

The Relationship between Distributed Leadership and Student Achievement in Schools under Sarpang Dzongkhag

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Abstract

The relationship between distributed leadership and student achievement was studied in schools of Sarpang Dzongkhag, Bhutan. The rationale of the study was the growing emphasis on collaboration and shared leadership in education and the lack of empirical evidence on the relationship between distributed leadership and student achievement in the context of Bhutan. The case study design opted for a mixed-methods approach. The sample consisted of 40 participants (20 principals and 20 senior teachers) from 20 chosen schools in Sarpang Dzongkhag. To select participants who had relevant knowledge and experience of distributed leadership practices, purposive sampling was applied. The data collected in this study were quantitative and qualitative in nature. The quantitative data focused on four dimensions of distributed leadership, namely mission, vision, and goals; school culture; shared responsibility; and leadership practices. The qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The study found a statistically significant relationship between distributed leadership and student achievement. Clear school goals were vital, together with a shared responsibility in working for the goals, trust and teamwork, participative decision-making, teacher empowerment, and professional growth. Moreover, student engagement proved to be another element of distributed leadership. It leads to confident leadership, ownership of learning, decision-making, problem-solving and more. The findings suggest that distributed leadership must not only involve the delegation of tasks by principals. But teachers and learners are important stakeholders to enhance schools. A study in Sarpang Dzongkhag states that strengthening leadership development, professional learning communities, collaborative decision-making teamwork as well as learner participation can help improve teaching. Further, strengthening these will improve learning and increase student achievement in school.

Key words: *Distributed leadership, mission, goal, student achievement.*

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I. Introduction

Distributed leadership aims to improve student success through the collective capacity, expertise, skills, creativity, and innovation of educators and others within the school. Educational systems face increasing demands to perform better, and this has created an interest in leadership practices that go beyond the principal-centric model. There is a strong emphasis today on distributing leadership to improve the quality of education and create enabling conditions for teaching and learning (Abuhamda et al., 2021). Distributed leadership recognizes that a school is a complex organization consisting of a variety of individuals and groups. A single person cannot effectively manage all the leadership roles. The functions of any particular leadership role can't solve a problem but, the principal, teachers, and other staff can work together for that. The advantages of having several people contribute to the leadership of a school include enriched decision-making, bolstered problem-solving, and shared ownership as well as shared blame (Agyare, 2021).

In recent years, distributed leadership has grown into one of the most recognized leadership approaches in education because it enhances shared responsibility and collective accountability for students' learning. In contrast to the traditional leadership model, which places decision-making authority solely in the hands of school principals, distributed leadership engages teachers and other school stakeholders in the leadership process. They then use what they learn to improve teaching and learning. Distributed leadership enhances teacher collaboration, professional learning communities, instruction, and climate, shows a new study. Aspects such as feelings of belonging, relationships, and school values support better educational outcomes. Additionally, systematic reviews reveal that distributed leadership in the context of education is an emerging trend. This is so because it is of great importance to guarantee school effectiveness, strong teachers, and organizational improvement.

The accomplishment of students serves as a significant yardstick for global educational quality. According to Kılınc (2023), there is an increasing body of evidence that suggests distributed leadership has an indirect effect on student achievement through modifying teacher professional practices, teacher self-efficacy,

collaboration and instruction quality. Recent reviews have also shown that schools with distributed leadership are more likely to create collaborative cultures which improve teaching and subsequently learning (Ling et al., 2023; Mifsud, 2024). The concept of distributed leadership has been explored in many countries. However, distributed leadership has not been empirically proven in Bhutan.

Of these strategies, the concept of distributed leadership has taken hold as an effective means of enhancing school performance. Distributed leadership suggests that leadership roles among principals, teachers, and others are spread out. In other words, leadership practices emerge through a process of social interaction and are not the preserve of one individual. Research indicates that distributed leadership leads to better professional commitment, learning, instructional improvement, school effectiveness, and ultimately, better achievement outcomes (Harris, 2020; Spillane, 2018). As education systems globally aim to enhance learning outcomes and engage with the evolving needs of education, there is a growing effort to better understand the nature and impact of distributed leadership in pursuit of student success.

Schools and educational institutions in Sarpang Dzongkhag, Bhutan have been empowered in student achievement. This has been done to develop better adherence at higher levels. Schools need to develop a culture of collaboration whereby teachers take part in decision-making as well as the implementation of curriculum and school improvement. When done well, distributed leadership can create opportunities for shared expertise, innovation, and collective accountability to strengthen teaching and learning. Yet, there is a dearth of empirical studies on distributed leadership and student achievement in Bhutanese schools. Thus, the investigation of this relationship is necessary to see whether collaborative and shared leadership practices result in better academic outcomes for students. The results of the study may guide school leaders, policymakers, and educators in the process of improving the quality of education and academic performance in schools under Sarpang Dzongkhag.

1.2 Context of the study

The school systems around the world have been realizing that accessing improvement cannot be done using principal-centred leadership approaches alone. Since schools require the efforts of many people to function effectively, the leadership and management of the school is more and more shared by the principal, teachers and other educators, school board members, parents, etc. Students and teachers are encouraged to speak out about their experience and what they hear from parents. New studies show that working with other professionals helps teachers become more committed to school and its positive environment. The learning environment's quality is helpful with improving student achievement indirectly (Mifsud, 2024; OECD, 2024; Tejeiro, 2024). Additionally, according to modern reviews, schools where distributed leadership occurs are better placed to respond to educational reform and drive learning through the skills and expertise of the staff and their shared commitment to certain goals.

Bhutan has reformed the school curriculum to the Bhutan Baccalaureate (BB) and the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD). Furthermore, taking a scientific approach towards the same educational philosophy. School leaders are expected to activate teachers to lead improvement in teaching and learning practices to better student outcomes. Distributed leadership is internationally accepted as a leadership approach that works. In Bhutan, however, no empirical evidence is available regarding its relationship with student achievement. Prior Bhutanese research has largely been confined to studies of school performance and organizational effectiveness without directly considering student academic outcomes under distributed leadership. Consequently, research needs to be carried out in the diverse settings schools of Sarpang Dzongkhag operate. The school systems in this area operate in varying contexts, such as rural and semi-urban, with uneven resources and teacher capacity. The findings of this study will offer context-specific evidence to help school leaders and policymakers develop collaborative leadership practices to enhance students' achievement.

1.3 Problem statement

The education system's main purpose is to improve student achievement. Despite the ongoing reforms in education, schools are not able to provide it. The education system is fundamentally designed to enhance student achievement. Schools are not able to offer education despite the reforms taking place. Recent research has shown that school leadership practices can impact the quality of teaching of teachers, teacher collaboration, the climate of the school and student achievement. Distributed leadership has been offered as a particularly strong model of leadership, among contemporary theories of leadership. Its core thrust is collaboration, shared decision making, promoting teachers' agency, and shared responsibility for school improvement. When teachers and students organize, the outcomes are entrepreneurship, innovation and better student improvement. However, the effects are contingent on various factors, including school culture, teacher involvement, and the organisation's capacity (Dema, 2021; Tejeiro, 2024; Zhan & Liu, 2026). International evidence indicates that distributed leadership positively contributes to school effectiveness and student achievement. However, further context studies are needed to determine whether this is the case in other contexts as well.

The Ministry of Education and Skills Development in Bhutan is reforming to promote collaborative leadership, developing professional learning communities and shared responsibility. Although these reforms have

taken place, there is little evidence to show that student achievement has improved in Bhutanese schools as a result of distributed leadership. There have been studies on Bhutanese educational institutions, but those were mostly about school performance and leadership practices. None have investigated the correlation between distributed leadership and students' academic performance at the Dzongkhag level specifically. Furthermore, no published research has specifically examined this relationship in schools that fall under Sarpang Dzongkhag, which are diverse in geographical, socio-economic, and resource terms. The absence of such empirical evidence results in a knowledge gap for school leaders and policymakers seeking evidence-based leadership strategies to enhance students' achievement. As a result, the purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between distributed leadership and student achievement in Sarpang Dzongkhag schools, the findings of which can help in Bhutan's decision-making.

1.4 Significances

The significance of this study is that it will provide knowledge of educational leadership, as it examines the relationship between distributed leadership and students' achievement in schools of Sarpang Dzongkhag. Shared leadership practices and students' academic performance in the Bhutanese context have a significant impact, as per the findings. The study will help school principals and teachers learn about effective leadership that will enhance collaboration, teachers' engagement, and effective teaching and learning processes. The results may help policymakers and educational leaders in formulating leadership policies as well as capacity-building programs that promote distributed leadership in schools. Moreover, the research will provide a crucial reference for those scholars who wish to explore leadership with regard to student achievement, especially in Bhutan and other such settings where the research on distributed leadership is lacking (Harris, 2020; Mifsud, 2024).

1.5 Objectives of the research

- ✓ The study aims to identify the connection between dimensions of distributed leadership and student achievement in the schools of Sarpang Dzongkhag.
- ✓ The purpose of this study was to identify the distributed leadership practices that noticeably contribute to student achievement in schools of Sarpang Dzongkhag.
- ✓ In Sarpang Dzongkhag schools, how far do distributed leadership practices predict students' achievement?

1.6 Research Questions

1. According to Sarpang Dzongkhag, how do the dimensions of distributed leadership and student achievement in school relate?
2. What are the leadership practices that heighten student achievement in schools in Sarpang Dzongkhag?

II. Literature review

2.1 Distributed Leadership and Shared Decision-Making in Schools

According to Gronn (2002), effective leadership will emerge from a collective rather than the act of one individual. Thus, it is appropriate to refer to it as distributed leadership. Leadership functions are shared among members of a school community rather than the sole responsibility of one person or a small leadership group. The impact of curriculum reforms, technologies, demographic changes, and new national education policies has put pressure on educational institutions. In this situation, the hierarchical leadership model can no longer cope with diverse demands (Gronn & Lacey, 2004). Distributed leadership has, therefore, emerged as an alternative leadership approach in schools. The participation of teachers, students, parents, and community members is an effort to be utilized. This must happen at the level of leadership and decision-making. With the shared distribution of leadership responsibilities within schools, it offers collaborative opportunities, effective organizational learning, and can also effectively meet stakeholder needs (Flessa, 2009).

2.2 Principal Preparedness and School Effectiveness

Research on educational leadership in South Africa is relatively scarce (Lerutla and Steyn, 2023); both local and international studies show that a significant number of school principals are not professionally trained in areas such as financial management and instructional leadership. The lack of this hinders their ability to lead their schools and foster the professional growth of teachers and staff. Similarly, Don and Raman (2019) assert that the absence of structured leadership and management training programmes hinders school leaders. In most cases, academic qualification is the primary criterion for selecting the principal rather than managerial and leadership quality. In addition, induction and support mechanisms for newly appointed teachers ought to be robust and reliable. Similarly, principals lack an external guide who can advise on the dilemmas of school management. Consequently, ineffective leadership and unequal leadership distribution may lead to poor school performance and student outcomes. Several schools have had significant operational and academic problems (Don & Raman, 2019).

2.3 Changing roles of distributive leadership.

The principal's role in contemporary schools is increasingly that of a collaborator and enabler rather than a top-down manager. It has evolved over the years. This change shows how people are increasingly seeing that good leaders get people involved and empowered, and not just bossy at the top. Just like TQM, which caught on in the 1950s due to Japanese automobile and electronics industry players, phrases teach you how to be better. Based on the theories of Deming on quality management, these industries implemented TQM practices that allowed them to enhance their performance, become more competitive, and eventually exceed many American firms in market share and profitability (O'Toole, 2005). As a consequence, Deming is often referred to as the "intellectual father of the quality movement" (Whiteley, 2006). At the center of the TQM approach is teamwork and shared responsibility, with its cultural underpinnings promoting employee involvement, teamwork, and the empowerment of leadership (Leonard & McAdam, 2002).

Traditionally, school principals have been perceived as managers responsible for the day-to-day running of schools. It's common for them to respond to parents, reply to teachers' questions and issues, fill out administrative paperwork, deal with budgets, and other operations. The hierarchy of schools has been a structure where teachers were more subject to the principal. It has always been with leadership administrations above and leading teachers below. The board above. Shellard (2003) pointed out that the concept of the administrative role of the principal originated from the idea of individual leadership, which equated with management. Nonetheless, the growing emphasis on accountability and school improvement has opened up a new understanding of leadership within schools. More than just a managerial concept focusing on control, leadership is about vision, collaboration, and improvement in instruction (Lashway, 1998).

In the past, a capable principal was equated to a powerful leader who exercised strong control, provided clear direction, and engaged in top-down leadership to steer schools (Lashway, 1998). Increasing focus on improving student achievement has changed the role of principals from spokesman to making them more actively involved as instructional leaders (Cotton, 2003). In today's world, the principal has the duty of creating a supportive and collaborative atmosphere throughout the school that enables teachers to improve their present-day professional practices. Moreover, they create effective learning experiences that help all students to find success. The most important task that principals are assigned these days is the task of instructional leadership (Shellard, 2003). However, due to various management and administrative requirements, they are left with little time for instruction (Shellard, 2003). Many school leaders become busy with operational tasks, taking their attention away from teaching and learning. However, principals have an overwhelmingly crucial role to play in establishing a positive learning environment and improving the effectiveness of schools (Allen, 2003). Today's principals must gain a proper understanding of their position as instructional leaders who assist in teacher development and who also improve student learning (DuFour, 2005).

2.4 Social Constructivism and Distributed Leadership in Schools

Under the theory of distributed leadership, social constructivist perspectives provide a key foundation through which leadership is conceptualized as a collaborative and socially constructed process (Fitzsimons et al., 2011). The perspective supports the main principle of distributed leadership that leadership is not only in the hands of appointed persons but is built through interactions and relationships of several people in the organization (Harris et al., 2013). Due to how interdependent and complex schools have become, leadership needs to reflect the collaborative process of learning to 'learn'. Distributed leadership thus emphasizes shared participation, building knowledge together, and interdependent practices more in tune with the modern-day realities of schools (Hargreaves, 2007).

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the study's research methodology and explains the procedures adopted to carry out the study. The research proposal includes research design, target population, sample size, sampling techniques, research instruments, validity and reliability of instruments, data collection procedures, and methods of data analysis.

3.2 Research Design

In this research, qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to analyze distributed leadership and student achievement. A case study design was considered appropriate, as it allows for the study of contemporary phenomena within their real-life contexts. This allowed for study into the influence of distributed leadership practices on student achievement in schools. The participants' data were collected in their school settings, where the participants found it authentic to express their leadership practices and educational outcomes. For quantitative results, the instrument (questionnaires) was chosen as it is designed to measure schools that implement distributed leadership in the four domains of school mission, vision and goals, school culture, shared responsibility and leadership practices that promote the student achievement.

3.3 Research setting and Context

The research was conducted in schools of Sarpang Dzongkhag, southern Bhutan. Schools in Sarpang Dzongkhag are located in diverse urban, semi-urban, and rural geographical and socio-economic contexts. Schools in this area cater to students from diverse backgrounds and face context-specific challenges, including limited resources, weak community engagement, and varying levels of professional capacity. As education reform continues and with the demand for better learning results rising, schools are invited to take a collaborative leadership approach where there is a shared responsibility, teacher involvement, and collective choices. In this regard, distributed leadership is becoming more relevant, as school leaders are expected to involve teachers and other stakeholders in school improvement activities. Consequently, distributed leadership practices are used in Sarpang Dzongkhag schools, and it was interesting to note how these practices are perceived to affect students' achievement levels. The research is about selected schools of the Dzongkhag to gain insights into the relationship between distributed leadership and student achievement or academic performance.

3.4 Participant/ sample

The study participants included 20 principals and 20 senior teachers from twenty selected schools. A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select relevant respondents who possessed the right knowledge and understanding of distributed leadership practices and could provide rich, meaningful data to be analyzed. Once institutional approval was received, participants were invited to participate in the study and provide informed consent. It was completely voluntary to participate in the study, and measures are in place to safeguard participants' confidentiality as well as anonymity and ethical treatment.

3.5 Data collection methods

To gather the qualitative data, researcher used semi-structured interviews for data collection. The method was chosen because it allowed for flexibility and allowed the researcher to engage participants on predetermined research themes, and the freedom for the freedom to express their experiences, perceptions, and reflections in their own words. The interview guide was developed based on the objectives of the study and relevant literature on distributed leadership and school achievement. The interview guide was helpful in eliciting important information on key areas like leadership practices, decision-making, collaboration among stakeholders, challenges of implementing distributed leadership, and its perceived impact on academic performance.

To ensure that the participants were relaxed in their setting, the interview process was conducted at the schools of the respective participants in an in-person manner (Brighton & Kenneth, 2021). Prior to the beginning of an interview, all participants were unambiguously informed about the purpose of the study along with their rights as research participants. Furthermore, the participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential. All interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. Researchers used the verbatim method for interviews, in which they record only the words used by the interviewee.

3.6 Data analysis procedure

To ensure that the participants were relaxed in their setting, the interview process was conducted at the schools of the respective participants in an in-person manner. Prior to the beginning of an interview, all participants were unambiguously informed about the purpose of the study along with their rights as research participants. Furthermore, the participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential. All interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. Researchers used the verbatim method for interviews, in which they record only the words used by the interviewee. The reason for variations in transcripts can be explained by English language characteristics.

3.7 Validity and reliability

In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the researcher used member checking, prolonged engagement, and triangulation employed to bolster the credibility of the findings (Jack et al., 2019). Member checking, prolonged engagement, and triangulation were used to fortify the credibility of the findings.

By providing a clear description of the research context, institutions, and participants involved, the researcher enhanced transferability, which allows readers to determine whether the case is transferable to another case of a similar nature. All the research protocols, methodological decisions, data collection, and analysis were carefully recorded in such a way as to establish a clear audit trail. The researcher used reflective journaling and triangulation strategies for confirmability, which reduced bias and ensured that findings were data-driven, rather than the researcher's personal assumptions.

3.8 Ethical and its consideration

Research ethics was followed while conducting this study. Before the collection of data, participants were informed about the purpose, process, and aims of the study and voluntarily consented. To safeguard responses and erase identifying attributes, confidentiality and anonymity were ensured for the respondents and

their responses. Participants were informed that they could freely participate in the study and withdraw their participation at any point without any adverse consequences

The data of the research were kept on a secure site and accessible only to the study. Respect and confidentiality were given to participants' information and issues. Moreover, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institution prior to the data collection. The integrity of the research was maintained according to research ethics, ensuring that the participants' rights, dignity, and welfare were protected during the research.

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of the research was to study the relationship between leadership, as reflected in the distributed leadership dimensions, and student achievement in schools under Sarpang Dzongkhag. Similarly, it sought to establish the impact of distributed leadership practices on student achievement. The study results are presented thematically according to the study's objectives. The themes were designed to enhance the understanding of the most crucial aspects of school leadership and their impact on practices. The analysis revealed numerous key themes such as having clarity of purpose, being goal-oriented, distributed leadership, collaboration and more. Participants' experiences, views, and ideas about leadership practices in their schools reflect these themes.

4.2 Demographic information on participants

The demographic information of the participants describes the key background characteristics of those who participated in the study. These characteristics included age, sex, educational qualification, job title, and years of professional experience. The participants' characteristics and the context for the findings of the study are described here.

Table 1. *shows the demographic status of the sample.*

Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	30	75
Female	10	25
Teaching experiences		
More than 20 years	10	25
16 – 20 years	5	12.5
11 – 15 years	10	25
5 – 10 years	10	25
5 years or less	5	12.5
Academic qualification		
Master	30	50
Bachelor	20	50

According to table 1, the participants were divided based on gender, teaching experience, and qualifications. According to the findings of the survey, 40 respondents which were 75% were male. This suggests a higher percentage of male participants. Regarding teaching experience, the data reveals that 10 respondents each for more than 20 years, 11-15 years and 5-10 years making equal of 25%. 16 to 20 years and less than 5 years have only 5 responded which has 12.5 percent each. When considering qualifications academic, 10 respondents (25%) hold a bachelor's degree, while the remaining 30 respondents (75%) possess a master's degree and many are principals.

4.3 Research question 1: *What is the relationship between the dimensions of distributed leadership and student achievement in schools under Sarpang Dzongkhag?*

Involving students in making recommendations enables the school community to more effectively participate in decision-making and provide more useful responses to the school leadership team to share with the principal. Through this analysis, sought to establish whether, and if so to what extent, different dimensions of distributed leadership are associated with students' academic performance. The ratings of the respondents were summed up to achieve composite scores for each item that provided a measure of how much distributed leadership practices are evident in schools. The mean and standard deviation of both composite scores and the scores of the four dimensions of distributed leadership are presented in Table 2. The mean scores represent an overall perception of respondents on the given leadership dimensions, and the standard deviations show the degree of variation in responses. Understanding these descriptive results of the prevailing distributed leadership practices provides a basis for examining relationships with student achievement.

Table 2. Mean and SD of the dimension distributed leadership activities. (N=40)

Dimension of distributed leadership	M	SD
Mission and vision, and goal	4.3	1.5
School culture	4.6	1.3
Shared responsibility	3.3	2.2
Leadership practice	3.0	1.2

The mean scores on the four dimensions as shown in Table 2 received scores between 3.00 to 4.6 with a total mean of 2.95. The frequency with which the leadership behaviours were experienced is 2.76 which on a scale of 0 to 4 is quite high. The mean scores of dimensions were not significantly different from each other. This indicates that schools have adopted fairly consistent distributed leadership practices.

Among the given five dimensions, the culture (M = 4.6, SD = 1.3) opt the highest mean score. This shows that respondents perceived this dimension to occur frequently to continually. In contrast, the lowest mean score was for leadership practices (M = 3.0, SD = 1.2), which means these practices were experienced more often from sometimes to frequently. In general, the evidence suggested that, although culture was the most strongly evident dimension, leadership practices were greater.

4.3.1 On vision, mission and the goals, teachers have the following opinion

Teacher 1 (T1)

"Our school has a mission and a vision that is quite clearly outlined. So, the teachers generally know what the school wants them to achieve. Management leadership relays these goals in the meeting and advises us to work together to improve the learning and development of students".

According to teacher 2 (T2)

"The vision of the school gives us direction. Our principal involves teachers in the setting of the school goals and opportunities are offered for us to share. As a result, we feel accountable for attaining the targets, not merely seeing them as targets determined solely by the school leadership".

As per teacher 3 (T3)

"According to me, school objectives are closely related to student achievement. We talk about students' performance and discuss the improvement areas. Teacher Encouragement to take extra charges for different activities helps us in achieving the mission and vision of the school".

Teacher 4 (T4)

"The core mission and vision do not often reach the teacher as effectively as they should or practical a lot. When educators collaborate and monitor our progress, the school goals get all the clearer. If all teachers participate in planning, it can strengthen this area further".

The opinions of the four teachers revealed that the school's mission was largely interpreted as providing a sense of direction for teachers and students. T1 said that the mission and vision was clear and helped the teachers in making improvements in the students' learning and overall development. T2 stated that the mission and vision are a driver of unity and prompted teachers to work together. According to T3, the mission of the school was closely linked to student success and helped teachers with their daily work. Notwithstanding, T4 thought that while the mission was clear, it needed to be elaborated better in everyday classroom practices. Evidently, the four teachers viewed the mission of their school positively as it addresses the concerns of the students while promoting teamwork and focus on students.

4.3.2 The school's vision and mission according to the principals

Principal 1 (P1);

"The vision and mission of the school direct all forms of instructional planning and decision-making. They give teachers, students, and parents a clear path toward common objectives. Through Continued Meetings and Planning, We Try To Continue To Align Our Teaching And Learning To The School Vision And Mission".

Principal 2 (P2);

"In my opinion, the vision and mission are essential in creating a positive school culture and improving student achievement. These priorities help focus funds and make quality education possible for children. We believe involvement of teachers, in addition to other stakeholders, in implementing the vision and mission is essential for improvement of the school".

The two principals confirmed that the school's vision and mission help the school to set an instructional direction and to guide the decision-making and educational activities of the school. According to the two school principals, the vision and mission are aligned towards the teachers, students and stakeholders in a direction that conceivably pursues the improvement of educational quality and student achievement. Furthermore, it is necessary to plan together, communicate regularly and involve stakeholders in implementing the vision and mission. All the principals evaluated that the vision and mission of the school are important mechanisms for reinforcing the

school's culture, enhancing shared ownership, and developing the system for continuous improvement of the school.

4.3.3 Why is goal important for students' achievement?

On this questing teaches and the principal have the following to say.

Teacher 5 (T5)

"It is important to have clear school goals because they provide teachers and students with direction. Clearly defined learning objectives facilitate teachers' planning of lessons according to the pupils' needs and enable teachers to monitor progress."

Teacher 6 (T6)

"Objectives give a clear idea to the students as to what is expected of them. When students have clear and achievable targets, they feel motivated to learn and are focused. Teachers can also recognize kids who need further help thanks to it".

Principal 5 (P5)

"The common direction of the entire school is possible because of the school goals, which helps improve student performance by 1. Principal. If teachers work collaboratively towards clearly defined goals, then resources and teaching strategies can be better matched to the learning needs of students".

Principal 4 (P4)

"When we set some measurable goals, we can track student progress and determine whether our actions are working. Careful goal setting ensures accountability amongst teachers and ongoing enhancements in education".

Teachers and the principal having clear and achievable goals leads to improvement in student achievement by providing directions, increasing student motivation, providing guidance to the instructional planning of teachers, and allowing the school to monitor learning. The participants also noted that having common goals fosters cooperation and accountability among teachers, allowing the school to detect students' learning gaps and offer assistance.

4.4 Research question 2: Which distributed leadership practices significantly contribute to and predict student achievement in schools under Sarpang Dzongkhag?

In the present era of increased accountability in education, identifying leadership practices that contribute to school performance and student achievement is increasingly important. Previous qualitative studies by Elmore (2000) and Spillane (2005) identified distributed leadership as a valid and effective leadership approach. However, the quantitative findings of the present study did reveal a statistically significant relationship between distributed leadership and student achievement. Since the significant association was identified, these findings suggest the need for further examination of distributed leadership theory and its potential influence on student achievement across different educational contexts.

4.4.1 How should distributed leadership be?

Distributed leadership ensures proper leadership of a school for better performance. It focuses on sharing the leadership of a school among various individuals in the school. It helps the leadership effect positive outcomes by using the whole school community's capabilities. When leadership is distributed between people within the school community, this builds up functions which improve core school performance.

P7 said that *'Distributed leadership is about giving [other] leaders ownership'*

P6 *"I believe an essential trait of an effective leader is trusting our team"*.

T7 agreed, saying that *"Distributed leadership means departments run much better because people feel accountable for the results."*

According to T9, *"working with outside educators furthers collaboration among staff and identifies possible leaders in the school."*

T10 stated that *"When teachers are given opportunities to lead projects or committees."*

T11 echoed this sentiment by saying: *"Through shared leadership, teamwork is embraced and feeling part of a whole is fostered as every member is valued"*.

According to the participants, the principals and teachers ought to have the will to forgo some authority, appoint able deputies, listen to their advice, and allow them to do the job. Naveed et al., (2020) state that distributed leadership entails open communication and identifying the limitations of one's leadership. The researcher believes that by building trust, encouraging creativity, and developing a culture of professional initiative, staff can be motivated to undertake greater responsibility and a sense of enthusiasm while contributing ideas for the school's development.

4.4.2 Teamwork

Teamwork refers to when a group of individuals works together. It indicates they are working in coordination and supporting each other to reach the objective. Effective communication influences organizational success, where communication refers to the spoken and written exchange of ideas and understanding between two parties. Teamwork is important everywhere. We often see people working together in their workplace, school, games, and other teams and communities where everyone contributes.

According to (P8), *"Teamwork plays an important role for leaders to experience success"*.

Furthermore, (P9) highlights: *"Effective collaboration strengthens relationships among staff and creates a positive school culture where everyone works towards shared goals."*

According to (T12), *"When teachers plan together, they can align their strategies and improve learner performance."*

(T15) noted, *"Collaboration allows suggestions to be shared, problems to be solved, resulting in generations of better decision-making and innovation."*

According to (T17), *"Collaborating as a group lightens the burden and helps students learn from each other"*.

(T19) stated *"Working together helps build trust and lots of confidence. It also makes it easier to navigate challenges and lend support."*

Participants emphasized and reported the collaborative nature of teamwork and efficient leadership in schools. During the interview, P8 indicated that teamwork should be encouraged among staff by leaders while P9 noted the importance of collaboration to strengthen professional relationships and develop a positive school culture where staff work towards common goals. In the same manner, T12 concluded that teachers' collaborative planning enables them to harmonize their pedagogical strategies and enhance learner performance. T15 said that teamwork helps people to share ideas, do collective problem-solving, make better decisions and be innovative. T17 indicated working together makes it easier to share responsibilities in addition to offering valuable learning opportunities. On the other hand, T19 pointed out that working together builds trust and solidarity towards more effectively addressing emerging challenges and supporting one another.

By emphasizing teamwork and a common goal, we promote staff collaboration. Note how each fills in various puzzle pieces. Song et al. (2025) claim that working together means dividing up the work, making it easier to do, and helps to boost efficiency and productivity. According to the researcher, when people's contributions can be chalked to the overall aims of the group, it makes it easier for staff to take ownership and support one another. When students get opportunities to learn together, teachers feel less professionally isolated. Trust and company among the staff is strengthened. All in all, teachers and leaders to work in collaboration to improve the school and student achievement, as teamwork creates an environment.

4.4.3 Perception of the principal on distributed leadership

The principals' perception and interpretation of Distributed Leadership within a school is to be studied. The term shared leadership refers to an approach to leadership where the roles, functions, or responsibilities, and decision-making of leadership are distributed among the different members of a school community and not just one single leader. The approach highlights the active participation of individuals, cooperation, and the use of knowledge owned by the people for a common purpose of the school.

According to P11, *"the distribution of leadership is effective because the teachers are taking good care of their classrooms as leaders there"*.

P12 stated that *"By offering everyone a role to play, distributed leadership encourages collaboration and trust amongst team members"*.

T6 observed that *"When leadership is shared, decision-making becomes more participatory, and teachers feel more valued and motivated to contribute"*.

P5 said, *"Well-distributed leadership is better for departments as each personnel understands who leads what and under whom"*.

T5 remarked, *"Teachers gain confidence and experience professional growth when they are entrusted with leadership roles."*

T8 believed that *"Distributed leadership supports collaboration, while also reducing dependence on the principal for every decision"*.

The research shows that schools view distributed leadership as an effective way of fostering collaboration, accountability, and professional development. P11 specified that making teachers leaders makes them take more accountability for what goes on in their classrooms. P12 added that giving everyone a role inspires collaboration and trust in all team members. Similarly, T6 said that shared leadership ensures participatory decision-making, which makes teachers feel valued and motivated. It was further pointed out by P5 that clearly demarcated responsibilities clarify each person's role, reporting relationships, and area of leadership. Moreover, T5 also showed that giving teachers leadership roles makes them more confident and helps them develop. T8 backed these views up by explaining that distributed leadership prevents teachers and staff members from depending on the

principal for every decision. These ideas suggest that distributed leadership enhances democracy, empowers teachers, work better as a team, and enhances school decision-making. The results confirmed recent literature indicating that distributed leadership reinforces collaboration, teacher empowerment, professional development, and joint-decision making in schools. According to Ma and Yao (2024), distributed leadership is positively related to collaborative learning and relational trust, which in turn fosters the professionalism of teachers. Distributed leadership may support teachers' collaboration both directly and indirectly according to Ma and Marion (2024), who add that professional learning and innovative school climate enhance that influence. The results echo the participants' beliefs that shared leadership can help to build trust, facilitate collaboration, and encourage teachers' participation.

4.4.4 Learner involvement perception

The theme is about students being engaged and active participants in their learning. This practice stresses involving learners in the educational process to facilitate their ownership and take responsibility for their learning. Through active participation of all learners, learning can become an engaging, student-centered, and effective process.

P15 mentioned, *"I think, constant communication and it has to be open"*.

P20 stated that *"Building student confidence and ownership through their own learning will improve other aspects of the school too."*

T13 *"Stressed that lively student interaction encourages logical thinking and problem-solving abilities in learning. An active learner has the ability to take part in decision-making"*.

According to T15, *"When students are involved in the leadership role as well as in classroom activities, they perform better while boosting their self-confidence."*

T16 stated that *"Distributed leadership enhances the collaboration between teachers and students and develops students' leadership abilities for the future."*

According to evidence, involvement of learners is a significant dimension of distributed leadership as learner engagement builds confidence, ownership, collaboration, and leadership skills. According to P15, effective communication is an ongoing and two-way process. This was reflected in the idea that students should be allowed to voice their views and participate meaningfully in the school. According to P20, fostering confidence and ownership in students in regard to their own learning positively affects other spheres of school life. Likewise, T13 indicated that students must react actively to strengthen reasoning, problem-solving, and decision-making. T15 also observes that the participation of students in leadership roles and class activities enhances students' performance and self-confidence. T16 underscored these views by pointing to how distributed leadership reinforces teacher–student collaboration while developing students' future leadership capacities.

With distributed leadership, performance can be improved. It allows the use of the accumulated information of administrators to enhance student achievement, teachers, and administrative staff. It enhances the formative leadership qualities of the students as they participate in leadership early and become confident and feel like a part and parcel of decision-making in school.

5.1 Conclusion

The research findings indicate that distributed leadership is significantly related to student achievement in schools in Sarpang Dzongkhag. The findings further reveal that distributed leadership practices were evident across all participating schools, with school culture emerging as the most strongly perceived dimension. The clear mission, vision, and goals of a school help teachers and students at the school be accountable and focus on their clear vision. Also, it assists in ensuring that the practice of teaching and learning meets student needs. Further, the findings show how shared leadership of principals, teachers and other members of the school nurtures collaboration, trust, professional growth, accountability and participatory decision. Teachers should not only rely on the principal to manage their school but also support one another in doing so. The existence of a significant relationship between distributed leadership and student achievement means that leadership which encourages shared responsibility leads to better educational outcomes. When students are provided with opportunities to actively participate in classroom activities, assume leadership roles, and contribute to decision-making, the findings indicate that they develop greater confidence and a stronger sense of responsibility for their own learning. Consequently, we should not view distributed leadership as merely the delegation of tasks and assignment of responsibility by principals but rather as a collaboration across the whole school to develop teachers' and learners' capacity. The school culture that can improve teaching and learning, and ultimately student achievement at different schools in Sarpang Dzongkhag, can be engineered through effective communication, collaboration, collective decision-making, teacher leadership, and meaningful learner participation.

5.2 Recommendations

The recommendations given below are based on the findings of the study.

Recommendations for the Dzongkhag Education Office (DEO).

1. The DEO should facilitate regular professional development programs to strengthen the capacity of principals and teachers in distributed leadership, collaborative decision-making, teamwork, and instructional leadership.
2. The DEO explore opportunities for schools to present and share successful practices of distributed leadership, challenges, and strategies through professional learning communities, cluster meetings, and inter-school learning.
3. The DEO ensure that schools get the technical, professional, and material support that will enable to undertake collaborative school improvement initiatives effectively.
4. The DEO promote evidence-based school improvement by encouraging schools to use student achievement data, teacher reflections, and stakeholder feedback for the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of leadership and school improvement initiatives.

Recommendation to principals

1. The principal should regularly provide opportunities for teachers, students and interested parties to participate in planning and decision-making and school improvements.
2. The principal should recognize the strengths of teachers. Further, meaningful leadership roles should be assigned to them. This can be in departments, committees, projects and instructional activities. The principal should also guide them and provide support as appropriate.
3. The principal must create an environment where teachers and students are free to communicate their ideas, issues, and suggestions. Communication should be normal, not judgment.
4. The collective responsibility for student learning and achievement can be strengthened by teachers' engagement in collaborative planning, peer support, joint problem solving, and professional learning.
5. Principals should allow participation in school activities and decision-making and classroom leadership and others that help develop confidence and leadership abilities in Learner Leadership.

Recommendation to teachers

1. Involvement in School Planning - Teachers should become more responsible for accepting leadership - participation in school planning committees and improvement activities.
2. Teachers ought to plan lessons together, share successful strategies, learn from one another, and work on problems together as much as possible.
3. Three steps that teachers can take to facilitate learner involvement in the classroom: Students' views should be allowed to make choices, solve problems, play leadership roles and take on more responsibility for their own learning.
4. The instructional practices of teachers should be in line with the school's mission, vision & measurable objectives so that collective effort goes toward student improvement.
5. Teachers should focus on ongoing professional development to strengthen their leadership capacity, pedagogical knowledge, and collaborative skills through professional development and peer learning opportunities.

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