher leadership by educators in their everyday world, the phenomenological term for this being the 'life world' (Creswell, 2014). In this research, the participants shared their lived experiences of informal teacher leadership and other succinctly related issues such as educational and distributed leadership, school culture and capacity building.

## 4.2 ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Before I discuss my ontological and epistemological assumptions in this section, it is worthwhile to interpret the two key terms under discussions, namely ontology and epistemology, before proceeding any further.

Crotty (2003:10) defines ontology as '*the study of being*'. It is concerned with '*what kind of world we are investigating, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such*'. Guba & Lincoln (1989:83) state that the ontological assumptions are those that respond to the question '*what is there that can be known?*' or '*what is the nature of reality?*' My ontological assumption is that it is very difficult to define reality. Unlike positivists, my quest for reality is based on a constructivist paradigm. I believe that the nature of reality can be constructed subjectively by different people. I live in world which is populated by human beings who have their own thoughts, interpretations and meanings of different phenomena. This study explores the way the participants construct their notions of informal teacher leadership based on their lived experiences which in turn are interpreted by me.

It is important to make it clear that there is a difference between knowledge and knowing. Knowledge may exist outside someone's experience. In this research, the participants' lived experiences have led them to develop experiential knowledge about informal teacher leadership. People *know* what they have experienced and their knowledge may be based on both what they have experienced and read about. While it is difficult to define reality, it is relatively easier to talk or refer to one's experiences in life.

In this research, I am interested in using the participants' lived experiences – or knowing - as data rather than their knowledge about informal teacher leadership. I am less interested in what they have read about informal teacher leadership in books or elsewhere but more on how they

have seen or experienced teachers displaying informal teacher leadership qualities and factors which have encouraged or impeded these informal teacher leaders to assume leadership roles in the schools where they work.

It is understandable that different participants have different experiences regarding the same phenomenon. These different experiences are useful in any phenomenological study. Each experience further enriches the data obtained and widens our understanding of the phenomenon. We benefit from a wide range of experiences, which may differ or converge, on the same phenomenon. My aim is to record and interpret data on the phenomenon (informal teacher leadership) from the participants in their natural professional environments (the organisational contexts of the research).

According to Bryman (2008) the ontological issues have to do with whether the social entities can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to the participants, or whether they can and should be considered social constructions built up from the perception and actions of the participants of this study. My ontological assumption is that informal teacher leadership cannot be viewed as an objective entity because it is lived and experienced subjectively. In this research, I assume that informal teacher leadership is a reality which can be built or constructed from the perceptions of the participants of this research. That is why my approach is that of a constructivist which fits this qualitative phenomenological study. But this makes it difficult to draw generalisations based on the subjective constructions of the participants. Later, in this chapter, I will discuss this issue when discussing limitations of the research.

Epistemology, on the other hand, is '*a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know*', (Crotty, 2003:3). My epistemological position is that informal teacher leadership as a phenomenon is constructed by those who experience it and live it professionally in their places of work. As a researcher, I am fully aware that there is not one construction of informal teacher leadership. That is why, I rely upon the lived experiences of the participants and attempt to see the phenomenon through their eyes and the way they construct it. My epistemological approach is that I need to suspend my sense beliefs and this explains why bracketing is useful in a phenomenological study (Denscombe, 2010). This entails some risks and is quite daunting

because I am an insider researcher. However, epistemologically, my approach sits well within phenomenology because

*When dealing with the way people experience facets of their lives, phenomenology stresses the need to present matters as closely as possible to the way that those concerned understand them. The phenomenologist's task, in the first instance, is not to interpret the experiences of those concerned, not to analyse them or repackage them in some form. The task is to present the experiences in a way that is faithful to the original. This entails the ability to see things through the eyes of others, to understand things in the way that they understand things and to provide a description of matters that adequately portrays how the group in question experiences the situation. (Denscombe, 2010:95)*

This is why as a phenomenological researcher, I describe and critically discuss the participants' constructions of informal teacher leadership, and not from some preconceived theoretical standpoint. This epistemological perspective is essentially post-modern, in recognizing that human experience is complex, and it is grounded in the world which is experienced inter-subjectively, but which has multiple meanings (Mason, 2002).

### 4.3 CONSTRUCTIVISM

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that I have opted for a constructivist approach in this study. Constructivism refers to the way we gain knowledge about a phenomenon. Constructionism is defined by Crotty (2003:42) as '*the view that all knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality as such is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context.*' Thus, meaning is not discovered, but constructed.

Constructivism, thus, refers to the way the participants perceive, understand and interpret informal teacher leadership which is the phenomenon being researched. In fact, qualitative research leans strongly towards constructivism while a quantitative research tends to be positivist. Like other constructivists, I also believe that there exists no single reality or truth regarding informal teacher leadership, and the participants of this study will help to construct our own understandings of informal teacher leadership. These multiple realities provide depth to the

way we interpret informal teacher leadership and they also provide a diversity of views which may not necessarily diverge. They help to objectify the subjective viewpoints of the participants through a reflexive exercise of due diligence.

That is why, I agree with Elkind (2005) who asserts that '*constructivism is the recognition that reality is a product of human intelligence interacting with experience in the real world. As soon as you include human mental activity in the process of knowing reality, you have accepted constructivism.*' Constructivism accepts reality as a construct of the human mind, therefore reality is perceived to be subjective. Hence, multiple realities can co-exist from a constructivist perspective.

According to Heck & Hallinger (1999: 147), the strengths of a constructivist orientation are '*in illuminating that which is little known or hidden from view*' and in revealing how, '*through examination of the unique nature of each school's culture and context, one can arrive at interpretations about how culture and context shape leadership.*' In brief, the participants' constructions of informal teacher leadership will help me, and other researchers gain a broader insight into informal teacher leadership in Mauritius. These multiple realities do not necessarily compete with one another and are not contradictory but only add to further broaden our perspective on informal teacher leadership. That is why I did not compare the experiences of the participants or the schools.

#### **4.4 PHENOMENOLOGY**

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed both my ontological and epistemological assumptions for this research. In this section, I will discuss why I opted for a phenomenological research approach, and more particularly why it is appropriate for the research topic. In fact, the phenomenology of practice is commonly used by pedagogues and by researchers in the field of education and is the method used to carry out research in professional contexts (van Manen, 2007).

Phenomenology is concerned, first and foremost, with human experience.. It is interested in how social life (e.g. informal teacher leadership) is constructed by those who participate in it (i.e. the participants). It is not primarily concerned with explaining the causes of the things but tries,

instead, to provide a description of how things are experienced by those involved. Denscombe (2010: 97) argues that,

*When the social world is seen as 'socially constructed' it opens up the possibility that different groups of people might 'see things differently'. There is the prospect of alternative realities – realities that vary from situation to situation, culture to culture. In this respect phenomenology stands in stark contrast to positivistic approaches to social research that are premised on the assumption of one reality. Whereas positivist approaches look for explanations that fit one universal reality, phenomenological approaches tend to live with, even celebrate, the possibility of multiple realities.*

In this research, the participants are educators who professionally experience informal teacher leadership in schools where they work. Reflection plays an important role in recalling and shaping these experiences. In fact, Denscombe (2010; 97) further adds that,

*Reflecting the fact that the world as experienced by living humans is something that is created through the way they interpret and give meaning to their experiences, phenomenology rejects the notion that there is one universal reality and accepts, instead, that things can be seen in different ways by different people at different times in different circumstances, and that each alternative version needs to be recognized as being valid in its own right.*

Elaborating further on the tensions between multiple realities and individual realities, Denscombe (2010: 97) draws our attention in the following cautionary note;

*It does not imply, however, that there are as many social realities as there are individuals – each interpreting his or her world in their own unique way. As has been stressed, phenomenology does not treat interpretations of the social world as totally individual things. Necessarily, they are shared between groups, cultures and societies, and it is only at these levels that phenomenology recognizes the possibility of there being multiple realities.*

Thus, while interpretations are purely subjective, they nevertheless have something in common and are 'shared' among the participants. In contrast to other research approaches that rely upon

processes of categorizing things, abstracting them, quantifying them and theorizing about them, phenomenology prefers to concentrate its efforts on gaining a clear picture of the ‘*things in themselves*’—the things as directly experienced by people in terms of authentic data. According to Leedy (1997:161), phenomenology seeks ‘*to understand a person’s or persons’ perspectives as they experience and understand an event, relationship, programme, emotion, etc.*’ The participants’ experiences, views and opinions (which constitute the data for the study) on the phenomenon (informal teacher leadership) are explored through two research tools, namely semi-structured interviews and personal professional diaries.

Phenomenologists, in contrast to positivists, believe that the researcher cannot be detached from his/her own presuppositions and that the researcher should not pretend otherwise (Hammersley, 2000). In the introduction of this research, I have already described my ‘*explicit beliefs*’ (Mouton & Marais, 1990: 12) regarding informal teacher leadership which are based upon my professional experience.

*In stark contrast with positivist approaches to social reality which are premised on the assumption of one reality, phenomenological approaches admit multiple realities. Reflecting the fact that the world as experienced by living humans is something that is created through the way they interpret and give meaning to their experiences. (Denscombe, 2010: 97).*

In the table below, the strengths and weaknesses of phenomenology have been summed up.

**Table 3 Advantages and disadvantages of phenomenology**

Advantages	Disadvantages
Can look at change processes over time	Data gathering can take up a great deal of time and resources
Help to adjust to new issues and ideas as they emerge	May be harder than positivist approach to control pace, progress and end points
Gather data which is seen as natural rather than artificial	Difficult to produce generalised data for policy purposes.
Highlights divergences in lived experiences	

(Source: adapted from Armstrong (2010), as taken from Easterby-Smith et al (1991))

Generally, the main criticism levelled against phenomenology is its heavy reliance on the subjectivity of the participants (Denscombe, 2010). Subjectivity is ambiguous and subtle. For example, the participants may be biased or prejudiced about a rector or teacher leaders. Their bias may influence their interpretations of their lived experiences which may impact on the findings. So, it is not 'observed' lived experiences but re-lived experiences recounted reflectively by the participants. While every attempt is made to remain neutral during the research and to use 'bracketing' (excluding personal influences for observations of non-personal phenomena), it has to be admitted that it is not always easy to do so.

That is why in a phenomenological study, the focus is on authenticity rather than reliability and validity. Reliability refers to the repeatability and replication (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) of a given study by researchers other than the original researcher, and whether independent researchers can discover the same phenomenon in comparable situations (Schwandt, 1997). However, these concepts remain a contested area in qualitative research.

Indeed, validity is a complex question in qualitative research. To deal with such situations, Guba & Lincoln (1989) replace internal and external validity with the concepts of trustworthiness and authenticity (Schwandt, 1997). Authenticity is then advanced since it is better aligned with a constructivist epistemology.

Criteria for authenticity such as fairness, neutrality and trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) are appropriate for judging qualitative research originating within a constructivist epistemology. LeCompte & Preissle (1993: 332) argue that,

*Unique situations cannot be reconstructed precisely; even the exact replication of research methods may fail to produce identical results. Qualitative research occurs in natural settings and often is undertaken to record processes of change, so replication is only approximated, never achieved...because human behaviour is never static, no study is replicated exactly, regardless of the methods and designs used.*

Thus, in this study the search for authenticity has been of utmost importance. Being an insider, also helps assessing on the authenticity of the participants' lived experiences. .

## 4.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design has been defined as a plan for a study, providing the overall framework for collecting data (Leedy, 1997). This phenomenological study was designed to gain a better understanding of informal teacher leadership in Mauritian secondary schools. The design of the study was shaped by the four research questions which sought to probe the participants' constructions of informal teacher leadership, the skills that informal teacher leaders possess, the cultural and contextual factors which either encourage or impede teachers from assuming informal teacher leadership roles in the schools where they are posted, the possible contributions that informal teacher leaders make to capacity building and school improvement and the policy implications of informal teacher leadership at school and national level.

Initially, I considered using each school separately as my unit of analysis because I anticipated a huge variation in the participants' constructions of informal teacher leadership. I thought that the professional context of the participants, that is the school where they worked, would lead to a wide difference in their constructions of informal teacher leadership. However, I had to review my decision because as the study progressed, I noted that the school where they worked mattered very little, in the way they constructed informal teacher leadership.

The absence of major variance in the data generated by the participants, irrespective of their gender, professional status or qualifications, ethnic background or even the schools where they worked did not come as much of a surprise to me. Intuitively, I knew that the phenomenon is experienced almost in the same way by educators. I had formed these impressions based on my experience as an educator, rector and former part-time lecturer at the MIE who had coached educators the Module on Teacher Leadership from nearly ninety different secondary schools in 2014. The findings confirmed my impressions.

For anonymity purposes, the three secondary schools have been called Rose Secondary School (RSS), Hibiscus Secondary School (HSS) and Lotus Secondary School (LSS). In Mauritius, there are four educational zones (Zones 1-4) and these three schools are from Zone 1 (refer to table 1 in chapter 2). I chose the schools from Zone 1 because I live in this Zone. These three chosen secondary schools are representative of the secondary schools in general in Mauritius.

Since the schools are located in the north of the island, the region where I live, I knew the background, the rector and educators of each of the three secondary schools. As a former rector, I had visited them on different occasions such as prize giving day, sports day or music day. My initial aim was to select three different secondary schools to see to what extent different contexts shaped the experiences of my selected informal teacher leaders.

However, as my research progressed I gradually realised that the contextual landscape of the three secondary schools was pretty uniform showing the homogeneity of the schools in Mauritius. That is why the educators' experiences did not vary much even if they worked in three different schools. This may very well be explained by the fact that Mauritius is a small island. The findings reiterated the fact that educational leadership is still deeply entrenched in a hierarchical manner, where informal teacher leadership is not easily accepted by rectors

Having decided to frame my design around individual teachers working in three different schools, I next gave thought as to who would be chosen for this study. I needed participants who would be ready to share their lived experiences without any inhibition. The participants were also selected on the basis of having experienced the phenomenon that is being researched (i.e. informal teacher leadership) and were willing to describe it in a tape-recorded interview and in diaries (kept for the purpose of this study).

I did not involve rectors or other stake-holders from the educational field in this study where I focus exclusively on educators' constructions of informal teacher leadership in three Mauritian secondary schools. In this phenomenological study, I wanted the study to focus exclusively on educators' lived experiences of informal teacher leadership. Rectors and other stakeholders would have talked about informal teacher leadership or how they are identified and selected to carry out specific tasks at school level. I did not want to include, at least in this research, rectors' constructions of informal teacher leadership. I opted for a purposive and convenience sampling while choosing the participants because I needed educators who would share their views, feelings and opinions with me on informal teacher leadership without any inhibition. According to Lunenburg & Irby (2008:175), '*purposive sampling involves selecting a sample based on the researcher's experience or knowledge of the group to be sampled.*'

Maxwell (1997:87) further defined purposive sampling as a type of sampling in which, *“particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices.”* Convenience sampling involves drawing samples that are both easily accessible and willing to participate in a study. Additionally, all the participants had followed workshops, read about or had completed a module on informal teacher leadership at the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE). A few among the participants had already participated in my previous research assignments which were carried out during the earlier stages of this doctoral study.

In Mauritius, an educator should have a minimum five years of teaching experience and a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) in order to be entitled for headship or should have more than seven years of teaching experience. These promotional criteria are spelt out by the Pay Research Bureau (PRB).

In tables 4, 5 and 6 respectively, the profile of each of the eighteen participants of the study from the three different schools has been presented. The participants' professional status basically refers to whether they are heads of their respective department or they are educators only.

Profile of the six participants from the Rose Secondary School.

Table 4 RSS

Teachers' pseudonyms	Professional status	Years of teaching experience.	Qualifications
Mrs Shailly	Head of Department	11 years	B.A
Mrs Mila	Head of Department	15 years	B.A/PGCE/MBA (Educational Leadership)
Ms Beryl	Educator	13 years	B.A
Mrs Kameeni	Educator	9 years	B.A
Mr Rakesh	Head of department	16 years	B.A/PGCE/MA (Educational Leadership)
Mr Vishal	Educator	5 years	B.A/PGCE/MA (Educational Leadership)

Profile of the six participants from the Hibiscus Secondary School.

Table 5 HSS

Teachers' pseudonyms	Professional status	Years of teaching experience.	Qualifications
Mrs Preety	Head of Department	29 years	B.A, PGCE
Mrs Kavita	Head of Department	14 years	B.A/PGCE/MA (Educational leadership)
Ms Rishta	Educator	13 years	B.A/M.A
Ms Neerousha	Educator	9 years	BA/PGCE/M.A
Mr Iqbal	Head of department	18 years	BSc/PGCE/MSc
Mr Michel	Educator	5 years	BA/MA

Profile of the six participants from the Lotus Secondary School.

Table 6 LSS

Teachers' pseudonyms	Professional status	Years of teaching experience.	Qualifications
Mrs Nalini	Head of Department	31 years	B.A
Mrs Sabnam	Head of department	13 years	B.A/MA/Ph D
Ms Dilshaad	Educator	13 years	B.A/PGCE
Mrs Kajal	Educator	9 years	BA/PGCE
Mr Ajay	Head of Department	26 years	BSc, MSc, PGCE.
Mr Simadree	Head of department	34 years	BA/MA

This qualitative study relied upon semi-structured one-to-one and group interviews as well as the participants' professional diaries to collect data on the phenomenon. Initially, I had contemplated the use of questionnaires to collect the experiences of the educators because they are easy to administer and are research-friendly but soon realised that I had better drop this idea. Epistemologically, questionnaires would not fit this phenomenological research. Questionnaires would not have given the participants the leeway to share the different shades and nuances of their lived experiences as the one-to-one interview permitted them. The aim of using interviews was to give the participants the opportunities to open up fully on their opinions, views and constructions of informal teacher leadership and its related issues. This sat well epistemologically with my research approach.

My design was not to compare the participants' lived experiences or to compare the three different secondary schools. I did not want to contrast one school against another or one participant's lived experiences against another because I consider each lived experiences to be unique.

I used the group interviews to allow the participants to elaborate further on what they shared during the one-to-one interview. I had the apprehension that the extrovert ones among them would talk more than the rest. However, I was surprised that each of the six participants took turn to talk and share their views during the group interviews.

Mauritius is a very small island and this may be the reason why the eighteen participants had almost the same professional experiences related to informal teacher leadership, irrespective of the school where they worked. The ethnic background, gender, professional status or teaching experience or qualifications of the participants did not influence the way they experienced and lived informal teacher leadership as can be testified by the findings of this research. The participants talked about the role of the rector in determining whether informal teacher leaders were empowered or not. The participants faced the same pull and push factors. The informal teacher leaders faced the same types of encouragement with a democratic rector and the same barriers to operate with autocratic rectors.

In brief, the leadership styles of the rectors, irrespective of the schools, determined how informal teacher leadership prevailed. What was interesting was that whether the rector practised democratic or autocratic leadership style, it did not deter the emergence of informal teacher leadership. While informal teacher leaders came forward happily and voluntarily in the case where the rector adopted democratic leadership style, informal teacher leaders were unhappy when they worked under rectors who created a hostile school culture because they did not share or distribute leadership and practised a autocratic leadership style.

In fact, the participants revisited their lived experiences and deepened their reflections further when they evoked anecdotal incidents to support their claims and stipulations. The group interviews were carried out after the one-to-one interviews were over in each of the three secondary schools. My interview schedule was almost the same in the three different schools.

The participants were asked to keep an electronic diary (refer to appendix 3) for a period six months, spanning from February to July 2016 and this was the period when the one-to-one and group interviews were carried out as well (refer to table 7). I preferred electronic diaries to the traditional paper diaries for various reasons. More and more educators carry out their professional work on their personal computers or laptops. In Mauritius, we are reinforcing the concept of Maurice Ile Durable and are gradually endorsing good practices in order to reduce our dependence on paper. I chose February to July because these months cover two out of the three semesters when educators are engaged in different curricular and extra-curricular activities (which are invariably not allowed during the third term of the school calendar). This was done so that the participants could talk about past and fresh lived experiences during the interviews as well as while filling in their electronic diaries.

I planned to collect the data school after school. I noted a synergy in the data which was obtained from the three sources. With hindsight, I consider that these research tools served their purposes. I also realised that it was better that I did not use observation as a research tool. Mauritian educators, in general prefer discretion and observation might have posed some problems. My aim was not to observe informal teacher leadership in action as much I wanted to have a reflection of the participants on the phenomenon under investigation. Through the chosen research tools, the participants provided sufficient data which has been elaborately discussed in the findings chapter.

What struck me was the uniformity in the views of the different participants so much so that at one point in time it seemed that the school context mattered very little or almost not at all in so far as their lived experiences regarding informal teacher leadership was concerned. This may have been because the three schools were from the same geographical zone or perhaps because informal teacher leadership is experienced in the same way, irrespective of the school context.

The findings of this study as discussed in chapter five help to broaden my understanding on educators' perceptions of the informal teacher leadership roles in Mauritian secondary schools.

It is important to plan the groundwork that needs to be accomplished prior to collecting any data. For example, prior to collecting, several logistical and administrative issues have to be addressed carefully. Administrative and logistical issues include things such as where and when the

research study will be conducted, and what approvals need to be obtained (and from whom) to conduct the research study and who will be involved in the research.

Fortunately, there were no major issues or hassles during my field work. Given that I was an insider researcher, I knew both the field and the participants relatively well. This is perhaps one advantage of conducting research in a small island state like Mauritius.

In the table 7 below, I explain how data for this study was collected on a time span of six months for this present study, that is, from February to July 2016.

Table 7 Planning for field work

Month	Plan of work
Feb-16	Semi-structured interview -one-to-one interview with each of the six participants of RSS (six interviews-each one hour long approximately).
Mar-16	Semi-structured interview -one-to-one interview with each of the six participants of LSS (six interviews-each one hour long approximately).
Apr-16	Semi-structured interview -one-to-one interview with each of the six participants of HSS (six interviews-each one hour long approximately).
May-16	Semi-structured interview -group interview with the six participants of RSS (a two hour long interview with all of them together)
Jun-16	Semi-structured interview -group interview with the six participants of LSS (a two hour long interview with all of them together)
Jul-16	Semi-structured interview -group interview with the six participants of HSS (a two hour long interview with all of them together)
February –July 2016	Educators keep their electronic professional diaries on informal teacher leadership
Aug-16	Reading and listening the data collected
September-December 2016	Transcription of data from one-to-one and group interviews and diaries
January-July 2017	Thematic coding of data from interviews and diaries from each participant
August-October 2017	Draft of data analysis to tutor

The data collection plan was designed after meeting the participants. While planning for data collection, it was crucial to establish proper channels of communication with the eighteen participants. Permission letters were sent to the three heads of schools to seek their official permission to conduct the research in their respective schools and with their staff (refer to appendix 1). Once the official permission was obtained, then the field work began.

Each of the eighteen participants was contacted on the phone as I had their contact numbers. Meeting them helped to have their formal consent to participate in the research. The place and time of interview were mutually decided. Given that the participants work and live quite close to my residence, meeting them either in the school where they are posted or at their residence or my own residence was quite easy to negotiate. On meeting the participants, a plan of work, based upon their free time and convenience, was established and our meetings were scheduled accordingly.

Meetings with the participants were mostly face to face (at their place of work or at any other mutually agreed venue). All interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants. I met the participants of this study both at their respective places of work and also outside their professional milieu depending upon their convenience. Field work mainly concerned carrying out the interviews as the entries of the diaries were electronically submitted through emails.

I met the six participants of one school first and then those of the next school and so on (refer to table 7 above). I kept one whole month to meet the six participants of one school individually for the one-to-one interviews. I had to fix a meeting with the participants depending upon their convenience. Then I repeated the same exercise with the participants of the other secondary schools. The one-to-one meetings of the participants of the three different schools took me three months. Then, I carried out the group interviews of the participants. I met the six participants of one school at one place. I kept one day per month to conduct the group interviews because I had to carefully fix a meeting with the six participants on particular day and a specific time which suited all of them. Thus, I carried out the three different group interviews in three months. In fact, the group interviews only further confirmed whatever the participants shared during the one-to-one interviews and in their diaries. I met the participants of this study both at their place of work and also outside their professional milieu depending upon their availability which was determined by their professional work load and time table at school. Data was collected on a time span of six months for this present study, that is, from February to July 2016. Field work mainly concerned the interviews as the entries for their personal professional diaries were electronically submitted through emails.

## 4.6 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

My epistemological assumptions determined the methods to be used to collect data. I strongly believe that our perceptions of truth are influenced by the way we experience it. I do not think that informal teacher leadership can be objectively measured, that is why I did not carry out a quantitative research. In fact, the notion of leadership itself is very subjective. Different people have different constructions of leadership. There is no one way of conceptualizing leadership, be it political or educational leadership, be it formal or informal teacher leadership.

Data collection is an essential component to conducting research. Data collection is a complicated and hard task. O'Leary (2004:150) remarks

*Collecting credible data is a tough task, and it is worth remembering that one method of data collection is not inherently better than another...Therefore, which data collection method to use would depend upon the research goals and the advantages and disadvantages of each method.*

The research tools to be used are determined by the nature and approach of the investigation that is carried out. Since I was carrying out a qualitative phenomenological research on informal teacher leadership, I opted for interviews and personal professional diaries as the research tools. In fact, in a phenomenological research, it is the experiences, views and opinions of the participants which provide the data. The whole phenomenological research revolves around the participants' account of their lived experiences.

I could have used observation to gather data for this study, but I finally opted for semi-structured interviews and participants' diaries to explore the multiple realities of informal teacher leadership. Observation obviously has its own advantages. For instance, Denscombe (2010:196) notes that

*It does not rely on what people say they do, or what they say they think. It is more direct than that. Instead, it draws on the direct evidence of the eye to witness events at first hand. It is based on the premise that, for certain purposes, it is best to observe what actually happens.*

However, I believed that it would be better for the participants to 'tell' me and 'write down' about their lived experiences rather than I actually 'see' these experiences. Denscombe (2010:204) cautions us that observation focuses '*on overt behaviour, describes what happens, but not why it happens. It does not deal with the intentions that motivated the behaviour.*' In general, interviews elicit spontaneous verbal responses from the participants and diaries give them the opportunity to write reflectively about events and anecdotes from memories. Diaries provide the participants the opportunities to be more reflective and analytical about the phenomenon as compared to interviews.

In the next sections, I give more details about the research tools which were used in this study.

#### 4.7 ONE-TO-ONE AND GROUP INTERVIEWS

In a phenomenological study, the in-depth interview transcript forms the basis of the data. It is through the participants' descriptions of the phenomenon being investigated that the researcher is able to uncover the invariant structures or essences of the phenomenon being investigated (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015).

Interviews followed the transcendental phenomenological tradition and data was collected through two individual in depth interviews, carried out in the participants' school (Eddles-Hirsch, 2013). No interview was carried out without both consent forms being signed and permission given for the interview to take place. Participants were also reminded at the start of each interview that they could leave the interview process at any time without fear of negative reprisals from their school or the university. All interviews in this study were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Questions in the interviews were concerned with the participants' perceptions of their everyday lived experiences in the specialised school environment. Each of the four research questions were used to formulate several questions (refer to appendix 4). For example, the first research question (How do the participants construct their notions of educational and informal teacher leadership and what skills and characteristics should informal teacher leaders have?\*) led to the following interview questions;

- What is the importance of leadership, if any, in managing a school?

- How far is your rector a transactional, transformational or autocratic leader? Give examples from your experience to support your views.
- How would you define informal teacher leadership?
- Is leadership distributed in the school where you work? If yes, explain how and in what ways.
- With the help of examples, explain in what ways do teachers lead-i) inside the classroom-ii) outside the classroom?

The questions devised for this study were intentionally open-ended in order to give the participants the opportunity to voice their own thoughts and opinions about different aspects related to informal teacher leadership.

I conducted the semi-structured interviews in the English Language. I sought the authorization of the participants to audio tape the interviews. One interview session lasted between 45 minutes to one hour. The convenience of the participants was taken into consideration while planning the day, time and place for the interview to be carried out.

Interview was chosen as a data collection tool because it is by far the most dominant method for data collection in phenomenological research (Bevan, 2014). The influential phenomenological researcher Giorgi (1997:245) stated that '*questions are generally broad and open ended so that the subject has sufficient opportunity to express his or her view point extensively*' which reflected a generalist approach. Giorgi (1997) also differentiated descriptions from interviews whereby a description provided content for the interview.

According to Padilla-Diaz (2015:104), '*the detailed descriptions or interpretations brought by the participant in the profound-phenomenological interview should be as representative of experienced reality as possible.*' This was scrupulously observed in this research as Ribbins (2007:208) rightly suggests that interviews allow the interviewer '*to find out what is in somebody else's mind but not to put things there*'. I kept this in mind throughout the one-to-one and group interviews.

The major advantage of the interview is the possibility of scheduling a mutually convenient time and place, and controlling the sequence and pacing of the questions asked. Most of the one-to-one interviews took place during the school vacations. However, a few of the interviews took

place at my or at the participants' residence. This helped me as well as the participants enormously.

These one-to-one interviews helped me to probe deeply into participants' beliefs, attitudes and inner experiences. Follow-up questions were also asked to obtain more information and clarify vague statements, wherever they were deemed necessary. Detailed information on the different succinct aspects of the phenomenon could be sought without much difficulty.

When the one-to-one interviews with each of the eighteen participants were over, then I met the six participants of each school to have a general group interview. Thus during these three separate group interviews, I asked the participants to share their views on the same questions I had asked them during the one-to-one interviews. Initially, I thought that my questions were going to be repetitive. But the group discussions proved to be livelier and the participants further elaborated on issues which they had already discussed in the one-to-one interview but reflected on them more critically. In the chapter five (findings), I have mentioned whether the data was obtained during one-to-one interviews or group interviews. Each of the group interviews lasted for more than two hours with regular coffee breaks in between. These group interviews also were audio taped.

However, I bore in mind the possible limitations of interviews. For instance, only sixteen participants from the three secondary schools were involved in the research because of time constraint. According to Denscombe (2010: 193), one major shortcoming of interviews is that

*The data from interviews are based on what people say rather than what they do. The two may not tally. What people say they do, what they say they prefer and what they say they think cannot automatic-ally be assumed to reflect the truth.*

Elaborating further on the limitations of interviews, Denscombe (2010:193) adds that

*The impact of the interviewer and of the context means that consistency and objectivity are hard to achieve. The data collected are, to an extent, unique owing to the specific context and the specific individuals involved. This has an adverse effect on reliability.*

Given that the participants know me personally, the disadvantage of being an insider researcher might have influenced them to some extent, in spite of the precautions that I took. And as in all

interviews, it was my (researcher's) duty to reassure the participants that their responses would be dealt with confidentiality and their responses were presented anonymously.

#### **4.8 ELECTRONIC PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL DIARIES**

The participants were asked to keep an electronic personal professional diary in which they would note down their experiences, anecdotes, views and opinions related to the phenomena under investigation (refer to appendix 3). Morrison & Galloway (1996) and Bell (1999) believe that diaries can yield additional data in a qualitative research which other research tools like interviews may not provide. Such data further enhanced this research. For instance, the participants were more reflective on their actions as educators. The diaries allowed them to relate different anecdotes to further elaborate on informal teacher leadership.

I requested the participants to open a Microsoft document file on their computers and encouraged them to share their views, opinions and experiences on informal teacher leadership in their professional context. They were asked to keep the electronic diary for a six-month period (refer to appendix 3). I did not set hard and fast rules regarding the filling of the diary in order not to make the exercise tedious. When I met them, at the beginning, I requested them to make entries on a regular basis. I left it open to them to decide whether they would do so on a weekly or daily basis. However, when I read the diaries, I noted that they had made entries on a regular basis, not necessarily on a daily basis. One pattern that I noticed was that most of them made their entries on Fridays or during weekends.

Just like any research tool, diaries also have their advantages and disadvantages. Among the advantages of diaries for qualitative research, we note that they provide accounts of sensitive or private experiences that are not easily obtained in interviews (Woll, 2013) and participants are able to make entries 'in their own time', as and when they feel able to comment on unfolding events or experiences. As a research tool, diaries have often been employed to provide insight into personal phenomena that are difficult to access through other methods (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977). The disadvantages are that some participants may not be at ease penning down their lived experiences. It is easier to talk rather than write about their experiences. Some may not have the available time or required skills to keep a diary while other participants may produce 'sanitised' accounts of their experiences or feelings.

Fortunately, the participants of this research collaborated fully with me. Each of the eighteen participants submitted their electronic diaries after the period of six months. This period of six months coincided with the period I carried out the one-to-one and group interviews. It is true that some wrote more elaborately than others but what mattered were their contributions irrespective of the length of their entries. They dealt with the different aspects of informal teacher leadership and wrote about different anecdotes which marked their professional experiences.

All of them wrote their entries in the English language and did not use French or Creole, which they were permitted to do. Thus, I did not have to translate their entries. Seven out of the eighteen participants, from the three different secondary schools were very assiduous in keeping their diaries. They wrote detailed accounts of their lived experiences. Another four of them kept their diaries in note form. They used bullet points to make their entries. In general, the data from the one-to-one and group interviews and the diaries did not differ much but reinforced whatever they wanted to share on informal teacher leadership. I did not raise any issue they wrote in the diaries during the interviews because I read the diaries after the interviews were carried out. I did not want to further question them on what they wrote in the diaries. I reproduced large extracts of their entries in the findings.

#### 4.9 DATA ANALYSIS

In the next findings chapter, the data related to the research questions have been thematically and critically discussed in different sections. Each section deals with a specific theme. According to Stephens (2009:98), '*analysis is the search for meaning in relation to the research purpose or question.*' As mentioned earlier, four major research questions were used to generate a further series of fieldwork questions used in the interviews and diaries to gather the data. The focus of a phenomenological study, according to Patton (1990), lies in the '*descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience.*' The goal is to identify the essence of the shared experience that underlies all the variations in this particular learning experience. In presenting the data, I employed a series of headings related to each of the research questions.

After collecting the data from the three different methods, I proceeded through different phases of analysis. During the first phase, I listened to the one-to-one interviews of the six participants, school after school. Then I listened to the group interviews, again school after school. Then I

read the entries from the electronic diaries of the different participants, one school after another. After this initial stage, I gained an overarching idea about the data.

Then during the second phase, I proceeded with listening to the one-to-one and group interviews and reading the electronic diaries again. I transcribed and coded the data from the different sources separately and grouped the data in a thematic way. Afterwards, as suggested by Saldana (2009), the data was codified, that is, words, phrases and sentences which captured the salient themes of the research were grouped and regrouped in order to consolidate meaning. Data analysis is the search for meaningful patterns in data and ideas.

While retaining the data relevant to the research questions, I also made room for emergent themes. For example, I looked for themes related to the participants' lived experiences linked to educational and teacher leadership, the impact of the rector's leadership style on informal teacher leadership, the way distributed and shared leadership is practiced, the role school context and culture plays on encouraging or impeding informal teacher leadership and the participants' solutions to the problems identified by them. For instance, they proposed mentoring as one in-house solution to sharing good practices in schools. One of the emergent themes was the participants' suggestion that leadership qualities be given due consideration during any promotion exercise along with keeping in mind the qualifications and experience.

During this phase, I also triangulated the data obtained from the three sources. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1999). Triangulation also has been viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources. I identified how their oral or written statements emerged and thematically connected to one another (Streubert & Carpenter 1999) from the three different data collection tools. The eighteen participants' written and spoken words from the one-to-one or group interviews and their electronic diaries have been presented verbatim in the chapter five (Findings) so that any one reading them can capture their 'lived experiences' through their anecdotes, views, opinions and feelings. I grouped the data related generated by the three different methods together thematically, bearing in mind their depth and nuances.

During the third stage, I reviewed the data from the three sources thematically. The themes emerged from the research and the interview questions. For instance, I grouped all the relevant data from the three sources under the theme 'constructions of educational leadership'. Whatever was pertinent and related to the participants' constructions of educational leadership was discussed thematically. My analysis was based upon the research questions which were used to generate the themes drawn from the data. This meant that I looked across the schools and individual teachers, though keeping in mind the importance of each teacher's context or setting.

Throughout the different stages, while handling the data, I used bracketing, in line with a phenomenological approach, to reduce the risk of my subjectivity in my analysis. Denscombe, (2010:99), says that

*Researchers who use a phenomenological approach need to be explicit about their own ways of making sense of the world and, in order to get a clear view of how others see the world, they need to suspend (or bracket off) their own beliefs temporarily for the purposes of research.*

While analysing the data, I suspended my own beliefs. I made my researcher's voice quite clear and distinct wherever I added my own views as a professional. I analysed and discussed the data from my own experience as a former teacher and rector. I, however, presented the data which was obtained from the three different research tools, and as far as possible I maintained a reflexive stance towards it.

Initially, I had planned to analyse the data school by school, looking for the contextual differences and their impact upon informal teacher leadership but after listening once again to the one-to-one and group interviews and re-reading the entries from the electronic diaries, I realised that there was very little variance in the way the different participants of the different schools constructed their notions of informal teacher leadership. Given that there was very little or almost no contextual variance, I decided to analyse the data holistically across the schools, guided by my research questions. However, each research question generated data that produced different themes. For example, the first research question generated the following themes: educational leadership, informal teacher leadership, skills and characteristics of informal teacher leaders, distributed teacher leadership and informal teacher leadership. Given that Mauritius is a

small island country, differences in the participants' constructions of the phenomenon were negligible.

The findings showed that the way informal teacher leadership is conceptualised moreover in the same way irrespective of the school context. The data of this research supported this viewpoint. . Perhaps if I had taken three schools from three different educational zones in Mauritius, this might have led to a significant contextual variance in the data.

As with any phenomenological research, the findings on informal teacher leadership in this research also cannot be generalized but are transferable. A positivist may very well say that the findings of my research do not represent the whole of Mauritius. I will still argue that the data of this research is authentic, trustworthy and reliable in spite of being qualitative and subjective data. The participants' experiences are 'true' as they have lived or experienced them. They are reliable professionals.

#### **4.10 INSIDER RESEARCHER, ETHICS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

Mercer (2007) points that there has been an exponential increase in the number of insider researchers in the past two decades and she rightly adds that it is mainly due to the '*emergence of the Doctorate in Education (EdD), as distinct from the Doctorate in Philosophy (PhD) which can be interpreted as both a stimulus and a response to this trend*'. It is appropriate to understand the two key terms, namely, 'insider' and 'outsider' when we are referring to the researcher. Merton (1972) considers insiders to be '*members of specified groups and collectivities*' while outsiders are 'non-members'. Griffith (1998:361) considers the insider to be someone who '*has a familiarity with the group being researched*' and the outsider to be '*a researcher who does not have any intimate knowledge of the group being researched, prior to entry into the group*'.

Based upon the above, I consider myself as insider in the sense that I have belonged to the educational system for the past 25 years. In general, the insider/outsider dichotomy sparks debates on the positions of the researchers and their subjects and the consequent power relationships that develop between them (Mullings, 1999), and have tended to focus on situations where the researcher is in a more powerful position than the participant (Lal, 1996). I was

cautious about my insider researcher position throughout the research. This doctoral research is an opportunity to learn from colleagues of the fraternity on issues of informal teacher leadership.

The ethical tension grows even further because of the fact that I am an insider researcher. I am carrying out research in schools which I know personally. I know the participants and the rectors. The participants shared information about rectors who are my colleagues. Both socially and professionally I interact with them. This ethical tension gnaws anyone who carries out a research in a small island state where, as we commonly say, everyone knows everyone. That is why I had to be very cautious in bracketing.

That is why, as a researcher, I am fully conscious that it is my moral obligations to adhere to established ethical norms scrupulously. So my primary concern is to safeguard confidentiality. Both the names of the schools and those of the participants have been kept anonymous (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999) and will never be divulged. The integrity and dignity of the participants will be unharmed at all points in time, especially during and even after the research is over. That is why I called the three secondary schools Lotus, Hibiscus and Rose. I used 18 pseudonyms to refer to the educators who volunteered as participants in this study. I opted not to discuss the findings with the rectors of the three secondary schools. It is important for me to be accurate in the way I reported my findings. It is also understood that I have been faithful to the highest level of personal integrity and avoided any form of plagiarism.

Anonymising schools and the participants is a daunting task in small island state because almost everybody knows everybody. While every precaution was taken to safeguard the identity of the schools and the participants' anonymity, still the risks are there for someone who knows the Mauritian educational system to make guesses about the schools and even the participants. Conducting research in small island state like Mauritius has both its inherent advantages as well as disadvantages. While it is easy to access the schools and the participants, the risk of their identities being guessed exists as in spite of attending to all the ethical aspects of research, it is close to impossible to maintain it 100% anonymity.

I am conscious that this research has its own limitations in spite of all the precautions that I took ethically. The first limitation was the realization that the focus of this study, investigating educators' perceptions of informal teacher leadership in the three secondary schools did not

include rectors as participants. This study looks at informal teacher leadership from the educators' perspectives only. The constructions of educational and informal teacher leadership are educator-centric. Including the rectors or other stake-holders would have added a greater variety in the way informal teacher leadership is constructed in Mauritian secondary schools. I leave it to other researchers to carry out further investigations by involving rectors and other stake-holders in the quest to find out more on informal teacher leadership.

Other researchers might have opted for other research methods, involved participants other than educators only and perhaps used other research tools to collect data to investigate informal teacher leadership. As a researcher, I agree that there are many other options to conduct a research and I made my choices.

The results can inform future work with teacher leaders, but cannot be generalized to the population of teacher leaders as a whole in Mauritius. The small number of participants (18) from three secondary schools cannot produce data which can be generalized to the whole system. The subjectivity of the participants has also to be kept in mind.

#### **4.11 SUMMARY**

This chapter maps the process that was adopted to conduct this phenomenological research. I have given a picture as to how I carried out the research on informal teacher leadership. After discussing my interpretations of methodology and methods at the beginning of the chapter, I gave a brief overview of constructivism and phenomenology which determined my research approach. Then I explained the tools which were used to collect data and gave an indication of how I planned for the field work. I also explained how I communicated with the participants and gave the profile of the 18 participants of the study.

Next, I described the data collection process and even inserted a table to explain how I planned to collect data. I then discussed why I chose interviews and personal professional diaries as data collection tools. This chapter also included sections on data analysis and my position as an insider researcher. At the end, I discussed the limitations of this research and the research ethics which guided me.

## 5.0 FINDINGS

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I present, analyse and discuss the findings of my research. The main aim of this research was to explore educators' constructions of informal teacher leadership in three secondary schools in Mauritius. The four research questions which guided this research are:

*RQ1.* How do the participants construct their notions of educational and informal teacher leadership and what skills and characteristics should informal teacher leaders have?

*RQ2.* What are the cultural and contextual factors that encourage or impede teachers from assuming informal teacher leadership role?

*RQ3.* What contributions, if any, can informal teacher leadership make to school improvement in Mauritius?

*RQ4.* What are the policy implications at school and national level for a greater role for informal teacher leadership?

In this chapter, the findings to the above research questions are presented thematically. A series of headings have been used to present, analyse and discuss the thematic findings related to each of the above research questions. It is good to be reminded that in this study I have taken a constructivist approach and as such it is the participants' constructions of the phenomenon which have been discussed critically.

Participants' spoken and written views and opinions, gleaned from the one-to-one and group interviews and from their electronic diaries, have been reproduced thematically. Their experiences regarding the phenomenon help us to understand informal teacher leadership in Mauritian secondary schools.

## 5.2 PARTICIPANTS' CONSTRUCTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL AND INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND THE SKILLS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERS.

1 *RQ1*<sup>3</sup> How do the participants construct their notions of educational and informal teacher leadership and what skills and characteristics should informal teacher leaders have?

The first research question focused on the participants' constructions of educational and teacher leadership in Mauritian secondary schools and the skills and characteristics of informal teacher leaders. This first research question was the overarching question meant to collect data on the different aspects of leadership related to informal teacher leadership. As has been discussed in previous chapters, educational leadership is gradually shifting from autocratic to a more democratic style of leadership which makes room for shared and distributed leadership in schools. The participants were invited to share not only their constructions of educational and informal teacher leadership but also their notions regarding the skills and characteristics informal teacher leaders should possess. They were also asked to share their views and experiences concerning distributed leadership in the schools where they worked and how rectors identified and selected informal teacher leaders to assume different responsibilities.

### 5.2.1 PARTICIPANTS' CONSTRUCTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

To begin with, it was important to find out how the participants constructed their notions of educational leadership. Even though the study focused on informal teacher leadership, it was pertinent to explore their views, experiences and opinions on educational leadership as well because it is mainly the leadership style of the rector which determined informal teacher leadership.

Talking on leadership during the one-to-one interview, Mr Michel from HSS said that

*Like other organizations, schools also have to be managed by leaders. It is the school leader who drives the school towards progress, improvement or efficiency. It is a*

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<sup>3</sup> RS1-Research Question 1

*demanding responsibility. Rectors, who have the necessary leadership qualities, obviously achieve the targets they aim. Much of what happens or does not happen in a school depends largely on the rector.*

The above comments support the view that school leadership is important to drive '*the school towards progress, improvement or efficiency*' (refer to Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006:4) because '*much of what happens or does not happen in a school depends largely on the rector.*'

Writing his views in his diary, Mr Simadree of LSS made the following observations,

*The one thing that strikes me about educational leaders in Mauritius is the amount of power and authority which they yield. While some are really good leaders, others have been quite mediocre. It is good to mention that the democratic leader is rare while the autocratic leader is quite common. Many think that the hierarchical position gives them the right and authority to treat the staff as 'professionally inferior human beings'. This is manifested in the way they deal with them, often with disrespect and disdain. The autocratic school leaders with whom I have worked are 'real bullies' and they do not realize the emotional wounds they leave in their subordinates.*

In the above comments the participant hints that the leadership style of the rector has a huge impact on the different stakeholders connected with his school. It is quite interesting to note that '*the democratic leader is rare while the autocratic leader is quite common.*' He also wrote about the hierarchical position of rectors as we note in the literature '*leadership has tended to be constructed as associated with ascribed authority and position*' (Crowther & Olsen, 1997: 6): '*leadership traditionally has been perceived to reside with school administrators where power flowed downward to teachers*' (Yarger & Lee, 1994: 226). However, what is worth noting is that some rectors are regarded as '*bullies*' who inflict '*emotional wounds*'. This is one factor which leads to '*strained relationships*' between rectors and educators and may impede the smooth running of the school. These '*strained relationships*' may also cause frustration among the educators and as a result their motivation goes down. Such situations do not augur well for school improvement or effectiveness. It is common knowledge that effective leaders realize that they must cultivate trustworthy relationships with their subordinates. Marzano, et al., (2005: 16)

believe that, '*leaders (who) establish an atmosphere of trust by their daily actions*' are more successful in working towards school improvement. Later in this chapter, the impact of the rector's leadership style on informal teacher leadership is discussed.

Mrs Mila, from RSS wrote the following in her diary

*In Mauritius, the main problem is that leadership is the most neglected aspect when people are selected or chosen to assume such a big responsibility as head of school. In Mauritius, the head of school is someone who indisputably holds the position of authority and power. The whole notion of leadership is blatantly ignored when recruitment or promotion is done. Often, other criteria like political, religious or caste have precedence over leadership qualities. That is one of the reasons some rectors are really effective and models of leadership, there are others who are mere caricatures of whatever is associated with leadership.*

Her comments, above, are a serious indictment of the way recruitment and promotion takes place in Mauritius. In the literature, we rarely come across situations where poor or weak school leadership is discussed. The deficit of leadership among rectors in the country is the outcome of unclear recruitment or promotion policies and that is why '*other criteria like political, religious or caste have precedence over leadership qualities*' and this often results in some of them being '*mere caricatures of whatever is associated with leadership.*' These comments should not be taken lightly because educational leadership plays a key role in determining the school culture, establishing an atmosphere of trust at school and in paving the way for the school improvement. From my own experience, I can vouch that those rectors that are '*mere caricatures of whatever is associated with leadership*' seriously imperil any attempt towards improvement in schools. Instead of motivating teachers, such 'leaders' dampen the zeal of teachers. We shall return to this issue in the final chapter.

It is interesting to note the following in Ms Rishta's diary, from HSS,

*A leader should normally encourage collaborative professional practices like team work. In a democratic set up, decisions are taken collectively, and staff members should have the right to voice out their views and opinions. In Mauritius, in most secondary schools, educators can hardly express their views. Educators have no choice but agree with*

*whatever the rector says. I can never envisage going against the decisions of the rector. I prefer to stay away from any form of conflict.*

In the comments above, the leadership styles of some rectors in Mauritius have been described. Educators expect leaders to encourage collaboration and team work. However, the participants complained that there is an absence of democratic leadership because many educators '*can hardly express their views*' and '*they have no choice but agree with whatever the rector says.*' This further consolidates what Mrs Mila said earlier when she asserted that a few rectors are '*mere caricatures of whatever is associated with leadership.*' Such rectors '*literally force you to beg for a local leave or a vacation leave and sometimes they make your life hell when you take a sick leave*' wrote Mrs Kajal of LSS.

During the group interviews which were held with the participants of the three different schools, one recurrent issue which came forward was that '*many Mauritian rectors are mere managers and lack leadership qualities.*' According to them, they have '*rarely worked with rectors with leadership qualities but have worked with managers.*' I wanted the participants to elaborate further on the distinction they made between leaders and managers during the group interviews and they responded as follows:

*Managers are people who are here to look after administrative affairs of schools. They are task oriented. They neither lead nor inspire the educators. On the other hand, the school leader does what the manager does but differently by inspiring the staff to accomplish the tasks. Leaders care for the staff. Leaders build up the confidence of the educators, empower them, guide them and believe in team spirit but managers only order and constantly rebuke or threaten.*

The participants' comments clearly deepen the discussion on the distinction between leaders and managers in Mauritian schools. While '*leaders build up the confidence of the educators, empower them, guide them and believe in team spirit, managers on the other hand, only order and constantly rebuke or threaten them.*' There is a marked difference in the way the rectors who are '*mere managers*' or those who are leaders go about with job or task accomplishments by the educators. The managers, as described by the participants share some of the qualities of

'autocratic and transactional leaders.' The participants prefer to work with transformational school leaders.

Ms Dilshaad of LSS wrote in her diary,

*Rectors who lack leadership qualities often use repression to run the school. They often put up one group of educators against another. Those whom they favour automatically 'act as professional bouncers' to repress the others. Educators can never unite because the seeds of division, jealousy and hatred are sown by cunning and conniving rectors who prefer to 'divide and rule' rather than 'unite and lead'.*

The absence of leadership qualities among some rectors is a major source of problems in many schools. Schools which are run by rectors who are '*cunning and conniving*' actually '*prefer to 'divide and rule' rather than 'unite and lead'*' and this definitely causes a lot of harm to the system and seriously affects the morale of the educators with whom they work. In the literature, we noted that transformational leadership is seen by Silins (1994: 274) as the '*bond (between) leader and followers within a collaborative change process and contributes to the performance of the whole organisation...(as against transactional leadership which) does not bind leaders and followers in any enduring way and results in a routinised, non-creative but stable environment.*' It is clear that informal teacher leadership best develops under the guidance of transformational leaders and are stifled by managers who share the traits of 'transactional' qualities of leadership.

Leadership qualities and skills have a universal dimension. Leaders in general, whether they come from the educational or any other sector like politics, religious organisations, sports, non-governmental organisations have common traits and qualities. Hostile and repressive school cultures may stifle the emergence of leaders but at times, rather surprisingly, we have to concede that teacher leaders emerge notwithstanding a hostile and oppressive school culture. It is quite interesting to note that even when rectors do not practise democratic or shared leadership, we still have informal teacher leaders in those schools. Rectors who practise '*democratic leadership are facilitators and enablers of informal teacher leadership*' as the participants of HSS put it during the group interview. The participants of LSS said that, '*rectors who lack leadership qualities choose a few informal teacher leaders and exclude many others from their immediate*

*inner circles. They prefer to work with a privileged group of informal teacher leaders rather than opening the collaboration to a bigger pool of informal teacher leaders.'* During the group interview, the participants of RSS explained that, *'rectors have their pets, their favourite educators, with whom they are more at ease and they select educators, irrespective of leadership qualities. The work is done by trial and error.'*

Thus the choice of informal teacher leaders often depends on the rector. Writing in her electronic diary, Mrs Sabnam of LSS wrote, *'while some rectors make judicious choices of informal teacher leaders, other just choose a group of educators to help them, and a few among them are informal teacher leaders.'* In his electronic diary, Mr Iqbal of HSS wrote that, *'there is no proper guideline as to how rectors identify, select or choose informal teacher leaders in Mauritian secondary schools and this gives way to frustrations when a few incompetent and undeserving educators are chosen to carry out tasks which require leadership qualities.'*

These comments portray the deeply entrenched Mauritian culture which prevails in schools and elsewhere when selection and choices are made. It is quite common for rectors to make choices on the basis of their personal preferences because there are no proper official criteria to do so.

## **5.2.2 PARTICIPANTS' CONSTRUCTIONS OF INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP**

In the previous section, the participants' constructions of educational leadership were presented, analysed and discussed. The second part of the first research question takes us to their constructions of teacher leadership. In this part, the findings related to the participants' constructions of informal teacher leadership are presented and discussed.

The interviews and the professional diaries gave the participants the opportunities to share their constructions of informal teacher leadership more elaborately. Writing in her diary, Ms Dilshaad of LSS, observed that

*Informal teachers also act as section leaders or discipline masters or heads of department. As section and discipline masters, they have to monitor the discipline and academic or overall behaviour of the students. They have to regularly deal with the students' form teachers, parents and the rector as well. In Mauritius, some heads of department may also have leadership qualities. All heads of department may not have*

*leadership qualities. Many are promoted to that position on the basis of their seniority, whether they have or do not have leadership qualities. It will be unfair to say that all heads of department are de facto informal teacher leaders. Some heads of department bring in their leadership in the way they manage the colleagues of the department but the others only deal with attributing time table and signing weekly reports of their colleagues. This is not leadership.*

Ms Dilshaad continued writing that,

*For me, a head of department with leadership qualities help in the growth of the members by ensuring that there is sharing of competencies and skills among colleagues. Attempts should be made to help novice teachers to adapt to school culture, improve their teaching skills and so on. These things are rarely undertaken by complacent heads of department. They should have departmental development plans and should ensure that proper teaching and learning is taking place but again I have noted a void at this level. We have a long way to go in order to be like teacher leaders in the west.*

Ms Dilshaad raised a series of succinct issues in her diary. In a nutshell, she made it clear that all heads of departments might not possess leadership qualities. In fact, it would be an aberration to consider all heads of departments as informal leaders in the Mauritian context. I agree with her observations because I have come across heads of departments who seriously lacked leadership skills to manage their respective departments. On the other hand, there were junior colleagues in the same department who displayed greater leadership skills than the head of department. Such situations deserve the attention of policy makers as school development suffers when heads of departments lack leadership skills.

However, Mrs Preeti of HSS and Mr Simadree of LSS, two of the most experienced participants of the group, identified other roles of informal teacher leaders. According to them, informal teacher leaders should be involved in '*sharing their professional expertise*', '*they have to induct novice teachers*' and '*they have to transmit the school values and ethos to new teachers*'. In fact, experienced teachers can play this role very well.

Writing in his personal professional diary, Mr Simadree of LSS wrote that.

*I intentionally refused to apply for the post of rector. Teaching gives me more satisfaction than anything else. Now, when I look back, I feel happy that I not only taught the students of the school but I also mentored many new teachers. I do not think that the rector could do this. Sharing my professional experiences, not only with those novice teachers of my department but also from the other departments, gave me immense satisfaction. At this age, I no longer help students to prepare for cultural programmes. I feel that I am a mentor. During the last few years of my career, I wish to further help the new generation develop the right attitude towards teaching and the pupils.*

What Mr Simadree highlighted is worth noting. In fact, the roles of informal teacher leaders evolve with time and their professional experience. If rectors realize that the senior staff can help to induct and mentor novice teachers, it would help them significantly in boosting the efficacy of the staff members. Personally, I used to organize working sessions where experienced staff members would share their expertise and good practices with the novice ones. And it worked well.

Mrs Preety added the following in her personal professional diary,

*The experienced staff members of the school gradually become the repositories of school values and culture and it is their duty to transmit them to the new teachers. This is done informally. There is no need to have workshops for that. During our interactions with the novice teachers, we can share our good practices, we can advise young teachers what to do and what not to do. We can bring the bulk of our experiences to their knowledge and it is up to them to use these effectively in the professional life.*

Mrs Preety further added that,

*Often, I talk to young colleagues who come for advice. I tell them how to manage discipline, how to establish proper professional relationships with colleagues, how to deal with recalcitrant students and boisterous parents. I am happy that my advice is heeded by many. This is my way of helping my young friends. I do not know whether I am a teacher leader or not. The title does not interest me. As a senior staff of the school, it is my duty to help to establish collegial relationships among the staff members.*

In fact, senior staff members have a crucial role to play as informal teacher leaders. It is something akin to the role that the middle management can play. They can be the important link between the rector and the rest of the staff. Their seniority gives them the respectability and this helps in the team building process. I have always given the senior staff with whom I have worked the respect that they deserved. I have benefitted from their experience and wisdom.

Informal teacher leadership is not limited to what happens inside the classroom. This study also aims at shedding some light on what roles are assumed by teacher leaders outside the classrooms as well. In fact, teachers do not only teach in schools. They handle a wide variety of tasks outside the classrooms on a daily basis.

Talking about the roles played by informal teachers outside the classrooms, Mr Rakesh of RSS said that

*They are multi skilled persons. Apart from being acknowledged as very good classroom teachers, they regularly handle extra-curricular activities and sometimes administrative tasks with passion.*

Ms Rishta and Mr Iqbal of HSS observed that informal teacher leaders also help in organizing different important school activities.

*They organize cultural programmes for the annual Prize Giving Day or the Music day or whenever a minister or VIP visits the school. These informal teacher leaders are often chosen by the rector to be members of the Parents Teachers Association. They help to raise funds because they know how to motivate colleagues and students.*

Indeed, as mentioned above by the participants, there are many educators who help their respective rectors to carry out different extra- curricular and administrative tasks on a regular basis. My own senior management team, comprising of a few highly dedicated staff helped me to prepare the time table of the school, prepare the School Developmental Plan (as observed by Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster, & Cobb, 1995; Heller & Firestone, 1995; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001), assume different offices in the PTA (Gabriel, 2005; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001) deal with emergencies like torrential rain and flood in the region of the school. These teachers would really act as the *'foot soldiers'* and manage fund raising activities, publication of

school magazine or handle cultural programmes (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). They would sacrifice their lunch and free time and sometimes their holidays to ensure that these tasks were carried out satisfactorily. It is on the basis of their proven leadership qualities that these staff members were assigned these tasks.

Elaborating further on this issue, Ajay of LSS added that

*They help to run the school based assessments and examinations. They act as supervisors and manage the exams. The rectors delegate these tasks to the teachers in whom they have trust. This trust is built upon the teachers' leadership qualities to assume such sensitive responsibilities like running a school based assessment or examination. Mistakes or shortcomings are not allowed. Obviously, rectors know to whom they should entrust such task.*

Mr Vishal of RSS sheds more light on his construction of informal teacher leadership in the following comments,

*An informal teacher leader is an exceptional teacher, who masters his subject matter and influences his colleagues or other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increasing students' learning and achievement.*

In fact, Mr Vishal's comments tally with those expressed by Mrs Kameeni earlier in this section where the teacher leader is recognised primarily as an 'exceptional teacher' who 'masters his subject matter' and 'influences his colleagues and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices.' In fact, I have come across such teachers who pose as self-proclaimed leaders but completely neglect their classes. They stay away from the class, their teaching time suffers and their pupils feel like being abandoned. These teachers are not held high in the esteem of their colleagues.

In her professional diary, Mrs Preety of HSS wrote that,

*A teacher leader is a leader. It is as simple as that. We have many such informal teacher leaders in different schools and they contribute a lot in managing the affairs of the school, especially the extracurricular activities of the school. In Mauritius, there is no such thing like a formal teacher leader. A rector who can count on informal teacher*

*leaders finds himself surrounded by a dynamic group of teachers who lead without an official or formal title.*

It is true to assert that a rector who is 'surrounded by a dynamic group of teachers who lead without an official or formal title' is more likely to meet the objectives of the school. These informal teacher leaders take charge of numerous academic and extra-curricular activities of the school. Their contribution is seminal in the school.

Ms Neerousha and Ms Rishta, both from HSS shared similar views during the group interview and added that,

*Informal teacher leadership has always existed in all schools, but some rectors recognize and value them while others simply ignore them or feel threatened by them.*

When asked to elaborate further on the reasons why rectors may feel 'threatened', the participants added that,

*Rectors who are weak, who lack leadership skills themselves feel that they may be eclipsed by the leadership skills of the teachers. Thus they do not give teachers with strong leadership qualities the chance to emerge or take the centre stage even if the school loses a lot at the end. When rectors change and are replaced by others that at times some teachers get the opportunities to come forward and display their talents.*

Mr Simadree and Mrs Nalini, both from LSS, expressed similar views,

*No one can expect the rector to run the school alone. Those who form part of the senior management team like the discipline masters or the heads of department are teacher leaders who have gained a lot of experience with time.*

Mrs Shabnam, Ms Dilshaad and Miss Kajal, all from LSS, adamantly insisted that

*One does not become a teacher leader on the basis of professional experience only. There may be many teachers with leadership skills and potential who shun leadership tasks or roles. They prefer to stay away from the managerial affairs because they know that they may suffer.*

The three participants made pertinent comments above when they asserted that '*one does not become a teacher leader on the basis of professional experience*' and '*many shun leadership tasks or roles*' because they '*may suffer*'. They were asked to elaborate on the reasons why teachers may 'suffer' while assuming leadership roles and they added, '*These teachers are considered to be the rector's pets and very often they are viewed negatively. They are bad mouthed.*' Very often, it is the rector, the formal leader, of the school who selects or appoints the informal teacher leaders to carry out tasks which are assigned to them. Sometimes, they may lead to conflicts among the educators. Those who are chosen by the head of school are considered to be the pets of the rector.

Rectors often have to select to informal teacher leaders to conduct different activities like preparing or overseeing school functions like Prize Giving day or Sports day. The choice of the rector can be interpreted as act of giving preference to a privileged group of teachers at the expense of others. The chosen ones are criticized by the rest of the staff. This is something quite common in Mauritius. This happens because of envy and jealousy among colleagues.

The participants have laid a lot of emphasis on the personal qualities of teacher leaders such as they are '*imbued with humane and institutional values*', '*selflessly involved in staff welfare*' and '*act as role models*'.

Given that teacher leadership is informal and unofficial in Mauritius, it is important that informal teacher leaders have intrinsic motivation, a personal drive and a selfless desire to serve the institution for them to come forward. The onus rests upon the rector to ensure that the enthusiasm to serve as informal teacher leaders is not dampened by a hostile school culture. In Mauritius, informal teachers do not benefit from any financial reward or promotion or career prospects. Very often these informal teacher leaders become frustrated when they see their colleagues who never acted as informal teacher leaders and blatantly lacking leadership skills getting promotion.

When the participants were asked the reasons which motivated the '*frustrated informal teacher leaders to continue carrying out their different leadership oriented tasks*', they said that the latter are imbued with '*humane and institutional values and they want to serve their kids (pupils) selflessly or they want to act as role models.*' During the group interview, Mrs Mila of RSS said

that '*genuine informal teacher leaders do not stop performing leadership tasks because they have not been promoted or they are frustrated.*' Mr Simadree of LSS added that '*the welfare of our school is more important than our promotion or frustration.*'

Rectors have a key role to play in the way informal teacher leadership operates in secondary schools. Research by Danielson (2007:14) reveals that '*not every school is hospitable to the emergence of teacher leaders, particularly informal teacher leaders.*' She further adds that rectors can play a crucial role in fostering the conditions that facilitate teacher leadership. Even Feiler et al., (2000: 68) supports the claim that the rector '*plays a key role in how effectively the teacher leader functions*'.

### 5.2.3 THE SKILLS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERS

In this section, I will discuss the participants' views on the skills and characteristics of teacher leaders. During the semi structured group interview, Mr Iqbal and Mrs Preety of HSS highlighted the following

*Informal teacher leaders should have very good skills in classroom management. This implies how they manage the academic progress of their students. Like leaders in the military or sport fields, they know how to inspire their pupils to go that extra mile. They are themselves role models and easily win students' attention and trust.*

In the above comments, we find that the participants consider that '*informal teacher leaders should have very good skills in classroom management*' apart from managing the academic progress of the students. These informal teacher leaders have to be '*role models*' and '*inspire their pupils to go that extra mile.*' These are qualities which are ascribed to leaders in different fields.

Elaborating further on informal teacher leaders' skills, Ms Neerousha of HSS wrote this in her personal diary

*Like any other leader, in any other position, an informal teacher leader should have excellent communication skills. I think it is imperative for a teacher leader to communicate effectively, not only with the students but also with colleagues, the*

*administrative staff, the rector, parents and other stakeholders. Sadly, I have noted that communication is one of the weakest links in Mauritian secondary schools and unfortunately, nothing serious is being done to address this issue. Educators spend very little time dealing with communication gap problems. For instance, when some students misbehave or have learning problems, the easiest approach is to tag the latter as lazy or a hopeless case. Educators need to have more empathy. They should discuss school related issues or problems with colleagues or rectors instead of backbiting, which is so widespread in our culture. Informal teacher leadership comes with some responsibility. It has to do with team building, the spirit of sharing, and the idea of giving the best of oneself. We cannot depend upon formal courses or degrees in Educational Management to develop the desire to help the school where we work into a better place, where we can grow collectively both as professionals and individuals.'*

Indeed, informal teacher leaders have qualities such as excellent communication skills, team spirit, a high level of empathy, and problem solving skills which most leaders generally possess. In the literature, we noted that teacher leaders have very good communication skills, especially the capacity '*to communicate proactively, confidently, assertively*' (Crowther, 1997: 12), and clearly with adults (Yarger & Lee, 1994). Teacher leaders should be able to communicate effectively, irrespective of the professional context where they have to operate. Ms Neerousha also mentions the responsibility of informal teacher leaders to work in teams and they should be guided by the spirit of sharing. When this happens in schools, then the school becomes '*a better place, where we can grow collectively both as professionals and individuals.*'

Mrs Kameeni of RSS highlighted an informal teacher leader's skills and characteristics as follows during the one-to-one interview

*Teacher leaders are those who possess leadership qualities just like any other leaders in any organization. Teacher leaders are primarily experts in the subjects they teach and are highly appreciated by pupils, parents other colleagues and even the rectors. But apart from that they also have the qualities to lead. They lead by doing a little more than what other teachers do in general. Apart from teaching, they take charge of their pupils' emotional, psychological and personal growth. They support them in myriad ways. Teacher leaders also help their colleagues by coaching, mentoring and inspiring them.*

Here, we have an idea about the way the notions of teacher leadership are constructed. Teacher leaders are '*primarily experts in the subjects they teach*' but '*they also have the qualities to lead*' and apart from '*teaching, they take charge of their pupils*' *emotional, psychological and personal growth*' and also '*help their colleagues by coaching, mentoring and inspiring them.*' Thus, teacher leaders are those who are endowed with excellent teaching skills, they provide forms of support to their students and also to their colleagues. These skills and qualities that they possess help them to demarcate themselves from the rest of the teachers who are not teacher leaders. These findings echo what we noted in the literature as teacher leaders are respected for their own teaching capabilities by fellow teachers and administrators alike (Danielson, 2007), and that they are versed in subject content as identified by Nieto (2007) and Lieberman et al. (2000).

Mr Rakesh of RSS, wrote the following in his diary

*A teacher leader is able to help in the smooth running of the school, by working in team with colleagues and all the other people who form part of the school.*

Another quality of a teacher leader is the ability to work in a team as mentioned by Mr Rakesh. From my own experience, I can say that team work is primordial in the smooth running of a school. If teachers are not willing to work as a consolidated team and if there is division, then the serenity of the school is threatened.

During the group interview, Mrs Mila of RSS shared the following views,

*As educators, we do not function with the 'formal or informal teacher leaders label or tag.' We come forward to share our expertise, knowhow, without really bothering about the title or tag linked with teacher leadership. Inside the classroom, we are involved in a wide variety of tasks. Prime among them is effective management of students' discipline and the curriculum. A teacher leader should play these roles effectively for the smooth running of the school.*

In fact, as a former rector, I can add that teachers who have leadership qualities handle students' discipline in an effective way. They deal with unruly students at classroom level. They painstakingly manage to talk and deal with recalcitrant students. They inspire the latter to change

their negative attitudes towards studies or school by empathically coaching them. This is a massive contribution from these informal teacher leaders. Without the support of such teachers, managing discipline in the school would be more than daunting, almost an impossible task to be managed alone by the rector.

In her professional diary, elaborating further on this issue, Mrs Mila of the RSS shared the following experiences,

*Very often we come across extremely difficult students. They are rebellious. They refuse to work or attend the class. They are major sources of disturbance. They incite other pupils to bunk the class or harshly reply back to teachers. I have been able to handle them in my class without ever feeling the need to report the matters to the rector. I remember the case of Mathieu who came from an extremely difficult background. He was unruly, untidy and undisciplined and almost every day he used to be reported to the school discipline committee. I never had to do so. It was a case that tested my patience and good nature. But after some time, Mathieu not only changed his attitude but started showing keen interest in my subject. Gradually, he started showing interest in other subjects as well. I am thankful to my rector who used to reiterate a saying in his staff meetings that, 'a good educator has to be a good human being and when you teach with compassion, you will surely overcome the negativities of colleagues and students alike'. Indeed this advice worked marvellously not only with Mathieu but all the other recalcitrant students who have come my way during the past fifteen years that I have been working at the RSS.*

Teacher leaders are indeed very good at managing students' discipline. They bring along with them their experiences and values which are extremely useful in dealing with difficult students. Teacher leaders need to have compassion and a good dose of knowledge about adolescent psychology. That is why some teachers successfully handle students while others often fail. Rectors who select these informal teacher leaders and assign them the responsibilities of handling students' discipline committees or welfare clubs ensure that their schools are managed effectively. It has to be admitted that apart from teaching, informal teacher leaders have a lot to do.

During the group interview, Mrs Shailly and Mrs Kameeni, both of RSS also emphasized that

*Teacher leaders have to be subject specialists. They have to master their subjects very well. When teachers teach their subjects with passion, they definitely win the students' appreciation and respect. Once students realize that you master your subject well, then their respect towards you becomes unconditional. The respect they show you becomes crucial in dealing with the students in almost all circumstances. Teacher leaders, thus, need to have excellent teaching skills along with mastery of the subject they are teaching. They are innovative in the ways they teach. They use up to date technology in their class. They constantly review their teaching skills and adapt themselves to the needs of the learners.*

As a former rector I had to deal with such issues when students and parents came with complaints regarding teachers who were not teaching satisfactorily. Parents would request me to shift their children from this one class to another simply because they trusted the other teacher. In 2008, I even wrote a letter to then Minister of Education, reminding him that recruitment of teachers has to be done with discernment. All teachers possessing a degree in a subject do not automatically become a subject specialist. Many such teachers, lacking the proper art of and passion for teaching, demotivate students from developing whatsoever interest in the subject they teach. Personally I hold the view that a teacher leader, whether he is operating in a formal or informal capacity, should primarily perform satisfactorily in the class. The teaching and learning transaction is the most important task that has to be assumed by a teacher leader, albeit an informal teacher leader.

Moreover, the skills and characteristics of formal or informal teacher leaders are almost the same. The findings show that the informal teacher leaders in Mauritius have '*a blend of professional and personal attributes*' as discussed by Hatfield et al. (1986:19). They have the key competencies listed by O'Connor and Boles (cited in Killion, 1996:68). In Mauritius also, these informal teacher leaders often display skills in confronting and overcoming troublesome barriers, both structural and human to contribute in all attempts which are geared towards school improvement (Crowther, 1997; Miller et al., 2000).

#### 5.2.4 DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP AND INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP

In the earlier chapters of this dissertation, the close links between distributed leadership and informal teacher leadership has been discussed. For instance, informal teacher leadership depends heavily on the style of leadership practised by the rector. When a rector practises democratic leadership, he allows other members of the organisation to assume leadership roles. In the absence of any official or formal status of leadership for teachers, it is mostly informal teacher leadership which is practised in Mauritius.

While deepening my investigation in order to understand if distributed leadership is practised in Mauritius and how it operates in schools, I got interesting insights from the participants. For instance, almost all the participants from the three secondary schools acknowledged that '*distributed leadership exists*' in the schools where they worked but nuanced their responses. For instance, Mr Rakesh from RSS said it clearly during the interview

*The way the heads distribute or share leadership depends on different factors. While some rectors, who are lazy or lack managerial skills, often, solicit the help of a group of teachers to complete different tasks. These rectors distribute tasks. This is not distributed leadership.*

The above comments are important. Mr Rakesh also wanted to drive home the idea that rectors '*who are lazy or lack managerial skills, often, solicit the help of a group of teachers to complete different tasks.*' To him, these rectors merely distribute and assign tasks to educators. This is not to be mistaken for distributed leadership. He makes a clear distinction between distributing tasks and distributed leadership. From my own experience, I remember that many rectors are happy to 'distribute tasks' as mentioned by Mr Rakesh. They normally ask a few teachers to carry out certain tasks which they cannot do or do not want to do themselves. For instance, they ask educators to prepare the time table for the staff and pupils, they also ask educators to deal with administrative paper work. This does not amount to distributed leadership.

I asked the participants to elaborate on the distinction they made between distribution of tasks and distributed leadership during the group interview. The participants of HSS were very

enthusiastic to share their experiences related to one acting rector, who was posted to their school for a few months.

*Miss VBP lacked managerial skills, leave aside leadership qualities. She did not know the basics of management and she just shifted her responsibilities upon the staff members. We could not refuse because of possible persecutions by her.*

In fact, it is quite likely to have such rectors who shift their 'responsibilities upon the staff members' in Mauritius. Writing in her personal professional diary, Ms Rishta of HSS wrote,

*The most painful days of my career were those days when Miss V.B.P came to replace the rector. That she does not have an iota of leadership was known to all of us. To veil her own weaknesses, she engaged in a bullying exercise. She would just throw tasks at us. She did not know how to plan school activities and very often she communicated poorly about the way she wanted the tasks to be completed.*

In the above comments, we note that rectors who lack leadership qualities have difficulties to involve teachers in leadership roles. In general these rectors or deputy rectors or acting deputy rectors do communicate poorly, 'throw tasks' at others, do not know how to plan school activities and their managerial weaknesses are known to other staff members.

Elaborating further in her diary, Ms Rishta added that,

*I remember how almost all the teachers decided not to help her for the School Prize Giving day. Fortunately, she was replaced by another rector who had the leadership qualities. In one week, he motivated us to mount a cultural programme for the Prize Giving day. Distributed leadership is something complex. It is not just that the head of school assigns certain tasks and responsibilities to the teachers.*

I concur with Ms Rishta who wrote that 'Distributed leadership is something complex' as it entails delegation of tasks and of power. A genuine leader has to form a team and communicate with the team members before assigning tasks to them unlike the anecdote above where tasks are thrown at teachers. When leadership is distributed, there is an element of motivation, supervision and proper monitoring that the tasks are being done properly.

During the group interview, all the staff of HSS, just like those of RSS and LSS, elaborated further on the nature of distributed leadership. They asserted that *'distributed leadership is based on trust and empowerment', 'giving the teachers the respect that they deserve for the potential that they have', 'it is not just giving them certain responsibilities', 'the tasks may be challenging but recognizing their leadership qualities is important and they have to be told they are leaders in their own right', or 'distributed leadership is possible when not only leadership roles are assigned but the appropriate authority accompanies it.'* The participants of the three different schools echoed moreover the same things on the important and nature of distributed leadership.

However, the participants acknowledged that distributing leadership in schools has its own impediments. They claimed with vigour that *'the head of school does not have much leeway to officially delegate authority to teachers.'* Asking the teachers to assume certain key tasks may even *'backfire and prove that the head is weak or an attempt to shun his official responsibilities'*. However, according to the participants some rectors *'manage to delegate tasks and responsibilities to staff members based on their potential, willingness to help and their commitment'*. According to them, such rectors are respected among educators.

The issue of distributed leadership through a proper delegation of tasks and power should be addressed while chalking out any policy in relation to informal teacher leadership. This will be discussed later in the recommendation chapter.

### 5.2.5 THE IDENTIFICATION AND SELECTION OF INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERS

During the one-to one and group interviews, the participants were asked *'how are informal teacher leaders identified and selected?'* The unanimous response of all the participants was *'it is the rector who identifies and selects the informal teacher leaders.'*

In his electronic diary, Mr Iqbal of HSS wrote that

*Rectors are the ones who have the sole responsibility to identify, choose and select the informal teacher leaders in Mauritius. Nobody can force a rector to choose such or such educator as an informal teacher leader. The choice of informal teacher leaders is a personal and subjective issue.*

Mr Ajay of LSS also echoed the same thing in his electronic personal diary,

*Rectors choose educators to assume informal leadership roles on a personal basis. There is no rule which guide them. They are free to choose those with whom they are at ease to work. They generally select people on the basis of merit; that is, those with proven leadership qualities. But in reality there are few rectors who choose a few educators because of their proximity with them.*

During the group interviews, the participants were asked to elaborate on the issue of selection of informal teacher leaders. Irrespective of the schools where they worked, they said that, *'each rector has his or her own way of choosing informal teacher leaders'*, *'some rectors choose educators whose leadership qualities will help them run the school effectively'*, *'some rectors give preference to educators who are close to them, who belong to their group or clan'*, but there are also *'some rectors who select a few educators who need exposure to and training in leadership in school set-up.'*

In his electronic diary, Mr Simadree of LSS wrote that

*Rectors who view their organisation in a holistic way always allow educators with leadership qualities to interact with those who have budding leadership potential. It is important not to focus only on those with leadership qualities only. Giving the opportunity to those who are new in the school or who have dormant leadership potential is one way of ensuring capacity building and sustaining school improvement. Relying only on a selected group of educators can be detrimental to the school development.*

However, the selection of informal teacher leaders by rectors poses a number of problems. The participants raised these concerns during the one-to-one and group interviews. According to the participants of three different schools, *'some rectors select the informal teacher leaders on the basis of their leadership and a teacher's leadership cannot be hidden'*, *'informal teacher leaders are respected inside and outside the classrooms and they lead both students and colleagues'*, and *'when they are entrusted with administrative or organisational responsibilities, they display their skills.'*

Writing in her electronic diary, Ms Dilshaad made the following pertinent remarks,

*It is in the interest of rectors to choose the right informal teacher leaders to help in managing the school. These informal teacher leaders know how to organise a school function, how to prepare a school calendar or reinforce discipline among students and many other administrative duties. If the rectors make the wrong choices, which they often do, because they want to give preference to a few educators, then this creates problems and a feeling of uneasiness among the teaching staff.*

In fact, all the participants insisted rectors should make the 'right choice of informal teacher leaders'. But the problems crop up when rectors are new in a school. They normally take time to identify the informal teacher leaders. Most of the participants complained that 'very often these rectors (who are new) may surround themselves with a few fake informal teacher leaders which may not be appreciated by the genuine ones who are neglected.' In some schools, rectors prefer to work with established informal teacher leaders and giving almost no opportunity to new recruits to join the senior informal teacher leaders.

Rectors sometimes have difficulties in forming a team with the informal teacher leaders. Bringing the informal teacher leaders together to carry out a task does not always operate smoothly. During the group interviews, the participants of RSS shared the following,

*Conflicts among educators exist at a very subtle level. Educators may not quarrel or dispute openly but this does not mean that there is no battle of ego or clash of personality or a silent competition among themselves.*

The participants of HSS had these observations to make,

*Informal teacher leaders have certain dexterity to do something more efficiently than other tasks. For example, some may excel at organising fund-raising, while others may be good at planning and organising a cultural programme. Likewise, there are a few informal teacher leaders who are very good at executing administrative duties like preparing School Development Plan or Department Development Plan. Others are good at resolving conflicts which crop up at different levels (with students, with parents, or among colleagues etc).*

Teacher leaders operate in an unofficial and informal way in Mauritius. There are no official guidelines which regulate the choice of informal teacher leaders and there is nothing official in the tasks that they have to assume. Rectors have the leeway to identify and select them. Rectors who nurture informal teacher leadership effectively identify teacher leaders, by providing them with leadership opportunities (Harrison & Lembeck, 1996; Uline & Berkowitz, 2000), and by ‘*encourag[ing] them to accept [those] leadership opportunities*’ (Buckner & McDowelle, 2000: 38). The process of ‘identifying and selecting teacher leaders’ (Killion, 1996: 65) is illustrated in the research carried out by Crowther et al., (2002: 57):

*In several instances, principals identified individual teachers; or small groups of teachers, for leadership of priority school projects and then made themselves available as mentors. In other instances, they encouraged staff members to nominate colleagues to develop innovative ideas and, subsequently, accorded the nominees wide responsibility in following through on those ideas.*

The participants reported that informal teacher leaders are generally identified and selected by the rectors but small groups of educators also nominate those colleagues with leadership qualities to assume leadership responsibilities, especially outside the classrooms. This choice and selection, in some schools, occurs in a transparent manner. The educators who are chosen have proven leadership qualities. They command respect of their colleagues and other stake-holders. However, we also have many cases where rectors tend to choose educators as informal teacher leaders on questionable and arbitrary basis.

### **5.3 SCHOOL CULTURE AND CONTEXT AND INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP**

*RS2<sup>4</sup> What are the cultural and contextual factors that encourage or impede teachers from assuming informal teacher leadership role?*

The second research question attempts to describe and analyse the cultural and contextual factors that encourage or impede informal teacher leadership. It has to be noted that sharing leadership with teachers can be viewed negatively in Mauritius. It may mark ‘*a sign of abdication, of poor leadership*’ as mentioned by most respondents during the group interviews. The participants

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<sup>4</sup> RS2 Research Question 2

asserted that *'officially it is the head of school who should formally display leadership, not the teachers.'* However, they remarked something quite interesting when they added that *'in many schools where the rectors are neither good managers nor good leaders, they suppress their staff from emerging as leaders.'* When the participants were asked why they thought that rectors *'suppress the staff from emerging as leaders'*, they added in unison that *'They feel belittled and challenged by the leadership qualities of the teaching staff.'* Leadership is closely linked to the hierarchical culture and institutional context. This is worth noting because in general a democratic and transformational leader does not suppress the leadership of others from emerging. Lambert (2002), Fullan (2002), Harris & Muijs (2005) support the claim that educational leaders need the contribution of others in order to manage their institutions more effectively.

According to the participants *'school culture depends a lot on the rector'*. During the one-to-one interview, Shabnam of LSS said that *'I have seen the school changing its ethos with the change of rectors.'*

Elaborating further in her professional personal diary, she added that

*When Mr D.M replaced Mr J.L.P as the rector of the LSS, I instantly felt that we were about to lose the democratic culture to which we were fully familiar. Mr D. M did not manage the school in the same way as Mr J.L.P and teachers were chosen to help on communal basis, or the basis of personal proximity. The school suffered terribly under the headship of Mr D.M.*

Mrs Dilshaad wrote the same thing in her professional personal diary

*It is the rector who sets the tone for a positive or negative school culture. Rectors who have leadership qualities manage their schools by rallying everyone. When Mr D.M took over the rectorship of the L.S.S, teachers suddenly felt there was a scission in the way the school was managed. Tensions, problems, and administrative disputes became frequent and leadership was not shared. Given that Mr D.M did not possess leadership qualities; he used ruse, intimidation, sanctions and threats to force some staff members to carry out certain tasks.*

Once more we come across interesting comments regarding the role of the rector in determining the school culture. A head of school that lacks leadership qualities may use '*ruse, intimidation, sanctions and threats to force some staff members to carry out certain tasks.*' As mentioned earlier, some rectors sometimes misuse their power, authority and position to manage the schools entrusted to them. While those who possess leadership qualities easily rally the support of informal teacher leaders, those who lack leadership qualities end up with '*tensions, problems, and administrative disputes.*' The participants complained that such situations spoil the '*mood of the educators*', '*demotivate us*' and '*school improvement may be halted.*'

I came across several anecdotes regarding the way rectors influenced the school culture in the professional personal diaries of participants from the three different schools. For instance, Mr Rakesh of RSS wrote that

*I saw the RSS degrading in front of my eyes. When Mr M.G was replaced by Mrs M.A as rector, the school went unruly. Mrs M.A's poor managerial skills severed the strong rector and staff bond which existed previously. Mr M.G used distributed leadership effectively and this could be felt by not only insiders but outsiders also. Many teachers of other schools wrote their PGCE or MA theses on the leadership style of Mr M.G.*

Mr Vishal, Mrs Beryl, Mrs Shailly, Mrs Mila and Mrs Kameeni, all from RSS, echoed the same thing during the group interview on the issue of school culture and distributed leadership.

*We know that we have to adapt with any rector. Still, we can't imagine how some people with no proven leadership skills manage to become deputy rectors and ultimately rectors. The school culture and distributed leadership depend on the rector's leadership style. For instance, when Mrs K B became the rector of the RSS, she adopted a rather bossy type of attitude and she did this to conceal both her lack of leadership and managerial skills.*

So, in Mauritian secondary schools, teachers are given the opportunities to lead by some rectors. These heads delegate powers to their staff and this helps in the smooth running of the school. Teachers realise that there is always a tension which lies in distributing leadership because it may be viewed as a sign of '*abdication of leadership*'. Contrary to what has been noted in literature, here in Mauritius, delegating authority and power cannot be done officially.

In her personal professional diary, Mrs Mila of RSS wrote that,

*When the rector of the school is on leave, then those (rectors) who have come to replace him have had a lot of difficulty to manage the school because they blatantly lacked leadership skills; they could neither delegate nor empower those teachers who are generally ready to assume leadership positions.*

The above findings show that distributed leadership is not practiced by all rectors. Some rectors practice it more efficiently as compared to others. It is also clear that distributed leadership is not practiced by all rectors and some find 'a lot of difficulty in sharing their leadership position; they could neither delegate nor empower those teachers who are generally ready to assume leadership positions.'

According to Mrs Mila of RSS,

*The Mauritian context is not fully attuned to accepting new leadership models because we are still rooted in the old and hierarchical system where the rector should be the lone leader in the school. The emergence of new leaders, that is, teacher leaders is viewed as a threat by rectors who do not understand the role, and significance of leadership at school.*

During the group interview the participants of HSS claimed that

*It seems that most of the Mauritian rectors do not realise that leadership is not a trophy to be kept for oneself. Unlike personal glories or trophies, leadership has to be shared and distributed. This is the foundation of a democracy. But most rectors believe that we have to obey them, dance to their tune, and we are their servants.*

Unfortunately, some rectors still believe in the master-servant model of leadership and practice it with impunity. However, they often end up harming the professional environment where they work. While a few educators may be at ease with it, other educators resent working with rectors who are autocratic and autocratic.

The participants of LSS also had almost the same views about distributed leadership. During a group interview which was held with the six participants of LSS, they voiced out the same opinions

*The field of education has evolved a lot. Unfortunately, the mentality of many rectors has remained archaic and backward. Come to our school one day and you will see how rectors enjoy the malicious pleasure of keeping educators after school hours for stupid reasons. We are always here to help and go out of the way to help but when the time comes to seek a permission to attend a funeral or an emergency, then there is discrimination. In Mauritius, we call it 'guette figir'\* (favouritism). It is obvious then that distributed leadership seems to be a mirage in our case. .*

In her electronic diary, Kajaal of LSS wrote

*Mauritian educators have immense leadership qualities. Some have more propensities to display these qualities than others. Some love to do so while others are intimidated to come forward and help. In each school, a number of these informal teacher leaders support their rector primarily because they care for their school and the students. Unfortunately, some autocratic rectors stifle such enthusiasm in many potential teacher leaders.*

Indeed, as discussed in the introduction chapter of this dissertation, leadership in schools is still embedded in the old traditional and colonial model. It is still viewed as something hierarchical, and the one who runs the school often wields absolute power which is not relinquished. This form of leadership verges on the autocratic and transactional model. There is a lot to be done to transform it into a democratic, shared and distributed and transformational. It comes as little surprise to note that the participants of the three different secondary schools, who have worked with different rectors, echoed almost the same comments about distributed leadership and informal teacher leadership.

The shared and distributed leadership model is one which accommodates teachers with leadership potential to play an active role in the management of the school affairs. The rectors who practise shared and distributed leadership consult the informal teacher leaders while planning and executing their administrative tasks. They delegate responsibilities along with

power and authority to the informal teacher leaders. This does not take place without hassle. Other teachers who are not informal teacher leaders may resent the criteria which has been used to select the informal teacher leaders because of jealousy and competition among the teachers. However, when informal teacher leaders are selected on merit and display their potential, they are more readily accepted by their peers.

With research now taking place in the educational sector and new concepts such as teacher leadership becoming popular, a rethinking process has to begin. In fact, this educational renewal has begun as a few rectors have adopted the democratic and transformational model of leadership. That is why investigation in informal teacher leadership pens the way for policy implications at school and national levels. These policies will be proposed later in this dissertation.

### 5.3.1 FACTORS WHICH ENCOURAGE INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP

The second research question also focuses on the factors which encourage and impede teacher leadership in the Mauritian secondary schools. Teacher leadership faces 'push and pull' factors in schools, that is, there are factors which encourage as well as impede informal teacher leadership. . Let's now look at these factors which can help rectors, informal teacher leaders, policy makers and prospective informal teacher as well.

Mrs Mila of the RSS made the following observations during the one-to-one interview:

*I sincerely believe that it is the rector who can either encourage or impede informal teacher leadership in the school. More than anyone else, the onus lies on the rector to encourage teachers with leadership qualities, skills and competencies to help in the smooth running of the school. It is not like what some believe that the rector just assigns someone a task to carry out. It is much more than a task- oriented relationship. It is something akin to a trust which exists between a teacher and the rector.*

She further added that,

*I have worked with different rectors and their approach is not the same. While I invest myself fully when a particular rector sought my help, I just carried out the task*

*grumblingly when asked by another. I recognize myself as a teacher leader and all rectors who have worked with me have acknowledged my leadership potential. However, their approach differs. While Mr M.G believed in distributed and shared leadership, he empowered teachers while delegating tasks to them and fully supported them; other rectors just shifted the load of the task from the shoulders. I do not refuse to carry out something when I am asked by the rector. However, it depends upon the head of school to draw out 100% of my potential.*

It is but natural that the element of trust between teacher and rector is the cement which binds them in a healthy professional relationship which is conducive to partnership. Rosenholtz (1991) maintains that teachers who feel trusted are more committed and effective than those who do not receive such trust. Support by means of teacher networks, cooperation among colleagues, and expanded professional roles increases teachers willingness to assume leadership roles in the school.

Pursuing in the same vein as Mrs Mila, during the group interview, the other participants of RSS, namely Mr Rakesh, Ms Beryl and Mrs Shailly all asserted that

*There is no financial reward to attract teacher leaders in Mauritius. We teachers, we are happy when we get our due and this due is best manifested through praise and compliments help. You will be surprised to note that praise and compliments often boost up the morale of the teacher leaders. This praise and compliments should primarily come from the head of school but also from colleagues, parents, students and other stake holders.*

Acknowledging the contribution of informal teacher leaders and giving them their due in terms of 'praise and compliments' in the staff meeting, assembly, in front of parents or other officials can be done easily by rectors. It is important for rectors to show that the work of the informal teacher leaders is valued, that it is seen as 'meaningful' as Wasley (1991: 138) puts it. This acknowledgement, recognition and support motivate informal teacher leaders or else they will not long go 'through the heroic efforts of leading schools . . . if the consequences of their work go unnoticed, unrecognized, or unvalued' (Barth, 2001: 448). Praise and compliments are non-monetary ways of 'recogniz[ing] and rewarding the efforts of those teachers willing to invest

*their time and energy in acting as leaders'* (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001: 14). Different rectors find different ways to acknowledge the effort made by informal teacher leaders (Blegen & Kennedy, 2000; Killion, 1996).

During my tenure as a rector, I never missed an opportunity (staff meeting, school assembly, official functions like Prize Giving Day etc) to compliment the informal teacher leaders. These justified praises and compliments promoted and encouraged teacher leadership in the school which I headed. The informal teacher leaders helped the school to obtain outstanding academic results (100% pass rate at School Certificate and five laureates and forty students ranked after the laureates after the laureates), to maintain excellent discipline among pupils and to organise a series of extra-curricular activities.

Mr Ajay of LSS probed the issue during the group interview and said that

*Many may think that informal teacher leaders have 'fun' only when they assume leadership roles. Far from that, they face a lot of stress and often they have to sacrifice lunch time and free time to devote to the tasks assigned to them. I have often helped in preparing the 'students and teachers' time table which can be an extremely daunting task. I have carried it out during school holidays and during the whole of the first term, the time table keeps on changing for various reasons. I am pressurized by colleagues and the head of school. I am not paid for that. Still I like doing it because it gives the opportunity to understand how the school functions.*

He went on to add that,

*While preparing the time tables, I understood the constraints of the rector who has to take many factors into consideration. For instance, Muslim teachers should be released on Fridays for the prayers, pregnant ladies or others with infants have to be given special attention. These experiences helped me when I was doing my MA in Educational Leadership. In one way, I could put into practice what I used to learn.'*

During the group interview, different participants acknowledged that informal teacher leadership *provides teacher leaders the opportunity to grow that is a reason why we are ready to help the school. While assuming leadership roles or undertake leadership tasks at school,*

*whether inside or outside the classrooms, we get the opportunity to develop both personally and professionally.*

In her personal professional diary, Mrs Kameeni wrote:

*Many do not and will never admit it; but they hope of being singled out and to get a promotion. An informal teacher leader often gets the chance to be in the forefront and in the limelight. While helping the rector to do something, we learn a lot of things but at the same time, we can build up and strengthen our network with different stakeholders. The more the high- ranking officials see us doing something for the school the better it is for our own goodwill. When we are noticed, it helps us.*

In the above comments we note that informal teacher leaders pin some hope *to get a promotion* as they get the opportunity to '*strengthen*' their '*network with the different stakeholders.*' Teacher leaders like to be '*singled out*' or '*noticed*' as they '*get the chance to be in the forefront and in the limelight.*' These could be some of the reasons why some teacher leaders are ready to assume leadership roles informally in Mauritian secondary schools.

### **5.3.2 FACTORS WHICH IMPEDE INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP**

In the previous section, we noted the participants' views and experiences regarding the factors which encourage informal teacher leadership in Mauritius. In this section, the factors which generally impede informal teacher leadership in Mauritius will be discussed.

During the interviews, different participants talked about the problems teacher leaders face when assuming leadership roles. Mrs Mila of RSS said,

*It is not easy to be an informal teacher leader. One has to make a lot of sacrifices in order to assume one's teaching responsibilities and at the same time carry out leadership tasks. The different tasks that the informal teacher leader has to assume may be the greatest impediment. The informal teacher leader has to teach, mark scripts, fill in report books, complete the syllabus as well as assume tasks which are sometimes not clearly defined. The informal teacher leader is constantly doing two things-teaching and*

*assuming leadership roles. It is tiring at times, especially when the head of school is not supportive.*

It is clear from the above that, *'the different tasks that the informal teacher leader has to assume may be the greatest impediment'* because the informal teacher leader has to do *'two things-teaching and assuming leadership roles.'* This may indeed be *'tiring at times, especially when the head of school is not supportive.'* In fact, ideally the head of school should know how to compensate teachers who assume leadership roles. I used to give them time-off and permissions to return home early during free periods. Mauritian educators generally appreciate such considerations. However, many participants complained, during the group interviews that

*The rector cannot ask us to carry out their administrative tasks and in return lack gratitude. Very often, we are discouraged when we do so much and still get nothing in return.*

Rewarding informal teacher leaders by giving them a special consideration which may range from a compliment in the staff meeting for a task satisfactorily accomplished to a time off may fire their zeal to invest themselves in informal teacher leadership roles. In my experience, a few rectors fail to do so and this may gradually deter potential teacher leaders from assuming leadership roles.

Mr Iqbal of HSS wrote in his diary

*The rector may be the greatest impediment in discouraging potential teacher leaders from coming forward and helping the school. In schools where the rector operates with a small group or those who form part of his clique, there are little prospects for genuine teacher leaders to emerge. I have seen such rectors and I have worked with them. These rectors have their 'favourites' and do not give others the chance to lead.*

In fact, many rectors in Mauritius operate on a basis of clique instead of building a well-organised team. The formation of *'a small group or those who form part of his (rector's) clique'* seriously deter the majority of potential teacher leaders from giving a helping hand. A democratic educational environment cannot operate with the rector's *'favourites'* having the upper hand in the organisation because others are denied the chance to lead and this irretrievably

leads to frustration. This serious managerial aberration will be addressed in the policy recommendations.

However, from my own experience as a former rector, I need to say that some informal teacher leaders are extremely versatile. They have the dexterity to do many things almost flawlessly; that is why some rectors prefer to rely on them rather than others when they need support. Hence, the same informal teacher leaders are seen assuming different tasks which require leadership skills. This may not be appreciated by other educators.

Elaborating further on this issue in his personal professional diary, Mr Iqbal of HSS wrote,

*I have seen colleagues who were extremely efficient as class teachers at the beginning of their career but gradually neglected 'teaching' in order to concentrate totally on the 'leading aspect'. I mean, they would not be able to bear the pressure of doing both the teaching and managing extra- curricular activities of the school. When the same teachers would sit on the PTA board, help to prepare students for extra-curricular activities, preside over disciplinary committees and constantly spend their time dealing with emergencies and crises of the school, then a lot of things go amiss. A few of these teachers have told me that they are paving their way to get a promotion and the best way to do so is to be in the good books of the rectors. I have colleagues who will spend their time writing the rectors' speeches, and overseeing tasks which should have been handled by the rectors.*

As long as the exact roles and responsibilities of informal teacher leaders are not clearly defined, it becomes quite difficult to prevent '*the pressure of doing both the teaching and managing extra- curricular activities of the school.*' No matter what might be the benefits accruing from informal teacher leadership, we should never overlook the harm that is done to the pupils when effective teaching is neglected. Given that different rectors use informal teacher leaders in different ways, there is no properly defined check list as to what they should actually do or not in schools. This can seriously negate the possible benefits accrued by informal teacher leadership in schools. That is why informal teacher leadership has serious policy implications.

Mr Simadree of LSS wrote in his personal diary,

*I have worked for more than three decades. I recall how some of the rectors who have led this school have left indelible impressions on me while others have left rather despicable memories. One rector, Mr T M who blatantly lacked leadership skills or qualities practiced communalism. People who belonged to his ethnic group (he acceded to his post because he got a push from the ethnic organization he belonged) had to be protected and this was a sort of unwritten pact he had acquiesced to. As he was the head of school, nothing could be done to prevent him from 'protecting' his clique. This situation created considerable tension among colleagues and discouraged many teacher leaders from assuming leadership roles in the school.*

The formation of cliques in schools is a real problem in Mauritius. Cliques may be formed on numerous factors. Some rectors and educators who belong to the same ethnic, political or linguistic or religious groups tend to form their cliques. Sometimes, in some rare cases cliques are also formed among colleagues who have an affinity for gambling or even drinking. It is quite shocking to note that *'one rector, Mr T M who blatantly lacked leadership skills or qualities practiced communalism. People who belonged to his ethnic group (he acceded to his post because he got a push from the ethnic organization he belonged) had to be protected and this was a sort of unwritten pact he had acquiesced to.'* Such types of attitude practised by any rector may vitiate the smooth running of a school and can create professional hurdles on the path of those who want to lead. Clearly spelt out policies which set the professional parameters can help to dissuade rectors from encouraging cliques.

Writing in her diary, Mrs Kavita of HSS observed that

*In the school where I work, there is a strong negative school culture. Instead of fostering a collaborative environment, the head of school has unwittingly encouraged a culture of unhealthy competition among the educators. Backbiting colleagues and bad mouthing them is the forte of most of the educators. Working in such a hostile environment is not only demotivating but also vitiates the whole system.*

In fact, when a school culture is 'negative' because of the *'unhealthy competition among the educators'*, the working environment becomes *'hostile'*, it not only demotivates the educators but also discourages the flourishing of informal teacher leadership. Harris & Muijs (2003) argue that

one major deterrent of teacher leadership is *'the feeling of being isolated from colleagues'* and of feeling *'less connected to peers when engaging in teacher leadership activities.'* When teachers compete among themselves, then this may go bad at times. That is why some prefer to stay away from leadership positions. Gabriel (2005:2) explained how teacher leaders, in order to function, have to overcome obstacles created by their peers. Gabriel (2005:21) also explained that asserted *'leadership breeds envy'* and that may explain why teacher leaders may be *'knocked down by colleagues because of jealousy'*.

In Mauritius, many prefer to stay away from leadership positions because they are afraid of being tagged *'the stooges of the rector'* and some *'really come forward to help just to win favours'* (Gungapersad, 2008). That is why it is not easy for some potential teacher leaders to assume leadership positions in their schools.

#### 5.4 INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

*RQ3*<sup>5</sup> *What contributions, if any, can informal teacher leadership make to school improvement in Mauritius?*

The third research question focuses on the contributions informal teacher leaders can make in school improvement. Participants shared their views and opinions as well as their experiences in relation to this research question.

Many unanimously claimed that informal teacher leaders have an instrumental role to play in any school improvement plan or project. During group interviews held with the participants of the three different secondary schools, many highlighted the view that school improvement is increasingly becoming a challenge as *'the performance of students is deteriorating'*, *'levels of indiscipline is rising, especially in the wake of the proliferation of synthetic drugs, teenage pregnancy and misuse of Information and Technology'* and parents are showing *'less and less interest in their children's education.'*

In his electronic diary Mr Simadree from LSS noted about the role informal teacher leaders play in the classrooms,

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<sup>5</sup> RQ3 Research Question 3

*Informal teacher leaders' contributions in school improvement start in the classrooms. They are focused in teaching. They use a variety of teaching strategies to motivate students. They apply differentiated teaching methods to reach out those students who have learning disabilities. They support slow learners. They believe in their students' potentialities. Students respond to their dedication with renewed faith in themselves and trust their educators. They maintain discipline. They support students who have emotional, academic, financial or other types of problems.*

He continued further to add that informal teacher leaders also support their colleagues,

*Informal teacher leaders share good teaching and learning practices with colleagues. They volunteer to look for solutions and work in teams in order to address problems novice educators may be facing to teach recalcitrant or troublesome students. They share their experiences and knowledge to ensure that others benefit and improve their practices. They do so because they have at heart the overall improvement of the school.*

During the one-to-one interview, Mr Rakesh, from RSS said that

*The rector alone cannot initiate any school improvement plan or scheme. In general, schools where teachers are valued and especially their leadership is respected have made marked progress. In my own school, we had a young and dynamic rector who roped in the help of several teacher leaders and then led the school to limelight. I believe that teacher leadership has an important contribution to make in promoting school improvement.*

Mr Rakesh made it clear that the 'rector alone cannot initiate any school improvement plan or scheme.' Put simply, school improvement partly depends on the extent to which informal teacher leaders own it. A capable rector, who can rally the professional support of the leadership potential of the educators, will 'awaken the sleeping giants' of the school as Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001) propose.

When he was asked how the rector identified the teacher leaders, Mr Rakesh added that

*It is not difficult for a head of school to identify teacher leaders. These teacher leaders possess qualities and skills which make them visible and identifiable. The rectors who fail*

*to identify the teacher leaders have problems to work towards the improvement of their respective schools. These teacher leaders go beyond their scheme of service or official routine to help in enhancing the school performance, the discipline of students, and the good will of the school. They invest themselves fully in ensuring that the school progresses, not only academically but in other fields as well, like discipline, school-home relationship, and the school culture in general.*

Identifying the informal teacher leaders rests upon the rector's discernment. Unfortunately, this research did not include rector as participants or else they might have clarified this issue. It should not take a rector much time to recognise educators with leadership qualities. Once these educators are identified, they should be empowered to assume informal teacher leadership roles in the effective management of the school. When a school is managed effectively, when collaboration among the staff prevails, school discipline is strongly reinforced, the morale of the students and staff is positively sustained and quality teaching and learning takes place, we can say that the school is experiencing improvement.

Like Childs-Bowen, Moller, & Scrivner, 2000 and Akert (2009) who argue that rector who sincerely expect student improvement invest energy in building leadership capacity around key issues regarding student achievement and empowering teachers to be leaders, Mrs Preety of the HSS is of the view that

*Schools need leaders to progress and improve, whether it is academically or non-academically. To initiate any change or to drive any progress, the head of school has to build a team which will help to implement the School Development Plan. Generally, the rector invites the teacher leaders from among the staff members for support. For instance, if the issue of discipline is being handled or used as a yardstick to measure school development, then those teachers who can best deal with discipline are chosen to help. These teachers have proved their leadership skills inside and outside the classrooms.*

She goes on to say that,

*Those rector who solicit abled and skilled teachers to carry out different tasks of the school are more successful. It is true that sometimes, there are rector who choose*

*teachers on the basis of their proximity and familiarity with them. If this is the sole basis of selection, then the school may not register the improvement which is sought. It is primarily the rector's ability to choose the teacher leaders which matters a lot. Some schools fail because their rectors have not been able to choose the right person for the specific task.*

Unbiased rectors who value the leadership skills and potential of teachers are more likely to be surrounded by a team which is efficient and capable to drive changes in the school. In fact, Heifetz (1994:21, cited in Rutledge 2009) believes that one of the main characteristics of a leader is *'mobilizing people to tackle tough problems.'* In the context of the school, it is the rector who has the task of *'mobilizing people'* in order to deal with *'tough problems'* so that school improvement is possible.

From my own experience, I can say that Mauritian teachers, whether they have a democratic or autocratic school leader, will come forward to offer their help if their school is facing *'tough problems'* related to students' indiscipline, a school crisis, rift among staff members, and so on. Mauritian educators' *'good nature'* and altruistic values very often overcome all other considerations like whether the rector is a democratic leader or an autocratic one, whether he is a *'professional bully'* like a participant mentioned earlier. What matters at the end of the day, is the students' welfare and the interest of the school. Such an attitude can help sustain school improvement.

In her professional diary, Dilshaad of LSS wrote

*Informal teacher leaders are those who work for their schools to progress. These informal teacher leaders are always willing to come forward and help the school. It is difficult to explain the influence informal teachers have in the school improvement. While it is true that all teachers contribute to varying extent in the school development, it is quite difficult to quantify the contribution of the teacher leader and the non-teacher leader. While teachers do not compete for the title of teacher leadership, a rector who is able to acknowledge the support of teacher leaders is definitely an excellent leader himself. '*

Indeed, in the absence of a research on the issue, it will be difficult to measure the extent to which informal teacher leadership influences school improvement. Still, it can be posited that informal teacher leadership may well contribute something in the school improvement.

Ms Beryl from RSS wrote that

*I remember how the rector discussed his vision for the school very clearly. It was in 2003. We were a group of young educators. The rector also was quite young. He told us that he ambioned to make the school a reference in the north of the country. He believed in team building, strategic planning, team work and looking for solutions to school related problems.*

It seems, therefore that when rectors share their enthusiasm in driving the school towards success or improvement, they garner the help of informal teacher leaders easily. The rectors' fiery enthusiasm can be contagious and when informal teacher leaders are given the opportunity to work in teams, it can be really helpful. As a former rector, I did build such teams to help me manage the school. Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001: 6) note that, '*teacher leadership develops naturally among professionals who learn, share, and address problems together.*'

School leaders who facilitate collaborative work are more successful in driving school improvement. Lambert (1998:18) suggests that educators should have the ability to '*develop a shared sense of purpose with colleagues, facilitate group processes, communicate well, understand transition and change and their effects on people, mediate conflict, and hold a keen understanding of adult learning from a constructivist perspective*'. Such a perspective allows teachers to build mutual trust, listen, and hear each other's opinions, pose questions and look for answers together while making sense of their work. Educators ought to have the ability to '*develop a shared sense of purpose with colleagues, facilitate group processes, communicate well, understand transition and change and their effects on people, mediate conflict, and hold a keen understanding of adult learning from a constructivist perspective*'. Such a perspective allows teachers to build mutual trust, listen, and hear each other's opinions, pose questions and look for answers together while making sense of their work.

Vishal of RSS discussed this issue in his professional diary

*There is still a lot which can be done by informal teacher leaders. Unfortunately all rectors do not have the leadership skills of nurturing leadership qualities in their staff. The weaker rectors, those who lack leadership qualities themselves fail to recognize and acknowledge the leadership potential of teachers. They do not give the teacher leaders their fair chance to contribute something for the school. I have worked with different rectors at RSS.*

He further added that,

*If Mr M.G knew how to build his team and work for the school improvement, other rectors like Mrs M A, Mrs K B, or Mr L S who came afterwards failed to group the teacher leaders and solicit their help for school improvement. A gradual disintegration of the teams built by Mr M.G was noted and the school started declining in terms of academic performance, discipline of students inside and outside the school premises and school culture degenerated to become toxic.*

My research shows that informal teacher leadership is still an untapped resource in many schools, especially in cases where the rectors do not recognise the potential of teacher leadership and prefer to work in isolation rather than in a systematically well-built team. Those rectors who believe in shared leadership are more likely to give teacher leaders a chance to support school improvement. Barth (2001) describes some of the reasons why a rector might not embrace the personal initiative taken by teacher leaders. Rectors may well hold onto power for themselves due to jealousy. They have worked hard for their position and enjoy being on centre stage.

However, in practice informal teacher leadership leads to a few problems. During the one-to-one interview, Mrs Shailly of RSS explained that,

*It is wrong to believe that informal teacher leadership can work wonders on its own. If it is not properly used and monitored, it can unleash a series of managerial problems in the school. For instance, some teachers can use the pretext of helping in managing the school the school to skip classes and neglect the actual teaching in class. There are teachers who excel in extra- curricular activities and are extremely weak and poor in the class. When it is not clear what, when, how an informal teacher is supposed to operate,*

*then the risks of abuse are enormous. By regularly interacting with the head of school, these informal teacher leaders irretrievably happen to seek certain personal advantages.*

These words of caution should not be taken lightly. In the absence of clearly drawn parameters for informal teacher leaders, the possibility of neglecting the actual teaching in the classroom is a possible risk and may well be detrimental to the overall school improvement.

Writing in his personal professional diary, Mr Iqbal of HSS noted,

*I have seen colleagues who were extremely efficient as class teachers at the beginning of their career but gradually neglected 'teaching' in order to concentrate totally on the 'leading aspect'. I mean, they would not be able to bear the pressure of doing both the teaching and managing extra-curricular activities of the school. When the same teachers would sit on the PTA board, help to prepare students for extra-curricular activities, preside over disciplinary committees and constantly spend their time dealing with emergencies and crises of the school, then a lot of things go amiss. A few of these teachers have told me that they are paving their way to get a promotion and the best way to do so is to be in the good books of the rectors. I have colleagues who will spend their time writing the rectors' speeches, and overseeing tasks which should have been handled by the rectors.*

As long as the exact roles and responsibilities of informal teacher leaders are not clearly defined, it becomes quite difficult to prevent '*the pressure of doing both the teaching and managing extra-curricular activities of the school.*' Informal teacher leaders contribute significantly in attempts which are made towards school improvement. However, policies have to be welcomed so that informal teacher leadership does not go off the track and informal teacher leaders do not '*spend their time writing the rectors' speeches, and overseeing tasks which should have been handled by the rectors*' as noted by Mr Iqbal in his diary. .

In his doctoral thesis on the impact of teacher leadership and school effectiveness in Texas, Hook (2006:14) observed that,

*each school will have various leadership roles that will need to be filled. Some will be standing roles such as department head or team leader. Some roles may be temporary*

*and others will be less defined and less formal such as the creation of a writing lab based on student scores on written examinations.*

In his research, Wilson (1993:24) found that teacher leaders are involved in the following tasks inside the classrooms:

- *they are hard-working and highly involved with curricular and instructional innovation;*
- *their creativity is demonstrated by their power to motivate students from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities;*
- *they are gregarious and make themselves available to other teachers as a resource or an advocate; and*
- *they energetically sponsor extra-curricular activities for young people.*

According to Barth (2001) teacher leaders play a crucial role in textbook selection, implementation of the curriculum, ensuring high standards for student behaviour, student tracking, staff development. Moreover, informal teacher leaders assume these roles in Mauritius also. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001:11) state that '*we believe that all teachers can select appropriate leadership roles for themselves, given their own experience, confidence level, skill, and knowledge*'.

In the research carried out in Turkey, Kilinc (2014) noted that '*teacher leaders are expected to be occupied with high quality instructional outcomes, building more positive and sincere relationships among school community members and creating suitable learning conditions for both themselves and others.*' Teachers' leadership skills and dispositions have been regarded as crucial for sustainable school improvement and higher levels of student achievement (Danielson, 2006; Frost & Harris, 2003; Harris & Lambert, 2003; Harris & Muijs, 2005; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Sergiovanni, 1996, 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teacher leaders are expected to design innovative classroom practices that best serve the diverse learning needs of students (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). Thus, professional improvement is regarded as one of the primary responsibilities of teacher leaders. According to Gronn (2000), school improvement

depends heavily on teacher leaders who continuously improve their teaching skills and enlarge their professional knowledge.

#### 5.4.1 INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Informal teacher leadership can also be viewed from a leadership capacity-building perspective and can be a critical ingredient to the success of school improvement efforts (Rutledge, 2009). Research evidence related to school improvement highlights the importance of the transfer of leadership at different levels within the organization (Fullan, 1992; Hopkins, Ainscow, & West, 1994; Hopkins, Harris, & Jackson, 1997). The significance of different levels of change within a school has been shown to be an essential component in successful school improvement efforts (Harris, 2001; Hopkins, Ainscow, & West, 1996). This change is not going to happen overnight in Mauritius. Transferring leadership, developing a shared and distributed model of leadership will take time. Resistance from rectors will subside gradually when they realise that empowering informal teacher leaders in Mauritian secondary schools will primarily i) help them to manage the schools more effectively, ii) support them to enhance school improvement and, iii) ensure sustainable capacity-building initiatives.

Teacher leadership, whether it is practised formally or informally, has the potential to help in capacity-building by providing teachers with the opportunities to learn and grow professionally. The participants, in general, noted that informal teacher leadership helps staff members learn new teaching methods and techniques from each other. Competent teacher leaders often find learning an on-going process and will work for a high level of expertise in spite of a school culture which often limits opportunities for professional growth (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

According to Mr Simadree from LSS who has 31 years of teaching experience,

*Teacher leaders help novice teachers to acquire a set of skills. We should not undermine the value of mentoring in schools which is done by teacher leaders. They go out of their way to provide new comers or novice teachers the opportunity to learn new teaching techniques because they willingly share their professional experiences. They do so informally. These teacher leaders are like magnets and easily bond with those who are new in the school.*

Mr Simadree, who is an experienced educator, raises here the issue of '*mentoring*'. Mentoring can help ensure capacity-building in a secondary school where refresher courses for in-service educators are rare. However, it is important to be careful. From my own experience as a former rector, I can say that mentoring has to be carefully monitored or else it can cause problems in schools. I have come across many seasoned educators who have gradually grown negative and they may, intentionally or unintentionally, transmit their negativity to novice educators. Novice or even experienced educators are vulnerable to, knowingly or inadvertently, internalising the negative values such as backbiting, absenteeism, being rude to colleagues or students, and showing lack of professionalism in the discharging of duties from other colleagues. Rectors will need to monitor mentoring in order to ensure that it is practised effectively.

Capacity-building occurs when there is a properly charted plan of collaboration to ensure that school improvement is sustained over time and even in the wake of the transfer of rectors or educators. Earlier, in this chapter, we noted how the transfer of rectors generally impacted negatively upon a school culture. Informal teacher leaders can help to maintain the continuity of good work being undertaken when rectors leave.

On this issue as to how informal teacher leadership can help in capacity-building, Mrs Preeti from HSS wrote the following in her electronic personal professional diary.

*Teacher leaders help to sustain the school culture. These teachers play a crucial role in perpetuating the values, ethos and culture of the school. How? I have seen how new teachers are inducted by these teacher leaders. These teacher leaders are like the repositories of values, ethos and culture which they transmit to new incumbents to the school. For instance, the teacher leaders 'tell' and 'show' new comers how things are done in the school, what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. The intangible and invisible 'identity' of the school is transmitted to the others. They also transmit the school culture through the informal curriculum which they impart to the students.*

This transmission of '*the intangible and invisible identity*' of the school is an important aspect of ensuring sustainable school improvement efforts. Rectors are often transferred from one school to another, just like teachers but what is important is that the school culture and ethos should be

perpetuated by teachers who remain in the school. Teacher leaders informally transmit the values of the school to new comers and novice teachers. They do so orally and through their actions.

In her diary, Mrs Nalini of LSS wrote that,

*Teacher leaders who are heads of departments help in mentoring colleagues of their respective departments. Those heads of departments who have leadership skills help to train the younger members of the department. In some cases, these heads of departments are humble enough to learn new techniques from the latter as well. For instance, I often have to deal with the younger members of the department and we share teaching and learning processes. The teacher leaders have the propensity to initiate this learning process.*

She further added that,

*If the head lacks this leadership, then the department does not engage in such activities. There is reflection, sharing of books, periodicals, articles and views on teaching when the head who is a teacher leader takes the lead for such discussions. It is sad to say but such discussions are wishful thinking in many departments where the discussions revolve around non-pedagogical issues like politics, domestic problems, television programmes rather than designing innovative teaching methods or dealing with slow of recalcitrant learners.*

Heads of departments, who have leadership qualities, therefore can play a crucial role in mentoring novice teachers and share good teaching and learning practices with them. School improvement can be initiated within the department when heads of department make innovative efforts to revamp student performance.

In fact, not all heads of department have leadership qualities. Those heads of department who may be lacking leadership qualities have difficulties to deal with the few members of their department because of their poor communication skills and also possibly because of their ego problems and, or their misuse of authority and power (like dumping classes considered to be tough to junior members of the department).

Mrs Nalini of LSS wrote the following views in her diary,

*It is imperative that teacher leaders be provided with the diverse opportunities for continuous professional development. Skills such as leading groups and workshops, collaborative work, mentoring, action research and collaborating with others need to be incorporated into professional development (and indeed initial teacher training) to help teachers adapt to the new roles involved.*

It is useful to consider providing informal teacher leaders with opportunities for continuous professional development in order to meet the emerging demands at school level. Dealing with students has become complex and demanding today. Secondary schools are plagued by many social problems such as drug-taking, especially synthetic drugs, cybercrime, teenage sex or pregnancy, violence and student-absence. Very often, it is informal teacher leaders who have to manage these problems, as we have seen earlier in the findings. Providing these informal teacher leaders with the appropriate training will help them. There is therefore a strong need to help informal teacher leaders adapt to the new roles involved (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001, Barth, 1998).

## 5.5 INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

*RQ4<sup>6</sup> What are the policy implications at school and national level for a greater role for informal teacher leadership?*

This research aims at investigating the role and nature of informal teacher leadership in Mauritius and its potential contribution to policy. The participants were asked to share their views on informal teacher leadership and its policy implications. Generally, they believe that informal teacher leadership has to be recognized by the authorities in Mauritius. According to them, leadership qualities and skills need to be nurtured and recognized among staff members.

Writing in this issue in his diary, Mr Ajay of LSS, notes that

*It is high time that informal teacher leadership be recognized. If the authorities have problems to formalize it because of financial reasons, at least something has to be done to give informal teacher leaders the recognition they deserve. For instance, when*

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<sup>6</sup> RQ6 Research Question 4

*promotions have to be made for the post of head of department, discipline masters, section leaders, Quality Assurance officers or deputy rectors, then priority should be given to informal teacher leaders. Unfortunately, many are nominated to these posts without having any track record of leadership.*

He further added that,

*In Mauritius, very often promotion is based on political backing or ethnic considerations which prevent the right person from acceding to the right place. If informal teacher leaders are given the chance to climb the hierarchical ladder, it will be a massive boost to their morale. The system will benefit by having leaders at different levels. I wonder whether this will ever materialize.*

Mr Ajay rightly decries one of the most serious problems gnawing the Mauritian educational system and it relates to the way promotions take place. He deplores that '*very often promotion is based on political and ethnic considerations*' and this '*prevents the right person from acceding to the right place*'. As long as promotions are based on '*political and ethnic considerations,*' many deserving educators with leadership qualities will be excluded from formal educational leadership roles (for example, deputy rectors and rectors). Indeed, it is unfortunate to acknowledge that many educators get promotions even when they are blatantly lacking in leadership qualities.

Mrs Preety wrote that

*Policy makers have to realize that informal teacher leadership provides the system with a reservoir of dedicated teachers who have shown, both inside and outside their classrooms, that they can be entrusted duties and responsibilities which go in line with ensuring school effectiveness. Henceforth, whenever a reference letter is sought from the rector in view of appointing somebody as a head of department, or discipline master or deputy rector, it should be primordial to certify the leadership skills and potential of the incumbent. Unfortunately, many informal teacher leaders are unwittingly ignored at the expense of other considerations.*

This is a systemic problem which has to be addressed by new policies. Indeed, it may well be time to suggest that reference letters should clearly stipulate whether a teacher has assumed a leadership role or not. This could be taken into consideration in promotion exercises. This might give a boost to teachers with leadership qualities in coming forward to participate in different curricular and extra-activities and display their leadership skills.

Mrs Mila of the RSS wrote the following in her diary;

*Informal teacher leadership should come out of its anonymity and policy makers have to make room for it. It is high time to make training in leadership as part of the professional growth of teachers. The module entitled Teacher Leadership that t educators follow at the MIE is already a harbinger of change in the mentality of educators. Educators should be equipped with the necessary tools to drive reforms and changes in the educational sector. If educators get the right training, they may serve their schools better. I hope rectors of all schools recognize the pertinence of teacher leadership and provide educators with the space to operate and put their leadership skills at the service of the school, both inside and outside the classrooms.*

In the comments above by Mrs Mila, we have an appeal for a paradigm shift in our approach towards informal teacher leadership. She suggests that '*informal teacher leadership should come out of its anonymity and policy makers have to make room for it*'. She proposes that educators be given proper training in leadership. Again, the onus is on '*rectors of all schools recognize the pertinence of teacher leadership and provide educators with the space to operate and put their leadership skills at the service of the school, both inside and outside the classrooms.*' It is also crucial to train rectors so that they may judiciously solicit the support of informal teacher leaders in any attempt they make for school improvement. The leadership qualities of informal teacher leadership should not be hidden from rectors who value the contribution of leadership qualities in others. This problem invariably occurs in cases where the rector may wish to favour a few educators at the expense of others. From my experience, this happens quite often in Mauritian secondary schools.

Indeed, there should be a profound rethinking about what should be done so that informal teacher leaders are not overloaded with work when they assigned leadership related tasks. Research

carried by Lingam et al (2017) in Fiji has shown that inadvertently overloading educators with additional work may prove to be counter-productive.

*Since teachers are the key ingredients in children's learning, it is important that they are engaged in the change process and also attention is paid to their capacity building. If teachers are bombarded with sweeping changes in their work without any attention to human capital development then their lack of preparation is likely to have a negative impact on the quality of school work. In ignorance of the why and how of the changes being imposed on them, teachers may struggle to cope with and implement the changes successfully. (Lingam et al, 2017:37)*

Rutledge (2009: 43) argues that *'the professional development for educators who lead will depend on the necessary knowledge and skills required for the particular leadership roles they have to assume'*. Gordon (2004) suggests a framework for professional development which includes the study of teacher leadership, alignment of school goals with the work of teacher leaders and a needs assessment to determine which knowledge and skills are required of the teacher leaders to achieve those school goals.

Policies will have to be developed to resolve the problem of providing fairer and acceptable guidelines for the choice of informal teacher leaders. This will help thwart frustrations among deserving teacher leaders who may well be neglected for one reason or the other by their respective rectors. The choice of informal teacher leaders is something too crucial to be left to the whims and caprices of rectors who carry out their selection in a biased way.

## 5.6 SUMMARY

The above findings have shown the pertinence of informal teacher leadership in Mauritian secondary schools. Given that teacher leadership is neither formally nor officially recognised, it faces a lot of difficulty to be practised in a standardised manner. Informal teacher leadership depends a lot on the rectors' style of leadership. In schools where the rectors practise a democratic leadership and ensures that leadership is distributed, informal teacher leadership prevails easily there.

The findings have also highlighted that the types or choices of secondary schools in the study have had almost an insignificant role. The gender of the students or educators or rectors did not have any influence on the findings. In fact, Mauritius is very small island state and the eighteen educators have had almost the same experiences regarding informal teacher leadership. Even though each educator shared their personal and unique experiences, yet the experiences are almost the same. It is hard to find differences in their experiences.

In fact, the findings have shown that there are no tensions between multiple realities and individual realities of the participants. Denscombe (2010: 97) had drawn our attention in the following cautionary note;

*It does not imply, however, that there are as many social realities as there are individuals – each interpreting his or her world in their own unique way. As has been stressed, phenomenology does not treat interpretations of the social world as totally individual things. Necessarily, they are shared between groups, cultures and societies, and it is only at these levels that phenomenology recognizes the possibility of there being multiple realities.*

In spite of working in three different secondary schools, the eighteen participants, irrespective of their gender, years of teaching experience, professional status, they had experienced the phenomenon (informal teacher leadership) in moreover the same manner as testified by the experiences they shared.

The findings highlight the different factors which either encourage or impede informal teacher leadership in Mauritian secondary schools as in other countries. It is only a clearly articulated set of policies which can help informal teacher leadership from getting a fertile soil to take deep roots in the Mauritian secondary schools. In spite of having its own limitations, informal teacher leadership has a lot to offer to the system.

## 6.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to this dissertation, I mentioned five reasons which motivated me to carry out this particular piece of research. This final chapter reviews what has been achieved and presents some important recommendations for policy and practice as well as for future research. The aim of this study was to explore educators' constructions of informal teacher leadership in Mauritius. The research has provided insights into the phenomenon under exploration and on a wide range of inter-related and succinct issues. The participants' views and opinions on the importance and style of educational leadership and its impact on informal teacher leadership, the school cultural factors which encourage or impede informal teacher leadership, the reasons why educators engage in or decide not to assume informal teacher leadership roles; issues that have provided food for thought when it comes to translating research into policy

The research has shown that the participants fully realize the importance of educational and school leadership in the effective management of a school. The rector of a secondary school is considered to be like the '*captain of a ship*' and their role in navigating to the port safely can never be underestimated. The participants' views and opinions on the importance of educational leadership echo those in the literature where the role of leadership in managing schools successfully has been amply demonstrated (Fullan, 1999; Lambert, 2002; Harris & Muijs, 2005).

However, the findings also demonstrate that some rectors use their official position as heads of school to wield '*power and authority*' in an abusive or unprofessional way among their subordinates. Whilst fundamentally leadership should be viewed as a means which binds people together in an attempt to build a team and develop collaborative strategies to work for the welfare of the institution, in Mauritian secondary schools, a few rectors have a misconception of their role as rectors and subsequently abuse their position.

It is suggested that Mauritius draws informed knowledge from countries such as Oman (Al Farsi, 2007), South Africa (Grant, et al., 2010), Morocco (Belhiah, 2007) and Pakistan (Shamsi, et al., 2010, Khan, 2011) which are actively engaged in bringing changes at the level of policy to empower educators so that they can play a more active role in managerial positions if they show they possess leadership qualities. This is a challenge particularly in countries where the culture is hierarchical and power is often centralised.

This study reveals that the participants make clear distinctions between democratic and autocratic school leaders. These autocratic rectors '*have no proper professional relationships with their staff*' whom they treat as '*professionally inferior human beings.*' The study has shown that there is a misuse of power and authority by some rectors. The whole notion of leadership should be revisited, especially by people who are in charge of schools where dozens of teaching and non-teaching staff work under them. In schools where the rectors adopt an autocratic leadership style, many of the staff members may suffer both professionally and emotionally. Undertaking the responsibilities as an informal teacher leader in such an environment is not easy. The Quality Assurance Department of the Ministry of Education could encourage educators and rectors to regularly engage in self-appraisal exercises in order to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the leadership style being practised in each school.

The participants unanimously condemned the autocratic leadership style of some rectors in Mauritius and made a plea to see a fairer and more democratic educational leadership model in the country. Mauritius could draw valuable insights from the South African Department of Education which stresses '*participative, 'democratic' management, collegiality, collaboration, schools as open systems and learning organisations, and, importantly, site-based management*' (Van der Mescht, 2008:14). However, we need to be cautious in transferring models of change from one national culture to another.

The participants consider that school leadership is important in driving '*the school towards progress, improvement or efficiency*' (Leithwood et al, 2006:4) because '*much of what happens or does not happen in a school depends largely on the rector*'. The participants deplore the blatant dearth of '*necessary leadership qualities*' among many rectors. According to them, rectors need qualities such as effective communication, the ability to foster trust among stakeholders or to manage the school in a collaborative environment.

The participants, unanimously, value shared and distributed leadership. They support the view that shared and distributed leadership is crucial in creating an appropriate school culture where informal teacher leaders can '*achieve the targets they aim*' for an effective school management. That is why they recommend the establishment of a school culture which is based on trust is mutually empowering for both the rector and the educators. School culture, however, cannot be established over-night or by wishful thinking. It takes time to be established. There may be resistance to change and in welcoming a different way of doing things.

School-based and in-house leadership discussions and training with the help of experts in educational leadership could be organised. Rectors and educators could be sensitised about the pertinence of a developing a strong working relationship with the view of aiming at school improvement. For the time being, as the findings have revealed, the school culture is not always favourable and conducive to the development of leadership skills of educators, at least not outside the narrow confines of the individual classroom (Smyser, 1995).

Researchers need to investigate new avenues which will support informal teacher leadership in Mauritius by compiling a portfolio of factors to eliminate obstacles and barriers so that successful practices of school-wide leadership for teachers can be envisaged. Prime among them should be the '*professional acceptance of the existence of teacher leaders in the profession and in the schools*' (Crowther et al., 2002: 32). There is a need for rectors to deepen their trust in informal teacher leaders (Blase & Blase, 2001; Crowther et al., 2002), especially through collaborative work (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Smyser, 1995). They also need to clarify the tasks to be assumed by informal teacher leaders by developing more specific job descriptions (Miller, 1992; Whitaker, 1997)

This research has also highlighted cases of '*strained relationships*' and '*misuse of power and authority*' by some rectors in the Mauritian secondary schools. That may explain why informal teacher leadership does not always find a fertile soil to develop solid roots in some Mauritian secondary schools. There are '*barriers which make it difficult to accept the changing role of teachers in our schools*' (Odell, 1997: 121). This can happen when supporting structures are set up so that informal teacher leadership can take root and blossom in Mauritian secondary schools (Frost & Durrant, 2003). It will require a reconceptualization of '*the context in which they work*' (Moller & Katzenmeyer, 1996: 7), that is, policy makers need to give a careful attention to '*the*

*organizational conditions necessary to function effectively*' (Smylie et al., 2002: 166). Unfortunately, there is also a plentiful store of evidence that there exists *'something deep and powerful within school cultures which seems to work against teacher leadership'* (Barth, 2001: 443). That is why *'institutionalizing teacher leadership as a norm within the cultural fabric of an entire school is a . . . challenging task'* (Keedy, 1999: 797). On the other hand, efforts to cultivate shared leadership are also hampered by the fact that there are *'few meaningful precedents'* (Little, 1990: 517).

The participants made pertinent comments about the way recruitment and promotion takes place. The official criteria for the recruitment and promotion are based upon qualifications and seniority. However, *'political backing'* often vitiates the process of recruitment and promotion. Leadership, though required, is often the most neglected aspect while deputy rectors and rectors are recruited. This leads to situations where a few rectors and deputy rectors are the *'official leaders'* without really possessing leadership qualities. In the literature, we rarely come across situations where poor or weak school leadership is discussed. In Mauritius, there are school leaders who are considered to be *'a mere caricature of whatever is associated with leadership'* as mentioned by the participants. This is an emergent theme which can be taken up by researchers willing to investigate the impact that ineffective recruitment and promotion of rectors has on school management. While in the literature, we noted that rectors are now *'expected to consult and reach consensus with a wide range of individuals and groups in decision making'* (Caldwell, 1992:7), the participants revealed that *'decisions are often imposed on them.'* This is the result of the leadership culture which prevails in the island and which is based upon our colonial heritage.

However, research on shared leadership reveals the fact that in general, irrespective of organisational context or country, *'the work of teachers acting as leaders . . . creates a number of potential difficulties'* (Ainscow & Southworth, 1996: 243). Hart (1995:12) refers to some of the causes which include *'role ambiguity, conflict, and overload are broadly reported negative side effects of teacher work redesign.'* In their research, Smylie et al., (2002: 166) noted that

*The research was clear, however, that these teacher leadership initiatives [can] cause serious problems. They [can] create work overload, stress, role ambiguity, and role*

*conflict for teacher leaders as they [try] to balance their new school-level responsibilities with their classroom responsibilities.*

Surprisingly, the participants said that even a school which is led by a head of school lacking in leadership qualities can still produce brilliant student academic performance because the overall performance of the school does not depend entirely on the leadership skills of the rector. Thus the credit for school effectiveness and improvement should not always go to the rector. There are other people, like staff and pupils and parents who make remarkable contributions in the academic performance of a school.

## **6.2 INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP**

Informal teacher leaders contribute significantly to the effective management of a school. They contribute their expertise in the subject areas they teach but also share their leadership skills for the overall effectiveness of the school. There are a myriad of reasons why teachers assume leadership roles, albeit informally in Mauritius. Teacher leaders look for opportunities to put their leadership qualities at the service of the school. Other teachers, who hesitate to assume informal leadership roles, rely on extrinsic motivations to display their leadership qualities. It is the school culture and the rector, to a large extent, who act as catalysts in tapping and unleashing the leadership potential of these teachers.

Given that teacher leadership is informal in Mauritius, it is conceptualized in different ways both in the literature and by the participants. Understanding the concept of informal teacher leadership still remains elusive and slippery. In the literature, we found the same tensions to define informal teacher leadership. This study also highlights the same definitional problem. The roles and duties of informal teacher leaders should also be spelt out by policy makers. However, we should be careful as the aim should not be to change informal teacher leadership into formal teacher leadership. Informal teacher leadership is all about the spontaneity with which leadership roles are assumed inside and outside the classrooms.

The participants made interesting observations on the way some rectors select informal teacher leaders. When skilled, competent and resourceful teachers possessing leadership qualities are chosen as informal teacher leaders, then the rectors surround themselves with people who can

contribute significantly to the school improvement process. Unbiased and professional rectors who value the leadership skills and potential of teachers are more likely to be surrounded by a team which is efficient and capable to drive changes in the school. In fact, Heifetz (1994:21) cited in Rutledge (2009) believes that one of the main characteristics of a leader is '*mobilizing people to tackle tough problems.*' In the context of the school, it is the rector who has the role of '*mobilizing people*' in order to deal with '*tough problems*' so that school improvement is possible. Unfortunately, some rectors lack leadership qualities. Those rectors who may require support in order to improve their leadership skills will need formal coaching through professional training and may also be mentored by established school leaders during workshops which are regularly organised by different organisations which specialise in leadership training.

School leaders who encourage collaborative work are more successful in driving school improvement if they solicit the teacher leaders to give a helping hand in managing the administrative affairs, students' discipline or enacting the mission statement of the school. Lambert (1998:18) suggests that teachers must have the ability to '*develop a shared sense of purpose with colleagues, facilitate group processes, communicate well, understand transition and change and their effects on people, mediate conflict, and hold a keen understanding of adult learning from a constructivist perspective*'. The existing organisational culture in many schools impedes such practices from taking place. Apart from cultural factors, the ill-defined roles which rectors and teacher leaders are asked to play in a shared and distributed leadership model are responsible for the tensions which may prevail in schools. For example, in their path breaking work on teacher leadership, Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992: 162–163) have reported that

*Virtually without exception, teacher leaders and principals referred to ambiguities and uncertainties to describe the conditions in which they had to develop their new working relationships. These ambiguities and uncertainties concerned how teacher leadership roles were to be defined and performed as well as how these roles might affect principals' leadership roles, teacher leaders' on-going classroom responsibilities, and the schools generally. They concerned how principals and teacher leaders would work together in the development and performance of these teacher leadership roles. They also concerned whether both teacher leaders and principals could trust each other and*

*whether each possessed the requisite knowledge and skill to develop and perform successfully in new work roles and working relationships.*

The study has also drawn our attention to the fact that heads of departments in schools should be recruited on the basis of their leadership qualities. Incidentally, this study notes that all heads of departments may not possess leadership qualities. In fact, it would be wrong to assume that all heads of departments are informal leaders in the Mauritian context. This research shows that there are junior colleagues often in the same department who display greater leadership skills than the head of department. Such situations deserve the attention of policy makers as school development suffers when heads of departments lack leadership skills. The pertinence of this observation is that educators are promoted to heads of departments or deputy rectors or rectors without officials taking leadership qualities as a criterion. It is suggested that recruitment and promotion to posts which require leadership skills must give adequate weighting to the leadership of prospective candidates. Almost all candidates who postulate for a promotion have moreover the same academic qualifications and years of professional experience. They have to be demarcated on their leadership aptitudes and skills. It is not going to be an easy task to do so. Perhaps observing or assessing their leadership skills over a probationary period can help to combat the dearth of leadership which is often decried in the Mauritian educational sector. The creation of the Mauritius Institute of Educational Leadership (MIEL), which is elaborated in the next section, could prove to be a remedy.

The participants' constructions of informal teacher leadership are clearly articulated. According to them, informal teacher leaders should be involved in '*sharing their professional expertise*', '*they have to induct novice teachers,*' and '*they have to transmit the school values and ethos to new teachers*'. Senior staff members with leadership qualities have a crucial role to play as informal teacher leaders. They can be a valuable link between the rector and the rest of the staff. Their seniority gives them the respectability and this helps in the team building process. The problem occurs when these senior staff members do not have leadership qualities. In such cases, those educators with leadership qualities, irrespective of their years of teaching experience, can help to do so.

This study confirms that informal teacher leadership is still an untapped resource in many schools, especially in cases where the rectors do not know the potential of teacher leadership and

prefer to work in isolation rather than within a systematically well-built team. Those rectors who believe in shared leadership are more likely to give teacher leaders a chance to support school improvement. Barth (2001) describes some of the reasons why a rector might not embrace the personal initiative taken by teacher leaders. Rectors may hold onto power for themselves due to jealousy as they have worked hard for their position and enjoy being on centre stage.

Informal teacher leaders often face '*the pressure of doing both the teaching and managing extra-curricular activities of the school.*' Indeed, teacher leaders often face the difficulty of '*separating their conventional classroom teacher roles from their extra-classroom teacher leadership roles*' (Odell, 1997: 120). Conflicts are likely to surface when teacher leaders themselves, or their peers, believe that school-wide leadership responsibilities prevent teacher leaders from '*fulfilling classroom obligations*' (Clift et al., 1992: 901) and '*interfere with teaching*' (Crowther et al., 2002: 35). Researchers have also reported that educators are unclear about the roles of teacher leaders (Smylie & Denny, 1989) and hence, develop less-than-well-defined expectations from informal teacher leaders (Odell, 1997). However, the tension that crops up in a situation when informal teacher leaders operate spontaneously, as and when their support is required, and the need to define the roles. Locating and defining '*the boundary between administration and teaching*' (Hart, 1990: 518) only adds to role-conflict for teacher leaders, other educators and rectors (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992).

The findings also raised the problems which crop up when rectors get transferred from one school to another, just like deputy rectors and the educators. This has an impact on the school culture and ethos as very often the rectors are the repositories of the school culture. In some cases, the deputy rectors manage to sustain the school culture but in most cases the in-coming rectors reshape and redefine the school culture. In most schools, the informal teacher leaders help to perpetuate and sustain the school culture by transmitting the values of the school to new comers and novice educators. They do so orally and through their actions. In the process of induction and mentoring, they can help to shape the value system of the new comers so that they will be able to adjust and adapt to the culture of the school. In some cases, it is more easily done than in other schools. When the new rector is open to perpetuating the established school culture, then it is relatively easier for informal teacher leaders to act as the link. But in cases, where the

new rectors want to impose their values and want to reshape the school culture in their own way, then informal teacher leaders have very little input.

The participants were asked to share their views on informal teacher leadership and its policy implications. They believe that informal teacher leadership should be recognized by the authorities in Mauritius. According to them, leadership qualities and skills have to be nurtured and recognized among staff members. Quite surprisingly, research carried out by scholars have argued that teaching is not a profession that values or encourages leadership within its ranks (Wilson, 1993; Troen & Boles, 1994) and *'that teachers who adhere to the current norms of the profession are . . . a barrier to changing the role of teachers in our schools'* (Odell, 1997: 121). Smyser, (1995: 131) goes even further to assert that, *'the school culture, irrespective of country or organisational context, is not conducive to the development of leadership skills of teachers, at least not outside the narrow confines of the individual classroom.'* Attempts have to be made, nonetheless, so that role-conflicts of informal teacher leaders be minimised through appropriate policies where leadership roles, in particular, can be defined in more overt ways.

It may not be a bad idea to give informal teacher leaders the possibility to accede to higher positions. Indeed, it is sad to note, as the participants unanimously acknowledged, that many educators do not gain promotions to managerial positions even when they may adequately possess leadership qualities. May be the reference letters, which are written by rectors when an educator applies for promotional post, should clearly stipulate whether a teacher has assumed leadership roles or not. Taking cognizance of the leadership qualities of educators while selecting them for promotion exercises may be a salutary step in rewarding informal teacher leaders. This may encourage those educators with leadership qualities to come forward and assume leadership roles in their respective schools. It will surely help the system to acknowledge the work done by informal teacher leaders.

Indeed, there needs to be a profound rethinking about what should be done by the PSC (Public Service Commission is responsible for the interview and selection and promotion of deputy rectors and rectors in state secondary schools) so that informal teacher leaders are not ignored when the time comes to place them in managerial positions or positions which warrant leadership skills and acumen. This should not cause any major problem to be implemented.

Rutledge (2009: 43) argues *'that the professional development for teachers who lead will depend on the necessary knowledge and skills required for the particular leadership roles they have to assume.'* Gordon (2004) suggests a framework for professional development which includes the study of teacher leadership, alignment of school goals with the work of teacher leaders and a needs assessment to determine which knowledge and skills are required of the teacher leaders to achieve those school goals.

Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001:123-124) suggest that *'supporting teacher leadership means understanding the concept, awakening the understanding of teachers themselves to their leadership potential, and then providing for the development of teacher leadership.'* Often, the responsibility to identify and nurture informal teacher leaders rests on rectors who have to *'encourage them to accept [those] leadership opportunities'* (Buckner & McDowelle, 2000; 38). Rectors, who themselves possess leadership qualities learn early who are the informal leaders within the school and invite them to help bring about change (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). These rectors empower these informal teacher leaders to contribute their leadership potential in all school improvement undertakings (Whitaker, 1997).

The findings have validated the claim that successful rectors work in teams and solicit the collaboration of others within the team to drive changes and to work for school improvement. Rectors who generally foster informal teacher leadership declare that they *'value team efforts'* (Little, 1987: 508). Values about shared leadership are built up from beliefs (Hart, 1994), shared interests (Little, 1988), shared expectations (Smylie, 1996), and shared purpose (Wasley, 1991).

Findings have also brought forth the different factors which encourage as well as impede informal teacher leadership in Mauritian secondary schools, as in most other countries and contexts as well. The participants have elaborated on the different barriers to informal teacher leadership which include the way educators are ostracised, isolated and alienated when they assume leadership roles. They are called the rectors' *'stooges'* by colleagues. Some informal teacher leaders become the victims of jealousy and envy. In some cases, these informal teacher leaders do not get the appropriate support from their rectors. The fact that the roles of informal teacher leaders are undefined further exacerbates the hostile school environment which prevails in many schools. Factors that hinder development include *'a lack of time, unsatisfactory relationships with teachers and administrators, and a lack of money to get the job done'* (Pellicer

& Anderson, 1995: 8). Put simply, cultural, contextual and organisational obstructions seriously impede informal teacher leadership.

On the other hand, there are also many factors which encourage educators to assume informal teacher leadership roles in Mauritius. The findings have shown that educators do not expect financial rewards but feel happy, valued and motivated when they are praised and complimented in staff meetings or school assembly in front of parents or other officials. In some cases, informal teacher leaders enjoy when they are noticed, get the chance to be in the forefront and limelight. They also get the opportunity to grow professionally and display their leadership potential. Little (1987:508) lists down the factors which encourage teacher leadership as follows: (1) *'symbolic endorsements and rewards that place value on cooperative work and make the sources of inter-dependence clear;* (2) *school-level organization of staff assignments and leadership;* (3) *latitude for influence on crucial matters of curriculum and instruction;* (4) *time;* (5) *training and assistance; and material support.'* These factors may be very helpful for a small island state like Mauritius which is different from other countries and contexts.

### 6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings call for a profound rethinking of the educational leadership practised by rectors. It is recommended to review the way rectors are selected and promoted in Mauritius. We should not forget that educators are promoted to the post of deputy rectors and finally it is deputy rectors who accede to the post of rectors. It is important to ensure that apart from educators' qualifications and seniority, leadership skills also should be considered as one of the main criteria for promotion to the post of deputy rectors, and then only those deputy rectors who have satisfactorily displayed leadership skills should then be considered for the post of rector. The PSC will have to review its list of criteria so that adequate weighting is given to leadership skills during selection exercise. The problem that may arise is how to gauge the leadership skills of an educator and who would do it. While working on new policies to promote educational and teacher leadership, this aspect need to be addressed by the PSC and the Ministry of Education.

The value in extending leadership roles to informal teacher leaders, therefore, needs to be reviewed so that supportive conditions for informal teacher leadership can be created. Robust

supportive conditions and structures will help to empower informal teacher leaders to play a more meaningful role in school improvement. In the literature, Hart & Baptist (1996:97) suggested that supportive conditions cluster into three categories: (1) *'interpersonal support,'* (2) *'tangible support,'* and (3) *'enlarged opportunities'* and they describe support for teacher leadership under six broad dimensions: (1) values and expectations, (2) structures, (3) training, (4) resources, (5) incentives and recognition, and (6) role clarity.

The findings have highlighted that educational leadership is not fully established in Mauritian culture and confirm that research on educational leadership is relatively new in the country (Ah Teck & Starr, 2012). In countries such as England and Australia, educational leadership has gained formal and informal recognition and is supported by research and informed policies (Harris, 2003; Petersen, 2016). In Mauritius, however, the notion of democratic, shared and distributed leadership in the educational sector is not clearly understood or gauged; it will be difficult to acknowledge informal teacher leadership. Rectors need to realise that *'leadership is more collective than individual'* as Elmore (2003:204) puts it so that they can recognise, nurture and encourage the leadership potentials in the teachers who work under them.

It is important to acknowledge that for many rectors, endorsing informal teacher leadership will require a transformation of their own conceptualisation of educational leadership and their own leadership roles (Murphy, 1994a, 1994b). Fullan, (1994:250) observes that,

*Good intentions and even strong efforts will fail in the absence of a strong conceptualization that informs and is informed by actions. So far, teacher leadership strategies are not being guided by strong conceptualization.*

The implications for rectors are considerable and this repositioning *'poses a significant challenge for principals'* (Crowther et al., 2002: 60)—and the findings reveal that *'we cannot assume that [rectors] . . . will be able to make shifts in leadership approach without effort or difficulty'* (Brown & Sheppard, 1999: 17). It is crucial for rectors *'to change some of their behaviours and be comfortable as facilitators when teachers are leading'* (Buckner & McDowelle, 2000:36). For instance, deep seated practices like autocratic leadership in Mauritian secondary schools have to be gradually replaced by fairer and more just and equitable leadership models, which will obviously face strong resistance from those rectors who have never applied them. That is why,

Murphy (2005:132) requests us to be patient in our quest to bring changes in the leadership models in schools because

*Cultivating teacher leadership in a hierarchical and bureaucratic organizational seedbed is problematic at best. New conceptions of organizations provide the foundations for developing the skills to foster teacher leadership. This is challenging work, but principals (rectors) who do not begin here are not likely to be effective in making shared leadership a reality in their schools.*

Danielson (2007:14) adds that '*not every school is hospitable to the emergence of teacher leaders, particularly informal teacher leaders.*' She asserts that rectors can play a crucial role in fostering the conditions that facilitate teacher leadership. The rector '*plays a key role in how effectively the teacher leader functions*' (Feiler et al., 2000: 68). As Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001:85) conclude from their extensive analysis, teacher leadership is not a chance organizational event. Where informal teacher leadership thrives, rectors '*make teacher leadership a priority and take risks to provide teacher leaders what they need to succeed*'. The literature on teacher leadership unambiguously informs us that rectors need to '*know how to develop, support, and manage these new forms of leadership*' (Smylie et al., 2002: 182). As long as some rectors will view the leadership of teachers as a threat instead of an opportunity to league together for the general welfare of the institution, it will be difficult to envisage this type of symbiosis so necessary in a collaborative work environment.

In many ways, the onus is on the rectors who to '*set the stage for teacher*' (Kahrs, 1996: 27) and '*the climate that encourages or stifles teachers*' attempts to enter the circle of leadership' (Blegen & Kennedy, 2000: 4). Rectors '*have both the power and the strategic position to create the internal structures and conditions that are conducive to teacher leadership*' (Frost & Durrant, 2003a: 179) and that is why some rectors are already encouraging and promoting informal teacher leadership. Second, if informal teacher leadership is to take root, rectors must help in reshaping organizational structures to create a pool of leadership around them and for this to happen, the rector's '*leadership is crucial*' (Moller & Katzenmeyer, 1996: 12).

Rectors who '*give meaning to these emerging shared leadership models through their words, actions, and interpersonal relationships*' (Murphy, 2005:135) and their '*willingness to share*

*leadership with teacher leaders is a key to improving the climate of the workplace for emerging teacher leadership.*' (Yarger & Lee, 1994: 234) rally the support of informal teacher leaders and undertake school improvement programmes with more confidence because they have mastered the art of redesigning power relationships by: '*delegating authentic leadership responsibilities*' and developing '*collaborative decision-making processes in the school*' (Leithwood et al., 1992: 30).

The findings revealed how some rectors inadvertently '*bully*', '*humiliate*' and '*professionally harm*' the educators working under them. To mitigate the different forms of harm caused by rectors lacking in leadership qualities, it is proposed that a manual on school management be written in which leadership roles and duties can be clearly spelt out. This manual may also include a self-assessment leadership kit as well. As formal training opportunities are flourishing, rectors should not find it difficult to get formal support by following courses in Educational Leadership in the different local and foreign universities. Rectors who are engaged in transformational reform efforts can be successful only by learning to delegate (Bredeson, 1991).

It is recommended that workshops to promote leadership among rectors and deputy rectors be organised on an annual basis. In Mauritius, the MIE, the British Council and other organisations are always ready to do so. These workshops can be held at the level of the zone or at national level and may even take the form of a retreat for rectors and deputy rectors to share good leadership practices. Regular interaction among practitioners can lead them to reflection on their practices and may give some the opportunities to review their leadership perspective. Almost all deputy rectors and rectors in Mauritius follow formal courses in leadership and one of the requirements for their certification is writing a dissertation on any aspect related to leadership. Very often, these dissertations lie on the bookshelves and are never discussed among practitioners. Perhaps, it would be a good idea for deputy rectors and rectors to take cognisance of the each other's work and to reflect upon the findings. Problems related to school management can also be discussed and solutions can be sought through brainstorming sessions. These measures can help deputy rectors and rectors to move away from their professional isolation and develop better networks among practitioners and develop a community of professional learners.

The notion that teacher leaders can coexist along with rectors also needs be driven home. The participants have referred to the possible merits of sharing and distributing leadership. In the

same way, research carried out by Prestine (1991:11-12) reinforces the idea of empowering educators through shared authority and decision making

*Data indicated that the overwhelming change perceived as necessary in the principal's role was the ability to empower teachers by sharing authority and decision making. From the teachers' perspective, the sharing of decision making authority was seen as essential.*

The professional school culture can be improved through goodwill and a profound rethinking of leadership roles and responsibilities. The top-down system of management which is a colonial legacy will have to be reviewed by redesigning new leadership parameters in schools. Relationships can be professionalized so that problems resulting in strained relationships can be resolved through mediation. The leadership potential of informal teacher leaders and rector can further boost the school improvement initiatives.

This will not be easy or straight forward. It will definitely take some more time for this to happen in Mauritian secondary schools because old habits and ways of doing things do not change easily. Judicious conceptualisations of leadership roles can go a long way in addressing the problems which result when rector and teacher leaders do not know what is professionally expected from them.

It is also recommended that the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) be harnessed effectively in order to create a virtual leadership platform for rector, deputy rector and educators with the help of local and foreign moderators who are experts in educational leadership. This virtual platform can be used as a powerful tool for the promotion and dissemination of good leadership practices. This on-line platform could prove to be helpful for educational leaders to interact and inform one another about their experiences, to look for possible solutions to emerging problems in schools and to develop a professional development network.

The research carried out by Curtis (2013) on teacher leadership for The Aspen Institute in the United States examined the various approaches that have been taken to systemically structure teacher leadership to meet the demands placed on educators today and found that there is no one right way to approach teacher leadership as each context is different, and the purpose and

practice of teacher leadership will be different. We need to bear in mind that *'systems need to create space for innovation while pursuing incremental systemic change that removes the barriers to innovation in differentiated teaching roles, instructional delivery, and aligned incentives'* (Curtis, 2013, p. iv).

One of the missing links in the leadership narrative in Mauritius is the stark absence of collaboration among educational leaders, be they rectors, deputy rectors or educators. In fact, collaboration is regarded as one of the key components of professional development in many countries. In Denmark, Finland, Italy, and Norway, teacher leaders support each other's professional growth by engaging in collaborative research projects. Similarly, educators in Japan participate in research lessons where they share instructional best practices with the view to improve upon their techniques (Darling-Hammond, Wei, & Andree, 2010). In New Zealand, a 'cluster model' is used to group similar schools and allow educators from those schools to connect and share ideas (Owens, 2015). In addition to formal professional development activities, teacher leaders often enjoy high levels of autonomy, which allows them additional opportunities to hone their leadership skills. For instance, educators in Finland regularly work alongside administrators to establish policies, develop curricula and assessments, select textbooks, set budgets, and plan professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010).

The roles and duties of informal teacher leaders have to be set out by the Ministry of Education, and the parameters within which they have to operate have to be clearly delineated. The different institutions which are responsible to carry out interviews and selection of educators for promotional posts need to recognize the contributions made by informal teacher leaders.

#### **6.4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH**

To achieve all the above-mentioned measures, it is important that policies to include a revisited scheme of service for educators which should irretrievably include leadership-related tasks for informal teacher leaders. However, policies should preferably be based upon well-designed educational research. Unfortunately, the practice in Mauritius has been to leave policies in the hands of those who rely upon intuition rather than research. Even the recently implemented, so called, reform in Mauritius 'The Nine Year Continuous Basic Education' (2015) is only a 24-slide power point presentation which was made by the present Minister of Education. This

reform is neither based on any empirical research nor was it ever piloted. It has been implemented in a complacent trial and error manner. Kulpoo (1998:3) was right when he had observed that,

*'The Master Plan recognized that, in the past, there had been too much educational policy developed on the basis of a reliance on anecdotal evidence and intuition, and that there was a growing need for 'hard evidence' about the education system, which needed to be gathered through well-designed educational research studies.'*

Policies are more easily proposed than properly implemented. It is important that the genuine impact of the policies be anticipated, based upon empirical data and supported by reliable data and practical ideas. The financial aspects as well the overall consequences of the policies have to be considered. In small island states, where there is a dearth of finance and the right persons to conceptualise and implement the policies, it is important to be careful prior to initiating anything.

Bishop and his colleagues (1997:78) outline the case as follows:

*Since policies usually guide the course of action of an organization, and their statements include objectives that guide the actions of a substantial portion of the total organization, teachers will believe that they are empowered when they feel that their actions are undergirded and protected by such formalized policy statements.*

One key issue which remains unsolved is the selection processes which should be used to identify informal teacher leaders. Little (1998:101) asserts that *'to the extent that the selection problem remains at the forefront of discussions of teacher leadership'*—to the extent that *'favouritism on the part of principals'* (Hart, 1990: 515) is perceived, the resulting educator resentment will likely severely undermine prospects for informal teacher leadership.

The research has revealed that training of informal teacher leaders has to be addressed. The participants have confirmed that informal teacher leaders are being asked to assume leadership roles with little or no training. In his research, Smyser (1995:132) discovered,

*With a great need for leadership from teachers, and with lack of training a major obstacle in establishing this leadership, it would seem obvious that there is a need for*

*teacher education programs that specifically train teachers to take on leadership roles. Unfortunately these programs are rarely available.*

Since '*pre-service programs often times omit leadership training*' (LeBlanc & Shelton, 1997: 34) for '*assuming leadership roles outside the classroom*' (Smyser, 1995: 134), most educators enter the profession with few leadership skills (Buckner & McDowelle, 2000). When tapped for leadership roles, they '*are expected to assume [them] with little or no preparation*' (McCay et al., 2001: 137). Studies consistently demonstrate that '*creating leadership roles without providing opportunities to learn how to enact these roles . . . leads to failure and despair*' (Lieberman & Miller, 1999: 91).

The participants said that one of the main pressures they felt was their inability to manage their professional time to do justice to their teaching assignments and carrying leadership roles outside the classrooms. More than money, it is perhaps time which is the key for the effective implementation of informal teacher leadership. Educators who have leadership qualities suffer from the pressure of managing their professional time to meet the exigencies of professional roles. Literature on teacher leadership also highlights the problems educators face because they have difficulties to manage their professional time. For instance, time is often needed to lift teacher leadership off the ground (Duke, 1994), to implement teacher leadership in ways that '*barriers and obstacles can be resolved*' (Whitaker, 1997: 15), and to prevent '*the strains [that] are compounded when the pace of implementation is fast*' (Little, 1988: 98). Time is required for professional development (Blegen & Kennedy, 2000; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001), '*for reflection and for opportunities to conduct professional inquiry*' (Troen & Boles, 1994: 278). Extra time is needed for teachers to take part in the leadership process (Wise, 1989), to perform leadership responsibilities (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Time for teachers to work together (Harrison & Lembeck, 1996; Wasley, 1991), '*for teacher leaders to engage in collaborative relationships*' (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001: 108) and '*democratic decision making*' (Kahrs, 1996: 28) is critical. Extra time for planning is also a requisite (Mitchell, 1997; Wasley, 1991).

Lieberman, (1992: 161) talks about the time constraints informal teacher leaders face in the following way

*time to learn; time to talk with one another; time to get new materials (or make them); time to experiment, reflect, talk about it; time to create; time to deal with the inevitable conflict that comes with a clash of values; time to build collegial relationships where there have been none.*

When discussing the policy implications of reviewing educational and informal teacher leadership in Mauritius, it is important to gain some insights from literature which confirms that for both the public and for educators themselves, teaching is defined '*almost exclusively by time spent in classrooms with children*' (Little, 1988: 100). According to Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, (1992: 164) for individual educators, time away from teaching is seen as '*compromising their effectiveness with children*'. Indeed, teacher leaders '*take a lot of criticism from principals [and] fellow teachers . . . over missing school*' (Fay, 1992: 81). It is not difficult to see how the norm of legitimacy could deter educators from assuming school-wide leadership responsibilities and how it could depress enthusiasm among those who believe in shared leadership (Murphy, 2005).

We should also bear in mind that the nature of the educator's work is one characterised by 'isolation' in the classroom which is far from working in groups. '*Most teachers . . . work alone, in isolation from their colleague*' (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999: 157) and they prefer it that way (Griffin, 1995). Collaborative cultures are rampant in the educational literature but actually much less visible in schools. Educators consider professional autonomy—'*which is viewed as freedom from outside scrutiny and the right to make independent judgments*' (Wasley, 1991: 26). They also learn '*not [to] meddle in the affairs of other teachers*' (Teitel, 1996: 144), especially in matters dealing with how their colleagues work with students in their classrooms or how they assume responsibilities outside classrooms. Paradoxically, many educators shun the idea '*to lead or to be led*' (Wilson, 1993: 27) and that may be one of the reasons why many potential teacher leaders prefer staying away from leadership roles, especially outside their classrooms. Urbanski & Nickolaou (1997: 245) argue that '*for the sake of such autonomy in their own classrooms, teachers sacrifice their prospects for influence at the school level and beyond.*'

Educational researchers often refer to '*egalitarian norms*' (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001: 4) which have a long history within the profession (Wasley, 1991). Basically '*all teachers hold equal position and rank, separated by number of years of experience*' (Wasley, 1991: 166)

'rather than function, skill, advanced knowledge, role, or responsibility' (Lieberman et al., 1988: 151)—and that is why there is a consensus in schools that '*all teachers should be equal*' (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001: 4).

Against this cultural backdrop, '*teacher leadership . . . may introduce status differences based on knowledge, skill, and initiative*' (Little, 1988: 98; Yarger & Lee, 1994). Informal teacher leadership positions are based upon '*superordinate and subordinate status differences that teachers may not view as socially and professionally legitimate*' (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992: 156) which irretrievably create tensions among colleagues, and '*challenge the norms of professional equality*' (Smylie & Denny, 1989: 16). In effect, then, because '*teacher leadership is inconsistent with the egalitarian culture in most schools*' (Moller & Katzenmeyer, 1996: 7) and '*assaults the egalitarian norms that have long been in place in teaching*' (Wasley, 1991: 147), norms of equality act as an '*obstacle to teacher leadership*' (Killion, 1996: 75) and as '*an obstacle to designing meaningful teacher leadership roles*' (Pellicer & Anderson, 1995: 20).

Without overcoming these long established cultural values which permeate schools and which are deeply entrenched in the professional mores of educators, it will be challenging for policy makers to envisage 'formalising' informal teacher leadership in Mauritius. Its introduction has to be done gradually, without upsetting or disturbing the inbuilt values surrounding leadership. For instance, the pervading belief that the job of teachers is to teach and the task of school administrators is to manage and lead—'*principals lead; teachers teach*' (Barth, 2001: 445) will take time to accept that educators also can lead, albeit jointly and in collaboration with the rector. For the time being, the '*norm of the authority and power of administrators*' (Keedy, 1999: 787), has a deep root structure in most schools and, as is the case with related norms discussed above, it casts a pall over the ideology of shared leadership. At the heart of the prerogative standard is the belief that school action outside of classrooms is the rightful domain of school administrators (Smylie, 1992).

Acknowledging informal teacher leadership by the Mauritian educational authorities will take some more time to be accepted nation-wide and may become a reality in the long term only. In the short term, it can gain popularity in schools where rector encourage and practice shared and distributed leadership. We should not undermine the role educational organisations, that is schools, play in promoting or impeding informal teacher leadership as Murphy (2005:127) says

that 'a collection of organizational conditions and a host of professional and cultural norms that can retard or promote the creation of a culture of shared leadership and constrain or enhance the activities of teacher leaders.'

It is important for policy makers to be fully conscious about the care they have to take while planning the strategies to introduce informal teacher leadership in an official manner. So far, informal teacher leadership has been operating in a spontaneous manner, with educators receiving no remuneration and no training. Officialising it by introducing policies to monitor it may cause tensions in the educational sector. If policies are not carefully designed and not properly introduced, they may 'kill the goose that lays the golden egg.'

In a small island state like Mauritius, it is important to consider the financial aspects as well as the overall impact these changes might have on the dynamics of leadership in schools. Crossley et al (2009:4) are right when they caution that

*Policy makers and planners need strategies to benefit from the fact that small states are sovereign entities, while handling the demands that this might bring for participation in international meetings and other events. Professionals in small states may also need to be more multifunctional than their counterparts in larger states who are more easily able to specialise, e.g. in aspects of curriculum, financing and aid negotiation. Small states may be more responsive to reform since a single actor can have a greater proportionate influence than would be the case in a larger state; but this may bring challenges of volatility. Planners in small states may also face stronger issues of dependency than their counterparts in larger states. These and other issues need further investigation in a range of contexts to identify commonalities across small states while also recognising the diversity arising from specific economic, cultural and socio-political contexts.*

In fact, the policy implications of informal teacher leadership can be situated at different levels as follows:

- The possible contributions it can make in enlarging the space for leadership, through increased distributed and shared leadership in a democratic set up.
- Teachers can informally benefit from continuous professional development at school level or formally by following teacher leadership training programmes designed for them.

- Teacher leaders can and should have greater visibility so that their leadership skills are taken into due consideration when opportunities for promotions to managerial posts arise.
- Rectors can rely on greater support from a pool of teacher leaders while targeting school development plans.
- The culture of shared, distributed and democratic leadership in educational set ups should be encouraged as a policy measure which will then trickle down at school level. Educational leadership policies should be based upon democratic principles of equity, merit, and sharing by doing away with the top down type of management. This will allow teacher leaders to play a more prominent role, albeit informally.

This research suggests the establishment of the Mauritius Institute of Educational Leadership (MIEL), an educational leadership training centre in Mauritius which will operate independently from the Mauritius Institute of Education but will work closely with it. This centre could take up the responsibility of providing leadership training to all people related to the educational sector in Mauritius. The setting up of the MIEL will need the approval of the Ministry of Education. It will entail accreditation, staffing and financial and other logistics procedures. It is proposed that the MIEL be chaired, managed and staffed by educational practitioners who, apart from qualifications and experience, should have proven leadership qualities. Rectors or educators who have excelled in their leadership roles and who can aspire to be role models for their peers in the educational sector would be those who will suitably run the MIEL. Foreign expertise will surely be of great help during the teething period of its setting-up. This centre would work in collaboration with other international training centres which are engaged in educational leadership.

The centre could also be involved in research in leadership related issues which will inform the parent Ministry on the way forward as and when reform in the educational sector will be carried out. The centre may also act as a resource centre for all those who are keen to boost up educational leadership in the sector. Obviously, the centre will require financial and human resources to become a reality but it is not impossible to seek funds for its realisation.

## 6.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE

Earlier, in the conclusion section of the literature review, the dangers of an uncritical transfer of Western-centric literature have been discussed. It was also postulated that the findings of this research have implications for theory and the international literature. In this section, I will discuss how this research i) supports the existing literatures, ii) build upon existing literatures and, iii) challenges the existing literatures.

To begin with, it is important to reiterate that existing literature has been useful in conducting this research. For instance, it has helped me place educational and teacher leadership in a perspective in order to critically examine the pertinence of democratic and distributed leadership, to review the cultural and contextual enablers and impediments to informal teacher leadership, to understand how informal teacher leadership can contribute in capacity building process to sustain school improvement processes notwithstanding the frequent transfer of rectors in the system and to use the findings to inform policy development.

Next, this research undoubtedly builds upon existing literature around the three waves of teacher leadership as discussed by Silva et al. (2000). The findings have shown that to a large extent, it is the third wave of teacher leadership as discussed by Silva et al. (2000) which is actually applicable to the Mauritian context. The findings of this research confirm that in some Mauritian schools, a few educators are engaged in sharing best practices among colleagues; they engage in administrative and organisational responsibilities and extend their knowledge in collaborative activities (Lieberman & Miller, 2005; Silva et al., 2000).

However, the findings of this research challenge the existing literatures in the way educational leadership is conceptualized, lived and exercised in Mauritian secondary schools. While in the West, heads of schools are school leaders because they are promoted to that position on the dint of their proven leadership qualities, here in Mauritius such is not necessarily the case. Many rectors, as testified by the participants, suffer blatantly from a leadership deficiency which seriously hampers the smooth running of schools. Tensions between rectors and educators or among educators are rife in the Mauritian educational system because the leadership model is still mired in incongruity. In the absence of a clear, well-defined and workable set of leadership guidelines, rectors operate in a rather unchecked and unaccountable manner.

The findings reveal how some rectors 'bully' the educators because they practise a dictatorial and autocratic leadership style. The colonial master's syndrome still lingers in the way leadership is exercised by the rectors who professionally transgress their authority. The literature, which has been reviewed, does not address such context and culture specific problems as seen in Mauritian secondary schools. For example, in Mauritius, distributed leadership merely means 'distributing tasks' without really empowering the educators.

In the light of the Western-centric literature, it is important to revisit the way leadership is conceptualized in Mauritius. In a globalized world, where every attempt is being made to empower people at different levels, to recognize the potential of everyone, to combat oppression by setting a more just and fairer system, it is imperative that the educational system of Mauritius paves the way for a subtle reform in the way leadership is viewed and practised democratically.

## **6.6 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY**

In section 1.11, the limitations of this research have already been discussed and these will be discussed in this section again. In fact, it is imperative to recognise the limitations of this study (Creswell, 2014; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Recognising and acknowledging these limitations help to ensure the researcher's integrity. Being conscious and aware about the limitations of a research increases the reflexivity of the researcher.

As mentioned in the 'Introduction' chapter, the limitations of this research are as follows:

- a) This research looks only at educators' constructions of informal teacher leadership and does not at all consider rectors' students and other stake holders' constructions.
- b) It is limited to three secondary schools within a particular geographical Zone of the island.
- c) Methodologically it is limited to the lived experiences of the educators rather than evidence drawn from researcher's observation of informal teacher leadership in action.

## **6.7 IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

One of the aims of this study was to contribute new knowledge to the field of informal teacher leadership. This new knowledge irretrievably provides a Mauritian perspective of the

phenomenon, informal teacher leadership. Researchers from around the world, working on either formal or informal teacher leadership, can have an insight about the way Mauritian educators construct informal teacher leadership in their professional contexts.

The findings of this research may be of interest to researchers who normally investigate education-related matters in small state islands. For instance, Crossley et al (2009:13) reported that

*The 1985 workshop in Mauritius which launched the Commonwealth Secretariat's work on education in small states stressed that small states should not be seen simply as scaled-down versions of larger states: they have an ecology of their own, which requires local research to supplement and perhaps modify the insights that can be obtained from larger countries (Commonwealth Secretariat 1986: 5-6). In all domains, globally informed but locally relevant innovation is required of future generations of leaders.*

Strengthened local research capacity is also vital if small states are to develop more genuine partnerships and engage more effectively and critically in mediating, adapting or, where appropriate, challenging global agendas (Holmes & Crossley 2004; Crossley 2008). That is why, it is expected that other researchers will surely probe the emergent issues of their interests which have surfaced in this study and which will require further investigations. Like any research, this one too sheds light on informal teacher leadership. It is intellectually stimulating to feel that at the end of a research, there is yet more to be probed in order to reach the epicentre of truth. What seems to be an end may be the beginning of other research in the future.

In the wake of this study, I have come across some important emergent issues related to the phenomenon under exploration. These emergent issues demand a profound rethinking and call for further studies to be carried out. I propose that research be carried out on the leadership styles of rectors and their impact:

- on staff's motivation,
- shared and distributed leadership,
- school culture,
- retention of staff in the system,
- the morale of staff,

- academic performance of students,
- students' discipline, and
- relationships with parents and other stake-holders.

## 6.8 SUMMARY

As mentioned in the first paragraph of the introduction of this dissertation, I consider this EdD venture as journey of growth-my own growth as a researcher. I can say that this growth is an on-going process. The quest for truth is on. My intellectual query seeking answers about the phenomenon is on.

When I began the EdD as far back in 2012, I used to naively think that informal teacher leadership was the miracle recipe to most problems facing secondary schools. I thought that it was enough to rally the support of informal teacher leaders in order to solve almost all the administrative and management related shortcomings of the school. I thought that the deficiency of the rector's leadership could easily be filled by the unimpeded contributions of the leadership potentials of the numerous informal teacher leaders. Overzealous as I was, I used to view informal teacher leadership as an unquestionable panacea to many problems gnawing the effective management of schools. Now my perspective has changed. Critical reflexivity and the researcher's objectivity have made me a more informed practitioner. I have moved a long way from the naïve insider to a critical insider now.

When I look back, I feel that my EdD venture has contributed significantly in the way I look at informal teacher leadership. Now I realize that informal teacher leadership has its own limitations just like it has a lot of merits and benefits. Interestingly, it is quite daunting and complex to conceptualise informal teacher leadership. It is equally challenging to draw a demarcation line between a teacher and an informal teacher leader. I am also conscious that implementing policies on informal teacher leadership is not going to be easy.

I realize that we have many teachers who serve as informal teacher leaders because they genuinely want to support the rector, the pupils, and the school where they work by contributing their leadership skills in dealing with administrative tasks, in providing quality and effective teaching and classroom management, by acting as role models to the students. However, it has to

be borne in mind that informal teacher leadership can provide solutions to many problems at school but can be the cause of a few as well. Dealing with many potential informal teacher leaders is not an easy task, especially in schools where the rector does not practise democratic, shared and distributed leadership.

It is important to realize that informal teacher leaders can prove to be very helpful to rectors in managing the school. They can help rectors to face the many challenges facing Mauritian secondary schools, which are not directly related to teaching in the classroom, but which require leadership qualities in order to be discharged effectively. The main problem faced by many rectors, who know about the importance of informal teacher leaders, is to identify them. It depends upon rectors to identify these informal teacher leaders and seek their support in the effective management of the school affairs.

Now I make greater sense of Katzenmeyer & Moller's (2001) 'Awakening the Sleeping Giant: Helping Teachers Develop as Leaders' and realize that the rectors will have to constantly manage the teacher leadership giant, whether the giant is sleeping or awake. For this to happen in an unbiased way, rectors will have to understand the whole notion of educational leadership, their own leadership style and qualities associated with informal teacher leaders.

Prospects for informal teacher leadership to gain its deserved recognition will be directly influenced by '*enabling policies*' (Lieberman & Miller, 1999: 28). Bishop et al (1997: 78) outline the case as follows:

*Since policies usually guide the course of action of an organization, and their statements include objectives that guide the actions of a substantial portion of the total organization, teachers will believe that they are empowered when they feel that their actions are undergirded and protected by such formalized policy statements.*

Implementing new policies in a small island state is quite challenging, especially if they deal with an overhaul of our deeply entrenched attitudes towards leadership. The participants vouch for a more transparent and fairer leadership model in schools.

As I mentioned earlier that I am active politically and I form part of the Education Commission of the Mauritius Labour Party, my research journey will help me to take more informed decisions

in the educational sector. I hope to translate the recommendations of this research into possible policy arenas. In the short term, I propose that a serious rethinking about the pertinence of having a democratic, shared and distributed model of leadership be undertaken by stake-holders in the educational sector. In the long term, the setting up of the Mauritius Institute of Educational Leadership (MIEL) should be envisaged which would look at educational leadership in a more holistic manner. This institute will be responsible to train people in

- Curriculum development and educational leadership
- Management of finance in the educational sector
- Monitoring and Evaluation of school leaders
- Managing conflicts and crises in the educational sector
- Ethical, shared and distributed leadership
- Rethinking educational leadership in the digital era
- Educational leadership to promote social and economic justice
- Continuous professional development in a globalised world.

The MIEL would be responsible to train heads of department, primary and secondary school inspectors, primary school teachers and secondary school educators, quality assurance officers of the Ministry of Education and all other officers who are linked with the educational sector in one way or the other because Bray (1992:48) recommends that,

*Planners in small states need to be more versatile than their counterparts in larger states. They need to be 'jacks of at least several trades and master of all'.*

At a personal level, I can say that an inner growth has humbly begun and sincerely hope it will continue. This EdD course has helped me to move from a practitioner to a practitioner-researcher and now I look at the educational sector in a more holistic way, with more criticality and reflexivity, which I lacked earlier.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: LETTER TO RECTORS SEEKING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE RESEARCH

Dear (name of rector)

Address (of the secondary school)

Dear Sir, madam

I am currently conducting a research in partial fulfilment of my doctoral assignment with the University of Brighton. The title of my Ed D research is '**Educators' constructions of informal teacher leadership in three Mauritian secondary schools: a phenomenological study.**' My study concerns teacher leadership (the way teachers construct informal teacher leadership).

Six educators working in your school have been selected as participants and they will share their professional experiences related to teacher leadership, which is the phenomenon under investigation. The phenomenological inquiry is particularly appropriate to address meanings and perspectives of research participants. According to Patton (1990: 71), '*...a phenomenological study...is one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience.*'

I am hereby seeking your permission to use the six selected educators of your school in the research. I will interview them on a one-to-one basis and also during a group interview. I will conduct my interviews either in your school premises or outside school, depending upon the availability of the educators and your consent. The educators will also be asked to keep an electronic professional diary to recount their experiences regarding the phenomenon under investigation.

It is my duty to inform you that whatever your staff will share in terms of oral or written information will be dealt with utmost confidentiality. I will not disclose to you or anyone else whatever will be communicated to me during the process of this research exercise.

I will kindly request you to give me your consent in writing please.

I rely on your collaboration to ensure that my research is carried out in a hassle free manner.

Warm regards

Mahend Gungapersad

## APPENDIX 2: LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS (Educators)

Dear colleague

Thank you for volunteering to participate in the research which I am conducting in partial fulfilment of my doctoral assignment with University of Brighton. The title of my Ed D research is '**Educators' constructions of informal teacher leadership in three Mauritian secondary schools: a phenomenological study.**' My study concerns informal teacher leadership (the way teachers construct informal teacher leadership).

Teachers will share their professional experiences related to teacher leadership, which is the phenomenon under investigation. The phenomenological inquiry is particularly appropriate to address meanings and perspectives of research participants. According to Patton (1990: 71), '*...a phenomenological study...is one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience.*'

It is imperative that you provide information without any fear or favour. It is important that the data reflects the truth, the actual feelings, opinions, views and ideas that you have without filtering or sifting them to sound politically correct towards me or anyone else. I will be meeting you on a face to face basis (or via skype) to gather your lived experiences as a teacher. Your feelings, opinions, views and ideas pertaining to the topic of research will be seminal in understanding the whole notion of teacher leadership in Mauritius.

Hope to have a frank one-to-one conversation (a narrative of your professional experience as a teacher leader). The conversation will be audio taped. I will also request you to keep an electronic professional diary where you can write down the most striking events or incidents which have marked you in your professional life as a teacher.

It is my duty to inform you that whatever you will share in terms of oral or written information will be dealt with utmost confidentiality. I have also informed your rector that no information given to me orally or in writing will ever be disclosed to the latter or anyone else. Nowhere in my research will your name or that of your school be mentioned.

I would kindly request you to give me your consent in writing.

Should you need any clarifications, please feel free to contact me on 57181848 or [mgungapersad@yahoo.com](mailto:mgungapersad@yahoo.com).

Thank you.

Mahend Gungapersad

Doctoral student, University of Brighton.

### APPENDIX 3: NOTE ON PROFESSIONAL PERSONAL DIARY

Dear colleague,

Apart from the one-to-one and group interviews which will be carried out to collect data for this study, I will kindly request you to keep an electronic personal professional diary as well. I have noted that participants have a lot more to say on the topic under investigation but miss out a lot of things during the interviews. That is why the electronic professional personal diary will help you to jot down your feelings, views, opinions, experiences or anecdotes related to the issues being raised during the one-to-one and group interviews.

The electronic personal professional diary should be kept in English Language but you are free to use French or Creole as well. You will keep the diary for a six month period where you can recount your professional experiences. The time frame will be from February to July 2016, when annually you are fully involved in a series of curricular and extra-curricular activities at school. You are free to make entries as and when you wish. You can decide upon the frequency of your entries as long as I can get data which will inform my research on different aspects related to informal teacher leadership. Please provide as many anecdotes as possible regarding teacher leadership that you have experienced personally.

Whatever you will share will remain strictly confidential. At no point in time, your name will ever appear in the research. In this phenomenological research, your lived experiences are the life blood of the data required. Your experiences will focus on

- How do you construct the notions of leadership, educational leadership and informal teacher leadership
- the leadership style adopted by the head of school,
- whether leadership is shared and distributed,
- how is leadership shared and distributed
- how are informal teacher leaders identified and selected by the rector
- the way educators assume leadership roles,
- the opportunities teachers get to assume such roles,

- different occasions when you or other educators who work in the same school assumed leadership roles
- the problems which crop up when teachers assume such roles,
- the ways the school/head of school or teachers benefit when teachers assume leadership roles,
- how informal teacher leaders deal with emergencies at school
- the different examples of emergencies that you have witnessed personally
- the contributions informal teacher leaders make in capacity building at school level
- how can the implementation of new policies help to promote informal teacher leadership.

When I meet you, I will brief you further on the way to keep the professional personal diary.

I will kindly request you to give me your consent in writing so that I can use the data provided by you in my dissertation.

Should you need any clarifications, please feel free to contact me on 57181848 or [mgungapersad@yahoo.com](mailto:mgungapersad@yahoo.com).

Thank you.

Mahend Gungapersad

Doctoral student, University of Brighton.

## APPENDIX 4: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW ON TEACHER LEADERSHIP

- What is the importance of leadership, if any, in managing a school?
- How far is your rector a transactional, transformational or autocratic leader? Give examples from your experience to support your views.
- How would you define informal teacher leadership?
- Is leadership distributed in the school where you work? If yes, explain how and in what ways.
- With the help of examples, explain in what ways do teachers lead-i) inside the classroom-ii) outside the classroom?
- How does the school culture where you work encourage informal teacher leadership?
- What factors impede informal teacher leadership to prevail in the school where you work?
- With the help of examples, can you explain how the school benefit from informal teacher leadership?
- From your experience, elaborate on the problems that informal teacher leadership may entail.
- How far do you think informal teacher leaders help in capacity building in a school?
- What considerations should be given to informal teacher leaders in a school development plan?
- Do you think policies in Mauritius have to make provision for informal teacher leadership? If yes, explain what should these policies be and how why should they be adopted or implemented?

## APPENDIX 5: Ed D ASSIGNMENTS

During my Ed D journey, I worked on the following assignments.

1. Gungapersad, M. (2012). Teachers as leaders: probing the way they lead in the Mahatma Gandhi Secondary Schools. Ed D assignment 1 submitted in partial fulfilment of Stage 1, University of Brighton.
2. Gungapersad, M. (2013). Teachers as leaders: probing the current situation at the Rabindranath Tagore Secondary school. Ed D assignment 2 submitted in partial fulfilment of Stage 1, University of Brighton.
3. Gungapersad, M. (2014). Teachers' constructions of informal teacher leadership at the RTSS-a phenomenological case study. Ed D assignment 3 submitted in partial fulfilment of Stage 1, University of Brighton.

APPENDIX 6: THE 4 EDUCATIONAL ZONES IN MAURITIUS

Educational Institutions by zone, 2015

