IIUM JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES (ENGLISH), 11:1 (JUN 2023) 87-103

ISSN: 2289-8085

Transnational Education Programme Leadership in Four Business Schools in Malaysia

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(Received: 30th May 2023; Accepted: 5th June 2023; Published on-line: 30th June 2023)

Abstract

A general understanding among colleagues working at private higher education institutions in Malaysia is that homegrown programmes are led differently from Transnational Education (TNE) programmes. It is generally accepted that TNE programmes have a more vibrant culture of distributed leadership, as the leadership style mirrors the practice in the home universities. The mixed methods study investigates the phenomenon by comparing the prevalence of distributed leadership in four private universities offering homegrown and TNE business programmes using the Edvantia Shared Leadership Continuum. The finding showed that distributed leadership practice was considerably lower in the TNE than in the homegrown programmes in all four universities. Leaders in all four universities were less inclined to practice distributed leadership as there were greater reputational and financial risks in TNE programmes. As a result, a higher level of oversight is required to maintain good relationships, successful partnerships, and profitability.

Keywords: *distributed leadership, transnational education, Edvantia shared leadership continuum, higher education Malaysia, mixed method study*

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a leader in Transnational Education (TNE) globally. Many TNE programmes are in the private higher education sector (Dang & Morini, 2023). Thus, homegrown and TNE programmes in most private institutions are often conducted within the same department or school. TNE programmes are popular in Malaysia as it promotes student and graduates' mobility. It is a staple in Malaysia as private higher education institutions are not publicly funded. Eighty-one per cent of private higher education institutions' funds come from student fees (Amran et al., 2019). To ensure sustainability, private higher education institutions must ensure profitability by providing attractive, quality education and student experience, and TNE is the enabler. Often, institutions offer attractive options to attract students, such as the two-in-one degree concept, where a student studies for one degree but obtains two at graduation. These popular TNE programmes primarily originate from the 'west' (the UK, Germany, USA, and Australia, where higher education institutional leadership is often distributed.

Traditionally, higher education leadership in Malaysia is seen as hierarchical and is managed vertically by Vice-Chancellors and senior management teams. The Programme Management Team, typically consisting of the Deans, Heads of Schools, and Programme Coordinators often supports the senior management team (PMTs). In the private sector, where most of the TNE programmes operate, PMTs are responsible for the management and administration of the programmes, and lecturers are responsible for curriculum delivery and classroom management. These stakeholders have different responsibilities, and they balance the challenging and competing demands and expectations of a range of internal and external stakeholders, including partners (Healey, 2015). These conflicting goals are fertile ground for leadership tension (Ho & Ng, 2017). However, institutional leaders are aware that they empower management and staff to remain competitive in a highly volatile market that is always seeking the best talents. Hence, distributed leadership is often seen as an empowering tool (Baddiri & Abdullah, 2017; Blase & Blase, 2001; Jamail & Don, 2016; Mohd Ali & Yangaiya, 2015; Thien & Tan, 2019). Therefore, if distributed leadership is practised at private higher education, particularly in managing TNE programmes, it would seem that that team will be empowered, thus ensuring effective programme implementation.

Traditionally, distributed leadership is seen as a primarily western concept. There is a general presumption that TNE programmes that originate from the West bring this concept of distributed leadership to the East. There is a presumption that the management of TNE programmes in Malaysia will mirror that of the country of origin. This study intends to provide valuable insights into how distributed leadership from the West is reflected in the management of TNE programmes by comparing them to homegrown programmes in four business schools in Malaysia.

Private Higher Education Institutions

Private universities in Malaysia offer homegrown and TNE programmes. Homegrown or indigenous programmes belong to the university. In contrast, TNE programmes are foreign academic programmes offered across international borders and operated jointly by local and overseas universities (Knight & McNamara, 2017). These programmes are generally very successful and attract local and international students. Over 50 per cent of the foreign academic programmes offered

in these private higher education institutions are from the United Kingdom (Viggo, 2020), making Malaysia the second-largest host country/region for UK TNE (QAA, 2020). The respondent institutions in this study had between 43 per cent and 90 per cent TNE programmes. Of these, the vast majority are programmes leading to a UK qualification with a historical precedent for collegiality, consultation, and academic freedom (Middlehurst, 1993), thus functioning as the foundation for distributed leadership. A review of the programme management in UK institutional partners in this study shows that leadership is primarily distributed, with programme management remaining with the School or the PMT. Correspondingly, the hypothesis is that the TNE programme in Malaysia would reflect the leadership style that resonates with the institution where the programme originates.

In Malaysia, however, the presumption is that TNE programmes are managed differently. The senior management team and the Vice Chancellor have a considerable say in how the programme is operated. The level of control varies according to the type of collaboration. For example, in a '3+0' model where the whole programme is studied and completed locally, the host (i.e., Malaysian) institutions typically control all assessments with oversight by the home institution (i.e., UK university). Sometimes, the final year project papers are sent to the home institution. In a 2+1 model, two years are studied in the host institution, generally under the oversight of the home institution. The final year is completed in the home institution and, in this case, in the UK. Another significant difference is the reporting structure. TNE programmes are subject to legal agreements between the two institutions, which involve potential liabilities. As such, the CEO of the host institution tends to exercise greater control of the management of TNE than with homegrown programmes. In addition, homegrown programmes are subjected to local quality assurance requirements set by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). On the other hand, TNE programmes comply with MQA's and the UK's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) requirements.

The concept of distributed leadership refers to the distribution of leadership responsibilities and activities across multiple roles and participants (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Gronn, 2000; Spillane et al., 2001). Through the process of distributed leadership, members participate in leadership functions (Hoch & Dulebohn, 2017) to effect instructional improvement (Camburn, et al., 2003). Spillane et al., (2004) state that in this model, leadership is distributed not by delegating or giving it away but by weaving people, materials, and organisational structures together in a common cause.

Leaders and Distributed Leadership in Higher Education

Leaders, at any level, are essential to the success of an organisation. They influence the management of the whole organisation via administrative systems and the development of priorities and strategic plans to ensure the success or even survival of the organisation. Educational leadership has been conceptualised in many ways, such as 'authoritarian versus democratic or collegial'; 'people-focused versus product or outcome-focused; 'transactional or transformational'; 'emotional leadership'; 'charismatic leadership'; and 'servant leadership. However, over the past two decades, there has been an increasing focus on the notion that leadership should not reside in a single individual. Rather, it should be 'shared' more widely amongst some or even all members. This approach can lead to organisational improvement (Bolden, et al., 2009; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017), improved work satisfaction, and improved staff performance (Han et al., 2021). In addition, many studies have found

an association between leadership behaviours and student academic performance (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Heck & Hallinger, 2010).

In educational organisations, where work is increasingly team-based (Han et al., 2021; Pearce et al., 2007;), the concept of distributed leadership becomes particularly pertinent (Sackett, & Fitzsimons, 2021). Leadership functions are shared, using collaborative or distributive approaches (Bolden, 2011). The collaborative approach brings people to perform leadership tasks together, whereas the distributive approach splits the task among team members. Distributed leadership will ensure that the person with the right skills/expertise manages a particular issue. Furthermore, it motivates and inspires teams to be creative (Gu et al., 2022), improves team effectiveness (Wu, et al., 2020), and positively impacts team creativity (Song, et al., 2020).

Distributed leadership benefits all stakeholders, not just leaders, as the team operates at maximum efficiency when leadership is distributed (Horner, 1997). In this regard, the theory of distributed leadership is a product of the collective position of the formal or nominal leader and the leadership contributions of all individuals in a team (Hernandez, et al., 2011; Hoch & Dulebohn, 2017; Wang, et al., 2014). Thus, distributed leadership is a dynamic, integrated framework, which includes the contribution and managing responsibilities of all individuals in a team towards shared objectives (Pearce et al., 2007). On the other hand, a top-bottom leadership structure, as is traditionally the norm in non-Western contexts, including Malaysia, is less likely to create a dynamic and integrated organisational leadership framework as there is a lack of common understanding (Bolden, 2011).

This concept is particularly relevant since home institutions here operate a more distributed leadership model. In contrast, host institutions use a traditional leadership approach. Therefore, creating differences of approach to programme leadership between two partner institutions and consequently between homegrown and TNE programmes. While homegrown programmes are assumed to use a highly traditional leadership approach, the TNE programme may use a more distributed leadership approach aligned with the overseas partners. This alignment evidences the transfer of knowledge and practice; in this case, leadership practice, as one of the consequences of TNE, had indeed taken place (Waters & Leung, 2017).

Distributed leadership of programmes impacts class management and consequently on the student experience. According to Duignan and Bezzina (2006), organisations with complicated managing systems, such as universities, are in great need of contributions from all individuals who work in them. The authors also suggest that distributed leadership is essential to make progress effectively as a collective entity. In this sense, leadership becomes "a dynamic team state" (Klasmeier et al., 2020) that could be continuously created from communication and cooperation among all members (Han et al., 2021).

In higher education, distributed leadership can help develop the organisation through contributions from more members, thereby creating an atmosphere where every member may appropriately practice leadership (Ensley et al., 2006). However, to achieve this, there must be an alignment of teams' aims and sharing of responsibilities (Duignan & Bezzina, 2006). One of the characteristics identified in the literature of effective leaders is their ability to set shared goals and

targets that can be accepted and pursued by everyone in the team (Putman, 2013). Inherent in this approach is a dynamic integration of the contributions of all members of the team. The application of a collegial higher education institutional culture has been associated with enhanced institutional effectiveness (Han et al., 2021; Hauge et al., 2014) and improved student academic performance (Poff & Parks, 2010; Huguet, 2017). These outcomes seem to be partly attributed to improving context-specific skills, dispositions, and professional knowledge resulting from engagement with distributed leadership (Westsmith, 2014).

In distributed leadership, lecturers are able to maximise their contributions, for which Lindahl (2008) proposes some practical methods; (1) to continue learning and improving their knowledge and teaching skills, (2) to involve themselves in higher-level decision-making and in team training, evaluation and assessment and (3) to take some responsibility in creating a shared culture of success and confidence among all lecturers and students. However, these proposed methods are difficult to implement in a top-down leadership structure (Ho & Ng, 2017; Lindahl, 2008). Leaders could create a culture of distributed leadership which ultimately will lead to higher levels of lecturer collaboration, which encouraged lecturers to better support and monitor student learning (Wang, 2016). A successful leadership model needs a shared higher education institutional culture and a rational distribution of leadership responsibilities to support collaboration and improvement (Hoch & Dulebohn, 2017) among all lecturers. As a result, lecturers are more motivated to improve their leadership and educational capacities, improving institutional efficiency and student performance (Liu & Hallinger, 2017; Westsmith, 2014).

In conclusion, it is generally accepted that distributed leadership may be the most effective form of leadership in universities. Within the context of TNE partnerships, the practice of distributed leadership in home institutions can be transferred into host institutions. It should be particularly beneficial to Malaysian institutions and the in-country Higher Education sector, the topic of the next section.

Distributed Leadership in Transnational Education Programmes

In all aspects of the delivery and management of homegrown programmes, leadership is usually provided by the PMT. However, in the delivery of TNE programmes, these PMTs are employees of the host institutions. However, they take direction from the home institutions in matters relating to the delivery and quality of the TNE programme. This study indicates that PMTs in these four business schools function as the 'managing administrators' and the 'connectors' between two independent institutions. They are often required to engage with too many operational issues (Lindahl, 2008), such as student recruitment, overseeing the quality of delivery and student experience, and staff management, without any actual authority. Putman (2013) argues that effective leaders tend to build a learning culture in which lofty goals are shared and targeted by every member of a team. Therefore, PMTs in both host and home institutions should share power and join forces to accomplish the team's shared purpose. Distributed leadership in the management of the TNE programme will enable PMTs to be more effective programme leaders and provide students with a better learning experience (Liu & Hallinger, 2017). The study sets off from the premise of inquiring whether distributed leadership is practiced in the management of the TNE programme in Malaysia and its entrenchment by comparing it to the management of homegrown programmes in the same school.

The Prevailing Dilemma

Given the traditional vertical management structures in most universities in Malaysia, distributed leadership is not a popular leadership style (Bush & Ng, 2019). Particularly in the private sector, where senior management is very hands-on, given the need to remain profitable. According to the respondents in this study, the senior management team is usually more involved in the management of TNE programmes due to its potential legal liabilities. Apart from the substantial involvement of the senior management team, TNE programmes are usually led by the programme owner, i.e., the home institutions. The host institution usually takes full responsibility for marketing and infrastructure (such as classrooms, learning resources) while curriculum content, delivery, and assessment are under the purview of the home institution. In practice, however, the *de facto* management of a programme is the responsibility of the host institution's PMT since this is the point of contact for academics, students, and their parents when faced with difficulties or challenges. In the case of TNE programmes, this creates another layer interposed between the home and host institutions, thus creating potential ambiguity of roles. In situations like these, the PMT of the host institution may be the first point of contact in academic matters but not the final port of call. In these instances, the PMTs usually refer issues to the home institution's PMT rather than to senior management.

METHODOLOGY

The study examines distributed leadership in the delivery and management of TNE programmes by comparing it to homegrown programmes in four private Business schools in Malaysia. It looks at how the increasingly team-based leadership practice (Han et al., 2021; Pearce et al., 2007), as practised in the foreign partner universities, filters down to the management of these TNE programmes in Malaysia. One of the perceived benefits of TNE programmes is the transfer of knowledge and practice (Waters & Leung, 2017) between the institutions. Therefore, in principle, there should be a high degree of distributed leadership in the delivery of TNE programmes as they mirror the practice at the overseas partner universities.

The study employed the mixed method design and collected data from a survey and focus group discussions with teachers and members of PMTs involved in the delivery and management of both the homegrown and TNE programmes. All of the TNE programmes were operated jointly with universities in the United Kingdom.

Instrument

Analysis of distributed leadership practice used the Edvantia Shared Leadership Continuum (ESLC) (2005), based on work sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences of the United States Department of Education. The ESLC consisted of ten distributed leadership statements. These were grouped into four categories: 'Complete shared leadership', 'We're getting to shared leadership', 'Lip service to shared leadership', and 'No interest in shared leadership' (see Table 1).

Table 1
The Edvantia Shared Leadership Continuum and Corresponding Categories

Percentage Agreement	Categories	Edvantia Shared Leadership Continuum Definition
75-100	A	Complete shared leadership
51-75	B	We're getting to shared leadership
26-50	C	Lip service to shared leadership
0-25	D	No interest in shared leadership

The Edvantia template was not research-based, but selected because it lacked a scholarly alternative. Furthermore, the ESLC was a suitable tool for an entry-level perception study. It used easy-to-understand precise characteristics to indicate the extent to which distributed leadership has been adopted. Moreover, the ESLS's description of the characteristics of distributed leadership closely resembles the reality in these institutions, thus making the instrument more relatable and consequently helping to secure higher returns and making the study more reliable.

Data Collection

The Business Schools that agreed to participate in this research operates several TNE programmes in partnership with universities in the United Kingdom and many homegrown programmes. Motivations for the study were the challenges and difficulties of leading TNE programmes where PMTs report to host and home institutions' managements. Thus, the focus was to gauge the extent to which the management of TNE programmes in the host institution follows a distributed leadership model mirroring the leadership style in the home institution.

The survey questionnaire containing the ten ESLC statements was distributed to all lecturers who taught in homegrown and TNE programmes. Lecturers were required to respond to the statements indicating their agreement to the statements concerning TNE and homegrown programmes. Eighty-nine questionnaires were distributed, and 61 were returned, giving a response rate of (68.5%). Reasons for this high response rate, as discussed earlier, could be the relatability of the survey instrument, as indicated by the pilot respondents. There was also an element of the intrinsic reward to respondents, which became apparent as the study progressed. Many felt that they now have an opportunity to 'speak' on something important to their professional wellbeing, thus indicating their willingness to participate in the study.

At the end of the questionnaire administration, nine focus group discussions consisting of 14 PMTs and 27 lecturers were organised. Respondents to the interviews were survey participants who had indicated their willingness to participant in the FGDs. Each FGD has between four and six respondents. The use of separate focus groups proved essential as it enabled free discussion and better interaction. In addition, the FGDs allow participants to elaborate further on the responses given in the survey and validate the survey findings. These FGDs yielded particularly rich data as these provided opportunities for participants to express their perspectives (Johnson & Christensen, 2014), and researchers to further explore through prompts. It also allows the researchers to understand institutional culture and participant reality (Creswell, 2021).

Data Analysis

Aggregated results from the questionnaires are shown in Table 2, which shows the percentage of agreement with the statements, the corresponding ESLC categories, and the alphabetical categories. The researchers used simple percentages to identify the categories, converting the Likert scale options of 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree' to percentages. The data and the percentage classification should be interpreted, mindful of the possibility of unintentional research bias.

The data from the FGDS were thematically analysed, coded and categorised by the frequency of words that were brought up by the interviewees (Creswell, 2021) according to the ESLC categories. To ensure validity of the data, the audio recordings of the interview were transcribed verbatim. The transcription was also checked several times in order to reflect accuracy (Willig & Stainton Rogers, 2017). Since the survey data were analysed descriptively, the survey results are presented together with the interview data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed to find how distributed leadership is practised in TNE programmes in selected Malaysian universities by comparing it to the management of homegrown programmes. The practice of distributed leadership in the management of TNE programmes would indicate that the transfer of leadership practices through TNE had occurred. The findings show significant and surprising variation between the leadership styles in these two types of programmes.

The Practice of Distributed Leadership in TNE and Home-grown Programmes

Contrary to the researchers' initial assumption, data show that distributed leadership was more common in the management of homegrown programmes rather than in the TNE. The overall average perception of distributed leadership in homegrown programmes was 70.1 percent which falls into the high 'we're getting to shared leadership' category of the ESLC (see Table 2). In comparison, the overall average perception of respondents on the TNE programmes was 46.4 percent, i.e., in the 'lip service to shared leadership' category.

Table 2 also shows far greater distributed leadership in homegrown than in TNE programmes, as expressed by the responses of the ESLC statements. An average of 74.0 percent of respondents on the homegrown programmes thought that 'what they do makes a difference' compared with only 49.1 percent on the TNE programmes. A large proportion of homegrown programme respondents (75.3%) thought that leadership is open to all who will assume responsibility compared to only 44.0 percent on the TNE programmes. A majority of the respondents (77.3%) on the homegrown programmes thought that institutional leaders communicate shared goals that help mobilise and energise the entire project management team compared to only 43.1 percent on the TNE programmes. Similar differences were evident across all other ESLC statements.

The results of the survey were a significant surprise. Whilst it was reasonable to expect some variations in distributed leadership practice in the homegrown and TNE programmes management, the apparent gap between them was unexpected. As there are no existing similar studies to compare

the results, there is a need for further investigation into this phenomenon. The results of the focus group discussions confirmed that the delivery and management of the homegrown programmes were under the complete control of the PMT, who 'freely share information with all lecturers' and that decisions are made 'locally' and 'within the hour in most instances'.

On the other hand, lecturers in the TNE programme felt that there was little opportunity for distributed leadership to flourish. Programme control rested with the home institutions, and important decisions were not made in consultation with the PMT in the host institutions. Many felt that they were not part of the team; "the programme and the award are not ours…, why then should we have the right to decide…we are mere tuition providers?". This view confirms the initial assumption that the PMTs merely take "instructions" from colleagues from the home institution. It affirms that TNE programme leaders are merely managing administrators or connectors between two independent institutions Lindahl's (2008) and feel less like effective leaders. It also places the spotlight on the leaders from the home institutions, where the lack of emphasis on building a learning culture makes the local PMT less effective as a leadership team (Putman, 2013). These findings result from the greater involvement of senior management of host institution management and the potential legal liabilities surrounding TNE programmes (Ho & Ng, 2017). The focus group discussants were able to confirm these.

Following from the above, it also seems that the leadership of the homegrown programmes differs significantly from the traditional top-down model prevalent in Malaysia. This finding indicates that the move towards more distributed leadership models, common in Western education systems, may be spreading to Malaysia. It also confirms the possible transfer of distributed leadership practices, albeit into the homegrown programmes. The findings display dynamism and levels of integration in homegrown programmes, which was not found in TNE programmes. Participants in the homegrown programme focus groups confirmed this by indicating that they were contributing significantly to the success of the programmes and that responsibilities were shared among all team members (Han et al., 2021). Consistent with the earlier findings (Pearce et al., 2007; Han et al., 2021), this study found distributed leadership as a dynamic and integrated form of leadership with contributions from and of all individuals in a team. In contrast, the TNE teams said they were doing what was required, and their 'contribution is limited to teaching in the classrooms'. It seems clear that there is a lack of distributed leadership on the TNE programmes mainly because it involves "another layer of leaders". When prompted further as to what is meant by "another layer of leaders", this participant confirmed that senior management has greater oversight over TNE programmes than the homegrown programmes.

Table 2

Overview of Distributed Leadership Perceptions for Home-grown and TNE Programmes and Corresponding Edvantia Shared Leadership Continuum Category (ESLC)

Edvantia Share Leadership Continuum Statement	Distributed Leadership Perceptions for Homegrown & TNE Programmes & Edvantia Shared Leadership Continuum Categories					
	Home-grown		TNE		AVG	
	%	ESLC	%	ESLC	%	ESLC
All members of the PM team believe that what they do makes a difference.	74.0	B	49.1	C	61.5	B
Leadership is not associated with positions or roles but is open to all who will assume responsibility.	75.3	A	44.0	C	59.7	B
Institutional leaders communicate shared goals that mobilise and energise the entire PM.	77.3	A	43.1	C	60.2	B
Those who are affected by a decision play a significant role in the decision-making process.	70.6	B	42.4	C	56.5	B
PM share information freely with all members of the learning community.	63.3	B	45.6	C	54.5	B
Individuals are encouraged to exercise initiative in making changes that will improve their personal performance	73.6	B	55.5	B	64.5	B
Individuals are encouraged to exercise initiative in making changes that will contribute to student learning.	78.9	A	44.7	C	61.8	B
PM facilitate others (lecturers, administrative support staff and students) in solving problems.	69.0	B	46.4	C	57.7	B
PM facilitate two-way communication between and among all members of the learning community	61.0	B	51.2	B	56.1	B
All members within the Programme have opportunities to develop leadership skills.	58.3	B	42.4	C	50.3	C
Average percentage	**70.1**	**B**	**46.4**	**C**	**58.3**	**B**

A different, more distributed leadership framework within the host institutions is a positive development. The transfer of leadership practice between the partner institution in the West to the institutions in the East, though ironically, seems to occur with homegrown programmes. Teams become highly effective when all members share similar leadership traits for their work and operate to maximum efficiency (Horner, 1997; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Wu et al., 2020). However, the senior management and the PMTs may not share the same ethos since they represent different interests. For example, we learned from the focus groups that the senior management teams focus on return on investment, while the PMTs and the home institution teams focus on quality delivery and student experience. This finding confirms that conflicting goals do not support distributed leadership practice (Ho & Ng, 2017).

A greater distributed leadership practice in the management of TNE programmes would allow lecturers to assume responsibilities even if they do not have formal leadership roles. Indeed, the survey findings show that lecturers on homegrown programmes show a 75.3 percent level of agreement that this might be the case. During the focus group discussions, respondents from

homegrown programmes were enthusiastic about assuming this responsibility; "the programme belongs to us". In contrast, lecturers in the TNE programmes lacked a sense of ownership. Only a quarter agreed that leadership is not associated with positions/roles but is open to all who assume responsibility. This was once again affirmed in the FGDs; "to sit down and talk with partners (the home institutions), one must have an official role".

There was also a much greater sense of togetherness or shared ownership among the homegrown programme teams. This finding supports the idea that distributed leadership is a product of the collective position of formal leadership and leadership by all individuals in a team (Hernandez et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2014; Hoch & Dulebohn, 2017) or a dynamic team state (Klasmeier et al., 2020). In the survey, 74.0 percent of homegrown programme respondents agreed that members of the PMT do make a difference, compared with only 49.1 percent of the TNE programme respondents. The FGDs respondents supported this by saying there is ‘greater comradeship’ in managing and teaching in the homegrown programmes as ‘any failure is our own’.

The last ELSC statement was whether all members within the programme have opportunities to develop leadership skills. This statement received a significantly low agreement rate from both programme respondents. TNE respondents rated this at 42.2 percent, whilst homegrown respondents rated it at 58.3 percent. Thus at best, opportunities to develop leadership skills are at the ‘we are getting to shared leadership level’, albeit at the lower end of the spectrum. This result shows a somewhat organic practice of top-down and centralised leadership in Malaysian universities. Such an environment does not allow distributed leadership to flourish, thus does not support team growth (Gu et al., 2022) nor improve team effectiveness (Wu et al., 2020). This finding is rather significant as it may signpost that centralised leadership can have different focal points; senior management team in TNE programmes and at PMTs in homegrown programmes. This conclusion was one of the most revealing information obtained during the focus group discussions. Focus group respondents felt that distributed leadership helps members develop as individuals and contribute significantly to the overall culture of the institution and student learning, corroborating findings from Huguet (2017). However, it does not extend to them ‘acquiring leadership skills’ since they "are not tested to demonstrate their leadership skills or potential". Nonetheless, the respondents agreed that there is a sense of “co-responsibility, " allowing lecturers to develop leadership skills, albeit in a ‘very subtle and gradual way’.

This concept of co-responsibility is at the core of distributed leadership, where individuals work towards one or multiple shared objectives. Members are required to be fair and open and cooperate. A team needs to understand the "knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviours" needed to accomplish objectives (Hernandez et al., 2011). Therefore, teams must work together to determine which members are best-suited to take on which aspects of leadership. This aspect is covered in the ESLC statements, which asked respondents if they feel that the project management team shares information freely with all learning community members. While the responses were not as positive as with the other ESLC statements, it is still the case that the degree of information sharing was greater in homegrown programmes (63.3%) than in the TNE programmes (45.6%).

This concept is further supported by a similarly low level of agreement on whether the PMT facilitates two-way communication between and among all members. Respondents in the homegrown

programme were slightly more optimistic (61.0%) than TNE programmes (51.2%). When prompted in the FGDs, many felt a reduced need for better communication between the PMT and lecturers on the homegrown programmes since 'these are long-established and internally monitored'. In comparison, the TNE programs are 'relatively new and require regular two-way communications' on 'a need-to-know basis'. In addition, there is 'some sense of urgency for improved communication' in TNE programmes as it involves external parties and that there 'will be significant implications for the organisation if something goes wrong' with the programme. Some FGD participants linked communication to student experience and expectations because 'students' feedback on the TNE programmes' is 'reported back to the overseas partner'; therefore, 'we take greater care'. However, all respondents of the focus groups agreed that communication could be improved so that leadership becomes a 'shared communal phenomenon' (Duignan & Bezzina, 2006).

To the ESLC statement that those affected by decisions play a significant role in the decision-making process, respondents from the homegrown programmes had a much higher level of agreement (70.6%) than those from the TNE programmes (42.4%). Thus, it would seem that the homegrown PMT practices distributed leadership in which lecturers are allowed to contribute and create an atmosphere where every member appropriately practices leadership (Lindahl, 2008). However, the TNE programme team seems to have a practice opposite from what Spillane (2006) proposed, i.e., that it focuses on position rather than leadership practice. The FGD respondents suggested a reason for this; the TNE programmes 'nature leaves very little room for error', especially when delivering 'programmes assessed and monitored' by the home institutions. In the questionnaires, respondents were also asked if individuals are encouraged to exercise initiative in making changes, an essential element of distributed leadership that will contribute to student learning. As with the other nine statements, respondents felt that the management of the homegrown programme reflected more distributed leadership (78.9%) in this area than the TNE programmes (44.7%). This finding significantly suggests that the intended focus of TNE programmes on quality and student experience may be slightly off target and may need further investigations.

Finally, in the questionnaire, respondents were asked if the programme management teams facilitate others such as the lecturers, administrative support staff, and students to solve problems. Once again, the homegrown PMTs seem to be more in tune with distributed leadership styles (69.0%) than the TNE teams (46.4%). The relative lack of autonomy and the variation between homegrown and TNE programmes was discussed in the FGDs. One reason for this, a majority felt, was the need to refer programme issues to the home institutions or the senior management of the host institutions, and the lack of ownership; "it is difficult to be [an] effective leader when one has to be on one's guard all the time".

Impact of Institutional Culture on the Practice of Distributed Leadership

There were some significant institutional variations on lecturers' perceptions of distributed leadership. However, in all cases, the findings indicated that there was still a greater degree of distributed leadership in homegrown than in the TNE programmes. The FGDs identified three reasons: the nature and duration of the relationship between the partners, the respective institutional culture, and the management-staff relationship. These findings would merit further investigation. A brief take is provided below.

With regards to the duration of relationship, at the institution with the highest score for the practice of distributed leadership, respondents were quick to add that 'we are comfortable with our counterparts in the UK' or that they 'are not seen different from us'. In the school where distributed leadership practice was the lowest, the respondents agreed that they are still in the early days of the relationship (18 months at the time of the FGDs). Respondents agree that they are 'still somewhat unsure how our partner may take specific issues', thus taking a counter-intuitive move to 'limit our communication'. When highlighted, one from the PMT group said, 'it is better to be safe than sorry', and further added, 'we are focused on making things work well and not rock the boat!'. The individual/collective relationship between the PMTs and the institutional leadership and the prevailing institutional culture also influenced staff perceptions of the distributed leadership. For example, in the institution, where distributed leadership practice was slightly better in the TNE programme than homegrown, both the lecturers and PMTs focus group had significant concerns with the senior management team. The respondents felt that an overhaul of the management board would improve programmes management and student experience.

This study shows that the perception of distributed leadership in the management of homegrown programmes generally falls high on the 'we're getting to shared leadership' category of the ESLC, while it is in the 'lip service to shared leadership' category for TNE programmes. This suggests that distributed leadership is more straightforward in homegrown than TNE programmes. What emerges from the analysis is a link between distributed leadership and a sense of ownership, i.e., that the programme belongs to them and that the team collectively is responsible for its success. The data provided in this study concludes that the higher the level or sense of programme ownership, the greater the practice of distributed leadership will be. Consequently, there is a high probability that distributed leadership is not just a leadership concern but one of team dynamics. Like-minded people coming together to achieve mutually accepted and agreed upon goals tend to slip into distributed leadership practice with greater ease. This study also confirms that lecturers are more passionate and willing to take on leadership roles if they are jointly responsible for success, especially if success depends on their team. The findings show that distributed leadership can flourish in a traditional, vertical management structure, such as can be seen from the management of homegrown programmes. Further, this study shows that distributed leadership is organic to a team where members, irrespective of their location, see each other as a single team and share the same vision and objectives. This concept seems more challenging within a TNE setting, particularly when the relationship is new.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from this study that homegrown programmes provide a more fertile environment for distributed leadership than TNE programmes. It is unfortunate and even ironic that PMTs and lecturers in the host institutions are reluctant to engage in distributed leadership when managing a TNE programme but are comfortable utilising this in homegrown programmes. Finally, on TNE and transfer of leadership practices, the study confirms that distributed leadership in the management of homegrown programmes indicates that the transfer may have happened after all, but not in an expected way.

Given the benefits of distributed leadership, TNE PMTs need to consider how distributed leadership can be further encouraged, even though this can be challenging in a TNE environment. For distributed leadership to flourish within the TNE sector, the conversation with the FGD respondents provides five enablers, and these are:

1. aligning team/collective purpose for collective improvement;
2. promoting continuous learning from experience;
3. engaging all members effectively;
4. reviewing the involvement of institutional leadership in TNE programmes; and
5. creating a sense of ownership among members.

These, too, warrant further study, but in the interim, PMTs need to find ways to align teams from the host and home institutions by having a shared mission, common culture, and a clear sense of authority and responsibility for the conduct of the TNE programmes. The PMTs should continue to learn and improve their knowledge and teaching skills through regular cross-country team building sessions. Programme leaders should engage lecturers in higher-level decision-making and create a sense of ownership through team training and collaboration as a sense of ownership positively impacts the practice of distributed leadership.

In conclusion, this study examined the applicability of distributed leadership in TNE programmes by comparing the practice to homegrown programmes within the same schools. The concept of distributed leadership has not been previously tested within the TNE sector. This case study provides an entry point into this discourse. An appreciation of how leadership practices are shared between institutions will undoubtedly add value to the industry and strengthen the growth of the TNE sector. Good to see if this is translated into branch campus leadership.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is a follow-up study from our research entitled “A Study of the Sharing of Leadership and Management Practices between Malaysian Higher Education Institutions and British Higher Education Institutions Operating in Malaysia”. The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the British Council, UK, for funding the first study. We would also like to thank all the participants who volunteered their time and participated in this study, without whom the research would not have been possible.

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