

An Investigation into Lecturers' Perceptions about Distributed Leadership in Public Universities in Nigeria

*David Jimoh Kayode ** Nurahimah Mohd Yusoff *** Arsay tham by Veloo **** Rhoda O. Oduwaiye ***** Adaramaja A. Sheu

Abstract

Distributed leadership has been perceived as an effective strategy toward improving the effectiveness of universities in this era of globalization. This study therefore examines lecturers' perception about distributed leadership in public universities in Nigeria. A quantitative research design was employed to collect data from lecturers in public universities in North-central geopolitical zone of Nigeria. A total of 160 questionnaires were distributed and only 101 were usable for data analysis. SPSS version 20 was used for data analysis. The findings of the study revealed that distributed leadership was not adequately practiced in the sampled universities. However, the result of the t-test analysis shows that there is no significant difference in the lecturers perception about distributed leadership based on the school type and their gender. Therefore, it is suggested that the university management should improve their effort towards distributed leadership.

Keywords: Distributed leadership, Nigerian universities, leadership functions, participative decision making

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¹ David Jimoh Kayode, Department of Educational Studies University Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Malaysia Department of Educational Management, University of Ilorin, Nigeria Davetol@yahoo.com

INTRODUCTION

The word "leadership" comes from a Germanic language root which means "to make go". However, leaders usually stumble once attempting to know who makes what go? Several leaders have confidence that there is need to "make" their subordinate work by ordering them to carry out a task but the modern business certainties required the type of headship that believe less in giving order rather than motivating the people. Leadership lies at the heart of achieving victory (Filson, 2000, 2002).

According to Bush, Bell, and Middlewood (2010), there has been an increase in the universal attention on the leadership of the school system most especially, the universities and the university leadership after the classroom practices has been seen as a major contributing factor towards the students and the university performance '(Leith wood et al., 2010). According to leadership practices have four parts which are: emotional part, rational path, organizational path and family path.

Furthermore, researchers have two different ideas about leadership (Sadeghi, Yadollahi, Baygi, & Ghayoomi, 2013), one group thinks it is acquired ((Henrikson, 2006; Rowley, 1997; Ruvolo, Peterson, & LeBoeuf, 2004) and the other group claim that persons are born with it (Grint, 2000; Lowen, 1975). This was investigated by in term of two theorists: incremental theorists who believe that leaders are made and the entity theorists or classical trait theorist Marturano, Wood, & Gosling, 2013) that rely on the claim that leaders are born with it, the study therefore revealed that incremental theorists have more leadership confidence than the entity theorist. In over thirty years of leadership research, numerous categories of leadership behaviors are known (Bass & Stogdill, 1990, Yammarine, 2013) . Scholars have begun to examine the effect of leadership behavior most especially charismatic or visionary leadership and transformational leadership on organizational effectiveness. (Ling, Simsek, Lubatkin, & Veiga, 2008a, 2008b, Wang,

Tsui,&Xin, 2011, Yuki,2008b) A troublesome challenge faced by the scholars is the difficulties in arranging various behaviors in a ranked nomenclature that is meaty as regards to the behavioral consequences (Yuki, 2008b).

In modern years, distributed leadership concept has been well-linked to alternate the leadercentric conventional leadership models which advocated that leadership is not an individual but a collective property (Bolden, Petrov, &Gosling, 2009). It emphasizes that leadership activities are a process of transferring information; that leadership roles are conditional, and various interpersonal expertise are associated with leadership practices((Nordeengren,2013).In both Europe and the United States, school leadership is progressively viewed as a key strategy in school reform ((Nordeengren,2013). Distributed leadership focuses on how leadership is shared within organizations like schools by several individuals, who engage in leadership with others or by themselves in an unpredictable ways at peculiar times Spillane, 2006). Under this view, “leadership practice (as both thinking and activity) emerges in the execution of leadership tasks in and through the collaborations among the followers, leaders, and the situations” (Spillane, Halverson, & diamond, 2004, p. 27). Such division of labor can occur in a variety of ways: multiple leaders may perform the same function together, perform the same functions in two different contexts simultaneously, or divide functions on the basis of expertise and availability (Spillane, 2012).

LITERATUR REVIEW

Concept of distributed leadership

Distributed leadership theory provides a framework through which scholars can understand how individuals without specifically identified leadership roles can be called on to perform leadership in specific situations within a school environment. As a framework, distributed leadership is compatible with several current models of scholarship in educational leadership, which utilizes a variety of collective leadership models (Nordengren, 2012). There has being a misunderstanding or mix-up in describing the concept of distributed leadership which has given

rise to a diverse nomenclature being used in the literatures, such as democratic leadership (Woods, 2004) and shared leadership which have been interchangeably and instinctively used often (Pearce & Conger, & Locke, 2008).

Distributed, collective and shared leadership are often used in the same study interchangeably as if they mean the same thing, with the researcher providing no definition or explanation on what is meant by each notion (Hammersley-Fletcher & Brundrett, 2008). The misunderstanding application of those notions has brought in confusion in the process of operationalizing distributed leadership which has created complexity when clarifying research findings implication.

In this study, dimension for distributed leadership will be adopted for the operationalization of distributed leadership (Hulpia, Devos, & Van Keer, 2011). Hulpia et al. (2011) studied the approach of distributed leadership as a practice in three dimensions: leadership functions through different sources; participative decision making among various members of the organization; as well as cooperation within the leadership team.

Leadership functions

In order to improve the school, leadership enhancement has being recognized as the main factor (Bush, 2008) and it is becoming more important for university leaders to understand their role in enhancing the students' learning experience as well as to ensure that the structures and systems to support administrative and academic processes are established as part of their leadership responsibility and accountability (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2010). In the same way Price water house Coopers (2007) submitted that school leaders behavior greatly influence the performance of the students and there is an extensive recognition that the leader of a school have an essential responsibility towards elevating quality learning and teaching within their various universities. According to Spillane, Diamond, Walker, Halverson, & Jita (2001), leadership practice focus primarily on the interaction among the leader, his subordinate and the situation surrounding them. However, Spillane (2006) in his distributed leadership theory, buttress that various sources of influence abound within the school system and empirical concentration has being reposition on the

“leader plus” phase of leadership functions (p.3). Moreover, leadership in the school system has taken a new dimension. It is not just a position but a practice by which various people within the university system will be involved to share or utilize their expertise towards achieving the goals of the university system. Therefore, leadership within the university system has been based upon multiple sources of influence (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008) For instance, who lead when the viceChancellor, the dean and the head of department is not available? And how experts who are not in a formal leadership position are involved in curriculum and instructional leadership to achievement of the university goals and objectives (Spillane & Camburn, 2006)

As argued by Green (1999), three attributes are expected of a university leaders in order to influence quality education which are: being supportive and interested in every efforts made by the members of school community in order to enhance teaching and learning process; enthusiastic in offering encouragement and compensation towards the lecturers and among leaders in order to achieve teaching and learning excellence; and being knowledgeable of what make up educational excellence. Leadership practice can be performed from various sources in Universities in Nigeria. However, it depends on the administrative or organizational structure of various universities which are very similar among the universities. For this study, it will be limited to the vice chancellor, deputy vice chancellors, deans and provost of the various faculties and colleges, head of department and directors of various institutes. The study conducted byLeithwood & Mascall (2008) revealed that faculty capacity, work setting, and motivation are greatly influenced by academics who are formally designated to perform a role.

Therefore, the role of every leadership team has a distinct impact on lecturer's commitment. However, each of them has supervisory and supportive roles to perform and this study is assessing their supervisory and supportive roles they perform towards the university goals' achievement. The leadership functions were examined by Hulpia et al. (2011) through strength of vision (De Maeyer, Rymenans, Van Petegem, Van den Bergh, & Rijlaarsdam, (2007)., offering intellectual simulation and instructional leadership(Hallinger, 2003) and supportive behavior (Hoy & Tarter). While the

supervisory aspect were examined from the theory of instructional leadership for monitoring and supervising academics (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999, 2000) According to Hulpia et al. (2011), the support received by lecturers is essential to their commitment which has a positive effect on organizational effectiveness rather than where the support comes from. This was in support of Leithwood & Jantzi, (2000) and (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008) who stressed that the regularity of leadership practice is what matters and not how it is performed by a distinct leadership role. Therefore, this study examined the leadership functions in terms of the supportive and supervisory roles of the university leaders.

Participative decision making

Decision making has been perceived as one of the essential task of any universities leaders (Hulpia et al., 2011) which can make or mar the achievement of the organization. Decision can be viewed as the conscious efforts made for the purpose of achieving a goal (Idoko, 2010). Decision making is being seen as an integral part of leading any organization and as such, every educational leader makes decisions in order to establish objectives, organize, control and direct the educational process (Alabi, 2002). Decision making is thus a process of identifying alternatives and choosing one of the alternatives in solving a problem or address an opportunity. A participative or shared process of decision making where lecturers are involved can be referred to as an element of distributed leadership (Heck & Hallinger, 2009, Seashore Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010). According to Mayrowetz (2008),the collaborative method that involved a broader collection of actors in the overall decision making process within the school system would help to reduce the risk encountered in the process of delegation of responsibilities. Moreover, Somech (2010) stressed that the growing development of participatory decision making in the school system reflects the extensively shared confidence that decentralized and flatter management authority formations support the potential for promoting the effectiveness of a school.

Previous researches have revealed that participatory decision making process of lecturers has a significant impact on the outcomes of the organization (Hulpia et al, 2011) According to (Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd (2007) and Robinson et al. (2008), leaders that not only encourage but likewise participate directly either through informal or formal professional learning will have a significant impact on student outcomes. This was similar to (2001) who concluded that the feelings of belongingness that lecturers have in the process of involving them in decision making will have a great impact on their job commitment.

Cooperation within the leadership team

Distributed leadership has been viewed by Groon (2003) as a leadership practice that rely more on interactions among individuals in the organization rather than individual property. They believe that the value of distributed leadership are achieved through practice has become a subject of discussion (Cutajar, Bezzina, & James, 2013) which was also confirmed by Mayrowetz (2008). According to Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2013), whose study was based on the social identity theory of leadership stipulated that the way the leaders and the subordinates perceive overview each other as member of a common group or team is all about effective leadership.

It is not a matter of having many leaders but the ability of the leaders to harmonize their actions in order to have a mutual influence on the improvement or effectiveness of the school (Mehra, Smith, Dixon, & Robertson, 2006).As argued by Scribner, Sawyer, Watson,& Myers (2007), the achievement of distributed leadership does not only rely on individuals carrying out diverse leadership roles effectively but also rely on new principles of influence and interaction among various staff in the university system. Therefore, interactions among leaders are believed to be very vital than the kind of their formal leadership roles (Harris, 2010). Therefore, distributed leadership should not be limited to distribution of leadership roles among leadership teams but how such roles are distributed and the cooperation among the leadership teams (Gronn, 2002, Spillane, 2006).

In the study conducted by Mujis & Harris (2007) to shows diverse ways that faculty leadership is available in schools, the study indicated that faculty leadership functions require on going leadership development , trust as well as cooperation among the leadership teams and also, shared vision and the structures of the school is paramount. This was supported by Briggs (2010) when trying to express the conditions that support cooperation among leadership team in order to distribute their leadership.

As recommended by Senior & Swailes (2007), mutual believe and reliance, assigned objectives, compromise decision making and honest expression of frame of mind and discrepancy are some of the elements needed by an effective teams. Likewise, there must be coordination, collaboration and consistency among the leadership teams (Buchanan &Huczynski, 2004) with a clear borderline amid the leadership team (Hackman, 2002).Cooperation among the leadership team will therefore be examined in terms of goal oriented, group cohesion and role clarity among the leaders (Hulpia et al, 2011). According to Hulpia et al (2011), lecturers' involvement in decision making in the schools is not as essential as the cooperation inside the leadership team or the quality of their support.

Objectives of the study

Therefore, this study tends to:

1. Investigate the extent to which distributed leadership is being practiced in public universities in North-central zone Nigeria.
2. Find out if there is a significant difference in lecturers' perception of distributed leadership in terms of their gender and school type.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative method of survey type was adopted in this study using a questionnaire. The population of the study comprises of all the academic staffs in public universities in northcentral, Nigeria. The study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique. The public universities in north central were first stratified into federal and state universities. One federal and one state university

were then randomly selected. In each of the selected university, the respondents were grouped into eight strata according to faculties and 10 respondents were randomly selected in each of the faculty in the selected universities. A total of 160respondents were selected for this study.

Lecturers who have spent at least three years in the school were purposively selected.

The distributed leadership inventory (DLI) which was developed by Hulpia, Devos, &Rosseel (2009) based on leadership functions, participative decision making and cooperation among the leadership team was adopted for this study. Table 1 shows the Cronbach's alpha (α) obtained in previous study which shows that the instrument is valid and reliable.

The data collected for this study were analyzed using statistical packages for social sciences (SPSS) version 20. The first research objective that examined the extent of distributed leadership practices as perceived by the lecturers was analyzed using descriptive statistics, i.e., the mean value and standard deviation of each dimension of distributed leadership. The difference in distributed leadership practice in terms of respondent gender and school type were also calculated using independent sampled t-test.

Table 1
Source of the survey instrument

S/N	Dimension	Source(s)	Cronbach's α
1.	Leadership function		

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2

Personal profile of the respondents

Profile	Description	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	75	74.3	74.3	74.3
	Female	26	25.7	25.7	100.0
School Type	Federal University	62	61.4	61.4	61.4
	State University	39	38.6	38.6	100
Faculty	Arts	13	12.9	12.9	12.9
	Education	13	12.9	12.9	25.7
	Engineering	8	7.9	7.9	33.7
	Law	12	11.9	11.9	45.5
	Science	13	12.9	12.9	58.4
	Social Science	17	16.8	16.8	75.2
	Management Science	21	20.8	20.8	96.0
	Vet. Medicine	4	4.0	4.0	100.0

Out of the 160 questionnaires distributed for this study, only 105 were returned and 101 are usable which are analyzed for this study. The following are the findings of this study based on the responses gathered from the respondents. The response rate is 65.62%.

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	Education	13	12.9	12.9	25.7
	Engineering	8	7.9	7.9	33.7
	Law	12	11.9	11.9	45.5
	Science	13	12.9	12.9	58.4
	Social Science	17	16.8	16.8	75.2
	Management Science	21	20.8	20.8	96.0
	Vet. Medicine	4	4.0	4.0	100.0

As shown in Table 2, majority of the respondents are male with 74.3% while 25.7% were female.

It is also evident that 61% of the respondent is master degree holder while 38.6 are Ph.D holder.

With the responses gotten from various faculties, management science has the highest number of respondents while veterinary medicine has the least response rate.

Research objective 1

The first research objective in this study was to examine the level of distributed leadership in the sampled public universities. In order to achieve the first objective in this study, a descriptive analysis was carried out. The mean and standard deviation of each dimensions of distributed leadership were analyzed. This is shown in Tables 3-7.

Table3
 Leadership Functions in terms of Support and Supervision
 (N=101)

Items	Mean	SD
Premises a long-term vision	2.347	0.943
Debates the school vision	2.178	1.033
Compliments lecturers	2.119	1.013
Helps lecturers	2.099	1.118
Explains his or her reason for criticism to lecturers	2.277	1.305
Is always available to help lecturers when assistance is needed	1.911	0.873
Looks out for the personal welfare of lecturers	1.921	0.924
Encourages me to pursue my own goals for professional learning	2.129	1.092
Encourages me to try new practices consistent with my own interests	2.129	1.055
Provides organizational support for lecturer interaction	2.168	0.917
Evaluates the performance of the staff	2.446	0.974
Is involved in summative evaluation of lecturers	2.376	1.112
Is involved in formative evaluation of lecturers	2.208	0.993
Composite Mean	2.178	0.754

Note: 1-2 = Low; 2.01-3= medium/moderate; 3.01 – 4= high

As shown in Table 3, there is a moderate supervisory and supportive leadership functions in the sampled schools universities? Although there is evidence that leaders are not always available to help lecturers when assistance is needed. It is also evident that the leaders do not look out for the personal welfare of the lecturers. This shows that supervisory leadership functions are more executed than the supportive functions by the leaders. Although, on the overall, leadership functions are moderately or partially executed in public universities. The findings of this study were in support of the otokatou (2012) that examined teachers' perception of distributed leadership in public schools in Cyprus. The study found a medium level of distributed leadership in the sampled schools.

Table4

Extent of Distributed leadership in terms of Participative Decision Making

(N=101)

Items	Mean	SD
Leadership is delegated for activities critical for achieving school goals	2.178	1.071
Leadership is broadly distributed among the staff	2.317	1.086
We have an adequate involvement in decision making	2.129	1.119
There is an effective committee structure for decision making	2.168	1.096
Effective communication among staff is facilitated	2.366	1.102
There is an appropriate level of autonomy in decision making	2.139	0.980
Composite Mean	2.216	0.921

The second aspect of distributed leadership is the participative decision making in the schools. It is evident that there is medium level of lecturers' involvement in decision making in the schools. Facilitation of decision making among the staff has the highest mean of 2.366 and the overall mean score of participative decision making in the school is 2.216 which is moderate or at medium level.

Table 5

Cooperation within the Leadership Team

Items	Mean	SD
There is a well-functioning leadership team in our school	1.990	0.843
The leadership team supports the goals lecturers like to attain with our school	1.832	0.788

	1.960	0.836
All members of the leadership team work in the same strain on the school's core objectives	2.069	0.803
In our school, the right man sits in the right place taking each individual's competency into account	2.069	0.941
Members of the management team have clear goals	2.208	0.875
Members of the leadership team know which tasks they have to perform	2.089	0.981
	2.050	0.931
The leadership team is willing to execute a good idea from its members		
Composite Mean	2.030	0.641

Looking at the third component of distributed leadership as identified in this study, cooperation within the leadership team has a mean score of 2.03 which means that cooperation within the leadership team in the sampled schools is at medium. However, members of the leadership team do not really support the goals lecturers intend to attain with their school. Although, as shown in Table 5, there is a moderate indication that members of the management team have clear goals as perceived by the lecturers. Much of the research reviewed for this article suggests that the successful achievement of distributed leadership is determined by the interactive influences of multiple members within an organization (Heikka et al., 2013).

Furthermore, Rosnarizah and Zulkifli (2009) in their exploratory study reveal that distributed leadership prevailed in high schools in Malaysia as 74% of the teachers who respond to the questionnaire indicated that distributed leadership is practiced in their various schools. The findings of this study also support other study on distributed leadership in different types of school. For instance technical and vocational school (Rabindarang et al., 2014); national primary school in Malaysia (Wahab et al., 2013); secondary school (Hulpia, Devos, & Rosseel, 2009; Rosnarizah &

Zulkifli, 2009); universities (Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2008). Therefore, it can be concluded that Nigerian universities has a positive and moderate view on the distributed leadership strategy being practice in Nigerian universities.

Distributed leadership in this study has three dimensions namely: leadership functions in terms of support and supervision; participatory decision making and cooperation within the leadership team were analyzed and the result shows that distributed leadership is being practiced among public universities in Nigeria. However, participatory decision making practice is the most visible distributed leadership approach in public universities in Nigeria with a mean value of 2.216 while leadership functions and cooperation among the leadership team has mean value of 2.178 and 2.03 respectively. The outcome of this study is consistent with (Harris, 2008; Rabindarang, Bing, & Yin, 2014; Rosnarizah & Hussein, 2015; Wahab, Hamid, Zainal, & Rafik, 2013).

Research objective 2

The significant difference in lecturers' perception of distributed leadership in terms of their gender and school type

Table 6

Group Statistics on gender

Variables	Gender	N	M	S D	Std. Error	Mean
	Male LF	75	2.2246	.72533	.08375	
	Female	26	2.0414	.83254	.16328	
		75	2.3222	.92119	.10637	
	Male PDM					
	Female	26	1.9103	.86440	.16952	

	75	2.0711	.61611	.07114
	Male CLT			
Female	26	1.9103	.70695	.13864

Table 7

Independent sample t-test according to gender

Levene's Test for				t-test for Equality of Means						
				Equality of						
				Variances		Std.	95%			
				Erro Confidence r						
				Interval of the						
				Difference						
				p	M	Diff	Difference			
				(2taile	Diff	eren	Low er			
				eren	ce	ce	Upper			
				F	Sig.	t	df	d)		
LF	Equal variances assumed	.599	.441	1.06	99.0	.288	.183	.172	-	.524
					8		00			.157
						.998	38.9	.324	.183	.184
								.184	-	.554
	Equal variances not assumed					76				.188
PDM	Equal variances assumed	2.981	.087	1.99	99.0	.049	.412	.206	.002	.822
				5			00			

			2.05	46.1	.045	.412	.200	.009	.815
			8						
	Equal			45					
	variances								
	not assumed								
CLT		.880	.351		99.0	.272	.161	.146	
	Equal	1.10	variances	4	00	.128	assumed		
	Equal			1.03	38.9	.308	.161	.156	
	variances			2	85				.154
	not assumed								

As revealed in Table 7, the t-test for all the three variables of the study are not significant. This means that there is no significance difference between male and female lecturers on their perceptions about leadership functions, participative decision making and cooperation among the leadership team in the sampled schools. However, male teachers perceived leadership distribution than their female counterpart in the sampled public universities as the mean score for male in the three components of distributed leadership are higher than female mean score.

Table 8

Group Statistics according to school type

Variable	Schooltype	N	M	S D	Std. Error	Mean
	Federal					
LF	University	66	2.1853	.74494	.09170	
	State University	35	2.1626	.78264	.13229	

Federal PDM				
University	66	2.2601	.93147	.11466
	35	2.1333	.90731	.15336
State University				
Federal	66	2.0926	.65331	.08042
CLT University				
State University	35	1.9111	.60846	.10285

Table 9

Independent sample t-test according to school type

variances not assumed							3			
CLT	Equal	.007	.932	1.360	99	.177	.182	.133	-.083	.446
	variances assumed									
	Equal			1.390	73.84		.169	.182	.131	-.079
	variances not assumed						3			.442

As shown in Table 9, all the t-test value demonstrated in the three components of distributed leadership are not significant. This result of the study also suggests that the respondents' perception of distributed leadership in federal and state universities is the same. However, the federal universities have a higher mean score than the state universities in the three component of distributed leadership. This means that supportive and supervisory leadership functions, participative decision making and cooperation within the leadership team is a little higher even though is not significant.

As concluded by Practitioners and Scholars, the school system are facing enormous challenges which are considered too vast to be solve by one person and therefore, call for opinions and suggestions from school community members. Involving lecturers in decisionmaking process offers collection of potential value needed for excellent schools (Somech, 2010), among which are: improving the quality of decisions made (Scully, Kirkpatrick, & Locke, 1995), contributing to the quality of their work life for example Somech and Bogler (2002) and enhancing lecturer motivation (Anderson, 2002; Taylor & Tashakkori, 1997; Verghese, 1989).

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In every established organization, there must be someone charged with the responsibility of steering the affairs of such organization. Such person has to be faced with responsibility of executing those policies and decisions, likely to be taken within the organization in order for the organization to

achieve its stated goals and objectives. Despite the fact that, there is no generally acceptable meaning of leadership; it is very uncommon for two persons to lead or govern the same way, it therefore shows that leadership will vary from one group or organization to another and there exist types of leadership or leadership behaviour in the university system.

As shown in the findings of this study, the university leaders need to improve their effort in supporting lecturers' goals towards the attainment of the university objectives. This can be achieved through enhancing lecturers professional development, providing necessary tools and facilities that will help the lecturers both in their classroom and outside classroom practices. There is also the need to look at the personal welfare of the staffs in order to motivate them to contribute towards the effectiveness of the school. As this study is a descriptive study, further study should be carried out to examine the impact of distributed leadership on the management process of the universities in order to enhance their effectiveness. This study has only covered north central geopolitical zone as well as public universities. Further study can be carried out to cover other part of the country as well as private universities.

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