



Research Article

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Exploring Distributed Leadership Practice in Nigerian Secondary Schools

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Abstract

A growing body of research on distributed leadership shows that it effectively improves school effectiveness in developed economies. However, due to centralized education systems, the full benefits of distributed school leadership have not been fully appropriated in developing economies. This study investigates the realities of distributed leadership practices as applicable in selected Nigerian secondary schools. Lensed with Distributed Leadership Theory, the study is located in the qualitative strand of the interpretivist paradigm. In a case study research design, a combination of purposeful and snowballing sampling techniques was adopted in selecting twelve participants comprising three school administrators and nine classroom teachers who participated in semi-structured interviews. The results show that distributed leadership is perceived and practised as delegation and distribution of roles by the superordinate to the subordinate in a manner inconsistent with the principles of distributed leadership theory. It was also revealed that teachers with no formal portfolio were assigned leadership responsibilities. Lastly, the findings showed that participants acknowledged the existence of the School Management Team in their school. Still, most are unaware of their roles in school leadership and how they impacted their jobs. Recommendations were made based on the findings.

Keywords: Distributed leadership, school leadership

1. Introduction

Historically, the Max Weber bureaucratic management principles had formed the basis of education systems and leadership worldwide. As good as it appears, its deficiencies have led to the quest for a more effective management model among school leadership scholars in the last three decades (Bush, 2018; Bush & Ng, 2019). Considering the challenges associated with a centralized education system, education leadership practice has assumed a decentralized fashion in developed economies since a couple of decades ago (Grant, 2017; Hickey et al., 2022).

Among the emerging school leadership model, transformational leadership and distributed leadership had informed leadership studies more than others (Bush, 2018). Though transformational

leadership is practicable in centralized and decentralized school and education systems, the practice of distributed leadership in a country with a centralized education system might pose challenges, if not impossible (Hickey et al., 2022). For instance, until recently, the Nova Scotia province in Canada, which has previously been practising a decentralized education and school system, decided to adopt a blend of a centralized education system and a decentralized school leadership via education reform tagged Ministerial Education Act Regulations 2018. The new act abolished the participation of key stakeholders such as school boards and regional educational leaders, thereby preventing them from participating in the decision-making on issues in schools where they have a stake (Williams & Young, 2022).

Noting the possible negative implications of this practice, Williams and Young (2022) argue that distributed leadership is apparent when various education stakeholders actively participate in educational processes. Also, in Malaysia, Bush et al. (2019) reported that the schools preferred the allocative dimension of distributed leadership to the bureaucratic model.

Nigeria predominantly practises a centralized bureaucratic educational system which implies bottom-up accountability and strict compliance with policy dictates. As a result, school administrators must ensure strict education policy implementation in their schools with little or no room for initiative (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). For instance, free education is proclaimed to be in effect in many states. Despite the fact that many schools are underfunded, school administrators are not permitted under any guise to levy the students to raise funds for basic school needs (Akinmoladun, 2021). In addition, the realities of the modern-day school system (such as increased student enrolment, technological influx coupled with an increased demand for accountability from various education authorities) have rendered a one-man school leadership model inappropriate. As an alternative, school administrators resorted to delegating and distributive leadership to relieve themselves of the increased workload. Gronn (2010) argues against this notion, noting that leaders should not misrepresent distributed leadership merely as a means of distributing duties to diminish an overburdened workload. This notion of leadership holds a semblance of Distributed Leadership but lacks its core principles.

2. Distributive Delegation Rather than Distributed School Leadership

The use of *school administration* and *management* constructs is prevalent in school leadership literature that emanates from Nigeria rather than the term *school leadership*. This could be associated with the notion that school leadership entails more administrative and management roles than leadership practices. A plethora of these studies typifies the school principal as a positional leader with administrative roles rather than a leader whose leadership practices can be distributed among teachers (both positional and non-positional) to harness their expertise to the advantage of the schools. Hence, the majority of these studies focus on areas such as the impact of principal personality traits on school effectiveness, gender and leadership, principal leadership style, and teacher job satisfaction, among others (Asuga et al., 2016; Hallinger & Kovačević, 2019; Bailey et al., 2021).

As earlier indicated, the complex nature of the school system has decoupled singular positional leadership to involve several subordinate teachers in leadership practices in schools (Mbonu & Azuji, 2021). Nevertheless, the assigned leadership roles are mere delegation of duties. In many cases, the preferred “anointed” servant leaders among teachers owe loyalty to the school administrator (Smylie & Eckert, 2017). Often, their loyalty strips them of the initiative and autonomy dimension of distributed leadership. By implication, the “preferred teacher leaders” often play according to the rule and decree of the “boss” and by extension, policy demands, thereby making the school miss out on the potential and expertise of the most qualified staff. This practice could result in low levels of commitment among teachers due to disloyalty and lack of trust among staff (Timperley, 2005). It is evident in a study that investigated the *relationship between school principals’ distributed leadership style and teachers’ organizational commitment in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria*,

which showed a low positive relationship between distributed leadership style and teachers' commitment.

Meanwhile, leader teachers such as Heads of Departments still hold and discharge their statutory duties. For instance, in a mixed-method study, Ibrahim and Ahmad (2019) found that school administrators in Nigeria were aware of and partly adopted distributed leadership principles to the degree they were comfortable with them. This implies that, though teachers are allowed and given the opportunity to lead, their leadership involvement is at the school principals' discretion. This situation could be attributed to school administrators' fear of losing power to subordinates (Tian et al., 2016). Distributed leadership practices in Nigerian schools, therefore, seem to be more of a distributive delegation of responsibilities rather than ideal distributed leadership practices.

3. Problem Statement

Education systems and school leadership have evolved from centralized to decentralised models in most advanced economies (Bush & Glover, 2014). Unfortunately, most developing economies, including Nigeria, still practise a centralized education system with pseudo-distributed school leadership. This has made the bottom-up and horizontal approach to school leadership a daunting task with its attendant negative impact on school effectiveness (Flessa et al., 2017; Bush & Ng, 2019). Notably, the centralization of school funding and the need to rely on the government for finance have hoodwinked school administrators from taking beneficial initiatives for their schools. Schools cannot be run effectively by policy dictates from the Ministry of Education (MoE); flexible access to funds by school administrators is germane for effective school administration. Secondly, studies show that teachers are aware of their professional challenges, which position school leaders cum TPD facilitators in vantage positions to proffer solutions to them via School-Based Teacher Professional Development (SBTPD) (Caena & Redecker, 2019). For instance, schools could take the initiative to organize School-Based Professional Development to cater for their instructional delivery deficiencies. Often, such initiatives are considered parallel to the centrally organized traditional Teacher Professional Development by the Ministry of Education. Unfortunately, such training does not meet teachers' professional needs (Bayar, 2014). Therefore, the crux of this study is to explore the perception of school administrators and teachers on the reality of distributed school leadership in a centralized education system, particularly in Nigeria (Bush & Ng, 2019).

4. Theoretical Framework

This study was underpinned by Distributed Leadership Theory (DLT). The use of Distributed Leadership in industries (though not defined as Distributed Leadership) dates to the mid-13th century (Oduro, 2004); while scholars acknowledged Gibbs (1954) as its progenitor in the mid-20th century (Gronn, 2000; Bolden, 2011). The movement remained unpopular until the early 21st century. DLT is relatively new in the education milieu but started gaining prominence among scholars in the early part of 21st century (Bush et al., 2018). The theory evolved as a build-up and improvement on Instructional Leadership Theory which was criticized for its principal and teaching-centric nature.

The Spillane (2006) perspective of DLT was adopted for this study. The rationale for adopting the Spillane perspective hinges on his pioneering and extensive studies on applying Distributed Leadership Theories in school systems (Ali & Yangaiya, 2015). Spillane defined distributed leadership as the collaborative, collective and coordinated distribution of leadership practices. The tenets of DLT, according to Spillane, hold that for general school effectiveness; leadership in schools should be decentralized and not be defined by formal roles, task assignment, positional authority, functions, structures and "heroism" attached to school heads. Instead, leadership should be viewed as "practice", an act that makes it possible for school administrators to harness and leverage on staff members' expertise for overall school improvement (Lambert, 2002; Harris, 2004; Spillane et al., 2004; Spillane, 2005; Bush & Glover, 2014).

The rationale for adopting DLT hinges on its principles that de-emphasize top-down bureaucratic school leadership models that emphasize principal heroic tendencies and accentuate positional authority to the detriment of school effectiveness. Appropriating the benefits of distributed school leadership remains elusive in the Nigerian school system due to its centralized education system with various attendant bureaucratic bottlenecks; hence lensing the study with DLT is appropriate.

5. Assumptions of Distributed Leadership Theory - Spillane 2006

According to Spillane, the theoretical underpinning of Distributed Leadership hinges on the elements of *leader(s)*, *situation* and *followers*. DLT focuses on leadership *practices* or *activities* as opposed to heroic leadership perspective that emphasizes leadership roles. Spillane argues that formal leaders had long been over-celebrated for organizational achievement. He further contends that no leader can single-handedly achieve organizational goals without the collective efforts of their subordinates. The tenets of DLT also hold that expertise and human resources capable of enhancing leadership practices are inherent among subordinates in every organization (including the school system). Hence, the formal leader(s) need to identify and leverage this to make leadership practice more effective. Spillane maintains that staff members should be accorded leadership positions according to their expertise and abilities to enhance the overall school leadership. This should be consistent with the action plan towards attaining school goals. In so doing, leadership practices begin to manifest through the interactions between leaders, followers and the prevailing situation. Going forward, we would like to unravel the concept of leader, followers and situation from the Spillane Distributed Leadership Theory perspective.

Leader: This assumption holds that leadership, should not be about the title, formal position or the leaders themselves, rather, the focus should be on the *activities* and *practices* involved in discharging their leadership responsibilities. This act is known as “Leadership Practice”. Spillane maintains that leadership finds expression in the practice or actions of a leader (Spillane, 2014). It is about how, when and why leaders carry out their micro-tasks, which are often performed through others via social interaction with other staff members and situations. This interaction requires people skills, otherwise known as **social capital**. According to Spillane et al. (2004, p.10), “our perspective on school-leadership practice focuses on leaders’ thinking and action in situ”. In other words, leadership is the aggregate of leadership practices or activities woven into the web of social interactions that transpire among leaders (not necessarily formal/positional leaders), followers, and their contextual situation while performing their tasks or functions (Harris, 2004). This implying that task performance either by the leaders or followers in a school system takes place through social interactions.

This assumption holds that leadership practices are spread over formal and informal leaders in organizations (including schools) in forms of **collaborative distribution**, **collective distribution**, and **coordinated distribution** (Spillane, 2006). **Collaborative distribution** entails two or more leaders working together in the same place and time to execute routines that culminate in the same goal. **Collective distribution** involves two or more leaders enacting leadership routines separately through independent tasks, routines, or roles. **Coordinated distribution happens** when leadership practices are in sequential order, where the role of the overall leader is a summation of the “*subordinate leaders*” and followers’ activities.

Situation: This assumption holds that:

“Situation is not external to leadership activity, but is one of its core constituting elements... situations offer particulars - e.g., tools of various kinds, organizational structures, and language - that are part and parcel of leadership practice, as these particulars vary, so too will the how of leadership practice” (Spillane et al., 2004, pp.20-21).

The above implies that the situation is a socio-cultural context in leadership practice. Every organization has a peculiar situation, such as *organizational structures/infrastructures, routine, artefacts, rules, procedures, ways of doing things and tools*, which enhance or hinder leadership practices (Spillane et al., 2004; Spillane, 2019). The school structures include routines such as graded-level meetings, teacher professional development, school assembly in the morning and afternoon, continuous assessment, teachers' lesson notes oversight functions, instructional supervision and staff meetings. Tools also include instructional materials, laboratories and so on. This tenet holds that *situation* shapes and is, in turn, shaped by leadership practices spread across leaders, followers and the situation itself over time. No two organizations are exactly the same, even if they both possess the same amount of resources (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). The leadership, management, structure and configuration would differ to a degree (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). Having said that, leadership distribution and practices must be contextualized according to the school situation to achieve optimum productivity.

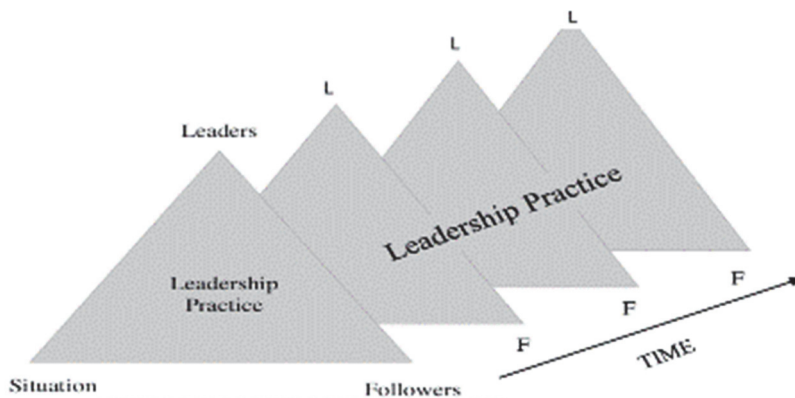


Figure 1: Constituting elements of leadership practice (Spillane, 2006)

Followers: This assumption holds that followers are essential to leadership practice (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). From a distributed leadership perspective, leadership practice is *spread over* a social interaction among leader(s) and followers. Against the *heroic* genre of leadership, where leadership connotes a unidirectional influence on followers, this assumption holds that followers can go a long way to influence leadership practices in an organization (Spillane et al., 2004). One of the core elements in distributed leadership continuum is *agency*. Followers are part of the agency in an organization. Agency implies members of an organization whose duties, actions, inactions, will, decisions, influence and dispositions or otherwise to the organization's modus operandi affect their job and that of others in the organization (Tian, 2016). Followers in organizations (as part of agency) can influence things. Leader and leadership do not exist in a vacuum – no leadership without followership. Given the elements of distributed leadership in the preceding discussion, distributed leadership practices in a school involve followers who enact leadership practices in various capacities (positional or non-positional) through multiple means, such as artefacts, lesson notes, reports and tests/continuous assessments, among others.

6. Benefits of Distributed Leadership in Schools: Empirical Evidence

A theory is said to be worthwhile after it has been subjected to empirical and theoretical scrutiny through many studies (Harris, 2009).

The validity and appropriateness of distributed leadership have been ascertained in both small

and large-scale studies. Studies by various researchers such as Harris (2004, 2009), Dinham (2009), Anthony et al. (2019) and Leithwood et al. (2020) tested distributed leadership theory principles against various school-related variables/factors. These variables/factors included teachers' commitment, teacher professional development, teacher effectiveness, school leadership, student learning outcome, teacher leadership, professional learning community, organizational change, school effectiveness and novice leaders' support, among others. For instance, distributed leadership was found to have positively enhanced school leadership and teacher professional development.

In a review of distributed leadership and teacher leadership literature, Harris (2004) found that continuous professional development is essential for teacher leaders. Her argument suggests that teacher leadership thrives most during professional development training, where the various leadership roles become distinct. She further stressed the importance of good interpersonal relations through which they can influence their colleagues to achieve high productivity levels. In another study, Anthony et al. (2019) investigated teacher leadership support towards novice teachers' induction. They established that teacher leaders play an essential role in orientating novice teachers about job expectations. Implying that teacher leadership as a typology of distributed leadership contributes towards inexperienced teachers' professional development. Distributed Leadership and Actions Learning (as a subset of teacher professional development) were found to be positively correlated by Dinham (2009) in a study with a scope that spanned 50 Quality Teaching Action Learning (QTAL) projects supported by New South Wales Department of Education (NSW DET), Australia. The findings show that "distributed leadership was both a major factor in the success and a significant outcome of teachers' action learning (Dinham, 2009). A successful action learning programme tends to inform a change in teacher instructional methods. This assertion corroborates the findings of Camburn and Han (2009), who investigated the relationship between distributed leadership and instructional change. Camburn and Han (2009, p.42) submitted that "a plausible case can be made that distributing leadership to teachers can support instructional change. Teachers tend to improve their instructional delivery skills where distributed leadership principles are operationalized, which could result from healthy social relations that foster trust, respect, collegial support, and commitment that give room for an impactful professional learning community.

Baiza (2011) investigated the relationship between distributed leadership and student achievement. His findings show that school principals created an enabling environment for teacher leadership where teachers are given opportunities to lead instruction and curriculum matters. His findings indicate that distributed leadership practices that take cognizance of social and situational contexts cum teachers' involvement culminate in improved student achievement.

Contrary to the affirmations of the studies earlier highlighted, opposing views argue that power and authority cannot be absolutely devolved in a school system. In a meta-analysis, Tian et al. (2016) assert that there is considerable evidence that power, as it is analyzed within the bureaucracy, remains; that is, those in formal authority roles retain power, particularly true for the principal, who has a great deal of control over what happens within the school (Tian et al., 2016). In other words, bureaucracy and hierarchy cannot be totally divorced from distributed leadership.

Similarly, Timperley (2005) agrees with the principles of distributed leadership and maintains that how teacher leaders emerge could challenge legitimacy, respect and cooperation among staff. He asserts that "teacher leaders may be particularly vulnerable to being openly disrespected and disregarded because they do not carry formal authority" (Timperley, 2005, p.412).

In summary, the importance and benefits of distributed school leadership outweigh the seemingly downside.

7. Methodology

This study was lensed through an interpretive paradigm using a qualitative approach. A multiple case study research design was implemented. Creswell (2003) indicates that a case study focuses on an individual, activity, process, or place. Three schools constituted multiple cases in this paper.

Given the fact that this study is situated in the qualitative research domain, a non-probability sampling technique was adopted, particularly a combination of purposive and snowballing sampling techniques to select three schools as research sites for the study, based on accessibility to participants, the proximity of the researcher to the selected schools and the researcher's convenience. Twelve participants, consisting of three school administrators and nine teachers, were selected. School administrators were chosen purposefully, while the selected classroom teacher participants were identified via snowballing.

7.1 Data Generation Instruments

This study adopted semi-structured interviews to generate data to explore participants' perspectives on the roles of school administrators in teachers' professional development. Al Balushi (2016, p.2319) describes semi-structured interviews as an effective tool that "helps the researcher gain in-depth data of participants' perspectives and make sense of their lived stories and experiences as told by them". A thematic analysis was utilized in this study to analyze the data collected. Since the instrument for data gathering is an audio recorded-semi-structured interview sequel to verbatim transcription, we condensed the data into a manageable size while retaining vital points without bias (Clarke & Braun, 2017). This study adopted the six stages of thematic analysis developed by Braun et al. (2016). The stages are: "familiarisation, coding, theme development, refinement and naming and writing up." (Braun et al., 2016, p.198). Cognizance was taken of relevant ethical practices; hence the selected schools and the participants were represented with pseudo names.

8. Findings and Discussion

8.1 Participants' Perception of School Leadership

During the interviews, leading and probing questions were asked to elicit the participants' perceptions of school leadership. Having made sense of the data set generated through the questions, two sub-themes emerged: *Leadership is Distributive* and *the School Management Team (SMT) roles in School Leadership*. Specifically, the main question we asked was, "What do you understand by school leadership?" This was followed by probing questions as dictated by the natural course of the discussion and the principles of open-ended questions and responses to the semi-structured interviews.

8.2 Leadership is Distributive

The Education system in Nigeria is bureaucratic, as indicated in the introduction. Similarly, in all schools, the hierarchy of authority also assumes the top-down model. At the top is the school principal, followed by the vice principal(s), then the Heads of Departments (HODs), the year tutor or the year head, followed by the teachers, the student representatives and the general student body. The duties and responsibilities of the academic officers are often spelt out in a manual or code of conduct with different titles and nomenclatures as deemed fit by each state. For instance, the *Ekiti State Teaching Service Manual* was the name given to the policy document that stipulates school staff duties and responsibilities. It is a policy statement highlighting the objectives of secondary education and the duties of all stakeholders within the school system.

Nevertheless, school leadership's hierarchical nomenclature empowers administrators to distribute/delegate leadership responsibilities among teachers. It means that, though leadership responsibilities were distributed, the motive is often devoid of the core futures of *spread-over* leadership practices that distributed leadership typifies. It is instead a means of relieving school administrators of their duties. Responses from respondents when asked the question, "what do you understand by school leadership" confirm this.

Looking at school leadership from the delegation point of view, Mr King, the Vice Principal of Kingdom School, said;

“No, you can’t do all things alone; you have to designate. You have people like the Head of Department, the Blockheads and others. You have to delegate to them, and from time to time, you have to monitor the work to give to them.”

In her response to the same question, Mrs Apat, the Vice-Principal of Church School, shared the same view. She remarked:

“In the school academic chart, we have the school principal as the leader, supported by the vice principal, the Head of Department for various subjects - science, humanities, languages and the Year Heads or Year Tutors who are in control of class teachers. They all constitute the school leadership.”

Two decades ago, one principal and one vice-principal could easily manage the entire population of students and teachers (Mbonu & Azuji, 2021). The situation in Up Hill School shows that it is practically impossible to lead a school these days single-handedly. Mr Braimo, Up Hill School Principal, supported the idea of supervising subordinates who have assigned leadership responsibilities to them. He remarked;

“No, it is practically impossible; how can you manage over 1,800 students all alone? I have about five vice principals. I manage and work with about 130 teachers. His (principal) responsibility is to oversee. His responsibility is to motivate the vice principal to work.”

This was corroborated by the teacher participants, as indicated in their responses. Mrs Grace’s remark further reinforces the opinion of the school principals by referring to them as the chief accountants of their schools:

“...no, it (school leadership) is not resident with the school principal alone, but the school principal is the chief accountant of the school. He has subordinates who assist in discharging leadership responsibilities.”

Mr Blessing and Mr Ade elaborated by citing examples of duties that the principals delegate to the subordinates.

According to Mr Blessing in Kingdom School,

“The school administrators cannot do it alone; they delegate duties. There are hierarchies. We have the vice principal and the head of departments. We have the vice principal administration and the vice principal academics. The vice principal administration is in charge of the school administration. He reports to the principal on issues that have to do with school administration, while the vice principal academics is in charge of supervision of teachers in the classroom, lesson note supervision and all academic-related matters within the school. They go as far as checking the student’s notes to ensure that teachers are teaching effectively.”

Mr Ade in Up Hill School responded and said:

“...for instance, the vice-principal administration does work hand-in-hand with the school principal, especially on how the teachers are performing in moving the school forward. While the vice principal academics is in charge of records. The vice principal student affairs also see to the welfare of the students. He works together with the school counsellor.”

As indicated above, teacher participants’ views on school leadership are in tandem with the views of the school administrators. The data suggest that school leadership is understood among the participants to mean the act of distributing/delegating leadership responsibilities by the overall superior to the subordinates in ways that get the job done.

This practice is associated with the complexities that characterize modern-day school systems and school leadership. It implies that a single leader can no longer shoulder leadership responsibilities in school, hence the need to distribute them over a string of sub-ordinates. Consistent with Spillane's (2006) principles of distributed leadership which centre on leader, followers and situation. However, the autonomy attached to leaders in the ideal distributed leadership scenario is somewhat lacking. Distributed leadership from Spillane's (2006) perspective posits that ideal distributed leadership practices are underscored by three components: collaborative, collective, and coordinated due to the interdependent nature of school activities. This was also corroborated by the submission of Bush (2018) that distributed leadership in Nigeria has a semblance of the ideal model of distributed leadership. Still, in reality, it is more like prescriptive distribution. The distributive nature of leadership could also be attributed to the traditional top-down nature of the Nigerian school system.

The results of one of the pioneering studies on the legitimacy of distributed leadership in the School of Education and Social Policy at Northwestern University conducted in 2004 by Spillane showed that "responsibility for leadership routines involves multiple leaders" (Spillane, 2005, p.145). According to him, the number of leaders involved is determined by routine and subject areas. He noted that the school principal and the vice-principal could handle monitoring and evaluation. At the same time, teacher professional development responsibilities involved the school principal, curricular specialists and Heads of Departments.

8.3 Involvement of Non-Positional Teachers in School Leadership

Recognizing expertise among teachers or staff members who are not positional leaders that could benefit the school could greatly enhance school leadership effectiveness. The results indicated that school administrators in the selected schools spread leadership to teachers who do not have formal portfolios as leaders.

The practice of *spreading* leadership responsibilities to non-formal leaders in schools also conforms with the principle of distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006). The principle states that leaders should leverage the expertise of subordinates to get things done rather than on their portfolios or formal positions. Remarks from vice principals of Church School and Kingdom School confirm that they often assigned leadership roles to non-positional teachers. In addition to assigning leadership roles to non-positional leaders, Mrs Apata noted that some teachers are trained before they are assigned leadership roles. The two principals agreed that their performances are satisfactory as far as their superiors are concerned. The questions that were asked to generate the data were "Are teachers without formal portfolios assigned leadership responsibilities in your school?" The following are excerpts from their responses.

According to Mrs Apata, one of the Vice-principals in Church School,

"...some teachers are given leadership roles besides the general teacher leadership roles. These teachers are trained in terms of what is expected of them before we assign leadership roles to them, and they have been performing very well.

In his response to the question, Mr King, the Vice-Principal (Academic) of Kingdom School, said,

"...here we are well satisfied with their performance because of the levels of the outcome because we do make regular inspections, so from there, we have record of their performances, and they have been performing very well."

The excerpts from the interviews with Mrs Agbabiaka and Mrs Kate are worthy of note. They note that those teachers are expected to submit reports of their activities to a senior positional leader such as the vice-principal. Cases of departments and units where non-positional leaders are assigned

leadership responsibilities were also mentioned.

In her response, Mrs Agbabiaka, Up Hill School, noted:

"...yes, they are; sometimes we'll make some teachers leaders of certain communities in school, such as the environmental committee have some of the senior teachers as the leader. Sometimes sports activities are led by teachers without formal portfolios. He is responsible to the vice principal administration overall."

Still referring to departments/units where non-formal leaders perform leadership roles, Mrs Kate, in Kingdom School, affirmed,

"We have also the timetable coordinator, who happens to be the head unit that coordinates school timetables to ensure that timetables do not clash. We have the Environmental Unit leader. We have the punctuality unit leader. And so on and so forth."

The results revealed that teachers without formal portfolios are assigned leadership responsibilities in schools by senior school administrators and that their performance is satisfactory. More so, they may have to be trained if the expected duties need a degree of expertise. In some instances, teachers who do not require training were assigned leadership responsibilities to leverage their resourcefulness and expertise in units/departments such as the sports council, sanitation committee, staff welfare committee and teacher professional development, among others. This practice aligns with the principle of Distributed Leadership which holds that leaders should leverage multiple leaders, including the expertise of non-formal leaders in an organization, to achieve set goals (Spillane, 2005).

The findings showed that school administrators are satisfied with the performances of teachers who are not formal leaders but are assigned leadership responsibilities implying that *spreading over* leadership positively impacts school effectiveness. This is similar to the findings of a systematic review of the literature on the effect of principals' distributed leadership practice on students' academic achievement by Daniel and Lei (2019). They concluded that distributed leadership becomes effective when school administrators encourage "shared vision, shared power, enable others to act, focus on capacity building and involve others in decision-making" (Daniel & Lei, 2019, p.195).

8.4 School Management Team (SMT) Participation in School Leadership

It is a common practice, backed by law that schools in Nigeria should have governing council, school board or school management team. These bodies come under different terminologies. Nonetheless, the name(s) given, their primary function is to ensure effective school leadership. The SMT is a body within the school that oversees the school affairs in its entirety. Provision for the SMT in the education policy statement gives credence to their existence and functions in schools in Nigeria. Beyond role delegation to subordinates, enacting the committee system, teamwork or board system in school leadership has proven to enhance leadership effectiveness. Hence, the need to understand participants' perceptions of the SMT roles in their respective schools.

Since the roles of the SMT include teacher supervision and professional development, we wanted to know participants' perceptions of the SMTs in schools. Probing questions to gain deeper insight into participants' understanding of team/committee systems as an integral part of school leadership reveals that they have a limited understanding of the formation and roles of the SMT.

The first question participants were asked was, "Does your school have a school management team?" As a sequel to their responses, we further probed by asking, "what is their (SMT) formation and functions?"

As we indicated earlier, they all acknowledged that the SMT exists in their schools, but they differed in their understanding of the formation and functions of the SMT. Some of the responses we got regarding the formation are as follows;

According to Mr Braimo, the school Principal at Up Hill School,

"Yes, we do. In the committee or management team, we have the principal, the vice principal and the Head of Departments."

Concurring with Mr Braimo, Mr King, Vice-Principal, Kingdom School, also remarked

"Yes, the formation; you have the principal, the vice principals, the head of department and the school board supervisor."

Additionally, Mrs Apata, a Vice-Principal in Church School, remarked

"Yes, as I indicated earlier, everyone in the school chart constitutes the school management team. That is, the school principal as the head of the committee, the vice principals the head of departments and Year Tutors."

Teacher participants' responses were also diverse regarding those who constitute the SMTs in their schools. They mentioned some school staff in addition to those mentioned by the school administrators. They included non-school staff and bodies that do not participate in the daily affairs of the school as members of the SMTs. Below is one response:

Mrs Adebare in Church school said;

"...yes, this involves the school principal, the PTA, the PTA committee, and the vice principal."

While responding to the same question, Mr Badmos, in Church School, mentioned individuals or entities who are not actively involved in daily school activities in addition to school-based educational practitioners. He had this to say:

"They include the school principal, the vice principals, a clergyman is involved because the school is a missionary school-who is the chairman of the Board representing the church. The representatives of the Parent-Teacher Association as well as student representatives. We have teachers' representatives, and Head of Departments are also represented."

So also, Mrs Agbabiaka Up Hill School remarked;

"...the school principal, the vice principals, the head of departments, and the blockhead or tear tutor, the registrar and the Counsellor."

Drawing from the disparity in participants' understanding of the formation of the SMT, the dataset suggests that their understanding differs regarding its functions. As a matter of fact, some teacher participants have no idea of the SMT roles in their schools which is precisely what the data revealed when we asked, "What are the functions of SMT in your school?" Some of the participants responded as follows:

Mr King, the Vice-Principal, of Kingdom School, asserted that the SMT functions include instructional supervision and counselling of teachers:

"Their function is to impart knowledge on the teachers... they would have to study the teachers and notice the areas of their weaknesses ...you will observe that, and during the course of counselling, you call the attention then and advise them based on your observation."

According to Mrs Kate in Kingdom School, in addition to supervision, they perform other roles. Her words,

"They see to the supervision of the school teachers during the teaching-learning process. That is called instructional supervision. They also ensure that the attendance registers of the teachers are updated."

They also ensure that the yellow book that contains the performance of the students is also updated.”

Besides instructional supervision, counselling and the upkeep of some school records, as indicated by Mr King and Mrs Kate, Mr Badmus and Mrs Agbabiaka focused on school funding and planning as part of the SMT functions. The following excerpts show this:

“...they ensure the smooth running of the school. They also see to how the school is being financed with various grants from the government and the World Bank.”

“They are the ones that plan the school activities for the year. They do meet before the school resumes every session to deliberate on the activities for the year.”

Unlike other participants, Mr Adebare had no idea about the functions of the SMT in his school. He said,

“...well, I don't have an idea of what their functions are because I am not part of the committee. They don't relay information that has to do with their functions to us except that information that concerns teachers and the students. Most times, we don't even know when such meetings are being held in the school.”

Mrs Apata, the Vice Principal of Church School, gave a detailed explanation of the roles of the SMT members in her school:

“The role of the principal is to control the school system, the teaching and the non-teaching. The vice principal had to do every of the duties of the school principal as assigned to them. This entails the monitoring of the teaching and non-teaching staff, supervision of the head of department and the blockheads, as well as the supervision of the class teachers. The head of the department also supervises and monitors the lesson notes of the teachers. They assigned subjects to the teachers and the number of periods they are to spend in the classroom. The blockheads or the Year tutors are to monitor the registers given to the class teachers to ensure that the teachers are punctual in the class and also ascertain the number of students that are present in the school that week.”

The comments of school administrators' regarding SMT formation are somewhat similar, but there are variations. They all agreed that the principal, vice-principals and HODs are members of the committee, but Mr King mentioned the school board supervisor as a member of the SMT. In contrast, Mrs Apata mentioned the year tutors as members of the SMT. The above data set revealed that participants' perceptions of the SMT formation and functions varied from one school to another and from one participant to another. Implying that teachers and schools, in general, are deprived of the contributions of the SMT in their schools because they are not adequately informed about the roles of the SMT in schools. Noting the importance of the school board cum the SMT in schools, Williams and Young (2022) argued that; Education stakeholders have a crucial role to play in creating new governance structures, processes, and supports that enable distributed leadership to thrive to the benefit of all stakeholders.

9. Conclusion

This paper aimed to examine the realities of distributed leadership practices among secondary school administrators in Nigeria. The quest for effective school leadership among scholars and education stakeholders has spanned over three decades, with transformational leadership and distributed leadership receiving the most attention. Distributed leadership has its roots in developed economies, meaning evidence of its legitimacy also emanated from western contexts. Non-western developing economies also imbibed the practice of distributed leadership over the years, notwithstanding that the cog in the wheel of its deployment remained a centralized education system. Several previous studies with mixed results investigated the possibility of adapting distributed school leadership in

developing economies. This paper contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the realities of distributed school leadership practices in non-western contexts where a centralized education system is prevalent. Evidence from the literature showed that bureaucratic practices that characterize a centralized education system are a barrier to the successful adoption of distributed leadership in non-western economies. The findings of this study show that school leadership is distributive and/or merely assumes a semblance of distributed leadership. Even after delegating leadership responsibilities to their subordinates, school administrators still hold on to power. The result further revealed that non-positional teachers with expertise are appointed to lead and that their performance is satisfactory, indicating that, if properly implemented, distributed leadership would greatly benefit schools. Finally, it was discovered that the schools had not appropriated the full benefits of the SMT. This research has implications for educational practitioners, policymakers and further studies. Our study, therefore, recommends that policies that engender decentralized school systems be formulated. Furthermore, school administrators should be re-oriented in the act and practices of distributed leadership geared towards school effectiveness; teachers and school administrators should be educated on policy provisions that established the SMT and their roles in school leadership; and further studies could examine how distributed leadership applies to higher institutions in Nigeria.

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