GHANAIAN HEADTEACHERS' AND TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT: *Distributed leadership practices in schools have gained prominence as a critical approach to meeting global educational goals. This study explored the perceptions of headteachers and teachers regarding distributed leadership practices in schools in Ghana. Anchored in the Distributed Leadership Theoretical Framework, the study adopted a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design underpinned by the constructivist philosophical paradigm. The research focused on headteachers and teachers in public basic schools within the Old-Tafo Municipal area of the Ashanti Region, Ghana. Using multiple sampling techniques, 15 participants were selected through census, purposive, and simple random sampling methods. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide and analysed through thematic analysis. The study found that distributed leadership fosters collaboration, inclusivity, shared responsibility, mutual trust among school stakeholders, and serves as an effective strategy to alleviate headteacher burnout and reduce leadership overload. The study concluded that distributed leadership is essential for enhancing teacher morale, building leadership capacity, and reducing headteacher workload. The study recommended that the Ministry of Education, teacher training institutions, and headteachers prioritize continuous professional development programmes to equip teachers with leadership skills. Also, headteachers should establish formal structures to support collaborative decision-making in schools.*

KEYWORDS: Collaborative practices, Distributed leadership, Headteachers' practices, Leadership overload, Skills development, Teacher's empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Organizational practices directly determine the success of the organization. The distributed leadership is another leadership approach that exists in organizations in this twenty first century. This approach is regarded as being highly appropriate for the purpose of changing and developing organizations in the right institutional conditions as it is not necessary for one person to perform all of the necessary management functions. There has not been any widely accepted cum synoptic definition of distributed leadership, however this approach is described as a practice of leadership in an organization, which aims at decentralizing of management powers and duties among more than one person as opposed to the traditional leadership approach, which is normally characteristic of a single person performing all leadership functions (Rashid, 2022; Kallio & Halverson, 2020). This approach simply assumes that leadership does not belong to a selected set of people who hold the reins of management, but to anyone bearing the experience, training, and ability to help his team in working towards the attainment of organizational goals. They include collaboration, the ability to think flexibly depending on the circumstances and the capacity to build a vision, trust and co-ownership of organizational goals across the participating members (Hickey, Flaherty & Mannix McNamara, 2022).

In recent years, the distributed leadership approach has been utilized in schools' operations. Distributed leadership in schools is viewed as the manner in which leadership power and tasks are shared with competent individuals in schools to assume leadership positions (Quansah, 2024). In the past, headteachers were perceived as the only people who undertook leadership roles in schools. However, schools are shifting from the traditional and rigid leadership system whereby one individual is assigned the leadership roles and subordinates are denied the opportunity to engage in shared leadership processes within the workplace. Although headteachers are responsible for the efficient functioning of the school through their leadership impact on the performance of schools, it is difficult for one individual to lead and function given the intricate nature of the structures within schools (Chitpin, 2020; Ataş Akdemir & Ayik, 2017). Hence, the headteacher and staff need to work together, take collective decisions to maintain a positive social environment, communicate effectively, and support one another for the overall well-being of the school community.

In Ghana and other countries, the practice of distributed leadership in school has emerged as imperative to satisfy the global agenda involving education (Dampson, Havor & Laryea, 2019). The distributed leadership practice is preferred by many researchers in the fields of school leadership and management because of its several advantages in spite of the fact that it may have few vices that are associated with its leadership structure such as being bureaucratic, which might slow decision making. When leadership roles are distributed among teachers, it would act as a developing process of teacher leadership and the following ideas as a part of teacher team work, take various responsibilities in school, sharing practices with your colleagues, receiving and giving constructive criticism on their work, enhancing the level of commitment and confidence of teachers are very effective (Aziz et al., 2021). The distributed leadership approach was also identified as an effective tool in enhancing students' outcome; school environment and school performance (Hongde, 2020). The distributed leadership as indicated in the study is highly recognized as a very important stream for headteachers to practice in the schools in Ghana. Other

scholars such as Nurudeen and Alhassan (2022), Quansah (2024), Ibrahim (2022), and Dampson et al. (2019) who have also written on this particular approach insist that the centrality of distributed leadership is a possible contribution to the improvement and positive change in school.

Problem Statement

Distributed leadership has emerged as a promising approach to enhance school performance through collaboration and shared decision-making. However, its implementation is often impeded by varied perceptions among headteachers and teachers. Many head teachers view distributed leadership with scepticism, perceiving it as a risky venture that may escalate existing challenges rather than contribute to school improvement (Dampson et al., 2019). Similarly, some teachers exhibit power-conscious behaviours, resistance, or fear when leadership roles are assigned to them, leading to power struggles and a lack of cooperation (Galdames-Calderón, 2023; Nicholas, 2019). The bureaucratic nature of traditional leadership structures further complicates the process, resulting in delays in decision-making and reluctance to share responsibilities. Some teachers resist distributed leadership because they see it as diminishing their professional roles, while others are concerned that it might lead to the delegation of critical tasks to less competent individuals. These perceptions significantly influence the willingness of headteachers and teachers to embrace distributed leadership practices, creating a barrier to its effective implementation.

Existing studies within the Ghanaian educational context have provided valuable perceptions into the impact of distributed leadership practices on various dimensions of school performance. Quansah (2024) explored its contributions to school improvement, while Nurudeen and Alhassan (2022) examined its effects on teachers' empowerment, commitment, and professional growth. Similarly, Ibrahim (2022) investigated its role in fostering positive behaviour management among teachers. These studies predominantly emphasize the outcomes and effects of distributed leadership, accentuating its benefits and challenges in educational institutions. However, a significant gap exists in the literature. Limited attention has been given to the perceptions of headteachers and teachers on distributed leadership and the reasons for recommending its practice in Ghanaian schools. This gap is critical, as perceptions shape attitudes and behaviours, which ultimately determine the success of leadership initiatives.

Moreover, the geographical context of this study presents another gap. While distributed leadership has been extensively studied in Ghana, no research has yet been cited to explore the perceptions of headteachers and teachers regarding this approach in public basic schools in the Old-Tafo Municipality, leaving a gap in understanding how it is perceived and practiced in this context. Addressing these gaps by focusing on the perceptions of headteachers and teachers, particularly within the Old-Tafo Municipal, will contribute significantly to the body of knowledge and offer practical acumen for improving leadership practices in Ghanaian schools.

Research Question

What are the perceptions of headteachers and teachers about distributed leadership practices in schools?

LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework

Distributed Leadership (DL) Theory is the theoretical foundation of this study. The DL theory emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s as a response to the limitations of traditional hierarchical leadership models. Distributed Leadership Theory assumes that leadership is not the sole responsibility of a single individual but is a shared and collaborative process involving multiple members of an organization. It emphasizes that leadership arises from the interactions between individuals, rather than from formal roles or positions alone (Spillane, 2012). The theory assumes that leadership roles and decision-making are dispersed throughout the organization, allowing members to contribute based on their skills and knowledge. DL theory also posits that leadership is situational, with different individuals taking the lead depending on the task, fostering a culture of mutual accountability and collective responsibility.

Scholars such as James Spillane and Peter Gronn were instrumental in formalizing DL as a framework that views leadership as a shared and interactive practice distributed across multiple individuals within an organization. This theory fits the study as it provides a lens to explore how headteachers and teachers perceive distributed leadership practices in their schools.

The Concept of Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership is an emerging concept in education. Historically, the traditional leadership model was the most dominant leadership approach in every institution. But considering the complex nature of education, and its accountability, it is clear that the traditional or the heroic leader model can no longer function (Kallio & Halverson, 2020). The traditional or heroic leadership approach has it that a person who has the knowledge, charisma, and willingness to lead a school can single handedly manage the school. The traditional approach to leadership is centred on one person taking on all leadership responsibilities in an organization. This is a top-down style of leadership in which teachers follow the guidance, directions, and motivations of a single leader.

The idea of empowering teachers in the areas of leadership, and valuing staff knowledge, skills, empathy, strategies, endurance, and boldness to accomplish an organization's predetermined goals bring forth the term "distributed leadership". This approach is new and still in the infancy stage therefore has still not been any common definition or understanding in that regard (Tian et al., 2016). Many authors commonly use the term shared leadership (Scott-Young, Georgy & Grisinger, 2019) while others go by distributed leadership (Botha & Triegaardt, 2016; Göksoy, 2015; Spillane, 2012; Harris, 2011). Others also describe distributed leadership as team leadership, democratic leadership, and transformational leadership (Irvine, 2021).

Distributed leadership focused on allowing staff to lead, and empowering them to use their knowledge, skills, empathy, strategies, patience, and braveness to work towards the achievement of an organizational goal. Hickey et al. (2022) postulated that the focus of distributed leadership approach is on encouraging leaders to share leadership roles among knowledgeable, experienced, and competent members of the institution to bring about effective organization's culture and practice. Distributed leadership approach has gradually eliminated the traditional way of

leadership where one person is seen as a hero who performs all leadership responsibilities. (Göksoy, 2015).

Distributed Leadership Practices in Schools

The distributed leadership approach is seen to be prevalent in schools in this contemporary time. Dampson, Mensah, and Laryea, (2019) found distributed leadership to be a tool that mitigates inefficiencies in school operations. Many research in the area of educational leadership revealed distributed leadership among the contributory factors to school improvement and teachers' effectiveness (Nadeem, 2024; Galdames-Calderón, 2023; Ibrahim, 2022; Dampson et al., 2019). According to Dampson et al. (2019), distributed leadership is an instrument for school improvement. Their study postulated that headteachers must delegate leadership responsibilities to teachers who have the capacity and willingness to perform leadership functions in some specific areas of school management. Williams and Young (2022) established that distributed leadership strengthens a sense of collective responsibility and collaboration among school staff.

The practice of the distributed leadership approach by authorities in schools is a result of its influence on school improvement. Therefore, managing a school in this twenty-first century requires the distribution of leadership to committed and capable teachers. Teachers' engagement in school leadership is founded on the teachers' quality, competencies, knowledge, and dedication (Pierro, 2020). It has therefore become necessary for headteachers to implement a distributed leadership approach due to the complex nature of the school structure. The school structure has become too complex such that one person cannot carry all the leadership responsibilities (Chitpin, 2020). Distributed leadership approach looks at giving leadership roles, responsibilities, and authority to other staff. The approach encourages teamwork and as well stimulates staff to function tirelessly towards achieving a set goal of the school. This leadership approach allows individuals or a team to make decisions on their own as to how to achieve the predetermined goals of the institution and usually, quality decision-making is assured from the process (Zamrodah, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Design

The study adopted a qualitative approach through descriptive phenomenological design, which is anchored in the constructivism philosophical paradigm. The descriptive phenomenological design was adopted because of its strength of allowing researchers to delve deeply into the lived experiences and perceptions of participants regarding a phenomenon. This design is particularly suitable for the study because it would aid in uncovering perceptions and experiences of headteachers and teachers regarding the practices of the distributed leadership approach in their school.

Population

The study population comprised headteachers and teachers in public basic schools in the Old-Tafo Municipal area in the Ashanti region of Ghana. The researchers' decision to engage public basic

schools was based on the fact that they wanted to work with headteachers and teachers who have had professional training. Most teachers from private basic schools may not be professionals. Five public basic schools in the municipality were accessible to the researchers in conducting the study.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The study adopted a multiple sampling technique to sample headteachers and teachers for the data collection. The headteachers were sampled using the census sampling technique, where all head teachers from the five accessible public basic schools in the municipality were included in the study. These headteachers were included in the study because they are the key decision-makers and implementers of leadership practices in the schools; their perspectives would offer a firsthand understanding of the practices of the distributed leadership.

The teachers were also selected using the purposive sampling technique, specifically the criterion sampling approach. The teachers included in the study were selected based on the criteria that they have stayed in the school for more than ten years. Teachers who have been at the school for a long period are likely to have a deep understanding of the leadership practices in the school. Engaging such experienced teachers offered a well-rounded, stable view of how the distributed leadership has been implemented, compared to teachers who may have joined the school more recently and have less exposure to the leadership transitions. For equal representation from each school, the researchers set a threshold number. In each of the five schools, two teachers were selected. A school with more than two teachers who meet the selection criteria, a simple random sampling technique, specifically the lottery method, was used to select the two teachers to represent the school. In total, 10 teachers were selected from the five schools.

Therefore, the sample size of the study was 15, consisting of 5 headteachers and 10 teachers. The sample size was deemed appropriate for a qualitative study since a qualitative study does not necessarily need a large sample size. According to Hennik and Kaiser (2022), qualitative studies usually reach data saturation with a sample size ranging from 9 to 17 participants; therefore, relying on a sample size of 15 participants is deemed appropriate.

Instrument and Data Collection Procedure

A semi-structured interview guide was self-constructed by the researchers to gather data for the study. The instrument was in two sections: Section A and Section B. Section A had 4 itemized questions that sought to explore participants' understanding of the distributed leadership approach and how the approach has been implemented in the schools. Section B also has 3 itemized questions to find out the reasons for the practice of the approach and the perceived influence of the distributed leadership approach. The validity of the instrument was ensured through reviews and revisions. The instrument was given to experts in the field of leadership for feedback. Expert feedback was incorporated to enhance the clarity of the questions and ensure that the questions will lead to gathering all the necessary data for the study. Ethical issues were considered in conducting the study. Permission was sought from the relevant authorities at the municipal and school levels. Each participant was provided with a consent form to fill out, and the researchers' assured participants of confidentiality and anonymity. The face-to-face interview lasted for at least 30 minutes. The interview was conducted at the participant's convenient time.

Data Analysis

The data was analysed using the thematic analysis procedures. The interview voice was transcribed, and the researchers familiarized themselves by repeatedly reading through the transcribed verbatims. The data were manually coded to ensure accuracy and consistency, and the themes were then generated and defined to arrive at the study's findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research Question: What are the perceptions of headteachers and teachers about distributed leadership practices in schools?

The research question aimed to explore the perceptions of headteachers and teachers regarding the practices of distributed leadership in schools. This exploration focused on understanding participants' views about distributed leadership practices and why their implementation is necessary in schools. Data collected from the participants (headteachers and teachers) were manually coded, and thematic analysis was employed. The themes that emerged from the verbatim transcriptions included one main thematic category and four sub-themes. These are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Theme and Sub-Themes Emerged from the Interview Extracts for Discussion

Thematic Category	Sub-themes
Participants' Perceptions of Distributed Leadership Practices in Schools	Collaboration and Shared Responsibility Empowerment and Teacher Involvement Avoiding Overload and Preventing Burnout Development of Leadership Skills

Participants' Perceptions of Distributed Leadership

This main theme emerged as the primary category for discussion, reflecting the importance of exploring participants' perceptions of the distributed leadership approach. Both headteachers and teachers demonstrated a solid grasp of the concept. Their responses revealed several key aspects of distributed leadership, leading to the identification of various sub-themes. These sub-themes, derived from their perceptions, are explored in detail in the following sections.

Collaboration and Shared Responsibility

Collaboration and shared responsibility emerged as a sub-theme under the thematic category *"Participants' perceptions of Distributed Leadership Practices in Schools."* Participants highlighted that distributed leadership emphasizes leaders working together and sharing responsibilities with their subordinates to foster unity and ensure the smooth running of school

activities. Delegating tasks enables teachers and headteachers to work collaboratively in addressing challenges and achieving the school's objectives. This shared effort not only eases the workload on headteachers but also builds a sense of inclusion and teamwork among staff members, creating a more supportive and effective school environment. These can be inferred from the following excerpts:

In my view, distributed leadership is about collaboration between the headteacher and the teachers. It is not just the headteacher making all the decisions and delegating tasks to the staff. Instead, it is a mutual effort, where both the headteacher and teachers share responsibilities. The headteacher may still hold the ultimate decision-making authority, but the important part of distributed leadership is that they actively involve teachers in making decisions that affect the day-to-day running of the school (Teacher 1).

Distributed leadership is about shared decision-making, where the headteacher and teachers come together to make important choices that affect the school's direction. It is not a top-down system, but a more horizontal approach where every teacher is encouraged to participate in discussions, offer ideas, and take ownership of school policies. For example, during staff meetings, instead of the headteacher dictating decisions, there is open dialogue where everyone is encouraged to share their perspective on issues (Teacher 4).

I believe distributed leadership is about making sure that everyone within the school community shares leadership responsibilities. This kind of leadership helps create an atmosphere of teamwork, where teachers are not just implementing directives from the headteacher, but are actively involved in shaping the direction of the school. When leadership is shared, it helps build a culture of trust, where everyone feels that they have a role to play in making decisions. This practice also encourages collaboration among staff members, leading to better communication, joint problem-solving, and more creative solutions (Teacher 5).

From my understanding, distributed leadership is when the headteacher shares responsibility for decision-making and leadership tasks with teachers. This could involve assigning leadership roles in different areas such as curriculum design, student performance tracking, and organizing school activities. Sharing these responsibilities, empower teachers to take ownership of certain aspects of the school's operation. This not only lightens the workload for the headteacher but also fosters a sense of ownership and accountability among the teachers. Moreover, this kind of approach improves collaboration, as we teachers work together towards a common goal, knowing that their contributions matter (Teacher 8).

In my view, distributed leadership is fundamentally about sharing responsibilities. The very term 'distributed' suggests that leadership cannot and should not be concentrated in the hands of one individual. It is about recognizing that leadership is not just a top-down process but something that can be shared across the entire staff. As a headteacher, I encourage my teachers to take on leadership roles in various areas such as planning, decision-making, and even conflict resolution. By doing so, I am not only distributing tasks but also empowering my teachers, which in turn strengthens the leadership structure of the school. It creates a more balanced and inclusive leadership model, where every member of the staff contributes to shaping the school's future (Headteacher 1).

From the interview extract, Teacher 1 highlights that distributed leadership is characterized by mutual effort, where the headteacher involves teachers in critical decisions affecting school operations. This inclusive approach ensures that teachers feel valued and fosters a positive work environment. The emphasis on collaborative decision-making, particularly in areas like resource allocation or changes in teaching methods, demonstrates how shared leadership builds trust and improves relationships within the school community.

Similarly, Teacher 4 elaborated on the horizontal nature of distributed leadership, highlighting the importance of shared decision-making. The open dialogue in staff meetings encourages contributions from all teachers, promoting ownership of school policies. This inclusive approach leads to achieving effective school operations. Teacher 5 further supported this perspective, emphasizing that distributed leadership cultivates a culture of trust and teamwork. Actively involving teachers in shaping the school's direction fosters better communication and encourages creative problem-solving. Teachers feel a shared sense of purpose, strengthening the collective effort required for school success.

Teacher 8 provided practical examples of how distributed leadership is operationalized, such as delegating tasks in curriculum design and student performance tracking. This approach not only empowers teachers but also promotes collaboration as they work together toward common objectives. The result is a more inclusive school culture where everyone's skills and contributions are recognized and valued. From a headteacher's viewpoint on transformative potential of distributed leadership, delegation of leadership roles in planning, decision-making, and conflict resolution, does not only help headteachers to reduce their own workload but also empowers teachers to become active contributors to the school's development. This approach fosters an inclusive leadership model where responsibilities are balanced across the staff, creating a stronger and more effective leadership structure.

From the discussions, it is established that collaboration and shared responsibility are critical components of distributed leadership in schools. Participants consistently highlighted that distributed leadership fosters teamwork, inclusivity, and mutual trust among staff members, empowering them to contribute meaningfully to decision-making processes. These findings align with existing literature. Hickey et al. (2022) asserted that distributed leadership promotes collaborative decision-making, leading to more effective school management. Similarly, Dampson et al. (2019) emphasized that shared responsibilities among teachers strengthen the leadership structure by leveraging diverse expertise.

Empowerment and Teacher Involvement

In exploring participants' understanding of distributed leadership, empowerment and teacher involvement emerged as a key sub-theme for discussion. Participants perceived distributed leadership as an approach that emphasizes empowering teachers by assigning leadership responsibilities that align with their strengths and expertise. This delegation of roles fosters inclusivity and ensures that teachers feel valued and engaged in the decision-making processes of the school. Teachers are seen as active contributors to the school's operations, with leadership responsibilities distributed across various domains such as curriculum development, student welfare, and extracurricular activities. This approach not only enables teachers to develop their

leadership potential but also promotes a sense of ownership and accountability, enhancing their commitment to the school's objectives. These views are visible in the following interview excerpts:

To me, distributed leadership means that every teacher is given specific responsibilities based on their strengths and areas of expertise. It is not about giving one person all the leadership roles but ensuring that everyone has a meaningful part to play. A teacher may take the lead in organizing school events, while another might focus on student welfare. It is about assigning roles that allow everyone to take ownership of a task, and in doing so, contribute towards the school's improvement. This approach helps to prevent burnout for the headteacher and also allows teachers to develop leadership skills, which is beneficial for the entire school community (Teacher 2).

As for me, distributed leadership means that the headteacher recognizes and values the skills and expertise of the teachers and delegates leadership tasks accordingly. When leadership is shared, the teachers are given opportunities to take on roles that match our strengths, whether that is leading a particular subject area, managing student discipline, or overseeing extra-curricular activities. This not only ensures that tasks are spread out but also allows each teacher to contribute their unique skills to the school's development. It makes the teachers feel valued and respected, which boosts our morale (Teacher 6).

From the best of my knowledge, distributed leadership involves assigning leadership roles based on the expertise and skills of individual teachers. Every teacher is given specific responsibilities that align with their strengths or areas of specialization. For instance, a teacher with a strong background in handling extra-curricular activities like sports may be given the task of leading the event, while another with a passion for organizing debates shall be given that role. This type of leadership ensures that all teachers have an active role in the school's operations and that leadership is not concentrated in the hands of the headteacher alone (Headteacher 3).

Distributed leadership allows the headteacher to recognize the talents and expertise of the teaching staff and assign them specific leadership duties. Rather than holding all decision-making powers, I believe it is crucial to empower teachers and involve them in the leadership process. I might delegate responsibilities such as overseeing the school's curriculum or managing student welfare programmes, based on teachers' qualifications and strengths. In doing so, leadership becomes a collective effort, which fosters a sense of ownership and belonging among the staff. This would allow for the development of leadership skills among teachers, creating a more dynamic and cooperative school environment (Headteacher 4).

The interview excerpts from the participants reveal that their understanding of distributed leadership strongly aligns with the concepts of empowerment and teacher involvement. From the extract, teacher 2 articulates that distributed leadership involves assigning responsibilities to teachers based on their strengths and areas of expertise. This means that leadership roles are not concentrated in the hands of one individual, but shared among the staff. Teachers, through their involvement in different aspects of school management, contribute meaningfully to the school's improvement. This practice not only prevents burnout for headteachers but also allows teachers to develop their leadership skills, creating a more dynamic and effective school environment. This

idea is in line with Hickey et al. (2022) who emphasized the importance of recognizing teachers' abilities in fostering a culture of shared leadership.

Teacher 6 reinforces the idea that distributed leadership is about recognizing and utilizing the skills and expertise of teachers. Delegating leadership tasks that align with teachers' strengths, such as leading a subject area or managing extracurricular activities, empowers teachers to take ownership of these roles under the guidance of headteachers. This approach not only ensures that the workload is shared, but it also makes teachers feel valued and respected, leading to higher morale and greater commitment to the school's objectives. Empowerment through role delegation and teacher involvement in decision-making are critical components of a thriving school culture (Zamrodah, 2016). Similarly, Headteacher 3 discusses how assigning leadership roles based on teachers' skills and expertise ensures that teachers play an active role in the school's operations. This approach prevents the concentration of power in the hands of the headteacher, promoting a more inclusive leadership model. Research has shown that the distributed leadership model not only helps distribute responsibility but also encourages a shared vision and collaborative problem-solving among staff members (Hickey et al., 2022).

Finally, Headteacher 4 also emphasizes that distributed leadership involves empowering teachers by assigning them leadership duties in areas such as curriculum management or student welfare programmes. This approach encourages a collective effort, where the leadership of the school is shared among staff members, thus fostering a sense of ownership and belonging. This finding is consistent with the findings of Pierro (2020) and Zamrodah (2016), suggesting that shared leadership leads to improved communication, better decision-making, and enhanced school outcomes.

Avoiding Overload and Preventing Burnout

The sub-theme "Avoiding Overload and Preventing Burnout" emerged from participants' perceptions of distributed leadership, which they viewed as a crucial approach for alleviating the burden on headteachers. Participants emphasized that in a distributed leadership model, leadership responsibilities are shared among both headteachers and teachers, thereby lightening the load on any one individual.

Headteachers are seen as delegating tasks and decision-making to teachers based on their strengths and expertise. This shared responsibility ensures that no single person is overwhelmed, creating a more balanced workload. Participants noted that this approach also promotes teamwork, allowing for more collaborative problem-solving, and ultimately fostering a more efficient school environment. The distribution of leadership roles allows headteachers to prevent burnout and maintain a sustainable workload for everyone involved. These perceptions are evident from the transcribed verbatim:

Distributed leadership, in my understanding, is about breaking away from the traditional way of leadership, where all the responsibility is placed solely on the headteacher. Instead, leadership is shared among several people. This means that teachers, as well as the headteacher, participate in leadership roles, making decisions together, and carrying out tasks collaboratively. It has to do

with headteachers recognizing that we the teachers also have valuable input and expertise to contribute (Teacher 3).

Distributed leadership to me is sharing leadership roles among teachers based on their strengths and interests. This would help reduce the burden on the headteacher, fosters teamwork, and allows teachers to grow professionally. When this type of leadership is practiced in our schools it would create a collaborative environment where teachers and their head teachers can work together to improve on the operations of the school (Teacher 9).

Distributed leadership is a leadership style that requires the headteacher to delegate certain powers and responsibilities to other staff members. It is about understanding that the headteacher cannot manage everything alone and that distributing some of these duties to some of the teachers. When this is done, I am sure it would not only lighten the load of the headteachers but would also improve the school's performance. I personally believe that delegating tasks like managing school activities or leading professional development for teachers allows the school to function better and helps the staff to feel more engaged in the administration (Headteacher 2).

From participants' quotations, it is clear that participants perceive distributed leadership as an effective way to reduce overload and burnout. When headteachers share leadership responsibilities with teachers, it creates a sense of collaboration and shared ownership in the school's progress. Trusting teachers with leadership roles makes them feel valued and appreciated, which increases their motivation to perform well. Distributing responsibilities also prevents leadership tasks from overwhelming one person, ensuring a more balanced workload for everyone. This collaborative practice eases the headteacher's burden and inspires teachers to give their best efforts, ultimately leading to improved school performance.

This finding is consistent with the assertion of Nadeem (2024), who emphasises that distributed leadership not only alleviates stress but also strengthens the capacity of the entire staff to engage in school improvement. Furthermore, participants highlighted that this approach fosters teamwork and collaboration, enabling teachers to contribute based on their strengths and expertise. This aligns with the work of Dampson et al. (2019), who argues that distributed leadership fosters a sense of shared responsibility, improving school effectiveness and teacher morale. However, it is important to consider that while shared leadership can reduce burnout, some studies suggest that if not managed properly, the redistribution of responsibilities can potentially lead to confusion or power struggles (Galdames-Calderón, 2023; Nicholas, 2019). Nonetheless, the overall perception of participants affirms that, when implemented thoughtfully, distributed leadership can significantly ease the burden on headteachers and prevent burnout, creating a more balanced and collaborative school environment.

Development of Leadership Skills

A prominent sub-theme that emerged from participants' responses was the development of leadership skills. Participants perceived distributed leadership as an approach that provides teachers with opportunities to develop their leadership capabilities. Distributed leadership allows teachers to actively participate in decision-making processes and have a direct influence on the school's development. This collaborative model encourages teachers to take on various roles, such

as overseeing discipline, curriculum, or extracurricular activities, which not only empowers them but also enhances their professional growth. The participants emphasized that as teachers gain more experience in leadership roles, they build confidence and skills that contribute to both their personal development and the overall success of the school. These can be deduced from the extracts:

To me, distributed leadership is about sharing leadership tasks so that every teacher is actively involved in decision-making and contributing to a school's direction. I believe this kind of leadership helps build a strong sense of collaboration, as we the teachers feel more engaged, it would have a direct impact on our professional development. The practice of this leadership style would allow us to develop leadership skills, which are essential for our professional growth as well (Teacher 7).

Distributed leadership is about encouraging collaboration, as teachers take on leadership roles in different aspects of the school operation. When leadership is shared with teachers, I believe it makes us feel more involved, especially when we are involved in the decision-making process. This to me would enhance our commitment to achieving the school's goals. Additionally, from my little search I have come to understand that distributed leadership practices foster a culture of teamwork and mutual respect among teachers, as we all recognize that we have a collective responsibility to improve the school. I believe that when we the teachers are given leadership roles, it would help us to develop leadership skills, which ultimately would benefit the school in the long run (Teacher 10).

In my experience, effective school management involves delegating leadership roles to various staff members based on their skills and knowledge. I encourage teachers to take leadership in different areas such as discipline and extracurricular activities. This practice not only reduces the burden on our headteacher but also helps teachers grow into leadership positions (Headteacher 5).

The responses reveal a shared perception of distributed leadership as a collaborative and inclusive approach that actively involves teachers in school leadership. Participants highlighted that distributed leadership fosters collaboration and engagement, allowing staff to contribute meaningfully to the school's growth. This aligns with the view that distributed leadership promotes democratic participation, where each individual's expertise is valued, ultimately leading to better decision-making and a cohesive school environment (Harris, 2012). Additionally, participants highlighted that sharing leadership roles cultivates a culture of teamwork and mutual respect, enhancing commitment to achieving the school's goals. This perspective is supported by Bush (2019) and Williams and Young (2022) who all establish that distributed leadership strengthens a sense of collective responsibility and collaboration among school staff, positively impacting overall school improvement. Delegating tasks based on expertise also reduces administrative burdens and creates opportunities for professional growth, which aligns with Nurudeen and Alhassan (2022) argument that distributed leadership fosters both efficiency and capacity-building within educational organizations.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study reveals that distributed leadership in schools fosters a culture of collaboration, inclusivity, and shared responsibility, where teachers and headteachers actively engage in decision-making processes. This approach promotes mutual trust, teamwork, and open communication, empowering teachers to take ownership of school policies.

Participants perceive distributed leadership as an approach that emphasizes teacher empowerment and involvement through the delegation of responsibilities based on teachers' strengths and expertise. This practice prevents the concentration of power in the headteacher's hands, fosters a collaborative school culture, enhances teachers' morale and leadership skills, and promotes a sense of ownership and shared commitment to school objectives.

Additionally, distributed leadership is viewed as an effective strategy to alleviate headteacher burnout and reduce leadership overload by delegating tasks among staff members. While participants acknowledge the potential challenges of mismanaged delegation, such as confusion or power struggles, they emphasize that thoughtful implementation enhances school effectiveness, teacher morale, professional growth, and creates a more balanced and collaborative environment for teaching and learning.

IMPLICATIONS TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The findings contribute to the literature by reinforcing the role of distributed leadership in fostering collaboration, inclusivity, and shared responsibility in schools. They align with existing research that highlights teacher empowerment and shared decision-making as key factors in improving school effectiveness. Additionally, the study extends the discourse on leadership distribution by emphasizing its role in preventing teacher burnout and enhancing teacher morale. In practice, these insights suggest that schools should adopt structured delegation strategies, clear role definitions, and continuous professional development to maximize the benefits of distributed leadership while mitigating challenges such as role ambiguity and power struggles.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that distributed leadership is a vital approach to fostering collaboration, inclusivity, and shared responsibility within schools. It empowers teachers, enhances their morale, and builds their leadership capacity while alleviating the workload of headteachers. Distributed leadership creates a balanced and collaborative school environment that supports professional growth and school effectiveness by leveraging teachers' strengths and actively involving them in decision-making processes. Although challenges such as mismanaged delegation may arise, the study affirms that with thoughtful implementation, distributed leadership can significantly enhance mutual trust, teamwork, and commitment to school objectives, contributing to the overall improvement of educational outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the Ministry of Education, teacher training institutions, and Headteachers invest in continuous professional development programmes to equip teachers with the necessary leadership skills and competencies. These programmes should focus on empowering teachers to take on leadership roles and responsibilities across various aspects of school management, fostering a more dynamic and effective school environment. Moreover, headteachers should be encouraged to establish formal structures that promote collaborative decision-making. Regular staff meetings, committees, and working groups should be created by headteachers to provide all staff members with a platform to actively contribute to the school's direction and policies. This approach would ensure an inclusive leadership approach where teachers feel valued and engaged in shaping the school's future.

Headteachers should also delegate leadership roles and tasks according to teachers' strengths, areas of expertise, and interests. This delegation will help distribute responsibilities more effectively and promote a greater sense of ownership, leading to increased teacher engagement in school improvement initiatives. Furthermore, headteachers should receive adequate support in managing their leadership roles. Support mechanisms should include distributing leadership tasks effectively among staff, ensuring that teachers share the workload, and providing headteachers with the necessary resources and time to manage their responsibilities without burnout. Such support helps schools maintain a balanced leadership structure that fosters a collaborative and sustainable work environment, benefiting both staff and students.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings highlight the need for further research on the impact of distributed leadership on school performance, teacher retention, and student outcomes. Future studies should explore how contextual factors, such as school size and leadership styles, influence its effectiveness and identify strategies to address challenges like role ambiguity and power struggles.

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