

## **TEACHERS AND THEIR PARTICIPATION TOWARD DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP PRACTICE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS, YOBE STATE NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

*In many countries of the world education is considered as the backbone of development and schools can be seen as a place that shape societies and promote development. Leadership effects the success and failure of a school as an organisation. This makes school leadership more challenging. It has become more difficult for any single person to competently lead a school today. This has led to the recognition for collective school leadership model i.e. distributed leadership to improve school conditions in order to attain societal development. Distributed leadership supports shared responsibilities for effective leadership in schools. The purpose of this study was to find out leadership participation of teachers toward distributed leadership practices in the management of schools the from teachers' perspective in Yobe State, Nigeria. Two hundred and twelve teachers completed a closed-ended questionnaire. The study employed descriptive statistical methods and used statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 for data analysis. Frequency, percentage and mean were used to find teachers' level of participation in distributed leadership roles. The results indicated that teachers participate in distributed leadership practices at a moderate level. This revealed that teachers were given the opportunity to participate in leadership but not completely involved in school leadership roles. That is, they are not empowered to take ownership of their responsibilities. The findings have resulted in seeking for more improvement toward distributed leadership practice in schools.*

**Keywords:** distributed leadership, participation, leadership role, shared responsibility

### **1.0 Introduction**

In Yobe State, Nigeria, school leadership has become an essential issue in the development of education and it continues to play a vital role in improving the effectiveness of school management. According to Bolden (2011) and Tashi (2010) distributed leadership is one form of collective leadership that is well known in the current educational dialogue. Distributed leadership involves working together as a team, not delegating of teachers in a formal leadership role in schools. It employs leadership that involves more hands towards effective and successful school leadership.

Teachers are among the key people in schools who principals always work with. School principals should distribute responsibilities and work collectively so that they are able to coordinate their various activities in the school management practices. Therefore, he does not have to work alone to achieve objectives.

However, in Yobe State, Nigeria there has been no researched information on how teachers participate in school leadership practices especially distributed leadership approach. As the State is striving to improve the standard of education, this study is needed as its result may help the Ministry of Education and Policy makers in Yobe toward this endeavour. The research was set to determine the participation of teachers in distributed leadership roles by relating the level of understanding from the teachers' perspective. In order to do that, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are school teachers' level of understanding of the concept of distributed leadership?
2. What are the teachers' level of participation in distributed leadership practices in schools?
3. What is the relationship between teachers' level of understanding of distributed leadership and teachers' level of participation in school leadership practices?

## **2.0 Related Literature Review**

With more need for development through education, schools are becoming hard to be administered effectively. According to Goksoy (2015) a school setup is not easy to be run effectively with leadership of a single person and few delegated leaders. It is nearly impossible for school principals to carry out all the activities of the work alone even if they are considered outstanding leaders. Therefore, it is fundamental to develop teachers' leadership in order to tap their potentials and provide chances to participate in leadership roles in schools.

### **2.1 Distributed Leadership**

Distributed leadership has been receiving much attention and increased support in recent issue of educational leadership (Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2005; Bakir 2013). In his theory of distributed leadership, Duignan, (2006) advocated that the idea of collective work in school is more meaningful because leadership of schools is too much for any one person to do. What he said and support is the development of leaders in school, and a development of an 'allowed-to-be-a-leader' culture. As such his theory rests on the participation of all teachers in school leadership practices through the recognition of their worth as people. Therefore, Duignan's theory forecasted that when school principals used shared leadership approach, their teachers develop positive perceptions and feel more involved in school management activities.

Pearce, Conger, and Locke (2008) defined distributed leadership as interactions of individuals to achieve common goals such as giving teachers the opportunity to participate in leadership outside the class room and to put in more effort to achieve greater performances. Harris (2008) and Tashi (2013) stated that school principals with ideas of distributed leadership dedicated their leadership activities with teachers participating in leadership roles.

Lieberman (2006), Bierly, Doyle and Smith (2016) said that teachers who work collectively can learn from each other and improve their practices. Also, it will improve development and effective leadership in schools. In her studies, Rani (2015) stated that teachers were highly involved in leadership roles in school management, which revealed significant relationship with school academic performance. Through this, it can be recognised that teachers

are motivated by involving them in distributed leadership activities in school management which will ensure greater achievement of school objectives.

Humpherys (2010) and Frost (2011) supported teacher leadership as one of the characteristics of distributed leadership which allow different teachers to become leaders at different times. Therefore, teacher leadership can have an impact on both teaching and learning situations and encourages teachers to dialogue with each other and reflect on their practices (Yilmaz, 2013). At the same time teacher leadership has a positive impact on improving leadership practices in schools since distributed leadership serves as motivational factor that could help to strengthen the teachers' effort to practice leadership in collaborative ways to help attain the objectives of the school.

### **3.0 Method**

In this study, a cross-sectional survey design was used with guided data collection and handling to examine the opinions of respondents (teachers). 212 public senior secondary school teachers were randomly selected as samples across the State. Questionnaire that was used included closed-ended questions which utilised a 5 point Likert scale, having number values as: strongly agree 5, agree 4, neutral 3, disagree 2 and strongly disagree 1. Thirty items out of 60 from Distributed Leadership Practice Questionnaire (DLPQ) developed by Humphreys (2010) was modified to suit the purpose of this study. This questionnaire was self-administered with the help of four survey assistants. The survey instrument was first tested on 30 teachers who responded to each item, the answers were studied and the questionnaire was re-examined to finalise the items based on any misconstruction related to the questions.

Descriptive statistics was used with statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 and calculated for frequency, percentage and mean. These were used to determine teachers' level of understanding of distributed leadership and teachers' level of participation toward distributed leadership practice in school management. The distribution of respondents' response scores showed three groups of teachers' level of involvement in distributed leadership practices in school management. These are categorised into: low, moderate and high levels of involvement.

Correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between teachers' level of understanding of distributed leadership and their level of participation in school management practices as perceived by the teachers themselves. In this study, a positive correlation obtained has low scores on the first variable and more associated with low scores on the second variable. This showed how they are associated with each other and to how variations in one is associated with variations in the other. Furthermore, a test on the significance using Pearson Correlation Coefficient was conducted by using t-value to confirm significance or lack of it.

### **4.0 Results and Findings**

Distributed leadership attributed collective leadership and organisational characteristics (Bakir, 2013). Its practice subjects an individual leader to shoulder all leadership activities in order to achieve objectives. Therefore, the essence of distributed leadership was to explore the potential of teachers by participating in school leadership through the principals' management practices. If teachers considered school performances as their collective responsibility, schools could reach their goals easily.

The level of understanding on the concept of distributed leadership practices was determined as low, moderate and high levels. After the scores were computed and the

distribution was obtained, it indicated the concentration of frequency of the response scores. This helped in classifying the level of understanding distributed leadership practice as low, moderate and high levels. Among the scores, 81 was obtained as the midpoint with frequency of 16 respondents, representing 7.5% which was considered as low level of understanding of the concept of distributed leadership practices. All the frequencies from scores of 80 down to 63 was summed up and frequency was obtained from 102 respondents, representing 48.2%. This showed a moderate level of understanding of the concept of distributed leadership practices. And all the frequencies from scores of 82 up to 91 was summed up from 94 respondents, representing 44.3% was obtained. This indicated the high level of understanding of the concept of distributed leadership practices.

The table and figure below show the levels of understanding of the concept of distributed leadership practices.

Table 1: Teachers’ levels of understanding the concept of distributed leadership practices.

Level of understanding	Frequency	Percentage
Low	16	7.5
Moderate	102	48.2
High	94	44.3
Total	212	100.0

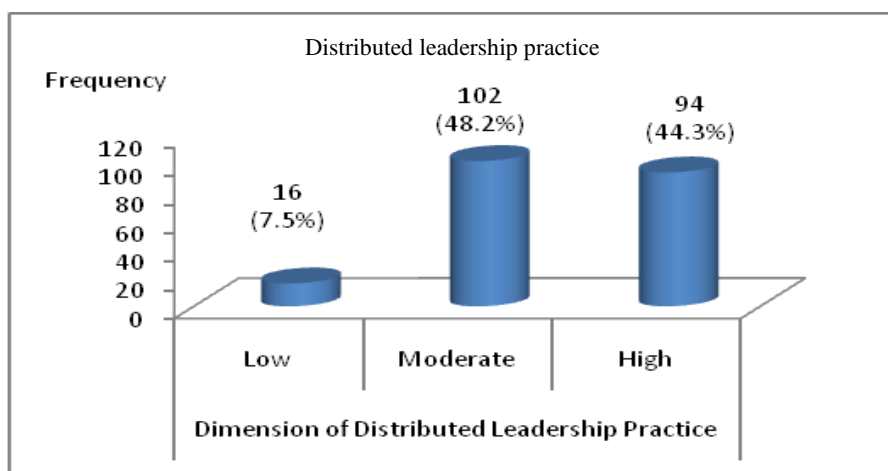


Figure 1: Teachers’ levels of understanding of the concept of distributed leadership practices.

Table 1 and Figure 1 above revealed respondents’ responses to the items on their understanding of the concept of distributed leadership practices. It reflects steadiness in understanding as applied to all teachers whether they hold a position of responsibility or not. However, quite a large number (48.2%) of the respondents had moderately understood the concept. This can be attributed to the observations in their schools’ leadership practices. Principals might have created the atmosphere that made them become flexible or sometime authoritative in leadership role, whether in managing staff, directing practices or supervising activities. This mixed leadership culture, both democratic and authoritative, could be the reason

why very few (7.5%) of the respondents indicated low level of understanding of the concept of distributed leadership, and 44.3% of them indicated high level of understanding of the concept of distributed leadership practices in various schools in this study. Therefore, the results revealed most of the respondents has moderately understood distributed leadership practices in schools.

The distribution of respondents' response scores of the teachers' level of participation in distributed leadership practices in school management was categorized into three: low, moderate and high levels of participation. The results revealed frequency of 29 respondents, representing 13.7% of the total responses as low level of teachers' participation in distributed leadership practices; a frequency of 134 respondents representing 63.2% were identified as having moderate level of participation in school management; and a frequency of 49 representing 23.1% of the total responses showed high level of teachers' participation. The table below presents the teachers' level of participation in distributed leadership practices in the management of the school.

Table 2: Teachers' level of participation in distributed leadership practices in the management of the school.

Level of participation	Frequency	Percentage
Low	29	13.7
Moderate	134	63.2
High	49	23.1
Total	212	100.0

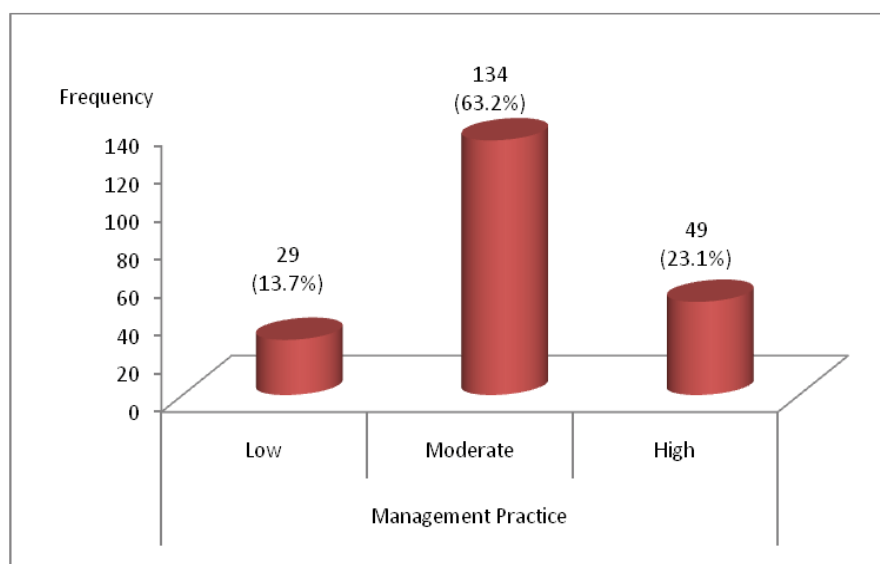


Figure 2: Teachers' level of participation in management practice.

The results of the responses provided evidence that teachers were participating in leadership practices in school management as shown in Table 2 and Figure 2 above. Their perceptions clearly showed that there was not much variation in the responses of the teachers. Majority of the responses with frequency of 134 (63.2%) signified that most of the teachers were moderately participating in distributed leadership activities in the school management. It

is evident that teachers were not given much opportunity to function as leaders in the responsibilities given to them. This could be the reason why most of the responses indicated teachers were moderately participating in school leadership practices, only 49 of them (23.1%) showed high level of participation, and 29 (13.7%) showed low level of participation.

This can be concluded that teachers were moderately participating in the distributed leadership practices in the management of the school. In other words, leadership might be distributed or shared by the principals at various schools not as who deserve to lead.

This section explained the correlation between teachers' level of understanding the concept of distributed leadership practice and teachers' level on participation in school management practices at public senior secondary schools in Yobe State, Nigeria. Hypothesis Ho shows that the data distribution is normal and hypothesis H1 shows the data distribution is not normal. The table below shows the result of the correlation test.

Table 3: Correlations between teachers' level of understanding the concept of distributed leadership and teachers' level of participation in school management practices.

		Participation in school management practices
Understanding the concept of distributed leadership	Pearson correlation	0.148*
	Sig (2-tailed)	0.031
	N	212

\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 above shows that there is a significant correlation (P-value =0.031) between the two groups of variables at 0.05 level of significance, and indicated a positive correlation (0.148) between teachers' level of understanding the concept of distributed leadership and teachers level of participation in school management practices. This shows a significant relationship at 5%, that is, as the level of understanding on the concept of distributed leadership increases, the level of participation in school management practices also increases.

Thus the sample result Ho is rejected i.e. the P-value falls in the rejection region. In this test, therefore the P-value has measured the strength of the evidence against Ho.

The value of the correlation coefficient was converted to t- value by using the value of r-calculated. The t-calculated is 2.169 and the degree of freedom =210. The critical value of t for alpha=0.05 and 210 degrees of freedom = 0.743, thus, t-calculated (2.169) is greater than the t-critical value ( $t_{0.95}=0.743$ ). therefore,  $H_0$  was rejected at alpha = 0.05 and  $H_1$  accepted. There is a positive relationship between teachers' level of understanding of the concept of distributed leadership and teachers' level of participation in school management practices with a 5% level of significance.

## 5.0 Discussion of Findings

The teachers' understanding of the concept of distributed leadership was moderate as leadership was not shared and executed with full opportunity. It was controlled by the principals who did not provide opportunities for teachers to display their potential as leaders. The respondents demonstrated their understanding with almost equal frequencies of moderate

level 100 (47.2%) and high level 104 (49%) on freedom that were given to teachers to express their opinions regularly.

The respondents also showed moderate level 99 (46.7%) and high level 105 (49.5%) of understanding on teachers being allowed to initiate ideas independently. These examples have been the atmosphere in school leadership practices, even though teachers can express their opinions and initiate ideas, they are not totally free to do so. Most of the time tasks were executed by teachers under their directions.

The responses on the items under the research question 1, were classified as low, moderate and high levels of understanding. The results revealed that respondents showed low level of understanding with a frequency of 16 (7.5%). Most of the respondents showed moderate level of understanding with a frequency of 102 (48.2%), while 94 (44.3%) respondents had a high level of understanding. The results suggest that concepts of distributed leadership was understood as there were elements of shared and delegated leadership in the practices. These elements revealed that sometimes the principals would democratically involved teachers while at other times they used their authority to appoint and delegate teachers in assigning responsibilities. In this sense, the term distributed leadership was not highly understood by the teachers as the term implies, rather the understanding was moderate. This could be based on the leadership practices of the principals (Krawford, 2010). Thus principals must have a particular leadership role that could make teachers understand the concept of distributed leadership moderately.

In the second research question, it was found as evident from the questionnaire responses that teachers perceived themselves to be participating in various activities in the management of the school. This indicated that teachers were given opportunities to share responsibilities with the principals.

Even though most of the teachers responded that they are participating in school leadership practices, their perception on the level of participation varies. Very few of the teachers indicated that the school principals did not support using of new ideas and innovations and there is no formal setup to provide teachers with opportunities to participate in leadership roles. According to majority of the teachers, while the principals support and value their performance in leadership activities, they were neither actively participating nor involved in the development of the schools' progress. This was revealed in the results where frequencies of 29 (13.7%) respondents indicating low level of participation, frequencies of 134 (63.2%) respondents as moderately participating and 49 (23.1%) signified high level of participation. These results indicated that responsibilities were distributed to almost all teachers but most of them were given moderate participation. This signified that teachers agreed that distributed leadership means working together and sharing ideas (Yilmaz, 2013), however majority of the teachers considered distributed leadership was not fully practiced in their schools. For example, responses to three of the items showed that teachers were not completely allowed to take ownership of their responsibilities or leadership actions. Humpreys (2010) reported similar findings in Eldorado school in Ireland where only 56.25% of the respondents were involved in decisions which affect the whole school. This was an insight into the respondents' views as only moderate level of participation was allowed in distributed leadership practices in the management of the school. This revealed that the role of the principals is of central importance, they should set up patterns to allow teachers to fully participate in leadership activities by distributing responsibilities.

Therefore, for leadership to be distributed among teachers, full cooperative and collective work must exist in the school environment. Teachers need to be supported and affirmed by school principals so that a level of confidence can be built up to reflect their own practices to achieve effective leadership and performance in schools.

It is worth noting that there was considerable relationship between respondents' level of understanding of the concept of distributed leadership practices and their level of participation in the school management. The hypothesis drawn from the third research question postulated that there was significant correlation between the two groups of variables. This evidence showed that the hypothesis was strongly supported. In other words, the respondents highlighted their participation in distributed leadership practices in schools.

The results indicated that the relationship included many of the characteristics of the distributed leadership pointed out in the literature. For example, Azwifarwi (2012) found that teachers put more effort in school activities when school principals involved them in leadership roles. Bierly, Doyle and Smith, (2016) reported that teachers who were collectively involved learn from each other and improved their practices. This could guide teachers to think more about the goals of the schools and ways in which they could help attain them. However, the findings in this study showed that teachers were not fully given the opportunity to practice leadership roles in their schools.

The most significant influences in distributed leadership were the principals' approaches, which in turn influenced how classroom teachers acted in their interactions. Polat, Damci and Tatar (2011) stated that the process of effective work and improvement must start with the leadership in an organisation as a role model. Thus, leadership occurred through interaction and influence among teachers and principals in school routines and practices for effective work and performance.

The teachers' views on level of understanding of the concept of distributed leadership and their level of participation in school leadership practices revealed a probable influence of distributed leadership on principal's practices in the management of school organisation. This was identified as the results showed moderate and consistency on level of understanding of the concept of distributed leadership and level of participation in school leadership practices as applied to all teachers, based on the responses to the questionnaires in this study. The outcome conformed to the theory of distributed leadership (Duignan, 2006) considered in the literature who forecasted that when school principals use distributed leadership approach, it will result in teachers having positive perceptions and feeling more involved in school management activities.

Participation of members in school leadership practices was the first idea of distributed leadership and the survey finding in this research revealed that teachers participated in school leadership roles. According to Tashi (2013) and Goksoy, (2015) distributed leadership adds efficiency, productivity and competence which will ensure achievement and happiness in the school. In this sense, the management of the school cannot be left to the principal alone, it should be leadership toward shared activities. The teachers clearly identified their participation in leadership role can lead to effective leadership which were established by the collective work of principal and themselves.

This was evident from the questionnaire responses that teachers perceived themselves as participating in various leadership activities in the management of the school. This signified that teachers were given opportunities to share responsibilities with the principals. However, the dominant pattern of the responses to the questionnaire suggested that teachers' participation is moderate in the school leadership practices. This may be due to common prevailing atmosphere in the schools. Leadership practices demonstrated by the school principals, did not empower teachers in their leadership roles.

Fred and Allan, (2012) implies that school principals who democratically distribute leadership by allowing the teachers to participate in making decisions that affect the school achieve better cooperation and greater performance. But without high participation, it is hard for teachers to contribute meaningfully to the leadership roles in the school. It is necessary to stress that the principals' approach is vital in the establishment of active teacher leadership



practices. The more they work collectively, the more teachers learn from each other and put more effort toward greater performance in school leadership practices.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

The concept of distributed leadership is a recent issue in Yobe State, Nigeria because principals at secondary schools are regarded as the only leader in schools and no one else especially the teachers should involve actively in the running of the school. Collective school leadership could provide educators with effective school leadership understanding. Teachers' leadership potential if well exploited will further develop leadership practices in schools.

However, the findings showed that the teachers' participation in school leadership roles is moderate, even though there was progress in some aspects of school education, such as providing schools with adequate teachers and allowing them to participate in leadership practices to a certain level. Since distributed leadership can help to improve school leadership, it could in turn bring about effective teaching and learning strategies. It requires inclusive and freedom in leadership between principals and teachers towards higher participation in school leadership roles.

The study may encourage policy makers and principals to examine leadership practices and consider distributed leadership as a way to lead schools toward success by providing more opportunity for teachers to participate in leadership roles. In conclusion, all teachers have leadership potentials and should be given more room for them to exercise these.

## **7.0 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

There were several limitations to this study that should be noted. Firstly, the study only involved public schools. Secondly, the results were obtained from cross-sectional study with sample population so there is need for longitudinal study for a wider coverage. Lastly, the findings also revealed only the levels of teachers' participation in leadership practices, thus there is a need to investigate teachers' empowerment in participation of their leadership roles.

Considering the limitations of the study, some ways of future research are necessary for researchers who may want to investigate further on the related issue.

Further research in this area, should explore a longitudinal study design and involve all teacher population instead of only a cross-sectional study design with sample population. Second, the study was concerned with public senior secondary schools only, therefore there is need to extend this study to private schools for more comprehensive conclusions. It would also be interesting to find out opinions between teachers of different genders. Lastly, future research should look into the empowerment of teacher leadership in schools. This will help to understand the level of taking ownership of leadership outcome by the teachers.

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