

**INVESTIGATING DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP AMONG UNIVERSITY
TEACHERS: A CASE STUDY OF BANGLADESH OPEN UNIVERSITY**

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into distributed leadership (DL) among faculty at Bangladesh Open University, focusing on their perceptions, practices, and challenges. Employing a sequential explanatory mixed-method approach, the research involved a cross-sectional survey and a focus group discussion (FGD) to collect data from university teachers. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 102 teachers of BOU who participated in the study with different roles and positions and FGD with 10 teachers of different positions. This method provided a comprehensive understanding of their attitudes toward various DL dimensions. The results indicate a positive perception of DL, underscoring its potential to enhance academic and administrative effectiveness. The additional findings highlight the complexities of practicing Distributed Leadership within the university context and offer insights into the factors hindering its effective implementation. The study highlights the pivotal role of DL in educational quality and institutional success, mainly through increased teacher participation in decision-making and leadership.

Keywords: Distributed Leadership (DL), Bangladesh Open University (BOU), leadership practice, etc.

INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving landscape of higher education, the scrutiny and interest in the role of leadership within academic institutions have significantly increased. As universities adapt to the challenges of the 21st century, traditional top-down leadership models are being reexamined in favor of a more collaborative and decentralized approach. This approach, known as distributed leadership, involves the dispersion of leadership functions and responsibilities among individuals within an organization (Berkovich& Hassan, 2023; Tandon, 2022). Such a shift is particularly relevant in universities due to academic work's diverse and dynamic nature, which demands a more inclusive and adaptable leadership structure (Bellibaş et al., 2021).

Higher education prepares qualified, competent, and visionary individuals for significant societal commitments. It is a crucial determinant of modern society's success (Monem& Muhammad, 2010). Student achievement is often used as a primary evaluation tool within the educational system, but it is essential to consider other assessments for the quality of education. These include individual and group influence, family and socioeconomic variables, and cultural and institutional motivation (Chang, 2011). The roles of the head of the institute and teachers are essential in

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ensuring institutional success. Improving the influencing power of teacher leaders can enhance the educational environment, subsequently supporting student performance (Harris & Muijs, 2004). Therefore, Leadership is crucial in maintaining educators' commitment to the institution's mission. Traditional leadership theory posits that the head of the institute is the principal organizational leader, responsible for influencing all decisions made in practice (Burke, 2010). However, distributive leadership (DL) advocates for interdependencies between teachers and leaders rather than reliance on a single individual (Spillane & Healey, 2010). In distributed leadership, individuals from various roles collaborate to impact practice collectively, each contributing their expertise. This approach has significantly affected organizational performance across various industries, especially in higher education (Jones et al., 2017).

In Bangladesh, universities are typically headed by a vice-chancellor, with several schools or departments led by deans or chairpersons (University Grant Commission of Bangladesh [UGCB], 2019). These formal positions are traditionally accountable for developing and improving their respective schools or departments. However, the inherent qualities of these leaders are as crucial as their positions (Gronn, 2003). Formal leaders often find their professional development hindered by the demands of administrative work, and their overstress can hamper organizational growth (Cardno, 2002). Since a traditional leader cannot accomplish institutional goals single-handedly, it is imperative to involve educators in various responsibilities and activities, fostering their growth into future leaders. Distributed leadership can provide a collaborative environment for working with all teachers, enhancing the effectiveness and development of the institution.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The quality of higher education in Bangladesh has not met international standards, as none of the 154 universities in the country have been ranked among the top 800 universities worldwide (The Research HUB, 2017; UGCB, 2019). Habibulah, Rouf, and Rana (2012) ascribe this to a shortage of research, substandard infrastructure, and unsatisfactory student experiences. In contrast, Monem and Muhammad (2010) contend that the main contributing factor is a deficiency in understanding and leadership among university educators.

Enhanced student outcomes can be anticipated when leadership practices are more equitably distributed across institutions and educators possess expertise in their respective fields (Silins & Mulford, 2002). Distributed leadership (DL) cultivates an environment that encourages leadership skill development among educators throughout an institution. This approach underscores the significance of teacher leadership and augments their participation in decision-making processes, ultimately leading to a more conducive institutional environment (Harris & Muijs, 2004). Critical aspects of leadership include engaging educators in relational learning, promoting collaboration, and nurturing a sense of shared responsibility for work performance (Harris, 2003). Thus, implementing distributed leadership is essential to benefit an institution fully.

Research on distributed leadership practices and educators' perceptions has been conducted across various nations, such as the USA, Greece, Belgium, Singapore, Hong Kong, Bhutan, and Bangladesh, with a focus on primary and secondary education (Hulpia et al., 2009; Hulpia et al., 2009; Smith, 2007; Wan et al., 2018; Tashi, 2015; Tsu, 2019; Salahuddin, 2011). Institutions in these countries have reported positive results when teachers employ distributed leadership. Nonetheless, the advantages differ between institutions. While research on distributed leadership has been conducted in schools and colleges in Bangladesh, there is a conspicuous lack of such studies at the university level. This gap in knowledge highlights the need for additional research in this domain. This study explores the perspectives on distributed leadership held by university educators at BOU. It seeks to examine their comprehension of distributed leadership and the ways

they implement leadership practices. Investigating how educators perceive and apply leadership in their respective institutions, including the distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities, is essential for understanding its influence on institutional success.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study This study aims to explore the perceptions, relationships, and challenges associated with the practice of distributed leadership among university teachers at Bangladesh Open University (BOU). The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To Investigate university teachers' perceptions concerning the practice of distributed leadership at BOU based on the four dimensions of the Distributed Leadership Readiness Scale (DLRS),
2. To analyze the relationships among the different dimensions of distributed leadership as identified by the DLRS at BOU, and
3. To identify the specific challenges and barriers that university faculty members encounter when attempting to implement distributed leadership at BOU.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research seeks to address the following central questions:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of university teachers concerning the practice of distributed leadership based on the four dimensions of the Distributed Leadership Readiness Scale (DLRS)?

RQ2: What are the relationships among the dimensions of distributed leadership at Bangladesh Open University (BOU)?

RQ3: What challenges do university faculty encounter in implementing distributed leadership?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Distributed Leadership (DL)

Leadership is a complex aspect of any organization, where individuals must be motivated and influenced. Gronn (2003) and Yukl (2013) define leadership as focusing on a person's ability to impact others and facilitate shared efforts. Furthermore, transformational leadership, for instance, emphasizes inspirational leadership, vision-setting, and individualized consideration (Bo, 2013). Transactional leadership, on the other hand, focuses on the exchange of rewards and punishments to motivate followers (Kark et al., 2018). The limitations of these theories lie in individual leadership, where teachers often encounter political pressure, hostility, and aggression. To counter these challenges, collaboration, motivation, trust, and communication are essential for positive changes (Spillane & Healey, 2010). Educational institutions are intricate organizations where leaders are not expected to make all decisions. Many stakeholders play active roles, and leadership tasks must be distributed among them. Research has shown that concentrating leadership in a single position does not enhance institutional improvement; it should be dispersed among teachers (Gronn, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2007).

Distributed leadership involves decision-making and strategic activities conducted at multiple levels rather than relying on one leader at the top of the hierarchical structure (Leithwood et al., 2007). Implementing distributed leadership usually involves various approaches to disseminating, distributing, collaborating, and sharing leadership practices. Distributed leadership contrasts with the 'focused' leadership approach, which emphasizes positional authority. However, Gronn (2003) suggests that a hybrid system incorporating formal and informal leadership in the institution would

be most effective. Establishing a conducive environment by the formal leader is crucial to motivating informal leaders (Harris, 2007). Spillane and Healey (2010) compare distributed leadership with positional or heroic leadership across different institutional contexts and situations. Distributed leadership entails decision-making based on collective and disseminated power according to context, while heroic leadership relies on the individual leader.

Distributed leadership highlights the convergence of expertise and abilities of all teachers, fostering the institution's growth and leadership continuity and granting a greater sense of autonomy. In contrast, in heroic leadership, followers aim to be respectful and obedient, expressing optimism about the leader's coordination and execution of decisions. Studies indicate that institutional heads adopting a distributed leadership framework are likelier to promote collaboration and communication and foster an institutional culture where more teachers can participate in decision-making (Leithwood et al., 2007; Spillane & Healey, 2010). Traditional leadership poses challenges regarding leader succession, as questions arise about who will lead next after the departure of a great leader. Distributed leadership can address this issue, as it does not rely on a single leader (Hargreaves & Fink, 2012).

Distributed Leadership (DL) and Teachers' Perceptions Toward Distributed Leadership (DL)

Over the past few decades, numerous studies have consistently established a significant positive correlation between distributed leadership (DL) and institutional improvement (Harris, 2007). Collaborative inclusion of teachers in the decision-making process has been linked to favorable institutional outcomes (Hulpia et al., 2009). Mascall et al. (2008) further highlight a positive relationship between intended DL and academic achievement, emphasizing that unintended planning leads to lower academic performance. Sun and Xia's (2018) investigation into the relationship between DL, job satisfaction, and teachers' self-efficacy in various US schools reveals a robust connection, indicating that teachers with more positive views of DL exhibit higher levels of self-efficacy and job satisfaction at the institutional level. These findings closely parallel those of Hulpia et al.'s (2009) study in Belgium, emphasizing the strong impact of participatory decision-making and collaborative leadership on teachers' institutional commitment. Hulpia et al. (2009) assert that the institution's head is pivotal in fostering DL to enhance job satisfaction and loyalty by creating a conducive teacher environment. However, Gronn (2003) argues that teacher commitment hinges on how teachers interpret and perceive the DL approach. Gronn contends that by promoting teacher leadership and involving them in decision-making processes, the DL approach will increase teacher commitment, ultimately enhancing their positive perception of DL.

Dimensions of DL

This research employs Gordon's (2005) DL Readiness Scale, encompassing four dimensions of distributed leadership (DL): Vision, Mission, and Goal; Institutional Culture; Shared Responsibility; and Leader Practice. Numerous studies globally, including in the Asian context, validate these dimensions, highlighting their high reliability for evaluating institutional leadership criteria. Within this framework, Vision, Mission, and Goals emphasize collaborative goal-setting, fostering efficient progress when well-defined (Gordon, 2005). Institutional Culture supports teacher leadership through collaboration, positively impacting learning environments (Hallinger, 2003; Gordon, 2005). Shared Responsibility, integral to distributed leadership, enhances teacher motivation and professionalism as an alternative to singular leadership models (Gordon, 2005; Yukl, 2013). Leadership Practices, emerging from leader-follower interactions, offer insights into how school leaders operate within the institutional structure, either as a formal function or through the spontaneous involvement of all teachers (Gordon, 2005; Spillane & Healey, 2010; Elmore,

2000). This comprehensive framework provides a nuanced understanding of distributed leadership dynamics, aligning with global research on its effectiveness.

METHODOLOGY

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework indicates that the teachers' perceptions of distributed leadership will be measured based on the four dimensions: VMG, SC, SR, and LP.

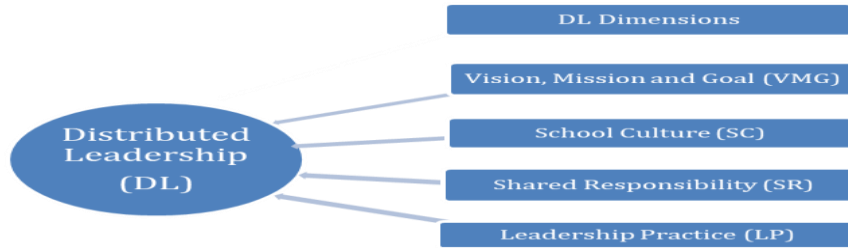


Figure 1: *Conceptual framework of Distributed Leadership (DL) based on the four dimensions of Gordon (2005).*

Research Method, Instruments

This study employs a mixed research method, explicitly utilizing a sequential explanatory approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The research design involves a cross-sectional survey method followed by a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to collect comprehensive data. The questionnaire, consisting of closed-ended questions, was structured to gather quantitative data on the practice and perception of distributed leadership, aligned with the dimensions of the DLRS adapted from Gordon (2005). Thirty out of forty questions were selected based on the Bangladeshi university context. This instrument was chosen for its explicit alignment with testing distributed leadership. The questionnaire, addressing Research Questions 1 & 2, comprises two parts: demographic information and DLRS. Responses to closed-ended questions were measured on a five-point Likert scale, with 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree, facilitating a nuanced understanding of teachers' perspectives on distributed leadership in the context of Bangladesh Open University.

Research Population & Sampling Method

The study was conducted on the faculty members of different schools at BOU. The university has six schools with a total faculty of 138 teachers. They have different critical roles in the schools, like Dean, Program Coordinator, and teacher. A total of 102 data were collected through both online and offline questionnaires. Yamane's (1967) sampling method was used to determine the sample size for this study.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$n \approx 102$$

Here, N=138 and error e=5%

Two deans and three coordinators, chosen purposefully based on their experiences and five teachers selected for their diverse teaching backgrounds, willingly participated in a focus group discussion (FGD). Before the FGD, all participants had completed an anonymous survey. The researcher ensured a balanced representation of teachers from various schools in the FGD, spanning different age groups and experiences.

Data Analysis

In the data analysis, descriptive statistics were employed using SPSS version 22. The comparison of means, standard deviations, and significance testing of the four dimensions of the Distributed Leadership Readiness Scale (DLRS) was conducted to elucidate teachers' perceptions of distributed leadership. Additionally, analyses were carried out to identify any significant relationships between demographic characteristics and the dimensions of distributed leadership. The correlations among different dimensions of distributed leadership were examined to understand the interrelationships within the four dimensions. Challenges faced by teachers were identified through thematic discussions, providing qualitative insights into the hurdles encountered in the practice of distributed leadership.

Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire adapted from the Gordon Model (2005) underwent rigorous validation by the researchers and was further reviewed by three professors with expertise in leadership research. Their feedback informed the selection of 30 questions from the Distributed Leadership Readiness Scale (DLRS). The final Cronbach's Alpha score, calculated with responses from 102 participants, was 0.913, exceeding the acceptable reliability threshold of 0.7 (Mohajan, 2017), affirming the questionnaire's reliability in gauging teachers' perceptions of distributed leadership at Bangladesh Open University.

FINDING & DISCUSSION

Findings

General Information of the Respondents

Of 142 teachers, 102 (72%) have responded to online and hard-copy questionnaires. Online responses were 73 (72%), while hard copy responses were 24 (28%). Demographic information of the respondents is given below (Table 2):

Table 2:

Demographic Information of Respondents			
<i>Categories</i>	<i>Particulars</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender	Male	65	63.7%
	Female	37	36.3%
School	School of Education (SOE)	15	14.7%
	School of Business (SOB)	12	11.8%
	Open School (OS)	27	26.5%
	School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Languages (SSHL)	33	32.4%
	School of Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD)	9	8.8%
	School of Science and Technology (SST)	6	5.9%
Designation	Lecturer	23	22.5%

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Particulars</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
	Assistant Professor	37	36.3%
	Associate Professor	19	18.7%
	Professor	23	22.5%
Teaching Experience	5 and below	24	23.5%
	6-10	31	30.4%
	11-15	14	13.7%
	16-20	12	11.8%
	More Than 20 Years	21	20.6%
Educational Qualification	Master	58	56.9%
	PhD	35	34.3%
	Others (Post Doctorate, B.Ed., M.Ed.)	9	8.8%
Key Role	Dean	5	4.9%
	Coordinator of any program	31	30.4%
	Teacher	66	64.7%

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher through surveys

Table 2 presents the demographic distribution, indicating that 64% of respondents are male and 36% are female. In terms of teaching experience, 46.1% have over ten years of experience, while 53.9% have ten years or less. Among respondents with five years or less of experience, 23% are lecturers, constituting 22.5% of the total responses, and the remaining 77.5% comprise assistant professors to professors. Regarding educational qualifications, 56.9% hold only master's degrees, while 43.1% have attained Ph.D. or other higher professional degrees. Regarding professional positions, 35.3% have various roles, and 64.7% solely hold teaching positions.

Distributed Leadership among University Teachers

Quantitative analyses were undertaken to address Research Question 1, aiming to comprehend University Teachers' perceptions regarding the practice of Distributed Leadership across the four dimensions of the Distributed Leadership Readiness Scale (DLRS). Considering all four dimensions, the overall average of respondents' perceptions of distributed leadership is $M=3.43$, with a standard deviation of $SD=0.47$ (Table 3). This indicates positive perceptions among teachers in all aspects of DL dimensions with relatively low variance. Among the dimensions, Vision, Mission, and Goals (VMG) yielded the highest positive result ($M=3.51$, $SD=0.63$), while Leadership Practices (LP) demonstrated the lowest impact ($M=3.29$, $SD=0.52$). School Culture (SC) and Shared Responsibility (SR) exhibited nearly identical means, with $M=3.45$ and $SD=0.6$ for SC and $M=3.46$ and $SD=0.56$ for SR, highlighting consistent positive perceptions across these dimensions.

Table 3:
Results of the Descriptive Analysis

Leadership Dimension	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
Vision, Mission, and Goal	102	1	5	3.51	0.63
School Culture	102	1	5	3.45	0.60
Shared Responsibility	102	1	5	3.46	0.56
Leadership Practice	102	2	5	3.29	0.52
Overall Distributed perception and practice	102	2	5	3.43	0.47

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher through surveys

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics for the items within each dimension. The means range from 3.13 to 3.85, all above the mid-average of 3, indicating that respondents positively perceive all items across all dimensions. The items' standard deviations (SD) range from 0.73 to 1.02, signifying a narrow spread around the mean score. Skewness values range from -1.05 to 0.45, suggesting almost symmetrically distributed means. Additionally, the kurtosis values, ranging from -1.05 to 1.86, indicate a mesokurtic distribution, signifying standard mean scores. These descriptive statistics affirm a generally positive perception of distributed leadership among respondents across various items and dimensions.

Vision, Mission, and Goal (VMG)

Table 4 includes six DLRS questions measuring teachers' perceptions within the Vision, Mission, and Goals (VMG) dimension (Q1 to Q6). The findings indicate that teachers exhibit the most positive perceptions in the VMG dimension compared to other dimensions, with an average mean of 3.51. Notably, the university's Vision statement received the highest rating with a mean of 3.85, surpassing all other items within the dimension. This suggests a powerful positive perception among teachers regarding the university's Vision statement in the context of distributed leadership.

School Culture (SC)

Within the School Culture (SC) dimension, ten items were utilized to gauge teachers' perceptions (Table 4: Q7 to Q16). Notably, teachers demonstrated the highest positivity in the item, highlighting that professional development plans are tailored to individual and school needs (M=3.71). Additionally, a positive result (M=3.60) suggests mutual respect and trust among teachers. However, there is a relatively lower positive perception (M=3.28) regarding collaboration between the dean and other teachers in developing an annual school plan, representing the lowest mean within the SC dimension. This highlights variations in teachers' perceptions of collaboration within the SC dimension, with room for improvement in specific areas.

Shared Responsibility (SR)

Within the Shared Responsibility (SR) dimension, eight questions (Table 4: Q17 to Q22) revealed teachers' perceptions. The highest mean (M=3.65) was associated with the school committee, indicating positive perceptions, specifically regarding other teachers' ability to make decisions for school improvement. Another positive perception (M=3.61, SD=0.80) emphasized the school community's significance in determining the school's success or failure. Overall, teachers positively view the Shared Responsibility dimension, emphasizing collaborative decision-making and community involvement.

Leadership Practice (LP)

Eight questions (Table 4: Q23 to Q30) gauged teachers' perceptions of Leadership Practices (LP). Notably, teachers expressed a nearly neutral stance on questions related to the time and resources needed to practice leadership roles in the school, with means of M=3.25 and M=3.13, respectively. Similarly, there was indifference toward the presence of expert teachers in the correct positions (M=3.19). The overall mean for LP (M=3.29) suggests that teachers hold a slightly optimistic view of Distributed Leadership (DL) practices at Bangladesh Open University. The most positive result within the LP dimension pertained to the willingness to participate in a leadership role, with a mean of M=3.53 and SD=0.92, indicating high positivity among teachers regarding their engagement in leadership roles.

	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
The university has written vision and mission statements	3.85	0.84	-1.057	1.862
The school has clearly written vision and mission statements	3.59	0.95	-0.793	0.644
Teachers understand and support a common mission for the school and can describe it clearly	3.36	0.82	-0.653	-0.433
School goals are aligned with the national educational statement.	3.47	0.85	-0.689	-0.207
The school uses a school improvement plan as a basis for progress.	3.35	0.84	-0.34	-0.364
Teachers, Coordinators and Dean collectively establish school goals and revise goals annually.	3.44	0.98	-0.346	-0.811
Vision, Mission and Goal	3.51	0.63		
There is a high level of mutual respect and trust among the teachers.	3.60	0.90	-0.996	0.799
There is mutual respect and trust between school dean and the teachers.	3.40	0.93	-0.662	0.231
The school Dean and coordinators welcome teachers' input on issues related to instruction and improving student performance.	3.54	0.93	-0.606	-0.054
The school supports using new instructional ideas and innovations.	3.42	0.86	-0.749	0.46
The dean actively participates in his or her own professional development activities to improve leadership in the school.	3.39	0.94	-0.421	-0.102
My dean and I jointly develop my annual professional development plan.	3.28	0.97	-0.469	-0.413
My professional development plan includes activities that are based on my individual professional needs and school needs.	3.71	0.73	-0.753	0.552
Teachers actively participate in instructional decision- making.	3.42	0.85	-0.541	0.166
The dean is knowledgeable about current instructional issues.	3.37	0.98	-0.24	-0.379
My dean's practices are consistent with his or her words.	3.35	1.02	-0.417	-0.27
School Culture	3.45	0.60		
Teachers share accountability for students' academic performance.	3.57	0.84	-0.992	0.293
The school is a learning community that continually improves its effectiveness, learning from both successes and failures.	3.61	0.80	-0.838	1.264
The school's daily and weekly schedules provide time for teachers to collaborate on instructional issues.	3.33	0.90	-0.061	-0.526
The school makes available a variety of data (e.g. school performance) for teachers to use to improve student achievement.	3.30	0.94	-0.575	-0.229
Decisions to change instructional programmes are based on assessment data.	3.32	0.82	-0.45	0.101
There is a formal structure in place in the school (school committee) to provide teachers opportunities to participate in school level instructional decision-making.	3.65	0.98	-0.646	-0.121
Shared Responsibility	3.46	0.56		
The school provides teachers with professional development aligned with the school's mission and goals.	3.30	0.94	-0.72	-0.355
Informal school leaders (teachers) play an important role in the school in improving the performance of professionals and the achievement of students.	3.41	0.79	-0.26	-0.529
The school has expanded its capacity by providing professional formal opportunities to take on leadership roles.	3.24	0.85	-0.173	-0.564
Teachers who assume leadership roles in the school have sufficient school time to permit them to make meaningful contributions to school.	3.25	0.88	-0.254	-0.753
Teachers who assume leadership roles in the school have sufficient resources to be able to make meaningful contributions to the school.	3.13	0.85	0.045	-1.05
Expert teachers fill most leadership roles in the school.	3.19	1.02	-0.157	-0.747
New teachers are provided opportunities to fill some school leadership roles.	3.25	0.88	-0.615	-0.745
Teachers are interested in participating in school leadership roles.	3.53	0.92	-0.322	-0.405
Leadership practice	3.29	0.52		

Table 4:
Descriptive Statistics of Four Dimensions of DL

Correlation among the Dimensions of DL

The Pearson correlation method was employed to examine the correlation between the dimensions of Distributed Leadership (DL), considering the four separate scale variables (Connolly, 2007). As shown in Table 5, a significance value (p-value) less than 0.01 with the two-tail test indicates highly interrelated dimensions, signifying significant relationships between them. According to Connolly (2007), a coefficient value ranging from 0.60 to 0.79 indicates a strong relationship, while a coefficient between 0.40 and 0.59 suggests a moderate correlation. The results reveal a strong relationship between Vision, Mission, and Goals (VMG) and School Culture (SC), followed by a good relationship between SC and Shared Responsibility (SR). A decreasing relationship is observed between SR and Leadership Practices (LP), followed by SC and LP. The lowest moderate relationship exists between VMG and LP, providing insights into the interconnectedness and varying strengths of relationships between different dimensions of DL.

Table 5:
Pearson Correlation Test

		<i>VMG</i>	<i>SC</i>	<i>SR</i>	<i>LP</i>
Vision, Mission, and Goal	Pearson r	1	.705**	.546**	.470**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
School Culture	Pearson r	.705**	1	.612**	.524**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
Shared Responsibility	Pearson r	.546**	.612**	1	.534**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
Leadership practice	Pearson r	.470**	.524**	.534**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Challenges to Practice DL at the University

This research explored the difficulties encountered by university teachers in implementing Distributed Leadership at BOU, focusing on four critical dimensions of Distributed Leadership. The findings, derived from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), reveal a complex landscape of issues that impede the effective implementation of DL across several key themes.

One significant challenge identified is the limited active involvement of all faculty members in shaping the school's vision and objectives. Junior educators, in particular, often face difficulties in contributing meaningfully to these discussions. Additionally, some educators exhibit resistance or inflexibility towards adopting or sharing innovative ideas, which hampers collaborative efforts in achieving the institution's goals.

Government regulations and strict oversight from the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh (UGCB) significantly impact decision-making and flexibility in curriculum development. The need for strict compliance with national educational plans influences the dynamics of leadership within the university. While this alignment with national standards is necessary, it can sometimes constrain the ability of faculty members to implement innovative educational practices.

The school culture at BOU acknowledges the importance of fostering mutual understanding and trust among colleagues. However, instances where faculty members lack respect for one another undermine this goal. Additionally, certain educators struggle with confidence issues in their

leadership capabilities, complicating efforts to cultivate a positive and collaborative school culture.

Teacher engagement is another critical area of concern. Educators often juggle multiple responsibilities, which can reduce their involvement in school activities. Some educators may also be unwilling to participate in these activities. Competency issues, such as difficulties in effective task management and coordination, further pose significant challenges. In some cases, faculty members may exhibit self-centered behavior or prioritize their research over collaborative efforts, impacting the overall effectiveness of distributed leadership.

The scarcity of opportunities for professional growth within the school is a major impediment to leadership development. The absence of training, workshops, and mentoring affects educators' effectiveness in leadership roles. This lack of professional development opportunities limits the ability of faculty members to enhance their leadership skills and contribute effectively to the university's goals.

The absence of a structured school plan hampers effective communication and shared responsibilities among faculty members. Limited dissemination of information to all faculty members restricts their ability to provide feedback for school improvement. Additionally, conflicts between the administration and educators when obtaining student-related data can be challenging, further complicating the implementation of distributed leadership.

Resource constraints, including limited staff and facilities, pose significant challenges to leadership and management at BOU. Faculty members struggle to handle many students with limited support staff, affecting their ability to effectively practice distributed leadership. The scarcity of resources impacts daily operations and limits the potential for innovative educational practices and leadership development.

The challenges to practicing distributed leadership at Bangladesh Open University are multifaceted, encompassing issues related to participation in vision and mission goals, decision-making authority, alignment with national educational plans, school culture, teacher engagement and competence, professional development, shared responsibility and communication, and resource constraints. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from all stakeholders to create an environment that supports and fosters effective distributed leadership.

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that participating teachers perceive leadership at the university as distributed, with the highest participation in the Vision, Mission, and Goal (VMG) dimension and the lowest in Leadership Practices (LP). This variation in perceptions aligns with prior studies by Tashi (2015) and Mascall et al. (2008), emphasizing the diverse perspectives on distributed leadership aspects across the university. The positive perception of involving teachers in developing VMG aligns with the belief that this engagement contributes to institutional success, as Elmore (2000) and Gordon (2005) noted.

Regarding School Culture, teachers at BOU positively perceive mutual understanding and support. The alignment of professional development with individual and school needs is essential, emphasizing the significance of mutual trust and respect between leaders and teachers. Building relationships and fostering shared values through collaborative decision-making processes are crucial for engaging teachers, echoing the principles discussed by Yukl (2013).

Shared Responsibility emerges as a notable engagement area for BOU teachers, with positive perceptions across components like accountability, learning community, information access, dissemination, and active participation in the school development committee. The study

underscores the importance of structural support for developing a learning community and fostering a collaborative environment to pursue common educational goals (Spillane & Healey, 2010).

However, in Leadership Practices, teachers at BOU express less engagement and less favorable perceptions. Acknowledging the influence of informal leaders on student learning, teachers cite challenges such as inadequate resources, time constraints, and insufficient school support for practicing leadership roles. Despite these challenges, teachers are highly interested in actively participating in school leadership, echoing the importance of sufficient time and resources for successful distributed leadership implementation (Tsu, 2019).

While the overall perception of distributed leadership is positive among BOU faculty, specific challenges within the school environment are identified. Administrative hurdles, strained relationships among teachers, conflicts between positional leaders and peers, and a lack of professional qualities for effective collaborative leadership are notable concerns. Teachers also highlight the burden of overloaded tasks hindering their active engagement in leadership roles, emphasizing the need for proper training and support from senior staff.

Despite the commitment to the four dimensions of distributed leadership, teachers stress the importance of addressing additional requirements, including providing adequate time, support, and resources to distribute leadership responsibilities effectively. The creation of a trusting and mutually respectful environment within the school is seen as crucial for the successful implementation of distributed leadership practices.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study findings suggest that many teachers believe distributed leadership positively affects relationships, teacher commitment, and school culture. Teachers are more likely to collaborate when their contributions significantly impact institutional development. Positional leaders' practices, such as inviting teachers to share knowledge and recognizing their efforts, positively influence distributed leadership.

Adequate resources, including time and remuneration, are necessary for teachers to practice distributed leadership. When positional leaders encourage participation, listen to ideas, and act on them, teachers show a strong interest in the school's mission and objectives. Distributed leadership requires clear expectations and commitment to a common goal. Teachers' participation in the learning community fosters strong cultural and collaborative practices in schools, positively impacting students, leaders, and teachers (Tashi, 2015). This outcome depends on well-managed, planned, target-oriented, and continuous development of distributed leadership, which involves developing the leadership potential of others.

Bangladeshi university education systems should transition from traditional to distributed leadership for more significant benefits and institutional improvement. Distributed leadership collaborates on teachers' skills and helps improve overall institutional improvements (Jones et al., 2017). However, some positional leaders fear losing power and distribute tasks without delegating authority. Hatcher (2005) contends that while leadership is distributed, power may not be. Distributing authority is crucial for practicing distributed leadership effectively.

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