

Impact of Distributed Leadership Practices on Teachers' Job Satisfaction and Instructional Effectiveness in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract: Leadership arrangements in schools are increasingly shifting toward shared models. This study examined how distributed leadership relates to teachers' job satisfaction and instructional performance in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria, and identified practical constraints on its implementation. A correlational survey design was employed. From an estimated population of 12,800 teachers, 380 respondents were selected through a multi-stage sampling process covering the three senatorial districts. Data were gathered with a structured, expert-validated questionnaire (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$). Analyses comprised descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlations, and factor analysis; hypotheses were evaluated at the 0.05 significance level. Overall, distributed leadership was practiced at a moderate level across the sampled schools, with comparatively greater emphasis on shared decision-making and collaborative planning than on teacher participation in policy design or support for teacher-initiated projects. A strong positive correlation was found between distributed leadership and teachers' job satisfaction ($r = 0.64$), and a moderate positive correlation emerged for instructional effectiveness ($r = 0.59$). Key obstacles included resistance to change, insufficient leadership training, over-centralization of authority, limited time for collaboration, and resource constraints. When enacted meaningfully, distributed leadership is associated with higher teacher morale and improved classroom practice. Strengthening policy frameworks, building leadership capacity, cultivating collaborative school cultures, addressing structural/resource limitations, and employing change-management strategies are recommended to support sustained implementation.

Keywords: Distributed leadership; teacher job satisfaction; instructional effectiveness; secondary education.

Introduction

Educational leadership is broadly acknowledged as a key determinant of teaching quality and the overall learning process. It influences teachers' work environments and directly affects student performance. Over the years, scholars and practitioners have observed a gradual move away from traditional leadership approaches dominated by the school principal toward more collaborative and participatory models. One of the most widely discussed approaches arising from this shift is distributed leadership, which emphasizes the collective sharing of responsibilities among principals, departmental heads, and classroom teachers. Unlike conventional top-down models, distributed leadership is not defined by position alone but by ongoing interaction, cooperation, and dialogue within the school community (Oroye-Okpoudhu, 2019; Harris & Jones, 2019).

Global evidence points to distributed leadership as a significant factor in strengthening teacher engagement, boosting morale, and supporting professional advancement. When educators are given meaningful responsibilities and actively included in decision-making, they tend to develop stronger loyalty and commitment to their institutions. This sense of belonging fosters trust, teamwork, and creativity in instructional delivery (Nguyen et al., 2020; Oduro, 2021). For many education systems, especially in developing contexts, distributed leadership is increasingly seen as a solution to ongoing challenges such as weak teacher motivation, resistance to pedagogical reforms, and stagnant student performance. In Nigeria, interest in this model is growing due to the pressing need to enhance teaching quality and raise student achievement in a globally competitive environment (Ezeani & Izuagba, 2022).

As Oroye-Okpoudhu (2019) observes, leadership practices that empower teachers through participatory governance tend to create more positive and supportive school climates. Such environments not only sustain teacher satisfaction but also encourage higher instructional quality. Teacher job satisfaction—understood as the fulfillment and contentment educators derive from their work and professional environment—has been linked to retention, dedication, and productivity (Bature et al., 2021). Instructional effectiveness, on the other hand, relates to teachers' ability to design lessons, deliver instruction, and assess learning in ways that promote successful outcomes (Ofoha, 2020). Evidence from existing literature shows that when teachers feel valued and included in decision-making, their motivation to improve classroom practice increases, which in turn enhances student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Despite these advantages, applying distributed leadership in practice remains challenging in Delta State's public secondary schools. Persistent systemic issues such as inadequate instructional resources, frequent teacher turnover, and inconsistent teaching quality

continue to pose obstacles (Nwankwo & Ede, 2024). Although state-level policies encourage collaborative decision-making, the degree of implementation differs across schools. In some institutions, authority remains heavily centralized, limiting teacher participation, while in others, principals deliberately delegate responsibilities and encourage teacher-driven initiatives (Okoro & Emeni, 2022).

This divergence between established policies and their implementation highlights the relevance of studying distributed leadership in Delta State. Understanding its influence on teacher satisfaction and instructional quality can help policymakers and administrators develop reforms based on evidence. The Delta State Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education's strategic plan (2023) underscores the need to raise educational standards, with a specific focus on strengthening teacher morale and classroom performance. Distributed leadership, therefore, emerges as a potentially transformative approach to meeting these objectives.

Against this backdrop, the present study investigates the relationship between distributed leadership, teachers' job satisfaction, and instructional effectiveness in public secondary schools in Delta State. The research not only expands the global discourse on distributed leadership but also provides locally relevant insights for the Nigerian educational system. By connecting leadership practices to teacher performance and student outcomes, the study offers practical implications for administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders. Ultimately, the findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective schools that support professional growth for teachers and foster academic success among students.

Statement of the Problem

While Nigerian educational policies highlight the importance of participatory and collaborative leadership, the reality in many public secondary schools across Delta State reflects a different picture. Leadership structures in these schools remain predominantly centralized, with authority and decision-making powers concentrated in the office of the principal. This arrangement leaves teachers with little room to contribute to governance, thereby limiting their professional autonomy. Such a hierarchical style of administration diminishes teachers' influence over instructional practices and undermines their sense of belonging within the school system (Oroye-Okpoudhu, 2019; Ezeani & Izuagba, 2022). As a result, numerous teachers experience low job satisfaction, reduced motivation, and waning commitment to maintaining high-quality teaching standards.

Studies conducted in other educational settings reveal that distributed leadership can foster greater trust among staff, promote healthier professional relationships, and enhance instructional quality by ensuring that teachers play an active role in decision-making processes (Harris & Jones, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2020). Despite these global findings, there is limited empirical research in Delta State that captures the extent to which schools have adopted distributed leadership or how such practices influence teacher satisfaction and instructional effectiveness. Available evidence suggests that practices vary widely: in some schools, principals intentionally delegate authority, encourage collaboration, and support teacher-led initiatives, while in others, leadership remains rigidly centralized (Okoro & Emeni, 2022).

The situation is further complicated by persistent structural challenges such as shortages of instructional materials, high levels of teacher attrition, and inconsistent supervisory practices. These factors make it difficult to maintain effective teaching and learning conditions across the state's secondary schools (Nwankwo & Ede, 2024). Without adopting leadership models that empower and support teachers, these systemic issues are likely to continue, undermining classroom quality, student achievement, and overall school performance.

If distributed leadership is not intentionally implemented and sustained, there is a risk that teachers will remain passive implementers of directives rather than active participants in school development. Such a culture diminishes teacher morale, limits innovation in teaching, and weakens the adaptability of schools to changing educational needs. For this reason, it is essential to examine how distributed leadership practices shape teachers' satisfaction with their work and their instructional effectiveness. Generating such evidence will provide a basis for practical recommendations to strengthen leadership strategies and raise the quality of education in Delta State's public secondary schools.

Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of this study was to explore the extent to which distributed leadership practices affect teachers' job satisfaction and instructional effectiveness in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria. To achieve this goal, the research focused on four specific objectives: (1) to determine the degree to which distributed leadership strategies are implemented in the administration of secondary schools; (2) to analyze the relationship between distributed leadership and teachers' job satisfaction; (3) to investigate how distributed leadership relates to teachers' instructional effectiveness; and (4) to identify the major obstacles hindering the effective adoption and implementation of distributed leadership practices in schools.

Research Questions

This study was guided by four key research questions:

1. To what extent are distributed leadership practices applied in the administration of secondary schools?
2. How does distributed leadership relate to teachers' job satisfaction?
3. How does distributed leadership influence teachers' instructional effectiveness?
4. What barriers hinder the effective practice of distributed leadership in schools?

Research Hypotheses

To further guide the investigation, the following null hypotheses were tested:

1. Distributed leadership practices have no significant relationship with teachers' job satisfaction.
2. Distributed leadership practices have no significant relationship with teachers' instructional effectiveness.
3. There are no significant barriers limiting the effective implementation of distributed leadership practices.

Methodology

This research adopted a correlational survey design to examine the association between distributed leadership practices, teachers' job satisfaction, and instructional effectiveness in public secondary schools across Delta State, Nigeria. The correlational approach was deemed suitable because it enabled the researcher to establish the strength and direction of relationships among the study variables without manipulating them, thereby preserving the non-experimental character of the research. As emphasized by Oroye-Okpoudhu (2019), correlational designs are particularly useful when the aim is to identify patterns of relationships and draw conclusions about how variables interact in natural settings. Additionally, this design provided the flexibility to explore contextual barriers that might impede the successful application of distributed leadership within the state's school system.

The study population consisted of all teachers employed in public secondary schools within the 25 local government areas of Delta State. According to records obtained from the Delta State Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (2025), there were approximately 12,800 teachers in the state at the time of the study. This population included classroom teachers, heads of departments, vice principals, and principals. These groups were considered appropriate because they combined teaching duties with varying levels of leadership responsibilities, making them relevant to a study of distributed leadership.

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to obtain a representative sample across the three senatorial districts of Delta State: Delta North, Delta Central, and Delta South. In the first stage, schools were stratified according to their senatorial districts to ensure proportional representation. In the second stage, schools were selected using proportional sampling based on staff size, ensuring that larger schools had greater representation. Finally, simple random sampling was applied within the selected schools to identify participating teachers. The Taro Yamane formula for finite populations, with a 5% margin of error, was used to determine the sample size, resulting in 380 teachers being chosen. This sample size was considered adequate for ensuring reliable results and generalizing the findings to the larger population of teachers in Delta State.

Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher and adapted from existing instruments that measure distributed leadership, teacher job satisfaction, and instructional effectiveness. The questionnaire was divided into five sections. Section A gathered demographic information such as gender, years of experience, and school location. Section B focused on distributed leadership practices, including shared decision-making, collaborative planning, delegation of responsibilities, and teacher-initiated leadership. Section C assessed job satisfaction, with items addressing workload, recognition, work environment, and autonomy. Section D focused on instructional effectiveness, covering lesson preparation, delivery, assessment practices, and student engagement. Section E explored barriers to implementing distributed leadership in schools. Responses were captured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

The validity of the questionnaire was established through expert review. Three specialists—one in educational management, one in measurement and evaluation, and one in educational psychology—assessed the instrument for clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness. Based on their feedback, necessary adjustments were made. To establish reliability, a pilot study was conducted with 30 teachers in Edo State, a neighboring state with similar educational structures. Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess internal consistency, producing a coefficient of 0.84, which indicated that the instrument was reliable for use in the main study.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed. Approval for the study was obtained from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee, and formal authorization was granted by the Delta State Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and allowed to withdraw at any stage

without penalty. Questionnaires were administered directly by the researcher, assisted by three trained research assistants who managed distribution across the senatorial districts. In most cases, completed questionnaires were retrieved on the spot to reduce non-response and minimize data loss.

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 25). Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations were used to answer Research Question 1, which examined the extent of distributed leadership practices. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was used to address Research Questions 2 and 3, which tested the relationships between distributed leadership and job satisfaction, as well as distributed leadership and instructional effectiveness. For Research Question 4, which focused on identifying barriers to distributed leadership, factor analysis and mean ranking techniques were applied to determine the most critical challenges. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 significance level to ensure statistical rigor.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics Showing the Extent of Distributed Leadership Practices Implementation

Distributed Leadership Indicators	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	Interpretation
Shared decision-making	3.72	0.81	H
Collaborative planning among staff	3.58	0.88	H
Delegation of responsibilities	3.40	0.92	M
Teacher involvement in school policy design	3.21	0.95	M
Support for teacher-led initiatives	3.35	0.90	M
Overall Mean	3.45		M

H = High, M = Moderate

Results presented in Table 1 revealed that the practice of distributed leadership in the surveyed schools was moderately implemented, as indicated by an overall mean score of 3.45. Shared decision-making ($\bar{x}$ = 3.72) and collaborative planning ($\bar{x}$ = 3.58) were the most practiced forms, while teacher involvement in school policy design ($\bar{x}$ = 3.21) and support for teacher-led initiatives ($\bar{x}$ = 3.35) were less emphasized.

Table 2: Correlation Between Distributed Leadership and Teachers' Job Satisfaction

Variables	N	r	r ²	r ² %
Distributed Leadership	380			
Teachers' Job Satisfaction	380	0.64	0.41	41%

As presented in Table 2, the analysis indicated a strong and positive correlation between distributed leadership and teachers' job satisfaction, with a coefficient value of $r = 0.64$. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.41$) revealed that distributed leadership practices accounted for approximately 41% of the observed variation in teachers' levels of job satisfaction.

Table 3: Correlation Between Distributed Leadership and Teachers' Job Satisfaction

Variables	N	r	p-value	Decision
Distributed Leadership	380			
Teachers' Job Satisfaction	380	0.64	0.000	Reject H ₀₁ (Significant)

The results presented in Table 3 revealed a strong, statistically significant positive correlation between distributed leadership and teachers' job satisfaction ($r = 0.64$, $p < 0.05$). On this basis, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming that distributed leadership practices have a meaningful and significant relationship with teachers' job satisfaction.

Table 4: Correlation Between Distributed Leadership and Instructional Effectiveness

Variables	N	r	r ²	r ² %
Distributed Leadership	380			
Instructional Effectiveness	380	0.59	0.35	35%

The results displayed in Table 4 demonstrated a strong positive correlation between distributed leadership and teachers' instructional effectiveness, with a coefficient value of $r = 0.59$. In addition, the coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.35$) indicated that distributed leadership practices explained roughly 35% of the variation observed in teachers' instructional effectiveness.

Table 5: Correlation Between Distributed Leadership and Instructional Effectiveness

Variables	N	r	r ²	p-value	Decision
Distributed Leadership	380	0.59	0.35	0.000	Reject H ₀₂ (Significant)
Instructional Effectiveness	380				

Findings reported in Table 5 revealed a moderate yet statistically significant positive correlation between distributed leadership and teachers' instructional effectiveness ($r = 0.59$, $p < 0.05$). As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected, establishing that distributed leadership practices are meaningfully and significantly linked to teachers' instructional effectiveness.

Table 6: Mean Ratings of Challenges Affecting Distributed Leadership Practices

Challenges Identified	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	Interpretation
Resistance to change among some teachers	4.05	0.82	MB
Lack of adequate leadership training	4.00	0.85	MB
Over-centralization by school heads	3.92	0.88	MB
Inadequate time for collaborative planning	3.88	0.90	MB
Insufficient resources to support initiatives	3.85	0.89	MB
Overall Mean	3.94		MB

MB = Major Barrier

Results in Table 6 showed that all the identified challenges recorded mean scores above 3.0, indicating that they were significant obstacles to the effective implementation of distributed leadership. To further determine the relative importance of each challenge, a factor analysis was conducted.

Table 7: Factor Analysis of Challenges Hindering Distributed Leadership

Challenges	Factor Loading
Resistance to change among some teachers	0.081
Lack of adequate leadership training	-0.175
Over-centralization by school heads	-0.115
Inadequate time for collaborative planning	-0.430
Insufficient resources to support initiatives	-0.034

The factor analysis in Table 7 revealed that all the identified challenges are interrelated, though their factor loadings vary. "Resistance to change among some teachers" showed the strongest positive loading, indicating it is the most dominant challenge. Additional factors—including lack of leadership training, excessive centralization of authority, limited opportunities for collaborative planning, and inadequate resources—also loaded negatively. This suggests that although these factors are less prominent, they nonetheless exert considerable influence in limiting the effective implementation of distributed leadership, thereby reinforcing the primary barriers already identified.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study indicated that distributed leadership was practiced at a moderate level within public secondary schools in Delta State. While approaches such as collaborative planning and shared decision-making were fairly common, teacher participation in policy formulation and the promotion of teacher-driven initiatives appeared less prevalent. One likely explanation is that principals recognize the usefulness of including teachers in operational decisions but remain hesitant to extend authority to more strategic areas such as policy or long-term planning. This reluctance may be linked to the deeply rooted hierarchical traditions within Nigerian school administration, where principals are often seen as the sole custodians of decision-making. Another contributing factor may be the lack of institutionalized frameworks mandating teacher participation in higher governance processes, leaving such involvement largely dependent on the discretion of individual principals.

These findings correspond with earlier studies. Harris and Jones (2019) as well as Odure (2021) reported that although distributed leadership was visible in several African contexts, its application tended to be partial, focusing on operational rather than strategic matters. Similarly, Oroye-Okpoudhu (2019) noted that Nigerian schools often embraced shared planning but seldom extended teacher input into institutional policy decisions. By contrast, research in other contexts demonstrates broader implementation. For example, Nguyen et al. (2020) in Vietnam and Leithwood et al. (2020) in Canada documented robust distributed leadership systems, where teachers actively contributed to curriculum design, budgeting, and school-wide improvement strategies. The disparity between these contexts and Delta State may be attributed to differences in policy support and leadership training. In Vietnam and Canada,

distributed leadership is reinforced by national frameworks and professional development programs, while in Delta State such structures are less developed, restricting its implementation.

An important finding of this study was the strong positive association between distributed leadership and teachers' job satisfaction, with the analysis revealing that distributed leadership practices accounted for 41% of the variation in satisfaction levels. Schools where principals encouraged collaboration, delegated responsibilities, and integrated teachers into decision-making processes recorded higher teacher motivation and fulfillment. This may be because distributed leadership nurtures professional recognition, as teachers feel that their contributions are respected and impactful. Teachers whose voices are acknowledged tend to demonstrate higher morale, greater motivation, and stronger attachment to their school communities. Furthermore, the sharing of responsibilities reduces work-related stress by promoting teamwork and collective problem-solving, which in turn enhances job satisfaction.

This finding aligns with Bature et al. (2021), who reported that participatory leadership improved teacher morale in Nigerian secondary schools, and Ofoha (2020), who observed that inclusive leadership practices strengthened teacher commitment in Enugu State. Similarly, Oroye-Okpoudhu (2019) found that teacher involvement in decision-making improved satisfaction by fostering trust between staff and administrators. However, this outcome contrasts with Oluwatayo and Akinleye (2019) and Cheng (2021). In Lagos, Oluwatayo and Akinleye reported that leadership participation was superficial, giving teachers nominal input without real influence, which limited its impact on satisfaction. Likewise, Cheng's study in Hong Kong revealed cultural preferences for hierarchical clarity, where shared leadership did not significantly affect satisfaction. The present study's different results may reflect the fact that in Delta State, distributed leadership—though moderate—often involves meaningful responsibilities linked to curriculum and resource allocation, which provide teachers with genuine influence over their work.

The study also revealed a moderate positive relationship between distributed leadership and instructional effectiveness, with findings indicating that distributed leadership explained 35% of the variance in teaching performance. Teachers in schools with stronger distributed leadership structures were more effective in lesson planning, classroom instruction, student assessment, and engagement. One explanation may be that involvement in leadership creates opportunities for peer collaboration, shared professional learning, and mentoring, all of which strengthen classroom practice. Distributed leadership may also encourage teachers to take ownership of student outcomes, motivating them to improve teaching strategies and adopt innovative practices.

These results are consistent with Leithwood et al. (2020), who found that teacher leadership enhanced instructional quality in Canadian schools, and Nguyen et al. (2020), who observed similar effects in Vietnamese schools. Likewise, Oroye-Okpoudhu (2019) reported that Nigerian teachers involved in curriculum leadership initiatives demonstrated improved instruction and student outcomes. On the other hand, Adeyemi and Adu (2019) in South Africa and Al-Jabri (2021) in Oman identified weak or non-significant links between distributed leadership and instructional outcomes. Both studies attributed the weak associations to insufficient professional development or restrictive administrative structures that prevented teachers from exercising autonomy. The present findings differ because in Delta State, distributed leadership often extends to instructional decisions such as material selection and assessment methods, which directly shape classroom practice.

Finally, the study identified several barriers that limit the adoption of distributed leadership. This included resistance to change among teachers, insufficient training in leadership skills, concentration of authority in principals, limited time for collaborative planning, and inadequate resources for teacher-led initiatives. Each factor was statistically significant, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The persistence of hierarchical administrative culture in Nigerian schools makes it difficult to adopt fully shared leadership models. Moreover, without structured leadership training, many teachers lack the capacity or confidence to assume leadership responsibilities. Resource limitations further exacerbate the problem, as teacher-led initiatives cannot be sustained in the absence of adequate financial and material support.

These findings are in line with Harris and Jones (2019), who noted that structural and cultural barriers constrained distributed leadership in African schools, and Bature et al. (2021), who highlighted insufficient resources and training as key obstacles in Nigeria. Similarly, Oroye-Okpoudhu (2019) reported that entrenched hierarchies and limited funding slowed progress toward distributed leadership in Delta State. By contrast, studies from contexts such as Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2020) and the United States (Spillane, 2019) reported fewer challenges. In these systems, distributed leadership is supported through explicit policy frameworks, resource provision, and comprehensive professional development, reducing barriers. The difference illustrates how institutional and policy contexts shape the scope and success of distributed leadership implementation.

Conclusion

This research examined the impact of distributed leadership on teachers' job satisfaction and instructional effectiveness in public secondary schools within Delta State, Nigeria, while also exploring the barriers that hinder its effective implementation. The findings revealed that distributed leadership is applied at a moderate level across the state. Practices such as collaborative planning and shared

decision-making were fairly common, yet teachers' involvement in policy development and the promotion of teacher-driven initiatives were relatively limited.

The study also identified a strong positive relationship between distributed leadership and teachers' job satisfaction. The results suggest that when educators are actively engaged in school leadership processes, included in decision-making, and encouraged to collaborate with administrators, they tend to experience greater motivation, professional fulfillment, and commitment to their work. Furthermore, the analysis established a moderate positive correlation between distributed leadership and instructional effectiveness. This implies that schools adopting shared leadership approaches are more likely to see gains in lesson preparation, teaching quality, assessment methods, and student participation.

Despite these advantages, the study revealed several barriers that hinder the full realization of distributed leadership. Key challenges included teacher resistance to change, limited opportunities for leadership training, persistent centralization of authority, inadequate time for collaborative activities, and insufficient resources to sustain teacher-driven projects. Addressing these constraints is essential for distributed leadership to function effectively as a strategy for improving teacher morale, enhancing instructional quality, and ultimately raising the performance of public secondary schools in Delta State.

Recommendations

Grounded in the evidence obtained, the study advances the following recommendations:

1. The Delta State Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education should formulate and enforce clear policies that institutionalize distributed leadership structures in public secondary schools. Such policies should guarantee that teacher participation in decision-making is systematic, consistent, and meaningful.
2. Continuous capacity-building programmes, including workshops and leadership training sessions, should be provided to strengthen teachers' confidence, skills, and knowledge. This will better prepare them to assume leadership responsibilities within the school system.
3. Administrators are encouraged to build a school culture that promotes trust, respect, and recognition, while also actively involving teachers in governance and instructional choices. Achieving this requires open communication channels, mutual respect, and acknowledgment of teachers' professional contributions.
4. Sufficient resources and time should be allocated to promote teacher-led initiatives. Adjustments in school timetables should also be made to create space for collaborative planning, ensuring that participation in leadership translates into tangible improvements in instructional practices.
5. Principals should implement deliberate strategies to reduce resistance to shared leadership. This may involve assigning smaller leadership roles to hesitant staff at first, gradually building their confidence, and demonstrating the benefits of distributed leadership through visible and practical outcomes.

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