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Partner Schools

Exploring distributed leadership among teachers

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Exploring distributed leadership among teachers at Leeds

School context

Leeds International School, Sri Lanka, established in 1999, offers a comprehensive English-medium instruction (EMI) education from Kindergarten to K-12, catering to students aged from two to 17. Leeds International School operates in the southern and western provinces, having 15 branches, and; includes four preschools, three primary schools, and nine secondary schools. The school's main focus is to provide equal educational opportunity for students who lack access to the commercial city, Colombo, along with providing a multicultural, multinational and multireligious environment. This diversity allows students to engage with various cultures and religions, enriching their educational experience. In addition to academics, the school emphasises students' participation in sports, clubs and leadership development activities from an early age. As the main branch celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2024, the school remains committed to fostering a well-rounded educational experience and nurturing leadership skills among its students.

About the author



Kaushalya Illeperuma is the Coordinating Principal at Leeds International School Network, Sri Lanka. She has accumulated over a decade of experience in the international school's education sector. She has always had a passion

for conducting research in different fields with regard to the development of leadership and management. Thus, this research centres on distributed leadership among teachers. Mrs Illeperuma has exhibited her leadership qualities starting from her secondary education, where she held the responsibility as the head girl of one of the leading National Schools in Sri Lanka. She commenced her career as an education administrator in 2013, following the completion of her Bachelor's Degree in Sociology from the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. She furthered her education with a Postgraduate Diploma and a Master's Degree in Labour Relations and Human Resources from the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. Additionally, she has obtained professional qualifications in Human Resources Management from the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management, Sri Lanka.

Key findings

- **New teachers who initially struggled with classroom management became more confident through the support of their mentors.**
- **The mentor–mentee programme has also contributed significantly to teacher professional development, as it emphasises not only monitoring but also guiding, supporting and inspiring others.**
- **82 per cent of mentees reported improvements in teaching strategies.**
- **While the results are positive, continued support is essential to ensure consistent progress among all participants.**



Exploratory Action Research questions

1. What aspects of distributed leadership do I believe impact teachers' ability to grow and improve them professionally?
2. In what ways do teachers feel distributed leadership either helps or hinders their ability to effectively manage their classrooms or work with colleagues?
3. What do Administrators expect from the introduction of distributed leadership?

Action Research rationale

Leeds International School offers English-medium education to students in regions lacking access to the commercial cities. Its vision is to develop futuristic global learners with a solid foundation in religion and culture, while emphasising academic excellence and holistic personality development. Leeds International School, comprising branches in Sri Lanka's southern and western provinces, carefully selects its academic staff to ensure high-quality educational standards in the network.

However, due to the geographical dispersion of its branches, the quality and capacity of teaching staff vary regionally. This variability in teaching skills and practices presents a significant challenge in maintaining uniform academic standards across the network. As the school celebrates its 25th anniversary, addressing this issue has become increasingly critical.

Hence, to tackle this challenge, the school management has identified the existing concerns in the managerial level of each branch. Moving forward, Leeds International School management is strategically developing a programme to empower capable academic staff, under distributed leadership. This research aims to explore the effects of distributed leadership on teacher professional development. By gathering and evaluating teacher feedback and student feedback, the study will assess how distributed leadership impacts the consistency and quality of teachers.



Data collection tools

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques to explore distributed leadership among teachers, focusing on its impact on professional development, classroom management, collaboration and administrators' expectations. A focus group discussion will be held with five teachers and two sectional heads from primary, secondary and upper sections to examine how distributed leadership influences teachers' professional growth.

Additionally, 30 teachers, with ten from each section, will complete questionnaires to assess their views on distributed leadership in classroom management and collaboration. A separate questionnaire will be distributed to 20 school leaders – board members, principals and deputy principals – to gather data on administrators' perspectives regarding the implementation and impact of distributed leadership within the school.

The study is subjected to certain limitations. The research encompasses a school system with 15 branches; only one branch is selected for the survey, potentially limiting the generalisability of the findings. Out of 72, 50 per cent of teachers are included in the survey in the selected branch, which may constrain the representativeness of data. A stratified sampling method will be used to ensure a balanced representation of each section. This might reduce bias while selecting the sample and also maintain some limitations in terms of sample diversity.

'I feel more confident and less anxious when my mentor visits my class. It's reassuring to know someone is there to guide me without judgement.'

Mentee Teacher, Branch School A

Data analysis for the exploration stage

Key findings from exploration

From a reflective journal, it has been noted that many educators are not fully utilising subject communities to share knowledge, leading to struggles in classroom management and low morale. Limited collaboration creates internal conflict among parallel teachers. To address this, we need effective strategies such as structured professional learning communities, mentorship programmes, training and workshops, and the use of technology to increase participation in distributed leadership initiatives.

In a focus group interview, sectional heads expressed satisfaction with professional development opportunities and valued shared decision making, especially in event organisation. They emphasised the need for greater awareness of distributed leadership, highlighting the importance of autonomy, teamwork and decision making in enhancing collaboration and professional growth.

Teachers widely agree that distributed leadership has improved classroom management by providing new strategies, insights and peer support, though some expressed concerns about resources such as technology, mentorship programmes and professional learning communities. Teachers noted improvements in managing disruptions, clarifying roles and reducing classroom issues. Additionally, distributed leadership has fostered greater collaboration among staff, promoting teamwork, communication and professional relationships, leading to more innovative teaching practices and a supportive environment.

Administrators expect distributed leadership to enhance teacher autonomy, support professional growth and improve communication and collaboration, positively impacting classroom management and school performance.

Action Research

Action plan

- An exploratory study has highlighted a gap in collaboration and knowledge sharing among educators, which negatively impacts classroom management and professional growth.
- To address this issue, a mentorship programme will be implemented in the school system, aimed at pairing experienced teachers with newly recruited educators.
- The primary objective of this programme is to offer new teachers the necessary support and guidance for their career development, using a peer-learning approach that helps them gain insights into school culture, curriculum planning, classroom management and resource sharing.
- Mentorship pairings will be based on the subjects taught, with experienced teachers serving as mentors to newly appointed staff.
- To initiate the programme, a group awareness meeting will be held to introduce the mentors and mentees.
- The programme will primarily consist of one-to-one meetings, classroom observations and feedback sessions, with mentors observing and evaluating their mentees weekly to provide ongoing feedback.
- An evaluation format will be introduced to ensure systematic assessment of the mentees' progress.
- Additionally, a survey questionnaire will be distributed to gather feedback from the mentees.
- The programme will run for one month, and if the impact proves positive, it will be continued on a sustainable basis.
- Initially, ten subject-specific mentors and ten mentees will participate in the programme, ensuring focused and personalised support for each new teacher.



'There's a visible improvement in how my mentee handles the classroom. Our regular discussions have helped her become more reflective and open to new strategies.'

Mentor teacher, Branch School B

Action plan evaluation tools

1. The evaluation of mentees by mentors will be collected through an evaluation form.
2. The experiences and knowledge-sharing practices between mentors will be gathered using a focus group interview.
3. The experience of the mentees will be gathered using a questionnaire.
4. The focus group interviews will involve a selected group of five mentors and five mentees to provide in-depth insights into the programme's effectiveness.



Data analysis and conclusions

Action plan implementation

The mentor–mentee programme was implemented through a structured and phased approach to ensure clarity, support and smooth execution.

Selection of mentors

Experienced and senior teachers across all branches were carefully selected to serve as mentors based on their expertise, leadership skills and willingness to guide others.

Appointment of mentees

All newly recruited teachers were identified and officially appointed as mentees to receive support as they adapted to their new roles.

Mentor–mentee pairing

Each mentor was paired with a mentee through a personalised communication process, ensuring compatibility and fostering a sense of connection and trust from the outset.

Training sessions

Dedicated training sessions were conducted for both mentors and mentees. These sessions clarified expectations, outlined roles and responsibilities, and provided practical strategies for effective mentoring and learning.

Classroom observations

Mentors conducted regular visits to mentees' classrooms to observe teaching practices, offer feedback and provide hands-on support. These visits created opportunities for constructive dialogue and professional growth.

Key findings

A key observation is that many new teachers struggle with classroom management due to limited teaching techniques, practices and resources. However, mentees feel more at ease and confident when mentors visit their classes, creating a relaxed environment that helps reduce anxiety and enhances lesson delivery. This supportive atmosphere encourages mentees to seek advice and openly discuss challenges.

Mentor support is rated highly, with 80 per cent of mentees rating their mentor as excellent. A strong majority (86.67 per cent) consistently received relevant guidance. Significant improvements in teaching strategies were noted by 82.35 per cent of mentees, and 76.47 per cent found the programme very effective in adapting to their new role. Collaboration has also improved, with 82.35 per cent reporting enhanced idea-sharing and teamwork.

Overall, 83.33 per cent rated the programme as very effective in fostering professional growth, with all respondents acknowledging its value in promoting guidance and shared learning. Additionally, 83.33 per cent of mentors observed noticeable improvements in mentees' teaching behaviour. While the results are positive, continued support is essential to ensure consistent progress among all participants.



Conclusions

The mentor–mentee programme has proven to be a valuable initiative in supporting the professional development of newly recruited teachers. It plays a crucial role in improving classroom management and teaching techniques through ongoing classroom support. Mentees feel more at ease during mentor visits, which fosters open communication, encourages feedback and builds confidence. Most mentees rated their mentors highly and consistently received relevant guidance, reflecting strong support within the programme.

The initiative has significantly enhanced teaching strategies, improved collaboration and helped new teachers transition smoothly into their roles. It has also encouraged the sharing of ideas and resources, contributing to a more connected and supportive teaching community. Participation in the programme has positively influenced mentees' teaching behaviour, teamwork and overall professional growth. All mentees acknowledged its role in facilitating professional discussions and shared learning experiences.

While the majority showed noticeable or significant improvement, a few mentees reported only minimal progress or limited guidance. This highlights the need for continued engagement and more targeted mentoring to ensure consistency and effectiveness for all participants. Strengthening these areas will help maximise the programme's impact and ensure sustained benefits across the school.

References

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Future actions

Based on the conclusions drawn from this action research, several key steps will be taken to enhance the effectiveness of the mentor–mentee programme within the school setting and across the wider educational network.

- Standardise mentoring practices.
- Ensure regular and structured mentoring sessions.
- Strengthen resource support for mentees.
- Ongoing evaluations and feedback.
- Promote continuous dialogue and collaboration.
- Expand the programme network wide.

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