



# Principals Distributed Leadership Practices and its' Impact on Teaching and Learning in Type 1AB and Type 1C Schools in the Colombo District Sri Lanka

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**Abstract:** Distributed leadership has been identified as one of the most important leadership practices in terms of enhancing quality of teaching and learning since it involves many members of the school. The main purpose of distributed leadership is to create secondary level leaders within the school and thus give more opportunities for teachers to improve their leadership skills. This study focused on investigating the distributed leadership practices and its impact on teaching and learning in type 1AB and type 1C schools in Sri Lanka. The objectives of this study were to identify how principals and teachers understand the concept of distributed leadership; how distributed leadership practices enhance teaching and learning; and what challenges principals and teachers face when devolving and practicing leadership responsibilities in their schools. Altogether 10 schools, 10 principals, 10 sectional heads and 200 teachers were selected for the study. Both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to gather necessary data. The findings revealed that all the principals and a significant number of teachers in the type 1AB and type 1C schools fully understood the concept of distributed leadership and have linked with teaching and learning. The study further revealed that the distributed leadership practices contributed to enhance quality of teaching and learning in both types schools to some extent. However, it was revealed from this study that a significant number of teachers reluctant to undertake leadership responsibilities and hence principals in both types schools face challenges when devolving leadership responsibilities among the staff.

**Keywords:** Distributed Leadership, Type 1AB Schools, Type 1C Schools.

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## Introduction

The term distributed leadership was used by Gibb (1954) for the first time. According to Gibb leadership should be regarded as shared functions among individuals in organizations but not as the authority of the individual. However, the idea of distributed leadership was widely theorized by Gronn (2000). Two common explanations have been found in the literature on distributed leadership by Spillane and Gronn. Distributed leadership has become very popular in the current educational dialogue as it supports in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. The main purpose of distributed leadership is to give more opportunities for teachers to improve their leadership skills and thereby create secondary level leaders within the school.

The Distributed form of leadership has been identified as one of the most important factors in terms of development of teacher leaders within the school. Spillane and Duignan (2001), recognized as two prominent researchers who worked much on distributed leadership. They observed distributed leadership as being central to the teaching and learning process in the school. Also they agree that leadership involves all members of the school community, not just

the principal and deputy principal. Spillane et al., (2004) argues that leadership occurs in a variety of ways all over the school. Also leadership is centered in the interaction between people. According to Spillane leadership roles are played by various individuals. The leadership roles played by various individuals can be formal or informal. Hence, all individuals take responsibility for leading and managing the school. Therefore, his perspective of distributed leadership is neither a top-down nor a bottom-up approach. However, Spillane identifies that leadership roles are played by different people at different times. Also leadership is not limited to those who are at the top of the organizational hierarchy or to those who have been assigned formal leadership tasks. According to Spillane et al., (2007) in this context leadership practice is a collective activity.

Gronn (2002) believes that the notion of distributed leadership presents a dynamic understanding of leadership. Also he identified distribution of organizational activities and tasks as a new form of the division of labor in organizations. Similar to this view Sergiovanni et al; (1999) recognized distributed leadership as a kind of social capital. He mentioned that distributed leadership encourages the notion of multiple leadership and it supports organizations to identify and address its shortcomings effectively. Hence, distributed leadership has been recognized as one of the most important leadership practice that can be used in developing teacher leaders within the school. They further emphasized that there is a positive relationship between distributed leadership practices and quality of instructional process.

As mentioned by Harris et al., (2007) team work, collaborative work practices and the trust are very important elements of distributed leadership. Leithwood et al (2008) see distributed leadership as one of the seven strong claims of successful school leadership. Accordingly, it is clear that the researchers identify distributed leadership as one of the most important leadership styles which can be used to improve quality of teaching and learning and student educational outcome through the motivation of team work and collaborative work culture in schools. Principals as effective leaders of the twenty first centuries schools need to develop teacher leaders within the school as school leadership has become a complex concept. In this connection school principals can use distributed leadership practices as an effective leadership style in terms of enhancing leadership skills of teachers and thereby quality of teaching learning and student outcome. Therefore, this study focused on investigating the distributed leadership practices and its impact on teaching and learning in Type 1AB and Type 1C Schools in Sri Lanka. This study looks at the distributed leadership practices by school principals on the instructional process and leadership development of teachers in Type 1AB and Type 1C schools in Sri Lanka.

### **Statement of the Problem**

It has been found that there is a positive relationship between distributed leadership practices and quality of pedagogical process in schools. The main purpose of distributed leadership is to provide more opportunities for teachers to develop various skills related to leadership, team work and collaborative work practices which directly benefit students' high level of educational performance. Based on the study findings of Rutherford (2002) concluded that a collaborative working environment enhances quality of teaching learning and students' educational achievements. The Report of the National Education Commission (NEC 2003) in Sri Lanka also states the importance of team work and collaborative work practices among teachers in the school sector highlighting that collaborative work practices help improve teaching learning and also professional development of teachers. It has further emphasized that "collaborative work practices are essential to ensure effective performance in the schools. Accordingly, it is clear from the evidence that team work and collaborative work practices are at the center of school improvement and development. All these findings in relation to collaborative work practices and team work of school teachers provide a relevant and valuable indication for the current study as it focuses on how principals working Type 1AB and Type 1C schools distribute leadership responsibility among staff and its impact on teaching learning and student educational achievement. Further, to date, research into this field in the country has focused

more on the other types of school leadership practices rather than on how the principals engage in distributed leadership practices as school leaders in the school. Also there is a growing concern about the little attention to distributed leadership practices by principals working in different categories of schools in Sri Lanka and hence there is a dearth of research into the field. Therefore, this study focused on examining the distributed leadership practices of principals' working in Type 1AB and Type 1C schools in Sri Lanka.

### **Purpose and objectives of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to examine how principals engage in distributed leadership practices in Type 1AB and Type 1C schools in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the specific objectives of the study were to:

1. To find out how principals and teachers of Type 1AB and Type 1C schools understand the concept of distributed leadership
2. To identify how distributed leadership practices, enhance quality of pedagogical practices and student educational achievement
3. To find out problems and challenges principals and teachers of Type 1AB and Type 1C schools face when devolving and practicing leadership responsibilities in their schools

### **Methodology**

The study employed a mixed methodology. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) stated that the combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches in a single study provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone can provide. As explained by Newby (2010) mixed methods research is becoming an increasingly popular approach in the fields of sociology, psychology, education and health sciences. Supporting this Tashakkori & Teddlie, (1998) mentioned that combining quantitative and qualitative approaches within different stages of the research process is possible. Accordingly, two phases of the study, a quantitative phase, followed by a qualitative phase was included in to the research design. The following diagram shows the research design of the current study.

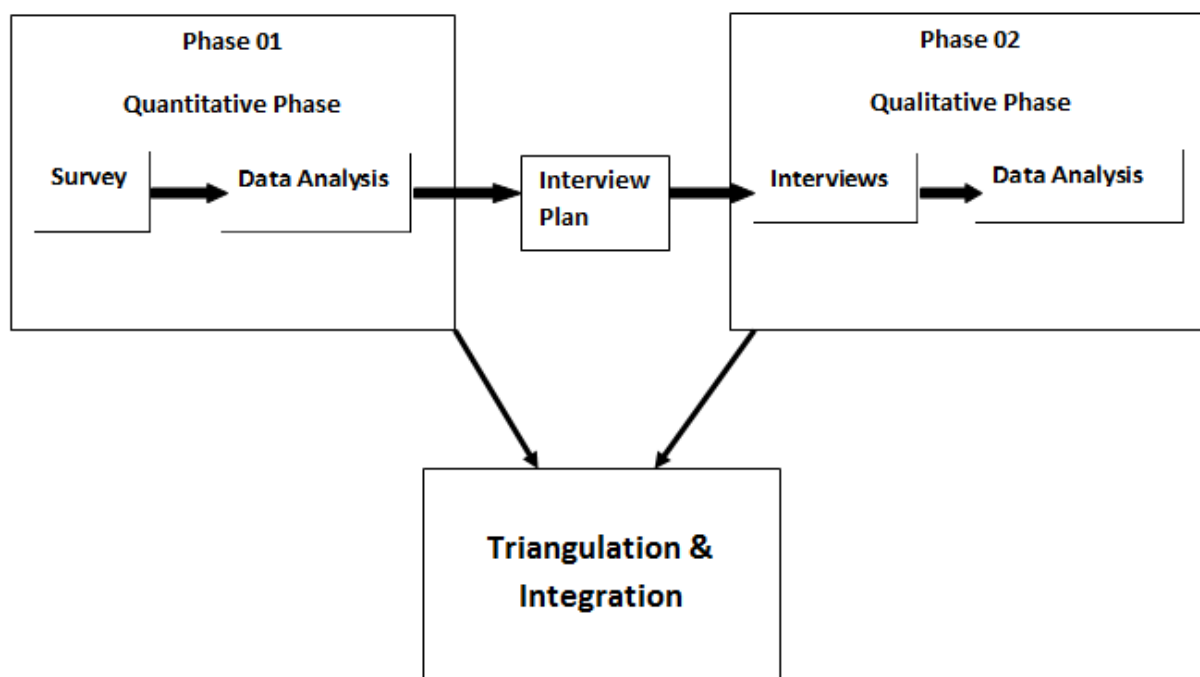


Figure: 1. Mixed Method Research Design approach – Adopted from Creswell 2012

### **Study Sample**

The following table shows the total number of study sample of the current study

**Table No. 1: Study Sample**

School Type	School Sample	Principal Sample	Teacher Sample	Sample of Sectional Heads
Type 1AB	05	05	120	05
Type 1C	05	05	80	05
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>10</b>

Accordingly, the study sample included 200 teachers randomly selected from 10 governments Type 1AB and Type 1C schools, 10 school principals, and 10 sectional heads.

### Data Collection Instruments

Both questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were used to collect the necessary data and information so that achieve the main purpose of the study. Accordingly, researchers-developed questionnaire for teachers and semi structured interview schedule for principals, selected teachers and sectional heads were used. The items selected for the questionnaire and interview in the current study were focused on main elements related to distributed leadership practices. The teacher questionnaire had two sections. Section A contained items regarding the respondent's profile while section B had two sub-sections designed to identify principals' distributed leadership practices. The teacher questionnaire consisted of 15 items which covers the areas of principals' distributed leadership practices as perceived by the teachers. A four- point scale with a response mode of V = very satisfied (4 points), S = satisfied (3 points), N= neutral (2 points) and NS = not satisfied (1 point) was used to measure the item responses. The respondents to teacher questionnaire were requested to indicate by ticking (√) in the appropriate boxes, the response applicable to the items. In addition to the questionnaire survey with teachers' interview is also used in order to collect qualitative data. Semi-structured interview was selected as a data collection technique to obtain data and information from individual principals and sectional heads about principals distributed leadership practices and its impact on teaching and learning in Type 1AB and Type 1C schools in Sri Lanka. Hence semi structured interview was held with principals, and sectional heads. Altogether 10 questions were included into each interview schedule of principals and sectional heads. The instruments were pilot tested in order to make sure about the validity and reliability. Two research assistants were trained in administering the questionnaire. The consent of the principals of selected 10 schools of Type 1AB and Type 1C was given and questionnaire was administered to the teachers in the schools. The principals and sectional heads were interviewed by the researcher herself. Respondents were properly guided to avoid misunderstanding of the purpose of the study. The exercise was completed within a month.

### Data Analysis

In order to analyse the data both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. Gorard (2004) stated that mixed methods research entails a combination of 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' approaches to generate a more accurate and adequate understanding of social phenomena than using only one of these approaches. According to Trochim (2006), one of the common ways to describe a single variable is with a frequency distribution. Therefore, in the current study frequency distributions were shown as tables. Distributions are displayed using percentages of teachers' responses in Type 1AB and Type C of 10 schools. Accordingly, the quantitative aspects of the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Kvale et, al. (1996) identified thematic analysis as a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the data that have been collected. Supporting to this, Daly et, al. (1997) identified thematic analysis as a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the data that have been collected. Accordingly, interview data were analyzed thematically.

### Findings

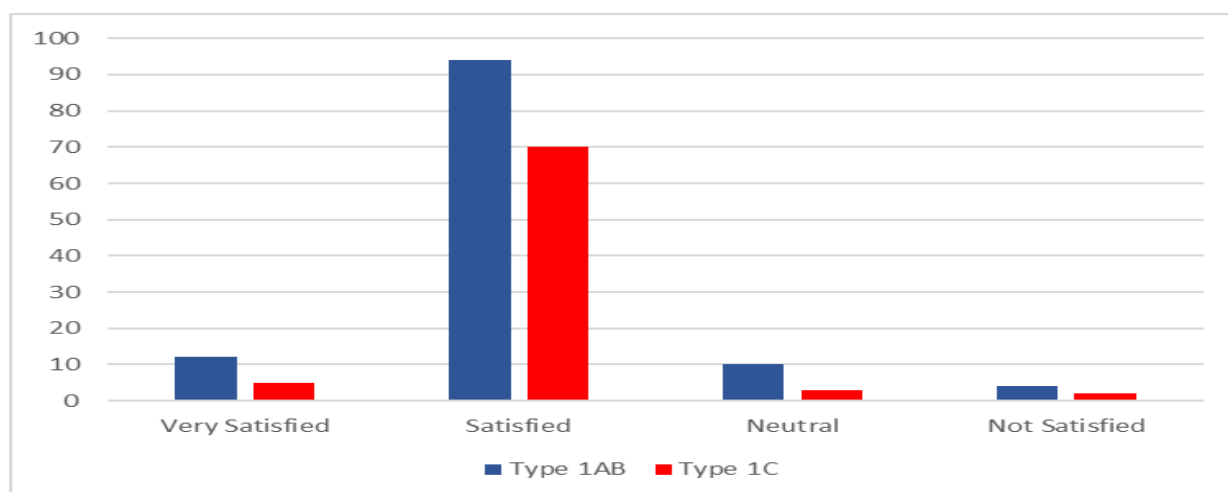
In this section, findings of the study are presented in Tables 1-2. Data presentation, analysis interpretations and discussion of findings are presented. In terms of responses obtained to the

question “What do you mean by distributed leadership practices?” all the principals of both types of schools responded that distributed leadership is sharing leadership responsibilities among the staff members with a view to improve educational achievement of students. In terms of the responses obtained to the question “To what extent are you satisfied about principals distributed leadership practices” irrespective of school type more than 80% of teachers from the entire sample responded ‘Satisfied’. Compared to this, the percentages of teachers who had responded ‘Not Satisfied’ were less amounting 5%. This situation has been shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Teacher Response to the Statement of to what extent are you satisfied about principals distributed leadership practices**

School Type	Teacher Responses								Total	
	Very Satisfied		Satisfied		Neutral		Not Satisfied		No	%
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		
Type 1AB	12	3.33	94	75.00	10	8.33	04	3.33	120	100.00
Type 1C	05	3.75	70	87.50	3	3.75	02	2.50	80	100.00
Total	17	8.50	164	<b>82.00</b>	13	6.50	06	<b>3.00</b>	200	100.00

This position has been further depicted in figure 2 below



**Figure 2. Teacher Response to the Statement of to what extent are you satisfied about principals distributed leadership practices**

This was supported by interviews with sectional heads of 1AB and Type 1C schools. Sectional heads’ interview in 10 schools of Type 1AB and Type 1C also gave strong evidence that principals are trying to implement distributed leadership practices in their schools. Sectional head 2 from Type 1AB School highlighted that distributed leadership practices supports to enhance educational achievements of students. However, the existing unsatisfactory collaborative working environment obstruct the successful implementation of distributed leadership practices in their school. According Sectional head 2,

*Principals in my school have devolved various leadership roles among staff members. When principals devolve leadership responsibilities particularly with regard to teaching and learning students get more benefits. However, the prevailing unsatisfactory collaborative working environment is a big challenge in implementing distributed leadership practices in...*

(Sectional head 2 from Type 1AB School)

Expressing a similar view to the above response, principal 2 from Type 1C School said,

*I have devolved various leadership responsibilities among our staff members as distributed leadership has been recognized as an effective leadership style which support in enhancing quality of teaching learning and thus educational outcome of the students. However, the negative attitude of some teachers in terms of holding leadership responsibilities has become a big challenge in our school and ...”*

*(Principal 2 from Type 1C school)*

With regard to the responses obtained to the question “ What type of distributed leadership practices enhance quality of teaching learning and student achievement” irrespective of school type a significant number of teachers (88%) from the entire teacher sample responded “coordination of instructional programmes, classroom observation, regular instructional supervision, planning and implementation of series of seminars relevant to instructions and maintain of parent teacher interactions were highlighted. This was further supported by the interviews held with the principals of both types of schools. According to the principal 4 from the Type 1AB School mentioned that,

*“Distributed leadership practices in schools directly linked with the instructional process. Therefore, leadership responsibilities have been devolved in my school focusing on different aspects such as coordination of instructional progeammes, planning and implementation of series of seminars , classroom observation, instructional supervision and coordination of parent teacher interaction (PTI) so that teachers get more opportunities to improve leadership skills ...”*

*(Principal 4 from Type 1AB schools)*

Expressing a similar view to the above response, principal 2 from Type 1C School stated that,

*I think through the delegation of leadership responsibilities the concept of “teacher leaders” needs to be motivated. Distributed leadership provides more opportunities for teachers to improve leadership skills. Therefore, this can be done considering various aspects when delegating leadership responsibilities among teachers .....”*

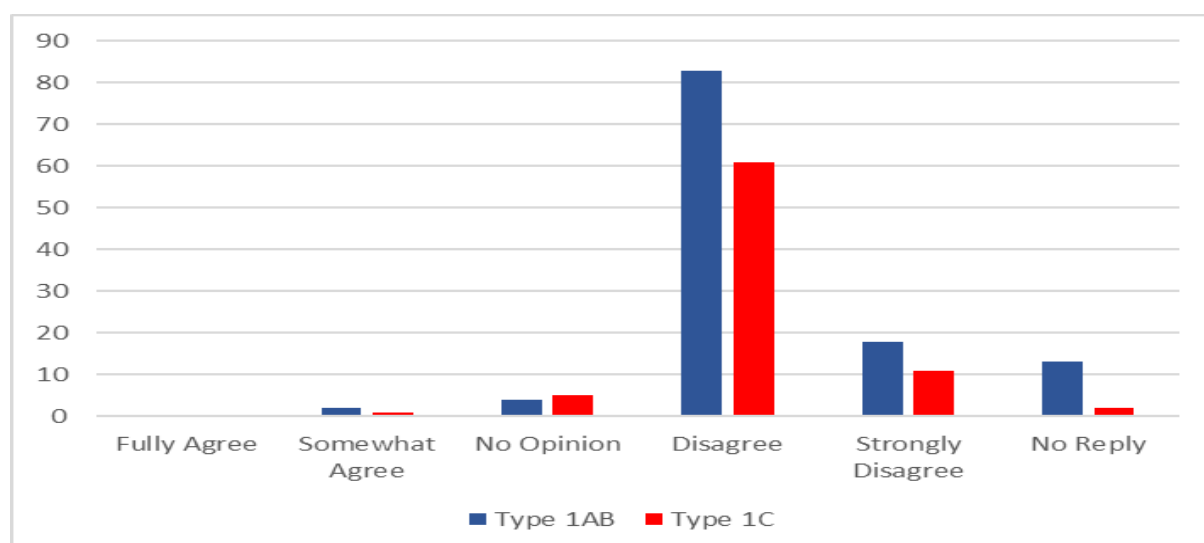
*(Principal 2 from Type 1C School)*

With regard to the responses obtained to the statement ‘I am satisfied about the team work and collaborative work culture in my school’ 70% of teachers from the entire sample replied ‘Disagree’ while another considerable percentage (14.5 %) of teachers from the entire sample replied ‘Strongly Disagree’. The highest percentage responded to ‘Disagree’ by type of school at 76.25% was from Type 1C schools. Results of this analysis are given in the Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Teachers Response to the Statement of “I am satisfied about the team work and collaborative work practices in my school”**

School Type and Statement No. 5	Responses												Total Number of Respondent	%
	Fully Agree		Somewhat Agree		No Opinion		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		No Reply			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
Type 1AB	00	00	2	1.66	4	3.33	83	69.16	18	15.00	13	10.83	120	100
Type 1C	00	00	1	1.25	5	6.25	61	76.25	11	13.75	2	2.50	80	100
Total	00	00	3	1.50	09	4.50	144	72.00	29	14.50	15	7.50	200	100

This position has been further depicted in figure 2 below



**Figure 3: Teachers Response to the Statement of “I am satisfied about the team work and collaborative work practices in my school”**

It was further revealed from this study that a significant number of teachers (87%) and principals (100%) in both types schools face number of challenges when practicing distributed leadership roles in their schools due to the major challenge of not having a collaborative working environment, lack of trust and structural and cultural barriers operate within schools.

Teachers’ interview in Type 1AB and Type 1C schools also gave strong evidence that implementation of distributed leadership practices has become a challenge due to the fact that unsatisfied team work and collaborative work milieu in their schools and this situation demotivate teachers to undertake leadership responsibilities. Teacher 3 from Type 1C School stated that,

*Principals and sectional heads motivate teacher leadership concept through the delegation of variety of leadership responsibilities in our schools. However, many teachers have negative attitudes in terms of teacher leadership concept and hence reluctant to undertake leadership responsibilities”*

*(Teacher 3 from Type 1C school)*

Expressing a similar view to the above response, Sectional head 2 from Type 1AB School said,

*“Generally, teachers in our schools engage only in instructional process as they have negative attitudes towards leadership responsibilities. Therefore, the implementation of distributed leadership practices has become a big challenge due to lack of trust and cultural barriers in our school.”*

*(Sectional head 2 from Type 1AB school)*

According to the above extracts of the responses of principals and sectional heads of Type 1AB and Type 1C schools, it is clear that the principals and teachers working in both categories of schools have understand the importance of distributed leadership practices, teacher leaders in enhancing quality of teaching learning and student educational achievements. However, it is clear that they find it very difficult to practice distributed leadership roles due to prevailing unsatisfactory team work and collaborative work environment and lack of trust and cultural barriers in their schools.

### Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study discovered that all the principals, sectional heads and a significant number of teachers in the Type 1AB and Type 1C schools have understand the concept of distributed

leadership practices and teacher leadership and importance of those to a satisfactory level. It was further revealed that the leadership responsibilities were devolved among the staff members in both types of school to a satisfactory level. However, it found from this study that the teachers working in these particular type schools face number of challenges in fulfillment of assigned leadership tasks as there was no satisfactory collaborative working environment. This situation could have a negative effect on the quality of pedagogical practices. This finding is not different from that of Hargreaves et al., (1991) and Harris et.al: (2007) who identified collaboration among teachers as an important contributory factor of school improvement and change. As mentioned by Spillane et al., (2006, 2008) and the National Collages of School Leadership (NCSL 2003) the distributed leadership practices and the teacher leadership is vital in terms of improving the quality of instruction and student educational achievement. As stated by Hopkins et al., (1996) successful schools promote a collaborative work milieu that encourages mutual support, assistance, and professional development.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

According to the findings of this study, all the principals, sectional heads and a significant number of teachers working in the Type 1AB and Type 1C schools have understand the concept of distributed leadership and teacher leadership. Further distributed leadership was recognized as one of the most important leadership styles in improving quality of instruction and student educational achievements. Hence, various types of leadership responsibilities were devolved among the staff members in both types of school. However, it found from this study that teachers and principals face a number of challenges and problems in assigning and fulfilling leadership responsibilities due to unsatisfactory team work and collaborative work environment in both types schools. Therefore, it is recommended that principals working in both types schools should plan and implement School Based Professional Teacher Development Programmes so that teachers can develop a collaborative working culture and thereby improve various skills related to school leadership. Further it is recommended that, more opportunities should be given for teachers to participate for the seminars, workshops and all the other programmes related to leadership development organize by the Ministry of Education, Faculties of Education of the Universities. Finally, it is recommended for future researchers to consider about the distributed leadership practices by principals working in other types of government schools, private school and international schools covering other educational zones as this study is limited only to the Type 1AB and Type 1C government Schools in the Colombo District in the Western Province, Sri Lanka

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