Implementation Challenges of Distributed Leadership Practices in Universities of Punjab, Pakistan

Iram Muzzamil

Irumzzzz7@gmail.com, University of Education, Lahore, Pakistan

Zunaira Muzzamil

zunairaaa93@gmail.com, Akhtar Saeed Medical and Dental College, Lahore, Pakistan

Zufishan Muzzamil

Zuffy311@gmail.com, Akhtar Saeed Medical and Dental College, Lahore, Pakistan

Zuraiz Muzzamil

zuraizmuzzamil2001@gmail.com, Georgian National University, Georgia

Abstract

Distributed leadership (DL) has gained significant popularity in the context of education within the past few decades and has influenced a variety of practices as well as theory. According to the distributed leadership model, multiple individuals with suitable talents share responsibilities rather than placing all of the weight on one person in an administrative position. This study's main goal was to investigate distributed leadership practices and associated challenges within the higher education institutions in Lahore, Pakistan. Sequential explanatory mixed-method research design was used by the researcher. It included a questionnaire with seven dimensions for leading practices distribution, covering the

entire university through simple random sampling. Semi-structured interviews using purposive sampling were then conducted with formal departmental leaders using various designation labels. The study's findings indicated that the structure of university is predominantly hierarchical and centralized so leadership has been distributed to limited extent within the departments. The results of the study showed that the university's organizational structure is mostly hierarchical and centralized, with a limited degree of leadership distribution across the departments. The implementation challenges that were brought up were the centralized structure, a lack of qualified faculty, an excessive workload, unclear duties, inappropriate delegation of responsibility, and a reluctance to lead due to feelings of professional jealously, and refraining from participating in or making decisions.

Keywords: Distributed leadership, Higher education, Shared responsibilities, Challenges, Dimensions, Centralized Structure, workload

Introduction

Higher education institutions are required to assess the services provided to students and investigate ways to improve measures for developing leadership and management practices focused on evolving competence for excellence (Rafiq, Khadim & Afzal, 2023). These tasks are attributed to a number of factors, including high student enrollment, limited funding, declining degree worth, lack of eligible and competent faculty, and increased competition between colleges and universities (Bolden et al., 2009; Carmen et al., 2021; Gronn, 2002; Kayode & Naicker, 2021; Khun, 2022;Timperley, 2005). Universities in Pakistan are autonomous entities which confront similar challenges (Rafiq, Kamran, & Afzal, 2024). The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has enforced requirements for curriculum revisions, degree alignment with international standards, highly qualified faculty, and quality assurance programs in both public and private universities offering high-quality education. In order to improve practical skills and improve the standard of education while providing students with more options and preferences, campuses need implement new leadership techniques and organizational structures.

One of the leadership philosophies that aspires to national and international recognition is distributed leadership. It also seeks to be expanded upon in contemporary educational discourse and provides a framework with theoretical underpinnings for analyzing leadership practices in various organizations (Spillane, 2006; Timperley, 2005). Leadership becomes effective when it focuses its attention and resources on working and developing as a competent team instead of on a single person. According to Spillane (Spillane, 2006), this changing paradigm has been termed as "distributed leadership," and it explains leadership exercise varies among leaders, supporters, and the situation or context of an education institution."

Distributed leadership is important for the process of teaching and learning in university settings as it creates an environment where all team members own the decisions of the organization and accountability is also distributed among all employees (Rafiq, Iqbal, & Afzal, 2024). It includes every department in the institutions as well as the lecturers, deans, associate and assistant professors, and department leaders. Its unique feature is the ability to foster collaboration between individuals or among a network of people who work together and whole team is responsible for accountability and decision making (Woods, et al., 2014).

Concept of Distributed leadership

Concepts related to distributed leadership can be divided into four classifications:

i. **Leadership as a distribution of practice**

The practice of leadership involves multiple leaders and is shaped by their interactions with the focus on directive actions and delegating decision-making authority beyond formal roles. (Spillane et al., 2004). In a teaching-learning context, it is expressed in collaboration, sharing of proficiency and understanding, initiating, responsibility, and accountability with the various actors working together for a common person.

ii. **Roles and responsibilities**

Distributed formal leadership clarify the roles and responsibilities of the faculty by delivering supervision and direction, recognize skills, and motivate faculty to share knowledge, make choices, and display inventiveness, as these are essential in making stronger involvement with power. Intentionally, they reshaped configurations and widely spread responsibilities with increasing employee involvement and self-

determination. Each institution has a distinct process for reformation, role shifting, and responsibility adjustments that are clearly defined and allocated in accordance with the organizational capabilities and requirements.

iii. **Structure of organization**

An organization's organizational structure influences its activities and provides the framework for its regular operating procedures and schedules. The impression designates the advanced ideal of distributed leadership: an environment of openness, knowledge, mutual respect, high values, shared beliefs, and a shared vision with the practice of collaboration and freedom in decision-making.

iv. **Autonomy is essential**

Adequate authority and autonomy are necessary for distributed leadership practices so that institutional leaders can adopt their particular programs. The leaders have the authority to make decisions that have the potential to significantly impact the department and learner performance. These decisions may include those that support educator collaboration, build a network, monitor staff, establish a planned direction for achieving the goals with staff engagement, and make recruitment an important part of Dl practice.

According to previous studies, it is clear that an organization's processes, structures, values, stakeholders, and goal accomplishments are associated with effective leadership.

Mitiku (2014) studied on the principals' distributed leadership practice in secondary schools of Southwest Shoazone and demonstrated how a lack of cooperation, a bad rapport between department heads, lecturers, and university deans, and a lack of collaboration had an adverse effect on the teaching-learning environment. The increased workload, lack of responsibility sharing, and centralization were primary barriers controlling the distributed leadership activities at University (Afzal & Rafiq, 2022).

Manaze, M. (2019), assessed the practices and difficulties of distributed leadership with a primary focus on the idea, behaviors, and difficulties of distributed leadership. In this case study, eight teachers, four administrators, and four members of the PTA were employed as a sample employing comprehensive and purposeful sampling approaches for the purposes of this study. The rehearses of distribution of leaders were hindered due to a lack of staff members' sense of identity, accountability, lack of confidence,

no trust on one other, and absence of mutual confidence. To adopt distributed leadership in campuses, it is necessary to create a welcoming atmosphere where staff members feel a sense of responsibility, accountability, assurance, and respect.

Conceptual Model of the Study

Seven key components were selected based on literature review of Tead's (1935) of distributed leadership for further investigation in this study and these were:

Organizational structure

A structure of an organization defines coordination of tasks, monitoring, and other actions towards the accomplishment of objectives. A formal university structure offers everyone the opportunity of participating in the decision-making process. There is agreement on leadership roles, and informal leadership and professional development are also encouraged among employees.

Strategic vision

A strategic vision outlines the organization's attainable future state. This statement helps staff members understand the organization's direction. One of the university's objectives is to create a learning environment and a shared vision with common values for everyone, where ownership of both staff and students is valued.

Values and beliefs

Organizational values and beliefs are the core morals or tenets that the organization always follow these. University culture is characterized by common respect, trust, and high standards. Such universities view errors as opportunities for learning rather than grounds for penalty.

Collaboration and Cooperation

Cooperation is the process of a group of people working or acting together for common, mutual, or potential benefit rather than working in competition for personal gains while collaboration is the process by which two or more people, units, or organizations work together to complete a task to achieve a goal. It is normal for university employees to collaborate in order to enhance student performance, achieve shared objectives, and resolve issues with exchanging knowledge with one another (Rafiq, Afzal & Kamran, 2022).

Decision making

It is the process of coming to a conclusion by determining options, obtaining data, and weighing potential solutions. Professionals at universities are free to choose how they want their work to be organized and what goes on within. Everyone participates in the decision-making process regarding the goals and

objectives of the campus, and there is confidence in experts to make well-informed decisions (Afzal, Rafiq & Kanwal, 2023).

Responsibility and accountability

Responsibility is the duty assigned by leadership to complete the task at hand or perform in accordance with the regulations. On the other hand, accountability means accepting answerability for the outcome of the task or process. University professionals are held accountable and given a sense of responsibility for their work. In order to help one another and enhance the institution with the opinions of specialists, regardless of their formal status, it is corporate culture in universities to give feedback to one another (Rafiq, Afzal & Kamran, 2022).

Initiative

Initiative is the capacity to assess and take action on one's own; in an educational setting, for example, it's a fresh challenge to reach an objective or find a solution to a difficult problem. It is based on their degree of expertise, which encourages everyone to offer their own insights and take the initiative (Rafiq, Kamran & Afzal, 2023).

Research Objectives

1. To explore the challenges or barriers that impact on the application of distributed leadership practices of chair personnel of universities.
2. To find out the ways or recommendation to overcome the effect of challenges on successful implementation process of distributed practices in the university.

Research Design

A study employing the sequential explanatory mixed method begins with a quantitative component and then examines a subsequent qualitative component of the same research. Consequently, mixed methods researchers can interpret how the qualitative outcomes benefit from providing details of the quantitative findings by employing the explanatory sequential design.

Population and Sample

In first quantitative phase, population comprised on public and private universities in Lahore Division and amongst them 125 formal positioned faculty consisted of Directors, Deans, Professors (Assistant & A and Associates) Lecturers from the faculty of the division or department of the university with simple random sampling. The sustainability and availability of administrative staff was a challenging assignment to ensure the

effectiveness of the accurate information as a primary source. Purposive sampling were then conducted with ten formal departmental leaders using various designation labels in four universities among them two were private and two were public.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

It would be better for the researcher to look at the actual practices of faculty members, rather than concentrating on the tasks assigned to individual employees, in order to ascertain whether or not distributed leadership having challenges. It needed to give particular consideration to how the seven dimensions of leadership practices were reflected in the department's faculty schedules and assignments.

Table 1: Challenges of Distributed Leadership Practices

Dimensions of Distributed leadership	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Organizational Structure	125	30.6	7.1
Vision	125	24.9	5.9
Values & beliefs	125	19.8	4.8
Collaboration & cooperation	125	28.6	6.5
Decision making	125	22.3	5.3
Responsibility & accountability	125	16.1	4.0
Initiative	125	20.0	4.7

From Table 1, the challenges of practicing distributed leadership in their institution observed over and done with overall dimensions. The dissemination of regular leading rehearses in the first dimension found with highest mean M=30.6 & SD=7.1 amongst all dimensions but considered starting in average range mentioned for level. Besides this second=24.9 & SD=5.9 ranged in low, third dimension M=19.8 & SD=4.8 also lied in low, fourth dimension M=28.6 & SD=6.5 represented low, fifth dimension M=22.3 & SD=5.3 indicated low, sixth dimension M=16.1 & SD=4.05 found very low in level and seventh dimension M=20.0 & SD=4.7 represented low level which indicated that designated leaders in the universities has prevalence of but in less clarity and with various obstacles. The responsibility& accountability and values & beliefs dimension assessed lowest in overall distribution of leading rehearses

evaluated leading the difficulties in clarification of roles. The standard deviation range from 4.0 to 7.9 showed that faculty members' practices and challenges regarding all the dimensions of distributed leadership varied, even mean of 16.0 to 35.8 exhibited the distribution of leadership rehearses prevailed in very low level the universities which indicates the extent of difficulties. Only 1st domain that was organizational structure ranked in average level and other remaining six dimensions were ranking in low level represented that the infrequent rehearsals or in another words having difficulties in distribution of leaders practices in the division.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The interviewees recognized challenge of centralization, hierarchy, formality, and complexity as elements of system design that guarantee good inter-unit coordination and organization interactions. One explained:

> *"In fact, how well the structure of organization is but if the culture is not matched, all the efforts are useless. In our context, the people are rigid minded, they do not believed in delegating powers but instead they believed in holding the powers into their hands. Centralization and top down hierarchal structure are very common in outlining our organizational structure".*

The analysis made it clear that, leaders were considered to be providing their staff members' additional power, but only in a restricted or constrained sense. They exhibited this by being reluctant to allow personnel to make decisions outside the boundaries of their jobs or by only empowering those who report to them. One participant explained it as:

> *"We are observing issues of dishonesty and exploitation in given that autonomy to campus because we all know the check and balance system in our national context. In my opinion, division should be decentralized for all their educational systems that can needed to act autonomously without the approval from the center."*

According to some interviewees, high management did a poor job of communicating the organization's vision and mission. One of them sharing his experience as:

> *"I am aware of the significance of the institution's vision and mission, but in none of the previous events, was top management in communication about it. Rather than that, they provide a statement that is put in the university brochure as an example whenever a relevant topic is brought up".*

The study's findings on cooperating and collaborating indicated their existence, but at a mediocre level that required development by knowledgeable collaborators to understand the importance of preserving a shared knowledge base with a range of expertise in accomplishing the objectives of the university. This viewed by one interviewee as:

> "Collaboration is different from cooperation, which is forming teams or groups of skilled persons for the achieving the tasks within the time period. In our university undertakings, colleagues tend to be more likely collaboration as compare to cooperation, as they were lack of time and expertise for the process of exchanging information requires in a progression of tasks to be completed all together."

Staff were limited to meeting attendance; they were not permitted to take part in important institutional decision-making. Well, dispersed leadership is demonstrated by the fact that all faculty members are capable of making decisions as emerging leaders, expressing themselves freely, and taking on roles based on their experience or area of expertise. The majority of respondents expressed dissatisfaction over not being included in departmental decision-making and they stated this:

> "It is not a concern of my job to participate in faculty decision making but sometimes there is a situation or requirement arise to decide on that spot on time. I attended my division meetings, and if my opinion is invited, I will give it. I answer all of the examiners' questions. But it happened very little, most of all of the meetings are arranged for describing the agenda not for participation."

The implementation of distributing exercise of leaders is often troubled by a key challenge that are the differences in the standards and beliefs of faculty members that are not subject to criticism or dispute. One participant described it up this way:

> "I worked with high ranking leaders in faculty and staff, and there were often disagreements about their philosophies and beliefs that could lead to a rejection of collaboration." It made it impossible to finish the assignments or projects with teamwork in the allotted time. I believe that because everyone has the freedom to think as they like and has a unique way of thinking, we should respect one another's views and opinions".

The majority of the organization's departments had to deal with the challenge of unclear roles and responsibilities for university personnel. They did not

perform well and were held accountable for not achieving the desired results since they were unaware of their roles. This difficulty was described by one participant as:

> *"Employees in departments often experienced difficulties because they believed others were interfering with their designated duties when there were unclear roles for each member. Furthermore, a lack of clarity in responsibilities often led to duplication of effort or incomplete tasks".*

Themes related to the question "What are the recommendations or fixes for effectively handling these challenges, guaranteeing a more thorough approach to it? Regarding this query, the data from the interviewees identified some theme for overcoming barriers to widespread leadership, such as the following:

The majority of interviewees stated that professional development is well-funded and planned for due to its significance in delivering high-quality, ongoing progress.

> *"In my opinion, one of the way out for spreading the idea of Dl and its practices smoothly that every senior leader must concentrate on preparing a professional development proposal through finding needs, zones for upgrading, and philosophies that merit more examination, leadership development with revising the plan annually; and facilitating educators' requirements of professional development and providing provision for this process".*

Formal leader can provide the team with the skills to make critical reflection a meaningful process by providing tangible and practical support. Majority of the partakers in interview were in favor of reflected activities and participation.

> *"I am as a chairperson, attempting to schedule meetings or conversations for reflective practice on a regular basis. These meetings or discussions should be held separately from staff meetings, which are used to discuss operational issues, and the focus should be on how often there are opportunities for reflection".*

One way to get beyond the obstacle is to foster strong relationships among members, which is closely related to the idea of trust. The development of strong interpersonal trust is one of the most crucial elements of successful university reform and improvement.

> *"Yes, we are considering the entire staff, not just the teaching staff. We're looking into, and we're trying to break down the walls that separate the faculty members with making the environment of trust*

upon each other in the department from upper to lower ranks. What's more, I think there are, hindrances in the department but I believe that they are unnecessary and that eliminating them would improve everyone's working environment".

Conclusion

It is determined that D.L. is a complicated phenomenon with an auspicious effect on academic accomplishment in addition to the fact that formal leaders play a very complex role that is crucial for sharing roles, vision, and power with followers and including them in decision-making processes through influencing and interaction processes in the Pakistani context of education. It concluded that distributed learning (D.L.) is a complex phenomenon with a positive impact on academic achievement and this hierarchical position, everyone in the staff is required to carry on communication in open lines, allocate tasks with duties clearly, and concentrate to the objectives coordinated with the vision while making decisions for developing effective distribution of leader's rehearsals (Rafiq, Kamran & Zaki, 2022).

Recommendation

To ensure that there is a shared understanding of why leadership needs to be spread, what will be distributed, and how it will be distributed, it appears to be essential to define exactly what is meant by the phrase distributed leadership. The study recommends formal appointed executives to avoid delegating tasks to incompetent or ineffective persons. After in-depth interviews, they ought to give certain prospective leaders chances to advance their careers and assume leadership roles. Professional development programs in educational leadership and management should be organized by top leadership. To get better outcomes, a continuous and frequent performance evaluation may also be carried out. It may be possible to compare distributed leadership techniques at bigger university populations through further research.

References

Afzal, A., & Rafiq, S. (2022). Impact of Teachers' Instructional Techniques on Students' Involvement in Class: A Case Study. *UMT Education Review, 5*(2), 184-204.

Afzal, A., Rafiq, S., & Kanwal, A. (2023). Relationship Between Teacher and Student and its Effect on Students' Academic Achievement. *Gomal University Journal of Research, 39*(1), 55-68.

Bolden, R. (2011). Distributed leadership in organizations: A review of theory and research. International journal of management reviews, 13(3), 251-269.

Bolden, R., Petrov, G., & Gosling, J. (2009). Distributed leadership in higher education: Rhetoric and reality. Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 37(2), 257-277.

Carmen, I. V., Yavuz, K. S., Constantin, G. A., & Ionuț, V. G. (2021). Distributed leadership in education, contemporary issues in educational leadership. leadership, 10(1).

Gronn, P. (2002). Distributed leadership as a unit of analysis. The leadership quarterly, 13(4), 423-451.

Kayode, D. J., & Naicker, S. R. (2021). Distributed Leadership and Administrative Processes as Determinants of Public Universities' Effectiveness. Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences, 16(5), 2070-2090.

Khun, J. L. (2022). Distributed Leadership in West Virginia Higher Education.

Manaze, M. (2019). Practice and challenges of distributed leadership at public secondary schools of dessie city administration. Asian Journal of Education and E-Learning, 7(4).

Mitiku, H. (2014). Principals' distributed leadership practice in secondary schools of South west shoa Zone. Unpublished MA thesis, AAU.

Rafiq, S., Afzal, A., & Kamran, F. (2022). Exploring the Problems in Teacher Evaluation Process and its Perceived Impact on Teacher Performance. Gomal University Journal of Research, 38(4), 482-500.

Rafiq, S., Afzal, A., & Kamran, F. (2022). Impact of School Environment on Students' Academic Achievements at the University Level. VFAST Transactions on Education and Social Sciences 10(4), 19-30.

Rafiq, S., Iqbal, S., & Afzal, A. (2024). The Impact of Digital Tools and Online Learning Platforms on Higher Education Learning Outcomes. Al-Mahdi Research Journal (MRJ), 5(4), 359-369.

Rafiq, S., Kamran, F., & Afzal, A. (2023). Enhancing Professional Motivation in the Early Childhood Teacher Education: Unraveling Issues and Challenges. Journal of Social Sciences Development, 2(1), 26-43.

Rafiq, S., Kamran, F., & Afzal, A. (2024). Investigating the Benefits and Challenges of Interdisciplinary Education in Higher Education Settings. Journal of Social Research Development, 5(1), 87-100.

Rafiq, S., Kamran, F., & Zaki, K. A. (2022). A Study to Analyze Need to Initiate Sex Education Programs in Schools. *Journal of Social Sciences Development,1*(2), 129-147.

Rafiq, S., Khadim, M., & Afzal, A. (2023). The Assessment and Impact of 360-Degree Leadership Performance Appraisal at University Level. *Journal of Social Sciences Development, 2*(2), 189-203.

Spillane, J. P., (2006). Distributed Leadership. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. B. (2004). Towards a theory of leadership practice: A distributed perspective. Journal of curriculum studies, 36(1), 3-34.

Timperley, H. S. (2005). Distributed leadership: Developing theory from practice. Journal of curriculum studies, 37(4), 395-420.

Woods, P. A., Bennett, N., Harvey, J. A., & Wise, C. (2004). Variabilities and dualities in distributed leadership: Findings from a systematic literature review. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 32*(4), 439-457.