Distributed Leadership Practices in schools in Ghana: Perspectives of headteachers and teachers in Basic Schools in the Northern Region

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Abstract: This study sought to explore the perceptions of basic school headteachers and teachers regarding distributed leadership practices across basic schools in Northern Ghana. The study population included all public basic schools in the Northern Region of Ghana. A qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design was adopted for data collection and analysis. A semi-structured interview guide was used for data collection. The findings revealed that distributed leadership plays a crucial role in enhancing school performance and increasing teachers' commitment to working effectively towards achieving predetermined goals. The study concludes that distributed leadership practices are vital for enhancing the overall effectiveness of basic schools. Based on these findings, the study suggests that a distributed leadership approach should be practiced to promote a positive school climate and efficiency in basic school management.

Keywords: Distributed Leadership, School improvement, Teachers

1.1 Introduction

Headteachers play a pivotal role in shaping and ensuring the efficiency of the educational system in an institution (Ibrahim et al., 2018). Effective leadership in twenty-first-century schools requires committed and capable headteachers and teachers. Schools today is gradually shifting away from the traditional and inflexible model of leadership, which involved one person holding all leadership responsibilities and did not allow for shared leadership practices among workers. This traditional approach has been criticized, as institutional leaders can be influenced by their followers, and the concentration of power in one person could lead to problems with leadership practices (Rashid, 2022). Therefore, schools emphasize the importance of distributed leadership, which involves shared decision-making and leadership responsibility among members, given the complex nature of the school structure and its challenges (Chitpin, 2020).

Distributed leadership practices in schools are centred on the shared responsibilities among headteachers and teachers within the school. The distributed leadership approach encourages headteachers to share leadership responsibilities among teachers to foster effective school leadership. This involves empowering and involving teachers in decision-making processes, fostering collaboration, and collectively addressing school environment complexities (Or & Berkovich, 2023). This aligns with the assertion of Harris and Elliott (2020) that distributed leadership approach promote collaboration and collective problem-solving, leading to improved organizational performance and employee job satisfaction. The distributed leadership approach also seeks to it that teachers accept responsibilities and utilize their abilities and skills to contribute to school goals (Hickey, Flaherty, & Mannix-McNamara, 2022). Teachers' active involvement in school leadership is

influenced by their individual qualities, competencies, knowledge, and unwavering dedication to multifaceted tasks within the school system.

While various perspectives on distributed leadership exist, it is often viewed as a collective and collaborative process where responsibilities are shared among individuals, emphasizing members' expertise, skills, and knowledge to achieve common goals (Hickey et al., 2022). Distributed leadership theory asserts that successful organization lies in the technique through which leadership is facilitated, supported, and orchestrated (Hickle, 2021). Studies have shown that different patterns of distributed leadership are critical in achieving organizational change, commitment, and overall school improvement (Connolly, James, & Fertig, 2019; Dampson, Mensah, & Laryea, 2019; Koch, 2019; Liu & Watson, 2020; Williams & Young, 2022). The study aims to explore the perceptions of headteachers and teachers on distributed leadership and its perceived impact on teachers' commitment and school improvement.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The ability of teachers to take on leadership responsibilities delegated to them depends on the headteacher's willingness to relinquish such authority to them. Some headteachers would not want to cede the control they have over their teachers and make them leaders (Dampson et al., 2019). Even though some headteachers may encourage the practice of a distributed leadership approach, however, there are some challenging issues such as power struggles, power-conscious, fear, and other abysmal behaviours that some teachers may show when leadership roles are assigned to them (Nicholas, 2019). This has brought about some kind of discomfort among headteachers in sharing leadership responsibilities with teachers in the basic schools. Headteachers may share

sentiments on distributing leadership roles and involving teachers in any decision-making process. Some headteachers, according to Harling (2018), are of the view that the bureaucratic nature of the leadership structure would lead to delays in the decision-making process. Others also resist distributing leadership roles because they see it as reducing their scope of work (Bush & Mooi, 2019). An unofficial conversation with some headteachers within the Tamale Catchment revealed that some headteachers do not want to engage their teachers in leadership responsibilities as well as in a decision-making process. Some have it that engaging their teachers in decision-making delays in agreeing or difficult in coming to a consensus and as such may lead to delays in finding immediate solutions to a problematic issue that seems to affect the schools. The delay in decision-making may have been the reason for some headteachers to discredit the idea of distributed leadership in school. Dampson et al. (2019), concluded that sharing leadership is a risky venture and can lead to the sharing of ineptitude. Some headteachers run the risk of not sharing leadership responsibilities with their teachers because they hold a view that sharing leadership will not contribute to school improvement (Dampson et al., 2019) but rather escalate the existing problems.

Existing studies in the Ghanaian educational context have extensively investigated distributed leadership practices (Ibrahim, 2022; Nurudeen & Alhassan, 2022). These studies have predominantly scrutinized the impact of distributed leadership on various dimensions such as academic performance, teachers' empowerment, commitment (Nurudeen & Alhassan, 2022), and positive behaviour management (Ibrahim, 2022). Despite these contributions, a critical research gap still exists as only a handful of studies delve into the perceptions of headteachers and teachers on distributed leadership and its impact on school improvement. While existing research recognizes distributed

leadership as an instrumental factor in teachers' commitment, and empowerment, understanding the impacts on school improvement from the viewpoint of headteachers and teachers is significantly underexplored. This current study is designed to bridge this gap, aiming to contribute to the existing knowledge by elucidating the perceptions of headteachers and teachers on distributed leadership practices and the perceived impact on basic school improvement. Based on this backdrop, it was imperative to conduct a study on Distributed leadership practices and the perceived impact on school improvement: Perception of headteachers and teacher's basic schools.

Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Distributed Leadership

The root of distributed leadership is traced back to the work of Gibbs in 1954 (Gronn & Hamilton, 2004) and as far back as the mid-1920s. However, this distributed leadership approach is relatively new in the educational leadership enterprise, having emerged as a concept in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Harris & Spillane, 2013). Some notable contributors to the development of the distributed leadership approach in the field of education can be traced to the publication of Spillane and Gronn (as cited in Lumby, 2013). The distributed leadership literature remains diverse and broad-based (Bennet et al., 2003 as cited in Harris, 2010). Therefore, conceptualizing the approach is one of the most challenging tasks for educational researchers, scholars, practitioners, and leaders due to the complexity of the leadership concept and its definition depending on the viewpoint and the ability to defend a particular perspective or depends on the conditions under which it is being made (Botha, 2014). Despite hundreds of studies, literature, and articles published on distributed leadership since the early 2000s, there still has not been any

commonly accepted definition (Tian et al., 2016; Dampson, Mensah, & Laryea, 2019).

According to Leithwood et al. (2009), distributed leadership is a regular means of dividing responsibilities in organizations among members to limit the likelihood of mistakes being committed under solo leadership models. Spillane et al. (2012) challenged the traditional view of leadership as a role occupied by an individual with formal authority to share responsibilities because of the limited information available to the single leader. They argued that distributed leadership occurs across multiple levels of the organization for improvement. Jambo and Hongde (2020) found that schools with a strong distributed leadership approach had higher levels of student achievement and improved school culture. Leithwood and Mascall (2008) conducted a systematic review of research on distributed leadership and found that the concept is associated with higher levels of teacher collaboration, improved teacher satisfaction, and better student outcomes. They also highlighted the importance of developing shared leadership capacity among teachers and other stakeholders, as well as the need for ongoing professional development and support for headteachers and teachers. Rumeli et al., (2022) opined that distributed leadership requires a focus on building relationships, developing trust, and promoting shared goals and values. However, there are also challenges to the successful adoption of distributed leadership, particularly in traditional administrative structures and political environments (Harris, 2010). Distributed leadership necessitates a shift in thinking about leadership and a willingness to share power and authority among multiple individuals.

The concept of 'distributed leadership' shares commonalities with several related leadership concepts. For instance, collaborative leadership, with emphasis on joint decision-making and teamwork, is akin to the collective

decision-making process of distributed leadership (Wallace, 2002). Similarly, shared leadership, as proposed by Pearce and Conger (2003), aligns with the idea of distributing leadership responsibilities across various individuals within an organization. Participative leadership, as described by Vroom and Yago (1998), is also similar to distributed leadership by emphasizing the inclusion of members in decision-making processes. Consequently, many authors commonly use the term "distributed leadership" synonymously with shared leadership and collective leadership (Spillane, 2012; Göksoy, 2015; Botha & Triegaardt, 2016). This accumulation of related concepts means that distributed leadership is often used to describe any form of shared, decentralized, devolved, or dispersed leadership practice in schools. It is this "generic" use of the term that has caused both the misconception that distributed leadership means that everyone leads and the misuse of the term to mean any form of shared leadership practice (Bush, 2019). Though every leadership is to some extent distributed, because leadership is essentially organizational direction and influence, it does not always mean that everyone in an organization instantaneously leads.

2.2 Effects of Distributed Leadership on school improvement

Many research in distributed leadership in Europe (UK), America (Canada, USA), Australia and Oceania (Australia), and Africa (South Africa, Ghana) revealed distributed leadership as one of the crucial contributors to school improvement and teachers' commitment (Bush, 2019; Connolly, James, & Fertig, 2019; Dampson, Mensah, & Laryea, 2019; Williams & Young, 2022). Akin, Botha, and Triegaardt (2016) disclosed that distributed leadership contributes to school improvement, specifically in teaching and learning. Dampson, Mensah, and Laryea (2019) conducted a study on distributed leadership in Ghanaian secondary schools and found that it was associated with

positive outcomes such as improved student achievement, teacher motivation, and school culture. The distributed leadership approach is seen as one of the most important leadership concepts that contribute to organizational commitment and school improvement globally (Ataş Akdemir & Ayik, 2017). In line with this, Pierro (2020) posited that the prevalent practice of the distributed leadership approach by headteachers in schools has a positive influence on school improvement.

According to Liu and Watson (2020) distributed leadership approach brings about commitment among staff due to its collaborative nature. Members' involvement in the leadership and operations of the school helps improve their commitment level and improvement of the school. This is because employees who feel involved in the management process remain committed and passionate about the success of the organization. Aziz et al. (2021) pointed out that workers' dedication to work is an indicator that determines the staff's commitment to work. Teachers' commitment to work is linked to how they become attracted to their work and how they develop an interest in working towards fulfilling the vision of the school. Several factors could bring about teachers' commitment and school improvement of which distributed leadership is not excluded. Liu and Watson (2020) postulated that staff commitment is determined by the attitude and loyalty they attach to their responsibilities as workers. Teachers' participation in school has been revealed by scholars to be a contributory factor to school improvements. In line with this, Koch, (2019) posited that practising the distributed leadership approach in schools contributes to teachers' commitment. This means that the approach makes teachers develop genuine feelings of attachment and commitment to the school. Emphasizing the idea of distributed leadership, White et al. (2017) and Botha (2016) postulate that educational institutions such as schools can be improved

when the teachers are actively engaged in leadership roles in the school. Akin, Botha (2016) argue that spreading leadership roles among some school teachers through the distributed leadership approach possibly led to school improvement. However, many headteachers isolate themselves from other teachers and assume primary responsibility for leading their school, which is a narrow view of leadership because it ignores the talents of teachers and fails to recognize their potential as leaders (Brinia, Mastora, & Psoni 2020).

2.3 Impediments to Distributed Leadership in the Ghanaian Context

While studies in the fields of leadership and school improvement support the benefits of distributed leadership, significant challenges exist for its adoption and adaptation in schools. Therefore, it would be unrealistic to overlook the barriers that make implementing distributed leadership difficult in schools in the Ghanaian context (Adu-Gyamfi, 2019). Several studies have identified barriers to the successful adoption of distributed leadership practices in Ghanaian schools (Adu-Gyamfi, 2019; Boakye et al., 2020). One significant barrier is the lack of awareness among teachers regarding the concept and practice of distributed leadership (Adu-Gyamfi, 2019). The traditional administrative structure of secondary schools and the political environment also create challenges for understanding the distributed leadership approach (Bush & Ng, 2019). The conventional hierarchy of leadership in schools in Ghana places power primarily in the hands of headteachers, which occasionally leads to conflicts and confusion regarding decision-making, resulting in staff dissatisfaction (Boakye et al., 2020). Furthermore, schools may face challenges due to the lack of competence among teachers to perform various tasks effectively (Dampson, Havor, & Laryea, 2018). The distribution of leadership roles among multiple individuals might inadvertently lead to the distribution of incompetence (Wairia & Munge, 2019).

Therefore, addressing the incompetence in leadership tasks is crucial for the successful implementation of distributed leadership in Ghana. Headteachers must consider vital factors, such as educational expertise and fostering relationships with teachers. Establishing trust-based relationships is crucial for headteachers to achieve significant outcomes (Oduro, 2012). This suggests that if headteachers cannot establish trust within the school, they are unlikely to achieve significant outcomes. This supports the idea that although leadership skill is a critical component of effective leadership, it alone is not enough. Therefore, headteachers must establish trust-based relationships to foster and maintain improvements in teaching and learning for school improvement (Asare, 2015). Despite the potential disadvantages of implementing distributed leadership in the schools in Ghana, such as challenges in addressing incompetence and establishing trust-based relationships, the benefits of this leadership approach should be carefully considered (Adu-Gyamfi, 2019). Through distributing leadership responsibilities among multiple individuals, schools can leverage the diverse talents and perspectives of their staff to improve teaching and learning outcomes (Asare, 2015). Therefore, it is important to broaden the discussion of distributed leadership in Ghana to fully explore its potential for promoting school improvement. Consequently, this study comprehensively explores the perceived impact of the distributed leadership approach on teachers' commitment and school improvement in basic schools in Ghana. This discourse includes an exhaustive review of pertinent literature to ascertain existing knowledge gaps and areas necessitating further exploration. Subsequently, direct dialogue with headteachers and teachers via interviews was employed to elicit their perspectives and experiences regarding the practice of distributed leadership in Ghanaian Basic schools and its perceived impact on school improvement.

3.1 Research Methods

The study population made up headteachers and teachers in the public basic schools within the Northern Region of Ghana. The research approach adopted was a qualitative approach using the descriptive phenomenological design. The adoption of this design assisted the researchers to explore and describe the lived experiences and perceptions of the headteachers and teachers regarding their understand and the practices of distributed leadership (Christensen, Welch & Barr, 2017). Furthermore, the descriptive phenomenological design enabled the researchers to provide an in-depth, detailed description and analysis of the lived experiences and perspectives of the headteachers and the teachers involved in the study. The study employed semi-structured interviews to gather data from participants. This approach involves exploring and understanding the depth of human experiences, behaviours and social phenomena (Bearman, 2019).

The semi-structured interview guide which was designed by the researchers, facilitated the in-depth exploration of participant's perspectives and captures the richness of their experiences and insights. The approach was purposively used since the researchers needed rich and concrete information for the study. According to Creswell (2017) and Iadertina and Luketi (2018), a qualitative approach is appropriate and suitable for a study that intends to reveal a deeper understanding of participants' experiences which is the focus of this study. A face-to-face interview was scheduled for the headteachers and teachers who were more than five years old in the schools. The decision to engage headteachers and teachers with more than five years of experience in the schools enhances the credibility of the data collection process. This criterion ensures that participants possess sufficient knowledge and experience to provide insightful responses, thereby enhancing the validity of the findings. The

approach was important for the study since it gave a comprehensive understanding from headteachers and teachers' perspectives on the impact of distributed leadership on school improvement. The qualitative approach was apt for the study considering the exploratory nature of the research questions guiding the study.

The interview guide consisted of questions divided into two sections: one for teachers and another for headteachers. For teachers, the interview questions explored their perspective of the distributed leadership, its importance, and its potential impact on school improvement. Similarly, the instrument investigated headteachers' perspective and support for distributed leadership and perceived impacts on school improvement. To ensure the validity of the interview guide, the researchers conducted thorough reviews and revisions of the content and structure of the interview questions. Expert feedback was sought and incorporated into the revisions to enhance the clarity of the questions and ensure that they measure what they intend to measure. The expert review process significantly strengthened the quality of the instrument.

The study considered a non-probability sampling technique. The purposive sampling technique were used for the public basic schools situated within the Sagnarigu district of Northern Ghana. The public schools were selected over the private basic schools because the researchers needed to engage participants who are professionally trained and are working in a public basic school since most of the private schools do not have professional teachers. The purposive sampling approach was also used to select the headteachers and teachers for the study. This technique was used because the researchers needed to conduct a thorough and in-depth exploration of the perspectives, experiences, and practices of each of the headteachers. The purposive sampling technique specifically the criterion sampling was also used to select six teachers who have

worked in the school for more than five years making 9 participants selected for the study. According to Hennink and Kaiser (2022), data saturation in qualitative studies can be achieved in an array of interviews from 9 to 17. Therefore, having a sample size of nine participants for the interview was ideal. Also, the sample size was considered appropriate because interviewing a large number of people with similar qualities would provide a restricted number of opinions since certain opinions would be repeated over and over (Cober & Adams, 2020). Akin, Yin's opinion (2018) of submitting two to ten samples is considered sufficient to reach saturation levels. Therefore, for this study, the level of saturation was seen in the ninth informant when there was a repetition of the same elements with other informants. This assertion suggests that qualitative research does not necessarily require a large number of interviews with the target population.

The data was qualitatively analysed based on the interview questions. An inductive bottom-up approach of thematic analysis was adapted for the data analysis. Initially, the data were transcribed from the recorded responses of participants, allowing the researchers to immerse themselves and gain familiarity with the gathered data. Subsequently, codes were generated to identify key elements within the data, resembling the process of categorization to discern significant patterns. These codes were meticulously examined to discover themes for analysis. These themes were identified with thorough scrutiny to ensure that they accurately represented the richness of the data gathered from participants. Thematic analysis was chosen for its suitability regarding the flexibility of the research questions, sample size, and research method used in the study (Clarke & Braun, 2018).

4.1 Results and Discussion

The study aims to explore the perceptions of headteachers and teachers on distributed leadership and its perceived influence on school improvement using a phenomenological qualitative approach. The focus is to provide an in-depth, descriptive understanding of the practices of distributed leadership by exploring the lived experiences and perspectives of the participants involved through extensive data collection instruments such as interviews, to gather data on participants' perspectives on how distributed leadership practices within their schools contribute to school improvement. The demographic data of the participants in the study are described in Table 1

Table 1: Demographic Information of Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Years of experience
Headteacher 1	Male	46	13
Headteacher 2	Female	44	12
Headteacher 3	Male	51	16
Teacher 1	Female	39	8
Teacher 2	Male	41	10
Teacher 3	Female	33	6
Teacher 4	Male	39	9
Teacher 5	Male	43	11
Teacher 6	Female	38	7

Source: Field Data

The headteachers who participated in the study include two males and one female. These headteachers range in age from 44 to 51 years. Considering their years of experience, which range from 8 to 11 years, it suggests that these headteachers have had considerable tenure in leadership positions. The sampled

teachers that participated in the study include three male teachers and three female teachers, demonstrating a balanced representation in terms of gender and reflecting a relatively equal distribution of gender among teachers. The age range of the teachers is from 33 to 43 years, indicating a diverse range of experience levels and perspectives among them. The years of experience among teachers vary from 6 to 11 years, suggesting a mix of early-career and mid-career professionals.

A face-to-face interview was scheduled with participants to explore their perception on the distributed leadership practices and the perceived impact it has on teachers' commitment and school improvement. Based on the interview questions asked, the following major themes and sub-themes presented in table 2 emerged for discussion.

Participants' Understanding of Distributed Leadership

It was deemed imperative to test the knowledge of the participants about the distributed leadership approach. Therefore, one of the icebreaker questions in the interview guide asked participants about their understanding of distributed leadership or how they would define distributed leadership. Most of the participants, both headteachers and teachers, demonstrated some basic understanding of the approach. The key characteristics of the approach revealed from the interview include the distribution of powers; extending leadership, shared responsibilities; building a successful administration; delegation of duties; distributing leadership responsibilities and tasks to do different jobs; and not leaving leadership in the hands of one person. These are evident in the following extracts:

> Sharing duties and taking decisions by both the head teacher and the subordinates. (Teacher 1)

I will base this on how you assign roles to various teachers so that every teacher will have his or her role to play in the school. (Teacher 2)

It's extending leadership with different people and not leaving leadership responsibilities in the hands of one person. (Teacher 3)

In my understanding, it emphasizes shared decision-making and responsibility among us as teachers and its concern is on building successful school administration (Teacher 4)

This is a type of leadership in which responsibilities are shared with every person within an organization. And brings about teamwork and collaboration (Teacher 5)

My understanding of distributed leadership is that when leadership responsibilities are distributed to teachers by the headteacher to ensure shared responsibilities such that every teacher's skill, and knowledge are valued in the school setting (Teacher 6)

The word alone even states clearly that it's supposed to be a shared responsibility among staff in an organization or educational sector. (Headteacher 1)

I will say distributed leadership has to do with delegating powers and where the head of the institution decides to give certain duties and share some of the responsibilities that he is supposed to have as a head for others to participate to build a successful administration (Headteacher 2)

> I will say it's the kind of leadership that every teacher is tasked
> with based on the expertise to do different jobs in the school
> (Headteacher 3)

From the interview excerpts, all the participants in this study agreed that distributed leadership encompasses sharing duties, taking decisions collaboratively, and assigning roles based on individual expertise. It extends leadership beyond the confines of a single authority figure, promoting shared decision-making and responsibility sharing among staff members. These views correspond with earlier discussions in the research literature that stated clearly that there is a link between distributed leadership and sharing of leadership responsibilities and working collaboratively. The study revealed that sharing leadership responsibilities is a significant component of distributed leadership (Botha & Triegaardt, 2016). Central to the study's finding is that distributed leadership is cultivation of teamwork and collaboration, where powers are delegated and responsibilities shared to foster a collective effort towards achieving common goals (Harris & Elliott, 2020).

The Practice of Distributed Leadership in Schools

To find out whether or not schools practised distributed leadership. Dampson et al. (2019) postulated that the ability of staff to take on leadership responsibilities depends on the leadership's willingness to relinquish such authority to them. Having this backdrop in mind, the researchers interviewed headteachers to find out whether or not they distribute leadership responsibilities to teachers in their various schools. It was noted that the school heads saw the distribution of leadership as being instrumental to school improvement. Therefore, they practice this leadership approach in their various schools. To probe further, headteachers were asked their reasons for

encouraging the practice of distributed leadership in schools. It was revealed from the interaction that headteachers encouraged the practice of distributed leadership in schools for some of these reasons: ensures effective teaching and learning; brings about peace among both headteachers and teachers; quality decision making; helps in running the school smoothly; brings about progression; reduces burden or workload on headteachers and others. These reasons can be deduced from the extracts:

> Yes, it brings about a peaceful environment to aid effective teaching and learning, and there is always cooperation between teachers and the head teacher. (Headteacher 1)

> Yes, I was encouraged to relinquish some leadership responsibilities to my teachers because it reduces the burden on me as the head teacher (Headteacher 2)

> Yes, in my point of view, I encouraged it because it makes the school run smoothly, faster, and smarter since, in the absence of the head, one does not slow down the activities or address the teachers. (Headteacher 3)

A statement from a headteacher drew the attention of the researchers to the point that a distributed leadership approach must be geared towards encouraging the leadership potential of the teachers. Headteacher 2 stated;

> As the headteacher, I call out all my teachers for a meeting to discuss with them the available positions or duties for them to decide on which one they can handle best. We sometimes cast votes to elect a preferred teacher.

These views of the headteachers affirm the statement made by Göksoy (2015) that to achieve the objectives of a school, it is essential to encourage the leadership potential of the human resources and give staff members equal opportunities and positions.

To verify and confirm the claims made by the headteachers concerning the practice of distributed leadership in the schools, teachers were also interviewed on the same variable. The responses from the teachers reveal that the approach is effectively practised in their schools. Even though one mentioned that it was just recently that the headteacher delegated leadership roles to them to perform certain duties,

> Leadership was held by only two people in this school. But now we are all involved. I am now in charge of academics. (Teacher 4)

To probe further into the reasons for the delegation of leadership roles to teachers, a headteacher pointed out that the school structure is complex such that one person cannot perform all the leadership roles. This claim by the headteachers supports the claim of Ataş Akdemir and Ayik (2017) that the complex nature of the school structure will not allow a person to lead and function effectively. However, all the teachers confirmed the fact that headteachers share leadership responsibilities with them. All teachers interviewed gave some specific leadership roles that were shared with them by their headteachers to perform. Academic leaders, sports leaders, curriculum leaders, health leaders, and a variety of others are examples of these leadership roles. These leadership roles enumerated were deduced from the verbatim transcribed as noted:

Our headteacher has delegated responsibilities to many of us these responsibilities include the class master, health teacher, and sports teacher (Teacher 1)

In this school, teachers are involved in everything. This is because the headteacher encourages and empowers us to share our ideas and because of that the headteacher has shared with us some leadership responsibilities some of which are the curriculum master, sports master, health master, and myriad others. (Teacher 2)

We have a health teacher, we have a responsibility as a chef coordinator, we have a responsibility as an assistant head, your responsibility can be maybe a sports teacher, and so many. (Teacher 3)

As I said, at first the headteacher took all the leadership responsibilities but now responsibilities are shared collectively with us. Now I am the head of ICT (Teacher 4)

We have the head, the assistant head, and then we have other roles for the teachers, like health, and ICT, those teachers are leading when it comes to those areas. (Teacher 5)

For instance, in a school like this, we have what we call a duty roster where everyone will carry out certain duties and responsibilities. Apart from that, every teacher in this school has another responsibility to carry out. I am the one talking as I am talking. I am the sports teacher at the school. Others are in charge of health, while others are in charge of the curriculum. (Teacher 6**)**

The responses from the teachers confirmed the claims of the headteachers about their practice of distributed leadership in their schools. The approach seems to play a significant role in the development of the schools. Considering what is revealed from the study, the teachers were further asked to share some reasons why headteachers distribute leadership roles to them. What they narrated does not contradict the reasons the headteachers gave, but two opinions were not shared by the headteachers but were revealed from the teacher's interview. Some teachers revealed that a lack of leadership skills and knowledge on the part of headteachers makes it necessary to distribute leadership. Also, teachers sometimes feel neglected if they are not involved in leadership. These are deduced from the transcribed verbatim:

> if one person is handling two positions, he will not get enough time to handle numerous positions. Others lack knowledge or leadership abilities, or the individual has no interest in the area of vacancy. (Teacher 1)

> Being the headmaster doesn't mean you have the potential for all kinds of things; there are people within who have knowledge that will bring about improvement if you discuss it with them. (Teacher 4)

> They feel neglected since they aren't involved, and that is why they won't share ideas with you. (Teacher 6)

The participants agreed that the practice of distributed leadership supports school improvement through the sharing of responsibilities among members of the school system without the head shouldering all the responsibilities. This study revealed that the majority of the participants agreed that distributed leadership support change in schools and that leadership

responsibilities should be shared to achieve organizational goals (Azorín, Harris, & Jones, 2020).

School Improvement

In discussing the theme "Distributed Leadership as an Instrumental Approach to School Improvement", the researchers began with a brief insight into what participants saw as the importance of distributed leadership when practised. This inquiry was made by the researchers to ascertain whether the implementation of the approach by their headteachers was deemed necessary. The teachers noted several important aspects of the approach that could be associated with school improvement. These benefits, as revealed by the teachers, are: making work easier for efficient productivity; promoting the academic performance of students; reducing the workload of headteachers since the multi-tasking responsibility of the headteacher may affect the effectiveness of performing some duties; and bringing about teamwork, togetherness, and unity. These are what some teachers said during the interview.

> When you distribute leadership or when you delegate powers and shared responsibilities to the teachers, it helps to make work easier and also promotes academic performance in the school. (Teacher 1)

> It brings unity and it also reduces the work because if one person is handling two positions, he will not get enough time to handle numerous positions. (Teacher 2)

> The burden will not be on only the headteacher but it will be sent to all the teachers and everybody comes in to put in their maximum effort to achieve a common goal. (Teacher 3)

It brings about collaboration, togetherness, and teamwork. This is because if leadership roles are delegated to someone it makes the person feel valued and heard so the person becomes devoted to working collectively with his/her colleagues which in turn would contribute to the development of the school. However, if leadership responsibilities are left in the hands of one person it can lead to division which would also affect the progress of the school (Teacher 4).

Teachers working together as a teamwork make change to take place for school improvement. For instance, if teachers are not speaking in the same way regarding school discipline, then we are going to have a serious problem with discipline in the school. This means a headteacher needs to work together with everyone in order to get a system running and working (Headteacher 2)

Both headteachers and teachers were interviewed about how distributed leadership contributes to school development. The headteachers, in response to this, pointed out three key things about distributed leadership that would lead to school improvement. They revealed that effective operation of schools, transparency, and diverse ideas in managing schools effectively are the main aspects of the distributed leadership approach that lead to school improvement. These are what they said:

It was just me and the assistant head teacher, but now our burden has been reduced. I can now teach and perform my few duties without facing a lot of challenges, like being in class

> when someone needs me to register a student or attend to a parent. Things are moving on well now (Headteacher 1)

> Since there is the involvement of diverse people, there will be diverse ideas as well to improve the growth of the institution. (Headteacher 2)

> Yes, for instance, if there is a capitation or gal lock and everybody is spending their money without accounting for it, it won't help, but we should have spending officers to check that and that will help the school. (Headteacher 3)

Teachers were also interviewed on the contributions of distributed leadership to school improvement. All the teachers hold the view that running the school effectively would lead to the school's development. According to some teachers, the distributed leadership approach brings about collaboration, and, according to them, if teachers and headteachers collaboratively work together in the school, it will improve the school's performance. Others asserted that the approach helps develop the managerial skills of the school leaders, which also has a significant relationship with school improvement. Among the teachers who were interviewed, one mentioned that distributed leadership makes one inclined toward work. This teacher considered this to be associated with school improvement because he thinks that if you have dedicated workers, productivity is assured. Some statements from the transcribed extract are;

> It develops the managerial skills and also the students' leadership skills and also improves collaboration and communication (Teacher 1)

> As it stands now, you are aware that the head teacher is not present, but teachers are present to speak on his behalf; despite

> his absence, things will proceed smoothly because leadership has been distributed. (Teacher 4)

> Because we work as a team and you know as we are working in a team, you will get the importance of it than working differently or some people are hard-working and others are relaxed, it doesn't improve performance. (Teacher 6)

All the participants agreed that distributed leadership approach helps in the smooth running of school system considering the importance of the approach that the interviewee made with emphasis on bringing about school improvement.

Professional and Personal Development

Prior to exploring how the distributed leadership approach improves teachers' professionalism in work, the research first tackles the contributions of the approach toward their personal development as teachers. This leadership approach is claimed to assist teachers in improving their quality of teaching and learning in schools (Johari et al., 2021). Teachers were interviewed about some of the possible qualities they develop from taking up shared responsibility. It was revealed from the interview that teachers gain leadership skills, knowledge, experience, and a hardworking attitude as well as become committed to their duties and responsibilities. Other qualities the teachers developed personally, as revealed by them, include collaboration skills, self-confidence, managerial skills, and communication skills. Some of their responses to consider are:

> You learn a lot from your colleagues. So, they carry out their project for the term, so you also develop your life. You go and find more information for the next academic year (Teacher 1)

It will develop my communication and communication skills, and as a teacher, it will also develop some teacher traits like patience and all those I did not have, and because I am a leader now, I will do them. (Teacher 2)

Although I wasn't the head teacher, for the sake of the things that I was delegated to do, like capitation grants, preparing speeches, and so many other things that were supposed to be administrative, the head teacher decided to give these things to me to get some experience. (Teacher 3)

It's good because sometimes we learn as we work. We learn as we do the things we do daily, so if you are being tasked as a leader, there are certain things you will be doing that will help you in a different way as an individual There is the opportunity to learn new things from others. (Teacher 4)

Improves Teachers' Commitment to Work

Teachers' perceptions were also sought on how distributed leadership influences teachers' commitment. Their responses revealed that the approach indeed has a significant link to teacher's commitment. The researchers discovered that the distributed leadership approach encourages participation and collaboration among teachers. This confirms the ascertained belief of Halverson (2020) that distributed leadership encourages teamwork with constant communication and interaction within an organization. According to him, emphasizing individual efforts will prevent employees from collaboratively working and developing together in the organization. Most of the teachers opined that participating in school activities would yield better outcomes. Therefore, distributing leadership responsibilities among them is key

considering the complexity of the school structure. The majority of the teachers further declared that if they are assigned leadership roles, they do their best to work satisfactorily, and this, in turn, contributes to the development of the school. To further explain, teachers become committed to the role or responsibility shared with them because of the accountability nature of the approach. Consider some of the responses from the extracts:

> It shows zeal, how you can do things to even impress yourself to be able to bring good results, so commitment always increases (Teacher 1)

> If you are engaged in any leadership role you do your maximum best to deliver since you take responsibility for your actions, I think assigning a teacher to certain responsibilities aside the normal teaching would make the teacher, feel valued so he or she is motivated to deliver satisfactorily (Teacher 3)

> It can help improve your commitment as a teacher because, as I said already when you are given another responsibility as a teacher aside from your regular teaching, you try to do your best when it comes to your tenure of responsibility to carry out. (Teacher 4)

> For instance, if I am chosen as the head teacher, I will be exposed to certain things, and that will help me (Teacher 6)

To confirm whether distributed leadership in schools develops teachers' commitment toward work, headteachers were also interviewed about the observations they make concerning teachers' commitment toward work whenever leadership responsibilities are shared with them. The responses from the headteachers disclosed that there is an improvement in job performance

when leadership responsibilities are assigned to teachers. Also, it was revealed that anytime they delegate leadership to teachers, they collaborate with them and speak concerning issues. This is in line with the claim of Pierro (2020) that distributed leadership brings about a community of practice where members use their knowledge and skills to voice their concerns about problems affecting the school and to help find solutions. According to the headteachers, teachers are motivated to work whenever they delegate leadership roles to them; teachers feel a sense of belonging and therefore, remain committed to their tasks. This confirms the statement of Liu and Watson (2020) that implementing the distributed leadership approach in schools is a factor that influences teachers' commitment. These are some statements made by the headteachers concerning the observations they make on teachers when they delegate leadership roles to their teachers:

> Since the roles were given to them, they participate very well and speak on issues, they feel part of the system, so they put up an effort to do more. Others perform very well, while others feel relaxed, Due to this, positions are given yearly. (Headteacher 1)

> At times, I deliberately assign duties to some people and get surprised at how they execute their duties." Per my observations, it has forced everyone to engage in school activities, at a point, they forget the hierarchy and do things on their own without consulting the higher offices. (Headteacher 2)

> The performing teacher continues to hold his/her position. There is also a package to encourage the best-performing teacher. (Headteacher 3)

From the extract, a headteacher revealed he deliberately assigned duties to test the commitment level of his teachers. The headteacher shares the same view as colleague teachers, who also revealed that teachers demonstrate commitment towards work whenever leadership is shared with them.

Enhances teachers' Leadership Skills.

This theme emerged from the interview with the headteachers. The responses from the headteachers indicated that they consider the qualities and capabilities of teachers before they assign them leadership roles. Notable among them, as revealed by the headteachers, include teachers who portray desirable behaviour; active teachers; quality; multi-tasking; hard-working; respectful; punctual; and have developed problem-solving skills. Referring back to the extract:

> As the headteacher, I consider how the teachers involve themselves in certain activities because most of them feel relaxed and do not care unless you talk about it before they do something. (Headteacher 1)

> Before I distribute any leadership role to someone, I have to look at the qualities of that person to see if she or he can play it well, some teachers are very calm, respectful, hard-working, able to multitask, and many more, and also other teachers who are there that you won't ask them to do something but you will

> see them doing that and doing it well, so as the headteacher, I will look at all of that. (Headteacher 2)

> First of all, you have to look at how hardworking the person is and if the person has problem-solving skills and can also work under pressure, multitasking person, and how the person is punctual and respectful to assign the person an additional role. (Headteacher 3)

The majority of the headteachers interviewed made emphasis on the fact that leadership must be shared among teachers. The headteachers interviewed hold similar views to Botha (2016), who says educational institutions such as schools can improve when teachers are actively engaged in leadership roles and decision-making processes. The teachers, in their conversations, mentioned some leadership qualities that teachers must possess. They include respect, hard work, and multitasking; that is, someone who can perform several responsibilities, and those who are willing to take up leadership responsibilities.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Distributed leadership is a leadership approach that has been prevalent in many institutions over the last two decades. The heart of the approach is to delegate or share leadership responsibilities to teachers, encouraging them to take initiative and use their knowledge, skills, empathy, strategies, endurance, and boldness to lead when leadership roles are delegated to them to accomplish a set goal.

Teachers and headteachers demonstrated a basic understanding of the approach. They perceived distributed leadership to be the distribution of powers; shared responsibilities; distributing leadership roles and tasks to do different jobs; and not leaving leadership in the hands of one person. The study

found that the approach is prevalent in basic schools due to its benefits such as effective teaching and learning; peace among both headteachers and teachers; quality decision-making; effective running of the school, reduction of headteachers' workload, and encouragement of teachers' leadership. The study noted that distributed leadership is perceived to have influence on school improvement by making work easier for efficient productivity; promoting the academic performance of students; and reducing the workload of headteachers since the multi-tasking responsibility of the headteacher may affect the effectiveness of performing some duties; transparency, shared ideas, teamwork/collaboration, togetherness, and unity.

The study further showed that teachers who are assigned to leadership roles, do their best to work satisfactorily, this, in turn, contributes to the development of the school. Also, the approach improves their commitment level because they hold the view that they remain accountable to the leadership of the institutions. The study also revealed job improvement as a perceived indicator to ascertain commitment level of teachers. The study revealed that certain qualities and capabilities of teachers must be considered when delegating leadership responsibilities. Notable among them from teachers' and headteachers' perspectives include; desirable behaviour; active teaching; quality teaching; multi-tasking skills; hard-working; respect; punctuality; problem-solving skills, and willingness to lead to ensure school improvement. Based on these findings, the study concludes that school headteachers and teachers perceive distributed leadership as an approach for improving teacher commitment and school improvement. The study recommends that school leaders/headteachers encourage the practice of distributed leadership in their schools for a positive school climate, school culture, teacher commitment, and school development.

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This study contributes to the discourse on distributed leadership in Ghanaian basic schools by highlighting its holistic approach, involving active participation and shared responsibilities of teachers and headteachers. It consolidates existing knowledge on distributed leadership and extends the discourse by presenting a nuanced understanding of its perceptions, benefits, and influences on teacher commitment and school improvement. This empirical evidence advances the body of scientific knowledge, providing a foundation for further research and practical applications in educational leadership.

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