



Redefining power structures: Teacher leadership and distributed management in education

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Abstract: The hierarchical nature of different institutional arrangements, especially those that are entrenched in the Indian context, has, historically and to some extent, suppressed the agency of teachers, hampered innovation, and reduced their responsiveness to the changing needs of modern education. The centralisation of authorities, which is based on these top-down structures with roots in colonial bureaucratic legacies, limits the power to make professional decisions and empower teachers. It presents a perspective on the future of teacher leadership, as conceptualised by the authors as an informal, expertise-based influence that is not confined to the classroom setting, but redefines leadership as a distributed, place-based praxis. This reconceptualization aims at reducing rigorous hierarchies through the prism of distributed management principles. Based on the development of distributed leadership as an emergent phenomenon by Spillane and others, which is built upon the interactions between actors, contexts, and artefacts, the paper will incorporate teacher-leadership conceptions that forecast empowerment, the development of professional communities, and influence within the school system. Theoretical underpinnings based on organisational learning, social constructivism, analysis of managerialism, and ideas of relational power support the suggestion that the hierarchies can be redesigned into horizontal, networked interdependencies. The Consistent model proposed is the Distributed Teacher Leadership Model (DTLM) that aligns the mobilisation of instructional leaders into distributed systems and the decentralisation of hierarchical structures and processes of interdependence and redistribution of authority and development of adaptability, agency, and collective efficacy. In addition, the DTLM aligns with the focus on teacher empowerment and decentralised governance outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), which provides conceptual connections between bureaucratic structures in their inner core based on equitable and democratic processes. The model achieves international pertinence with its appeal to the larger paradigm shift that is post-heroic, relational leadership in the complex educational contexts. The authors observe that distributed teacher leadership is potentially transformative to the development of responsive and inclusive organisations, but conclude by accepting that additional theoretical development, especially relating to critical social-justice and post-colonial aspects, is still achievable.

Keywords: *Teacher leadership, Distributed leadership, Distributed management principles, Hierarchical flattening, Relational power, Organisational adaptability.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Indian educational institutions in India are historically shaped by colonial top-down hierarchies (as in the rest of the world), where the collective power is concentrated in the hands of principals, district education officers, and top-level administrative authorities. This form of organisation is a legacy of colonial administrative structures, which were structured to achieve centralised control and homogeneity, and which continued into the post-independence era through state-controlled systems (Government of India, 2020). Indian schooling is operated according to a federal model: the Ministry of Education (previously the Ministry of Human Resource Development) sets up policies at the national level, and state governments implement these policies through directorates, district officers, and local bodies (Wikipedia, 2025). These systems of arrangements are indicative of well-documented systems of bureaucratic education based on the management of the industrial era, which focused more on efficiency and control (Spillane, 2006). These hierarchies in India tend to reflect the stratifications in the society, such as caste-like scales in which decision-making is still positional and thus limits the teacher participation (Indian Express, 2020).

Such inflexible structures remain even with the changing educational requirements, creating a lot of theoretical dilemmas. The hierarchical models are inappropriate to respond to modern complexities, including the needs of diverse learners, technological adoption, equity priorities, and fast changes in policies, as an example of a National Education Policy (NEP 2020) (Government of India, 2020). They discredit teacher agency, which is the ability to make use of professional judgment, to innovate in pedagogy, and to affect the practices in the school, and prevent the responsive actions to challenges in such areas as inclusion in the Right to Education Act, student disengagement, and curriculum reform (Frontiers in Education, 2025, 8). Indian educators often must deal with administrative overload, lack of autonomy, and hierarchy that worsens their morale, lack of innovation, and inequities (Nawani, as cited in Indian Express, 2020). Similar models are a problem in reducing collective efficacy and responsiveness all over the world (Spillane et al., 2001; Spillane, 2006).

This paper attempts to theoretically analyse how teacher leadership, as the expertise-based influence of teachers that extends beyond the classroom, beyond collaboration and initiative and is entrenched in distributed management, can transform leadership from positional power to situated practice. Based on the distributed leadership theory, leadership is argued as the face of interactions between people, objects, and situations, but not confined to positions of authority (Spillane, 2006).

The conceptual questions to be guided are:

- How do the distributed leadership theories reverse the hierarchical assumptions?
- In what way would teacher leadership theoretically lead to the reallocation of influence and authority?

What are the more general conceptual implications of power relations and school organisations?

This work has theoretical importance because it contributed to changing the discussion on educational leadership, in particular, the transition to post-heroic and relational paradigms. It promotes the view of leadership as emergent, interactive, and practice-based, distributed

individualistic, hierarchical paradigms, and democratic, adaptive organisations (Harris, 2008, as cited in other distributed leadership reviews). This exploration is especially relevant in the context of NEP 2020, which in India supports teacher empowerment, holistic education and flexibility but faces barriers in hierarchical implementation (Government of India, 2020). The findings have universal appeal as they reflect worldwide changes from centralised to collaborative models with the growing complexity.

The importance of this paper lies in its potential to advance policy and conceptual change. It offers theoretically useful tools in reducing hierarchical stratification in diverse settings with limited resources, like India, by means of a combination of distributed leadership and teacher leadership, thus promoting equity, professional agency, and sustainable change. It is a work that connects international theoretical concepts, such as those exemplified by Spillane, with Indian realities, whereby bureaucratic opposition is coupled with the desire to be reformative, hence affecting the emergence of more inclusive educational governance.

The paper will be structured in the following way: Section 3 provides the conceptual definition and identifies the key constructs; Section 4 is a literature review; Section 5 is a conceptual analysis; and finally, Section 7 suggests an integrated conceptual model; Section 8 gives the theoretical implications, and finally, Section 9 will reflect and give future directions.

2. THEORY CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS AND KEY CONSTRUCTS

The concept of teacher leadership is defined as a non-structured and expertise-based power that teachers have outside of their respective classrooms with an emphasis on agency, collaboration, and pedagogical leadership to enhance teaching and learning practices and schoolwide practices. This idea makes teachers active participants in the teaching process, which helps them to contribute to the professional development of their peers, influence the decision-making process, and improve student performance with their teaching experience. Teacher leadership in an Indian setting is still limited by the old hierarchies, in which bureaucratic frameworks restrict teacher autonomy and initiative (Government of India, 2020). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to solve that by empowering educators with professional development, mentorship, and acknowledging teachers with critical responsibilities in reform, restoring dignity and agency in a system that was previously dominated by administration (Government of India, 2020). Seminal reviews around the world refer to teacher leadership as the influence of positions outside the classroom, including support of learning among peers, policy impact, and student achievement goals with no official positional power (Wenner and Campbell, 2017; York-Barr and Duke, 2004). This is in line with the efforts of NEP 2020 to promote teacher-led innovation in India due to the prevailing issues, such as administrative overwork and insufficient professional voice.

These are **distributed management/leadership** where leadership is conceptualised as practised by dynamic interactions between leaders and followers and situational contexts, instead of being vested in formal authority figures, which is more based upon the views of Spillane et al. Leadership becomes a practice that is spread over people, tools, routines, and environments, and focuses more on collective performance rather than heroic performance (Spillane, 2006). This perspective criticises centralised models because it views leadership as an organisational asset that emerges from interdependent actions. Distributed leadership can

provide an avenue of decentralizing influence and encouraging collaboration in Indian schools where, due to colonial legacies, hierarchical bureaucracies with strong top-down structures still exist, and NEP 2020 encourages the use of teacher empowerment and shared responsibility (Government of India, 2020). Distributed leadership has become popular throughout the world as a reaction to complexity, providing adaptive practices through collective wisdom, and diminishing the need to rely on positional leaders (Harris, 2008, as cited in distributed leadership literature; Spillane et al., 2001, as cited in Spillane, 2006). Similarities in India underscore how it is likely to solve the problem of teacher inability to be empowered in bureaucracies and capitalise on the world trend that favours relational and practice-driven models.

Rethinking hierarchies entails the abandonment of vertical, positional control whereby authority moves downwards through chains of command which are strict, rigid, and inflexible to horizontal, networked interdependence which is characterised by emergent, collaborative interactions. This change is based on the activity theory and distributed cognition, and it presents leadership as being situated within activity systems that comprise subjects, objects, tools, rules, communities, and divisions of labour (Spillane, 2006; Wikipedia, 2025). Activity theory sheds light on the way leadership is created through a combination of actions and not through roles, and the distributed cognition perceives knowledge and power as social extensions. In India, a reconsideration of hierarchies opposes the setting of bureaucratic models that reflect the fragmentation of society and restrict flexibility (Indian Express, 2020). This is implicitly supported by NEP 2020, which proposes the principles of autonomy, fewer silos, and teacher-centred reforms to flatten the structures and ensure equity (Government of India, 2020). This reconceptualization is a critique of managerialism globally, with preference given to networked constructions that help promote innovation and responsiveness in the complex education contexts.

There are **differences and interrelations** between these concepts, but these are synergistic. Teacher leadership gives the authority and competence that operationalise distributed management, and as such, teachers can exercise influence in a non-positional manner. The theoretical perspective of distributed management provides a prism through which to perceive leadership as situated and interactive and refute the hierarchical assumptions on which teacher leadership is based. The rethinking of hierarchies is the general objective, and distributed management and teacher leadership are the means to realise the flatter and more balanced structures. These interconnections are used to solve long-standing problems: hierarchical rigidity reduces teacher agency, and distributed strategies and teacher leadership (in accordance with the empowerment of NEP 2020) provide an opportunity for interdependence and collaboration. On an international front, such cross-relations demand individualistic paradigms and promote relational frameworks, which contribute to collective efficacy and flexibility. The combination of them creates a unified model of changing educational organisations into non-bureaucratic but inclusive structures.

3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The main theory of anchoring that will be used in this article is Distributed Leadership Theory, as explained by Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004), which views leadership as an emergent practice that is shared among people, situations, and equipment as opposed to being among positional leaders. In this viewpoint, leadership is extended across interactions within organisational interactions and how routines, artefacts, and social relations are co-constructive of leadership activities (Spillane et al., 2004). With bureaucratic hierarchies prevailing as the norm in the Indian educational system, under policies like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, where distributed leadership provides an alternative narrative to centralised control, shared decision-making is a solution to issues related to shortages of teachers and even distributions of resources (Government of India, 2020). For instance, within the Indian higher education sector, distributed leadership has already been associated with better institutional performance because of the decentralisation of power between faculty and administrators and the reduction of the impact of top-down governments inherited during colonialism (Bhola and Dhanawade, 2024). This theory reflects changes in the western world, where it opposes heroic models of leadership by enhancing the flexibility of leadership in challenging situations as observed in school reforms in the U.S and U.K (Spillane, 2006).

To supplement this is the **Teacher Leadership Frameworks**, which focus on empowerment, professional communities, and school-wide influence. York-Barr and Duke (2004) produced a synthesis of two decades, which conceptualised teacher leadership as a process in which teachers, either individually or in groups of teachers, have an impact on their peers, principals, and stakeholders, to enhance teaching and learning. Wenner and Campbell (2017) built on it by reviewing empirical foundations by focusing on the role of teacher leadership in professional learning communities and policy implementation. In India, NEP 2020 puts teachers in the lead by requiring them to engage in continuous professional development, mentoring, and curriculum innovation, to advance their role in a system where they tend to be subordinated in administration (Government of India, 2020). This is in line with the attempts to incorporate teacher-based efforts in rural educational establishments where there are equity gaps that are elevated by the spirit of hierarchy (Kumar and Choudhury, 2024). These models are a duplicate across the world, where European and North American models have shown teacher leadership to improve retention and student performance through the establishment of collaborative networks across the classroom walls.

The theories that support this are also an enrichment. **Organisational learning theory**, which was developed by Argyris and Schoen (1978), assumes that organisations learn in the process of single loop and in the process of double loop, wherein assumptions made by people are questioned to facilitate adaptive change (Argyris and Schoen, 1978). This was extended by Senge (1990) to the learning organisations, where the focus is on systems thinking and shared vision. This helps NEP 2020 in Indian education to encourage reflection in the face of quick reforms with the aim of topping inflexible bureaucracies that choke innovation. On an international level, it is like corporate and educational applications of promoting ongoing improvement.

Social constructivism is based on the work of Vygotsky (1978), and it considers knowledge as having been constructed socially in interaction, where scaffolded learning is emphasised by

such concepts as the zone of proximal development. In India, NEP 2020 is based on this theory as it focuses on collaborative pedagogies to overcome cultural and socioeconomic barriers. It educates inclusive education designs in the whole world.

Managerialism is criticised based on efficiency-conscious managerial practices like commodification of education, which Deem (2003) refers to, and advocating for performative cultures that destroy professional autonomy. In India, this condemns NEP implementation in situations of resource deficiency, in favour of relational options.

The Foucaultian-based relational approaches to power perceive power as circulatory and productive, which are entrenched within discourses that constitute subjectivities (Foucault, 1980). The concept is applied by Ball (2013) in the education field, where he criticises the way policies are used to create control. This displays the perpetuation of inequities in India through hierarchies, and it also condemns the neoliberal reforms in other parts of the world.

All these theories contribute to reevaluating the hierarchies in education, to be horizontal networks rather than vertical control. The models of distributed leadership and teacher provide avenues of power distribution, but the organisational learning and social constructivism facilitate the provision of adaptive and collaborative cultures. Managerialism and Foucauldian power critique discourses depict the existence of hierarchical weaknesses and offer fair and just relationships of power. Therefore, India is aligned with the NEP 2020 vision of empowered and inclusive systems as the globe is shifting towards democratic education in complexity.

4. CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The movement of leadership theories in education is also an aspect of how leadership was based on individualistic and top-down approaches, but nowadays, with the growing complexities in teaching and learning, leadership is increasingly adopting collaborative and inclusive models. Conventionally, the leadership was mainly instructional, which emphasised the direct observation of curriculum and instruction by principals to enhance student performance (Hallinger, 2005). This became transformational leadership that focuses on setting a vision, motivation, and cultural change to motivate employees (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005). At the beginning of the 2000s, the paradigms of distributed and shared leadership developed, redefining leadership as a group practice that is shared among stakeholders, and which is determined by situational factors (Spillane, 2006; Gronn, 2002). The evolution in India reflects the trends on the global level, but it is influenced by the colonial experiences of bureaucratic power, where the leadership has been concentrated within the hands of principals and district officers (Government of India, 2020). The use of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 as a turning point in favour of distributed models and supporting the empowerment of teachers and participatory governance is a move to support inequity and holistic education (Bhola and Dhanawade, 2024). This is like what happens in the West, whereby reform in a distributed leadership context is a response to the accountability pressure and the multiple student needs, which lead to innovation when responsibility is shared (Harris, 2008).

Classical literature has provided the basis of distributed leadership and teacher leadership. The concept of leadership presented in Spillane (2006) is based on the works of a scholar who

viewed leadership as an emergent practice extended across relationships between leaders and followers, as well as contexts, indicating the importance of tools and routines when it comes to school improvement. This is expanded by Harris (2008) and Gronn (2002), who discuss the implications, the ability of distributed leadership to build capacity and the possibility of a concertive action model, respectively, whereby leadership is the result of hybrid group and individual formations. Synthesising on teacher leadership, York-Barr and Duke (2004) defined teacher leadership as the influence of teachers on peers and decisions made at the school level to support learning. Wenner and Campbell (2017) developed further and considered the empirical foundations and emphasised the role of teacher leadership in the professional community. These ideas are reflected in the focus of NEP 2020 on teacher-led innovation, but adjusted to hierarchical settings (in India); Bhola and Dhanawade (2024) use distributed models in the Indian higher education sector with antecedents such as supportive cultures. These works are similar to those in the United States and the United Kingdom, whereby distributed leadership increases resilience in the organisation (Spillane et al., 2004).

These paradigms have major controversies and conflicts. There are still conceptual uncertainties, and distributed leadership has not been defined very well, which is why it overlaps with shared or collaborative models and may be misapplied (Harris, 2014). Diffused accountability risks are the result of a situation where leadership is too thin, which then dilutes responsibility and makes it hard to assess (Gronn, 2009). The state of power imbalances persists since formal leaders might be opposed to redistribution, and this maintains inequities (Crawford, 2012). Whether in a hierarchy or not, there are issues of cultural resistance to flattening structures. These tensions are sharp in India, where bureaucratic tradition and the caste-like orders make aspirations distributed by NEP 2020 experience barriers to implementation in the form of resource shortage and bureaucratic overwork (Indian Express, 2020). Otherwise, the same problems are observed in various locations around the world, where the power relations do not grant fair involvement (Williams, 2011).

The theoretical gaps are not well explored. The mechanisms of redistribution of power are poorly theorised, and there are fewer models of influencing negotiations in unequal formations (Mifsud, 2021). The distributed interactions, such as gender, caste, or socioeconomic status, and intersectionality, are ignored, which may cause even more exclusion (Crawford, 2012). The implications of equity need to be considered in more detail, especially how distributed leadership is used or used to enhance disparities in diverse populations. The concept of sustainability in diverse environments, such as those in resource-poor or non-Western environments, does not have longitudinal structures. The gaps in India are adapting the global theories to the realities of multiculturalism, and NEP 2020 identified the need to implement equity-oriented sustainability in urban-rural differences (Kumar and Choudhury, 2024). Internationally, these are concurrent calls toward situational research in developing countries, between theory and practice towards inclusive results (Tian et al., 2016).

Teacher leadership is a multi-dimensional construct that goes beyond the conventional classroom walls. Cheung et al. (2018) gives a foundational base for limiting the non-positional roles whereas Blank (2021) uses survey method to evaluate the dimensions like instructional collaboration, professional advocacy and curriculum development. Fostering the capacities

asks for administrative support in school districts for a steady progress (Eckert & Daughtrey, 2019; Simpson, 2021). Crucially, leadership styles and teacher's psychological capital are mediating factors that give confidence and resilience to both new and proficient educators to take leadership roles (Cheng & Szeto, 2016; Zhang et al., 2022). Teacher leadership is one of the primary driver of school improvement and bringing equity in educational achievements across multicultural landscapes as found in studies in UK (Muijs & Harris, 2006) and Shanghai (Pang & Miao, 2017). Recent research underscores the positive impact of virtual communities of practice (vCoPs), where teacher agency and distributed leadership interact to bring in dynamism and global innovation (Shah et al., 2024).

5. METHODOLOGY

A theory building conceptual analysis has been used to reduce the gap between localised policy implementation and global educational leadership paradigms. The study operates within a Critical- Relational meta-theoretical paradigm. It is dependent on relational perspectives which look at leadership as a distributed practice placed within interactions instead of positional authority. Meanwhile a critical lens has been applied to deconstruct the colonial legacies and caste-class stratifications in India. The objective is to generate a theoretical blueprint that can conceptualise how hierarchical flattening functions in resource scarce situations. The literature was purposively chosen to develop a dialogue between contemporary empirical evidence, real time policy contexts, and classical theoretical frameworks. The selection of papers was done in three tiers. The first tier was using the conceptual authors from foundational texts in distributed leadership and teacher leadership. The second tier saw the use of policy documents like NEP 2020 and socio-cultural artifacts like Indian express and open-source encyclopaedia like Wikipedia. This gives the ground level realities and constraints like administrative overload and bureaucratic resistance. In the third-tier international studies were reviewed to give a global base to the paper. The analysis of the literature was done using deconstruction, synergistic integration, and model construction. Deconstruction saw usage of Foucauldian post-structural lenses and managerialism. the traditional models were critically analysed to bring out their limitations. While undergoing the synergistic integration teacher leadership provided the pedagogical expertise and the agency required to act as a catalyst while distributed leadership management provides the prism for this influence to exist non-positionally.

6. CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

The conceptual processes of redesigning hierarchies in schools and colleges entail a challenge to vertical hierarchies, and so are in favour of more permeable, accommodative forms. The distribution of leadership functions by means of distributed management is one of these mechanisms that reduces the reliance on single positional leaders by redistributing power among many actors and situations. Based on the distributed leadership theory presented by Spillane (2006), the aspect of leadership is not a personal characteristic but a practice represented by association and tools, and routines that provide an opportunity to solve problems collectively. This dispersion is consistent with the focus of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 on decentralising governance in India to enhance the capacity of local stakeholders in educational systems, which are deeply rooted in bureaucracies that were established during

colonial rule (Government of India, 2020). As an example, NEP supports the idea of school management committees with the participation of teachers and parents, with less part of principals or district officers, and overcoming the inefficiency of resource distribution in the face of multiregional needs (Bhola & Dhanawade, 2024). On the global scale, the mechanism is similar to the reforms in the Western systems, including the U.S. school districts that have adopted the distributed models in their efforts to become more responsive to the contextual nuances of the multicultural setting, where the singular leadership model is frequently not able to perceive the situational context (Spillane et al., 2004).

Teacher leadership is central to such a rethinking because it helps to make teachers co-constructors of practice, and to contest vertical authority, by exerting influence based on expertise. Leadership frameworks of teacher leadership reimburse conceptualising teachers as agents, who are involved in curriculum, professional development, and policy, which consequently flatten hierarchies (York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Wenner and Campbell, 2017). This is essential in the Indian context amid NEP 2020, where teacher-led innovation is promoted, with teachers having an opportunity to co-design practices to overcome such challenges as linguistic diversity and inclusion, overcoming top-down requirements that suppress agency (Kumar & Choudhury, 2024). As an illustration, in Indian rural schools, the leadership programs of teachers have allowed joint lesson planning, disrupting the dominance of administration, and promoting equity (Indian Express, 2020). This connector role is replicated in other parts of the world, as European systems, teachers as co-creators offer greater efficacy in schools, a fissure between policy and practice in the hierarchical systems (Harris, 2008).

Mechanisms that support such changes are also based on theoretical processes which shed more light on the change. According to the activity theory, interdependence and the situated interaction have led to collaborative decision-making because the leadership is developed through networks of actors, tools and communities of actors as opposed to individual directives (Spillane, 2006). This is filled in by social constructivism, which sees knowledge as co-constructed in dialogue, which further allows the teacher to negotiate practices in real-time (Vygotsky, 1978). In India, this process underpins the vision of NEP 2020 of multidisciplinary learning, where teams that rely on each other to solve challenging problems are present, no longer established by bureaucratic silos. It is similar to organisational learning worldwide in the Scandinavian education, where situational interactions result in the cultivation of adaptive curricula (Senge, 1990).

Another process is power changes based on hierarchical control to negotiated, relational influence and is informed by relational views on power that view it as circulatory, embedded in discourses (Foucault, 1980; Ball, 2013). The critique of managerialism points to the redistribution of power across distributed approaches to take away the performative pressures and put the voices of the marginalised into the limelight (Deem, 2003). The change in India is an opposition to caste-type hierarchies in schooling that allows relational bargains in NEP to ensure social justice. It is a global campaign against neoliberal inequities in the schools of the United Kingdom and is therefore an inclusive influence.

It results in enhanced organisational adaptability, teacher agency, and collective efficacy, and the organisational learning theory makes it possible to question assumptions in a double loop to support resilient systems (Argyris and Schoen, 1978). This will enable responsiveness to post-pandemic challenges in India, which increases agency through the professional communities of NEP. It reflects the U.S. reforms on a global level where collective efficacy enhances performance in different districts (Gronn, 2002).

Possible counterarguments are idealism, in which distributed models disregard physical limitations (Harris, 2014). This can theoretically be countered through focusing on the contextual adjustment in the sense that Spillane (2006) proposes situated practices. Accountability is at risk of diffusion due to dilution of responsibility (Gronn, 2009), which is refuted by hybrid models that balance between dispersion and explicit roles (Crawford, 2012). Such resistance to change of culture in a hierarchical society, as the bureaucratic norms in India, is addressed by the slow integration through policy framework such as NEP 2020, inspired by other experiences of successful cultural change in the world (Tian et al., 2016). These reactions highlight the possibility of redefining hierarchies using subtle theory.

7. PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL MODEL

In this section, the cohesive theoretical framework, dubbed the Distributed Teacher Leadership Model (DTLM) of Hierarchical Flattening, will be synthesized connecting the implementation of teacher leadership in distributed management provisions to the reconceptualization process of educational hierarchies and their flattening. The DTLM is based on distributed leadership theory (Spillane, 2006), teacher leadership theories (York-Barr and Duke, 2004; Wenner and Campbell, 2017), and other supporting theories, including organizational learning (Argyris and Schoen, 1978), social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), criticism of managerialism (Deem, 2003), and relational views of power (Foucault, 1980; Ball, 20). Distributed arrangements can make rigid chains of command less steep to eliminate such factors as teacher disempowerment and uneven resource allocation, and in the Indian context, where bureaucratic hierarchies continue to exist based on the colonial legacies (Government of India, 2020), the model refers to the theme of teacher empowerment and decentralized governance within the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (Bhola and Dhanawade, 2024). The DTLM is similar to the changes in Western education systems, including U.S. and U.K. reforms to focus on collective leadership models instead of heroic leadership models in the face of growing complexity and diversity (Harris, 2008; Gronn, 2002).

The DTLM has four main components, namely (a) Teacher Leadership Enactment, (b) Distributed Management Arrangements, (c) Processes of Interdependence and Redistribution of Power, and (d) Results of Hierarchical Flattening. These elements exist as a dynamic, cyclical structure in which the teacher leadership initiates an influence in the distributed structure, which creates a process that gives rise to flattened hierarchies and greater organisational performance, contributing to further enactment. Teacher Leadership Enactment is the practice where teachers act informally in an expertise-based manner by means of collaboration and innovation, which is the entry point of change (Wenner and Campbell, 2017). Distributed Management Arrangements offer the structural setting, with the launching of

leadership functions distributed among actors, tools, and situations (Spillane et al., 2004). The transition is mediated by Processes of Interdependence and Power Redistribution and facilitated by interdependence that promotes situated interactions (Vygotsky, 1978) and power changes that make the difference into negotiated influence (Ball, 2013). The results are increased adaptability, teacher agency, and collective efficacy that will maintain the flattened organisation (Senge, 1990).

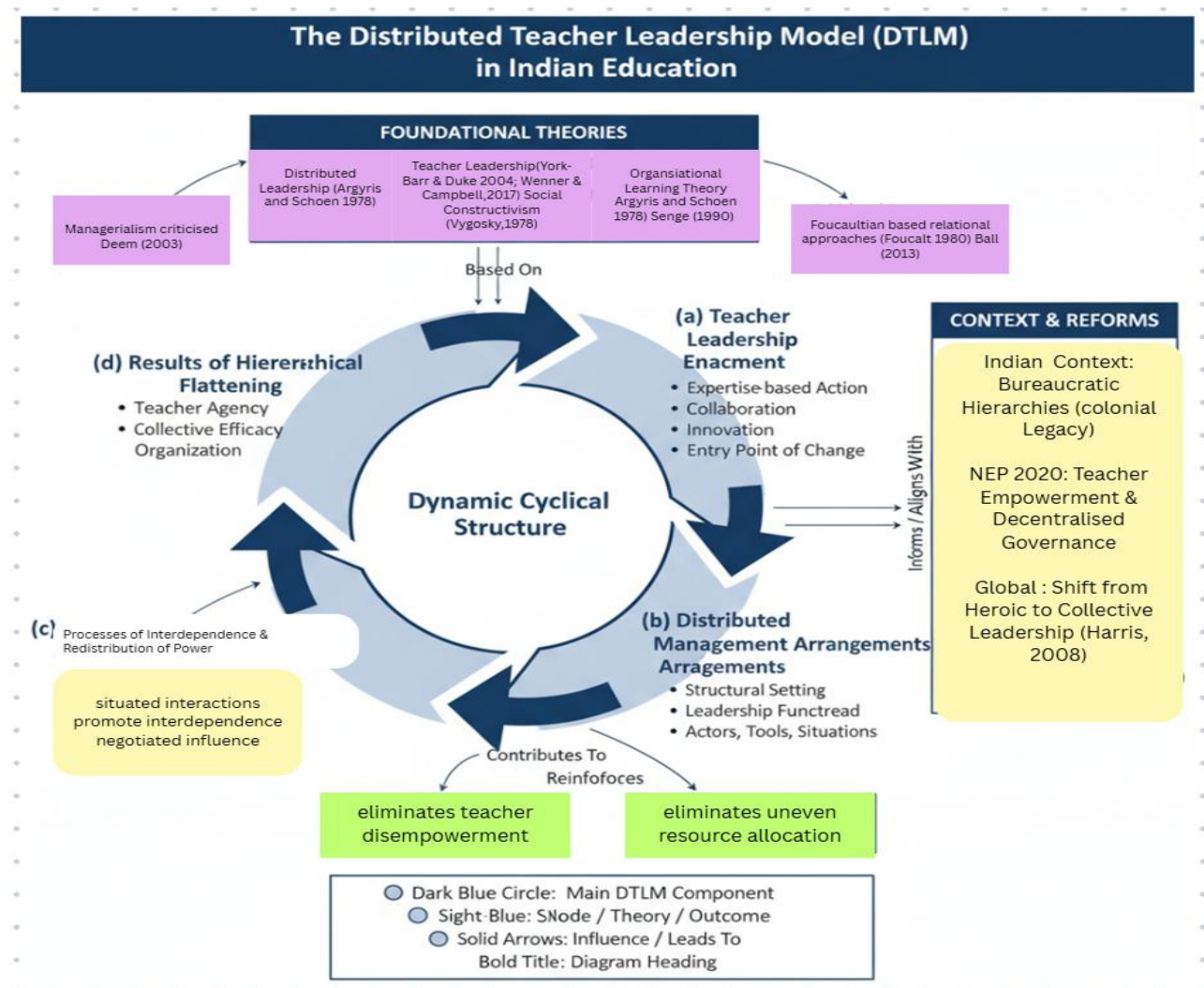


Figure 1 The Distributed Teacher Leadership Model In India made by authors using Canva To illustrate, Table 1 outlines the components and their relationships.

In India, relationship is demonstrated by the promotion of school complexes and teacher clusters in NEP 2020, where teacher enactment in the distributed arrangements would redistribute power between the district officers and collateralised groups, and provide adaptable responses to regional disparities (Kumar and Choudhury, 2024). The same dynamics are taking place in Scandinavian models of interdependence around the world, flattening hierarchies, to ensure inclusive education (Tian et al., 2016).

Table 1 components and their relationships of teacher leadership

Component	Description	Relationships to Other Components
Teacher Leadership Enactment	An agency and pedagogical expertise-based informal influence by teachers outside classrooms (York-Barr and Duke, 2004).	Triggers in Distributed Management Arrangements trigger Processes of Interdependence, adding to the result by questioning vertical authority.
Distributed Management Arrangements	Leadership as emergent practice was the one that spanned over people, situations, and tools (Spillane, 2006).	Gives context to Teacher Leadership Enactment; facilitates Processes by means of dispersion; results in Outcomes by means of less positional dependence.
Processes of Interdependence and Power Redistribution	Relational power turns into negotiating situations and situational interactions instead of control (Vygotsky, 1978; Foucault, 1980).	Facilitates between Enactment/ Arrangements and Outcomes; promotes cooperation in NEP-led reforms in India (Government of India, 2020).
Outcomes of Hierarchical Flattening	Increased adaptability, agency, and efficacy in fair structures (Argyris and Schoen, 1978).	Enhances the cyclical feedback to Enactment and Arrangements; endorses the sustainability within multiple environments.

The DTLM fosters the knowledge of leadership as an emerging and relationship process by redefining it outside of positional qualities. According to the distributed theory, leadership is a result of interactions in situated contexts, whereby actions of teachers are used to co-construct practices, and not to follow directions (Spillane, 2006). It is relational because the negotiations of powers circulate the power and criticise the managerial hierarchies where roles are commoditised (Deem, 2003; Ball, 2013). This development reverses caste-like educational segregations in India, where leadership is considered co-constructed in the professional circles according to NEP 2020, which improves relational equity (Indian Express, 2020). On the global level, it is similar to post-heroic paradigms in Australian and Canadian contexts, which focus on emergence in networked systems (Gronn, 2009; Harris, 2014).

The explanatory power of the model in explaining concepts of educational reform is that it can guide policies and practices to bring about sustainable change. It documents how teacher leadership can be combined with distributed management with the aim of flattening hierarchies and provides a blueprint to such reforms as the NEP 2020 emphasis on autonomy and inclusion,

foreshadowing better efficacy in resolving digital and socioeconomic inequalities (Bhola and Dhanawade, 2024). It clarifies changes in OECD nations globally, as distributed strategies increase responsiveness in the face of globalization that offers theoretical solutions to equity-oriented changes (Crawford, 2012). The DTLM emphasises cyclical reinforcements, which emphasise long-term sustainability, and is a bridge between theory and reform in the hierarchical context.

8. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The theoretical exploration of teacher leadership as a distributed management in this article has profound implication to the educational leadership theory, conceptual reformation, and general organisational implications, and future theoretical extensions, especially in the light of the changing educational landscape in India through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and its analogue within the global context.

The Contributions on education leadership theory focus on reinforcing post-heroic and practice-oriented views. Using the synthesis of distributed leadership as emergent and relational (Spillane, 2006), the current work goes beyond conceptualising individualistic and heroic models, to a way of conceptualising leadership as a distributed practice, spread in interactions, tools, and contexts. This strengthens post-heroic perspectives of interdependence rather than positional power (Harris, 2008), obstructing conventional hierarchies involving priority to principal-based control. In India, bureaucratic frameworks based on colonial legacies are still the most common, and, therefore, the contribution recommends a shift to relational, practice-based leadership, in accordance with the NEP 2020 focus on teacher empowerment and collaborative governance (Government of India, 2020). The findings are globally translated to parallel transformations in Western systems between transformational and distributed paradigms and therefore make the theory relevant to complex and diverse environments where situated enactment is preferable to a fixed role.

The **suggestions about conceptual change** provide avenues for redefining governance, professional growth, and policy with the distributed perspectives. Distributed management decentralises the decision-making process, hence permitting shared governance which weakens top-down silos and enhances structures that are inclusive (Spillane et al., 2004). In India, this would require reshaping the school governance through school management committees and teacher clusters under the NEP 2020 that would facilitate the autonomy and reduce administrative workload (Bhola and Dhanawade, 2024). The focus on professional development should be switched to collaborative, situated learning communities that would focus on the ongoing capacity-building of teachers as leaders (Wenner and Campbell, 2017). Distributed principles can be incorporated in policy reforms in order to focus on equity-based initiatives, including inclusive pedagogies and redistribution of resources, and overcome access and achievement disparities. Internationally, similar analogous reforms in the context of OECD reveal the potential of distributed approaches to promote policy responsiveness through the inclusion of stakeholder participation, because of which adaptive governance, due to the accelerated pace of change, can offer templates.

The **wider implication** is that it may prove to be a more democratic, responsive, and equitable educational organisation. Distributed teacher leadership has the effect of facilitating democratic participation through flattening hierarchies, where teachers co-construct practices and influence decisions, which results in cultures of trust and collective efficacy (York-Barr and Duke, 2004). This increases sensitivity to other needs, promoting equity through the empowerment of marginalised voices and alleviating inequities based on socioeconomic, cultural, or caste-based lines in India (Indian Express, 2020). This makes organisations adaptive, and therefore they can be able to respond to the modern set of challenges, including digital divides and inclusion by collaboratively innovating (Senge, 1990). The relevance of this importance is consistent all over the world, where the distributed models enhance the collective good and sustainability, which are part of the democratic educational ecosystems equipping learners with equitable societies.

Recommendations on theory expansion comprise a combination with significant lenses like social justice and postcolonial, or non-Western and heterogeneous environments. The inclusion of social justice paradigms can enhance the study of power redistribution and clarify how distributed leadership can help to reduce or extend inequities (Theoharis, 2007). India is one of the most relevant areas to consider in the context of postcolonial perspectives; colonial bureaucratic legacies determine hierarchies. Applying the theory to the practice of decolonisation may reveal epistemic justice mechanisms and cultural reclaiming (Khalifa et al., 2019). Applications to non-Western situations, such as rural or multilingual Indian contexts, might examine sustainability in resource-limited situations, and intersectional analyses of gender, caste and region would deepen sensibilities of distributed interactions. International comparisons across cultures with African or Latin American examples would help to emphasise adaptations between cultures, thus improving theory and making it more inclusive and equity-based.

These implications make the integrated model a vehicle of reformative change that balances theory and practice in the pursuit of equitable and democratic education in India and other parts of the world.

9. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This theoretical analysis of teacher leadership in the distributed management provides several possibilities for future research to develop the concept of understanding the hierarchies in education in the Indian setting, and making comparisons with the situation in other parts of the world. Future trends must focus on longitudinal conceptual clarifications, interdisciplinary consolidations, and contextual usages to fill the onward gaps in theory and practice.

To explore the sustainability and development of distributed teacher leadership over time, first, longitudinal conceptual explorations are needed to investigate how distributed teacher leadership is developed and sustained. Although the existing structures are focusing on the emergent practices (Spillane, 2006), little theorisation is done on the survival of these arrangements in times of policy changes, change of leaders or pressure on the systems. In India, where the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has brought new ambitious reforms in teacher empowerment and decentralisation of governance, future work might follow conceptual lines

of distributed models of implementation, to evaluate how initial flattening of hierarchies adjusts to bureaucratic opposition or resource limits (Government of India, 2020). Internationally, longitudinal studies within such systems as in the United Kingdom or Australia might follow in the same footsteps and juxtapose how distributed leadership has been perpetuated in the wake of reform and informs the development of adaptive theory (Harris, 2014).

Second, integrations through interdisciplinary approaches that are critical have rich prospects in terms of enriching the framework. The theory of social justice leadership integration may clarify the role of a distributed arrangement that turns inequities based on caste, gender, region, and socioeconomic status (Theoharis, 2007). India is a country with educational hierarchies that can reflect the social division, and future theorising needs to consider decolonising aspects, exploring how postcolonial critique of the issue can be used to detect and suggest culturally relevant alternatives to epistemic justice (Khalifa et al., 2019). Similar examples of parallels in postcolonial and Indigenous leadership scholarship can be found globally, as in New Zealand or South Africa, where distributed models are reframed in the context of cultural sovereignty. Intersectional analyses might also consider the ways of intersection of multiple identities in distributed interactions that will enhance relational power understandings (Ball, 2013).

Third, it is not thoroughly theorised as applied to non-Western and diverse settings. Applicability of the Distributed Teacher Leadership Model to rural, multilingual, or low-resource Indian context might provide insights into special processes of interdependence and agency facing infrastructural complications. Future theoretical exploration can include exploring hybrid approaches to combine distributed principles and indigenous knowledge systems or community-based governance, especially in tribal or marginalised areas. International comparisons with other developing countries, including the sub-Saharan African or the Southeast Asian nations, may show the contextual adaptations, prove the transferability of the model, and note those factors that are universal and those unique to the culture (Tian et al., 2016).

Also, the discussion of overlaps with the emerging educational paradigm, including digital leadership or post-pandemic hybrid models, would bring theory into the world of modern complexities. In India, where NEP 2020 facilitates change by encouraging the use of technology, the future orientation may hypothesise the use of distributed teacher leadership in supporting equitable digital access and online communities. This is in line with current studies on technology-mediated distributed leadership in different environments across the world.

All these directions are set to narrow down and broaden the post-heroic, relational theory of leadership to make it pertinent to equitable and democratic educational change in India and elsewhere. By filling these gaps, future scholarship will be able to close the conceptual gaps, update the development of the policies, and add to more inclusive educational organisations.

10. CONCLUSION

This paper has conceptualised the role of teacher leadership in the distributed management as one avenue to redefine and de-hierarchise the conventional hierarchical systems in learning institutions. The main thesis is that traditional top-down bureaucracies, with their deep roots in

most systems such as the administrative structures that the Indian colonial rulers left behind, restrict the actions of teachers, their collaboration in workplace innovations, and their ability to respond to modern educational needs (Government of India, 2020). Using the distributed leadership theory (Spillane, 2006), which defines a leader as an emergent practice spread over people, situations, tools, and routines, the analysis frames the teacher leadership as a pivot element that puts the shared power of authority into practice, and questions the dominance of positions (York-Barr, 2017).

Distributed Teacher Leadership Model (DTLM) was synthesised to provide Hierarchy Flattening, incorporating these components into a dynamic, cyclical model. The most important factors are Teacher Leadership Enactment being the driving force, Distributed Management Arrangements being the facilitating context, Processes of Interdependence and Redistributed Power being the mediating processes, and Outcomes of Hierarchical Flattening as the reinforcing outcomes (Spillane et al., 2004; Vygotsky, 1978; Ball, 2013). In India, the model is well aligned with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of empowered teachers, decentralised governance, and equitable reform that provides conceptual tools to break the vice of bureaucratic stagnation, administrative overload, and enduring inequities based on historical and societal divisions (Bhola & Dhanawade, 2024; Indian Express, 2020). The structure is also like Western and other systems across the world, where post-heroic relational models of leadership are also responding to complexity, diversity, and fast change (Harris, 2008; Gronn, 2002).

The change possibilities of teacher leadership inherent to distributed management are the ability to rethink the educational organisations as democratic, responsive, and equitable organisations. This distribution of leadership functions and the encouragement of located interactions, instead of dependency on single positional leaders, redistribution of power by negotiation and not by control, and, crucially, professional communities that can tackle complex problems, such as including and digitalising, regional inequalities, and post-pandemic recovery. Such transformation in the Indian context presents potential to achieve the goals of NEP 2020 of holistic, flexible, and inclusive education through raising the status of teachers as implementers to co-creators of practice. It is part of the wider forces of construction of adaptive systems around the world that focus on collective efficacy and social justice rather than managerial efficiency (Senge, 1990; Theoharis, 2007).

Theories of leadership are currently developing in terms of the demands of the modern educational conditions, and current trends are shifting towards practice-based, relationship-based approaches that are more likely to reflect networked, interdependent aspects of modern schooling. With the increasing diversity of educational settings, their technological mediated and policy-based nature, the theories need to be concerned with emergent dynamics, power flows, and contextual variations. This current contribution advances this development by connecting distributed leadership to teacher leadership in a way that explicitly addresses hierarchical persistence to provide a theoretically sound alternative that fits well in both resource-constrained and high-complexity environments.

Theories in the future ought to take several directions in order to narrow down and elaborate on these concepts. There is a need to conduct longitudinal conceptual inquiries to track the changes in distributed teacher leadership arrangements over time, especially the reaction to the policy implementation cycles and systemic pressure in India within the framework of NEP 2020. Critical analysis integrations, including social justice leadership, postcolonial theory, and intersectionality, can enhance the study of the redistribution of power, epistemic justice, and equity concerns in various cultural contexts (Khalifa et al., 2019). Additional elaborations to cover the recognised gaps, such as the mechanisms of sustainable power shifts and their use in non-Western, rural, or multilingual context will contribute to the explanatory power and transferability of the model. Comparative analysis with other developing and postcolonial settings can highlight both universal and context-specific aspects, which can sooner or later make post-heroic leadership theory more comprehensive and democratic in the future of education.

Overall, the redesign of hierarchies based on teacher leadership and distributed management is not only a theoretical step but also a conceptual base of transformational educational practice in India and elsewhere.

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DECLARATION OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper. This research was conducted independently, with no external funding or institutional bias, and reflects solely the academic perspectives of the authors.

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