



Implementation of Delegated Leadership Practices in Public Secondary Schools in Kinondoni Municipality, Tanzania

Article Information :

Articles Submitted :

2026-08-25

Articles Received :

2026-09-09

Published Articles :

2026-09-16

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Keywords:

delegated leadership; distributed leadership; institutional management; public secondary schools; Tanzania

Abstract: Secondary schools require leadership arrangements that distribute managerial and supervisory work beyond the head of school. This study examined how delegated leadership was implemented in Kinondoni Municipality, Tanzania. The article focuses on assessing the implementation of delegated leadership practices. A mixed-methods approach and explanatory sequential design were used. The sample comprised 417 participants: 400 students, eight class teachers, four academic teachers, three head teachers, and two Ward Education Officers. Students were selected through stratified random sampling, while education stakeholders were purposively selected. Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentary reviews generated the data. Following permission and consent for the study, questionnaires preceded interviews; observations and school records provided corroborating evidence. SPSS version 28 produced frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, while qualitative evidence was analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's six phases. Triangulation across four instruments supported validity and credibility; however, the source study reported no numerical reliability coefficient. Ethical safeguards included institutional and municipal approval, voluntary participation, adult written consent, parental consent for minors, anonymity, confidentiality, and protection from harm. Delegated leadership was implemented moderately: effective delegation and improved accountability each attracted 47.0% agreement; responsibility for outcomes, 42.8%; teacher participation, 40.8%; and clear communication of responsibilities, 36.8%. Means ranged from 2.96 to 3.27. Interviews identified centralization, inadequate authority, limited training, resistance, and uncompensated workload. The study concludes that delegation exists but often transfers tasks without sufficient clarity, authority, or preparation. It recommends written delegation structures, commensurate decision authority, leadership development, supportive monitoring, teacher participation, workload recognition, and periodic implementation audits

Conceptualization: all authors

Methodology: all authors

Investigation: all authors

Writing original draft preparation: all authors

Acknowledgments

All praise and gratitude to God for the successful completion of this article. The author expresses his gratitude to all parties involved and those who contributed to its preparation. Thanks to their constant prayers and support, this article was successfully completed.

Writing review and editing :

all authors

Visualization: all authors

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary public schools are complex organizations in which instructional supervision, resource management, student welfare, assessment, and community accountability cannot be sustained by one formal leader acting alone. Successful school leadership influences organizational conditions indirectly by setting direction, developing people, and redesigning structures, while the effects of any particular practice depend on context (Day et al., 2010) (Leithwood et al., 2020). Delegation is therefore an important administrative mechanism: it assigns responsibility for defined work to others so that expertise and attention can be located closer to the task. Yet delegation should not be equated automatically with distributed leadership, which involves broader agency, reciprocal influence, and participation in shaping organizational direction (O'Sullivan & Mac Ruairc, 2025).

In Tanzanian public secondary schools, head teachers operate within demanding environments characterized by expanding enrolment, diverse learner needs, staff supervision, compliance obligations, and constrained resources. National education policy promotes decentralization, participation, accountability, and effective institutional leadership (United Republic of Tanzania, 2014). Delegating roles to academic teachers, department heads, class teachers, and committees can reduce administrative congestion and support timely supervision. The benefits are conditional, however: responsibility must be clearly communicated, accompanied by sufficient authority, supported through capacity development, and followed by constructive monitoring. Without these conditions, delegation can become downward task transfer rather than meaningful leadership development.

Kinondoni Municipality provides an important urban context for examining this implementation gap. The source study found that delegation was visible but uneven, while participants described persistent centralization, limited teacher authority, insufficient leadership preparation, and resistance to additional uncompensated duties. International evidence similarly shows that teachers' joint work, collegial support, knowledge sharing, self-efficacy, and shared goals are more evident where leaders genuinely distribute leadership roles (Amels et al., 2021). This article therefore addresses one objective: to assess the implementation of delegated leadership practices in public secondary schools in Kinondoni Municipality. It asks not only whether duties are assigned, but whether delegation is clear, participatory, accountable, and supported by real decision-making authority.

Literature Review

1. Theoretical review

The study is anchored in Distributed Leadership Theory, which treats leadership practice as stretched across leaders, followers, and their situation rather than located exclusively in the head teacher's office (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Hatcher (2005) sharpened this perspective by examining the relationship between distributed leadership and power in schools. Leadership distribution is consequential only when participants can influence decisions, use relevant expertise, and assume responsibility for organizational work. For this study, the theory directs attention to who receives delegated responsibilities, how tasks are defined, and whether the recipients possess authority to act.

A critical distinction is required between task delegation and holistic distributed leadership. Delegation may remain hierarchical: the head assigns predetermined activities but

retains decision authority. Distributed leadership is broader, involving formal and informal leaders in reciprocal influence and collective direction-setting (Gronn, 2002). O'Sullivan and Mac Ruairc (2025) show that education systems can promote the language of distributed leadership while enacting limited, directed delegation in practice. This distinction is particularly relevant to the Kinondoni evidence because participants reported receiving tasks while still needing the head teacher's permission for consequential decisions.

The theory also clarifies the conditions under which delegation may enhance management and supervision. Role clarity reduces duplication and omission; authority enables responsible action; competence makes discretion productive; and monitoring connects autonomy to accountability (Timperley, 2005). Collective agency also depends on trust and recognition, because assigning additional work without support or acknowledgement can intensify workload and resistance (Hallinger & Heck, 2010) (Lumby, 2013; O'Sullivan & Mac Ruairc, 2025). Accordingly, effective implementation is conceptualized here as a bundle of clear communication, participation, appropriate authority, accountability, preparation, and supportive follow-up—not simply the presence of assigned duties.

Empirical Review

Empirical work generally links well-enacted distributed leadership with professional collaboration and organizational capacity (Bush & Glover, 2014; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). In a mixed-methods study involving 787 teachers and 58 principals, Amels et al. (2021) found stronger joint work, collegial support, knowledge sharing, self-efficacy, and internalization of school goals in schools where leaders distributed leadership among teachers. Leithwood et al. (2020) likewise conclude that successful school leadership is highly context-sensitive and works through organizational and professional conditions (Marks & Printy, 2003). These findings suggest that implementation quality matters more than the label applied to a leadership model.

Evidence from African public schools emphasizes both promise and constraint. Dampson et al. (2019) reported that distributed leadership could support school improvement in Ghanaian senior high schools, while unclear responsibilities and organizational conditions limited enactment. The source article also cited Tanzanian evidence associating delegation by heads of school with teacher performance and institutional effectiveness (Msigwa et al., 2024). Across these studies, delegation is most credible when staff understand expectations and can connect assigned responsibility to school goals, supervision processes, and measurable outcomes.

Recent critical research warns that apparent distribution may reproduce hierarchy. O'Sullivan and Mac Ruairc (2025) distinguish limited delegation from more holistic forms in which staff exercise agency and reciprocal influence. Their analysis also identifies workload and reward as important contextual issues. This is directly relevant to Kinondoni, where interviewees described reluctance to accept extra responsibilities without compensation and frustration when tasks were delegated without authority. The empirical gap is therefore not whether delegation is theoretically desirable, but how consistently it is implemented in urban Tanzanian secondary schools and which conditions weaken its effectiveness (Hartley, 2007).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach and an explanatory sequential design in which quantitative evidence was collected and analysed first, followed by qualitative inquiry to explain the observed patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It was conducted in public secondary schools in Kinondoni Municipality, Dar es Salaam.

The reported sample comprised 417 participants: 400 students, eight class teachers, four academic teachers, three head teachers, and two Ward Education Officers. The methodology section states that five schools were sampled, whereas the demographic results describe four schools; this discrepancy is retained as a reporting limitation rather than silently corrected. Stratified random sampling selected students across classes, while purposive sampling identified head teachers, academic teachers, class teachers, and Ward Education Officers with relevant leadership and supervisory experience.

Four instruments were used: questionnaires, semi-structured interview guides, observation schedules, and a documentary-review guide covering school policies, duty-allocation documents, supervision reports, staff-meeting minutes, and institutional records. After permission from relevant authorities, including the Kinondoni District Education Officer, participants received information about the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of the study. Questionnaires generated the first-phase data; interviews then explored the quantitative patterns, while observations and documents were reviewed for corroboration. Quantitative responses were coded and analysed in SPSS version 28 using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Qualitative material was subjected to Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase thematic analysis: familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition and naming, and reporting.

The use of multiple respondent groups and four instruments supported triangulation, credibility, and construct coverage. Nevertheless, the source document did not report expert-validation procedures, piloting details, or a numerical internal-consistency coefficient; consequently, the reliability of the questionnaire cannot be independently judged from the available report.

Ethical practice included institutional and municipal authorization, written informed consent from adult participants, parental or guardian consent for students younger than 18 years, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and avoidance of harm. Of the questionnaires distributed to students, 400 complete responses were analysed, reported as a 95.2% response rate; all 17 selected education stakeholders participated in the qualitative component.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The selected objective assessed implementation of delegated leadership practices. Across the five indicators, means ranged from 2.96 to 3.27 on the five-point response scale, demonstrating moderate but uneven implementation. No item secured majority agreement. Table 1 presents the 400 student responses reported in the source study.

Table 1.
Student Assessments of Delegated Leadership Practices (N = 400)

Delegated leadership indicator	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean
Head delegates duties and responsibilities to teachers and staff	16.3	30.7	20.3	20.5	12.2	3.18
Responsibilities are clearly defined and communicated	12.3	24.5	24.5	24.5	14.2	2.96
Teachers participate in school decision-making	14.3	26.5	22.5	22.2	14.5	3.04
Delegation improves accountability among staff	18.5	28.5	24.5	18.5	10.0	3.27
Staff are responsible for outcomes of delegated tasks	16.3	26.5	26.5	20.5	10.2	3.18

Note. SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = neutral; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree. Source: Field data (2026), adapted from the source article.

Delegation was Present But Inconsistent

A combined 47.0% of students agreed or strongly agreed that heads of school delegated duties and responsibilities, while 32.7% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 20.3% were neutral (M = 3.18). The qualitative evidence confirmed both the existence and unevenness of delegation. A head teacher explained, “I delegate duties to my teachers, especially department heads and class teachers. For example, the academic teacher is responsible for examinations, and department heads oversee curriculum delivery” (Head Teacher, School A). The account shows that delegation followed recognizable school roles and covered core academic functions. However, the same participant added that “some teachers are not willing to take on extra responsibilities because they feel they are not paid enough,” revealing a motivational and workload constraint. Thus, delegation was visible but not consistently accepted or enacted across the schools.

Distributed Leadership Theory explains that leadership becomes effective when practice is stretched across formal and informal actors through interaction, expertise, and shared responsibility, rather than through isolated task assignment (Hatcher, 2005). The findings partly support the theory because academic teachers and department heads performed leadership work, but the moderate mean indicates that distribution was incomplete. The result agrees with Msigwa et al. (2024), who found that heads’ delegation enhanced teacher performance in Tanzanian secondary schools but varied across institutions. It also supports Leithwood et al. (2020), who argue that leadership practices depend strongly on organizational context. The workload concern is consistent with Lumby’s (2013) warning that distributed leadership may intensify staff work when responsibilities are expanded without appropriate recognition or power.

Role Clarity Was the Weakest Element

Only 36.8% agreed that delegated responsibilities were clearly defined and well communicated; 38.7% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and the mean of 2.96 was the lowest recorded. The interview evidence helps interpret this result. A class teacher stated, “Sometimes the head teacher delegates duties but does not give us the authority to make decisions. We are given tasks but we cannot make decisions without consulting the head” (Class Teacher, School C). Although the quotation primarily concerns authority, it also demonstrates unclear boundaries: the teacher knew the assigned task but not the extent of permissible action. Ambiguity of this kind can produce delays, duplicated work, neglected tasks, and uncertainty over who is accountable for results.

This finding challenges the central expectation of Distributed Leadership Theory that responsibility should be exercised through meaningful agency and reciprocal influence (Hatcher, 2005). When delegated staff cannot determine how to execute their responsibilities, leadership remains concentrated in the head teacher. The finding agrees with Dampson et al. (2019), who showed that unclear responsibilities and organizational conditions constrained distributed leadership in Ghanaian senior high schools. It also parallels O’Sullivan and Mac Ruairc’s (2025) distinction between traditional task delegation and holistic distributed leadership. Written delegation matrices, role-specific terms of reference, and explicit decision boundaries would therefore make responsibility more visible, actionable, and auditable.

Participation and Decision Authority Remained Limited

Teacher participation in school decision-making attracted 40.8% agreement ($M = 3.04$), while 36.7% disagreed and 22.5% were neutral. The qualitative data located this result within a culture of centralization. A Ward Education Officer observed that “head teachers have been used to doing everything themselves” and that some “fear that if they delegate, they will lose control over the school” (Ward Education Officer). Similarly, the Class Teacher from School C concluded that staff were “just carrying out orders without real responsibility.” These accounts indicate that teachers participated mainly as implementers, while strategic decisions and authority often remained with the head teacher.

The pattern is inconsistent with the fuller form of Distributed Leadership Theory, which conceptualizes leadership as reciprocal practice among leaders, followers, and the organizational situation (Hatcher, 2005). It represents limited delegation rather than shared influence. This interpretation agrees with O’Sullivan and Mac Ruairc (2025), who found that institutions may use the language of distributed leadership while maintaining hierarchical control through directed delegation. Conversely, Amels et al. (2021) found that genuine distribution of leadership roles was associated with stronger joint work, collegial support, knowledge sharing, self-efficacy, and shared goals. The Kinondoni schools may therefore strengthen implementation by identifying decisions delegates may make independently, those requiring consultation, and matters reserved for the head of school.

Accountability Showed Potential but Weak Follow-Through

Accountability received the highest mean ($M = 3.27$), although only 47.0% agreed that delegation improved staff accountability. Responsibility for the outcomes of delegated tasks attracted 42.8% agreement ($M = 3.18$). The Head Teacher from School A described named

academic and departmental responsibilities, which provides a basis for answerability. Yet the Class Teacher from School C reported that delegated staff lacked authority to decide, indicating that they could be held responsible for outcomes they did not fully control. The evidence therefore shows potential accountability, but not a consistently balanced relationship between responsibility, authority, and follow-up.

Distributed Leadership Theory treats accountability as relational: formal leaders, delegated staff, and the school situation jointly shape leadership outcomes (Hatcher, 2005). Accountability should therefore flow in both directions—delegates report progress, while head teachers provide authority, resources, feedback, and assistance. This interpretation is consistent with Amels et al. (2021), who found that meaningful distribution was associated with collegial support and shared organizational goals, and with Leithwood et al. (2020), who identify developing people and redesigning organizational conditions as central leadership practices. Short review meetings, task records, agreed indicators, and constructive feedback can connect delegated autonomy to institutional learning without turning supervision into fault-finding.

Capacity, motivation, and centralization constrained implementation

The qualitative evidence identified three interacting implementation barriers (Silins & Mulford, 2002). First, the head teacher's statement that teachers resisted responsibilities because "they feel they are not paid enough" linked delegation to workload and recognition (Head Teacher, School A). Second, an academic teacher explained, "We are not trained in leadership. When we are given responsibilities, we do not know how to manage them properly. We learn on the job, but this is not always effective" (Academic Teacher, School A). Third, the Ward Education Officer's account of fear of losing control showed that leader beliefs also restricted delegation. Together, these accounts explain the moderate questionnaire scores by revealing why duties were accepted unevenly and exercised cautiously.

Distributed Leadership Theory assumes that leadership can be exercised by people with relevant expertise, but this potential depends on opportunities to develop competence and exercise agency (Hatcher, 2005). Assigning roles without training weakens that theoretical mechanism. The finding agrees with Leithwood et al. (2020), who emphasize developing people as a core leadership practice, and with Amels et al. (2021), who associate distributed leadership with knowledge sharing and self-efficacy. The workload evidence also supports Lumby (2013) and O'Sullivan and Mac Ruairc (2025), who caution that distributed-leadership discourse can conceal work intensification. Capacity development, workload adjustment, transparent selection, recognition, and commensurate authority are therefore necessary if task delegation is to become sustainable distributed leadership.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that delegated leadership was implemented to a moderate and uneven extent in public secondary schools in Kinondoni Municipality. Delegation and accountability were more visible than clear communication, teacher participation, and responsibility for outcomes. The qualitative evidence explains this gap: schools often assigned duties within existing hierarchies while retaining decision authority at the top, offering limited leadership preparation, and giving insufficient recognition to the additional workload.

Delegation therefore supported day-to-day management but did not consistently mature into a genuinely distributed form of leadership characterized by reciprocal influence, professional agency, and shared direction-setting.

Heads of school should establish written delegation matrices that define each role's purpose, expected results, decision authority, resources, reporting arrangements, and review dates. Delegated authority should be commensurate with responsibility, with clear categories for independent decisions, consultative decisions, and matters reserved for the head. Schools should involve teachers in planning and review, provide induction and continuing leadership development, and use supportive monitoring and feedback rather than fault-finding inspection. Municipal and national authorities should incorporate delegation, coaching, accountability, and participatory decision-making into leadership-development programmes; recognize substantial additional duties through workload allocation or incentives; and periodically audit whether delegated roles carry real authority. Future research should use validated scales with reported reliability coefficients, reconcile school and participant counts, compare school types and municipalities, and test relationships between implementation quality, teacher outcomes, supervision effectiveness, and student learning.

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