Distributed Leadership Practices by principals working in Type 2 and Type 3 schools in the Colombo District, Sri Lanka

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Abstract: **This study examined on the distributed leadership practices by principals working in type 2 and type 3 schools in Colombo District, Sri Lanka. The objectives of this study were to identify how principals and teachers understand the concept of distributed leadership; how distributed leadership practices enhance teaching and learning; and what challenges principals and teachers face when devolving and practicing leadership responsibilities in their schools. Using random sampling method altogether 08 schools, 08 principals, 08 sectional heads and 150 teachers were selected for the study. Both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to gather necessary data and information. The findings revealed that all the principals in the type 2 and type 3 schools fully understood the concept of distributed leadership. However, a significant number of teachers in both types schools have not understood the concept of distributed leadership. The study further revealed that the distributed leadership practices in both types schools did not contribute to enhance the quality of instruction to a satisfactory level. It was further revealed from this study that a significant number of teachers and principals in both types schools face number of challenges when practicing distributed leadership roles due to the major challenge of retention of experienced teachers as they trying to get transfers to the so called 1AB schools, insufficient resources and unsatisfactory collaborative working culture.**

Keywords: **Leadership, Distributed Leadership, Colombo District, Type 2 Schools, Type 3 Schools**

I. INTRODUCTION

Distributed leadership has been identified as one of the most important leadership practices in terms of enhancing quality of teaching and learning since it involves many members of the school. The main purpose of distributed leadership is to create secondary level leaders within the school and thus give more opportunities for teachers to improve their leadership skills. The Distributed form of leadership has been identified as one of the most important factors in terms of development of teacher leaders within the school. The term distributed leadership was used by Gibb (1954) for the first time. According to Gibb leadership should be regarded as shared functions among individuals in organizations but not as the authority of the individual. However, the idea of distributed leadership was widely theorized by Gronn (2000). Two common explanations have been found in the literature on distributed leadership by Spillane and Gronn. Distributed leadership has a range of interpretations in the modern education leadership dialogue.

Spillane and Duignan (2001), recognized as two prominent researchers who worked much on distributed leadership. They observed distributed leadership as being central to the teaching and learning process in the school. Also they agree that leadership involves all members of the school community, not just the principal and deputy principal. Spillane et al., (2004) argues that leadership occurs in a variety of ways all over the school. Also leadership is centered in the interaction between people. According to Spillane leadership roles are played by various individuals. The leadership roles played by various individuals can be formal or informal. Hence, all individuals take responsibility for leading and managing the school. Therefore, his perspective of distributed leadership is neither a top-down nor a bottom-up approach. However, Spillane identifies that leadership roles are played by different people at different times. Also leadership is not limited to those who are at the top of the organizational hierarchy or to those who have been assigned formal leadership tasks. According to Spillane et al., (2007) in this context leadership practice is a collective activity

Gronn (2002) believes that the notion of distributed leadership presents a dynamic understanding of leadership. Also he identified distribution of organizational activities and tasks as a new form of the division of labor in organizations. Similar to this view Sergiovanni et al; (1999) recognized distributed leadership as a kind of social capital. He mentioned that distributed leadership encourages the notion of multiple leadership and it supports organizations to identify and address its shortcomings effectively. Hence, distributed leadership has been recognized as one of the most important leadership practice that can be used in developing teacher leaders within the school. They further emphasized that there is a positive relationship between distributed leadership practices and quality of instructional process.

A similar view is presented by Harris et al., (2007) on the concept of distributed leadership. She highlighted the importance of team work, collaborative work practices and the trust. Leithwood et al (2008) see distributed leadership as one of the seven strong claims of successful school leadership. Accordingly, it is clear that the researchers identify distributed leadership as one of the most important leadership styles which can be used to improve quality of teaching and learning and student educational outcome through the motivation of team work and collaborative work culture in schools. Principals as effective leaders of the twenty first centuries schools need to develop teacher leaders within the school as school leadership has become a complex concept. In this connection school principals can use distributed leadership practices as an effective leadership style in terms of enhancing leadership skills of teachers and thereby quality of teaching learning and student outcome. Therefore, this study focused on investigating the distributed leadership practices by school principals working in Type 2 and Type 3 Schools in Colombo District Sri Lanka. This study looks at the distributed leadership practices by school principals on the pedagogical practices and leadership development of teachers in Type 2 and Type 3 schools.

Statement of the Problem

It is clear that the main purpose of distributed leadership is to provide opportunities for teachers to develop their leadership skills, team work and collaborative work practices which directly benefit students' high level of educational performance. Also it has been found that there is a positive relationship between distributed leadership practices and quality of instructional process in schools. According to Harris et al., (2007) there is a high possibility to achieve school improvement, if teachers and their colleagues are confident about their own capacity and the schools' capacity to encourage professional development. Rutherford (2002) investigated the impact of collaborative work environments on student educational achievement. Based on the study findings Rutherford concluded that a collaborative working environment enhances quality of teaching learning and students' educational achievements. The study finding further revealed that the successful head-teachers practice positive dynamic and flexible leadership styles and encourage a friendly working environment. Accordingly, it is clear from the evidence that team work and collaborative work practices are at the centre of school improvement and development. The Report of the National Education Commission (NEC 2003) in Sri Lanka also states the importance of team work and collaborative work practices among teachers in the school sector highlighting that collaborative work practices help improve teaching learning and also professional development of teachers. It has further emphasized that **"collaborative work practices are essential to ensure effective performance in the school organization as well as a multifaceted quality of**

life". All these findings in relation to collaborative work practices and team work of school teachers provide a relevant and valuable indication for the current study as it focuses on how principals working in Type 2 and Type 3 schools in Colombo District distribute leadership responsibilities among staff and its impact on teaching learning and student educational achievement.

Hence, principals as school leaders should have a desire to delegate leadership responsibilities among the staff members and enhance the leadership skills of teachers which in turn benefit for quality of instruction and enhance student educational achievement. However, there is a growing concern about the little attention to distributes leadership practices by principals working in different categories of schools in Sri Lanka. From the resent pass the poor academic performance of students and decline of the quality of education has been a subject of concern to stakeholders of education in Sri Lanka. To date, research into this field in the country has focused more on the process of other types of school leadership practices rather than on how the principals engage in distributed leadership practices as school leaders in the school. Therefore, this study focused on investigating the distributed leadership practices of principals' working in Type 2 and Type 3 schools in Colombo District Sri Lanka.

Purpose and objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine how principals engage in distributed leadership practices in Type 2 and Type 3 schools in Colombo District Sri Lanka. Therefore, the specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify how principals and teachers of Type 2 and Type 3 schools understand the concept of distributed leadership
2. Find out how distributed leadership practices enhance quality of instructional process and student educational achievement in Type 2 and Type 3 schools
3. Identify what challenges principals and teachers of Type 2 and Type 3 schools face when devolving and practicing leadership responsibilities

Research Questions

The following research questions are raised to direct this study.

1. How principals and teachers of Type 2 and Type 3 schools understand the concept of distributed leadership?
2. How distributed leadership practices enhance quality of instructional process and student educational achievement?
3. What challenges principals and teachers of Type 2 and Type 3 schools face when devolving and practicing leadership responsibilities?

II. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed methodology. The two phases of the study, a quantitative phase, followed by a qualitative phase was included in the research design. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) the combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches in a single study provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone can provide. As explained by Tashakkori & Teddlie, (1998) combining quantitative and qualitative approaches within different stages of the research process is possible. Accordingly, two phases of the study, a quantitative phase, followed by a qualitative phase was included in to the research design. The following diagram shows the research design of the current study.
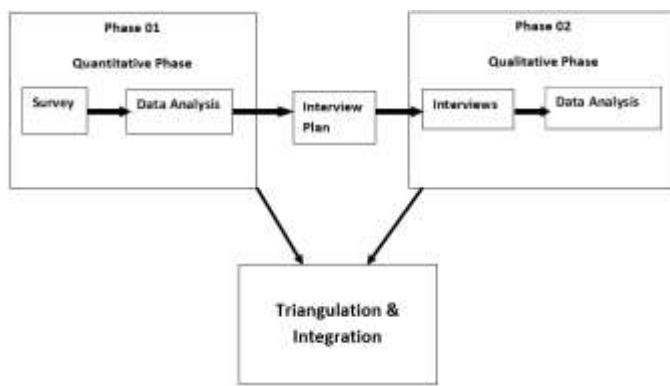

Figure: 1. Mixed Method Research Design approach – Adopted from Creswell 2012

Study Sample

The following table shows the total number of study sample of the current study

Table No. 1: Study Sample

School Type	School Sample	Principal Sample	Teacher Sample	Sample of Sectional Heads
Type 2	04	04	80	04
Type 3	04	04	70	04
Total	**08**	**08**	**150**	**08**

Accordingly, the study sample included 150 teachers randomly selected from 08 governments Type 3 and Type 2 schools, 08 school principals, and 08 sectional heads.

Data Collection Instruments

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, both questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were used to collect the necessary data and information. Accordingly, the instruments used for data collection were researchers-developed questionnaire for teachers and semi structured interview schedule for principals, selected teachers and

sectional heads. The items selected for the questionnaire and interview in the current study were focused on main elements related to distributed leadership practices. The teacher questionnaire had two sections. Section A contained items regarding the respondent's profile while section B had two sub-sections designed to identify principals' distributed leadership practices. The teacher questionnaire consisted of 15 items which covers the areas of principals' distributed leadership practices as perceived by the teachers. A four-point scale with a response mode of V = very satisfied (4 points), S = satisfied (3 points), N= neutral (2 points) and NS = not satisfied (1 point) was used to measure the item responses. The respondents to teacher questionnaire were requested to indicate by ticking ($\sqrt{}$) in the appropriate boxes, the response applicable to the items. In addition to the questionnaire survey with teachers' interview is also used in order to collect qualitative data. Semi-structured interview was selected as a data collection technique to obtain data and information from individual principals, sectional heads and teachers about principals distributed leadership practices and its impact on teaching and learning in Type 2 and Type 3 schools in Sri Lanka. Hence semi structured interview was held with principals, teachers and sectional heads. Altogether 08 questions were included into each interview schedule of principals, sectional heads and teachers.

The instruments were pilot tested in order to make sure about the validity and reliability. Four research assistants were trained in administering the questionnaire. The consent of the principals of selected 08 schools of Type 2 and Type 3 was given and questionnaire was administered to the teachers in the schools. The principals, teachers and sectional heads were interviewed by the researcher herself. Respondents were properly guided to avoid misunderstanding of the purpose of the study. The exercise was completed within a month.

Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyze the main data. In the current study frequency distributions were shown as tables. Distributions are displayed using percentages of teachers' responses in Type 2 and Type 3 of 08 schools. In addition, a chi-square (X^2) statistics have also been calculated where appropriate to investigate whether there is a significant difference among the responses of different categories of the schools. In particular, the significant difference was considered between actual value and expected value (expected value is the value obtained based on contingency table according to the sample of 150 teachers) given by teachers for 6 distributed leadership practices. Therefore, six Chi-Square tests have been conducted to find out whether there is a significant difference in the respond rates. The results are evaluated based on "P" values. For example, if the P value is less than 5% it indicates that there is a significant difference between actual value and

expected value. The Chi value was calculated using the following equation.

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$$

X^2 = Chi Value
O = Observed Value
E = Expected Value

Accordingly, the quantitative aspects of the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics. Kvale et, al. (1996) identified thematic analysis as a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the data that have been collected. Accordingly, interview data were analyzed thematically.

III. FINDINGS

Findings of the study are presented in Tables 2-3. In this section, data presentation, analysis interpretations and discussion of findings are presented. In terms of responses obtained to the question "What do you mean by distributed leadership practices"? all the principals of both types of schools responded that distributed leadership is sharing leadership responsibilities among the staff members with a view to improve educational achievement of students. In terms of the responses obtained to the question "To what extent are you satisfied about principals distributed leadership practices" irrespective of school type more than 60% of teachers from the entire sample responded 'Not Satisfied'. Compared to this, the percentages of teachers who had responded 'Satisfied' were less amounting 15%. Further a chi-square calculation is also indicated that there was no significant difference between school type and principals distributed leadership practices as the P value is more than 5%. This situation has been shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Teacher Response to the Statement of to what extent are you satisfied about principals distributed leadership practices

School Type	Teacher Responses								Total	
	Very Satisfied		Satisfied		Neutral		Not Satisfied		No	%
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		
Type 2	08	10.00	11	13.75	10	12.50	51	63.75	80	100.00
Type 3	05	7.14	09	12.85	15	21.42	41	58.57	70	100.00
Total	13	8.66	20	**13.33**	25	16.66	92	**61.33**	150	100.00

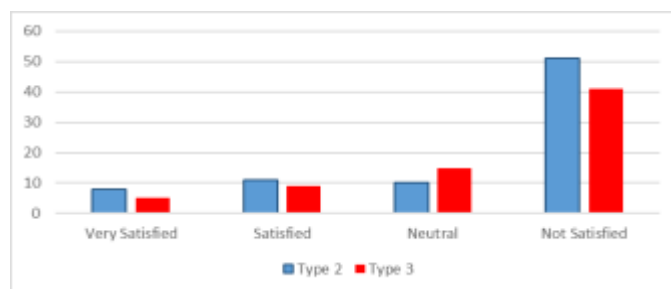This position has been further depicted in figure 2 below

Figure 2. Teacher Response to the Statement of to what extent are you satisfied about principals distributed leadership practices

This was supported by interviews with sectional heads of Type 2 and Type 3 schools. Sectional heads' interview in 08 schools of Type 2 and Type 3 also gave strong evidence that principals do not make effort to implement distributed leadership practices in their schools. Sectional head 2 from Type 2 School highlighted that distributed leadership practices has not been linked with the instructional process and hence it does not facilitate to enhance quality of instruction and educational achievements of students. However, she further mentioned about the existing unsatisfactory collaborative working

environment hinder the successful implementation of distributed leadership practices in their school. According to him,

Principals in my school have not devolved various leadership roles among staff members to a satisfactory level. Even though leadership responsibilities were distributed, the prevailing unsatisfactory collaborative working environment is a big challenge in implementing distributed leadership practices in…"

(Sectional head 2 from Type 2 School)

Expressing a similar view to the above response, principal 3 from Type 3 School said,

, I know that distributed leadership has been recognized as one of the effective leadership styles. However, the negative attitude of teachers in terms of holding leadership responsibilities has become a big challenge in devolving and implementing distributed leadership practices in my school…"

(Principal 3 from Type 3 school)

With regard to the responses obtained to the question "What type of distributed leadership practices enhance quality of instruction and student achievement'' irrespective of school type a significant number of teachers (74%) from the entire teacher sample did not respond. This situation indicated that teachers in these particular types schools did not have a clear idea about the concept of distributed leadership practices or teacher leadership concept. This was further supported by the interviews held with the principals of both types of schools. According to the principal 4 from the Type 2 School mentioned that,

> *"It is not an easy task to devolve leadership responsibilities among the staff members due to lack of trust and unsatisfactory collaborative working culture in my school. Even though leadership responsibilities have been devolved teachers failed to fulfill the responsibilities within given time period and this has negatively affected the quality of education and students' educational achievements."*

> *(Principal 4 from Type 2 schools)*

Expressing a similar view to the above response, principal 2 from Type 3 School stated that,

> *"Distributed leadership provides more opportunities for teachers to improve leadership skills. However, teachers in my school are reluctant to undertake leadership responsibilities as they always try to get a transfers to so called 1AB schools…."*

> *(Principal 2 from Type 3 School)*

With regard to the responses obtained to the statement **'I am satisfied about the team work and collaborative work culture in my school'** 68% of teachers from the entire sample replied 'Disagree' while another considerable percentage (18.66 %) of teachers from the entire sample replied 'Strongly Disagree'. The highest percentage responded to 'Disagree' by type of school at 72.50% was from Type 2 schools. A chi-square calculation also indicated that there was no significant difference between school type and team work and collaborative work culture as the P value is more than 5%. Results of this analysis are given in the Table 3 below.

Table 3: Teachers Response to the Statement of "I am satisfied about the team work and collaborative work practices in my school"

School Type and Statement No. 5	Responses											Total Number of Respondent	%
	Fully Agree		Somewhat Agree		No Opinion		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		No Reply			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
Type 2	00	00	3	3.75	4	5.00	58	72.50	12	15.00	3	3.75	80	100
Type 3	00	00	1	1.42	6	8.57	44	62.85	16	22.85	3	4.28	70	100
Total	00	00	04	2.66	10	6.66	102	**68.00**	28	**18.66**	06	4.00	150	100

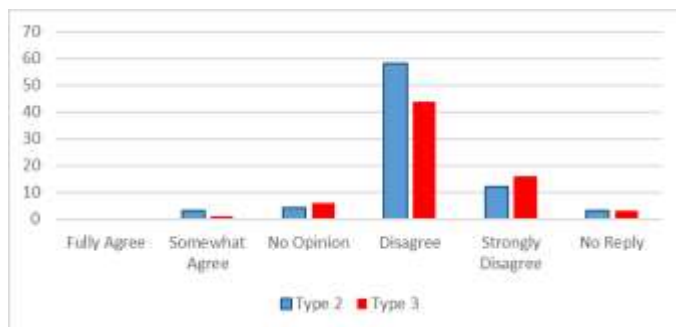This position has been further depicted in figure 2 below

Figure 3: Teachers Response to the Statement of "I am satisfied about the team work and collaborative work practices in my school"

It was further revealed from this study that a significant number of teachers (79 %) and principals (100%) in both types schools face number of challenges when practicing distributed leadership roles in their schools due to the major challenge of not having a collaborative working environment,

lack of trust and structural and cultural barriers operate within schools and also insufficient resources and challenges related to retention of experienced teachers. Teachers' interview in Type 2 and Type 3 schools also gave strong evidence that implementation of distributed leadership practices has become a big challenge due to the fact that unsatisfied team work and collaborative work environment in their schools and this situation de-motivate teachers to undertake leadership responsibilities. Teacher 3 from Type 2 School stated that,

> *Many teachers have negative attitudes in terms of teacher leadership concept and hence they don't fulfill assigned leadership roles as a team"*

> *(Teacher 3 from Type 2 school)*

According to the above extracts of the responses of principals, teachers and sectional heads of Type 2 and Type 3 schools, it is clear that the principals working in both categories of schools find it very difficult to practice

distributed leadership roles due to prevailing unsatisfactory team work and collaborative work environment and lack of trust and cultural barriers and insufficient resources in their schools.

IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings of the study revealed that all the principals, working in the Type 2 and Type 3 schools have understand the distributed leadership practices and teacher leadership concept to a satisfactory level. They believe that the distributed leadership practices is one of the most important leadership styles which can be used to improve quality of instruction and student educational achievement. However, it found from this study that the fulfillment of assigned leadership tasks become a big challenge for teachers as there is no satisfactory team work and collaborative work environment in both types schools. The results could be recognized to the fact that when there is no properly functioning team work culture, it could negatively affect the quality of instructional process and the decline of educational achievements of students. This finding is not different from that of Harris et.al: (2007), who found in their investigation that team work and collaborative work practices are the key element of successful teaching learning in schools and student higher level of outcome. As mentioned by Spillane et al., (2006, 2008) and the National Collages of School Leadership (NCSL 2003) the distributed leadership practices and the teacher leadership is very important with regard to the improvement of quality of teaching and learning and student educational achievement. Also they highlighted how teacher leaders support for smooth function of the central administration of the school and quality improvement of teaching and learning through the team work and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). As stated by Hopkins et al., (1996) successful schools promote a collaborative work milieu that encourages mutual support, assistance, and professional development.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study, all the principals working in Type 2 and Type 3 schools have understand the distributed leadership practices and teacher leadership concept and its importance to a satisfactory level. They identified distributed leadership practices as one of the most important leadership styles in improving quality of teaching learning and student outcome. However, it found from this study that the fulfillment of assigned leadership tasks become a big challenge for teachers as there is no satisfactory team work and collaborative work environment. Further, lack of trust in terms of fulfilling assigned leadership responsibilities and insufficient resources in both types schools have negatively affected in implementation of distributed leadership practices.

Therefore, it is recommended to implement leadership development programmes for teachers working in Type 2 and Type 3 schools in Sri Lanka in order for them to improve skills pertaining to school leadership. Further it is recommended that principals working in different categories of schools should plan and implement professional development progrmmes within the school in order to change the negative attitudes of teachers in terms of distributed leadership and the concept of teacher leadership. Also it is recommended to provide sufficient resources to all types schools in Sri Lanka so that principals working in different categories of schools could retain experienced teachers in order to enhance quality of teaching learning process and students educational achievements. Also, it is recommended that the teachers should be given more opportunities to participate for the seminars, workshops and all the other programmes related to professional development organize by the Ministry of Education, Faculties of Education of the Universities. Finally, it is recommended for future researchers to consider about the distributed leadership practices by principals working in other types of government schools, private school and international schools covering other educational zones as this study is limited only to the Type 2 and Type 3government Schools in the Colombo in the Western Province, Sri Lanka.

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