

Teachers' Perceptions about Distributed Leadership Practices in South Asia: A Case Study on Academic Activities in Government Colleges of Bangladesh

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Abstract:- The concept of teacher leadership is relatively a new entry into the educational terminology and interpretation in the context of developing countries. The distributed perception on leadership may pave attention about activities orientation, not in position of teacher.

➤ *Aims & Objectives*

In a government college in Bangladesh, this study investigates the perspectives of faculty members regarding the implementation of distributed leadership practices in academic affairs. Furthermore, it investigates the perspectives of educators regarding the challenges associated with the implementation of distributed leadership within that particular institution. This study aims to investigate teachers' perspectives on distributional leadership and the obstacles that hinder its implementation in the academic activities of government colleges in Bangladesh.

➤ *Methodology*

In order to accomplish the research objectives, this study employed qual-quant methods, specifically an opinion survey and interviews with teachers of a government college in Bangladesh who were selected for the study. Participants were purposefully selected from among the teachers who possessed expertise in distributed leadership. Document review for three-dimensionality verification is another method of data collection. Analyzing qualitative data, this investigation employs thematic analysis. **Result-** The study identifies several obstacles that hinder the implementation of the distributed leadership approach in all academic activities at the chosen government college in Bangladesh. These challenges include a lack of employee commitment to the organization, limitations in management, apprehension regarding power loss, and cultural factors.

➤ *Contribution*

The findings indicate that distributed leadership has been implemented in certain academic activities, and instructor opinions indicate that this leadership style should be utilized in additional activities.

Keywords:- Leadership, Distributed Leadership, Teachers' Perceptions, Academic Activities, Government College.

I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership has a vital role in determining the performance of various organizations. The idea of teacher leadership is comparatively a new entry into the educational terminology, vocabulary, conversation, interpretation and discourse in developing countries from South Asian context. Although there is no comprehensible explanation of teacher leaders, actually greater part of the research studies used an umbrella model of teacher leadership (Sharar & Nawab, 2020). The efficacy of an educational institution is significantly impacted by the leadership styles used (Balbuena et al., 2020). Educational leaders' styles of leadership are changing in response to new challenges posed by external forces, such as technological advancements (Shava & Tlou, 2018). Efforts are being made to explore innovative leadership approaches in higher education to tackle the challenge of competing in an intensely competitive global landscape (Jones et al., 2012). The concept of distributed leadership has gained considerable attention from education professionals in recent years. It is becoming increasingly popular at educational institutions worldwide (Floyd & Fung, 2015). It is a philosophy that involves the sharing of leadership responsibilities among multiple stakeholders (Spillane et al., 2001). It is a form of collaborative leadership that differs from traditional hierarchical leadership, which relies on established arrangements and institutions (Harris, 2004).

➤ *Statement of the Problem*

The use of case studies focuses specifically on government colleges in Bangladesh. We know, distributed leadership is a leadership approach that efficiently manages the operations of an educational institution in different circumstances (Salahuddin, 2011). It fosters collaboration among diverse groups and departments on campus while maintaining sustainability in the organization's internal culture (Avissar et al., 2017). Previous studies also shows a strong and positive correlation between teachers' organizational commitment and principals' distributed leadership behaviors (Akdemir and Ayik, 2017). Nevertheless, the current leadership approach in the government colleges is predominantly rooted in the traditional hierarchical colonial method (Thornton, 2006). The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) is presently focusing on enhancing leadership quality in colleges. The GOB has recently initiated the endeavor of creating and delivering leadership training for principals. Furthermore, there are arrangements made for upcoming leadership training specifically targeting individuals who possess the potential to assume the role of principals. The training is conducted under the supervision of the College Education Development Project (CEDP) funded by the World Bank.

Implementing distributed leadership can greatly improve the leadership effectiveness of government colleges in Bangladesh. This kind of leadership has proven effective in educational institutions in a number of studies. While the concept of distributed leadership has many potential benefits, it is critical to remember that putting it into practice is no simple (Torrance, 2013). Additionally, distributed leadership programs rely heavily on teachers, who will inevitably take on leadership roles and participate in initiatives (Elmore, 2000). Now, the research problems are: What are the teachers' perceptions of implementing distributed leadership in academic activities, and according to instructors, what are the barriers to implementing this strategy in academic work?

➤ *Objectives of the Study*

This study aims to explore:

- To draw a layout on the teachers' perception of practicing distributed leadership in academic activities in Government college of Bangladesh;
- To investigate the teachers' perception of the barriers to practice distributed leadership in academic activities in Government college of Bangladesh.

II. EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY

A. *Distributed Leadership*

Although distributed leadership has attracted many researchers' attention, it is not a new topic at all. In 1954, it was firstly introduced by the Australian psychologist Gibb to understand the dynamics of the impact processes between formal and informal teams (Harris et al., 2007). In this style of leadership, multiple people make decisions independently of

one another, allowing the organization to function smoothly (Harris, 2008). The emphasis is on the role or decision-making abilities of the individual (Harris, 2004). Distributed leadership encompasses the principles of post-heroic leadership theory, which posits that achieving optimal outcomes is more likely when a group is led successfully rather than relying on the leadership of a single individual. The major themes revolve around the concepts of responsibility sharing, teamwork, and collective action (Chang, 2011). According to Harris et al. (2007), there should be group engagement in organizational operations, support for projects, input into decision-making, and delegation of responsibilities and authority among employees. Distributed leadership within an organization encompasses direct and indirect leadership of employees, encouraging their active involvement in organizational activities. It involves effective communication and collaboration to achieve shared goals, fostering trust among team members. Distributed leadership also entails taking personal accountability for one's actions and outcomes, providing individuals with a voice in decision-making processes, and ensuring a fair allocation of authority and responsibility among formal and informal leaders (Dambrauskiene, 2018).

B. *Distributed Perspective of Leadership*

This discussion will focus on the viewpoints of two renowned scholars, Gronn and Spillane, on distributed leadership theory. Gronn (1999, 2002) defines distributed leadership as a form of leadership that involves numerous people working together in a coordinated and interdependent manner. He views leadership as a recognized position that can be attributed to an individual, a group of individuals, many individuals working together, or a bigger organizational entity consisting of multiple members. From this perspective, it is evident that multiple individuals can endorse a leader's role within a group, or it can be shared among individual members, with various people assuming the leadership position at different times. Nevertheless, the significance of an individual's leadership pales in comparison to the collective leadership of its members. Gran believes that individuals inside an organization have the potential to exhibit leadership qualities on certain occasions. In this instance, distributed leadership might be regarded as the collective amalgamation of all individual leadership. If the guidance is disseminated to numerous or all members of the organization, it will be quantifiable. Hence, there exists the possibility that every member can assume leadership roles at some point in time.

Spillane et al (2001) addressed numerous crucial matters about distributed leadership. The emphasis in the practice of leadership is on distributional leadership rather than on individual leaders and their positions within the organizational structure. The focus lies not on individuals' actions, but rather on their manner and motivation behind their behavior. Their concentration lies in the distribution of leadership practices among their followers, encompassing both positional and informal leaders. Gaining insight into the collaborative or

individual actions of the organization's leaders in carrying out leadership tasks is a crucial element of the practice of socially distributed leadership. Leadership emerges through the interplay of various leaders and followers, utilizing unique tools and industry knowledge to accomplish particular goals. Interdependence occurs when the effectiveness of administration relies on the collaboration of two or more individuals. From a distribution standpoint, followers are essential constituents of leadership endeavors. Followers are more influenced by the actions of leaders rather than the modification of exterior aspects of leadership activity. Followers play a crucial role in leadership tasks since leaders heavily rely on them for various leadership activities. Leadership is manifested in any situation and activity by the necessary interdependence that is needed to accomplish the task. Multiple specializations are essential for optimal work performance. In this scenario, the integration of specialized domains necessitates interdependent interactions. The members of these specialized groups can collaboratively coordinate their work, and this coordination happens mutually.

C. *Distributed Leadership in Educational Institution*

In order to enhance leadership skills in the field of education, Jones et al. (2012) suggest implementing a distributed leadership approach that prioritizes collaborative efforts over individual autonomy and competence. Distributed leadership can help schools build the required capacity to improve their educational system (Harris, 2004). Chang (2011) found that distributed leadership had a favorable effect on teachers' academic expectations and success. Alenezi (2019) found a significant association between the academic optimism of faculty members and the use of distributed leadership. According to Nguyen (2013), there is a considerable correlation between instructors' perspectives on distributed leadership methods and their commitment to the institution. Members of the distributed research group, including professors and researchers, found that men exhibited greater commitment to the organization compared to women. Additionally, experienced faculty members have shown a higher level of group affiliation compared to their less experienced colleagues.

The relationship between the leadership team and support is strongly correlated with organizational commitment and, indirectly, with job satisfaction (Hulpia et al., 2009). Nevertheless, there is a minimal association between organizational commitment and job satisfaction, as well as the decentralization of leadership activities. The principle plays a pivotal role in distributed leadership, which has a beneficial and indirect impact on students' academic advancement (Jambo & Hongde, 2020). He asserts that individuals in academia, government, and professional fields should collectively recognize the significance of the principle in distributed leadership and adhere to its optimal methods. In a study conducted by Nukari (2019), a strong association was found between the implementation of distributed leadership by principals and the attitudes of teachers towards their

profession. The study suggests that principals should undergo distributed leadership training to improve these attitudes.

D. *Barriers to Practice Distributed Leadership in Educational Institution*

In their study, Fitzgerald and Gunter (2007) posed the topic of whether distributed leadership may foster a policy climate that promotes authority and responsibility for a well-defined group labeled leadership and management. This question implies that the current hierarchical structure of the educational institution hinders diffused leadership and prevents the establishment of an informal leadership system and agency. Harris (2004) identifies distance, culture, and structure as the primary obstacles to attaining distributed leadership. The adoption of distributed leadership is hindered by physical space since it poses a challenge for teachers to establish connections due to isolation. The "top-down" model of leadership can be characterized as a cultural framework. The shift from the current state to distributed leadership is characterized by a natural and unplanned process, which presents greater difficulties in terms of control. Leaders must enhance their leadership abilities and focus on the organization's infrastructure development for leadership (Dambrauskiene, 2018). Murphy et al. (2009) highlight the significant impact of the formal leader in altering an organization's framework and effectively utilizing its workforce. Facilitating an atmosphere conducive to nurturing the passions of individuals has a transformative impact on both the culture and the job of the formal leader. Ensuring teacher autonomy, which encompasses the aforementioned concerns, might pose a significant obstacle due to administrators' lack of emphasis on innovation and creativity, as they are answerable to the organization (Rodriguez & Hovde, 2002). The head plays a crucial role in the advancement of distributed leadership. In order to transfer leadership inside an organization, the chief must establish and revoke power and authority (Harris, 2012). In the context of distributed leadership, those in formal leadership roles must transfer authority to others who are capable of questioning and challenging the leader's ego. The principal is likely in a vulnerable position as a result of the absence of direct control over activities. The current leadership structure of the institution is a significant barrier to implementing a distributed leadership model, where power is shared across the top team.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on qual-quant method to establish a qualitative research design. The main objective of research is to explore and explain the teachers' perception of practicing distributed leadership in academic activities in the selected public college in Bangladesh. The study's population consists of teachers from the particular college, and a purposive sample technique is employed to gather qualitative data. Five teachers were chosen based on the researcher's assessment of their familiarity with distributed leadership, taking into account the duration and time limitations of the study. This research

attempts to find answers to questions and hidden truths through conversations with participants in natural environments. The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews to collect qualitative data that carries the opportunity to investigate the teachers' perception in-depth on the distributed leadership. Participants were interviewed using open-ended questions. In addition to conducting interviews, the researchers analyzed the organogram documents, duty allocation records, and the minutes of various academic committees, teacher councils, and departmental meetings at the chosen institution. This analysis was done to compare the comments made by the instructors during the interviews. The researcher in this study simulates the gathered data from the interview conversation and subsequently examines the data using open-coding approaches. Following the coding process, themes and categories are established to explain the data.

IV. FINDINGS

Based on literature research, five sub-questions were constructed to ascertain the two primary research questions that participants asked about throughout the interview. The first question pertained to the participant's understanding of distributed leadership. Participants define distributed leadership as the allocation of leadership across all employees in an organization, assigning roles and duties, and granting sufficient authority to carry them out. Furthermore, the involvement of lower-ranking individuals in the process of making decisions might be referred to as distributed leadership. The second question aimed to ascertain the participants' perspectives on the implementation of distributed leadership in the college's academic activities. Each participant expressed a favorable position regarding the enactment of distributed leadership in the college's academic activities and outlined several potential benefits. As per the participants' feedback, implementing distributed approaches to leadership in the college will foster the development of leadership attributes among all teachers, promote collaboration among teachers, empower them, enhance their sense of responsibility towards the organization, and ensure transparency and accountability in leadership. The participating teachers were asked question three to ascertain which college academic activities practiced distributed leadership. Participating teachers believe that the academic activities at their institution mostly conform to the ideals of distributed leadership. The college incorporates it into educational activities, including co-curricular activities. In addition, teachers possess full autonomy in classroom instruction, exam administration, creating internal exam question papers, and assessment. There exist multiple committees, such as the examination and education development committees. The college has both an academic council and a teachers' council. Important decisions are made through discussions between the two councils. The fourth question asked participants to pinpoint college academic activities that should implement distributed leadership but currently do not. While the college mostly

employs distributed leadership in academic activities, the professors who took part expressed a desire for greater involvement in the academic decision-making process. Additionally, there should be a higher level of proficiency in evaluating both in-course and practical examinations. They should participate in evaluating pupils based on their collegiate, non-collegiate, and dis-collegiate status. Teachers who took part in the study were asked to describe obstacles that would disrupt the implementation of distributed leadership in college academic activities. Significant challenges to establishing distributed leadership exist, including employees' lack of commitment, top management's fear of power loss, and the organization's deeply rooted culture.

Organograms, responsibility distribution documents and minutes of various meetings of the selected colleges are investigated in this study. The college's organogram identifies the principal and vice principal as its two highest-ranking administrators. At this college, there is an academic committee and a teachers' council. The Academic Committee consists of heads of all departments, whereas the Teachers' Council includes every single teacher. The principal and vice-principal serve as the ex-officio chairman and vice-chairman of the two committees, respectively. The minutes of the Academic Committee and Teachers' Council meetings were reviewed. The minutes of the Academic Committee indicate that decisions are made unanimously through deliberation on any matter. This committee guides the principal and vice-principal in establishing the necessary policies for college administration. If there is a topic that appears to require a decision, it is deliberated upon by the teachers' council. Upon analyzing the minutes of the teachers' council, it is evident that while all individuals have an equitable chance to voice their opinions on the matter, junior members exhibit lower levels of participation compared to senior members during the deliberation. Nevertheless, the decisions are made unanimously. The documents clearly state that the instruction of students is the responsibility of their departments, and these departments have the authority to make decisions in this area. Multiple committees have been established to carry out diverse responsibilities, such as conducting examinations. Associate professors are the conveners of these committees, and assistant professors and lecturers are the members of those communities. Each member is equally allocated the task of several committees. The committees seek the collaboration of fellow teachers in fulfilling their responsibilities. The documents about the assignment of teachers' duties within a department of the college, as well as the records of departmental meetings, are taken into consideration. The allocation of responsibilities indicates that courses have been assigned among the teachers for instruction. The department teachers have the responsibility of administering internal examinations, creating question papers, and assessing the answer sheets. Based on the resolution of the meeting, it may be stated that decisions are made unanimously on various departmental matters.

V. DISCUSSIONS

Participants noted different concepts of distributed leadership. Some mention it as shared leadership, and others see it as an allocation of work and duties. However, there are also specific elements of distributed leadership in their perspectives. The critical point is that there is a general similarity between the ideas of distributed leadership presented by Harris et al, (2007) and Dambrauskiene (2018). They view it as a division of work among the people, involving everyone in the leadership process, delegating responsibilities to others, decentralizing leadership and power, and leading in their work. Participants' views revealed that distributed leadership creates a climate of partnership, teamwork, trust, and respect in the college. Participants provided a perspective where good relations develop among all staff, and members help each other, contributing to the organization's overall purpose. It is a collective form of leadership that relies on multiple leaders working together to carry different skills, knowledge, and vision (Jones et al, 2012). Participants agree with the form of the joint agency of distributed leadership stated by Spillane et al (2001) that integrates the individual's work.

Participants further indicated that if everyone is engaged in leadership, their work is acknowledged, and their potential and skills are considered. They are interested in doing more for the organization's work. These will increase the commitment of teachers towards the institution. This improves the achievement of college (Chang, 2011). Alenezi (2019) also found a significant positive relation between distributed leadership practice and faculty members' academic optimism. Teachers' perceptions of distributed leadership practices are significantly related to institutional commitment (Nguyen, 2013). Most participants expressed the view that the division of responsibilities provides a way to empower staff and nurture teacher leadership. Creating the foundation for a more significant leadership capacity by allowing them to take the lead, and the interest in taking on leadership roles stimulates teachers. Participants' view was that power and responsibilities should be distributed among all staff members by taking the lead in the college's distribution. Teachers may be empowered by ensuring their participation in the decision-making process. According to Hopkins and Jackson's (2002) capacity building model, leadership is distributed based on social cohesion and trust. It also supports the distribution of power and responsibilities to create and develop a capacity for continuous improvement.

Participants and documents show that the college has a distributed leadership practice culture in academic activities, including co-curricular activity. Teachers enjoy complete freedom in teaching, conducting examinations, preparing internal examination question papers, and evaluating the answer scripts. Separate committees were formed to perform various activities, including taking multiple tests, and almost all works at the college were conducted through the

committee. Moreover, the college has academic and teacher councils. When critical issues are decided, they are discussed in the two councils. However, there are opportunities for teachers' further empowerment in a few activities, including in-course exams, practical exams, and industry tours, should be further empowered. Teachers also feel that teachers should be more involved in the decision-making process recommended by Harris et al (2007). Participants felt that employees' lack of commitment to the organization, management limitations, fear of losing power, and culture are the main obstacles of distributed leadership practices as stated by Harris (2006). The practice of distributed leadership requires a change in the design of the organization and the role of the formal head in the meaningful use of staff (Murphy et al, 2009). Since the principal must be accountable to the higher authorities for the organization's work, they do not focus on the teachers' autonomy and creativity, which is a big obstacle for distributed leadership practice (Rodriguez & Hovde, 2002).

➤ *Delimitation of the Study*

There are some limitations to the research work: i) Sometimes, data were generated using unstructured or semi-structured questionnaire to get purposive sampling; ii) The interviews were not conducted with students in their respective institutions; iii) The study didn't use SWOC method while it has been applied ORGANOGRAM documents, and even iv) the motto of the researchers was not to generalize the outcomes beyond the distributed leadership system.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study explores through the interviews of teachers from the college that there are some benefits and barriers to distributed leadership practice. Obstacles feel to be imminent and implicit, which could mediate against the distributed leadership practice. This study promotes distributed leadership as teacher empowerment and collaboration. Both carry the components of distributed leadership practice, and these components are considered the key to promoting the sustainable improvement of the educational institution and encouraging teachers. Leadership can be practiced by all members of the staff, not by one person. Harris et al (2007) recommended group involvement and collaboration in organizational activities, participation in the decision-making process, and the distribution of power among staff and activities. Chakraborty and Mondal (2023) focused the ultimate goal of this study plan that is to create a positive classroom environment conducive to oral communication. Chang (2011) stated that distributed leadership indicates the team leader's performance is better than that of the leader working alone, and it emphasizes the shared responsibility, team building, and combined responsibility.

Based on this study's results, the following recommendations are made for individuals holding formal positions in college principals and other Bangladeshi college

leaders. They can establish suitable weather for college activities and make possible the distribution of leadership roles within the current policy. Principals should make the best use of their positional power in the interests of the college. Formal leaders must realize their college's actual situation, ascertain their staff's strengths and potentials, and provoke each team to realize their potential. All stakeholders should work together to develop the vision and mission of the college. It turns out a partnership approach that results in staff members and other stakeholders developing enthusiasm for it, and they create a sense of ownership and inclusion. Teamwork and collaboration should be inspired and induced to take part in the college operating.

This study found that distributed leadership is practiced a lot in the academic activities of the college. This study suggests that the participatory decision-making process, collaborative culture, group activities, and teachers' empowerment should be included in the college's academic activities of Bangladesh. The challenge now is to adopt distributed leadership practices in all Bangladesh colleges, especially teacher empowerment, to enhance sustainable academic success.

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