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Shared Leadership and Teacher Engagement in International Schools: A Qualitative Study

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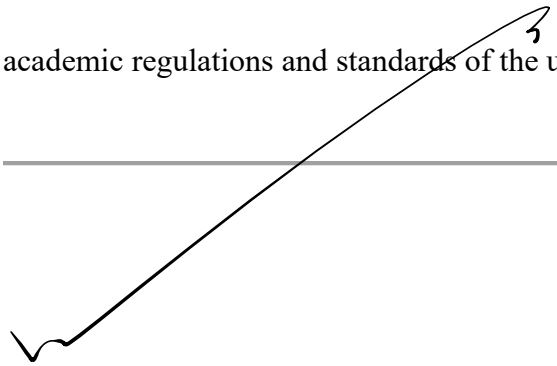
June, 2026

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work and effort, and that it has not been submitted, either wholly or partially, for any other degree or qualification at this or any other institution

All sources of information, ideas, data, quotations, and references from published and unpublished works have been properly acknowledged and cited in accordance with the required academic referencing style.

I further affirm that this research has been conducted ethically and in compliance with the academic regulations and standards of the university.



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Shared Leadership and Teacher Engagement in International Schools: A Qualitative Study

ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study investigates how shared leadership practices shape teacher engagement in international schools. Modern educational institutions operate within complex, rapidly changing environments characterized by accountability demands, curriculum innovation, multicultural communities, technological advancement, and heightened stakeholder expectations. In such contexts, leadership concentrated in a single formal leader often proves insufficient to address the diverse expertise and adaptive responses required for meaningful school improvement.

Shared leadership—characterized by collaborative decision-making, distributed responsibility, and the recognition that multiple organizational members can enact leadership—has emerged as a promising approach. Simultaneously, teacher engagement has become critical to educational effectiveness, as engaged educators demonstrate greater commitment, professional initiative, resilience, and willingness to contribute beyond contractual obligations.

International schools present a particularly rich context for this investigation. These institutions employ educators from diverse national and professional backgrounds, serve multicultural student populations, and implement internationally recognized curricula. They frequently encounter distinctive challenges, including staff mobility, cross-cultural communication demands, varying pedagogical expectations, and the pressure to maintain academic excellence in competitive markets. Within such environments, teacher engagement is not simply beneficial but essential for organizational continuity, learning quality, and positive school culture.

This study explores how teachers in one Malaysian international school perceive and experience shared leadership practices, and how these experiences influence their engagement. Using a qualitative case study approach with 8–12 purposively selected teachers, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Thematic analysis identified patterns in how teachers interpret shared leadership, the ways it influences their motivation and commitment, the organizational factors supporting or hindering engagement, and evidence-based recommendations for strengthening practice.

Findings suggest that teacher engagement strengthens when educators are entrusted with meaningful responsibilities, included in authentic decision-making, recognized for their expertise, and supported within collaborative cultures. Teachers report higher morale, stronger belonging, greater professional efficacy, and increased willingness to contribute when leadership is enacted inclusively. Conversely, barriers include superficial consultation, unclear expectations, inequitable workload distribution, inconsistent communication, lack of recognition, and symbolic opportunities without genuine influence. These findings indicate that shared leadership effectiveness depends not on structure alone but on the quality of implementation, relational trust, organizational coherence, and alignment between stated and lived practice.

This study contributes to educational leadership scholarship by centering teacher engagement rather than solely student outcomes or organizational performance, and by addressing the under-researched context of Malaysian international schools. Findings offer practical guidance for principals, deputy heads, and middle leaders seeking to design leadership structures that foster commitment, retention, collaboration, and school effectiveness. Ultimately, the research demonstrates that when leadership becomes a shared organizational capacity rather than an individual possession, schools develop greater capacity to cultivate engaged educators and sustain meaningful improvement.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Educational leadership has undergone significant transformation over recent decades. Traditionally, principals or headteachers held centralized authority, bearing primary responsibility for decision-making, strategic planning, and school improvement. While hierarchical structures provided clear accountability lines, they often restricted participation, underutilized staff expertise, and created unhealthy dependence on a small leadership group. Today's educational landscape—characterized by complexity, rapid change, and diverse stakeholder demands—requires more flexible, collaborative, and responsive leadership approaches.

Consequently, shared leadership has gained prominence as schools recognize that effective leadership cannot rest solely on individual leaders. Shared leadership distributes influence, responsibility, and decision-making authority among multiple organizational members. Teachers lead curriculum projects, contribute to strategic planning, mentor colleagues, shape policies, and coordinate professional learning communities. Rather than diminishing formal leaders' roles, shared leadership enhances organizational capacity by leveraging expertise distributed throughout the school.

Concurrently, teacher engagement has emerged as a strategic priority. Engagement encompasses emotional commitment, enthusiasm, cognitive investment, energy, and willingness to contribute positively to one's work and the broader school community. Engaged teachers demonstrate persistence, creativity, collegiality, and readiness to support whole-school initiatives. They remain loyal to their institutions, reducing turnover and preserving institutional knowledge. Conversely, disengagement manifests through low morale, withdrawal, resistance to change, minimal compliance, and limited improvement participation.

The relationship between leadership and teacher engagement is therefore critical. Leadership practices influence teachers' daily experiences through communication, trust, recognition, autonomy, workload management, and participation opportunities. When teachers feel valued, respected, and empowered, engagement increases. When they experience exclusion, uncertainty, or token participation without real influence, engagement declines. Shared leadership is often positioned as an engagement strategy because it creates participation opportunities and fosters professional agency. However, its success depends not merely on formal structures but on how teachers genuinely experience those practices.

This connection is particularly significant in international schools. These institutions employ educators from diverse national backgrounds, serve multicultural student populations, and implement internationally recognized curricula. They frequently face distinctive challenges: staff mobility, strong parental demands, competitive market pressures, and the challenge of building cohesive cultures among culturally diverse employees. In such environments, leadership practices promoting trust, belonging, and commitment are especially valuable.

Malaysia's rapidly expanding international school sector provides an important research context. As this sector grows, schools must attract and retain high-quality educators while maintaining standards and meeting stakeholder expectations. However, research examining shared leadership and teacher engagement in Malaysian international schools remains limited. Existing studies often focus on public schools, student outcomes, or broad organizational performance metrics rather than teachers' lived experiences of engagement. A clear need exists for context-specific qualitative research prioritizing teacher perspectives.

This study explores shared leadership and teacher engagement in one selected Malaysian international school through qualitative case study methodology. It investigates how teachers perceive shared leadership practices, how these experiences influence engagement, what organizational factors support or hinder positive outcomes, and what evidence-based recommendations might strengthen future practice. By centering teachers' voices, the study offers deeper, more nuanced understanding beyond policy statements or structural descriptions, recognizing that leadership is experienced through relationships, daily interactions, opportunities, and organizational culture.

This chapter outlines the study's rationale, problem statement, purpose, objectives, research questions, significance, scope, limitations, theoretical framework, and operational definitions.

1.2 Rationale for Research

Two interconnected developments in contemporary education justify this study: increasing complexity of school leadership and growing recognition of teacher engagement as critical to organizational effectiveness.

Growing Leadership Complexity

Schools today operate in environments marked by constant change. Institutions must respond to curriculum reforms, digital learning demands, safeguarding responsibilities, inclusive practices, parental expectations, student wellbeing concerns, and accountability pressures. No

single leader realistically possesses all expertise needed to address these challenges effectively. Leadership has consequently shifted from traditional individualism toward collaborative capacity-building. Shared leadership reflects this evolution by emphasizing collective intelligence, distributed expertise, and shared responsibility.

Strategic Importance of Teacher Engagement

Meaningful educational improvement depends fundamentally on teachers' discretionary effort. Policies and strategic plans ultimately succeed or fail based on teachers' daily practices. Carefully designed reforms may fail if teachers feel emotionally disconnected, unconvinced, or excluded from implementation. Engaged teachers, by contrast, invest additional energy, participate in innovation, and contribute positively to school culture. Teacher engagement should therefore be viewed not as peripheral human resources management but as strategic educational priority.

Research indicates that participatory leadership can strengthen engagement by enhancing autonomy, professional voice, and organizational identification. However, findings are not uniformly positive. Some distributed leadership structures result in role overload, unclear accountability, or tokenistic participation. Teachers may be expected to lead initiatives without sufficient authority, time, or support. This suggests that leadership distribution alone does not automatically create meaningful engagement. Instead, relationship quality, communication processes, workload management, and trust function as important mediating factors.

These issues are particularly significant in international schools. Their multicultural staffing profiles can enrich collaboration but may create challenges around communication, expectations, and professional identity. Teachers often arrive with different assumptions about hierarchy, collegiality, and leadership participation. Additionally, international schools frequently experience higher staff turnover than many local schools, making engagement and retention especially important. Shared leadership may support diverse staff integration through inclusive structures, but poor implementation can lead to confusion or fragmentation.

In Malaysia, the international school sector has expanded considerably, yet scholarly attention to internal leadership dynamics remains relatively limited. Much local research has concentrated on national schools or higher education. International schools, despite their visibility and economic importance, remain underexplored as organizational settings. Furthermore, existing studies often prioritize quantitative measures over in-depth qualitative

understanding. Teachers' narratives about how leadership influences motivation, belonging, and commitment are less frequently heard.

This study addresses these gaps by examining shared leadership and teacher engagement through teachers' lived experiences in a Malaysian international school. It is particularly timely as schools increasingly seek collaborative leadership models while facing challenges related to recruitment, retention, and staff morale. Understanding not only whether shared leadership exists but also how it is perceived and enacted can provide valuable insights for more effective educational practice.

1.3 Problem Statement

Teacher engagement is widely recognised as essential for sustainable school improvement. Engaged teachers are more likely to contribute positively to student learning, collaborate with colleagues, support innovation, and remain committed to the organisation. However, many schools continue to experience challenges such as low morale, resistance to change, professional isolation, and staff turnover. These challenges may undermine continuity, culture, and performance.

One factor frequently linked to engagement is leadership. Leadership influences how decisions are made, how communication flows, whether staff feel valued, and how responsibilities are allocated. In highly centralised schools, teachers may perceive limited opportunities to shape decisions that affect their professional lives. They may feel that expertise is overlooked or that change is imposed rather than co-constructed. Such conditions can reduce ownership and weaken engagement.

Shared leadership has been advanced as an alternative that empowers staff and fosters collaborative culture. Yet the presence of committees, teams, or delegated tasks does not necessarily mean leadership is genuinely shared. In some settings, participation may be symbolic rather than substantive. Teachers may be consulted after decisions are effectively finalised, assigned leadership tasks without resources, or invited into processes without clarity of expectations. Under such conditions, the language of shared leadership may coexist with frustration rather than engagement.

A further problem is the limited qualitative evidence examining how teachers themselves interpret these experiences in international school settings. Much leadership research measures outcomes through surveys or focuses on principals’ perspectives. While valuable, such

approaches may overlook the nuanced ways teachers experience trust, influence, autonomy, or exclusion in daily school life. Without teacher-centred evidence, leadership reforms risk being designed around assumptions rather than lived realities.

The international school context adds further complexity. Multicultural staff teams may hold different beliefs about authority and collaboration. Higher mobility may weaken continuity of leadership initiatives. Competitive pressures may encourage rapid change that strains staff capacity. These conditions make teacher engagement both more fragile and more important.

In Malaysia specifically, there remains insufficient research on how shared leadership shapes teacher engagement in international schools. This creates a knowledge gap for leaders seeking evidence-informed strategies suited to their context. Therefore, the central problem addressed by this study is the limited understanding of how teachers in Malaysian international schools perceive shared leadership and how those perceptions influence their engagement.

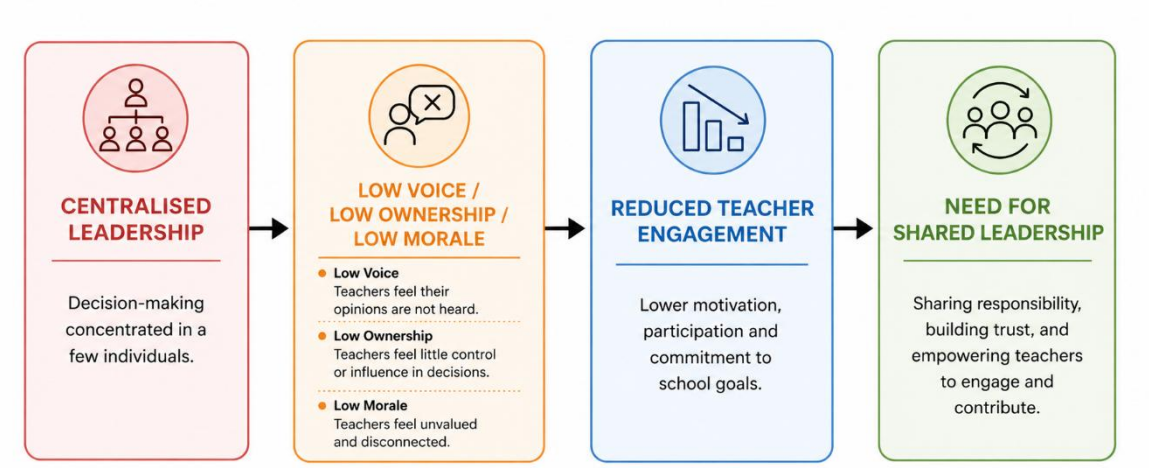


Figure 1.0 Problem Solution Pathway: *From* Centralised Leadership to Shared Leadership

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine in depth the relationship between shared leadership and teacher engagement within the context of an international school. In recent decades, the field of educational leadership has undergone a significant paradigm shift, moving away from traditional hierarchical and top-down leadership models towards more collaborative, participatory, and distributed forms of leadership. This evolution reflects the increasing complexity of contemporary school environments, where the demands of teaching, learning, and organisational management can no longer be effectively addressed by a single leader. Instead, leadership is now understood as a dynamic and collective process that is distributed across multiple individuals within the organisation (Spillane, 2006). Within this context, shared

leadership has emerged as a critical framework for understanding how leadership practices can be restructured to better support both teachers and students. As such, exploring how shared leadership operates and how it influences teacher engagement is both timely and necessary.

More specifically, this study seeks to investigate how teachers perceive, interpret, and experience shared leadership practices in their everyday professional contexts. While shared leadership is often conceptualised as the distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities among members of an organisation, it also encompasses deeper elements such as mutual influence, collaborative decision-making, and collective responsibility (Gronn, 2002). However, the mere presence of shared leadership structures does not guarantee meaningful participation or positive outcomes. The effectiveness of shared leadership depends largely on how it is enacted in practice and how it is experienced by teachers. Therefore, this study moves beyond abstract theoretical discussions to focus on the lived experiences of teachers, examining the extent to which they feel genuinely involved in decision-making processes, empowered to contribute their professional expertise, and supported within a culture of trust and respect. By doing so, the study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of shared leadership as both a structural and relational phenomenon.

In addition, this study aims to explore how shared leadership practices influence various dimensions of teacher engagement. Teacher engagement is widely recognised as a multidimensional construct that includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components, often manifested through teachers' levels of energy, dedication, and absorption in their work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Engaged teachers are more likely to demonstrate high levels of commitment, intrinsic motivation, and a willingness to invest additional effort beyond their formal responsibilities. Such engagement not only contributes to individual professional fulfilment but also plays a crucial role in enhancing student learning outcomes and overall school effectiveness. Existing research suggests that when teachers are actively involved in leadership processes, they are more likely to develop a sense of empowerment, professional agency, and ownership over school initiatives (Leithwood et al., 2004). However, the extent to which these outcomes are realised may vary depending on contextual factors, particularly within the diverse and complex environments of international schools. This study therefore seeks to deepen understanding of how shared leadership interacts with teacher engagement in such settings.

Furthermore, the study aims to identify the organisational and interpersonal conditions that either facilitate or hinder teacher engagement within a shared leadership framework. While shared leadership is often associated with positive organisational outcomes, its implementation is not without challenges. The success of shared leadership depends on a range of contextual factors, including the level of trust among staff, the quality of interpersonal relationships, the effectiveness of communication channels, and the broader school culture (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). In particular, relational trust has been identified as a foundational element that enables collaboration, openness, and professional risk-taking. Without a strong foundation of trust, attempts to implement shared leadership may result in superficial or tokenistic practices that fail to genuinely empower teachers. Additionally, issues such as unclear role expectations, power imbalances, and resistance to change may further complicate the implementation process. By examining these enabling and constraining factors, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions under which shared leadership can effectively enhance teacher engagement.

The study also recognises that international schools present a unique and complex context for examining shared leadership and teacher engagement. These schools typically operate within culturally diverse environments, employ teachers from a wide range of national and professional backgrounds, and are influenced by both local and global educational policies and expectations. Such diversity introduces additional layers of complexity in terms of communication, cultural norms, leadership expectations, and professional interactions. As a result, the ways in which shared leadership is enacted and experienced may differ significantly from those observed in more homogeneous national school systems. This study therefore seeks to generate context-specific insights that reflect the realities of international school settings, thereby contributing to a more globally relevant understanding of educational leadership practices.

In addition to its theoretical contributions, this study aims to generate practical and evidence-based recommendations for school leaders who seek to foster more collaborative and engaging professional environments. By identifying effective shared leadership practices and the conditions that support their successful implementation, the study intends to offer actionable strategies that school leaders can adopt to enhance teacher motivation, commitment, and professional fulfilment. These recommendations may include approaches to building relational trust, promoting meaningful teacher participation in decision-making, strengthening communication structures, and cultivating a positive and inclusive school culture. Ultimately,

the goal is to support school leaders in creating environments where teachers feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute meaningfully to the organisation.

Finally, this study aspires to contribute to the broader field of educational leadership by positioning shared leadership as a potentially transformative approach to improving teacher engagement and overall school effectiveness. By integrating theoretical perspectives with empirical insights, the research aims to advance understanding of how leadership practices can be reimagined to better align with the evolving demands of contemporary education. In doing so, the study highlights the importance of moving beyond traditional leadership models towards more inclusive and collaborative approaches that recognise the collective capacity of educators. Through this lens, shared leadership is not merely a structural arrangement but a cultural and relational process that has the potential to reshape how schools operate and how teachers experience their professional roles

1.5 Research Objectives

1. To explore teachers' perceptions of shared leadership practices in international schools.
2. To examine the influence of shared leadership on teacher engagement.
3. To identify organisational and interpersonal factors that support or hinder teacher engagement within shared leadership contexts.
4. To develop recommendations for leadership practices that strengthen teacher engagement in international schools.

1.6 Research Questions

1. How do teachers perceive shared leadership practices in international schools?
2. In what ways does shared leadership influence teacher engagement?
3. What factors support or hinder teacher engagement under shared leadership?
4. What recommendations can be proposed to enhance teacher engagement through shared leadership?

1.7 Significance of the Study

1. For School Leaders - This study is expected to generate nuanced, empirically grounded insights for school leaders—including principals, deputy heads, and middle leaders—regarding the enactment and impact of shared leadership within international school contexts. Shared leadership, conceptualised as the distribution of leadership functions across multiple actors, has been shown to enhance organisational outcomes such as teacher motivation, trust, and commitment (Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2006). By examining leadership as a socially constructed and practice-based phenomenon rather than a position-bound function, the findings may assist leaders in reconceptualising traditional hierarchical models towards more participatory and networked forms of leadership.

Furthermore, the study may inform the strategic design and implementation of leadership structures by identifying the organisational conditions under which shared leadership is most effective. Research suggests that relational trust, role clarity, and professional capacity are critical enablers of successful distributed leadership practices (Leithwood et al., 2020). The findings may also illuminate potential tensions—such as role ambiguity or uneven influence—that can arise within shared leadership arrangements, thereby supporting leaders in developing more coherent and sustainable leadership frameworks.

2. For Teachers - For teachers, this study provides a structured platform to articulate their lived experiences, perceptions, and expectations regarding their participation in leadership processes. Teacher involvement in shared leadership has been associated with increased professional agency, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction (Muijs & Harris, 2006). By foregrounding teachers' voices, the research positions them as active contributors to organisational leadership rather than passive recipients of top-down directives.

In addition, teacher engagement is increasingly conceptualised as a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional, cognitive, and behavioural investment in one's work (Kahn, 1990). Participation in shared leadership may strengthen these dimensions by fostering a sense of ownership, purpose, and belonging within the school community. However, the study may also uncover challenges such as increased workload or unclear expectations, which have been noted as potential drawbacks in distributed leadership contexts (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

3. For International Schools - At the organisational level, this study holds significant implications for international schools, which operate within complex and dynamic environments characterised by cultural diversity, varied governance structures, and high

accountability demands. Collaborative and trust-based professional cultures have been identified as key drivers of school effectiveness and improvement (Fullan, 2014). By examining how shared leadership influences teacher engagement, the study may support international schools in strengthening professional culture, enhancing staff retention, and improving organisational coherence.

Moreover, given the unique contextual features of international schools—including multicultural staffing and diverse curricular frameworks—the study may offer contextually relevant insights into how leadership practices can be adapted to suit diverse educational settings. This is particularly important as leadership models developed in Western or public school contexts may not always be directly transferable (Hallinger, 2011).

4. For Academic Research - From a scholarly perspective, this study contributes to the educational leadership literature by examining the relationship between shared leadership and teacher engagement within the relatively underexplored context of Malaysian international schools. While shared leadership has been widely studied, much of the existing research is concentrated in Western contexts, thereby limiting its generalisability (Bolden, 2011).

The study also contributes to theoretical development by integrating perspectives from distributed leadership theory and teacher engagement frameworks, offering a more comprehensive understanding of leadership as a relational and context-dependent construct. Additionally, it responds to calls for more context-sensitive and empirically grounded research in educational leadership (Bush, 2011).

Methodologically, the study may provide insights into research approaches suitable for examining complex organisational phenomena such as shared leadership, thereby informing future research in similar contexts.

1.8 Scope of the Study

This study is delimited to a single selected international school in Malaysia, with the aim of developing an in-depth and contextually situated understanding of shared leadership practices and teacher engagement. The adoption of a bounded case enables the researcher to explore complex organisational phenomena within their real-life context, thereby generating rich, nuanced insights into how leadership is enacted and experienced in practice (Yin, 2018). Such an approach is particularly appropriate for examining relational and socially constructed

processes, including leadership and engagement, which are highly sensitive to contextual influences.

Participants in this study will comprise teachers from different levels and departments within the school, including both primary and secondary sections where applicable. This inclusion of diverse teaching groups is intended to capture a range of perspectives and experiences, recognising that leadership practices may vary across organisational substructures. Engaging participants from multiple levels enhances the depth and credibility of qualitative inquiry by allowing for the exploration of convergences and divergences in experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study specifically examines three interrelated constructs. First, it explores shared leadership practices, conceptualised as the distribution of leadership functions across individuals within the organisation rather than being confined to formal positional authority (Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2008). This includes how leadership roles are enacted, negotiated, and sustained within the school context. Second, the study investigates teacher engagement, understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing teachers' emotional, cognitive, and behavioural investment in their professional roles (Kahn, 1990). Third, it examines teachers' perceptions and lived experiences, which provide critical insight into how shared leadership is interpreted and experienced at the individual and collective levels.

By focusing on these constructs, the study seeks to uncover the dynamic interplay between leadership practices and teacher engagement within a specific organisational setting. This focus aligns with contemporary educational leadership literature that emphasises the importance of distributed forms of leadership in fostering professional collaboration and enhancing organisational capacity (Leithwood et al., 2020).

To maintain conceptual clarity and analytical focus, the study deliberately excludes several areas. It does not examine student academic performance, as the primary concern is with internal organisational processes rather than outcome-based metrics. Similarly, financial management and parental satisfaction are excluded, as these domains fall outside the scope of leadership practices and teacher engagement under investigation. In addition, the study does not involve comparisons between multiple schools, as its purpose is not to generate broad generalisations but to provide a deep, contextually grounded understanding of a single case. This delimitation is consistent with qualitative research traditions that prioritise depth, meaning, and contextual richness over breadth (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

1.9 Limitations of the Study

Notwithstanding the potential contributions of this study to the field of educational leadership, several methodological and contextual limitations must be acknowledged to appropriately situate the scope and interpretation of the findings.

To begin with, the study is bounded within a single international school in Malaysia, which inherently constrains the breadth of its applicability across diverse educational contexts. The organisational structures, leadership practices, and socio-cultural dynamics of international schools can vary considerably depending on factors such as governance models, student demographics, and institutional ethos. As such, the findings derived from this case may not be directly generalisable to other international schools or educational systems. However, it is important to emphasise that the purpose of qualitative inquiry, particularly case study research, is not to achieve statistical generalisation but to facilitate analytical generalisation through in-depth exploration of a phenomenon within its real-life context. As argued by Yin (2018), the value of case studies lies in their ability to contribute to theoretical understanding, allowing readers to determine the extent to which findings may be transferable to similar contexts. To support this, the study will provide detailed and context-rich descriptions to enable informed judgements regarding transferability.

A second limitation relates to the reliance on self-reported data obtained from teachers, which may be subject to various forms of response bias. Participants' accounts of their perceptions and experiences may be influenced by social desirability, organisational hierarchies, or concerns about confidentiality, particularly when discussing leadership practices within their own institution. In such cases, participants may consciously moderate their responses or present perspectives that align with perceived expectations rather than their authentic views. Furthermore, individual recollections may be shaped by selective memory or personal interpretations of events. As highlighted by Bryman (2016), qualitative data derived from interviews are inherently interpretive and context-dependent, which may introduce variability and potential bias. To mitigate these challenges, the study will prioritise ethical considerations by ensuring anonymity, fostering trust, and creating a supportive environment that encourages candid and reflective dialogue.

Third, the interpretive and constructivist orientation of this study means that the researcher plays a central role in the processes of data collection, analysis, and meaning-making. While this is a recognised strength of qualitative research—allowing for depth, reflexivity, and

contextual sensitivity—it also introduces the possibility of researcher subjectivity influencing the interpretation of findings. The researcher's prior experiences, assumptions, and theoretical positioning may shape how data are coded, categorised, and ultimately understood. This limitation necessitates a high degree of reflexivity and methodological rigour throughout the research process. To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, established qualitative validation strategies will be employed. These include member checking, whereby participants are invited to review and validate interpretations of their responses; peer debriefing to challenge analytical assumptions; and the maintenance of a comprehensive audit trail documenting all stages of data analysis. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), such strategies are essential for ensuring credibility, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative research.

A further limitation concerns practical constraints, particularly those related to time and resource availability. The scope of the study, including the number of participants and the depth of engagement with each participant, may be influenced by limitations in scheduling, access, and the overall duration of the research process. While qualitative research prioritises depth over breadth, limited time may restrict opportunities for prolonged engagement in the field, iterative data collection, and extensive follow-up interviews that could further enrich the data. As noted by Creswell and Poth (2018), such constraints can impact the extent to which data saturation is achieved and may limit the exploration of emerging themes. Nevertheless, the study will employ purposive sampling and focused data collection strategies to maximise the richness and relevance of the data within the available timeframe.

In addition, it is important to recognise that the study captures participants' perspectives at a specific point in time, thereby reflecting a snapshot of shared leadership practices and teacher engagement within the selected school. Organisational dynamics, leadership structures, and levels of engagement are not static; they evolve in response to internal developments and external influences. Consequently, the findings may not fully capture longitudinal changes or shifts in perceptions over time. This temporal limitation suggests that future research adopting a longitudinal design may provide deeper insights into how shared leadership and teacher engagement develop and interact over extended periods.

In summary, while these limitations impose certain constraints on the scope, transferability, and interpretation of the study, they are inherent to qualitative, context-bound research of this nature. Rather than undermining the value of the study, they highlight the importance of situating the findings within their specific context and recognising their contribution to a deeper,

theory-informed understanding of shared leadership and teacher engagement in international schools.

1.10 Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by the theoretical lens of Shared or Distributed Leadership Theory, with particular reference to the work of James P. Spillane. Distributed leadership reconceptualises leadership as a practice that is stretched over multiple individuals, interactions, and situational contexts, rather than being confined to formally designated leaders. In contrast to traditional hierarchical models, which position leadership as the responsibility of a single authority figure, this perspective emphasises the collective and relational dimensions of leadership within organisations. Leadership, therefore, is not simply what leaders do, but how leadership emerges through social interactions, shared responsibilities, and contextual influences (Spillane, 2006).

At its core, distributed leadership theory posits that leadership practice is co-constructed through the dynamic interplay between leaders, followers, and the organisational context. This perspective aligns with a practice-based understanding of leadership, where actions, routines, and interactions are central to how leadership is enacted in everyday school life. Rather than viewing teachers as passive recipients of directives, the theory recognises them as active contributors to leadership processes. This conceptualisation is particularly relevant in contemporary educational settings, where increasing complexity, accountability demands, and the need for innovation require leadership to be shared across multiple actors within the organisation.

Within the context of this study, shared leadership practices are operationalised through several key dimensions that reflect how leadership is distributed in schools. These include participation in decision-making, where teachers are involved in shaping policies, curriculum directions, and school initiatives; delegation of responsibilities, which allows leadership tasks to be distributed according to expertise rather than formal position; and collaborative planning, where teachers work collectively to design instructional strategies and programmes. Additionally, teacher leadership opportunities—such as leading committees, initiatives, or professional learning communities—represent an important avenue through which leadership is enacted beyond formal hierarchies. Underpinning these practices is the presence of mutual trust and professional support, which are widely recognised as essential conditions for effective shared leadership to flourish.

These dimensions are not merely structural features; they reflect deeper relational processes that shape how leadership is experienced by teachers. The theoretical framework assumes that when leadership is distributed in meaningful and authentic ways, it has the potential to positively influence teacher engagement. Drawing on engagement theory, teacher engagement is conceptualised as a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional, cognitive, and behavioural investment in one's professional role (William A. Kahn, 1990). Within this study, shared leadership practices are expected to enhance engagement through several interrelated mechanisms.

First, participation in leadership processes may lead to increased motivation, as teachers perceive their contributions as valued and impactful. When individuals are given opportunities to influence decisions, they are more likely to feel intrinsically motivated to contribute to organisational goals. Second, shared leadership may foster stronger organisational commitment, as teachers develop a deeper sense of alignment with the school's vision and direction. This sense of alignment is often reinforced through collaborative processes that emphasise shared goals and collective responsibility.

Third, distributed leadership practices may cultivate a sense of ownership among teachers. When teachers are actively involved in shaping initiatives and policies, they are more likely to take responsibility for their implementation and outcomes. This ownership is closely linked to professional identity and agency, as teachers perceive themselves not only as practitioners but also as contributors to organisational leadership. Fourth, shared leadership may enhance professional satisfaction, as opportunities for collaboration, leadership, and recognition contribute to a more fulfilling work experience. Finally, these factors collectively contribute to active participation in school life, where teachers are more engaged in both formal and informal aspects of the organisation.

Importantly, the relationship between shared leadership and teacher engagement is not linear or deterministic. The effectiveness of shared leadership practices depends on various contextual and relational factors, including organisational culture, leadership capacity, and the quality of interpersonal relationships within the school. For instance, the presence of trust, open communication, and role clarity can significantly influence whether distributed leadership leads to positive outcomes. Conversely, poorly implemented shared leadership—characterised by superficial participation or unclear expectations—may result in confusion, role overload, or disengagement.

The selection of distributed leadership theory as the guiding framework for this study is particularly appropriate given the nature of international school environments. International schools are often characterised by cultural diversity, dynamic organisational structures, and a need for adaptability in response to global educational demands. In such contexts, leadership cannot be effectively sustained through hierarchical models alone; rather, it requires collaborative and flexible approaches that leverage the expertise of diverse staff members. Distributed leadership provides a conceptual foundation for understanding how leadership can be enacted across different roles and cultural contexts, making it highly relevant for examining leadership practices in international schools.

Furthermore, this theoretical framework aligns with contemporary perspectives in educational leadership that emphasise collaboration, professional learning communities, and teacher empowerment. It also provides a robust lens for analysing how leadership practices are experienced by teachers, thereby linking organisational processes with individual outcomes such as engagement. By integrating distributed leadership theory with constructs of teacher engagement, this study seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how leadership practices influence teachers' professional experiences within complex school environments.

The theoretical framework of this study positions shared leadership as a relational, practice-based phenomenon that is distributed across individuals and shaped by contextual factors. It conceptualises teacher engagement as a multidimensional outcome influenced by teachers' participation in leadership processes. Through this framework, the study aims to examine not only the presence of shared leadership practices but also the mechanisms through which these practices shape teachers' motivation, commitment, and professional involvement within an international school setting.

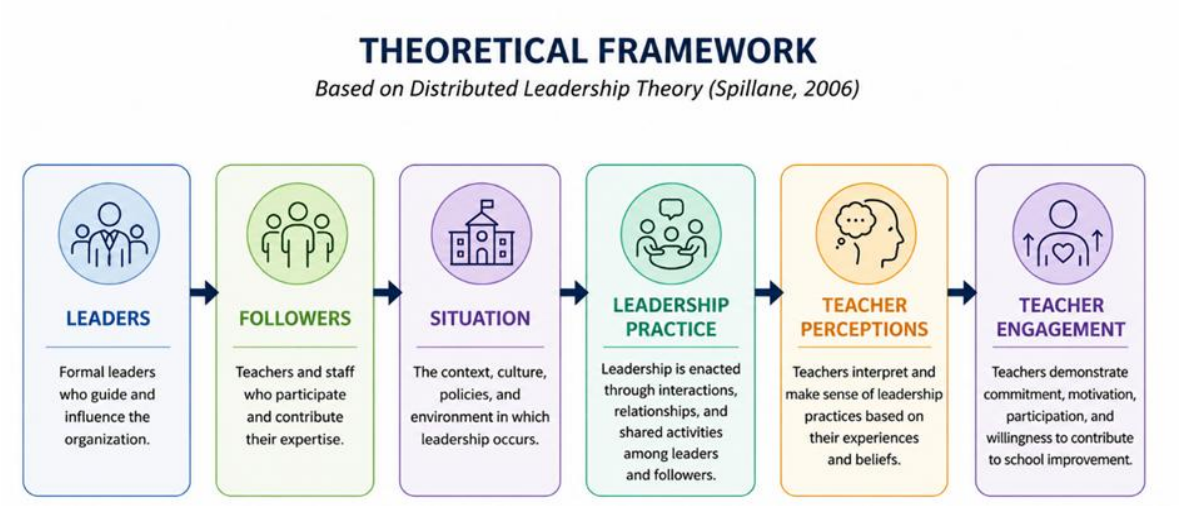


Figure 1.1 Theoretical Framework of the Study

1.11 Conceptual Framework

This study advances a conceptual framework that explicates the relationship between shared leadership practices and teacher engagement within an international school context. Grounded in distributed leadership theory and contemporary engagement literature, the framework posits that leadership is enacted through collective practices that shape teachers' professional experiences, which in turn influence their level of engagement. Rather than assuming a simplistic direct relationship, the framework adopts a process-oriented perspective in which shared leadership practices operate as antecedent conditions, positive teacher experiences function as mediating mechanisms, and teacher engagement emerges as the outcome. This approach is consistent with research suggesting that leadership influences outcomes indirectly through its impact on individuals' perceptions and experiences of their work environment (Alma Harris, 2020; Rebecca J. Collie, 2021).

At the core of the framework are shared leadership practices, operationalised through key dimensions such as teacher voice, delegation of responsibilities, mutual trust, and collaboration. These dimensions reflect the extent to which leadership is distributed across organisational members and enacted through relational processes rather than hierarchical authority. In line with the work of Harris (2020), shared leadership is conceptualised as a form of collective agency that enables teachers to actively participate in shaping school direction and practices.

Teacher voice refers to the degree to which teachers are provided with meaningful opportunities to contribute to decision-making processes related to curriculum, pedagogy, and school improvement initiatives. When teacher voice is authentically embedded within organisational

processes, it signals recognition of teachers' professional expertise and fosters a sense of inclusion. This is particularly significant in promoting positive professional experiences, as individuals who perceive their voices as valued are more likely to feel respected and empowered.

Delegation of responsibilities represents another critical component of shared leadership. It involves the intentional distribution of leadership tasks based on teachers' expertise, interests, and professional capacities. Effective delegation extends beyond task assignment; it entails granting autonomy, fostering accountability, and supporting teachers in assuming leadership roles. Such practices contribute to the development of professional agency and self-efficacy, which are essential elements of positive work experiences.

Mutual trust underpins the successful enactment of shared leadership practices. Trust facilitates open communication, encourages risk-taking, and reduces the fear of negative evaluation. In high-trust environments, teachers are more likely to engage in collaborative problem-solving and to take initiative in leadership activities. Conversely, the absence of trust can undermine shared leadership by limiting participation and fostering disengagement.

Collaboration serves as both a mechanism and an outcome of shared leadership. Through collaborative structures such as professional learning communities and team-based planning, teachers engage in collective inquiry, knowledge sharing, and joint decision-making. Collaboration enhances not only instructional practices but also relational bonds among staff, thereby contributing to a supportive and cohesive professional environment.

These shared leadership practices are theorised to influence teacher engagement indirectly through the mediating role of positive teacher experiences. This mediating layer is central to the framework, as it recognises that leadership practices shape how teachers perceive their work environment, which subsequently affects their engagement. Positive teacher experiences are conceptualised in terms of feeling motivated, valued, supported, and professionally satisfied. These experiences are aligned with the broader literature on teacher well-being and engagement, which emphasises the importance of supportive organisational conditions in fostering positive work-related attitudes (Collie, 2021).

Motivation is enhanced when teachers are provided with meaningful opportunities to contribute and when their efforts are acknowledged. Feeling valued is closely linked to the extent to which teachers' input is respected and integrated into decision-making processes. Supportive environments, characterised by trust and collaboration, further reinforce positive experiences

by providing teachers with the resources and encouragement needed to succeed. Professional satisfaction arises from engaging in purposeful work, experiencing growth opportunities, and being part of a collegial and supportive community.

The outcome of this process is teacher engagement, which is conceptualised as a multidimensional construct encompassing commitment, active participation, and sustained involvement in the organisation. Engaged teachers demonstrate a strong emotional attachment to the school, align themselves with its goals and values, and actively contribute to its development. As highlighted by Kahn (1990), engagement involves the investment of emotional, cognitive, and physical energies into one's work role. Within this study, engagement is reflected in teachers' willingness to participate in collaborative initiatives, take on leadership responsibilities, and remain committed to the organisation over time.

Importantly, the framework also acknowledges the potential influence of contextual factors that may shape the relationship between shared leadership practices and teacher engagement. Organisational culture, communication patterns, and leadership capacity may either facilitate or constrain the effectiveness of shared leadership. For instance, a culture that promotes openness, trust, and collaboration is more likely to enhance the positive effects of shared leadership, whereas a rigid or hierarchical culture may limit its impact.

In addition to articulating these relationships, the conceptual framework informs the development of the study's research questions. Specifically, it guides the investigation of how teachers perceive and experience shared leadership practices, how these practices influence their engagement, and what organisational conditions support or hinder this relationship. In this way, the framework ensures coherence between the theoretical foundations, research design, and analytical focus of the study.

This conceptual framework provides a comprehensive and theoretically informed model for examining the relationship between shared leadership and teacher engagement. By emphasising the mediating role of positive teacher experiences, it offers a more nuanced understanding of how leadership practices translate into engagement outcomes. The framework not only guides the empirical investigation but also contributes to the broader discourse on educational leadership by highlighting the importance of relational, participatory, and context-sensitive approaches to leadership in international school settings.

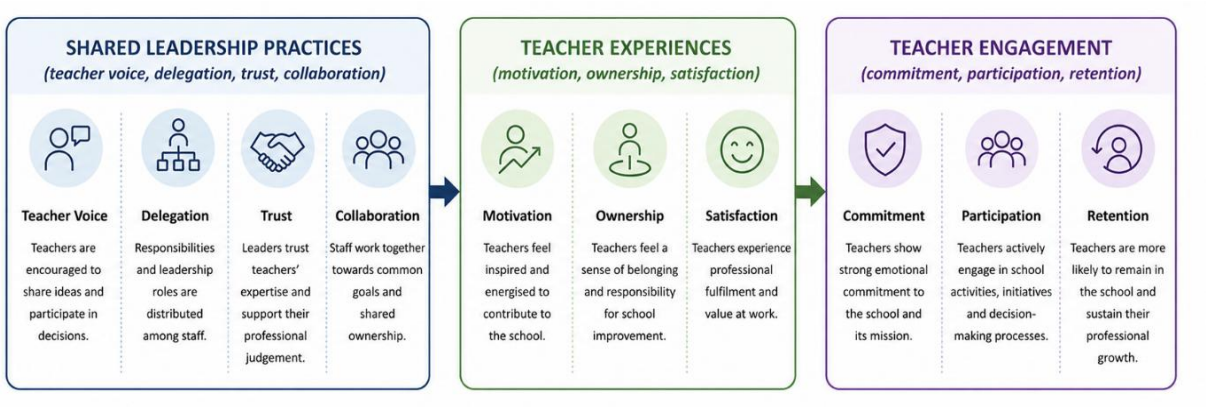


Figure 1.2: Conceptual Framework of the Study

1.12 Operational Definitions

To ensure conceptual precision and analytical clarity, this study adopts carefully delineated operational definitions for its key constructs. These definitions are grounded in established theoretical perspectives while being contextualized to reflect international school realities. By explicitly defining these terms, the study seeks to minimize ambiguity and ensure interpretation consistency throughout the research process.

Shared Leadership

In this study's context, shared leadership is defined as collaborative leadership approach in which influence, responsibility, and decision-making authority are distributed among multiple school community members, rather than being concentrated solely within formal leadership positions. This conceptualization draws on James P. Spillane's (2006) work, which conceptualizes leadership as practice emerging through individuals' interactions and their situational context, rather than as formal roles' function alone. Similarly, Alma Harris (2008; 2020) emphasizes that shared leadership involves collective agency, where teachers and leaders jointly contribute to shaping organizational processes and outcomes.

Within this study, shared leadership is operationalized through observable and experiential practices set. These include teachers' active participation in decision-making processes, purposeful delegation of leadership responsibilities, opportunities for teachers to assume formal or informal leadership roles, collaborative planning and problem-solving, and mutual trust and professional support presence within the organization. Importantly, these practices are not viewed merely as structural arrangements, but as dynamic interactions reflecting how leadership is enacted in everyday school life.

A critical distinction is made between task delegation and leadership distribution. While delegation may involve assigning responsibilities, shared leadership requires influence and authority meaningful distribution. Teachers must not only be involved in carrying out tasks but also be empowered to contribute to decisions and shape outcomes. As such, shared leadership in this study is understood as relational and practice-based construct contingent upon trust, open communication, and supportive organizational culture.

Furthermore, shared leadership is recognized as context-dependent and fluid. Its manifestation may vary across departments, teams, and situations within the school, depending on expertise, interpersonal relationships, and organizational structures factors. Therefore, this study does not treat shared leadership as fixed model but as evolving practices set co-constructed by school community members.

Teacher Engagement

In this study, teacher engagement is conceptualized as the degree to which teachers are emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally invested in their professional roles and in the broader school life. This definition is informed by William A. Kahn's (1990) foundational work, which describes engagement as individuals' physical, cognitive, and emotional energies harnessing in work performance. Extending this perspective to educational contexts, Rebecca J. Collie (2021) highlights that teacher engagement is closely linked to supportive organizational environments and positive professional experiences.

Operationally, teacher engagement in this study is understood as multidimensional construct comprising three interrelated components. Emotional engagement refers to teachers' attachment sense, enthusiasm, and belonging within the school. Cognitive engagement reflects the extent to which teachers are intellectually invested in their work, including their willingness to reflect on practice, engage in problem-solving, and pursue continuous improvement. Behavioral engagement is demonstrated through active school activity participation, colleague collaboration, and involvement in leadership or improvement initiatives.

In addition to these dimensions, teacher engagement encompasses broader indicators such as organizational commitment, professional satisfaction, and willingness to contribute beyond basic job requirements. Engaged teachers are characterized by proactive and dedicated work approach, strong professional identity sense, and sustained interest in contributing to school success.

Importantly, teacher engagement is not viewed as inherent personal trait but as dynamic state shaped by organizational and relational conditions. Within this study, it is conceptualized as outcome influenced by shared leadership practices, particularly through how these practices shape teachers' work environment perceptions. This perspective aligns with existing research emphasizing leadership's role in fostering engagement by promoting autonomy, recognition, and professional growth opportunities.

International School

For this study's purposes, an international school is defined as educational institution delivering internationally recognized curriculum and serving diverse student population, typically comprising individuals from multiple cultural and national backgrounds. These schools often employ multicultural teaching workforce and operate within globalized educational framework prioritizing international-mindedness, intercultural competence, and academic excellence.

International schools are commonly associated with curricula such as Cambridge International Curriculum or International Baccalaureate, designed to prepare students for global mobility and worldwide higher education institution access. Beyond curriculum, these schools are characterized by their organizational complexity, diverse stakeholder expectations, and need to balance global standards with local cultural contexts.

From leadership perspective, international schools present distinctive challenges and opportunities. Staff and student diversity necessitates inclusive, adaptive, and culturally responsive leadership approaches. As Philip Hallinger (2011) notes, leadership practices are inherently shaped by contextual and cultural factors, and therefore must be understood within specific enactment environments. This highlights the importance of examining shared leadership within Malaysian international schools' unique context.

The international school is viewed as complex, dynamic organization where leadership, teaching, and learning are shaped by global and local influences. Its multicultural context highlights the need for collaborative, distributed leadership drawing on diverse perspectives and expertise.

CHAPTER 2: LITERETURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents critical and integrative literature review relevant to the present study, which examines shared leadership and teacher engagement relationship within international school contexts. This chapter's primary purpose is to situate the study within established scholarly discourse, clarify theoretical underpinnings, synthesize key empirical findings, and identify gaps warranting further investigation. At doctoral level, literature review serves not merely as prior studies summary but as critical analytical exercise demonstrating how existing knowledge informs, supports, and justifies current research (John W. Creswell & Cheryl N. Poth, 2018).

In educational leadership field, leadership conceptualizations have evolved significantly over time. Earlier models tended to emphasize hierarchical authority, formal roles, and top-down decision-making processes. However, such approaches have increasingly been challenged by contemporary schooling's growing complexity. Schools today are no longer viewed as simple administrative units but as complex, knowledge-intensive organizations requiring adaptive and collaborative leadership approaches. As Peter Gronn (2016) notes, highly centralized leadership structures may constrain professional expertise effective utilization within schools and limit collaborative decision-making opportunities.

This critique reflects broader educational thinking shift, recognizing that modern schools' challenges cannot be effectively addressed through hierarchical control alone. One of traditional leadership models' key limitations lies in their failure to fully acknowledge teachers' professional expertise. Teachers play central role in shaping educational outcomes through curriculum design, pedagogy, assessment, student well-being, and classroom management work. Their knowledge is not only technical but also relational and context-specific, requiring nuanced judgment and continuous adaptation. When leadership is concentrated solely within formal roles, opportunities to leverage this distributed expertise may be significantly reduced. Moreover, centralized decision-making can lead to teachers' detachment sense, as they may feel excluded from processes directly affecting their professional practice.

Additionally, overly hierarchical leadership structures may inhibit schools' innovation and responsiveness. In rapidly changing educational environments, schools must adapt to new policies, technologies, and student needs. However, when decision-making authority is restricted to small leader groups, the organization's effective response capacity may be limited.

Centralized leadership can also create dependency, where teachers rely heavily on formal leaders for direction rather than exercising their own professional judgment. This dynamic may undermine professional agency and reduce collaborative problem-solving opportunities.

In response to these limitations, contemporary scholarship has increasingly reconceptualized leadership as relational and process-oriented phenomenon. Rather than being viewed as position or authority function, leadership is now understood as influence process emerging through individuals' interactions within particular context. This perspective emphasizes relationships, communication, trust, and shared understanding importance in shaping leadership practices. As James P. Spillane (2006) argues, leadership should be understood as practice distributed across leaders, followers, and situation, highlighting its inherently social and context-dependent nature.

This perspective shift has led to alternative leadership models development moving beyond hierarchical assumptions. Among these, transformational leadership focuses on inspiring and motivating individuals to achieve collective goals by fostering shared vision and promoting professional growth. Instructional leadership emphasizes leaders' role in improving teaching and learning by supporting curriculum development, pedagogy, and assessment practices. Servant leadership prioritizes others' needs, with leaders acting as facilitators supporting their staff's development and well-being. Each of these models reflects movement toward more relational, participatory, and values-driven leadership approaches.

Within this evolving landscape, shared leadership has gained particular prominence as model aligning with modern schools' complex and collaborative nature. Shared leadership builds on recognition that leadership capacity exists throughout the organization and that effective leadership involves mobilizing this capacity to achieve common goals. As Alma Harris (2020) notes, shared leadership enables schools to draw upon teachers and staff's collective expertise, thereby enhancing organizational learning and improvement. This approach not only distributes responsibilities but also fosters ownership sense and engagement among school community members.

Furthermore, leadership reconceptualization as distributed and relational process aligns with broader organizational theory developments, which emphasize collaboration, knowledge sharing, and collective efficacy. In educational settings, this perspective recognizes that leadership is embedded in everyday practices and interactions, rather than confined to formal

roles. It also highlights creating organizational conditions supporting participation, trust, and professional dialogue importance.

In international schools' context, these contemporary leadership understandings are particularly relevant. International schools are characterized by cultural diversity, complex organizational structures, and evolving educational demands. Leadership in such settings must be adaptable, inclusive, and responsive to diverse perspectives. Traditional hierarchical models may be insufficient in addressing these complexities, as they do not fully leverage diverse workforce expertise and contributions. Shared and distributed leadership approaches, therefore, offer more appropriate framework for understanding and enacting leadership in these environments.

In summary, educational leadership concept has evolved from narrow hierarchical authority and managerial control focus toward broader, more dynamic understanding of leadership as relational and distributed process. While traditional models provided important organizational structure and accountability foundations, they are increasingly viewed as insufficient for addressing contemporary schooling complexities. Alternative leadership models, particularly shared leadership, reflect growing recognition of need for collaborative, context-sensitive approaches harnessing educators' collective expertise. This evolution provides critical foundation for examining shared leadership's role in shaping teacher engagement, which is this study's central focus.

2.2 Concept of Leadership in Education

Leadership in education has traditionally been associated with formal authority vested in individuals occupying senior positions, such as principals, headteachers, or administrators. Historically, leadership was conceptualised within a bureaucratic and managerial paradigm, where schools were viewed as structured organisations requiring clear hierarchies, defined roles, and centralised control. Within this framework, the principal functioned as the primary decision-maker responsible for planning, organising, directing, and evaluating the work of others. Leadership effectiveness, therefore, was often measured in terms of efficiency, compliance with policies, and the ability to maintain order and stability within the institution.

Such traditional models were heavily influenced by broader organisational theories rooted in scientific management and bureaucratic administration. These approaches prioritised standardisation, supervision, and accountability, with leadership understood as a top-down process. In many education systems, particularly those characterised by strong regulatory frameworks, centralised leadership provided advantages in ensuring policy implementation,

maintaining consistency, and establishing clear lines of responsibility. As a result, hierarchical leadership structures became deeply embedded in school systems, shaping both organisational practices and professional expectations.

Despite these advantages, traditional leadership models have increasingly been critiqued for their limitations, particularly in the context of contemporary education. Schools today are no longer viewed as simple administrative units but as complex, knowledge-intensive organisations that require adaptive and collaborative approaches to leadership. As noted by Peter Gronn (2016), highly centralised leadership structures may constrain the effective utilisation of professional expertise within schools and limit opportunities for collaborative decision-making. This critique reflects a broader shift in educational thinking, which recognises that the challenges faced by modern schools cannot be effectively addressed through hierarchical control alone.

One of the key limitations of traditional leadership models lies in their failure to fully acknowledge the professional expertise of teachers. Teachers play a central role in shaping educational outcomes through their work in curriculum design, pedagogy, assessment, student well-being, and classroom management. Their knowledge is not only technical but also relational and context-specific, requiring nuanced judgment and continuous adaptation. When leadership is concentrated solely within formal roles, opportunities to leverage this distributed expertise may be significantly reduced. Moreover, centralised decision-making can lead to a sense of detachment among teachers, as they may feel excluded from processes that directly affect their professional practice.

In addition, overly hierarchical leadership structures may inhibit innovation and responsiveness within schools. In rapidly changing educational environments, schools must be able to adapt to new policies, technologies, and student needs. However, when decision-making authority is restricted to a small group of leaders, the organisation's capacity to respond effectively may be limited. Centralised leadership can also create dependency, where teachers rely heavily on formal leaders for direction rather than exercising their own professional judgment. This dynamic may undermine professional agency and reduce opportunities for collaborative problem-solving.

In response to these limitations, contemporary scholarship has increasingly reconceptualised leadership as a relational and process-oriented phenomenon. Rather than being viewed as a function of position or authority, leadership is now understood as a process of influence that

emerges through interactions among individuals within a particular context. This perspective emphasises the importance of relationships, communication, trust, and shared understanding in shaping leadership practices. As argued by James P. Spillane (2006), leadership should be understood as a practice that is distributed across leaders, followers, and the situation, highlighting its inherently social and context-dependent nature.

This shift in perspective has led to the development of alternative leadership models that move beyond hierarchical assumptions. Among these, transformational leadership focuses on inspiring and motivating individuals to achieve collective goals by fostering a shared vision and promoting professional growth. Instructional leadership emphasises the role of leaders in improving teaching and learning by supporting curriculum development, pedagogy, and assessment practices. Servant leadership prioritises the needs of others, with leaders acting as facilitators who support the development and well-being of their staff. Each of these models reflects a move towards more relational, participatory, and values-driven approaches to leadership.

Within this evolving landscape, shared leadership has gained particular prominence as a model that aligns with the complex and collaborative nature of modern schools. Shared leadership builds on the recognition that leadership capacity exists throughout the organisation and that effective leadership involves mobilising this capacity to achieve common goals. As noted by Alma Harris (2020), shared leadership enables schools to draw upon the collective expertise of teachers and staff, thereby enhancing organisational learning and improvement. This approach not only distributes responsibilities but also fosters a sense of ownership and engagement among members of the school community.

Furthermore, the reconceptualisation of leadership as a distributed and relational process aligns with broader developments in organisational theory, which emphasise collaboration, knowledge sharing, and collective efficacy. In educational settings, this perspective recognises that leadership is embedded in everyday practices and interactions, rather than confined to formal roles. It also highlights the importance of creating organisational conditions that support participation, trust, and professional dialogue.

In the context of international schools, these contemporary understandings of leadership are particularly relevant. International schools are characterised by cultural diversity, complex organisational structures, and evolving educational demands. Leadership in such settings must be adaptable, inclusive, and responsive to diverse perspectives. Traditional hierarchical models

may be insufficient in addressing these complexities, as they do not fully leverage the expertise and contributions of a diverse workforce. Shared and distributed leadership approaches, therefore, offer a more appropriate framework for understanding and enacting leadership in these environments.

In summary, the concept of leadership in education has evolved from a narrow focus on hierarchical authority and managerial control to a broader, more dynamic understanding of leadership as a relational and distributed process. While traditional models provided important foundations for organisational structure and accountability, they are increasingly viewed as insufficient for addressing the complexities of contemporary schooling. The emergence of alternative leadership models, particularly shared leadership, reflects a growing recognition of the need for collaborative, context-sensitive approaches that harness the collective expertise of educators. This evolution provides a critical foundation for examining the role of shared leadership in shaping teacher engagement, which is the central focus of the present study.

2.3 Evolution from Traditional to Shared Leadership

The development of leadership theory in education reflects wider transformations in organisational thinking, societal expectations, and the increasingly complex nature of schooling. Earlier conceptualisations of leadership were grounded in industrial-era assumptions, where organisations—including schools—were perceived as structured systems requiring control, efficiency, and predictability. Within this framework, leadership was closely associated with hierarchy, authority, and compliance. School leaders were primarily responsible for maintaining order, ensuring adherence to procedures, and implementing externally mandated policies. Effectiveness was often evaluated based on stability, consistency, and regulatory compliance rather than innovation or professional growth .

These early leadership models were influenced by classical management theories that emphasised standardisation, supervision, and clearly defined chains of command. In educational settings, this translated into leadership practices that prioritised administrative efficiency and procedural control. While such approaches were effective in ensuring organisational stability, they were increasingly seen as inadequate in addressing the demands of contemporary education. As schools began to operate in more dynamic, uncertain, and diverse environments, the limitations of rigid, hierarchical leadership structures became more evident .

A significant shift in leadership thinking emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century, as scholars began to reconceptualise schools as complex, knowledge-driven organisations rather than purely administrative entities. This perspective emphasised the importance of continuous learning, adaptability, and collaborative problem-solving. Schools were increasingly viewed as *learning organisations*, requiring leaders to facilitate reflection, innovation, and collective engagement. This shift challenged traditional assumptions and laid the foundation for more participatory and relational models of leadership .

One of the earliest responses to this reconceptualisation was the rise of transformational leadership, which gained prominence during the 1980s and 1990s. Transformational leadership shifted the focus from control and supervision to inspiration and motivation. Leaders were expected to articulate a compelling vision, foster shared values, and cultivate a positive organisational culture that supports change and improvement. As highlighted by Kenneth Leithwood, transformational leadership involves influencing teachers' beliefs, values, and motivations in ways that enhance their capacity to contribute meaningfully to school development .

This model represented a significant departure from traditional approaches, as it emphasised relationships, professional commitment, and shared purpose. Rather than relying solely on positional authority, transformational leaders sought to engage teachers through inspiration and collective vision. This approach aligned with broader educational reforms that promoted professional autonomy, school-based management, and collaborative cultures. However, despite its progressive orientation, transformational leadership continued to centre the role of the individual leader. The principal remained the primary driver of vision and change, which limited the extent to which leadership could be genuinely shared across the organisation .

Concurrently, instructional leadership emerged as another influential model, particularly in contexts where accountability and student outcomes became central priorities. Instructional leadership redirected attention towards the core purpose of schooling—teaching and learning. Leaders were expected to actively support instructional practices, monitor student achievement, enhance curriculum quality, and facilitate professional development. As noted by Philip Hallinger (2011), instructional leadership places teaching and learning at the centre of leadership practice, highlighting the direct impact of leadership on classroom processes .

Instructional leadership gained prominence in accountability-driven systems, where measurable student performance became a key indicator of school effectiveness. By aligning

leadership practices with educational outcomes, this model strengthened the connection between leadership and student learning. Nevertheless, similar to transformational leadership, instructional leadership often retained a centralised orientation, positioning the principal as the primary agent of improvement. This raised questions about practicality, particularly given the increasingly complex and multifaceted nature of school leadership .

As educational environments became more complex, scholars began to question whether it was feasible—or even desirable—for a single individual to possess the breadth of expertise required to lead all aspects of school development. Modern schools are expected to address a wide range of responsibilities, including curriculum innovation, inclusive education, student well-being, technological integration, assessment reform, safeguarding, community engagement, and staff development. The diversity and complexity of these demands exceed the capacity of any one leader, highlighting the need for more distributed and collaborative approaches to leadership .

In response to these challenges, the concept of shared leadership emerged as a more suitable framework for contemporary educational contexts. Shared leadership reconceptualises leadership as a collective organisational capacity rather than an individual attribute. It acknowledges that expertise is dispersed across members of the school community and that effective leadership involves mobilising this expertise through collaboration and shared responsibility. As articulated by James P. Spillane (2006), leadership practice is “stretched” across individuals and contexts, emphasising its distributed and relational nature .

Within this framework, leadership is not confined to formal roles but is enacted by a range of individuals, including teachers, middle leaders, coordinators, and specialists. These individuals contribute to leadership processes based on their expertise, experience, and situational understanding. For instance, teachers may lead curriculum initiatives, support student well-being programmes, or facilitate professional learning communities. Leadership thus becomes a dynamic and context-responsive process rather than a fixed organisational function .

A key feature of shared leadership is its emphasis on relational processes such as trust, communication, and collaboration. The effective distribution of leadership depends on an organisational culture that supports openness, mutual respect, and professional dialogue. Without these conditions, attempts to distribute leadership may result in role ambiguity, superficial participation, or organisational fragmentation. As noted by Alma Harris (2020), shared leadership is not simply about delegating tasks but about fostering genuine participation and collective agency within the organisation .

Furthermore, shared leadership aligns closely with the concept of schools as professional learning communities. It promotes collective efficacy, where educators believe in their shared capacity to improve outcomes, and encourages innovation through the integration of diverse perspectives. By engaging multiple stakeholders in leadership processes, shared leadership enhances organisational adaptability, resilience, and capacity for continuous improvement.

In the context of international schools, the transition towards shared leadership is particularly significant. These schools operate within culturally diverse and organisationally complex environments that require inclusive and flexible leadership approaches. Leadership must accommodate varying cultural expectations, professional norms, and educational practices. Shared leadership provides a framework for harnessing the diverse expertise of a multicultural workforce, thereby enabling more responsive and context-sensitive leadership practices .

In conclusion, the evolution from traditional to shared leadership reflects a fundamental shift in how leadership is understood within education. While earlier models prioritised hierarchy, control, and efficiency, contemporary approaches emphasise collaboration, professional agency, and distributed expertise. Transformational and instructional leadership contributed to this transition by highlighting the importance of vision, culture, and teaching and learning. However, shared leadership represents a more comprehensive response to the complexities of modern schooling, positioning leadership as a collective, relational, and context-dependent process. This evolution provides a critical foundation for examining how shared leadership influences teacher engagement, which remains central to this study.

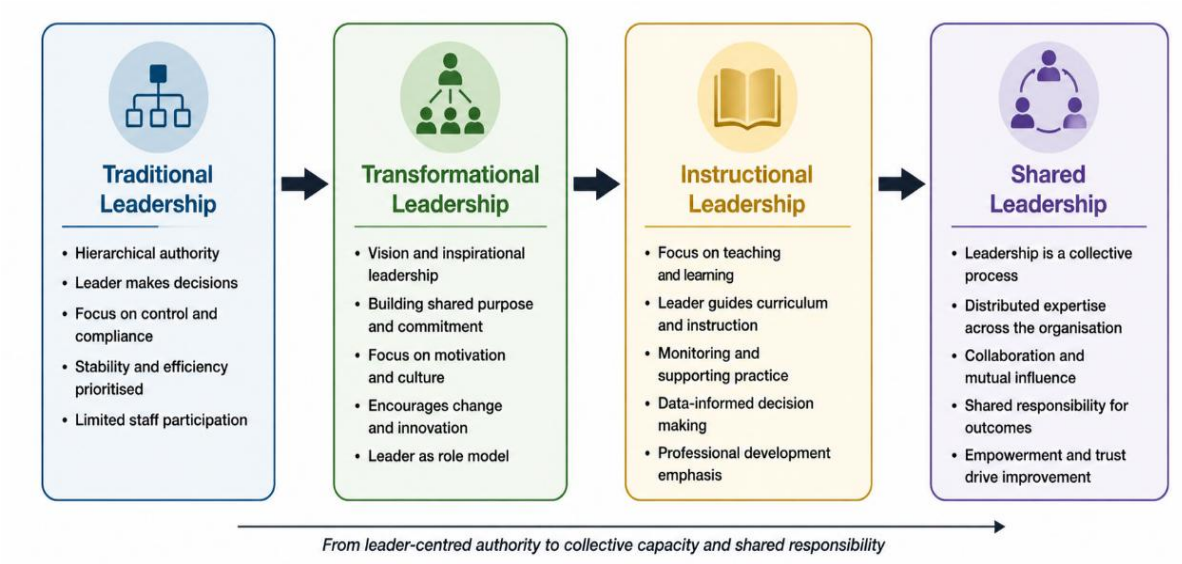


Figure 2.0 Definitions of Shared Leadership

Leadership theory development in education reflects wider transformations in organizational thinking, societal expectations, and schooling's increasingly complex nature. Earlier leadership conceptualizations were grounded in industrial-era assumptions, where organizations—including schools—were perceived as structured systems requiring control, efficiency, and predictability. Within this framework, leadership was closely associated with hierarchy, authority, and compliance. School leaders were primarily responsible for maintaining order, ensuring procedure adherence, and implementing externally mandated policies. Effectiveness was often evaluated based on stability, consistency, and regulatory compliance rather than innovation or professional growth.

These early leadership models were influenced by classical management theories emphasizing standardization, supervision, and clearly defined command chains. In educational settings, this translated into leadership practices prioritizing administrative efficiency and procedural control. While such approaches were effective in ensuring organizational stability, they were increasingly seen as inadequate in addressing contemporary education's demands. As schools began operating in more dynamic, uncertain, and diverse environments, rigid hierarchical leadership structures' limitations became more evident.

A significant shift in leadership thinking emerged in the twentieth century's latter part, as scholars began reconceptualizing schools as complex, knowledge-driven organizations rather than purely administrative entities. This perspective emphasized continuous learning, adaptability, and collaborative problem-solving importance. Schools were increasingly viewed as learning organizations, requiring leaders to facilitate reflection, innovation, and collective engagement. This shift challenged traditional assumptions and laid foundation for more participatory and relational leadership models.

One earliest responses to this reconceptualization was transformational leadership's rise, which gained prominence during the 1980s and 1990s. Transformational leadership shifted focus from control and supervision to inspiration and motivation. Leaders were expected to articulate compelling vision, foster shared values, and cultivate positive organizational culture supporting change and improvement. As Kenneth Leithwood highlights, transformational leadership involves influencing teachers' beliefs, values, and motivations in ways enhancing their capacity to meaningfully contribute to school development.

This model represented significant departure from traditional approaches, as it emphasized relationships, professional commitment, and shared purpose. Rather than relying solely on

positional authority, transformational leaders sought to engage teachers through inspiration and collective vision. This approach aligned with broader educational reforms promoting professional autonomy, school-based management, and collaborative cultures. However, despite its progressive orientation, transformational leadership continued centering the individual leader's role. The principal remained primary change and vision driver, which limited the extent to which leadership could be genuinely shared across the organization.

Concurrently, instructional leadership emerged as another influential model, particularly in contexts where accountability and student outcomes became central priorities. Instructional leadership redirected attention toward schooling's core purpose—teaching and learning. Leaders were expected to actively support instructional practices, monitor student achievement, enhance curriculum quality, and facilitate professional development. As Philip Hallinger (2011) notes, instructional leadership places teaching and learning at leadership practice's center, highlighting direct leadership impact on classroom processes.

Instructional leadership gained prominence in accountability-driven systems, where measurable student performance became key school effectiveness indicator. By aligning leadership practices with educational outcomes, this model strengthened leadership and student learning connection. Nevertheless, similar to transformational leadership, instructional leadership often retained centralized orientation, positioning the principal as primary improvement agent. This raised practicality questions, particularly given school leadership's increasingly complex and multifaceted nature.

As educational environments became more complex, scholars began questioning whether it was feasible—or even desirable—for single individuals to possess all expertise breadth required to lead all school development aspects. Modern schools are expected to address wide responsibility ranges, including curriculum innovation, inclusive education, student well-being, technological integration, assessment reform, safeguarding, community engagement, and staff development. These demands' diversity and complexity exceed any one leader's capacity, highlighting need for more distributed and collaborative leadership approaches.

In response to these challenges, shared leadership concept emerged as more suitable framework for contemporary educational contexts. Shared leadership reconceptualizes leadership as collective organizational capacity rather than individual attribute. It acknowledges that expertise is dispersed across school community members and that effective leadership involves mobilizing this expertise through collaboration and shared responsibility. As James P. Spillane

(2006) articulates, leadership practice is "stretched" across individuals and contexts, emphasizing its distributed and relational nature.

Within this framework, leadership is not confined to formal roles but is enacted by range of individuals, including teachers, middle leaders, coordinators, and specialists. These individuals contribute to leadership processes based on their expertise, experience, and situational understanding. For instance, teachers may lead curriculum initiatives, support student well-being programmes, or facilitate professional learning communities. Leadership thus becomes dynamic and context-responsive process rather than fixed organizational function.

Shared leadership's key feature is its emphasis on relational processes such as trust, communication, and collaboration. Leadership distribution's effective achievement depends on organizational culture supporting openness, mutual respect, and professional dialogue. Without these conditions, leadership distribution attempts may result in role ambiguity, superficial participation, or organizational fragmentation. As Alma Harris (2020) notes, shared leadership is not simply about delegating tasks but about fostering genuine participation and collective agency within the organization.

Furthermore, shared leadership aligns closely with schools as professional learning communities concept. It promotes collective efficacy, where educators believe in their shared capacity to improve outcomes, and encourages innovation through diverse perspective integration. By engaging multiple stakeholders in leadership processes, shared leadership enhances organizational adaptability, resilience, and continuous improvement capacity.

In international schools' context, shared leadership transition toward is particularly significant. These schools operate within culturally diverse and organizationally complex environments requiring inclusive and flexible leadership approaches. Leadership must accommodate varying cultural expectations, professional norms, and educational practices. Shared leadership provides framework for harnessing diverse multicultural workforce expertise, thereby enabling more responsive and context-sensitive leadership practices.

In conclusion, traditional to shared leadership evolution reflects fundamental shift in how leadership is understood within education. While earlier models prioritized hierarchy, control, and efficiency, contemporary approaches emphasize collaboration, professional agency, and distributed expertise. Transformational and instructional leadership contributed to this transition by highlighting vision, culture, and teaching and learning importance. However, shared leadership represents more comprehensive response to modern schooling complexities,

positioning leadership as collective, relational, and context-dependent process. This evolution provides critical foundation for examining how shared leadership influences teacher engagement, which remains this study's central focus.

2.4 Theoretical Foundations

This study is primarily underpinned by Distributed Leadership Theory, complemented by additional frameworks that provide insight into motivation, organisational commitment, and workplace engagement. Collectively, these perspectives offer a comprehensive foundation for examining how shared leadership operates and how it may influence teacher engagement within educational settings.

At the core of this study is Distributed Leadership Theory. James Spillane (2006) reconceptualised leadership as a practice that is distributed across leaders, followers, and the contexts in which they operate. Rather than viewing leadership as a fixed attribute possessed by a single individual, this perspective positions leadership as something that emerges through interaction. It recognises that leadership is shaped not only by people, but also by organisational routines, tools, and contextual conditions that either enable or constrain practice.

This perspective is particularly relevant in schools, where teaching and learning are inherently collaborative in nature. For example, a curriculum reform initiative may involve direction provided by a principal, subject expertise contributed by middle leaders, and practical insights offered by classroom teachers. Each participant contributes to leadership in ways that reflect their knowledge and role within the organisation. Furthermore, the enactment of leadership is influenced by contextual elements such as school culture, available resources, and institutional expectations. As a result, leadership is more appropriately understood as a collective and dynamic process rather than an individual function.

One of the key contributions of Distributed Leadership Theory lies in its challenge to traditional “heroic” models of leadership, which tend to emphasise the role of a single leader. Instead of focusing solely on the actions of principals, this approach encourages examination of how leadership is constructed through collaboration among multiple actors. This shift allows for a deeper understanding of how decisions are made, how problems are addressed, and how teaching and learning are shaped within schools. It also underscores the importance of relational and contextual factors, including trust, communication, and professional norms, in influencing leadership practice.

Moreover, this theoretical perspective highlights that formal structures alone are insufficient to ensure effective shared leadership. Schools may adopt similar organisational arrangements, such as committees or leadership teams, yet experience markedly different outcomes. Such differences are often attributable to variations in school culture, levels of trust, and the quality of relationships among staff. In this regard, leadership is not merely a structural arrangement but is embedded within social interactions and organisational dynamics.

Expanding on this foundation, Peter Gronn (2016) introduced the concept of hybrid leadership configurations. This perspective suggests that leadership in organisations is rarely purely hierarchical or entirely distributed; rather, it involves a dynamic interplay between formal and informal leadership practices. Hybrid configurations acknowledge that different forms of leadership can coexist and shift depending on situational needs.

In practical terms, leadership may vary according to the nature of the task, the expertise required, and the urgency of the situation. For instance, in cases involving safeguarding or crisis management, formal leaders may adopt a more directive approach to ensure timely and appropriate responses. Conversely, in areas such as curriculum development or pedagogical innovation, leadership may be more distributed, with teachers and subject specialists taking the lead based on their expertise. This adaptability allows schools to respond effectively to complex and evolving demands, making hybrid leadership particularly relevant in contemporary educational contexts.

While Distributed Leadership Theory provides a structural understanding of leadership, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model offers a psychological and organisational perspective on engagement. Developed by Arnold Bakker and Evangelia Demerouti (2007), the JD-R model explains how employee wellbeing and engagement are influenced by the balance between job demands and job resources.

Job demands refer to aspects of work that require sustained effort and may lead to stress or burnout if not adequately managed. These can include workload, time pressures, and emotional challenges. In contrast, job resources are factors that support goal attainment, mitigate demands, and promote personal growth. Examples include autonomy, social support, recognition, and opportunities for professional development.

Within this framework, shared leadership can be viewed as a potential job resource. By enabling teachers to participate in decision-making and take on leadership roles, it may enhance their sense of autonomy, professional agency, and belonging. These factors are closely linked

to increased engagement and motivation. However, the JD-R model also highlights a potential drawback. Shared leadership may become a job demand if it leads to additional responsibilities without adequate support, time, or recognition. In such cases, what is intended to empower staff may instead contribute to increased workload and stress.

To further explore the motivational dimensions of teacher engagement, this study also draws on Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (2000), SDT proposes that individuals are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation and wellbeing when three fundamental psychological needs are met: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Autonomy refers to the sense of having control over one's actions and decisions. Shared leadership can support this need by involving teachers in meaningful decision-making processes. Competence relates to the feeling of being capable and effective in one's role. Opportunities to lead initiatives and take on responsibilities can enhance teachers' sense of competence. Relatedness refers to the need to feel connected to others. Collaborative leadership practices foster stronger relationships and a sense of belonging within the school community.

When these three needs are fulfilled, individuals are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of motivation and engagement. However, similar to the JD-R model, the success of shared leadership in meeting these needs depends on how it is implemented. Without appropriate support, alignment, and clarity, efforts to distribute leadership may fail to produce positive outcomes and may even undermine motivation.

The integration of Distributed Leadership Theory, the JD-R model, and Self-Determination Theory provides a strong and multidimensional theoretical foundation for this study. Distributed Leadership Theory explains how leadership is enacted across individuals and contexts, the JD-R model highlights the role of workplace conditions in shaping engagement, and Self-Determination Theory offers insight into the psychological processes underlying motivation.

By combining these frameworks, this study is able to examine both the structural and psychological mechanisms through which shared leadership may influence teacher engagement. It acknowledges that leadership practices are shaped by organisational environments as well as individual experiences. Ultimately, this integrated approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of how shared leadership can contribute to enhanced engagement, wellbeing, and effectiveness in schools.

2.5 Dimensions of Shared Leadership

Shared leadership manifests differently across schools, yet several recurring dimensions appear consistently in the literature.



Figure 2.1: Dimensions of Shared Leadership

The diagram illustrates seven interconnected dimensions of shared leadership that collectively influence how leadership is practised within schools. These dimensions—participation in decision-making, meaningful delegation of responsibility, collaborative planning, teacher leadership opportunities, trust and psychological safety, transparent communication, and collective accountability—provide a structured lens for examining how shared leadership functions in real contexts. In international schools, where complexity, diversity, and high performance expectations are prevalent, these dimensions offer valuable insights into how leadership practices can shape teacher engagement.

The first dimension, participation in decision-making, highlights the degree to which teachers are involved in influencing key areas of school operations, such as curriculum design, assessment practices, student support systems, and strategic planning. When teachers are meaningfully included in these processes, they are more likely to develop a strong sense of ownership and commitment to school outcomes. This aligns with existing research indicating

that active participation enhances professional agency and fosters greater engagement (Harris, 2008). In the context of international schools, where staff often come from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds, inclusive decision-making also supports alignment and shared understanding across the organisation.

Closely linked to this is the second dimension, the delegation of meaningful responsibility. Unlike traditional delegation, which may involve assigning tasks without real authority, meaningful delegation entails granting teachers genuine responsibility, along with the necessary resources and clarity of expectations. This approach empowers teachers to act as leaders within their areas of expertise. As suggested by Spillane (2006), leadership is most effective when it is distributed based on knowledge and capability rather than formal hierarchy. Consequently, meaningful delegation contributes not only to organisational effectiveness but also to individual professional development, thereby strengthening teacher engagement.

The third dimension, collaborative planning, underscores the importance of teachers working collectively to design curriculum, interpret data, and address instructional challenges. Such collaborative practices are particularly significant in international schools, where diverse student needs require flexible and responsive teaching strategies. Collaboration enables teachers to exchange ideas, reflect on their practice, and build collective efficacy. Evidence suggests that collaborative cultures are associated with higher levels of teacher motivation and improved student learning outcomes (Harris & Muijs, 2005). Additionally, collaboration helps to reduce professional isolation, a common issue in international school settings.

Teacher leadership opportunities, identified as the fourth dimension, further expand the scope of shared leadership. These opportunities may take formal forms, such as leadership positions within departments, or informal forms, such as mentoring colleagues or leading innovation initiatives. Providing such opportunities recognises teachers' expertise and supports their professional growth, contributing to a stronger sense of competence and identity. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, these experiences fulfil the need for competence, which is a key driver of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In international schools, where career advancement structures may vary, these opportunities can also enhance teacher retention and job satisfaction.

The fifth dimension, trust and psychological safety, serves as a fundamental condition for effective shared leadership. Trust encourages teachers to share ideas, take risks, and engage in open dialogue without fear of criticism or negative consequences. Psychological safety ensures

that individuals feel secure in expressing their views and challenging established practices. Without these conditions, shared leadership is unlikely to be fully realised, as individuals may hesitate to participate meaningfully. Gronn (2016) emphasises that relational factors, particularly trust and mutual respect, are critical to the success of distributed leadership.

The sixth dimension, communication transparency, plays a vital role in supporting shared leadership practices. Transparent communication involves openly sharing information and ensuring that decision-making processes are clear and accessible to all staff. This helps to minimise uncertainty and fosters a sense of fairness and inclusion. In international schools, where differences in language and culture may affect communication, transparency becomes even more important. Effective communication not only facilitates collaboration but also strengthens organisational alignment and coherence.

The final dimension, collective accountability, reflects the shared responsibility for school improvement. In a shared leadership framework, accountability is distributed across individuals and teams rather than being concentrated solely at the top. This does not weaken accountability; instead, it promotes a sense of collective ownership for both successes and challenges. Teachers are encouraged to take responsibility for outcomes, contributing to a culture of continuous improvement. This aligns with the principles of professional learning communities, where shared accountability supports ongoing development and innovation.

Importantly, these seven dimensions are not independent; they interact and reinforce one another to create the conditions necessary for effective shared leadership. For instance, participation in decision-making is more impactful when supported by trust and clear communication. Similarly, meaningful delegation is more effective when combined with collaboration and professional learning opportunities. This interconnected nature reflects the complexity of leadership in schools and highlights the importance of adopting a holistic approach.

From the perspective of teacher engagement, these dimensions can be interpreted through the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. When implemented effectively, shared leadership practices act as job resources by promoting autonomy, providing support, and offering opportunities for professional growth (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). However, if not carefully managed, they may become job demands, particularly when teachers are expected to take on additional responsibilities without adequate support or recognition. This underscores the

importance of maintaining a balance between demands and resources to ensure positive outcomes.

Furthermore, the dimensions align closely with the principles of Self-Determination Theory. Participation in decision-making and delegation enhance autonomy, leadership opportunities foster competence, and collaboration alongside trust strengthens relatedness. By fulfilling these psychological needs, shared leadership can promote intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement among teachers (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

In international school contexts, these dimensions are especially relevant due to the dynamic and diverse nature of such environments. High staff mobility, cultural diversity, and varying educational expectations require flexible and inclusive leadership approaches. Shared leadership enables schools to draw on the diverse expertise of their staff while fostering a sense of community and belonging. Through collaboration, trust, and shared responsibility, these dimensions contribute to a more adaptive and inclusive organisational culture.

In conclusion, the seven dimensions presented in the diagram offer a comprehensive framework for understanding the enactment of shared leadership and its impact on teacher engagement. By integrating structural, relational, and psychological components, this framework captures the complexity of leadership in educational settings. When effectively implemented, these dimensions create a supportive and collaborative environment that enhances teacher engagement and contributes to overall school effectiveness.

2.6 Benefits of Shared Leadership in Schools

When implemented authentically, shared leadership may generate significant benefits for schools. Research links shared leadership with stronger collaboration, improved problem-solving, greater innovation, and enhanced organisational capacity (Harris, 2020). By drawing upon distributed expertise, schools may become more adaptive and resilient.

Shared leadership can also improve decision quality. Teachers possess frontline knowledge of classroom realities, learner diversity, and implementation barriers. Their participation may therefore produce decisions that are more practical, contextually grounded, and sustainable.

Another benefit concerns motivation and ownership. Teachers who are trusted with meaningful influence often report stronger commitment to school goals. They may invest greater effort in initiatives they helped design and support.

Shared leadership may further strengthen succession planning. When leadership capability is cultivated across the workforce, schools are less vulnerable to disruption caused by leadership turnover.

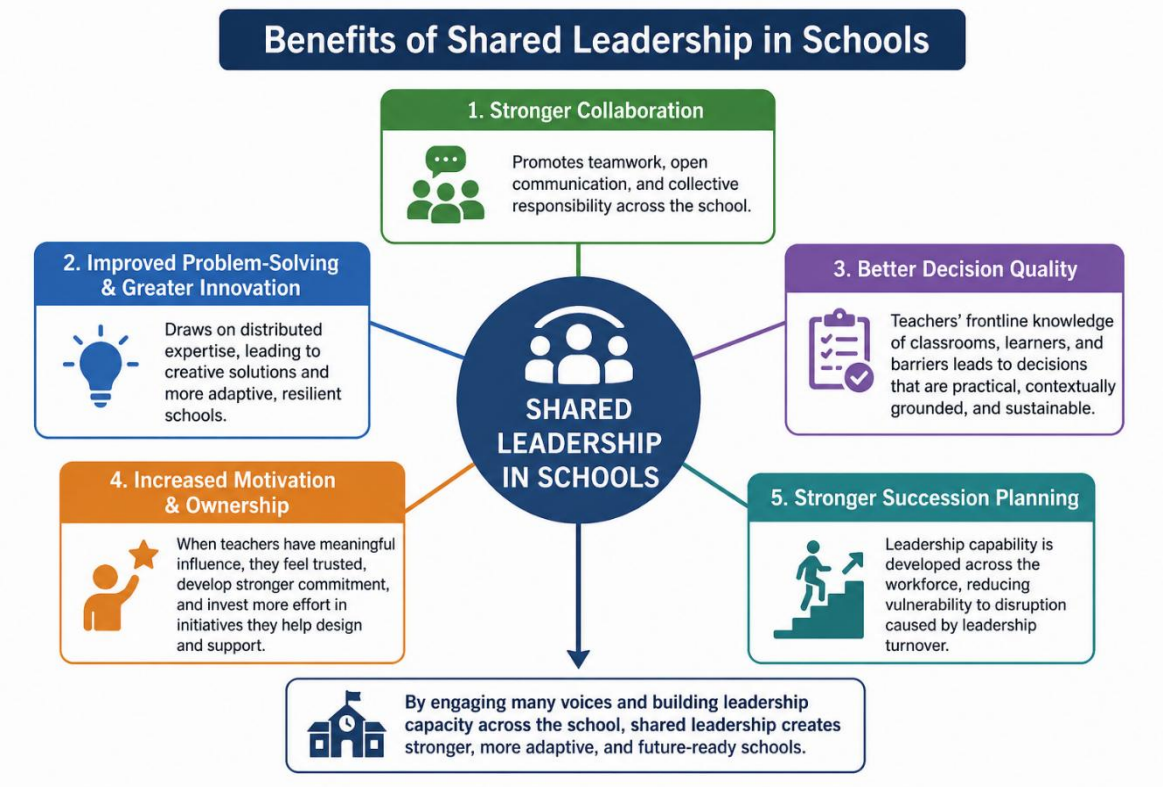


Figure 2.2 Benefits of Shared Leadership in Schools

The diagram outlines five central advantages of shared leadership in school settings: enhanced collaboration, improved problem-solving and innovation, higher quality decision-making, increased teacher motivation and ownership, and more effective succession planning. Collectively, these benefits demonstrate how shared leadership contributes to both organisational performance and teacher engagement. Within international schools, where complexity, diversity, and ongoing change are common, these advantages are particularly impactful.

The first benefit, enhanced collaboration, reflects the capacity of shared leadership to foster teamwork, open communication, and a shared sense of responsibility among staff. When leadership is distributed, teachers are encouraged to work collectively rather than independently. Such collaboration facilitates the exchange of ideas, sharing of resources, and alignment of practices, ultimately strengthening teaching and learning. Existing research indicates that collaborative environments play a significant role in promoting professional engagement by cultivating a sense of belonging and mutual support (Harris & Muijs, 2005). In

international schools, where staff often come from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds, collaboration also helps to build cohesion and ensure consistency in practice.

Closely associated with collaboration is the second benefit: enhanced problem-solving and innovation. Shared leadership leverages the diverse expertise within a school, enabling multiple perspectives to inform how challenges are addressed. This collective approach often results in more creative, flexible, and context-sensitive solutions. As noted by Spillane (2006), distributing leadership across individuals increases an organisation's ability to respond effectively to complex and evolving situations. In international school contexts, where issues such as student mobility, curriculum diversity, and cultural variation are prevalent, the capacity for innovation and adaptability is particularly important.

The third benefit, improved decision quality, further highlights the value of shared leadership. When teachers participate in decision-making processes, decisions are more likely to reflect the realities of classroom practice. Teachers bring valuable insights into student learning, instructional challenges, and contextual factors, thereby enhancing the relevance and practicality of decisions. This supports the argument that leadership should be informed by expertise rather than solely by hierarchical position (Spillane, 2006). Improved decision-making not only strengthens organisational outcomes but also enhances teacher engagement, as individuals feel that their contributions are recognised and meaningful.

The fourth benefit, increased motivation and ownership, is especially significant in understanding teacher engagement. When teachers are provided with meaningful opportunities to influence school practices and lead initiatives, they are more likely to feel valued and trusted. This sense of empowerment strengthens their commitment and encourages greater investment in their work. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, such experiences fulfil the psychological needs of autonomy and competence, both of which are essential for intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In international schools, where teacher retention can be a concern, fostering motivation and ownership is critical for sustaining long-term engagement.

Another important advantage of shared leadership is strengthened succession planning. By distributing leadership responsibilities across a broader group of staff, schools build leadership capacity at multiple levels. This reduces dependence on a small number of individuals and supports continuity in leadership practices. Gronn (2016) highlights that leadership often operates through hybrid configurations, where formal and informal leadership coexist. Shared leadership contributes to this by preparing teachers to assume leadership roles when necessary,

thereby minimising disruptions associated with leadership turnover. In international schools, where staff mobility is relatively high, effective succession planning is essential for maintaining stability and continuity.

These five benefits are closely interconnected and reinforce one another. For instance, strong collaboration creates the foundation for effective problem-solving and innovation, while increased motivation encourages active participation in decision-making. Similarly, improved decision quality enhances overall school effectiveness, which in turn supports higher levels of teacher engagement. This interconnected nature underscores the complexity of shared leadership and the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach.

From a theoretical standpoint, these benefits can be interpreted through the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. Within this framework, shared leadership acts as a job resource by providing opportunities for autonomy, collaboration, and professional development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). These resources contribute to higher levels of engagement by supporting teachers in meeting the demands of their work. However, it is important to acknowledge that shared leadership may also introduce additional responsibilities. Without adequate support, these responsibilities may become job demands, potentially leading to stress or burnout. Therefore, the successful implementation of shared leadership requires a careful balance between demands and available resources.

In addition, the benefits of shared leadership align closely with the principles of Self-Determination Theory. Participation in leadership processes supports autonomy, leadership opportunities enhance competence, and collaborative practices strengthen relatedness. When these psychological needs are satisfied, teachers are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This highlights the importance of implementing shared leadership in ways that support both professional and psychological needs.

Within international school contexts, these benefits are particularly relevant. International schools operate in dynamic environments characterised by cultural diversity, varying curricula, and high stakeholder expectations. Shared leadership enables schools to draw upon the diverse expertise of their staff while fostering a sense of collective responsibility. Through collaboration, innovation, and shared decision-making, schools are better equipped to respond to the complexities of global education.

Furthermore, shared leadership contributes to the development of a strong professional learning culture. Through collaborative practices and shared accountability, teachers engage in ongoing reflection and improvement, enhancing their professional capabilities. This aligns with the concept of professional learning communities, where collective effort drives sustained development. In international schools, where adaptability and continuous learning are essential, such a culture is particularly valuable.

In conclusion, the diagram demonstrates how shared leadership offers multiple benefits that enhance both organisational effectiveness and teacher engagement. By promoting collaboration, strengthening problem-solving and innovation, improving decision-making, increasing motivation and ownership, and supporting succession planning, shared leadership creates a positive and dynamic working environment. These benefits are especially significant in international schools, where diverse and complex conditions require flexible and inclusive leadership approaches. When effectively implemented, shared leadership not only improves school outcomes but also fosters sustained teacher engagement, making it a highly relevant model for contemporary educational leadership.

2.7 Challenges of Shared Leadership

Although shared leadership is widely regarded as a progressive and beneficial approach, it is not automatically effective. Its success depends largely on the manner in which it is implemented, the organisational environment, and the presence of supportive conditions. While shared leadership is often linked to enhanced collaboration and teacher engagement, poorly executed practices may result in unintended drawbacks. Consequently, it is important to critically examine the challenges associated with shared leadership, particularly within international schools where diversity and complexity may intensify these issues.

One prominent challenge is tokenistic participation. In some instances, teachers may be invited to attend meetings or provide input, yet their contributions have little real impact on final decisions. Such practices create an impression of inclusivity without offering genuine influence or authority. Over time, this can lead to frustration and disengagement, as teachers recognise the limited value of their involvement. Alma Harris (2008) emphasises that authentic participation is essential for developing professional agency; without it, shared leadership risks becoming superficial. Instead of fostering engagement, tokenistic approaches may erode trust and generate scepticism among staff.

Another key issue is role ambiguity. When leadership responsibilities are distributed without clear definitions of roles, authority, and accountability, confusion can emerge. Teachers may be uncertain about their responsibilities or the extent of their decision-making power, which can lead to inefficiencies, duplication of effort, or conflict. James Spillane (2006) highlights that leadership practice is shaped through interactions and organisational routines; without clarity in these structures, leadership enactment may become fragmented. This lack of clarity can ultimately undermine the effectiveness of shared leadership initiatives.

Workload intensification presents another significant challenge. Teachers are frequently expected to assume leadership responsibilities alongside their existing teaching duties. While shared leadership is intended to empower staff, it may inadvertently increase workload and stress if adequate time, support, and recognition are not provided. The Job Demands-Resources model suggests that excessive demands without sufficient resources can result in burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In international school settings, where teachers often manage diverse responsibilities and high expectations, additional leadership tasks may further intensify pressure if not carefully managed.

A further concern is unequal participation. In practice, leadership opportunities are not always distributed equitably. They may be concentrated among a limited group of individuals who are more confident, more visible, or more closely aligned with senior leadership. This can inadvertently reinforce existing hierarchies rather than reduce them. Peter Gronn (2016) notes that leadership frequently operates through hybrid configurations, where both formal and informal power structures coexist. As a result, certain individuals may exert greater influence, limiting inclusivity and potentially affecting staff morale.

Closely linked to unequal participation are broader power dynamics within the organisation. Although shared leadership aims to distribute influence, traditional hierarchies and informal networks often remain influential. Senior leaders may retain ultimate authority, while informal factors such as relationships, experience, or reputation may determine whose voices are prioritised. These dynamics can hinder genuine collaboration and restrict the extent to which leadership is truly shared. Addressing such issues requires deliberate efforts to create equitable structures and ensure that diverse perspectives are recognised and valued.

Another critical challenge is the dependence of shared leadership on trust and relational conditions. Trust is fundamental to effective collaboration, open communication, and the willingness to take risks. However, it can be fragile and difficult to establish, particularly in

environments where past experiences, inconsistent practices, or perceived favouritism have undermined confidence. Peter Gronn (2016) underscores the importance of relational trust in enabling distributed leadership. In contexts where trust is lacking, teachers may be hesitant to engage fully, thereby limiting the success of shared leadership initiatives. Building trust requires consistency, transparency, and fairness over time.

In addition, cultural and contextual differences present unique challenges in international schools. Teachers often come from varied cultural backgrounds, each with different expectations regarding authority, hierarchy, and collaboration. In some cultures, hierarchical leadership is more strongly valued, which may influence how shared leadership is perceived and enacted. Differences in communication styles and professional norms can also create misunderstandings or tensions. As a result, school leaders must adopt culturally responsive approaches to ensure that shared leadership practices are inclusive and effective across diverse contexts.

Sustainability is another important concern. While shared leadership initiatives may initially be implemented with enthusiasm, maintaining them over time can be challenging. Changes in leadership, staff turnover, and shifting priorities may disrupt established practices. This issue is particularly relevant in international schools, where high staff mobility can affect continuity. Without ongoing efforts to build capacity and embed shared leadership into the organisational culture, such practices may become inconsistent or diminish over time.

Furthermore, there is the challenge of achieving an appropriate balance between autonomy and accountability. Shared leadership encourages distributed responsibility, yet schools must still maintain clear accountability structures to ensure effective functioning. If accountability remains overly centralised, it may restrict teacher autonomy and undermine the purpose of shared leadership. Conversely, if accountability is too dispersed, it may lead to confusion or inconsistency in decision-making. Striking the right balance between these elements is essential for maintaining both empowerment and organisational coherence.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that shared leadership is not universally applicable in a uniform manner. Its effectiveness is shaped by the specific characteristics of each school, including its culture, leadership capacity, and organisational structure. Practices that are effective in one context may not necessarily translate directly to another. Therefore, shared leadership should be implemented with careful consideration of contextual factors rather than as a standardised approach.

In conclusion, while shared leadership offers considerable potential to enhance teacher engagement and organisational effectiveness, it is accompanied by a range of challenges that must be thoughtfully addressed. Issues such as tokenistic participation, role ambiguity, workload intensification, unequal participation, power dynamics, lack of trust, cultural diversity, sustainability, and the balance between autonomy and accountability all play a role in determining its success. Addressing these challenges requires intentional planning, strong leadership, and supportive organisational conditions. Only through careful and context-sensitive implementation can shared leadership achieve its intended impact in international school settings.



Figure 2.3: Challenges of Shared Leaderships in Schools

2.8 Concept of Teacher Engagement

Teacher engagement is widely recognised as a critical factor influencing both teacher effectiveness and overall school performance. It is commonly defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). These three dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals connect with and invest themselves in their work. Vigour refers to high levels of energy, resilience, and a willingness to persist despite challenges. Dedication reflects a strong

sense of purpose, enthusiasm, and pride in one's professional role. Absorption describes a state of deep concentration in which individuals are fully immersed in their tasks, often losing track of time. Together, these elements capture both the intensity and quality of an individual's engagement with their work.

Within educational contexts, however, teacher engagement extends beyond individual psychological experiences. Teaching is inherently relational and embedded within a broader organisational and social environment. As such, teacher engagement encompasses not only internal states of energy and commitment but also observable professional behaviours that contribute to the effectiveness of the school. Engaged teachers demonstrate commitment to their students, actively participate in collaborative practices, and contribute to the wider goals of the school community. This broader conceptualisation acknowledges that engagement is both an individual and collective phenomenon.

A central dimension of teacher engagement is commitment to students. Engaged teachers invest significant time and effort in understanding the diverse needs of their learners and adapting their instructional strategies accordingly. They are more likely to provide additional academic support, differentiate instruction, and create inclusive classroom environments that foster both academic achievement and personal development. This commitment is particularly important in international schools, where student populations are often culturally and linguistically diverse. In such contexts, engaged teachers play a vital role in promoting inclusion, supporting diverse learning needs, and fostering a sense of belonging among students.

Another key component is collaboration with colleagues. Teacher engagement is closely associated with active participation in teamwork, professional learning communities, and shared problem-solving processes. Engaged teachers are more inclined to exchange ideas, reflect critically on their practice, and support their peers. This collaborative engagement contributes to a positive organisational culture and enhances collective efficacy within the school. Research suggests that collaboration not only improves teaching practices but also strengthens teacher engagement by fostering professional support and a sense of belonging (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). In international school settings, where teachers often come from diverse educational systems, collaboration is essential for ensuring coherence and alignment in teaching practices.

Openness to innovation is another defining characteristic of engaged teachers. Highly engaged educators demonstrate a willingness to experiment with new pedagogical approaches, integrate

technology into their teaching, and adopt innovative practices that enhance student learning. Rather than resisting change, they tend to view it as an opportunity for professional growth and improvement. This adaptability is particularly important in contemporary education, where schools are required to respond to evolving curricula, technological advancements, and diverse student needs. In international schools, where change is often rapid and continuous, teacher engagement is a key factor in the successful implementation of new initiatives.

In addition to these professional behaviours, teacher engagement is reflected in active contributions to the wider school community. Engaged teachers frequently go beyond their formal job responsibilities, demonstrating what is often referred to as discretionary effort. This may include mentoring students, organising extracurricular activities, supporting school events, developing teaching resources, or assisting colleagues. Such contributions are not always formally required but are essential in creating a vibrant and supportive school environment. Discretionary effort is therefore a strong indicator of engagement, as it reflects a willingness to invest additional time and energy for the benefit of the school.

It is important to distinguish teacher engagement from related constructs such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and motivation. Although these concepts are interconnected, they represent different aspects of the work experience. Job satisfaction refers to an individual's overall sense of contentment with their job, including factors such as working conditions, relationships, and remuneration. However, a teacher may be satisfied without being fully engaged. Organisational commitment reflects an individual's emotional attachment to and identification with the organisation, indicating a desire to remain within it. While commitment suggests loyalty, it does not necessarily capture the level of energy or involvement in daily tasks. Motivation, on the other hand, relates to the underlying reasons that drive behaviour, whether intrinsic or extrinsic. Although motivation influences engagement, it does not fully capture the experiential and behavioural dimensions associated with being engaged.

Teacher engagement differs from these constructs by emphasising active involvement, sustained energy, and meaningful participation in professional work. It is not simply about feeling satisfied or committed but about being fully invested in one's role. Engaged teachers exhibit enthusiasm, persistence, and focus, which are reflected in both their attitudes and behaviours. This distinction is significant because it positions engagement as a more dynamic and action-oriented construct, making it a stronger predictor of performance and effectiveness.

The significance of teacher engagement extends beyond individual outcomes to influence broader organisational and student outcomes. Engaged teachers are more likely to deliver high-quality instruction, create positive and supportive classroom environments, and contribute to improved student achievement. They also demonstrate greater resilience, which supports teacher retention and organisational stability. In contrast, low levels of engagement may lead to disengagement, burnout, and reduced effectiveness. For this reason, fostering teacher engagement is a key priority for school leaders, particularly in complex and demanding contexts such as international schools.

From a theoretical perspective, teacher engagement can be understood through frameworks such as the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Self-Determination Theory. The JD-R model proposes that engagement is influenced by the balance between job demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). When teachers have access to sufficient resources—such as autonomy, support, and opportunities for professional development—they are more likely to experience higher levels of engagement. Conversely, excessive demands without adequate support may lead to stress and burnout. Self-Determination Theory further suggests that engagement is enhanced when individuals' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled (Deci & Ryan, 2000). These frameworks highlight the importance of organisational conditions in shaping teacher engagement.

Within this study, teacher engagement is conceptualised as both a psychological state and a set of observable behaviours. It encompasses internal experiences such as energy, commitment, and immersion, as well as external actions such as collaboration, innovation, and contribution to the school community. This dual perspective allows for a more comprehensive understanding of engagement, capturing both what teachers experience and how they act within their professional environment.

Teacher engagement therefore represents a multifaceted and dynamic construct that plays a central role in educational effectiveness. By integrating psychological, behavioural, and organisational dimensions, it provides a valuable framework for understanding how teachers connect with their work and contribute to school improvement. Its relevance is particularly pronounced in international schools, where complexity, diversity, and continuous change require teachers to remain actively involved, adaptable, and committed to both their students and the broader school community.

2.9 Models of Teacher Engagement

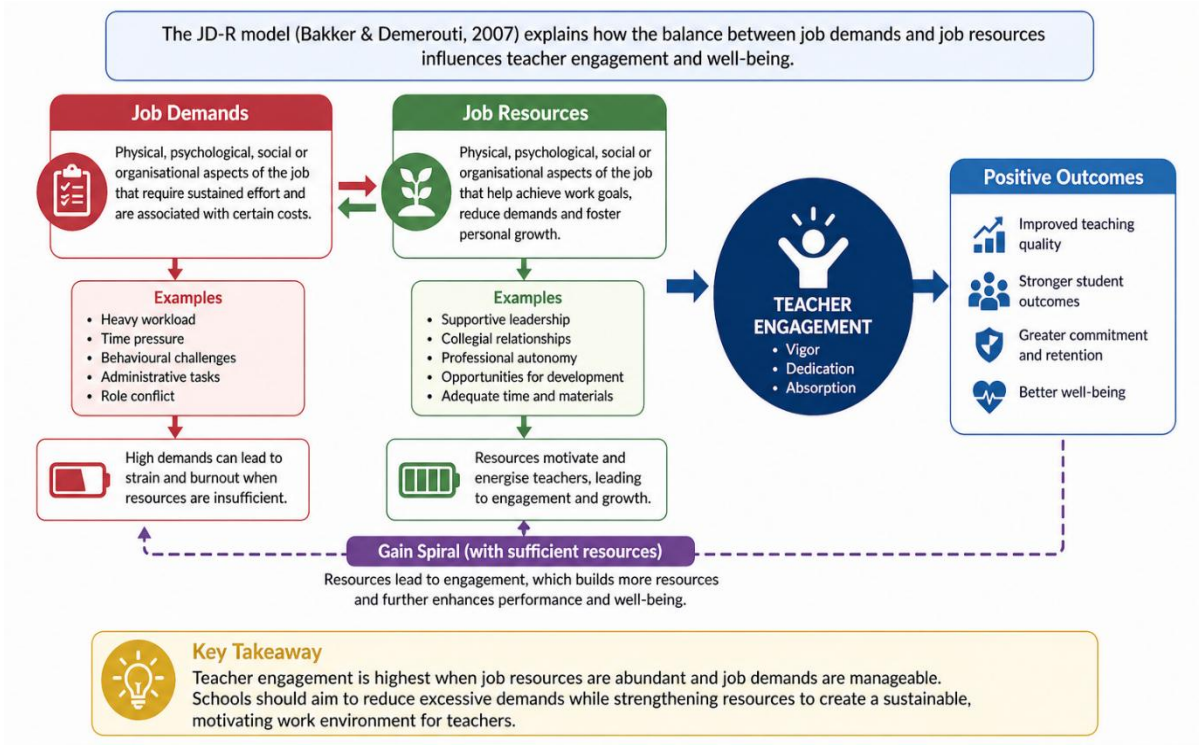


Figure 2.4: Models of Teacher Engagement - The JD-R Model

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how workplace conditions shape employee engagement. It suggests that engagement is enhanced when individuals have access to sufficient job resources—such as autonomy, constructive feedback, social support, and opportunities for professional growth—to cope effectively with the demands of their roles (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). These resources not only facilitate the achievement of work-related goals but also promote personal development and motivation. Conversely, when job demands—such as heavy workload, time constraints, and emotional pressures—exceed the available resources, individuals are more likely to experience strain, exhaustion, and reduced engagement. In educational settings, this model underscores the importance of ensuring that teachers are adequately supported in order to sustain their motivation and wellbeing.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a complementary perspective by focusing on the psychological factors that influence motivation and engagement. Deci and Ryan (2000) argue that individuals are more likely to demonstrate sustained engagement when three fundamental psychological needs are fulfilled: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy involves having a sense of control and choice in one's work, competence refers to feeling effective and

capable in performing tasks, and relatedness reflects a sense of belonging and connection with others. Within the teaching profession, these needs can be supported through meaningful involvement in decision-making, access to professional learning opportunities, and the development of positive collegial relationships. When these conditions are met, teachers are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation and actively engage in their professional roles.

Social Exchange Theory further explains engagement by emphasising the reciprocal nature of relationships within organisations. According to Blau (1964), employees are likely to respond positively when they perceive fair treatment, recognition, and support from their organisation. In return, they demonstrate commitment, loyalty, and a willingness to exert additional effort beyond their formal responsibilities. In school contexts, this may be reflected in teachers' willingness to support extracurricular activities, mentor students, or contribute to school improvement initiatives. However, when teachers perceive a lack of fairness or insufficient support, they may reduce their level of engagement. This perspective highlights the importance of trust, equity, and supportive leadership in fostering strong organisational relationships.

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory provides an additional lens by focusing on how individuals manage and protect their personal and professional resources. Hobfoll (1989) suggests that individuals are motivated to acquire and preserve valued resources, including time, energy, status, and social support. When these resources are threatened or depleted, individuals are more likely to experience stress and burnout. In contrast, the accumulation of resources enhances resilience and supports higher levels of engagement. In the teaching context, ongoing resource loss—such as excessive workload or lack of institutional support—can lead to disengagement, whereas access to supportive conditions and professional development opportunities can strengthen engagement and wellbeing.

Taken together, these theoretical frameworks offer a holistic understanding of teacher engagement. The JD-R model highlights the importance of balancing demands and resources, Self-Determination Theory emphasises the role of psychological needs, Social Exchange Theory focuses on reciprocity and fairness, and Conservation of Resources Theory underscores the significance of resource management. Collectively, they demonstrate that teacher engagement is shaped by the interaction between organisational conditions and individual experiences, providing valuable insights for enhancing engagement in educational environments.

2.10 Factors Affecting Teacher Engagement

Teacher engagement is shaped by interacting personal, relational, and organisational influences.

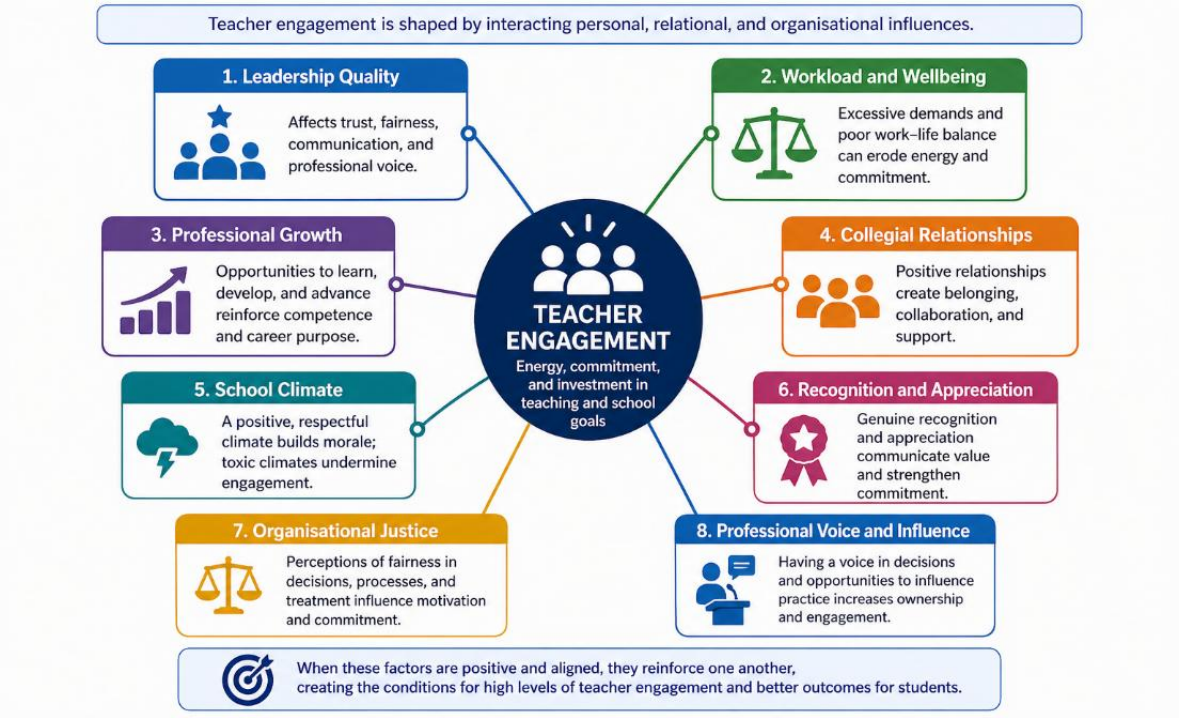


Figure 2.5: Factors Affecting Teacher Engagement

Teacher engagement is shaped by a combination of personal, relational, and organisational factors that interact to influence how teachers feel, think, and act within their professional roles. These factors do not operate in isolation; rather, they work together to create conditions that either enhance or hinder engagement. Understanding these elements is particularly important in school contexts, where teacher engagement directly impacts student outcomes and overall school effectiveness.

One of the most significant factors is leadership quality. Effective leadership influences trust, fairness, communication, and the extent to which teachers feel their voices are valued. Supportive leaders who demonstrate transparency and inclusivity are more likely to foster a positive environment where teachers feel respected and motivated. In contrast, poor leadership practices may undermine trust and reduce engagement.

Another key factor is workload and wellbeing. Excessive job demands, coupled with insufficient support or poor work-life balance, can lead to stress, fatigue, and eventual disengagement. Teachers who experience manageable workloads and are supported in

maintaining their wellbeing are more likely to sustain high levels of energy and commitment in their work.

Professional growth opportunities also play a crucial role. Access to continuous learning, skill development, and career advancement reinforces teachers' sense of competence and purpose. When teachers feel that they are growing professionally, they are more likely to remain engaged and committed to their roles.

Equally important are collegial relationships. Positive interactions with colleagues foster a sense of belonging, collaboration, and mutual support. Strong professional relationships contribute to a supportive school culture, which enhances engagement and reduces feelings of isolation.

The broader school climate further shapes teacher engagement. A positive and respectful environment promotes morale, motivation, and job satisfaction, while a negative or toxic climate can significantly undermine engagement. School climate influences how teachers perceive their workplace and their role within it.

Recognition and appreciation are also essential. When teachers feel that their efforts are acknowledged and valued, they are more likely to maintain high levels of commitment and motivation. Genuine recognition reinforces the importance of their contributions and strengthens their connection to the school.

Another influencing factor is organisational justice, which refers to perceptions of fairness in decision-making processes, treatment, and policies. When teachers perceive fairness and equity, they are more likely to trust leadership and remain engaged. Conversely, perceived injustice can lead to dissatisfaction and disengagement.

Finally, professional voice and influence are critical. Teachers who have opportunities to contribute to decision-making and influence school practices are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility. This involvement enhances engagement by making teachers active participants rather than passive recipients of decisions.

When these factors are aligned and positively reinforced, they create a supportive environment that promotes high levels of teacher engagement. Such conditions not only enhance teacher wellbeing but also contribute to improved student learning and overall school effectiveness.

2.11 Relationship Between Leadership and Engagement

A substantial body of research highlights leadership as a key influence on teacher engagement, shaping how teachers experience their work, respond to change, and decide the level of effort they invest in their professional responsibilities. Leadership extends beyond administrative functions and plays a central role in constructing the working environment, expectations, and professional climate within a school. As emphasised by Leithwood, K., leadership remains one of the most significant school-related factors affecting both teaching quality and student learning outcomes. This underscores the importance of examining how leadership practices directly and indirectly shape teacher engagement.

From a relational standpoint, leadership contributes to the development of trust, openness, and psychological safety. Leaders who are supportive, approachable, and consistent tend to foster environments where teachers feel comfortable voicing concerns, proposing ideas, and seeking assistance without fear of criticism. Edmondson, A. defines psychological safety as a condition in which individuals feel able to engage in interpersonal risk-taking without negative repercussions. In school contexts, such an environment can encourage collaboration, reflective practice, and sustained professional involvement. When teachers perceive their leaders as respectful and trustworthy, they are more likely to demonstrate commitment and active participation in school initiatives.

In structural terms, leadership shapes engagement through organisational systems and practices. Decisions related to resource distribution, professional development opportunities, and participation in school governance significantly affect how teachers perceive their roles. Leadership that promotes shared decision-making and values teacher input tends to enhance teachers' sense of ownership and professional agency. Robinson, V. M. J. suggests that leadership practices focused on collaboration and instructional improvement have a measurable impact on teacher motivation and student achievement. In contrast, rigid or top-down leadership structures may limit teacher involvement, potentially reducing motivation and weakening engagement.

Leadership also operates symbolically by conveying the values and priorities of the organisation. The ways in which leaders acknowledge teacher expertise, celebrate contributions, and model professional expectations communicate what is considered important within the school culture. Recognition can reinforce teachers' professional identity and strengthen their sense of purpose, whereas a lack of acknowledgment may contribute to feelings of

marginalisation. Day, C. notes that teacher commitment is closely tied to professional identity and the degree of support experienced within the school environment.

While supportive leadership is often linked to increased engagement, stronger commitment, and reduced burnout, these effects are influenced by contextual factors such as consistency of leadership practices and the prevailing school culture. Leadership approaches that appear participative or supportive may not yield positive outcomes if they are implemented superficially or without genuine empowerment. The interaction between leadership style, organisational structures, and relational dynamics continues to shape how teachers experience their roles and sustain their engagement over time.

2.12 Shared Leadership and Teacher Motivation

Organisational commitment refers to psychological attachment and loyalty sense that individuals develop towards their institution. In educational settings, it reflects the extent to which teachers identify with school values, goals, and long-term vision. Shared leadership has been identified as significant factor that can strengthen this commitment by involving teachers more directly in school direction shaping. When teachers contribute to decision-making processes—particularly those related to curriculum, teaching practices, and school improvement—they are more likely to internalize organisational goals. As Meyer, J. P. and Allen, N. J. highlight, commitment is closely linked to individual's emotional attachment and their organization identification.

Ownership and Belonging Development

Through shared leadership, schools create opportunities for teachers to develop stronger ownership and belonging sense. When teachers feel that their voices are valued and their expertise is recognized, they are more inclined to align themselves with institution's mission. This inclusion sense can foster affective commitment, where individuals remain with organization because they genuinely want to, rather than out of obligation. Leithwood, K. suggests that participative leadership practices can enhance teachers' purpose sense and strengthen their school community connection.

Trust and Social Exchange

Trust plays central role in this relationship. When school leaders demonstrate trust by delegating responsibility and providing meaningful participation opportunities, teachers are likely to respond positively. This reciprocal dynamic aligns with social exchange theory

principles, where supportive organizational practices are met with increased loyalty and engagement. Teachers who feel trusted may demonstrate higher school advocacy levels, contribute beyond their formal responsibilities, and invest additional effort in supporting school initiatives. Such discretionary effort is particularly valuable in sustaining school improvement and maintaining positive organizational culture.

International School Context

Shared leadership's role in fostering organizational commitment is especially relevant in international school contexts. High staff turnover is common challenge in such settings, often disrupting continuity, professional relationships, and institutional memory. By strengthening teachers' school attachment, shared leadership may help reduce turnover intentions and promote stability. When teachers feel connected to organization and see themselves as integral success contributors, they are more likely to remain committed over time.

Implementation Authenticity

However, shared leadership's organizational commitment impact depends on implementation authenticity. Superficial or inconsistent practices may weaken trust and reduce intended benefits. Meaningful participation, clear communication, and adequate support remain essential in ensuring that shared leadership contributes positively to teachers' belonging sense and long-term commitment.

2.13 Shared Leadership and Organisational Commitment

International schools provide distinctive and complex context for examining shared leadership practices. These institutions often employ internationally mobile staff, serve culturally diverse student populations, and implement globally recognized curricula such as those offered by Cambridge Assessment International Education and International Baccalaureate Organization. Such environments are characterized by diversity in professional backgrounds, teaching philosophies, and cultural norms, which can both enrich and challenge leadership practices.

Diversity Opportunities

Diversity within international schools presents significant shared leadership opportunities. Teachers often bring varied pedagogical experiences, training systems, and perspectives from different educational contexts. When effectively harnessed, this diversity can enhance collaboration, innovation, and problem-solving. Shared leadership provides structure through

which these varied expertise forms can be integrated into school improvement efforts. As Harris, A. suggests, distributed leadership enables schools to "mobilise the expertise of many rather than rely on the authority of one," allowing for more responsive and contextually relevant decision-making. In this way, inclusive leadership practices can strengthen both professional learning and organizational effectiveness.

Cultural Challenges

At the same time, cultural diversity may introduce shared leadership interpretation and enactment challenges. Expectations regarding hierarchy, communication styles, conflict resolution, and participation can differ significantly across cultures. What is perceived as empowering and collaborative in one cultural context may be viewed as unclear or lacking direction in another. Hofstede, G. highlights that cultural values influence workplace behaviours, including authority attitudes and decision-making. As a result, international school leadership practices must be carefully adapted to ensure clarity, inclusivity, and mutual understanding among diverse background staff.

Staff Mobility Impact

High staff mobility further complicates shared leadership implementation in international schools. Frequent turnover can disrupt continuity, weaken professional relationships, and reduce institutional memory. New staff members may require time to understand and adapt to collaborative leadership structures, which can slow decision-making processes and affect consistency. This aligns with Odland, G. observations, who notes that international school staff mobility can impact organizational stability and long-term development.

Sustainability Strategies

To sustain shared leadership effectively in such contexts, schools must invest in ongoing induction, clear expectation communication, and strong relational trust development among staff. Leadership structures need to remain flexible yet coherent, ensuring that new members can integrate into collaborative systems while maintaining school practice continuity. The interplay between diversity, cultural expectations, and staff mobility continues to shape how shared leadership is experienced and sustained in international school environments.

2.14 Shared Leadership in International Schools

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Diversity within international schools presents significant opportunities for shared leadership. Teachers often bring varied pedagogical experiences, training systems, and perspectives from different educational contexts. When effectively harnessed, this diversity can enhance collaboration, innovation, and problem-solving. Shared leadership provides a structure through which these varied forms of expertise can be integrated into school improvement efforts. As suggested by Harris, A., distributed leadership enables schools to "mobilise the expertise of many rather than rely on the authority of one," allowing for more responsive and contextually relevant decision-making. In this way, inclusive leadership practices can strengthen both professional learning and organisational effectiveness.

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2.15 Malaysian International School Context

Malaysia has emerged as significant Southeast Asia international education hub, driven by economic growth combination, regional mobility, and growing globally recognized qualifications demand. International school expansion in the country has been supported by expatriate communities, as well as growing local middle class seeking alternative education pathways for their children. Institutions offering programmes such as those by Cambridge Assessment International Education and International Baccalaureate Organization have contributed to Malaysia's reputation as competitive international schooling destination (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2020).

Sector Diversity

Despite this growth, Malaysian international schools are highly diverse in terms of size, governance, curriculum models, and student demographics. Some are large, corporate-owned institutions with extensive resources, while others are smaller, independently operated schools with more localized structures. This diversity suggests that leadership practices and teacher experiences are unlikely to be consistent across the sector. As Bray, M. notes, variations in school structures and contexts can significantly influence how educational policies and leadership practices are enacted at institutional level (Bray, 2011).

Competitive Pressures

The competitive Malaysian international school sector nature further intensifies effective leadership and teacher engagement importance. Schools must compete not only for student enrollment but also for highly qualified and experienced educators. In addition, strong parental expectations—particularly regarding academic outcomes, pastoral care, and global opportunities—place additional school pressure to maintain high standards. These factors make teacher engagement strategic priority, as engaged teachers are more likely to contribute

positively to student outcomes, school reputation, and organizational stability (Day & Gu, 2010).

Multicultural Complexity

At the same time, both staff and student population multicultural composition introduces additional leadership practice complexity. Malaysian international school teachers often come from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds, requiring leaders to navigate differing expectations regarding communication, collaboration, and authority. Hofstede, G. suggests that cultural differences can shape workplace interactions and leadership perceptions, highlighting culturally responsive leadership approaches need (Hofstede, 2001).

Research Gap

Despite the sector's rapid growth, there remains relative lack of research focusing on internal leadership dynamics within Malaysian international schools. In particular, qualitative, teacher-centered studies exploring how leadership is experienced and interpreted by educators are limited. This gap suggests deeper investigation need into how leadership practices influence teacher engagement, motivation, and organizational commitment within this specific context (Hallinger, 2018).

2.16 Research Gap

Gap 1: Limited Focus on Teacher Engagement

Elaboration: While substantial research examines student achievement outcomes and principal leadership behaviors, relatively few studies center on how teachers themselves experience and respond to leadership approaches. Teacher engagement is a critical mediating variable that directly influences classroom effectiveness, yet it remains underexplored in the shared leadership literature. As researchers have noted, "the relationship between leadership practices and teacher engagement remains poorly understood in many educational contexts" (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). This oversight is particularly significant because teacher engagement serves as a bridge between leadership initiatives and student outcomes.

Why it matters: Understanding teacher perceptions of shared leadership provides insight into the mechanisms through which leadership models translate into organizational outcomes.

Gap 2: Methodological Limitations in Existing Research

Elaboration: The shared leadership literature has been dominated by quantitative surveys and statistical analyses, which, while valuable for identifying correlations and generalizable patterns, cannot capture the nuanced, contextual experiences of teachers. As Gronn (2002) argues, "distributed leadership research has privileged quantitative measurement over qualitative understanding of how leadership is actually practiced." Quantitative approaches often treat shared leadership as a measurable construct rather than exploring *how* it actually functions in daily school life, what barriers teachers face, and how their engagement emerges from lived practice. Mezirow (1997) emphasizes that "transformative learning requires understanding the meaning people make of their experiences," suggesting that quantitative methods alone are insufficient for capturing the interpretive dimensions of leadership.

Why it matters: Qualitative research reveals the "why" and "how" behind engagement patterns, offering rich contextual understanding that surveys cannot provide.

Gap 3: Underrepresentation of International School Contexts

Elaboration: International schools operate within unique contexts characterized by diverse student populations, transnational leadership, multiple curriculum frameworks, and highly mobile staffing. Yet empirical research on leadership and teacher engagement in these settings remains sparse compared to the extensive literature on public education systems. Hayden and Thompson (1995) note that "international schools have received limited attention in the broader educational research literature despite their growing prevalence globally." This gap is particularly significant given that international schools face distinct challenges in building cohesive school cultures and sustaining teacher commitment across transient populations.

Why it matters: International schools cannot be assumed to operate under the same dynamics as public systems; context specific research is essential for evidence based practice.

Gap 4: Scarcity of Malaysian Evidence

Elaboration: While leadership research has proliferated globally, Malaysia remains underrepresented in the international research literature. Malaysian schools operate within a specific cultural, policy, and institutional context that shapes how leadership is practiced and perceived. Normore and Khalifa (2014) observe that "educational leadership research in Southeast Asian contexts remains limited, with Malaysia particularly underrepresented in peer reviewed journals." Without localized evidence, international findings may not adequately

address the realities of Malaysian educators, and policy recommendations may lack cultural and contextual appropriateness.

Why it matters: Building a research base in underrepresented geographic contexts strengthens global understanding and ensures locally relevant recommendations.

Gap 5: Structural versus Experienced Shared Leadership

Elaboration: Many studies examine shared leadership as a structural variable measuring whether schools have distributed leadership roles, committees, or formal decision making structures. However, having structures in place does not guarantee that teachers *experience* shared leadership or feel genuinely included in meaningful decision making. Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004) argue that "distributed leadership is not simply about structure; it is fundamentally about how people interact around leadership tasks." This gap reflects a disconnect between organizational design and human experience, where the existence of formal structures may mask underlying inequities in voice and influence.

Why it matters: Understanding the lived reality of shared leadership whether teachers feel heard, valued, and empowered is fundamentally different from documenting that structures exist on paper.

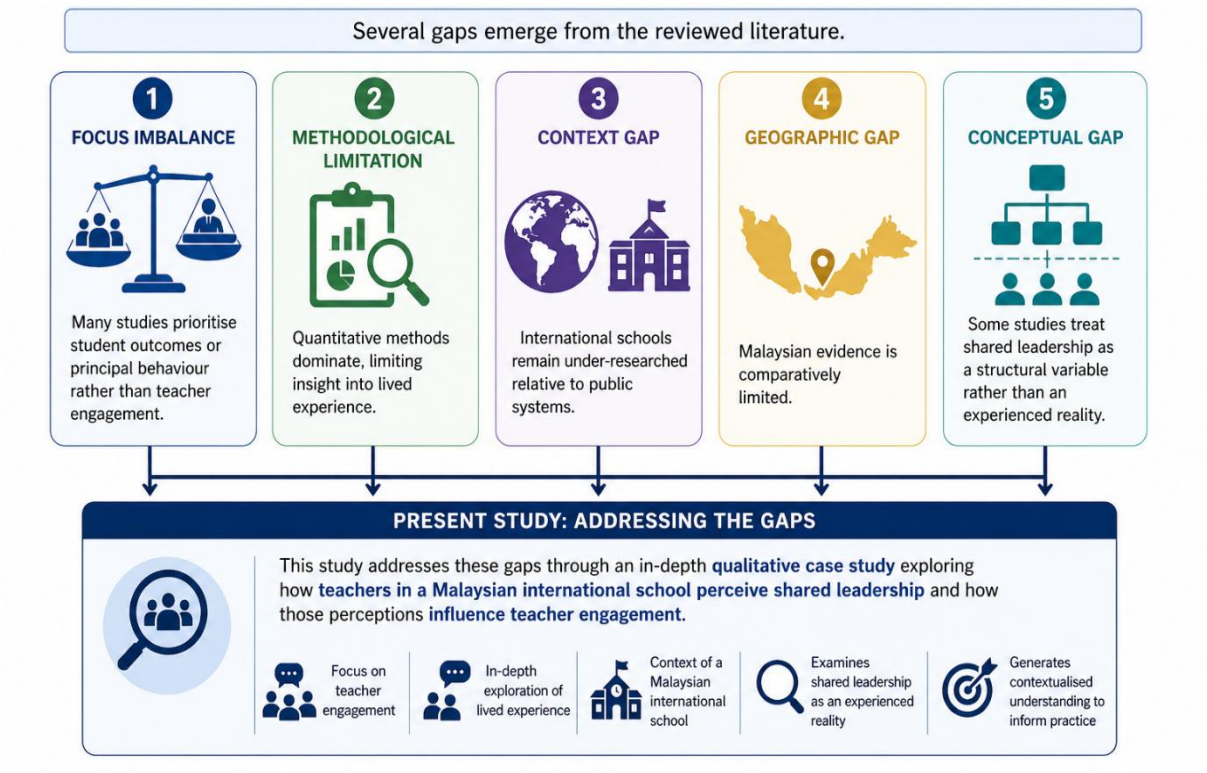


Figure 2.6: Research Gap

2.17 Conceptual Framework

This study's conceptual framework illustrates how shared leadership practices, teachers' psychological conditions, and teacher engagement outcomes connect to one another. The framework also recognizes that contextual factors play an important role in moderating these relationships. The framework is built on educational leadership and motivation theories that emphasize an important principle: leadership does not directly cause engagement. Instead, leadership influences the internal psychological experiences of teachers, and these experiences then lead to engagement. This approach is more sophisticated than simple cause and effect models. It recognizes that shared leadership practices do not automatically produce engagement. Rather, they create conditions where teachers may develop specific psychological experiences, which then translate into engagement behaviors and outcomes. This understanding is especially important for international schools, where cultural diversity, staff mobility, and competing stakeholder interests create complex environments where leadership and engagement interact in intricate ways.

Component One: Shared Leadership Practices

Shared leadership practices form the first part of this framework. These practices include collaborative decision making, distributed leadership roles, professional voice, joint problem solving, and trust based relationships. Together, these practices represent a shift away from traditional hierarchical models where administrators make decisions and teachers implement them. Instead, shared leadership embraces participative and inclusive approaches that recognize teachers as valuable contributors.

Collaborative decision making means that important school decisions are made through processes involving teachers, not just administrators. Distributed leadership roles means that formal and informal leadership responsibilities are spread across the school rather than concentrated in administrative positions. Professional voice means teachers have genuine opportunity to express their perspectives and influence decisions affecting their work. Joint problem solving means teachers and administrators work together to address school challenges. Trust based relationships means people interact with mutual respect, openness, and genuine care.

Spillane (2006) argues that "leadership is not confined to a single individual but is distributed across organization members, allowing schools to draw on collective expertise." This idea is important because it moves away from the traditional view of leadership as something only

administrators do. Instead, it recognizes that teachers possess substantial expertise in teaching, learning, curriculum, and student development. When schools tap into this expertise through shared decision making, schools become stronger. Gronn (2002) adds that "distributed leadership involves mutual dependence among leaders" and requires "coordinated action among multiple actors." This coordination does not happen automatically. Instead, schools must deliberately create structures and relationships that make genuine collaboration possible.

In international schools, shared leadership practices become even more important. International schools typically employ teachers from many different countries and educational backgrounds. These teachers bring varied perspectives on how schools should operate, what effective teaching looks like, and how decisions should be made. When schools actively seek and integrate these diverse perspectives through shared leadership, the school benefits from rich knowledge and multiple ways of solving problems. When leadership remains hierarchical and teacher voice is limited, international schools miss opportunities to use their greatest strength: a globally minded, educationally diverse faculty. Additionally, international schools often experience high staff turnover. Shared leadership practices that create genuine participation and build community help teachers feel like valued members rather than temporary workers. This sense of belonging can increase teacher commitment and help schools retain experienced staff.

Shared leadership practices create many opportunities for teachers to actively participate in school processes. When teachers participate in curriculum committees, they help shape what students learn and how teaching happens. When teachers serve on hiring committees, they help build a school community aligned with school values. When teachers participate in professional development planning, they ensure that learning opportunities address their real needs. When teachers contribute to school improvement initiatives, they help identify problems and develop solutions based on classroom experience. These various forms of participation increase teachers' sense of investment in school processes. Spillane (2006) emphasizes that "distributed leadership stretches the social and organizational infrastructure of leadership," creating more opportunities for leadership engagement across the school. Teachers who participate in these processes develop deeper understanding of school challenges, gain appreciation for the complexity of school leadership, and feel greater ownership of school decisions because they helped shape them.

Component Two: Psychological Conditions

The second part of the framework focuses on psychological conditions. These are teachers' internal experiences, beliefs, and emotional states in response to leadership practices and school contexts. Psychological conditions are the crucial bridge between what leaders do and how teachers engage. The framework identifies five key psychological conditions: meaningfulness, competence, relatedness, autonomy, and psychological safety.

Meaningfulness is about whether teachers feel their work is important and aligned with their values. Teachers experience meaningfulness when they understand why their work matters and feel they contribute to something beyond themselves. Shared leadership practices increase meaningfulness because when teachers participate in school decision making, they understand how their voice shapes school direction. When teachers help set school vision and goals, they see stronger alignment between their personal values and school mission. When teachers contribute to curriculum decisions, they understand how their expertise directly influences student learning. When teachers help solve school problems, they see the real impact of their thinking. Hackman and Oldham (1980) developed an important theory showing that when people understand their work has significant impact, they become more motivated and engaged. Shared leadership practices increase this sense of significance by ensuring teachers understand how their contributions matter.

Competence is about teachers' confidence in their ability to do their work well and meet job demands. Teachers develop competence when they have opportunities to learn, receive helpful feedback, and experience success. When shared leadership includes professional development aligned with teacher needs, teachers develop skills in areas important to their work. When experienced colleagues mentor and coach teachers, teachers learn through guided experience. When school leaders provide constructive feedback that helps teachers improve without damaging confidence, teachers grow stronger. Self Determination Theory explains that competence is a fundamental human need. When this need is met, people experience greater intrinsic motivation and engagement. Without competence, teachers disengage regardless of how meaningful their work might be.

Relatedness is about teachers' sense of connection to others and belonging to the school community. Relatedness addresses the human need to feel part of something larger and to experience genuine relationships with others. Shared leadership practices that create collaborative structures such as grade level teams, subject departments, or school committees

provide opportunities for teachers to work together and develop relationships. When shared leadership is built on trust and genuine listening, teachers feel valued as people and professionals. In international schools where staff come from different countries and backgrounds, deliberately building relatedness is particularly important. New teachers or teachers new to a country may feel isolated. Shared leadership practices that actively include them in decision making and create spaces for collaboration help them feel part of the community. Baumeister and Leary (1995) explain that belonging is a fundamental human motivation. When people feel excluded or disconnected from community, they experience distress and reduced well being. When people feel connected and valued, they experience greater happiness, motivation, and engagement.

Autonomy is about teachers' sense of choice, agency, and control over their work. Autonomy increases when teachers have voice in decisions affecting their work, flexibility in how they approach teaching, and freedom to use their professional judgment. Shared leadership practices that distribute decision making and invite teacher input directly increase autonomy. When teachers participate in deciding school policies, they feel greater ownership of those policies rather than feeling policies are imposed on them. When teachers have voice in curriculum decisions, they can shape instruction to match their expertise and their students' needs. When teachers have flexibility in how they implement school initiatives, they can adapt approaches to their particular situations. Self Determination Theory explains that autonomy is a fundamental human need. When autonomy is satisfied, people experience intrinsic motivation and engagement. When autonomy is restricted, people disengage. In international schools where teachers come from educational systems with different levels of teacher autonomy, shared leadership that clearly protects and communicates teacher voice is essential for engagement.

Psychological Safety is about teachers' belief that they can take interpersonal risks without fear of negative consequences. Taking risks means expressing ideas, asking questions, admitting mistakes, or requesting help. Negative consequences might include ridicule, punishment, or exclusion. Psychological safety is foundational; without safety, teachers will not express ideas, take risks, or fully invest in collaborative work. Edmondson (1999) defines psychological safety as "a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking" and shows that psychological safety is critical for team learning and performance. When shared leadership is built on genuine respect, non defensive responses to disagreement, and inclusive norms, teachers experience psychological safety. When leaders respond to different viewpoints

with curiosity rather than defensiveness, teachers feel safe expressing different perspectives. When mistakes are treated as learning opportunities rather than occasions for blame, teachers feel safe trying new approaches and learning from failure. When all voices are genuinely valued regardless of status or how long someone has been at the school, teachers feel safe participating in decision making. Without safety, teachers stay silent, keep ideas to themselves, and disengage from collaborative processes.

These five conditions are closely connected to Self Determination Theory, developed by Deci and Ryan (2000). This theory explains that people are more motivated and engaged when three fundamental psychological needs are satisfied: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Deci and Ryan explain that "autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fundamental to intrinsic motivation and engagement." They distinguish between intrinsic motivation (doing something because it is inherently interesting) and extrinsic motivation (doing something to get rewards or avoid punishment). When psychological conditions satisfy these needs, teachers experience genuine motivation and engagement. When psychological conditions fail to satisfy these needs, teachers experience only external motivation and may comply without truly engaging. Additionally, psychological safety, while not explicitly part of Self Determination Theory, is increasingly recognized as foundational. Without safety, people cannot authentically express autonomy, demonstrate competence, or experience genuine relatedness.

These five psychological conditions work together, not separately. A teacher might experience competence and autonomy but lack psychological safety, which would prevent full investment in shared leadership. Another teacher might experience meaningfulness and relatedness but feel incompetent, which would limit their ability to contribute effectively. The strongest engagement occurs when teachers experience all five psychological conditions simultaneously. When shared leadership is implemented authentically, it is likely to satisfy all these psychological needs. When leadership remains hierarchical, exclusionary, or lacks genuine trust, these conditions are not satisfied, and engagement remains limited regardless of how meaningful the work might be.

Component Three: Teacher Engagement Outcomes

The third part of the framework focuses on teacher engagement outcomes. This is the ultimate goal teachers' engagement is multidimensional, including affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions, as well as professional commitment and positive teaching outcomes. This comprehensive view recognizes that engagement is complex and shows up in multiple ways.

Affective engagement is the emotional dimension. This includes teachers' enthusiasm, passion, enjoyment, and emotional investment in their work. Affectively engaged teachers feel positive emotions when thinking about their work, feel energized by teaching, and maintain emotional connection to students and school community. Affective engagement is visible in teachers' demeanor, tone of voice, and willingness to do more than minimum. Teachers with high affective engagement genuinely care for their students, celebrate student successes with enthusiasm, and stay optimistic even when facing challenges. In international schools, affective engagement is particularly important because teachers' emotional presence and enthusiasm directly influence the school community atmosphere and students' sense of belonging and safety.

Cognitive engagement is the intellectual dimension. This includes teachers' sustained focus and attention, investment of mental effort, active thinking about their work, and commitment to continuous learning and improvement. Cognitively engaged teachers think deeply about their teaching practice, consider how to improve instruction, engage in professional reading and reflection, and actively contribute to school improvement conversations. Cognitive engagement involves both focused attention in the present moment and strategic thinking about future directions. Teachers with high cognitive engagement are not simply going through the motions; they are actively thinking about how to enhance learning, considering student needs, and continuously evaluating their effectiveness. Cognitive engagement is essential for school improvement because through teachers' thoughtful engagement, innovations are successfully implemented and school effectiveness is enhanced.

Behavioral engagement is the action dimension. This includes teachers' discretionary effort (effort beyond what is minimally required), participation in school activities and committees, contribution to collaborative processes, and follow through on commitments. Behaviorally engaged teachers volunteer for school initiatives, invest time in professional development, participate actively in meetings and collaborative planning, and take on leadership roles. Behavioral engagement is observable through teachers' actions and choices about how they allocate time and energy. Teachers with high behavioral engagement are not only physically present; they are actively participating and contributing. In international schools where school improvement depends on teachers' willingness to take on additional roles and responsibilities, behavioral engagement is particularly critical.

These three dimensions of engagement are connected and strengthen each other. Teachers who experience affective engagement are more likely to invest cognitive effort and behavioral participation. Teachers who are cognitively engaged tend to maintain affective enthusiasm and follow through behaviorally on commitments. Teachers who participate behaviorally in school processes develop stronger cognitive understanding and affective connection. However, these dimensions can also operate somewhat independently. A teacher might display behavioral participation while lacking affective enthusiasm, or demonstrate cognitive understanding without behavioral follow through. The most complete engagement occurs when all three dimensions are strong.

Professional commitment represents teachers' dedication to the teaching profession, desire to remain in teaching, and investment in their professional growth. Committed teachers view teaching as a calling rather than merely a job, invest in developing their expertise, and maintain commitment to students even when facing challenges. Professional commitment is important because it strongly predicts whether teachers stay in teaching, and teacher retention is critical for school stability and effectiveness. In international schools where teacher turnover is often high, shared leadership practices that enhance professional commitment can help schools retain experienced teachers who provide continuity and institutional knowledge.

Positive teaching outcomes represent the ultimate goal: improved teaching quality and student learning. Engaged teachers are more likely to use effective instructional practices, create supportive classroom environments, use formative assessment to guide instruction, and facilitate student learning. Research shows that teacher engagement is associated with higher student achievement, improved student behavior, and enhanced student engagement. Saks (2006) suggests that "engagement is associated with higher performance, commitment, and organizational effectiveness levels." In educational contexts, this means engaged teachers deliver better instruction and create better learning environments for students. The ultimate purpose of shared leadership and the psychological conditions it creates is to enhance teacher engagement, which in turn improves teaching quality and student outcomes.

Component Four: Contextual Moderators

The framework also includes contextual factors that moderate relationships between leadership practices, psychological conditions, and engagement outcomes. These contextual variables shape how shared leadership is experienced, determine whether psychological conditions are activated, and influence the degree to which engagement is expressed in observable outcomes.

Understanding these moderators is essential because they explain why shared leadership produces different results in different contexts.

School culture refers to the shared beliefs, values, norms, and traditions that characterize a school community. School culture profoundly influences how shared leadership works. In schools with strong collaborative cultures where teachers regularly work together, share ideas, and support each other, shared leadership practices are likely to flourish and activate psychological conditions. In schools with fragmented cultures where teachers work in isolation and competition characterizes relationships, even well intentioned shared leadership initiatives may struggle. Additionally, cultural norms around hierarchy, respect for authority, and appropriate roles for teachers vary across cultures and countries. In some cultural contexts, shared leadership that challenges traditional hierarchical structures may be viewed as disrespectful or inappropriate. In these contexts, shared leadership approaches must be adapted to align with cultural values while maintaining genuine teacher voice. In international schools, where staff come from multiple cultural backgrounds, understanding and navigating these cultural differences in approaches to leadership and hierarchy is essential.

Leadership support refers to the quality of support administrators provide for shared leadership implementation and teacher engagement. Leaders who genuinely value teacher input, create time and resources for collaborative work, follow through on teacher recommendations, and model collaborative behaviors create conditions where shared leadership succeeds. Conversely, leaders who claim to value shared leadership while maintaining decision making authority, fail to allocate time for collaboration, or ignore teacher input undermine shared leadership initiatives. Leadership support also includes leaders' skill in facilitating collaborative processes, managing diverse perspectives, and building psychological safety. Leaders who lack these skills may create shared leadership structures that fail to generate genuine collaboration and engagement.

Workload and resources refer to the time, materials, support, and assistance available to teachers for their work. When teachers are overwhelmed with excessive workload, lacking necessary resources, or unsupported in their work, they experience reduced availability the psychological condition reflecting capacity for engagement. Even if shared leadership practices create meaningfulness, safety, and autonomy, teachers who are exhausted and unsupported cannot fully engage. Conversely, when schools provide reasonable workload, necessary resources, and adequate support, teachers have the availability to engage fully. In international

schools where teachers often take on multiple roles and responsibilities due to smaller staff size, attention to workload management is particularly important for sustaining engagement.

Teacher characteristics refer to individual differences among teachers that influence how they experience shared leadership and engage in their work. These include teachers' years of experience and career stage; prior experiences with shared leadership in previous schools; professional identity and commitment to teaching; individual differences in need for autonomy, relatedness, and participation; cultural background and values regarding leadership and hierarchy; and personal circumstances affecting energy and availability. A teacher early in their career may experience shared leadership differently than an experienced teacher. A teacher who has previously experienced collaborative leadership may be more ready to embrace shared leadership than a teacher who has only experienced hierarchical leadership. A teacher from a culture valuing collective decision making may more readily embrace shared leadership than a teacher from a culture emphasizing individual autonomy. These teacher characteristics interact with shared leadership practices to shape how psychological conditions develop and how engagement is expressed.

Broader school context refers to the larger organizational and institutional environment in which schools operate. This includes national education policy and governance structures, curriculum frameworks and accountability pressures, sociocultural norms around hierarchy and decision making, and the broader educational landscape. In some national contexts, education policy mandates specific governance structures or decision making processes that either support or limit shared leadership. In contexts with high stakes accountability, schools may feel pressure to maintain hierarchical control rather than distribute leadership. In some cultural contexts, societal norms around hierarchy and respect for authority may influence how shared leadership is viewed and implemented. For international schools specifically, the broader school context includes the host country's education system and regulations, the home countries of the international school community, international school accreditation standards, and the international school's particular mission and philosophy. Understanding this broader context is essential for interpreting how shared leadership and engagement operate.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasizes that "individual behaviour is influenced by multiple environmental systems," suggesting that leadership effects cannot be understood in isolation. This ecological systems perspective explains why shared leadership produces different outcomes in different contexts. The same shared leadership practices may produce strong

engagement in one school and weaker engagement in another school because of differences in school culture, leadership support and workload.

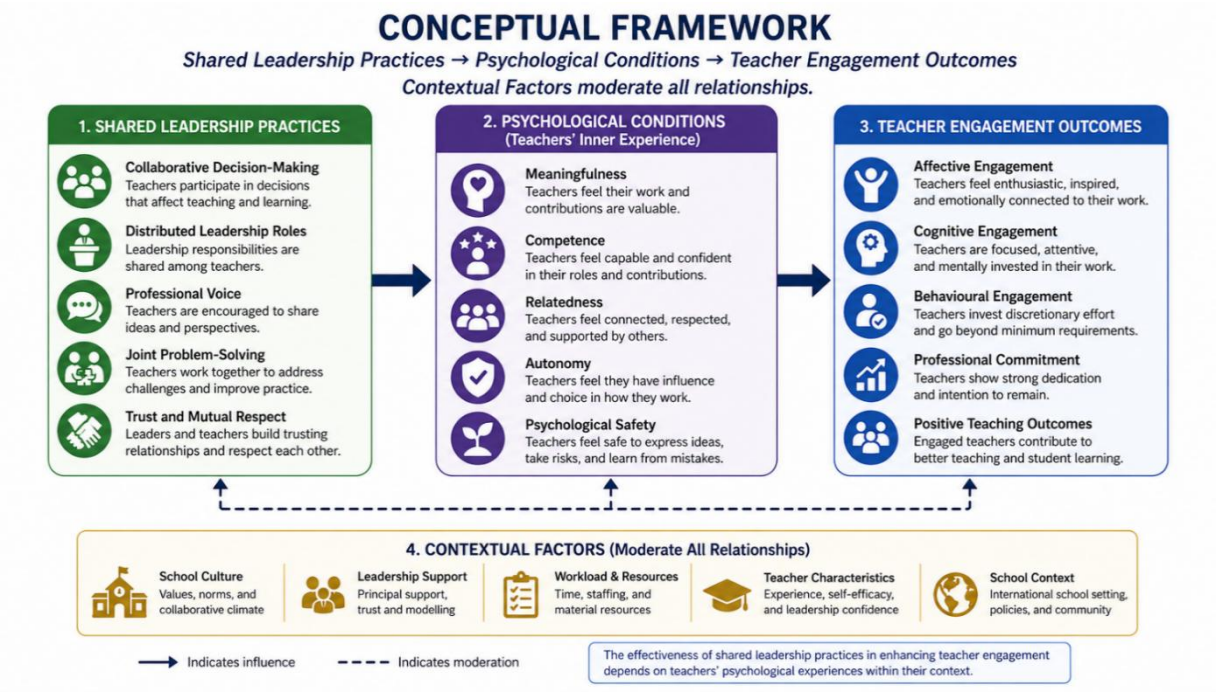


Figure 2.7: Conceptual Framework

2.18 Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined existing literature related to shared leadership and teacher engagement, with particular focus on international school settings. It began by outlining educational leadership approaches development, noting gradual transition from traditional hierarchical structures towards more collaborative and participatory models. Contemporary perspectives increasingly view leadership as collective process rather than single individual responsibility. This reconceptualization reflects growing school complexity and need to draw upon multiple stakeholder expertise.

The discussion then explored shared leadership meaning and key dimensions. Core practices identified in literature include collaborative decision-making, leadership responsibility distribution, professional voice encouragement, joint problem-solving, and trust and mutual respect cultivation. These elements enable teachers to play active role in shaping school processes and contribute to more inclusive organizational culture. Evidence from previous studies suggests that when teachers are meaningfully involved in leadership activities, they are more likely to feel ownership sense and alignment with school goals.

The chapter also considered several theoretical frameworks underpinning leadership and teacher engagement relationship. Distributed Leadership Theory provides basis for understanding leadership as shared and context-dependent activity. Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model highlights organizational resources importance, such as supportive leadership, in enhancing engagement and mitigating burnout. Additionally, Self-Determination Theory offers insight into how psychological needs fulfillment—specifically autonomy, competence, and relatedness—supports intrinsic motivation. Deci, E. L. and Ryan, R. M. emphasize that these needs are fundamental in sustaining professional environment motivation and engagement.

In reviewing literature, both shared leadership advantages and potential limitations were identified. While shared leadership can foster collaboration, innovation, and professional development, its success depends heavily on implementation manner. Superficial or symbolic participation forms, unclear expectations, and insufficient support structures may reduce effectiveness. This highlights ensuring shared leadership importance accompanied by clear roles, adequate resources, and meaningful teacher involvement opportunities.

The chapter further examined various teacher engagement influencing factors, including leadership practices, school culture, workload, and interpersonal dynamics. Leadership was shown to play significant role in shaping motivation, organizational commitment, and professional participation levels. Supportive and inclusive leadership approaches can enhance psychological safety, strengthen professional identity, and encourage teachers to invest additional work effort. Conversely, less effective leadership practices may contribute to disengagement and diminished morale.

Consideration was also given to international schools' specific characteristics, which operate within culturally diverse and often rapidly changing environments. These schools typically employ staff from different backgrounds, serve multicultural communities, and adopt internationally recognized curricula. While such diversity offers innovation and shared learning opportunities, it also presents challenges related to communication, cultural expectations, and leadership practices. Malaysian international school context was highlighted as particularly significant, given its rapid expansion, competitive landscape, and organizational structure variation.

Although shared leadership and teacher engagement research growing body exists, notable gaps remain. In particular, there is limited research focusing on internal leadership dynamics

within Malaysian international schools, especially from qualitative perspectives centering on teachers' lived experiences. Much existing literature tends to focus on broader structural or policy-level issues, leaving need for deeper exploration into how leadership is enacted and experienced at school level. These identified gaps provide clear present study justification, which seeks to contribute to more nuanced shared leadership understanding and its impact on teacher engagement within this context.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and methodology adopted in this study, which aims to explore the relationship between shared leadership and teacher engagement within international school contexts. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive, systematic, and transparent account of how the study was conducted, ensuring methodological rigour and coherence throughout the research process. A clearly articulated methodology is essential in qualitative research, as it allows readers to evaluate the credibility, trustworthiness, and relevance of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The chapter begins by outlining the research paradigm and approach that underpin the study. The interpretivist paradigm is adopted to support an in-depth exploration of teachers' perceptions and lived experiences of shared leadership practices. This paradigm is particularly suitable for studies that seek to understand how individuals construct meaning within their social and professional contexts, rather than to measure predefined variables or test causal relationships (Schwandt, 2014). By situating the study within an interpretivist framework, the research acknowledges the subjective nature of human experiences and the importance of context in shaping these experiences.

Following this, the chapter explains the research design, including the rationale for adopting a qualitative multiple-case study approach. Case study research is widely recognised as an appropriate strategy for investigating contemporary phenomena within real-life settings, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). The use of multiple cases further strengthens the study by enabling cross-case comparison, allowing for the identification of patterns, similarities, and differences across different school environments. This enhances the robustness and depth of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The research sites are subsequently described to provide contextual understanding of the study settings. These descriptions are important in qualitative research, as they allow readers to understand the specific organisational, cultural, and structural contexts in which the study is situated. Contextual detail also supports the transferability of the findings by enabling readers to determine the extent to which the findings may be applicable to other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Following this, the chapter details the participants and sampling strategy employed in the study. Purposive sampling is used to select participants who have direct experience with shared leadership practices and teacher engagement. This approach is commonly used in qualitative research to identify information-rich cases that can provide meaningful insights into the research problem (Patton, 2015). The inclusion of participants from different roles, such as teachers, middle leaders, and senior leaders, ensures a range of perspectives and enhances the depth of the analysis.

The data collection methods are then presented, including the use of semi-structured written responses and document analysis. Semi-structured methods are particularly effective in qualitative research as they provide a balance between structure and flexibility, allowing participants to express their experiences in their own words while ensuring that key research areas are addressed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The use of written responses in this study allows participants to reflect on their experiences and provide thoughtful, detailed accounts. Document analysis complements these responses by providing additional contextual evidence, enabling triangulation of data sources and strengthening the credibility of the findings (Bowen, 2009).

The procedures for data collection are explained to ensure clarity regarding how the data were obtained. This includes steps such as participant recruitment, distribution of questions, data organisation, and storage. Providing a clear account of these procedures is essential to demonstrate the systematic nature of the research process and to ensure transparency (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The chapter also outlines the data analysis process, focusing on thematic analysis and cross-case comparison. Thematic analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It allows the researcher to organise complex data into meaningful themes that capture key aspects of participants' experiences. Cross-case analysis further enhances the study by enabling comparison between the two school contexts, providing deeper insights into how shared leadership and teacher engagement may vary across settings (Yin, 2018).

In addition, issues of trustworthiness are addressed to ensure the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the findings. These criteria are essential in qualitative research as they provide an alternative to traditional notions of validity and reliability (Lincoln

& Guba, 1985). Strategies such as triangulation, member checking, and rich description are used to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

Ethical considerations are also discussed to demonstrate adherence to established research ethics. These include obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and respecting participants' rights throughout the research process. Ethical rigour is particularly important in studies involving human participants, as it protects their wellbeing and maintains the integrity of the research (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001).

Finally, the researcher's positionality is examined, particularly in relation to their role within one of the research sites. Acknowledging positionality is important in qualitative research, as the researcher's background, experiences, and relationships may influence data collection and interpretation. Reflexivity is therefore necessary to minimise bias and ensure that findings are grounded in participants' perspectives rather than the researcher's assumptions (Berger, 2015).

Overall, this chapter provides a detailed and systematic account of the research design and methodology, ensuring that the study is grounded in a rigorous and transparent methodological framework. This foundation supports the subsequent analysis and interpretation of findings presented in later chapters.

3.2 Research Paradigm and Approach

3.2.1 Interpretivist Paradigm

This study is guided by the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasises the understanding of human experiences through the meanings individuals assign to them. Interpretivism is grounded in the belief that reality is socially constructed and that individuals interpret their experiences based on their own perspectives, interactions, and contexts. Rather than assuming a single objective reality, interpretivism recognises that knowledge is subjective and shaped by social, cultural, and organisational influences (Schwandt, 2014).

Within educational research, the interpretivist paradigm is particularly relevant as it allows researchers to explore complex human behaviours, relationships, and perceptions in context. Teaching and leadership are inherently social processes, influenced by interpersonal interactions, institutional culture, and individual beliefs. As such, understanding how teachers perceive and experience shared leadership requires an approach that captures these nuanced and context-dependent meanings (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

In the context of this study, the interpretivist paradigm is appropriate because the research seeks to explore teachers' perceptions of shared leadership and how these perceptions influence their engagement. The focus is not on measuring predefined variables or testing causal relationships, but rather on understanding how teachers make sense of leadership practices within their specific school environments. This aligns with the interpretivist emphasis on exploring lived experiences and the meanings individuals attach to those experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The interpretivist approach also acknowledges that multiple realities may exist. Teachers within the same school may experience shared leadership differently depending on factors such as their roles, relationships with leaders, professional backgrounds, and personal expectations. For example, a middle leader may perceive shared leadership as empowering, while a classroom teacher may view it as limited or inconsistent. Recognising these multiple perspectives allows the study to capture a more comprehensive and authentic representation of the phenomenon under investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Furthermore, interpretivism supports the use of qualitative methods, such as semi-structured written responses, which enable participants to express their thoughts and experiences in their own words. This approach allows for deeper insight into how teachers interpret leadership practices, how they experience engagement, and what factors shape these experiences. By prioritising participants' voices, the study ensures that findings are grounded in real-world experiences rather than imposed theoretical assumptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Another important aspect of the interpretivist paradigm is the recognition of the researcher's role in the research process. In qualitative research, the researcher is not a detached observer but an active participant in data collection and interpretation. This is particularly relevant in this study, as the researcher is situated within one of the research contexts. As such, reflexivity is essential to acknowledge and manage potential biases, ensuring that interpretations remain faithful to participants' perspectives (Berger, 2015).

Given these considerations, the interpretivist paradigm provides a suitable and coherent framework for this study. It enables a rich, contextualised exploration of shared leadership and teacher engagement, capturing the complexity of teachers' experiences within international school settings. The findings are therefore intended to offer in-depth insights into the phenomenon, rather than to produce generalisable or predictive outcomes.

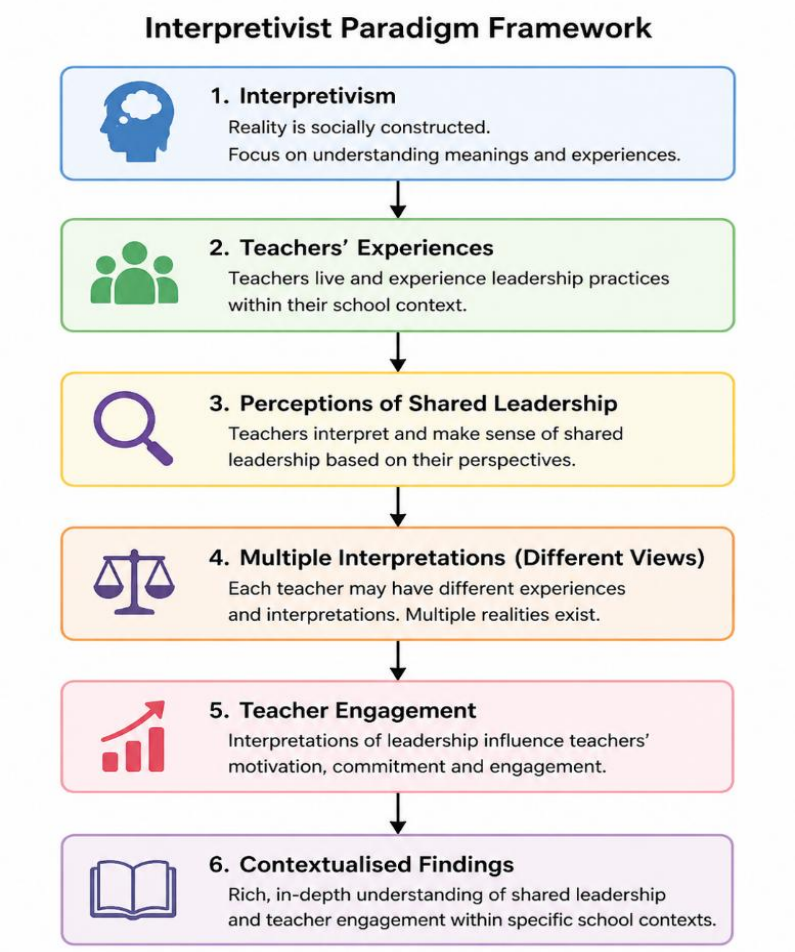


Figure 3.0: Interpretivist Paradigm Framework

3.2.2 Qualitative Research Approach

A qualitative research approach is adopted in this study to enable an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of shared leadership and teacher engagement. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for studies that aim to understand complex social phenomena within their natural contexts, where meanings, relationships, and interactions play a central role (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In educational settings, leadership practices and teacher engagement are not isolated variables but are embedded within dynamic social and organisational environments, making qualitative inquiry an appropriate methodological choice.

The qualitative approach allows the researcher to examine how teachers experience shared leadership in their daily professional lives and how these experiences influence their sense of motivation, commitment, and participation. By focusing on participants' perspectives, qualitative research prioritises depth over breadth, providing rich and detailed insights that cannot be captured through numerical data alone (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This is

particularly relevant in this study, as teacher engagement is influenced by subjective factors such as trust, autonomy, and professional identity, which require interpretive understanding rather than measurement.

Through qualitative methods, the researcher is able to:

- Capture detailed descriptions of teachers' experiences within their school contexts
- Explore the meanings teachers assign to leadership practices and organisational structures
- Identify patterns, themes, and relationships emerging from participants' responses

These capabilities align with the aim of the study, which is to explore how shared leadership is perceived and enacted, and how it shapes teacher engagement. Qualitative research enables participants to express their views in their own words, allowing for a more authentic and nuanced representation of their experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

In contrast to quantitative research, which focuses on numerical data, measurement, and statistical relationships, qualitative research emphasises context, interpretation, and meaning. While quantitative approaches may be useful for identifying general trends or correlations, they may not fully capture the complexity of human experiences or the underlying reasons behind individuals' behaviours and attitudes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In the context of this study, understanding how teachers interpret shared leadership practices requires an approach that allows for flexibility, depth, and openness to emerging insights.

Furthermore, qualitative research supports the use of flexible data collection methods, such as semi-structured written responses, which allow participants to reflect on their experiences and provide detailed accounts. This flexibility is important in capturing diverse perspectives, as participants may have different experiences depending on their roles, backgrounds, and school contexts (Patton, 2015). The ability to adapt questions and explore emerging themes also enhances the richness of the data collected.

Another key strength of qualitative research is its capacity to generate inductive insights. Rather than testing predefined hypotheses, the researcher allows themes and patterns to emerge from the data. This inductive approach is particularly valuable in exploratory studies, such as this one, where the aim is to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between shared leadership and teacher engagement (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Given these considerations, the qualitative research approach provides a suitable and coherent framework for this study. It enables a comprehensive exploration of teachers' lived experiences, capturing the complexity, diversity, and contextual nature of shared leadership practices and teacher engagement within international school settings.



Figure 3.1: Qualitative Research Approach

3.3 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative multiple-case study design to explore the phenomenon of shared leadership and its influence on teacher engagement within international school contexts. A case study approach is particularly suitable when the aim is to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life setting, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. In this research, shared leadership is examined as a contextualised practice shaped by organisational structures, school culture, and interpersonal dynamics among educators.

The use of a multiple-case design strengthens the study by enabling cross-case comparison and analytical generalisation. Rather than relying on a single setting, multiple cases provide richer insights into how shared leadership is enacted across different environments, allowing patterns, similarities, and variations to emerge. This approach enhances the credibility and robustness of

the findings, as evidence can be corroborated across cases. Furthermore, it allows the researcher to identify both context-specific practices and broader themes related to leadership and teacher engagement.

The two cases selected for this study are School X and School Y in Malaysia, both of which represent established international school settings with distinct organisational cultures and leadership structures. These schools were purposively selected based on their relevance to the research focus, accessibility, and their potential to provide meaningful insights into shared leadership practices. The selection is also informed by the researcher's professional experience in both institutions. The researcher previously served at School Y for 16 years as Head of E-Learning and as a specialist Mathematics and ICT teacher, providing in-depth contextual understanding of the school's leadership practices and culture.

At the time of this study, the researcher is currently employed at School X as the Deputy Head of International School and Head of Examinations, offering current and practical insights into leadership implementation within a different organisational setting. While both institutions operate within the broader framework of international education, they differ in terms of size, leadership distribution, and institutional history, making them suitable for comparative analysis.

By examining these two cases, the study aims to develop a nuanced understanding of how shared leadership is implemented and how it influences teacher engagement in diverse school contexts. The findings from the cross-case analysis are expected to contribute to both theory and practice, offering valuable implications for school leaders seeking to foster collaborative leadership and enhance teacher engagement in international school environments.



Figure 3.2: Logos of the two selected case study schools: School X and School Y

3.3.2 Rationale for Multiple Cases

The selection of two cases in this study is guided by several methodological, practical, and contextual considerations. A multiple-case study design is particularly appropriate when the research aims to explore a complex phenomenon across different settings, allowing for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the issue under investigation. In this study, the focus is on shared leadership and its influence on teacher engagement within international school contexts. By examining two distinct schools, the researcher is able to explore how shared leadership is interpreted, implemented, and experienced in different organisational environments, thereby providing a broader and more in-depth perspective on the research problem.

First, the use of two cases enables meaningful and systematic cross-case comparison. Through this approach, the researcher is able to identify both convergent and divergent patterns in leadership practices, decision-making processes, and levels of teacher engagement. Such comparisons are essential in determining whether particular aspects of shared leadership are shaped primarily by contextual factors or whether they represent more generalisable practices across international school settings. This comparative dimension allows the study to move beyond a single-context analysis and contributes to a more robust analytical framework, supporting the identification of key themes and relationships.

Second, the inclusion of multiple cases enhances the credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness of the findings. When similar patterns are observed across both cases, the study benefits from a form of replication logic, whereby evidence from one case is supported by findings from another. This strengthens the internal validity of the research and increases confidence in the interpretations made. At the same time, any differences identified between the cases provide valuable insights into how contextual variables influence leadership practices and teacher engagement. This balance between convergence and divergence contributes to a more rigorous and transparent research process.

Third, the use of two cases allows the study to capture a wider range of organisational contexts and experiences. Each school operates within its own unique setting, shaped by factors such as institutional history, leadership structures, school size, and cultural dynamics. These contextual elements influence how shared leadership is enacted and how teachers perceive and respond to leadership practices. By examining these variations, the study is able to develop a more

contextually grounded understanding of the phenomenon, highlighting not only what works but also under what conditions it is most effective.

Furthermore, the multiple-case design supports the concept of transferability by providing rich, detailed descriptions of each case. Such "thick description" enables readers and practitioners to determine the extent to which the findings may be applicable to other educational settings. Rather than seeking broad generalisations, the study offers insights that are analytically transferable, allowing school leaders and researchers to draw relevant connections to their own contexts.

In addition, the inclusion of two cases allows for a degree of methodological triangulation, as data can be compared across different settings to validate emerging themes. This strengthens the overall rigour of the study and ensures that the findings are not limited to a single institutional perspective. The interaction between data sources, contexts, and interpretations contributes to a deeper and more holistic understanding of shared leadership and its relationship with teacher engagement.

Taken together, the use of a multiple-case study design provides both depth and breadth in exploring the research problem. It enables the study to generate richer insights, strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings, and offer meaningful contributions to both theory and practice within the field of educational leadership.

3.4 Research Sites

3.4.1 School X

School X is a fully international school offering a comprehensive educational pathway from Pre-Nursery to IGCSE, with accreditation for the Cambridge International A Level programme. The school serves approximately 300 students and is supported by a teaching faculty of around 30 educators. As an institution operating within the international education landscape, it adopts globally recognised curricula while also responding to the needs of its local and diverse student population.

The school represents a relatively smaller international school environment, which has important implications for its organisational structure and leadership practices. In such settings, leadership roles are often less hierarchical and more fluid, allowing for greater collaboration among staff members. Teachers may take on multiple responsibilities beyond their primary teaching roles, contributing to decision-making processes, curriculum planning, and school-

wide initiatives. This creates a context in which shared leadership is not only encouraged but often necessary for the effective functioning of the school.

In addition, the relatively close-knit nature of the school community fosters stronger interpersonal relationships among staff, which can facilitate open communication, trust, and collective problem-solving. These conditions are particularly conducive to the implementation of shared leadership, as they support distributed responsibilities and collaborative practices across different levels of the organisation. The accessibility of leadership within a smaller school setting may also enhance teacher engagement, as educators are more likely to feel involved, valued, and empowered in shaping school practices.

Furthermore, the school's emphasis on delivering an international curriculum, alongside its commitment to holistic education, provides a meaningful context for examining how leadership influences both teaching practices and teacher motivation. The integration of academic excellence with character development and global competencies requires coordinated efforts among school leaders and teachers, further highlighting the relevance of shared leadership in this setting.

As such, School X offers a valuable case for exploring how shared leadership operates within a smaller, dynamic international school environment, and how such practices may contribute to enhancing teacher engagement and overall school effectiveness.

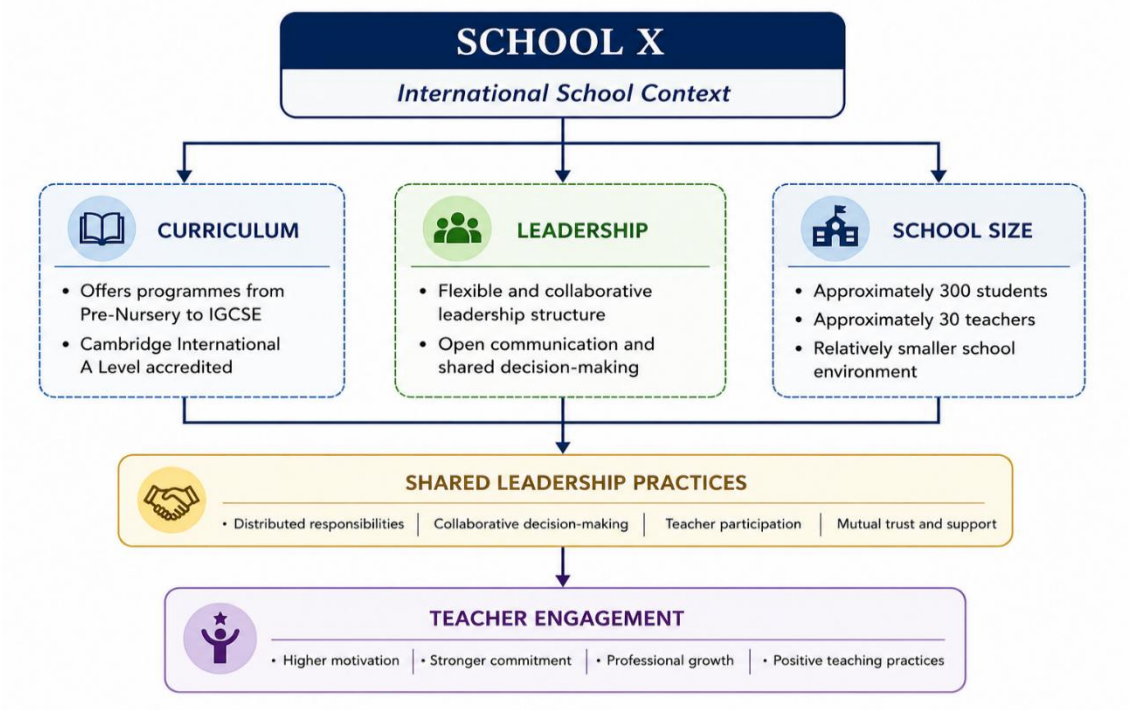


Figure 3.3: School X

3.4.2 School Y

School Y is a well-established private primary institution comprising approximately 600 students and a teaching staff of around 60 educators. The school adopts a hybrid curriculum that integrates the Malaysian national syllabus with elements of the Cambridge curriculum, thereby positioning itself at the intersection of local educational requirements and international pedagogical standards. This dual orientation reflects a strategic effort to balance national accountability with global competitiveness, offering a context that is both academically rigorous and culturally responsive.

As a larger educational organisation, School Y operates within a comparatively formalised and hierarchical structural framework. Leadership responsibilities are distributed across multiple tiers, including senior leadership, middle leadership, and subject-level coordination, resulting in clearly delineated roles and lines of authority. Such structural complexity necessitates systematic coordination, standardised procedures, and formal communication channels to ensure organisational coherence and consistency in instructional practices. Consequently, leadership within this context is likely to be shaped by institutional protocols, accountability mechanisms, and strategic planning processes.

However, the presence of a more structured organisational framework does not preclude the practice of shared leadership; rather, it reconfigures how such leadership is enacted. Within larger institutions, shared leadership may manifest through formalised structures such as professional learning communities (PLCs), departmental collaborations, and committee-based decision-making processes. These platforms provide opportunities for teachers to exercise professional agency, contribute to school improvement initiatives, and engage in collective sense-making, albeit within defined organisational boundaries. The extent to which shared leadership is genuinely distributed, as opposed to administratively delegated, becomes a critical point of inquiry within this setting.

Furthermore, the scale and diversity of the school introduce additional layers of organisational complexity. Variations in teacher experience, subject specialisation, and student needs require leadership approaches that are both adaptive and context-sensitive. Managing such diversity necessitates a balance between maintaining institutional stability and fostering collaborative practices that empower teachers. This dynamic creates a fertile context for examining the tensions between hierarchical leadership structures and the principles of shared leadership.

As such, School Y provides a contrasting case to smaller, less formalised school environments, enabling a deeper exploration of how shared leadership is interpreted, structured, and experienced within a larger institutional context. This case is particularly valuable in understanding how organisational scale and structural formalisation influence the enactment of shared leadership and its subsequent impact on teacher engagement.

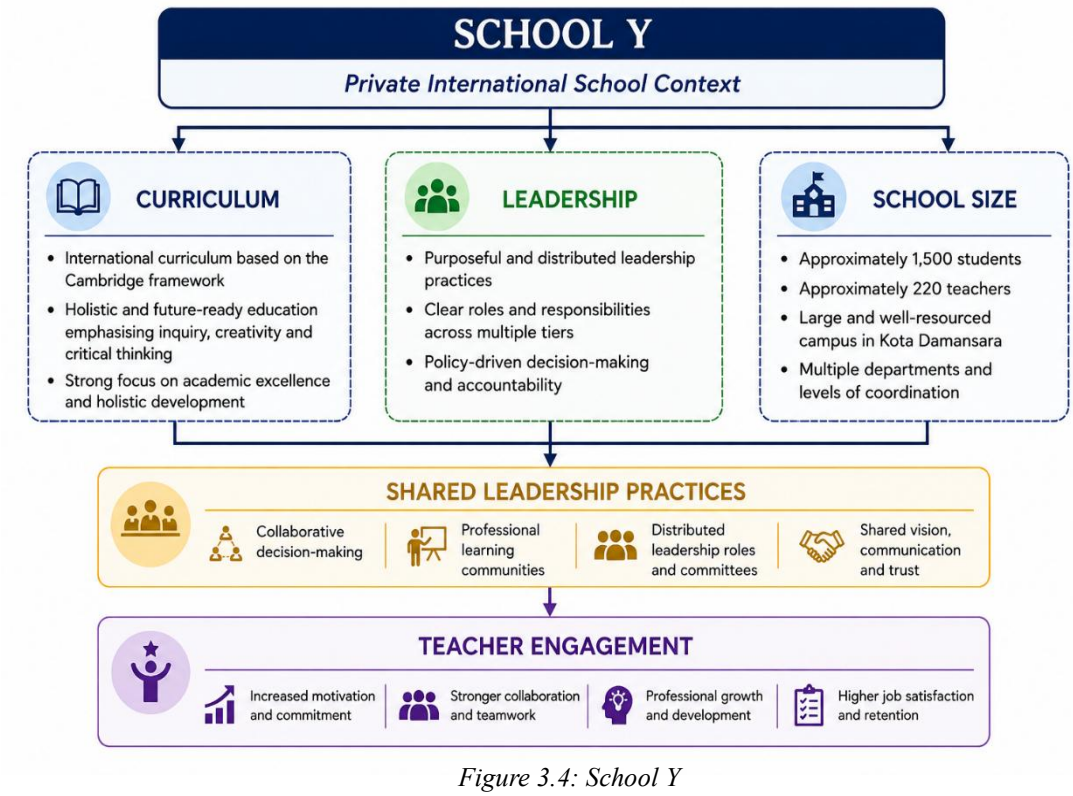


Figure 3.4: School Y

3.5 Participants

This study involves approximately 15 to 20 participants drawn from the two selected case study schools. The participants comprise a purposeful mix of classroom teachers, middle leaders (e.g., subject coordinators or heads of department), and senior leaders (e.g., members of the school leadership team). This range of participants is intentionally selected to capture multiple perspectives on shared leadership practices and their influence on teacher engagement across different hierarchical levels within the school organisation.

A purposive sampling strategy is employed to ensure that participants are information-rich and directly relevant to the research focus. The selection of participants is guided by specific criteria aligned with the objectives of the study. First, participants are required to have demonstrable experience with leadership practices within their respective schools, whether through formal leadership roles or active involvement in collaborative decision-making processes. This

ensures that participants are able to provide informed and reflective insights into how shared leadership is enacted in practice.

Second, participants are selected based on their level of involvement in school processes, including curriculum planning, professional development initiatives, and organisational decision-making. Such involvement indicates a degree of engagement with the operational and strategic functions of the school, thereby enhancing the relevance and depth of the data collected. Including participants from different functional roles allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how shared leadership is distributed and experienced across the organisation.

Third, participants must demonstrate a willingness to participate in the study. This includes providing informed consent and engaging openly in data collection processes such as interviews or discussions. Voluntary participation is essential to ensure ethical integrity and to facilitate the collection of authentic and meaningful data.

The inclusion of participants from diverse roles and levels within each school supports data triangulation and enhances the credibility of the findings. By capturing varied perspectives, the study is better positioned to develop a holistic and nuanced understanding of shared leadership and its relationship with teacher engagement within international school contexts.

3.6 Sampling Method

This study adopts a purposive sampling strategy to identify and select participants who are directly relevant to the research objectives. Purposive sampling is particularly appropriate for qualitative research, as it enables the intentional selection of information-rich participants who possess the knowledge, experience, and insights necessary to address the research questions. In the context of this study, participants are selected based on their involvement in leadership practices and their capacity to provide meaningful perspectives on shared leadership and teacher engagement within their respective school settings.

In addition to purposive sampling, the study incorporates maximum variation sampling to ensure a diverse range of perspectives is captured. This approach involves selecting participants across different roles, levels of responsibility, and professional experiences within the school organisation, including classroom teachers, middle leaders, and senior leaders. By including participants with varied backgrounds and positions, the study is able to explore how shared leadership is understood and enacted across different layers of the organisational hierarchy.

The use of maximum variation sampling enhances the depth and breadth of the data by capturing both common patterns and unique experiences. It allows the researcher to identify similarities that cut across participant groups, as well as differences that may be influenced by contextual factors such as leadership roles, years of experience, or departmental responsibilities. This contributes to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Furthermore, the combined use of purposive and maximum variation sampling strengthens the credibility and transferability of the study. By ensuring that participants are both relevant and diverse, the sampling strategy supports the generation of rich, contextually grounded data that can offer valuable insights for similar educational settings. This approach aligns with the qualitative research paradigm, where depth of understanding and contextual richness are prioritised over statistical generalisation.

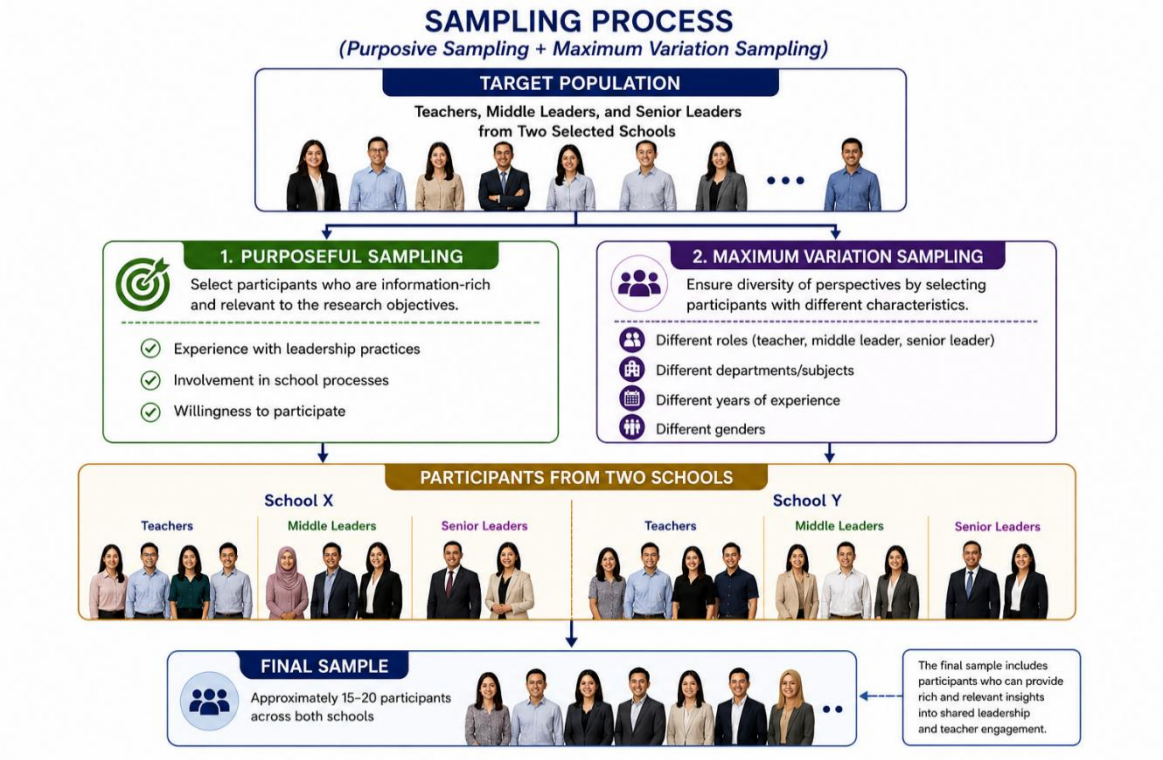


Figure 3.5: Sampling Process

3.7 Data Collection Methods

3.7.1 Semi-Structured Written Responses

Data for this study were collected using semi-structured written responses derived from interview-style questions. This approach integrates the depth and flexibility of semi-structured interviews with the reflective advantages of written data collection. Participants were provided

with a set of open-ended questions designed to guide their responses while allowing sufficient flexibility to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives related to shared leadership and teacher engagement. Semi-structured approaches are widely recognised for their ability to elicit rich, detailed accounts while maintaining alignment with research objectives (Kallio et al., 2016).

The semi-structured format ensures that key areas aligned with the research objectives are systematically addressed across all participants. The questions were developed based on the study's conceptual framework and relevant literature on shared leadership, with particular attention to leadership distribution, collaborative practices, decision-making processes, and perceived impacts on teacher engagement. At the same time, the open-ended nature of the questions enables participants to introduce additional insights or experiences that may not have been anticipated, thereby enriching the data and supporting inductive analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The use of written responses based on interview questions offers several methodological advantages. It allows participants adequate time to reflect on their experiences and articulate their responses in a considered and deliberate manner. This is especially important when exploring complex and context-dependent phenomena such as leadership practices within schools. In addition, the absence of real-time interaction reduces the potential for interviewer bias and ensures consistency in the data collection process across participants, contributing to the dependability of the study (Bryman, 2016).

This approach is also well suited to the school context, where participants may face time constraints due to professional responsibilities. The flexibility to complete the responses at a convenient time supports higher participation rates and encourages more comprehensive and thoughtful contributions.

Semi-structured written responses based on interview questions therefore provide a rigorous and contextually appropriate method for generating rich qualitative data, enabling an in-depth exploration of shared leadership practices and their influence on teacher engagement within the selected case study schools.

3.7.2 Document Analysis

Document analysis was employed as a complementary data collection method to provide contextual and organisational insights into leadership structures and practices within the

selected schools. The use of documentary sources enables the examination of formally recorded information related to leadership processes, decision-making structures, and institutional priorities, thereby supporting a more comprehensive understanding of shared leadership in practice. Document analysis is widely recognised as a valuable qualitative method for examining organisational contexts through existing records (Bowen, 2009).

In this study, document analysis was limited to publicly accessible and non-confidential institutional documents due to restricted access to internal records. The documents analysed included organisational charts, staff handbooks where available, and information obtained from official school websites and published materials. These sources provided an overview of the schools' formal structures, policies, and stated leadership approaches. Organisational charts, in particular, offered insight into leadership roles and reporting relationships, while staff handbooks and publicly available materials reflected institutional expectations, procedures, and governance frameworks.

Access to internal documents such as meeting minutes, committee or professional learning community (PLC) records, and detailed school improvement plans was restricted due to confidentiality considerations. As such, these documents were not included in the analysis. Despite this limitation, the selected documents were sufficient to establish a contextual understanding of each school's organisational structure and formal leadership orientation.

Document analysis served primarily as a contextual support to the main data source, which comprised semi-structured written responses from participants. It enabled the researcher to situate participants' accounts within the broader institutional context and to examine the extent to which reported leadership practices aligned with formally documented structures. The integration of multiple data sources supports triangulation, which enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). This approach allows for a more nuanced interpretation of shared leadership practices within the selected case study settings.

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

This study followed a systematic and ethically informed data collection procedure comprising three main phases: participant recruitment, data collection, and data management. The process was designed to ensure methodological rigour, consistency across cases, and adherence to ethical standards throughout the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Participant recruitment was conducted using a purposive sampling strategy to identify individuals who were directly involved in leadership practices and school processes. Potential participants from both School X and School Y were approached through formal communication, including email invitations and professional networks. The purpose of the study, expectations of participation, and ethical considerations were clearly explained to all participants. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, and participants were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. These procedures align with established ethical principles in qualitative research (Bryman, 2016).

Data collection was primarily carried out through semi-structured written responses based on interview-style questions. Participants were provided with a set of open-ended questions aligned with the research objectives, focusing on shared leadership practices, collaboration, and teacher engagement. The instrument was distributed electronically, allowing participants to complete their responses at a time convenient to them, which was particularly suitable given the professional commitments within school settings. A reasonable timeframe was provided for completion, with follow-up reminders issued where necessary to ensure an adequate response rate. In addition to participant responses, document analysis was conducted using publicly accessible and non-confidential institutional materials, such as school websites, organisational charts, and published documents, to provide contextual support for the study. The use of multiple data sources supports triangulation and enhances the depth of qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018).



Figure 3.6: Data Collection Procedures

Data management procedures were implemented to ensure the secure handling and organisation of all collected data. Participant responses were compiled, anonymised, and assigned codes to protect identities and institutional confidentiality. All data were stored securely in password-protected digital files, accessible only to the researcher. The data were organised systematically to facilitate subsequent analysis, with clear categorisation by case (school) and participant role (teacher, middle leader, senior leader). Ethical considerations, including confidentiality and data protection, were strictly adhered to throughout the process.

This structured approach to data collection ensures consistency across both case study sites while maintaining flexibility to accommodate the practical realities of the school environment. It supports the generation of rich, reliable data and provides a strong foundation for subsequent analysis of shared leadership practices and their influence on teacher engagement.

3.9 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, a widely recognised qualitative approach for identifying, examining, and interpreting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019). This method was selected due to its flexibility and suitability for exploring participants' experiences and perceptions of shared leadership and teacher engagement within complex educational settings.

The analysis followed a systematic and iterative process guided by the six phases of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first phase involved data familiarisation, where the researcher engaged in repeated reading of the participants' written responses to develop a comprehensive understanding of the dataset. Initial insights and observations were documented to inform subsequent stages of analysis.

In the second phase, initial coding was undertaken by identifying meaningful segments of data relevant to the research questions. Codes were applied systematically across the dataset to capture significant features related to leadership practices, collaboration, and teacher engagement.

The third phase involved theme development, where codes were examined and grouped into broader patterns of meaning. Emerging themes were constructed to represent recurring ideas and relationships within the data, particularly in relation to shared leadership practices and their influence on teacher engagement.

During the fourth phase, the identified themes were reviewed and refined to ensure internal coherence and consistency with the dataset. This process involved evaluating whether the themes accurately reflected both the coded extracts and the dataset as a whole.

In the fifth phase, themes were clearly defined and named, with detailed descriptions developed to articulate the essence and scope of each theme. This ensured that each theme was conceptually distinct and aligned with the research objectives.

The final phase involved the interpretation and reporting of findings, where themes were synthesised to construct a coherent narrative addressing the research questions and highlighting key insights.

In addition to within-case analysis, a cross-case comparison was conducted to explore similarities and differences between School X and School Y. This comparative approach enabled the identification of recurring patterns across both cases, as well as context-specific variations in leadership practices and teacher engagement. Cross-case analysis enhances the analytical strength of case study research by supporting analytical generalisation beyond a single setting (Yin, 2018).

The integration of thematic analysis with cross-case comparison contributes to the credibility, dependability, and depth of the study. It allows for a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of how shared leadership is implemented and experienced across different school environments.

3.10 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in this study was addressed through four key criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These criteria provide a recognised framework for ensuring rigour in qualitative research and for enhancing the quality and integrity of the findings.

Credibility concerns the extent to which the findings accurately represent participants' perspectives and experiences. In this study, credibility was strengthened through the use of data triangulation across different participant groups, including teachers, middle leaders, and senior leaders. This approach enabled the inclusion of multiple viewpoints and supported a more comprehensive understanding of shared leadership practices. In addition, careful and repeated engagement with the data during the analysis process contributed to accurate interpretation.

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the research process. This was ensured through the use of a clearly defined and systematic procedure for data collection and analysis. Detailed documentation of each stage of the research process was maintained, allowing for transparency in how the study was conducted. The use of an audit trail further supports dependability by providing a clear record of methodological decisions and analytical steps.

Confirmability relates to the degree to which the findings are shaped by the data rather than researcher bias. This was addressed through systematic coding procedures and by maintaining a reflexive stance throughout the study. The inclusion of data extracts in the findings helps to demonstrate the connection between participants' responses and the interpretations made, thereby enhancing the objectivity of the analysis.

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings may be applicable to other contexts. This was supported through the provision of detailed descriptions of the research setting, participant characteristics, and school contexts. Such descriptions allow readers to assess the relevance of the findings to similar educational environments.

The application of these strategies supports the rigour of the study and ensures that the findings are grounded, transparent, and meaningful within the context of the research.

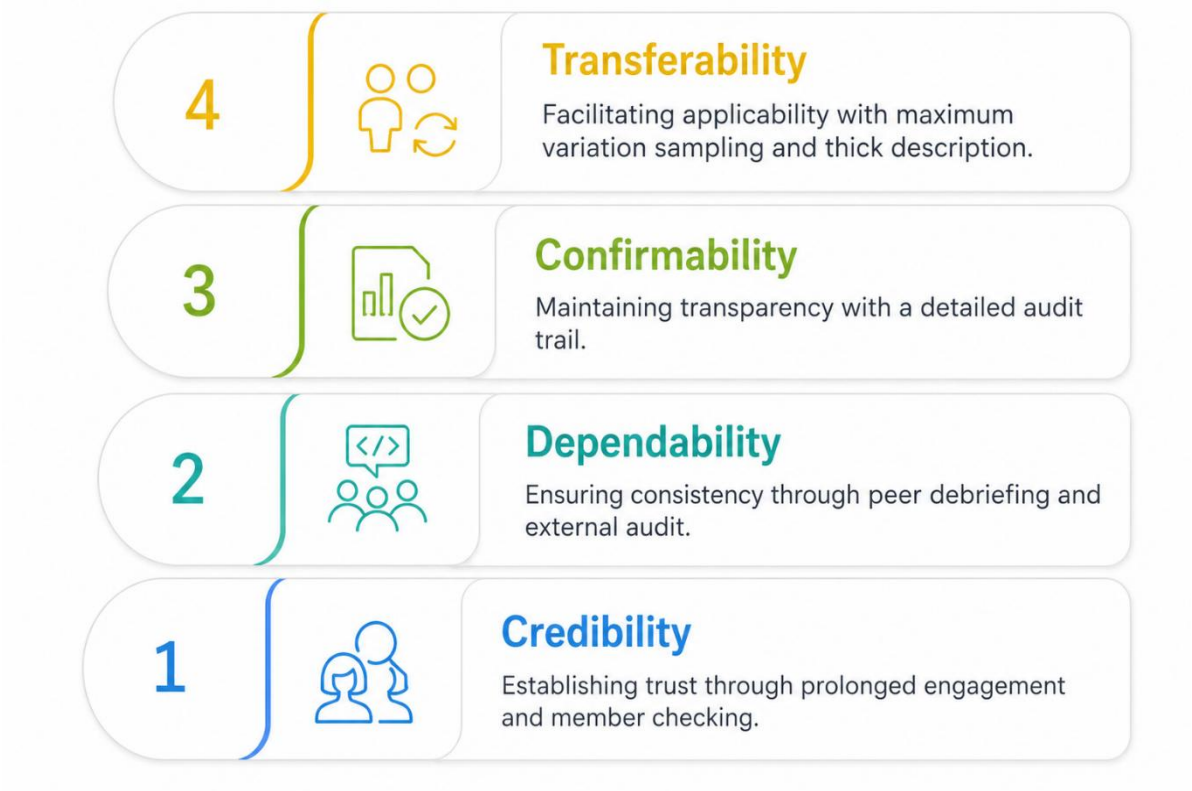


Figure 3.7: Trustworthiness

3.11 Researcher Positionality

Researcher recognizes their positionality as both insider and practitioner within one research site, acknowledging that this dual role has potential to shape research process, data interpretation, and overall meaning construction. In qualitative inquiry, researcher is not detached or neutral observer but plays active role in knowledge generation. As such, it is essential to critically examine and make explicit one's positionality to ensure transparency, reflexivity, and methodological rigour (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Researcher's extensive professional experience within educational context provides valuable contextual insight into organizational structures, leadership practices, and teacher engagement. This insider perspective facilitates deeper and more nuanced phenomenon understanding, allowing for more informed participants' responses interpretation. It also supports effective participant engagement, as shared professional experiences may foster trust and openness during data collection process. However, this research setting proximity also introduces potential challenges, including bias risk, pre-existing assumptions, and subjective interpretation possibility influencing analysis.

To mitigate these risks, deliberate and systematic strategies were employed throughout study. Reflexivity was maintained as ongoing process, with researcher engaging in continuous self-examination to identify and critically reflect on personal beliefs, experiences, and potential research influences. This reflective stance enabled greater awareness of how interpretations were formed and helped ensure findings remained grounded in data. In addition, structured and transparent coding process was implemented, ensuring themes emerged inductively from dataset rather than being shaped by prior expectations or assumptions.

Multiple data sources use further strengthened study by supporting triangulation. Data were collected from participants occupying different roles within school, including teachers, middle leaders, and senior leaders, alongside relevant documentary evidence. This approach allowed perspective comparison and reduced likelihood that findings were influenced by single viewpoint. Attention was also given to maintaining clear and explicit links between raw data and resulting interpretations, thereby enhancing study confirmability.

Ethical considerations were carefully upheld throughout research process. Researcher maintained professional boundaries, ensured confidentiality and anonymity, and approached study with commitment to fairness and integrity. Participants' voices were prioritized, and care was taken to represent their perspectives accurately and respectfully.

Clear researcher positionality acknowledgement contributes to overall study transparency and strengthens its credibility. By explicitly recognizing both insider role advantages and limitations, research is positioned as reflective, ethically grounded, and methodologically robust.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout research process to ensure study was conducted in responsible, respectful, and professional manner. Study adhered to established qualitative research ethical principles, particularly those related to informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Bryman, 2016).

Prior to data collection, participants were provided with clear and comprehensive study purpose information, their involvement nature, and how data would be used. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they fully understood their rights and research scope. Participants were also informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary, and they had right to withdraw from study at any point without negative consequences.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout study. Participants' identities were protected through codes or pseudonyms use, and any identifying information was removed from dataset. In addition, institution names were treated with discretion where necessary to avoid potential identification. All collected data were stored securely in password-protected digital files, accessible only to researcher, ensuring sensitive information safeguarding.

Voluntary participation principle was upheld by ensuring participants were not coerced or pressured into study participation. Given researcher's professional connection to one research site, particular care was taken to minimize any perceived power dynamics or influence. Participation was based solely on individuals' willingness, and all communication emphasized no impact on professional relationships or responsibilities.

Ethical responsibility was also demonstrated in findings reporting. Participants' views were represented accurately and respectfully, without distortion or misinterpretation. Researcher remained mindful of maintaining integrity and honesty in data analysis and presentation.

Attention to these ethical principles supports research process integrity and ensures participants' rights, dignity, and well-being are protected throughout study.

3.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented comprehensive research design and methodology adopted in this study account, detailing philosophical alignment, methodological choices, and procedural steps undertaken to investigate shared leadership and its teacher engagement influence. Chapter began by establishing qualitative approach appropriateness, supported by multiple-case study design, to explore complex and context-dependent phenomenon within real-life educational settings. Such approach enables in-depth participants' experiences understanding while allowing cases comparison, thereby enhancing study analytical strength (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Research context was subsequently outlined through selected two case study schools description, providing clear their organizational structures, leadership environments, and educational settings understanding. This was followed by sampling strategy detailed explanation, which combined purposive sampling with maximum variation sampling to ensure participant inclusion who were both information-rich and diverse in their roles and experiences. This strategy supports meaningful insights generation and allows multiple organizational perspectives exploration (Patton, 2015).

Chapter further described study-employed data collection methods. Semi-structured written responses, derived from interview-style questions, served as primary data source, enabling participants to provide reflective and detailed experience accounts. Document analysis was also incorporated as supplementary method, focusing on publicly accessible and non-confidential institutional materials to provide contextual support. Multiple data sources use facilitated triangulation, thereby strengthening findings' credibility and depth (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participant recruitment, data collection, and data management procedures were outlined in systematic manner, ensuring transparency and consistency across both research sites.

Data analysis process was explained through thematic analysis application, following Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019) proposed six-phase framework. This approach enabled systematic data pattern identification, organization, and interpretation. Cross-case comparison inclusion further enhanced study analytical depth by allowing both shared patterns and context-specific differences identification between two schools. Such approach supports analytical generalization and strengthens findings' explanatory value (Yin, 2018).

In addition, chapter addressed research quality and rigour-related key considerations. Trustworthiness strategies were discussed, including credibility, dependability, confirmability,

and transferability, in line with Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed framework. Researcher positionality was also critically examined, acknowledging insider role and outlining reflexive practices implemented to minimize bias and ensure interpretations remained grounded in data. Ethical considerations were carefully integrated throughout research process, with attention to informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation, thereby ensuring participants' rights and well-being were protected (Bryman, 2016).

Presented methodological framework demonstrates clear alignment between research design, data collection methods, and analytical strategies, ensuring study is both coherent and methodologically sound. By providing detailed and transparent research process documentation, this chapter establishes strong foundation for subsequent findings presentation and interpretation in Chapter 4. Next chapter will build upon this foundation by presenting key derived themes and discussing how shared leadership is enacted and experienced within selected school contexts.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS, AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents study analysis and findings, focusing on how shared leadership influences teacher engagement within international school contexts. This chapter's purpose is to report derived results and to provide systematic participants' experiences and perceptions interpretation. Findings are organized according to generated themes through qualitative analysis and are aligned with study research objectives and questions.

Study is guided by following research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive shared leadership practices in international schools?
2. In what ways does shared leadership influence teacher engagement?
3. What factors support or hinder teacher engagement under shared leadership?
4. What recommendations can be proposed to enhance teacher engagement through shared leadership?

These questions frame findings presentation and ensure analysis remains focused on study core aims.

Study data were derived from two primary sources. Main data source consisted of semi-structured written responses collected from participants across two international school settings, namely School X and School Y. Participants included teachers, middle leaders, and senior leaders, allowing diverse school organizational different levels perspectives inclusion. These responses provided rich, reflective insights into leadership practices, collaboration, and engagement within each school context. In addition, document analysis was conducted using publicly accessible and non-confidential institutional materials, such as school websites, organizational charts, and published documents. These documents served as supplementary data, providing formal leadership structures contextual understanding and participants' responses interpretation support.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, widely recognized qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019). This approach is particularly suitable for exploring participants' lived experiences and for generating themes capturing shared dataset meanings. Analysis followed systematic and iterative process, beginning with data familiarization, followed by coding,

theme development, and refinement. This process allowed key shared leadership practices and teacher engagement-related themes identification.

In addition to within-case analysis, cross-case comparison was conducted to examine two school contexts similarities and differences. This comparative approach enables deeper understanding of how shared leadership is enacted in different organizational settings and how contextual factors may influence teacher engagement. Cross-case analysis is recognized case study research strategy that enhances analytical depth and supports broader findings interpretation (Yin, 2018).

Findings presented in this chapter are structured into thematic sections. Each theme is supported by relevant participants' response data extracts and, where appropriate, linked to document analysis insights. This approach ensures findings are grounded in empirical data while also providing coherent and meaningful narrative.

By presenting data in structured and systematic manner, this chapter aims to provide clear understanding of how shared leadership is experienced within selected schools and how it shapes teacher engagement. Analysis sets foundation for subsequent discussion chapter, where findings will be interpreted in relation to existing literature and theoretical perspectives.

Part A: Data Analysis

4.2 Data Analysis Approach

This study adopted qualitative data analysis approach informed by interpretivist paradigm and supported through thematic analysis. Interpretivist perspective is particularly relevant to this research as it emphasizes how individuals construct meaning from their experiences within specific social and organizational environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Within this study, approach facilitated in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions and experiences relating to shared leadership and teacher engagement in international school contexts.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, flexible and widely applied qualitative method used to identify, examine, and interpret patterns within qualitative datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019). This method was considered suitable due to its ability to capture participants' experiences complexity while remaining adaptable to study's exploratory nature. Thematic analysis is especially appropriate in educational research where understanding participants' meanings, interactions, and perspectives is central to addressing research problem.

Analytical process was guided by Braun and Clarke (2006) developed six-phase framework. First stage involved data familiarization through participants' written responses repeated reading to gain thorough dataset understanding. During this stage, preliminary observations and analytical notes were recorded to support later interpretation.

Second stage focused on initial codes generating by systematically identifying meaningful data segments relevant to research questions. These codes were subsequently reviewed and organized into broader categories and potential themes based on recurring ideas, relationships, and shared patterns identified across dataset.

Emerging themes were then examined and refined to ensure consistency, clarity, and overall dataset alignment. Each theme was carefully defined and labeled to accurately reflect central meanings represented within data. Final stage involved findings interpretation and presentation in relation to research objectives, research questions, and study guiding theoretical framework.

Alongside within-case analysis, cross-case comparison was undertaken between School X and School Y. This comparative approach enabled both commonalities and contextual differences identification in relation to shared leadership practices and teacher engagement. Cross-case analysis strengthens case study research by supporting deeper interpretation and enhancing findings' analytical robustness (Yin, 2018).

Thematic analysis integration within interpretivist framework provided systematic and contextually sensitive approach for examining how shared leadership is understood and experienced across different international school settings.

4.3 Coding Process

Coding process was conducted in systematic and iterative manner to organize, interpret, and make sense of qualitative data obtained from participants' written responses. Coding involves identifying meaningful data units and assigning labels representing significant concepts, ideas, or patterns related to research questions (Saldaña, 2021). This process enabled researcher to manage large textual data volumes while retaining context and meaning embedded within participants' responses.

Analysis began with initial coding phase, during which researcher examined data line by line to identify recurring statements, ideas, and experiences associated with shared leadership and teacher engagement. Descriptive codes were assigned to text segments reflecting participants' perspectives, perceptions, and experiences. Examples of these initial codes included "teacher

participation," "shared responsibilities," "supportive leadership," "transparent communication," and "workload pressure."

Following initial coding stage, related codes were grouped into broader categories according to conceptual similarities and recurring patterns within dataset. For instance, codes such as "teacher voice," "involvement in meetings," and "opportunities to contribute ideas" were consolidated under "participation in decision-making" category. Likewise, codes associated with "leader support," "trust," and "approachable management" were grouped under "communication and trust" category.

Categories were subsequently refined and synthesized into broader themes addressing study objectives and research questions. This stage involved constant comparison across participant responses to ensure themes accurately represented experiences and perspectives shared by participants. Coding and categorization process also facilitated cross-case analysis by enabling School X and School Y systematic similarities and differences identification.

To strengthen analysis consistency and trustworthiness, coding process was conducted repeatedly and reviewed throughout study. Detailed coding decisions, category formation, and theme development records were maintained to provide transparency and ensure analytical process coherence.

4.4 Cross-Case Analysis Procedure

A cross-case analysis was conducted to enable a detailed comparison between School X and School Y in relation to shared leadership practices and teacher engagement. Within qualitative multiple-case study research, cross-case analysis is regarded as a significant analytical strategy as it allows the researcher to extend beyond individual case descriptions and develop broader interpretive understanding across different organisational contexts (Yin, 2018). By systematically comparing the two schools, the analysis aimed to identify recurring patterns, contextual variations, and organisational factors influencing how shared leadership is experienced by teachers.

Although both schools operate within the Malaysian international education sector and share similarities in terms of internationally oriented curricula, multicultural staffing, and emphasis on educational quality, important contextual differences emerged throughout the analysis. Both institutions function within professional environments that value collaboration, accountability, and continuous school improvement. However, differences in organisational size, leadership

structures, institutional culture, and operational processes significantly shaped the implementation and perception of shared leadership practices.

School X represents a smaller international school setting with approximately 300 students and around 30 teaching staff. The relatively compact organisational structure appeared to create a more relational and flexible leadership environment. Participants frequently described leadership interactions as accessible, collaborative, and less hierarchical in nature. Due to the smaller scale of the school, communication between teachers and senior leaders was often more direct and immediate, allowing teachers greater visibility and involvement in school-related matters.

Within this environment, shared leadership practices were commonly experienced through informal collaboration, interpersonal trust, and collective participation in school initiatives. Teachers were often assigned responsibilities beyond their formal teaching duties, including involvement in event management, curriculum planning, committees, and leadership-related tasks. Participants frequently associated these opportunities with stronger professional ownership, increased visibility within the organisation, and greater personal investment in school development. The flexible nature of the school structure also appeared to facilitate quicker decision-making processes and more responsive communication channels.

In contrast, School Y represented a larger and more organisationally complex educational setting. The larger student population and teaching workforce contributed to a more formalised leadership structure characterised by multiple layers of leadership and clearly defined operational systems. Leadership responsibilities were distributed across senior leaders, heads of department, coordinators, and middle leaders, resulting in a more structured administrative framework.

Within this context, shared leadership was generally experienced through formal organisational mechanisms such as departmental meetings, committees, collaborative planning structures, and professional learning communities (PLCs). Opportunities for participation and collaboration remained present; however, these opportunities were typically embedded within institutional systems and governed by established organisational procedures. Participants' experiences therefore reflected a more structured and procedural form of shared leadership compared to the more interactional and relational leadership environment observed in School X.

The analysis further revealed notable differences in the nature of teacher engagement across the two schools. In School X, engagement appeared to be strongly associated with leadership

accessibility, interpersonal relationships, trust, and direct participation in decision-making processes. Teachers frequently described feeling valued when they were entrusted with responsibilities and included in collaborative discussions. In contrast, teacher engagement within School Y was more closely linked to organisational support, clarity of roles, professional systems, and opportunities to contribute within structured frameworks. Participants often associated engagement with professional recognition, institutional support, and clearly defined expectations.

Despite these contextual differences, several common patterns emerged across both schools. Participants consistently highlighted communication, leadership support, mutual respect, and opportunities for professional contribution as important factors influencing teacher engagement. Across both cases, teachers reported higher levels of engagement when they perceived that their opinions were acknowledged, their expertise was respected, and their contributions were valued by school leadership. Conversely, factors such as excessive workload, unclear communication, unequal distribution of responsibilities, and limited participation opportunities were identified as barriers that negatively affected engagement in both settings.

The cross-case analysis also demonstrated that organisational size and structural complexity significantly influence the enactment of shared leadership. In the smaller school context, leadership practices appeared to rely more heavily on interpersonal interactions, collaborative culture, and informal communication processes. In the larger school context, leadership distribution was mediated through formal systems, established procedures, and organisational hierarchies. These findings suggest that while shared leadership may exist across different school settings, its implementation is shaped by institutional context, organisational culture, and structural conditions.

Through this comparative analysis, the study provides a deeper understanding of how shared leadership is experienced within different international school environments and how these contextual variations influence teacher engagement. The findings indicate that shared leadership is not a uniform practice but rather a contextually situated process influenced by organisational structures, leadership accessibility, institutional culture, and professional relationships. These insights contribute to the broader understanding of shared leadership within international schools and offer implications for leadership practices aimed at strengthening teacher engagement across diverse educational contexts.

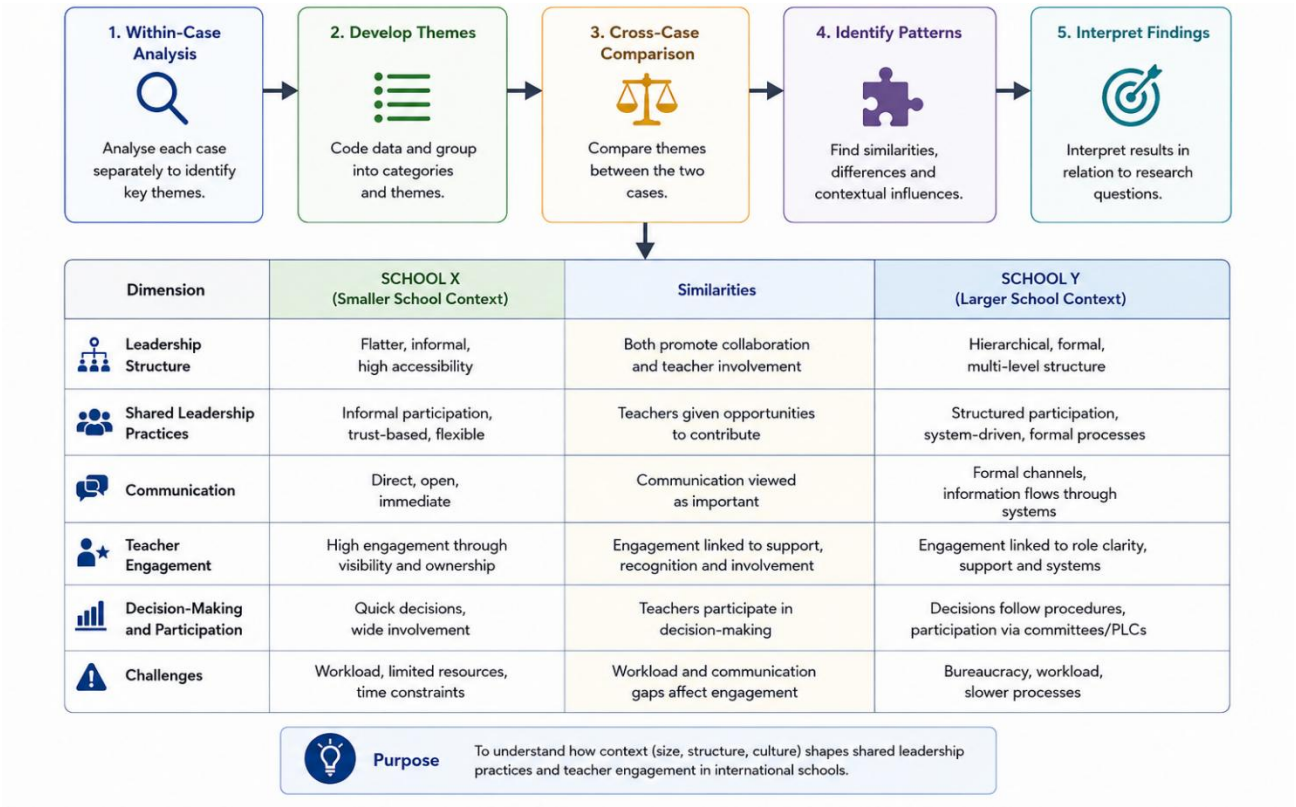


Figure 4.0: Cross-Case Analysis Procedure

4.5 Use of Document Analysis

Document analysis was utilised in this study as a supplementary source of data to support the interpretation of participants' responses and to provide contextual understanding of leadership structures and organisational practices within the selected schools. In qualitative research, document analysis is recognised as an important method for examining institutional contexts, organisational processes, and formally communicated practices through existing records and publicly available materials (Bowen, 2009). Within this study, document analysis functioned primarily as a means of triangulation, enabling the researcher to compare participants' perceptions with documented institutional information and thereby strengthen the credibility and depth of the findings.

Due to confidentiality and access limitations, the document analysis focused exclusively on publicly accessible and non-confidential institutional materials obtained from official school sources. This approach ensured ethical compliance while still allowing meaningful contextual insights to be generated. The documents analysed were derived primarily from the official websites and publicly published materials of Knewton Global Schools Rawang and School Y

Several categories of public documents were examined as part of the analysis. These included official school website pages such as institutional profiles, school background information, vision and mission statements, leadership and management pages, curriculum information, academic programmes, school values, organisational structure information, and published announcements or reports. School prospectuses, brochures, promotional publications, newsletters, and publicly accessible handbooks or policy summaries were also reviewed where available. In addition, curriculum pathway information, accreditation details, and public information relating to educational frameworks and international programmes were analysed to better understand the operational and educational contexts of the schools.

The analysis of these documents provided insight into several key dimensions relevant to the study. First, organisational charts and leadership information available through school websites enabled the researcher to examine formal leadership structures, reporting hierarchies, and the distribution of leadership responsibilities within each institution. This supported a clearer understanding of how leadership was formally organised and how leadership roles were distributed across senior leaders, middle leaders, coordinators, and teaching staff.

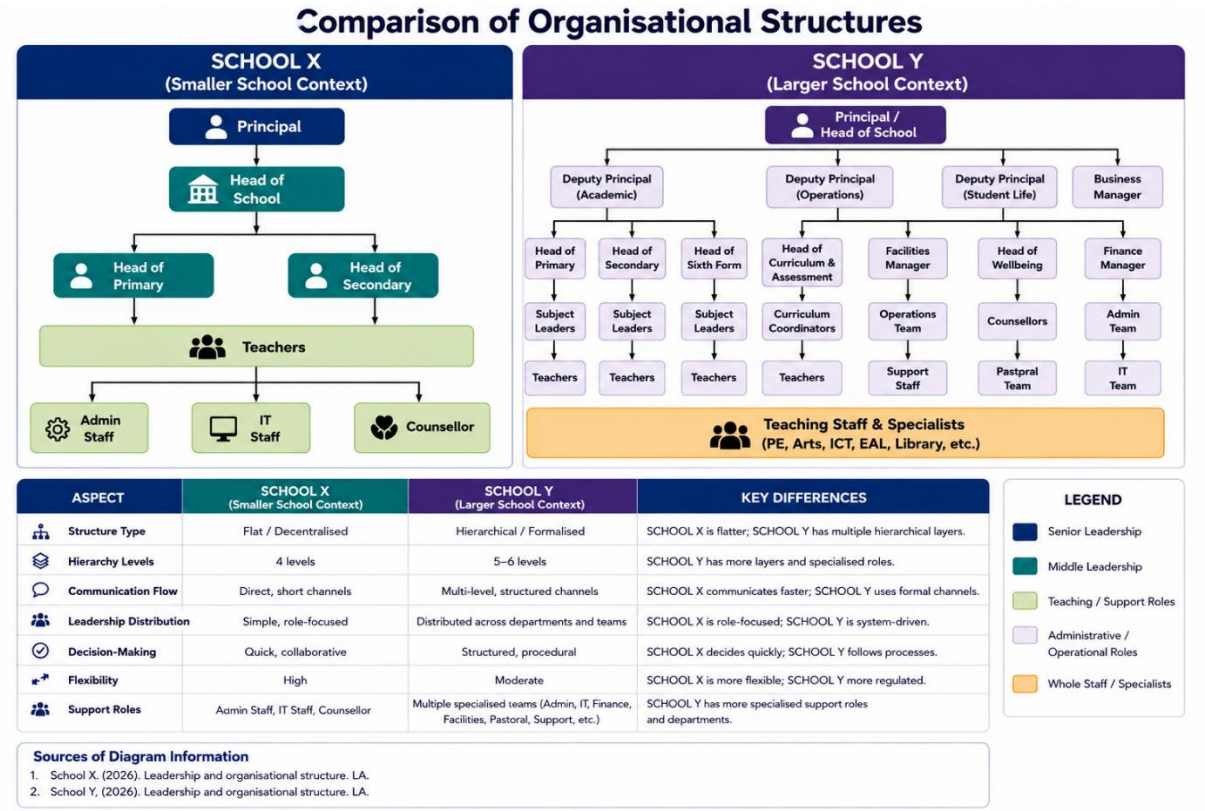


Figure 4.1: Comparison of Organisational Structures

Second, vision and mission statements, school values, and institutional philosophies provided insight into the schools' stated educational priorities and leadership orientations. These documents helped contextualise participants' descriptions of collaboration, communication, teacher involvement, and leadership culture. The analysis also enabled examination of whether institutional narratives regarding collaboration and leadership aligned with participants' lived experiences.



Figure 4.2: Vision, Mission, Values and Philosophy

Third, curriculum information, programme descriptions, and publicly available academic materials contributed to understanding the educational environment in which shared leadership practices operated. As both schools function within international educational contexts, these documents provided important background regarding curriculum expectations, organisational demands, and professional responsibilities that may influence teacher engagement and leadership practices.

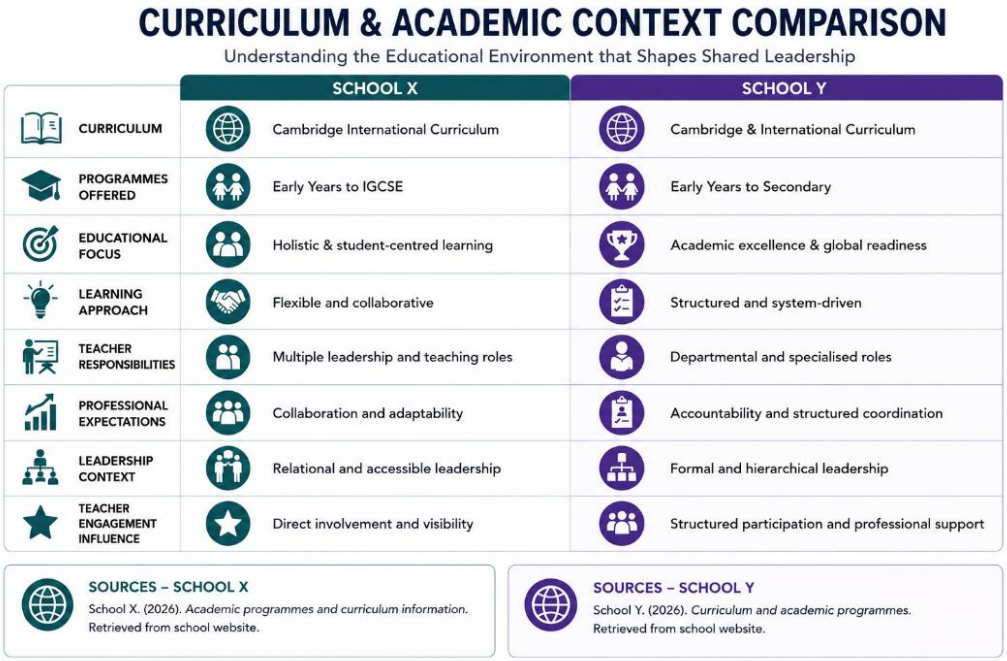


Figure 4.3: Curriculum and Academic Context Comparison

Document analysis also supported the examination of communication structures and collaborative practices within the schools. Publicly available newsletters, school updates, event reports, and published activities offered insight into the visibility of teamwork, collaborative initiatives, staff involvement, and organisational culture. These materials provided indirect evidence of leadership practices and institutional emphasis on collaboration, participation, and professional engagement.

The use of document analysis within this study was not intended to replace participant data but rather to complement and contextualise the findings derived from semi-structured written responses. Participant responses remained the primary source of data, while documentary evidence served to support triangulation and enhance interpretive depth. Through comparing participants' accounts with institutional documents, the researcher was able to identify areas of alignment and divergence between formally communicated leadership structures and the actual experiences reported by participants.

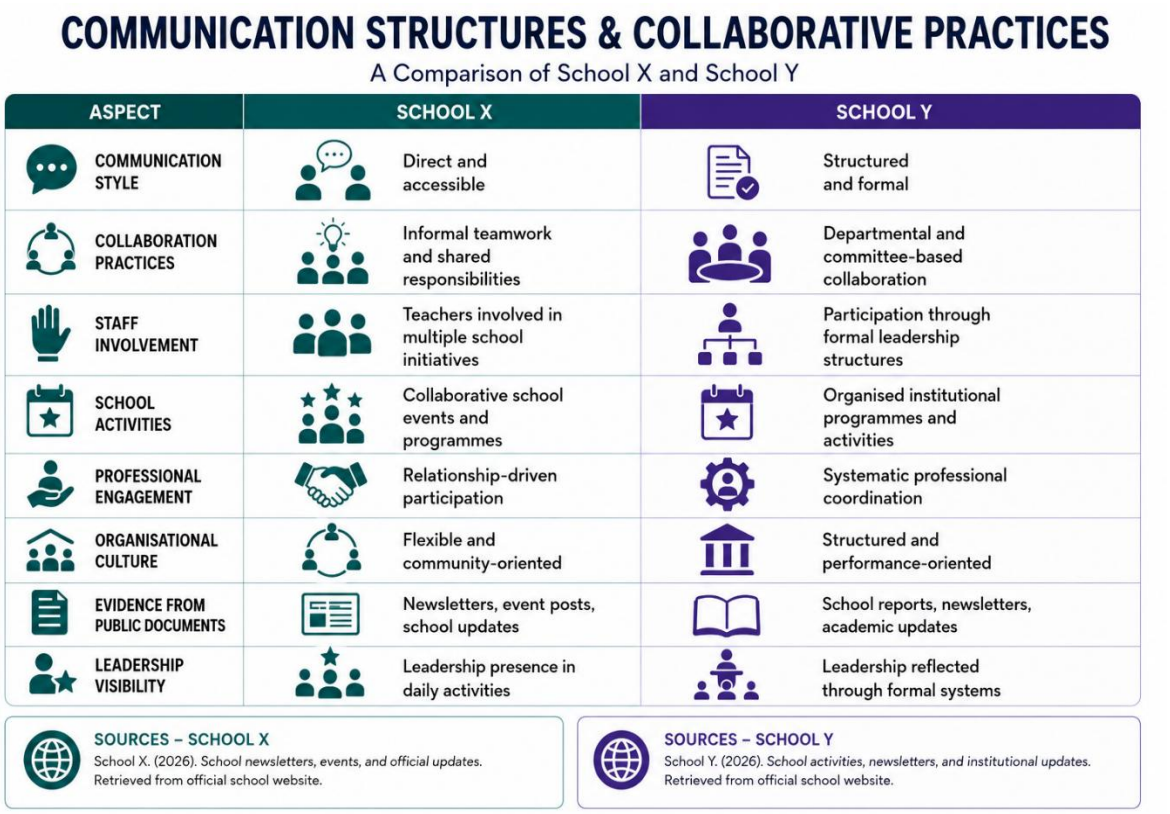


Figure 4.4: Communication Structures and Collaborative Practices

The integration of document analysis strengthened the trustworthiness of the study by contributing to data triangulation, a recognised strategy for enhancing credibility in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). By incorporating multiple sources of evidence, the study achieved a more comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of shared leadership and teacher engagement within the selected international school settings.

PART B: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS & FINDINGS

4.7 Participant Profile

Description of Participants by Role and School

The study involved participants from two international schools in Malaysia, namely Knewton Global Schools Rawang and Sri KDU International School. The participants consisted of senior leaders, middle leaders, and teachers from various academic departments and leadership positions. Their diverse roles and experiences provided valuable perspectives on shared leadership practices and teacher engagement within different school contexts.

Table X: Description of Participants by Role and Experience

School X

Role Level	Participant Code & Position	Teaching / Leadership Experience	Key Leadership Responsibilities
Senior Leadership (SL)	SL1 – Head of School	Extensive leadership experience	Strategic leadership, school vision, shared leadership facilitation
	SL2 – Head of National School	Decades of experience in education	Leadership philosophy, teacher empowerment, staff development
Middle Leadership (ML)	ML1 – Head of Primary International	Experienced	Curriculum leadership, teacher development, student wellbeing
	ML2 – Deputy Head of Secondary	Experienced	Academic coordination, assessment management, teacher growth
Teacher Level (T)	T1 – Primary Teacher	1 year	Homeroom teaching, limited formal leadership responsibilities
	T2 – Bahasa Melayu Teacher	1 year	Subject teaching, collaborative participation
	T3 – Reception Teacher	1 year	Early years teaching, informal involvement in school activities
	T4 – Reception Teacher / Teaching Assistant	1 year	Language support, classroom assistance
	T5 – Primary Teacher	3 years	Year 1 instruction, school event support
	T6 – Teaching Assistant	2 months	Year 5 classroom support, limited teaching experience
	T7 – Mandarin Teacher	8 months	Language instruction, subject coordination

Table Y: Description of Participants by Role and Experience

School Y

Role Level	Participant Code & Position	Experience	Key Leadership Responsibilities
Senior Leadership (SL)	SL1 – Head of School	Extensive	Compassionate leadership, school culture, staff wellbeing
	SL2 – Deputy Principal	Extensive	Strategic empowerment, mentorship, accountability
Middle Leadership (ML)	ML1 – Head of Pastoral Care	Experienced	Student development, discipline, school events
	ML2 – Head of Academic	Experienced	Academic policies, department oversight
	ML3 – Head of Mathematics	Experienced	Curriculum planning, teacher mentoring
	ML4 – Head of LOTE	2 years	Language programmes, curriculum coordination
Teacher Level (T)	T1 – Science Teacher	25+ years, 8 years at school	Extracurricular coordination (photography, athletics)
	T2 – Mandarin Teacher	25+ years, 8 years at school	Photography/videography coordination
	T3 – Science & Math Teacher	Several years	Informal leadership, event coordination
	T4 – English Teacher	10 years (primary & secondary)	No formal leadership role
	T5 – ICT Teacher	3+ years	Assistant House Master

Note. *Participants are categorised into Senior Leadership (SL), Middle Leadership (ML), and Teacher Level (T) based on their roles and responsibilities within School Y.*

4.8 Overview of Themes

Key Themes Identified from Interview Data

Theme 1: Shared Leadership as a Collaborative Practice

Definition: Leadership distributed across multiple levels with meaningful teacher involvement in decision-making.

Key Findings:

- Both schools emphasize shared leadership through collaborative meetings, teacher committees, and distributed responsibilities
- School X: Teachers involved in planning, curriculum discussions, and school improvement initiatives
- School Y: Leadership embedded in daily operations; teachers have autonomy within their areas
- Variations: School X demonstrates more structured collaboration; School Y emphasizes relationship-building and trust as foundations

Supporting Evidence:

- SL1 (School X): "Leadership responsibilities are distributed across different levels to ensure collaboration and collective accountability"
- SL2 (School Y): "Leadership responsibilities are distributed across various teams and committees, ensuring that teachers take ownership"

Theme 2: Teacher Empowerment and Professional Growth

Definition: Systems and opportunities that enable teachers to develop leadership capacity and contribute meaningfully.

Key Findings:

- Professional development is a critical empowerment tool (workshops, training, collaborative planning)
- Leadership opportunities through committees, projects, and mentoring roles build teacher confidence
- Recognition and appreciation strengthen motivation and sense of value
- Mentorship programmes (particularly at School Y) develop emerging leaders

Supporting Evidence:

- ML1 (School X): "Teachers are given opportunities to lead school initiatives, coordinate programmes, and contribute to curriculum development according to their strengths"
- SL2 (School Y): "Training and empowering talented individuals who demonstrate readiness for greater responsibility"

Theme 3: Teacher Engagement and Motivation

Definition: The degree to which teachers feel valued, heard, and committed to school goals.

Key Findings:

- Supportive leadership directly correlates with higher engagement and retention
- Sense of ownership increases when teachers are involved in decision-making early
- Recognition of contributions (both formal and informal) boosts morale
- Workload and time constraints are significant barriers to sustained engagement
- Communication quality affects teacher confidence and willingness to contribute

Indicators of Engagement:

- Proactive participation in meetings and discussions
- Willingness to contribute ideas beyond basic responsibilities
- Positive collaboration with colleagues
- Initiative in school improvement efforts

Indicators of Disengagement:

- Minimal participation and resistance to change
- Lack of enthusiasm and reduced communication
- Reluctance to take on additional responsibilities

Supporting Evidence:

- T1 (School X): "When leaders listen, support, and communicate well with teachers, I feel more comfortable and motivated"
- T3 (School Y): "I do feel a certain sense of ownership towards school goals and initiatives, but not entirely. I believe this depends greatly on how much involvement teachers are given"

Theme 4: Barriers to Shared Leadership Implementation

- Definition: Challenges that limit the effectiveness of shared leadership practices.

Common Barriers Identified:

Table Z: Common Barriers Affecting Shared Leadership and Teacher Engagement

Barrier	Frequency	Impact on Shared Leadership and Teacher Engagement
Time Constraints and Heavy Workload	High	Reduces teachers' capacity for meaningful participation in leadership activities and decision-making processes.
Resistance to Change	Medium	Slows the adoption and implementation of new leadership practices and collaborative initiatives.
Varying Readiness Levels	Medium	Creates inconsistent engagement and participation among staff members.
Communication Gaps	High	Leads to confusion, misunderstandings, and feelings of exclusion among teachers.
Top-Down Decision-Making	Medium–High	Weakens collaborative culture and reduces teachers' sense of ownership and involvement.
Lack of Confidence Among Some Teachers	Medium	Limits teacher participation in leadership roles and shared decision-making opportunities.

Supporting Evidence:

- ML1 (School X): "Time constraints and workload pressures" are main challenges
- T1 (School Y): "Limited opportunities for open discussion, top-down decision-making approaches"

Theme 5: Accountability Within Shared Leadership

Definition: Maintaining quality, consistency, and responsibility while distributing leadership.

Key Findings:

- Clear expectations and roles are essential for accountability
- Regular monitoring and feedback help maintain alignment with school goals
- Trust and empowerment must be balanced with oversight
- Collaborative accountability reduces blame-shifting and strengthens collective responsibility

Strategies Used:

- Setting clear goals and timelines upfront
- Regular follow-up discussions and progress reviews
- Transparent evaluation processes
- Reflective practices and data review

Supporting Evidence:

- SL1 (School X): "Regular follow-ups, collaborative discussions, and reflective practices help maintain alignment with school goals"
- SL2 (School Y): "Support before judgement—Providing guidance, resources, and mentorship before holding individuals accountable"

Theme 6: School Culture and Relationships

Definition: The interpersonal environment and values that underpin leadership practices.

Key Findings:

- Trust and respect are foundational to effective shared leadership
- Open communication and approachability of leaders encourage participation
- Appreciation and recognition strengthen relationships and morale
- Inclusive environment where teachers feel valued as individuals, not just employees

- Differences between schools: Knewton emphasizes collaboration; School Y emphasizes compassion and relationship-building

Supporting Evidence:

- SL1 (School X): "Leadership should not only focus on achieving academic goals but also on caring for the wellbeing and growth of teachers"
- T2 (School Y): "I feel more engaged when leaders ask me about why I do things and how I do them, instead of judging quickly"

Theme 7: Decision-Making Processes

Definition: How schools involve teachers in decisions affecting teaching and learning.

Key Findings:

- Early involvement of teachers in planning increases buy-in and ownership
- Consultation methods include meetings, surveys, informal discussions, and committees
- Challenges: Some teachers report decisions being finalized before consultation occurs
- Variation between schools: School X more structured; School Y more informal and relationship-based
- Teachers want more transparency and earlier involvement in decision-making

Supporting Evidence:

- T2 (School Y): "At times, I have felt excluded when decisions were made without wider consultation among teachers"
- T6 (School X): "Teachers can share any opinions or suggestions at any time by going directly to the principal's office"

Theme 8: Future Directions and Recommendations

Definition: Suggestions from leaders and teachers for strengthening shared leadership.

Key Recommendations:

From School Leaders:

- Expand teacher leadership opportunities and mentorship pathways
- Strengthen professional development aligned with individual growth goals
- Enhance staff wellbeing initiatives
- Improve communication systems and transparency
- Create structured feedback mechanisms

From Teachers:

- Involve teachers earlier in decision-making processes
- Improve communication systems (reduce email overload, create clearer updates)
- Provide more leadership opportunities for all teachers
- Balance workload to enable meaningful participation
- Recognize and celebrate contributions more consistently
- Establish clearer channels for teacher feedback

Supporting Evidence:

- SL1 (School X): "Future plans include creating more structured teacher-led professional sharing sessions and cross-department collaboration"
- T3 (School Y): "Shared leadership could be strengthened by giving teachers more meaningful involvement in decision-making processes"

Summary Table: Cross-School Comparison

DIMENSION	SCHOOL X	SCHOOL Y
Leadership Style	Collaborative, structured	Compassionate, relationship-focused
Teacher Involvement	Formal committees, structured meetings	Informal discussions, open-door policy
Empowerment Focus	Professional development, skill-building	Trust, respect, personal growth
Communication	Regular meetings, clear directives	Open dialogue, approachable leaders
Challenges	Time management, consistency	Balancing autonomy with accountability
Engagement Levels	Generally positive, some workload concerns	Generally positive, some top-down concerns
Future Focus	Expand opportunities, strengthen PD	Enhance mentorship, succession planning

4.9 Theme 1: Participation in Decision-Making

Explanation

Participation in decision-making is a foundational element of shared leadership. Across both schools, teachers report varying levels of involvement in decisions that affect their work. At School X, senior leadership emphasizes that teachers are "regularly involved in discussions regarding curriculum planning, assessment improvements, and school events before final decisions are made" (SL1, 2026). This is reinforced by middle-level leaders who involve teachers "through regular team meetings, collaborative planning sessions, surveys, and professional discussions" (ML1, 2026). Teachers at School X report feeling reasonably included when decisions relate to their roles, with one primary teacher noting that "when teachers have good ideas or solutions, I feel the school gives them a chance to share and contribute" (T1, 2026).

In contrast, School Y presents a more mixed picture. While senior leadership states that teachers are "regularly invited to share their opinions and suggestions," teachers themselves describe the process as "somewhat limited" and "top-down" (T1, 2026). One teacher at School Y observed that "most meetings focus more on informing teachers about decisions rather than encouraging open discussions," indicating that participation often occurs after decisions have already been made (T1, 2026). This suggests a significant gap between leadership intention and teacher perception regarding meaningful participation.

Key Quotes

- "Teachers are involved when the decision is related to their role, subject, class, or school activities... when teachers have good ideas or solutions, I feel the school gives them a chance to share and contribute." (School X - T1, 2026)
- "Leadership practices in this school are generally quite top-down. Most meetings focus more on informing teachers about decisions rather than encouraging open discussions." (School Y- T1, 2026)
- "Teachers and coordinators are regularly consulted during curriculum reviews and planning discussions to ensure decisions are practical, student-centred, and aligned with educational goals." (School X - SL2, 2026)

Comparison Across Schools

School X demonstrates more proactive inclusion of teachers in decision-making processes, with structured opportunities for input before final decisions are made. School Y, while articulating a commitment to shared leadership, appears to struggle with implementation, with teachers feeling consulted after decisions have been finalized. This difference suggests that the timing and authenticity of teacher participation varies significantly between institutions, with implications for teacher perceptions of shared leadership.

4.10 Theme 2: Distribution of Leadership

Explanation

The distribution of leadership responsibilities reveals how schools operationalize shared leadership through formal structures and informal delegation. At School X, leadership is "distributed across different levels to ensure collaboration and collective accountability," with responsibilities allocated through "collaborative planning meetings across departments, teacher-led initiatives and projects, involvement in curriculum and assessment discussions, leadership opportunities through committees and task forces, and open communication between leadership and staff" (SL1, 2026). The delegation process at School X is intentional, with middle-level leaders distributing responsibilities based on "teachers' strengths, interests, and professional growth goals," communicating "clear expectations, timelines, and outcomes from the beginning" (ML1, 2026).

School Y employs a more hierarchical approach to leadership distribution, with explicit emphasis on structured accountability. The deputy principal articulates a philosophy wherein "leadership responsibilities are distributed across various teams and committees, ensuring that teachers take ownership of key initiatives," with department heads and coordinators "granted autonomy to make decisions within their areas" (SL2, 2026). However, School X emphasizes that "everything should always be in black and white — each meeting should be minutes and follow-up conversations need to happen" (ML2, 2026), suggesting a more formalized, documentation-focused approach to delegation compared to School X 's collaborative model.

Key Quotes

- "Leadership responsibilities are distributed across different levels to ensure collaboration and collective accountability." (School X - SL1, 2026)
- "I delegate responsibilities based on teachers' strengths, interests, and professional growth goals. Clear expectations, timelines, and outcomes are communicated from the beginning." (School X - ML1, 2026)
- "Department heads and coordinators are granted autonomy to make decisions within their areas, while my role is to support, guide, and remove obstacles rather than to micromanage." (School Y - SL2, 2026)
- "Everything should always be in black and white — each meeting should be minutes and follow-up conversations need to happen." (School Y- ML2, 2026)

4.11 Theme 3: Communication and Trust

Explanation

Communication quality and interpersonal trust form the relational foundation upon which shared leadership operates. At School X, teachers describe leadership as accessible and responsive, with one primary teacher noting that "the school leaders are open to communication and they listen to teachers. The principal is also open to hearing opinions" (T1, 2026). This openness is supported by institutional practices including SWOT analysis sessions and an open-door policy, creating multiple channels through which teachers can voice concerns and ideas. Teachers at School X report feeling that leadership "believes in" their strengths and capabilities, with one teacher explaining that "when I feel that the leadership trusts me and allows me to work in my own effective way, I become more willing to help beyond my classroom" (T1, 2026).

In contrast, School Y faces significant communication challenges that undermine trust. Teachers report that "communication can sometimes feel overwhelming due to the large number of emails sent throughout the day, making it difficult to keep track of important information" (T1, 2026). More critically, teachers describe a pattern wherein decisions appear "to be finalised before teachers were informed or consulted," creating a sense of exclusion from meaningful participation (T1, 2026). Additionally, one teacher noted that "when contributions are overly controlled, even on collaborative platforms such as MS Teams, it may reduce

confidence and willingness to share ideas openly" (T1, 2026), suggesting that even ostensibly collaborative tools can inhibit authentic participation when oversight is perceived as restrictive.

Key Quotes

- "The school leaders are open to communication and they listen to teachers. The principal is also open to hearing opinions." (School X - T1, 2026)
- "When I feel that the leadership trusts me and allows me to work in my own effective way, I become more willing to help beyond my classroom." (School X - T1, 2026)
- "Leadership practices in this school are generally quite top-down... communication can sometimes feel overwhelming due to the large number of emails." (School Y - T1, 2026)
- "When contributions are overly controlled, even on collaborative platforms such as MS Teams, it may reduce confidence and willingness to share ideas openly." (School Y - T1, 2026)

4.12 Theme 4: Teacher Empowerment

Explanation

Teacher empowerment encompasses the systems, opportunities, and cultural conditions that enable educators to develop professionally and exercise meaningful autonomy. At School X, empowerment is systematized through "professional development and training opportunities, collaborative planning sessions, leadership roles through committees and projects, mentoring and peer support systems, and regular staff feedback and reflection sessions" (SL1, 2026). Critically, School X employs a strength-based approach to empowerment, wherein teachers are assigned responsibilities according to their capabilities rather than deficits. One teacher noted appreciatively that "the school tries to use teachers' strengths rather than focus on their weaknesses," and when leadership demonstrates this trust, teachers "feel more confident to use my strengths and support the school in other areas" (T1, 2026).

School Y frames empowerment through a developmental lens, with senior leadership emphasizing "training and empowering talented individuals who demonstrate readiness for greater responsibility" and "nurturing and guiding those with potential who require development and mentorship" (SL2, 2026). The school has established "mentorship programmes" that "pair emerging leaders with experienced staff for guided development," as well as "leadership rotation" to "provide opportunities for teachers to lead committees, events,

and projects" (SL2, 2024). However, the effectiveness of these systems in fostering genuine empowerment may be constrained by the more hierarchical, top-down communication culture observed at School Y, as noted above.

Key Quotes

- "Teachers are given opportunities to lead school initiatives, coordinate programmes, and contribute to curriculum development according to their strengths and expertise." (School X - SL1, 2026)
- "The school tries to use teachers' strengths rather than focus on their weaknesses." (School X - T1, 2026)
- "Training and empowering talented individuals who demonstrate readiness for greater responsibility... when individuals are treated with dignity and given genuine opportunities to grow, they rise to meet expectations." (School Y - SL2, 2026)

4.13 Theme 5: Impact on Teacher Engagement

Explanation

Shared leadership practices demonstrably influence teacher motivation, organizational commitment, and willingness to contribute beyond minimum job requirements. At School X, teachers who experience genuine participation in decision-making report heightened engagement. One primary teacher articulated this connection, stating: "When the school considers teachers' suggestions, it makes us feel that we are part of the school, not just people working there... This makes me care more about the school's goals and success" (T1, 2026). Similarly, a Bahasa Melayu teacher noted that "being given the opportunity to share my ideas and contribute to decision-making makes me feel valued and responsible for the outcomes," which "encourages me to align my teaching practices with the school's goals and work towards continuous improvement" (T2, 2026). These responses suggest that shared leadership fosters psychological ownership—a critical driver of engagement and retention.

At School Y, engagement is similarly influenced by leadership practices, though with greater variability. Teachers who feel included report higher motivation; one teacher stated: "Yes, I feel a sense of ownership because teachers are included in school activities, programmes, and planning processes" (T5, 2026). However, the more restrictive communication environment at School Y appears to dampen engagement for some. As one teacher observed, "when there is a

lack of communication, transparency, or fairness, it can feel discouraging and affect morale" (T3, 2026). Senior leadership at both schools recognize this relationship explicitly, with one head noting that "teachers are more likely to stay committed and motivated when they feel cared for, appreciated, and emotionally supported" (School Y- SL1, 2026).

Key Quotes

- "When the school considers teachers' suggestions, it makes us feel that we are part of the school, not just people working there. This makes me care more about the school's goals and success." (School X - T1, 2026)
- "Being given the opportunity to share my ideas and contribute to decision-making makes me feel valued and responsible for the outcomes." (School X - T2, 2026)
- "Shared leadership positively impacts teacher morale and motivation because teachers feel trusted, respected, and valued when they are involved in leadership and decision-making." (School Y- ML1, 2026)
- "When there is a lack of communication, transparency, or fairness, it can feel discouraging and affect morale." (School Y- T3, 2026)

4.14 Theme 6: Barriers to Engagement

Explanation

Despite the aspirational articulation of shared leadership at both schools, multiple barriers constrain its full implementation and effectiveness. The most pervasive barrier across both institutions is workload and time constraints. Senior leadership at School X acknowledges that "one of the main challenges is balancing workload and time management while ensuring meaningful participation from staff" (SL1, 2026), and teachers corroborate this concern, noting that "time constraints due to heavy teaching workload" limits their capacity to participate in leadership activities (T2, 2026). Similarly, at School Y, a teacher observed that "heavy workload and limited time can sometimes limit teacher participation in leadership roles and additional responsibilities within the school" (T5, 2026). This structural constraint suggests that shared leadership, while conceptually sound, may be practically limited by the finite time and energy teachers possess.

Resistance to change represents a second significant barrier, with leadership at both schools identifying this challenge. School X 's senior leader notes that "resistance to change" is a

"common challenge," and middle-level leaders report that teachers may be "hesitant to adopt new approaches" (SL1, SL2, 2026). School Y similarly identifies that "some staff may be accustomed to traditional hierarchies and require time to adapt" (SL2, 2026). A third barrier stems from varying levels of teacher readiness and confidence. As one senior leader explained, "different levels of experience, readiness, and confidence among teachers may affect involvement in leadership responsibilities" (School X - SL1, 2026), and some teachers "may not feel confident taking on leadership roles or may fear additional responsibilities" (School X - ML1, 2026).

Communication breakdowns constitute a fourth barrier, particularly acute at School Y. Teachers report that "communication can sometimes feel overwhelming" and that decisions appear finalized "before teachers were informed or consulted" (T1, 2026), which contradicts the premise of shared leadership. Finally, insufficient recognition and feedback inhibit engagement. Teachers at School Y note that "feedback tends to focus more on negative aspects, which can sometimes feel demotivating" (T1, 2026), and recommend that leadership balance this by providing "more positive recognition and appreciation" (T1, 2026). These interconnected barriers suggest that shared leadership requires not only philosophical commitment but also systemic changes in time allocation, communication practices, and recognition culture.

Key Quotes

- "One of the main challenges is balancing workload and time management while ensuring meaningful participation from staff." (School X - SL1, 2026)
- "Time constraints due to heavy teaching workload, limited opportunities for all teachers to voice their opinions" limit participation (School X - T2, 2026)
- "Some staff may be accustomed to traditional hierarchies and require time to adapt." (School Y- SL2, 2026)
- "Feedback tends to focus more on negative aspects, which can sometimes feel demotivating." (School Y- T1, 2026)
- "Balancing communication with more positive recognition and appreciation would help improve morale." (School Y- T1, 2026)

4.15 Cross-Case Findings

The cross-case findings revealed both similarities and contextual differences in the implementation of shared leadership practices and their influence on teacher engagement within School X and School Y. Although both schools demonstrated elements of collaborative leadership, the manner in which shared leadership was enacted differed according to organisational size, structural complexity, communication patterns, and institutional culture.

School X, as a smaller international school context, demonstrated a more relational and flexible leadership environment. Participants frequently described leadership interactions as direct, accessible, and collaborative. Teachers reported greater visibility within the organisation and more immediate involvement in decision-making processes, school initiatives, and leadership-related responsibilities. The smaller organisational structure appeared to facilitate faster communication, closer professional relationships, and stronger interpersonal trust between staff and school leaders. Teacher engagement within this context was commonly associated with feelings of inclusion, recognition, ownership, and direct contribution to school development.

In contrast, School Y reflected a more formalised and hierarchical organisational structure due to its larger institutional size and more complex administrative systems. Leadership responsibilities were distributed across multiple levels, including senior leaders, heads of department, coordinators, and specialised teams. Participants described shared leadership as occurring primarily through formal structures such as committees, departmental collaboration, professional learning communities (PLCs), and institutional processes. While opportunities for teacher participation were present, involvement was often mediated through established organisational systems and formal channels of communication.

Despite these differences, participants from both schools identified communication, leadership support, mutual respect, and opportunities for participation as significant factors influencing teacher engagement. Teachers in both contexts reported higher levels of engagement when they perceived that their contributions were acknowledged, their expertise was valued, and they were given opportunities to participate meaningfully in school processes. Conversely, workload pressures, communication challenges, unclear expectations, and uneven distribution of responsibilities were identified as common barriers affecting engagement across both schools.

The cross-case comparison further highlighted how organisational context shapes leadership experiences. In School X, leadership distribution appeared more interactional and relationship-

driven, whereas in School Y, shared leadership was embedded within formal organisational systems and professional structures. These findings suggest that while both schools practised elements of shared leadership, the implementation and experiences of such practices were strongly influenced by institutional context and organisational design.

TABLE 4.15

CROSS-CASE COMPARISON OF FINDINGS

ASPECT	SCHOOL X	SCHOOL Y
Organisational Structure	Smaller and flexible	Larger and structured
Leadership Style	Relational and collaborative	Formal and system-driven
Communication	Direct and accessible	Structured and hierarchical
Teacher Involvement	Informal and immediate participation	Participation through formal structures
Decision-Making	Faster and collaborative	Procedural and coordinated
Leadership Accessibility	High visibility of leaders	Multiple leadership layers
Teacher Engagement	Ownership and visibility	Professional contribution and support
Main Challenges	Workload and overlapping roles	Bureaucratic processes and communication gaps

4.16 Integration with Document Analysis

Document analysis was integrated into the study to support and contextualise the findings obtained from participants' responses. Publicly accessible institutional documents, including school websites, organisational charts, curriculum information, newsletters, school updates, and published materials, were analysed to examine whether formally communicated leadership structures and institutional values aligned with participants' lived experiences.

The analysis demonstrated several areas of alignment between institutional documents and participants' responses. Organisational charts and leadership information from both schools reflected distributed leadership structures involving senior leaders, middle leaders, coordinators, and teaching staff. These documented structures corresponded with participants' descriptions of collaborative responsibilities, leadership involvement, and professional participation within the schools.

Vision and mission statements from both schools also reflected strong emphasis on collaboration, educational excellence, student-centred learning, and professional growth. Participants' responses generally supported these institutional narratives, particularly in relation to teamwork, communication, and shared responsibilities. In School X, participants frequently described a collaborative and relational working environment, which aligned with publicly communicated values emphasising inclusivity, innovation, and community. Similarly, participants from School Y described structured collaboration and professional coordination, reflecting the school's institutional emphasis on academic excellence, organisational systems, and global educational standards.

Publicly available newsletters, school updates, and event reports further supported participants' accounts regarding staff involvement and collaborative school culture. These documents demonstrated evidence of teacher participation in school programmes, curriculum initiatives, student activities, and institutional events. Such materials provided indirect evidence of leadership practices and reinforced participants' descriptions of collaborative engagement within both schools.

At the same time, the integration of document analysis revealed that formal leadership structures alone did not fully represent teachers' lived experiences of shared leadership. While institutional documents outlined leadership frameworks and collaborative intentions, participants' responses provided deeper insight into how these structures functioned in practice. This distinction highlights the importance of combining documentary evidence with qualitative participant data to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of leadership experiences within educational organisations.

The integration of document analysis therefore strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the study through triangulation, enabling findings from participant responses to be supported and contextualised through multiple sources of evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

4.17 Summary of Findings

This chapter presented the findings generated from the thematic analysis of participants' semi-structured written responses, supported by document analysis conducted across School X and School Y. The analysis provided an in-depth exploration of how shared leadership practices are experienced within international school contexts and how such practices influence teacher engagement. Through the integration of participant perspectives and documentary evidence,

the chapter developed a comprehensive understanding of the organisational, relational, and structural dimensions shaping leadership experiences within both schools.

The findings demonstrated that shared leadership plays a significant role in influencing teacher engagement; however, the ways in which these leadership practices are enacted and experienced vary considerably according to organisational context, leadership structures, institutional culture, and communication practices. Across both schools, participants consistently emphasised the importance of collaborative leadership approaches that encourage professional involvement, participation in decision-making, mutual trust, and supportive communication. Teachers were more likely to demonstrate positive engagement when they perceived that their professional voices were acknowledged, their expertise was respected, and their contributions were meaningfully incorporated into school processes and initiatives.

Several interconnected themes emerged throughout the analysis. These included participation in decision-making, communication and trust, leadership accessibility, teacher empowerment, collaboration, and professional engagement. Collectively, these themes illustrate that teacher engagement extends beyond individual motivation and is strongly influenced by organisational relationships, leadership practices, and opportunities for professional participation. Participants from both schools frequently associated engagement with feelings of inclusion, ownership, professional recognition, and relational support within the school environment.

The analysis also highlighted important contextual distinctions between the two case study schools. School X reflected a comparatively smaller and more flexible organisational environment characterised by closer interpersonal relationships, direct communication, and accessible leadership practices. Participants within this context frequently described leadership as relational, collaborative, and interactional in nature. Shared leadership was often experienced informally through direct involvement in school initiatives, collaborative discussions, and collective responsibilities. Teachers in School X commonly reported stronger visibility within the organisation and greater immediacy in communication and decision-making processes.

In contrast, School Y demonstrated a larger and more structurally formalised organisational context characterised by clearer hierarchies, established procedures, and multiple leadership layers. Within this environment, shared leadership practices were generally embedded within formal organisational systems, including committees, departmental structures, professional learning communities (PLCs), and coordinated leadership frameworks. Participants from

School Y frequently associated engagement with professional support, institutional coordination, role clarity, and structured opportunities for participation. Although collaboration remained present, leadership interactions were more procedural and system-oriented compared to the more relational dynamics observed in School X.

Despite these contextual differences, the findings revealed several common patterns across both schools. Communication, leadership support, mutual respect, collaborative culture, and opportunities for professional contribution emerged as critical factors influencing teacher engagement regardless of institutional setting. Participants consistently reported that supportive leadership practices fostered stronger professional commitment, increased motivation, and greater willingness to contribute beyond formal teaching responsibilities. Conversely, barriers such as excessive workload, communication gaps, uneven distribution of responsibilities, and unclear expectations were identified as factors that could negatively affect engagement within both contexts.

The integration of document analysis further strengthened the findings by providing contextual and organisational evidence that complemented participants' responses. Publicly accessible institutional documents, including organisational charts, school websites, newsletters, curriculum information, and published materials, demonstrated alignment between formally communicated institutional values and participants' descriptions of leadership and collaboration practices. At the same time, the analysis highlighted that formal leadership structures alone do not fully capture teachers' lived experiences of shared leadership. While institutional documents reflected intended leadership frameworks and collaborative priorities, participant responses provided deeper insight into how these structures were interpreted, experienced, and enacted in practice.

The triangulation of participant data and documentary evidence enhanced the credibility, trustworthiness, and interpretive depth of the study. The findings collectively suggest that shared leadership is not a uniform or standardised practice but rather a contextually shaped process influenced by organisational size, leadership accessibility, institutional culture, professional relationships, and structural conditions. The study therefore contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how shared leadership functions within international school environments and how it influences teacher engagement across different organisational contexts.

In addressing the research questions, the findings demonstrate that shared leadership practices have meaningful implications for teacher engagement, professional participation, and organisational culture within international schools. The chapter establishes an empirical foundation for the subsequent discussion chapter, which will critically interpret the findings in relation to existing literature, theoretical perspectives, and implications for educational leadership practice, policy, and future research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT/FUTURE RESEARCH

5.1 Discussion and Implications of Results & Findings

Synthesis of Key Findings

This study provides empirical qualitative evidence elucidating the multifaceted mechanisms through which shared leadership practices facilitate teacher engagement within international school contexts. Through systematic thematic analysis of participant narratives across two distinct institutional settings, this research substantiates the theoretical proposition that leadership practices transcending conventional hierarchical paradigms engender measurable enhancements in teachers' professional engagement, collaborative capacity, and organisational commitment. The findings corroborate contemporary leadership scholarship positing that organisational leadership increasingly manifests as a relational, participatory, and distributive phenomenon rather than as authority concentrated exclusively within formal positional roles (Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2020).

Meaningful Participation and Professional Agency

A particularly salient finding concerns the instrumental significance of authentic participation in organisational decision-making processes. Participants from both research sites consistently articulated that substantive opportunities to contribute ideational input, engage in deliberative discussions, and exercise influence over school initiatives substantially enhanced their perceived professional value, sense of organisational ownership, and agentic capacity. This empirical observation aligns robustly with distributed leadership theoretical frameworks, which posit that leadership emerges organically through interactive dynamics and collaborative praxis distributed across organisational actors rather than through positional authority as a singular determinant (Spillane, 2006). Teachers who conceptualised themselves as consequential contributors to institutional processes demonstrated markedly elevated levels of intrinsic motivation, professional commitment, and proactive engagement with organisational improvement trajectories.

Relational Trust and Communication as Foundational Mechanisms

The findings further illuminate the pivotal role of relational trust and communicative transparency as essential antecedent conditions for shared leadership effectiveness. Participants consistently reported elevated engagement experiences when leader-staff communication demonstrated transparency, reciprocal respect, and substantive support. Relational trust functioned as a foundational prerequisite enabling collaborative knowledge production, professional dialogue, and meaningful leadership participation. These empirical observations extend prior theoretical work demonstrating that relational trust constitutes a significant predictor of school effectiveness, teacher morale, professional collaboration, and organisational resilience (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Conversely, discontinuous communication patterns, ambiguous role expectations, and insufficient feedback mechanisms adversely influenced teachers' perceptions of leadership legitimacy and substantially diminished engagement trajectories.

Organisational Structure and Leadership Accessibility

A further significant implication emerges regarding the relationship between organisational structure and leadership accessibility. School X manifested a comparatively fluid and relationally-oriented leadership environment characterised by unmediated communicative channels and proximate interpersonal dynamics between teaching staff and institutional leaders. Conversely, School Y reflected a more hierarchically stratified and procedurally formalised organisational configuration incorporating multiple leadership tiers and bureaucratic coordination mechanisms. Notably, notwithstanding these structural divergences, both institutional contexts demonstrated that teachers prioritise leadership practices acknowledging pedagogical expertise, facilitating collaborative engagement, and instantiating substantive opportunities for meaningful participation. This pattern suggests that effective shared leadership implementation transcends organisational scale and structural morphology, instead contingent upon how leadership praxis is enacted within specific institutional cultures and contextual realities.

Professional Identity, Empowerment, and Emotional Investment

The study further establishes that shared leadership practices substantially strengthen professional identity construction, organisational ownership, and teacher empowerment, thereby augmenting engagement intensity. Teachers articulated notably heightened engagement when experiencing institutional trust to exercise leadership responsibilities

extending beyond conventional classroom pedagogy. Opportunities to facilitate school initiatives, engage in collegial collaboration, and participate in institutional development endeavours cultivated substantially deeper emotional and professional investment in organisational objectives. These empirical findings operationalise Kahn's (1990) multidimensional conceptualisation of engagement as the simultaneous emotional, cognitive, and behavioural mobilisation individuals invest within professional roles.

Challenges and Unintended Consequences

Concurrently, the findings illuminate substantive challenges attending shared leadership implementation. Participants identified consequential difficulties including workload intensification, role ambiguity, inequitable responsibility distribution, and episodic communication inadequacies. These observations suggest that shared leadership may precipitate unanticipated organisational pressures absent sufficient role clarity, institutional support mechanisms, and recognition infrastructure. The findings therefore corroborate extant literature positing that shared leadership necessitates meticulous organisational coordination and enabling conditions to function optimally (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Implications for International School Leadership

The findings carry substantial implications for international school leadership scholarship and practice. International schools operate within highly dynamic, multicultural, and organisationally complex ecosystems characterised by considerable environmental volatility. Within such contexts, leadership praxis fostering collaboration, inclusive participation, and professional trust potentially strengthens teacher retention trajectories, organisational cohesion, and professional commitment. Given contemporary challenges regarding teacher recruitment, staff mobility, and organisational sustainability within the international school sector, the study posits that shared leadership may constitute a strategically significant mechanism for strengthening organisational culture and advancing long-term institutional efficacy.

Contribution to Educational Leadership Scholarship

The study addresses several substantive lacunae within existing educational leadership literature. First, it foregrounds teacher engagement as a primary analytical focus rather than emphasising solely student outcomes or leadership structural configurations. Second, it contributes rich qualitative phenomenological insight into teachers' lived experiences of shared leadership, thereby extending beyond predominantly quantitative empirical approaches. Third,

the study furnishes context-specific evidence from international school settings within Malaysia, a geographical and institutional context remaining significantly underrepresented within educational leadership scholarship.

Theoretical Synthesis

Synthesising these findings, the study substantiates that shared leadership functions optimally when instantiated as a relational and collaborative organisational process rather than as merely a structural distribution mechanism. Leadership distribution in isolation proves insufficient to guarantee positive outcomes; rather, the aggregated influence of interpersonal relationship quality, communicative processes, professional trust architecture, and organisational culture collectively determine how leadership manifests experientially and how teacher engagement trajectories develop within school communities.

5.2 Evaluation: Strengths and Limitations

Methodological Strengths

This study demonstrates several noteworthy methodological strengths contributing to its scholarly validity and practical utility. The qualitative multiple-case study design constitutes a primary methodological strength, enabling comprehensive phenomenological exploration of teachers' lived experiences and situated perceptions regarding shared leadership and professional engagement. In contradistinction to predominantly quantitative methodologies centring on measurable variables and statistical associations, the qualitative approach facilitated capture of nuanced, contextually-embedded insights into how leadership practices are interpreted, negotiated, and experienced within naturalistic educational settings.

A second significant methodological strength resides in the deliberate prioritisation of teacher perspectives and experiential narratives. Extant educational leadership literature predominantly foregrounds principal perspectives, leadership structural arrangements, or distal organisational outcomes. By centering teachers' voices and positioning participant narratives as primary epistemological sources, this study generates substantively deeper understanding of how leadership practices influence professional experiences, intrinsic motivation, collaborative engagement, and organisational commitment within school communities. This participant-centric epistemological approach substantially enhances the authenticity and contextual saturation of the findings.

The incorporation of two distinct international school contexts strengthened analytical sophistication through systematic cross-case comparison. Comparative analysis of School X and School Y facilitated identification of both convergent patterns and context-contingent variations in leadership practice manifestations and teacher engagement trajectories. This comparative analytical architecture augmented the interpretive richness and theoretical transferability of the study.

Furthermore, methodological triangulation through document analysis strengthened findings credibility and epistemic trustworthiness. Publicly accessible institutional documents—including organisational charts, institutional websites, institutional communications, and policy documentation—provided contextual corroboration for participant testimonies and enabled systematic comparison between official institutional narratives and teachers' lived experiences.

Research Limitations

Despite these strengths, several substantive limitations warrant explicit acknowledgment. First, the study's scope circumscription to two international school sites within Malaysia constrains generalisation potential. Organisational cultures and leadership practice configurations demonstrate considerable heterogeneity across institutions and educational systems. Consequently, findings may not demonstrate full transferability to broader international school populations or national educational contexts. However, qualitative research epistemology prioritises contextual understanding and analytical insight over statistical generalisation (Yin, 2018).

Second, the research design's reliance upon self-reported participant responses introduces potential measurement limitations. Although participants received encouragement to provide candid and reflective responses, perceptions may have been systematically influenced by personal biographical trajectories, existing organisational relationships, or confidentiality-related concerns. Self-reported data therefore inherently carry susceptibility to subjective bias and selective interpretive filtering.

Third, institutional constraints limited researcher access to confidential organisational documents. Document analysis consequently remained restricted to publicly disseminated and non-sensitive institutional materials. While this limitation did not fundamentally compromise study integrity, expanded access to confidential organisational documentation might have

furnished additional phenomenological insight into internal leadership processes and decision-making architectures.

A fourth limitation concerns researcher positionality within one research site. Although reflexivity protocols and ethical safeguards were systematically maintained throughout the investigation, the possibility of researcher bias cannot be entirely nullified within qualitative inquiry paradigms. Consequently, systematic coding procedures, data triangulation mechanisms, and reflexive practice were deliberately employed to strengthen credibility and minimise interpretive distortion.

Finally, the study captures participants' experiences as a temporal snapshot within specific historical moments. Leadership practices and teacher engagement constitute dynamic phenomena subject to evolution through organisational transitions, leadership succession events, and broader educational system developments. Longitudinal investigation employing temporal tracking mechanisms might furnish additional phenomenological insight into how shared leadership evolves and influences engagement trajectories across extended timeframes.

5.3 Recommendations for Improvement

Based upon the empirical findings and analytical conclusions, the following recommendations are advanced to strengthen shared leadership practice implementation and augment teacher engagement within international school contexts.

First, institutional leaders should substantially expand opportunities for substantive teacher participation in organisational decision-making processes. Teachers should not be confined to post-hoc notification roles following decisional implementation; rather, they should constitute active contributors to deliberative processes, strategic planning, and collaborative problem-resolution. Authentic participatory engagement strengthens professional agency, organisational ownership, and institutional commitment.

Second, schools should prioritise systematic development of relational trust infrastructure and communicative transparency mechanisms. Leadership practices instantiating openness, reciprocal respect, constructive feedback, and consistent communication substantially influence organisational culture quality and teacher engagement intensity. Institutional leaders should therefore establish regularised communication channels facilitating professional dialogue, reflective practice, and collegial interaction.

Third, leadership responsibility distribution should be characterised by explicitness and equitable allocation. While shared leadership mechanisms can substantially empower teachers, excessive or ambiguously-defined responsibilities may precipitate workload stress and role ambiguity. Schools should therefore ensure that distributed leadership roles incorporate appropriate institutional support, professional recognition, unambiguous role definition, and sustainable performance expectations.

Fourth, international schools should strengthen professional collaboration infrastructure through structured professional learning communities (PLCs), collaborative planning mechanisms, and interdisciplinary team configurations. Collaborative professional environments facilitate knowledge exchange, collegial support, and collective responsibility for institutional improvement trajectories.

Fifth, institutional leaders should systematically recognise and value teachers' pedagogical expertise and professional contributions. Professional recognition, institutional appreciation, and meaningful professional development opportunities substantially influence teacher morale and engagement intensity. Leadership practice should therefore cultivate institutional cultures where teachers experience respect, institutional trust, and professional valuation.

Finally, institutional leadership development programming should incorporate substantive training in collaborative leadership praxis, communicative competence, conflict management, and relational leadership approaches. Capacity-building across multiple organisational levels supports more sustainable and inclusive leadership structures within schools.

5.4 Recommendations for Further Studies

Several trajectories for future research investigation emerge from this study's findings and limitations.

First, future investigations could expand research scope across substantially larger numbers of international schools to examine whether identified patterns of shared leadership and teacher engagement demonstrate consistency across diverse organisational configurations and cultural contexts. Comparative investigations involving multiple countries or distinct educational systems would strengthen understanding of contextual influences on leadership practice manifestations.

Second, future research could employ mixed-methods approaches integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Quantitative analysis might illuminate broader statistical patterns

and associative relationships, while qualitative investigation could continue furnishing contextually-rich phenomenological insight into teachers' lived experiences.

Third, longitudinal investigations examining leadership practice evolution and teacher engagement trajectories across extended timeframes would contribute substantial understanding of how organisational cultures and leadership relationships develop and transform within school communities.

Fourth, future studies could systematically incorporate perspectives from multiple organisational stakeholders including school principals, middle-tier leaders, students, and parent communities. Multi-stakeholder perspectives would furnish more comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics within educational organisations.

Fifth, further investigations could examine shared leadership's relationship to additional organisational outcomes including teacher retention trajectories, professional well-being, organisational commitment, innovation capacity, and school effectiveness indicators.

Finally, future research specifically examining Malaysian international schools remains substantively important given the relative scarcity of locally-grounded evidence within educational leadership literature. Continued investigation within this geographical and institutional context would strengthen contextually-relevant understanding and facilitate evidence-based leadership practice within the expanding international school sector.

5.5 Conclusion

This qualitative multiple-case study examined the relationship between shared leadership and teacher engagement within international school contexts, incorporating two distinct institutional sites. The empirical findings substantiate that shared leadership practices substantially influence teachers' professional experiences, intrinsic motivation, collaborative engagement, and organisational commitment.

The study established that teachers experience elevated engagement when leadership practices instantiate meaningful participation, communicative transparency, relational trust, collaborative engagement, professional recognition, and teacher empowerment. Shared leadership functions not merely as a structural responsibility distribution mechanism but as a relational and organisational process fundamentally shaped by interpersonal dynamics, organisational culture configurations, and contextual realities.

Concurrently, the findings illuminate that shared leadership implementation presents substantive challenges, particularly when leadership responsibilities lack clarity, demonstrate unequal distribution, or receive insufficient institutional support. Shared leadership effectiveness therefore depends not solely on structural configurations but rather on the aggregated influence of relationship quality, communicative practices, professional trust architecture, and institutional support systems.

By systematically centering teachers' lived experiences and phenomenological perspectives, this study contributes significant qualitative insight to educational leadership scholarship and addresses substantive gaps within existing literature, particularly within the underexplored Malaysian international school context. The study further advances understanding of how leadership praxis influences teacher engagement within increasingly complex and multicultural educational environments.

Ultimately, the study demonstrates that schools pursuing sustainable institutional improvement and robust professional culture must transcend predominantly hierarchical leadership paradigms towards more collaborative, inclusive, and relationally-grounded leadership approaches. When teachers experience genuine empowerment, institutional respect, and substantive inclusion within organisational processes, schools cultivate substantially greater capacity for teacher engagement, organisational resilience, and sustained meaningful educational improvement.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Research Title

Shared Leadership and Teacher Engagement in International Schools: A Qualitative Study

Researcher

Mr Teo Kok Choon
Doctor of Education Candidate
European International University (EIU-Paris)

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore teachers' perceptions of shared leadership and teacher engagement in international schools.

Participation

You are invited to participate in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30–45 minutes.

Confidentiality

All information shared will remain confidential and used only for academic purposes.

Voluntary Participation

Participation is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Consent

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Participant Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research Title

Shared Leadership and Teacher Engagement in International Schools: A Qualitative Study

Researcher

Mr Teo Kok Choon
Doctor of Education Candidate
European International University (EIU-Paris)

Introduction Script

Good day and thank you for participating in this interview.

This interview is conducted as part of a doctoral research study examining shared leadership and teacher engagement in international schools.

The interview will take approximately 30–45 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and all responses will remain confidential. No names or identifying information will be used in the research report.

With your permission, this interview will be audio recorded for research purposes only.

Do you agree to proceed with the interview?

Interview Sections

Section A: Background Information

1. How long have you been teaching in this school?
2. What is your current teaching role or responsibility?

Section B: Shared Leadership Practices

3. How would you describe leadership practices in your school?
4. In what ways are teachers involved in decision-making?
5. Can you share examples of collaborative leadership practices in your school?

Section C: Teacher Engagement

6. How do leadership practices influence your motivation at work?
7. Do you feel valued and supported by school leadership? Why?
8. How does shared leadership affect your commitment to the school?

Section D: Supporting and Hindering Factors

9. What factors encourage teacher engagement in your school?
10. What challenges or barriers affect teacher engagement?

Section E: Recommendations

11. What improvements would you suggest regarding leadership practices in the school?
12. How can schools strengthen teacher engagement?

Closing Statement

Thank you for your valuable participation and contribution to this research study.

Your responses will be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes.

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

SET A - TEACHER

Study Title: Shared Leadership and Teacher Engagement in International Schools: A Qualitative Study

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Background

1. Can you briefly describe your teaching role and how long you have worked in this school?
2. What leadership responsibilities, if any, do you currently hold?

Shared Leadership Practices

3. How would you describe leadership practices in this school?
4. In what ways are teachers involved in decision-making processes?
5. Can you share an example where your ideas or suggestions were considered by school leaders?
6. How are responsibilities delegated among staff members?

Teacher Engagement

7. How do leadership practices in this school affect your motivation to work?
8. Do you feel a sense of ownership toward school goals and initiatives? Why or why not?
9. How does leadership influence your willingness to contribute beyond classroom teaching?
10. What factors make you feel more engaged in your role?

Challenges

11. What challenges, if any, limit teacher participation in leadership?
12. Have you ever felt excluded from important decisions? Please explain.

Recommendations

13. What could school leaders do to improve teacher engagement?
14. What changes would strengthen shared leadership in this school?

Set B – MIDDLE LEVEL LEADER

Background

1. Please describe your leadership role in the school.

Leadership Practices

2. How do you involve teachers in planning and decision-making?
3. What strategies do you use to build collaboration within your team?
4. How do you delegate responsibilities while maintaining accountability?

Engagement

5. In your experience, how does shared leadership influence teacher morale and motivation?
6. What signs indicate that teachers are engaged or disengaged?

Challenges

7. What barriers make shared leadership difficult to implement?
8. How do you manage resistance or lack of participation?

Recommendations

9. What improvements would help strengthen teacher engagement?

Set C – SENIOR LEADER

Background

1. Can you describe your leadership philosophy?

Shared Leadership Vision

2. How is shared leadership practised in this school?
3. Why is teacher involvement important in school leadership?
4. What systems are in place to empower teachers?

Teacher Engagement

5. How do you believe leadership affects teacher engagement and retention?
6. What initiatives have been successful in improving staff motivation?

Challenges

7. What difficulties do you face in sustaining shared leadership?
8. How do you balance accountability with distributed decision-making?

Recommendations

9. What future leadership strategies do you plan to enhance engagement?

APPENDIX D: CODING AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS SAMPLES

E1. Sample Interview Transcript Excerpts and Initial Coding

Participant Excerpt	Initial Code
"Teachers are involved through meetings, discussions, and sharing ideas before decisions are made."	Teacher participation
"Supportive leadership motivates me because I feel respected and supported."	Leadership support
"Heavy workload and lack of time can limit teacher participation."	Workload barrier
"The principal is very open to listening to teachers."	Open communication
"I feel ownership because teachers are included in school activities and planning."	Sense of ownership
"Sometimes decisions are made without enough teacher discussion."	Limited consultation
"Recognition of teachers' efforts improves motivation."	Teacher recognition
"Shared leadership can be strengthened through better communication and teamwork."	Collaboration improvement

E2. Open Coding Process

Raw Data	Open Code
"Leadership practices are supportive and collaborative."	Collaborative leadership
"Teachers are encouraged to share opinions."	Teacher voice
"Clear communication increases engagement."	Effective communication
"Workload reduces participation in leadership."	Time constraints
"Teachers feel more motivated when appreciated."	Feeling valued
"Some decisions are already finalised before teachers are informed."	Top-down decision-making
"Supportive leaders encourage contribution beyond teaching."	Leadership encouragement
"Teachers participate actively in school programmes."	Active involvement

E3. Category Development

Codes	Categories
Teacher voice, participation, collaboration	Shared leadership practices
Feeling valued, appreciation, motivation	Teacher motivation
Open communication, trust, support	Supportive leadership culture
Time constraints, workload, lack of time	Leadership barriers
Limited consultation, top-down decisions	Exclusion from decision-making
Active involvement, ownership, contribution	Teacher engagement

E4. Theme Development

Categories	Emerging Themes
Shared leadership practices, supportive leadership culture	**Collaborative Leadership Environment**
Teacher motivation, active involvement, ownership	**Teacher Engagement and Commitment**
Leadership barriers, exclusion from decision-making	**Challenges in Shared Leadership**
Open communication, trust, recognition	**Positive Organisational Culture**
Time constraints, workload	**Structural and Operational Barriers**

E5. Sample Thematic Analysis Matrix

Theme	Supporting Evidence from Participants
Collaborative Leadership Environment	Teachers described leadership as supportive, open, and encouraging collaboration.
Teacher Engagement and Commitment	Participants reported higher motivation when they felt trusted, respected, and involved.
Challenges in Shared Leadership	Some teachers experienced limited consultation and top-down decision-making.
Positive Organisational Culture	Recognition, communication, and teamwork contributed to positive engagement.
Structural and Operational Barriers	Heavy workload and time limitations reduced participation in leadership activities.

E6. Sample Final Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme 1: Shared Leadership Practices



Sub-Themes:

- Teacher participation
- Collaborative decision-making
- Delegation of responsibilities
- Open communication

Theme 2: Teacher Engagement



Sub-Themes:

- Motivation and morale
- Sense of ownership
- Commitment to school goals
- Contribution beyond classroom teaching

Theme 3: Challenges to Shared Leadership



Sub-Themes:

- Heavy workload
- Time constraints
- Top-down leadership practices
- Limited teacher voice

Theme 4: Recommendations for Improvement



Sub-Themes:

- Better communication
- Increased teacher involvement
- Recognition and appreciation
- Professional development opportunities

E7. Sample Narrative Explanation



PROCESS OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The thematic analysis process involved several stages, beginning with familiarisation of the interview transcripts through repeated reading. Initial open coding was conducted by identifying meaningful statements related to shared leadership and teacher engagement. Similar codes were then grouped into broader categories such as leadership support, teacher participation, communication, and workload challenges. These categories were further refined into major themes that reflected participants' lived experiences and perceptions regarding shared leadership practices within international schools.



KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings revealed that collaborative leadership practices, supportive communication, and teacher recognition positively influenced teacher engagement. However, barriers such as workload, time limitations, and top-down decision-making reduced opportunities for meaningful participation. These themes formed the basis for the study's discussion and recommendations.

APPENDIX E: ETHICS APPROVAL DOCUMENTS

E1. Research Ethics Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research practices and guidelines for qualitative educational research. Participants were informed about the purpose, objectives, and procedures of the study prior to the interviews. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants were given the freedom to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences.

The researcher ensured that all information collected during the study was treated with confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes. To protect the identities of participants and institutions, pseudonyms were used throughout the study. The participating schools were referred to as **School X** and **School Y**, while participants were identified using coded labels such as **SL (Senior Leadership)**, **ML (Middle Leadership)**, and **T (Teacher)**.

All interview responses and research data were securely managed and accessed only by the researcher. The findings presented in this study were reported objectively and ethically to ensure the trustworthiness and integrity of the research process.

E2. Participant Consent Statement

Prior to participation, all participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the research study. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews were conducted.

Participants were also informed that:

- Participation was voluntary.
- They could refuse to answer any question.
- They could withdraw from the study at any time.
- The collected data would only be used for academic research purposes.
- No real names of participants or schools would be disclosed in the thesis.

E3. Confidentiality and Anonymity Statement

To maintain confidentiality and protect participants' identities, pseudonyms and participant codes were used throughout this study. The names of the participating schools were replaced with **School X** and **School Y**. Participants were identified according to their leadership roles using the following coding system:

- **SL** – Senior Leadership
- **ML** – Middle Leadership
- **T** – Teacher Participants

Examples include:

- SL1 (Senior Leader 1)
- ML2 (Middle Leader 2)
- T3 (Teacher 3)

No identifying personal information was disclosed in the reporting of findings, interview excerpts, or thematic analysis.

E4. Interview Protocol Statement

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method in this study. The interview questions focused on participants' experiences and perceptions regarding shared leadership practices and teacher engagement within international school settings.

The interview protocol consisted of the following sections:

1. Background Information
2. Shared Leadership Practices
3. Teacher Engagement
4. Challenges in Shared Leadership
5. Recommendations for Improvement

Interviews were conducted in a respectful and professional manner, allowing participants to express their opinions openly and honestly.

E5. Data Management Statement

All interview notes, transcripts, and related research materials were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes. Data collected during the research process were handled responsibly to ensure participant confidentiality and research integrity.

Only the researcher had access to the collected data, and all information was reported anonymously in the thesis.

APPENDIX F: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK DIAGRAM

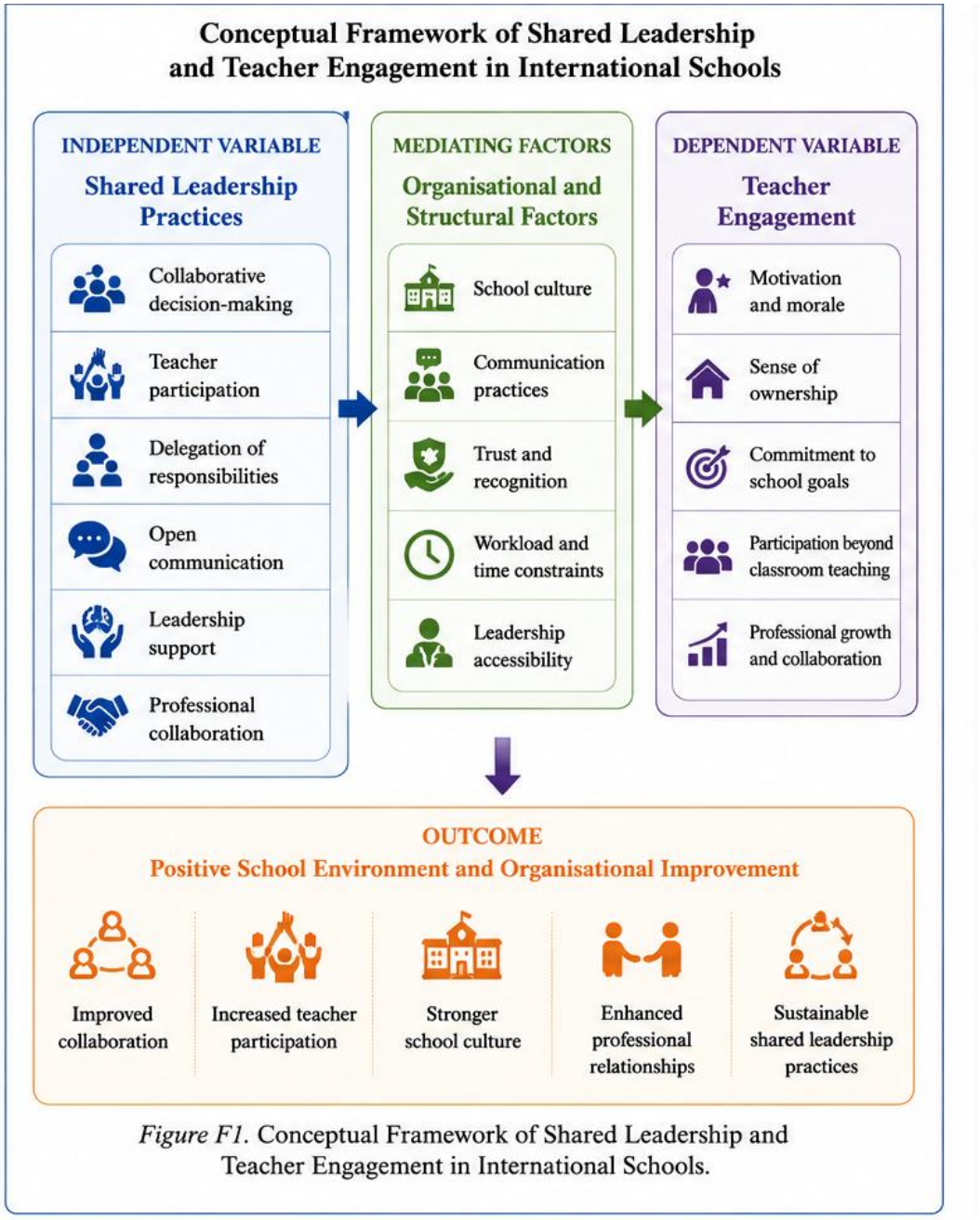


Figure F1. Conceptual Framework of Shared Leadership and Teacher Engagement in International Schools.

Figure F1 illustrates the conceptual framework of the study, showing the relationship between shared leadership practices and teacher engagement within international schools. The framework demonstrates how collaborative leadership practices, communication, teacher participation, and organisational factors influence teacher motivation, commitment, and involvement, ultimately contributing to a positive school environment and organisational improvement.

APPENDIX G: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK DIAGRAM

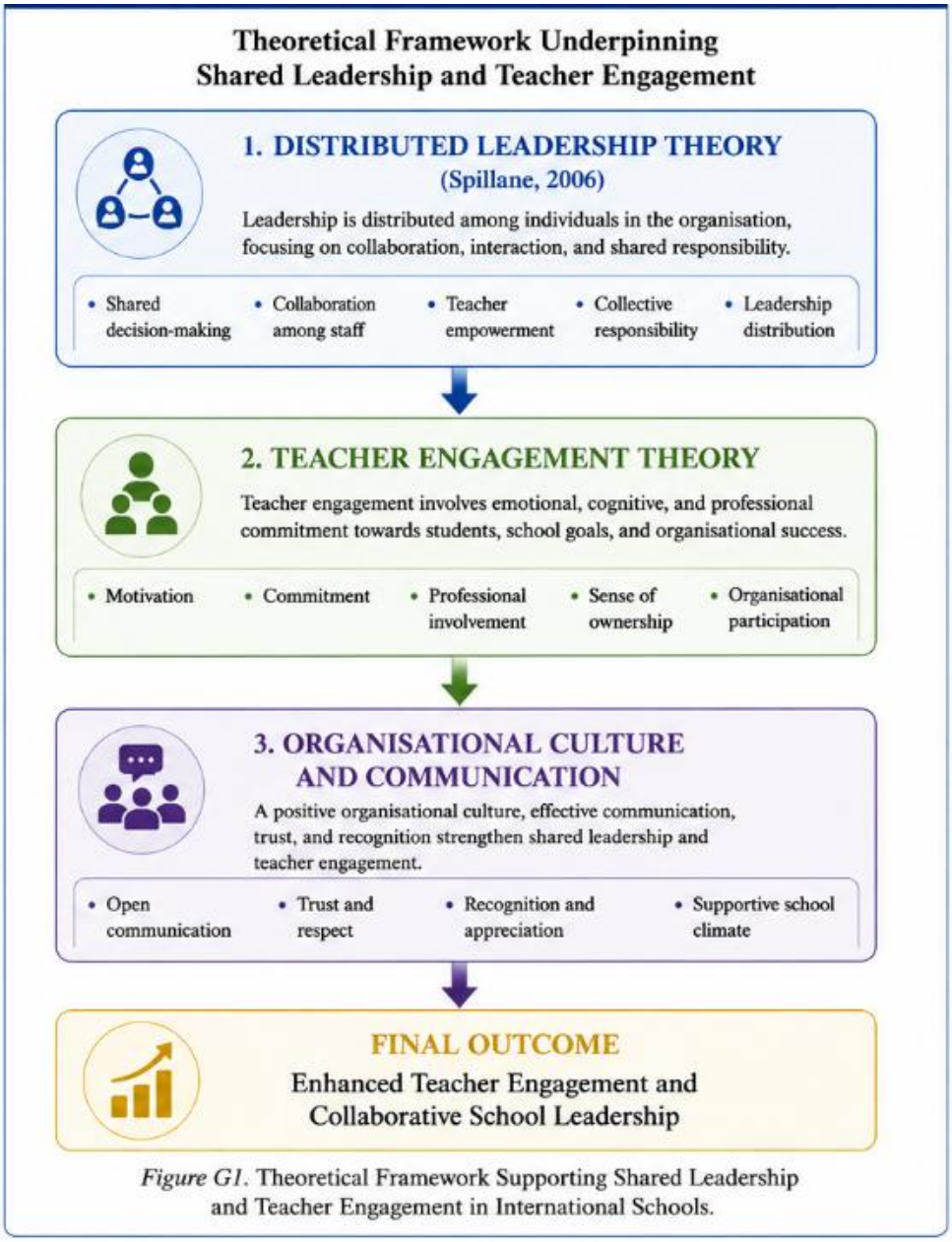


Figure G1. Theoretical Framework Supporting Shared Leadership and Teacher Engagement in International Schools.

Figure G1 presents the theoretical framework underpinning this study. The framework is grounded in Distributed Leadership Theory and Teacher Engagement Theory, highlighting how collaborative leadership, organisational culture, communication, trust, and teacher empowerment contribute to enhanced teacher engagement and effective shared leadership practices within international schools.