

9-2020

## The Influence of Distributed Leadership on Effective School Governance and Improved School Performance A Study Conducted in Two Private Schools in the UAE

Rima Al Hassanieh  
*British University in Dubai*

Solomon Arulraj David  
*British University in Dubai*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/ela>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#), and the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Al Hassanieh, Rima and David, Solomon Arulraj (2020) "The Influence of Distributed Leadership on Effective School Governance and Improved School Performance A Study Conducted in Two Private Schools in the UAE," *Journal of Educational Leadership in Action*: Vol. 7 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/ela/vol7/iss1/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Educational Leadership in Action by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact [phuffman@lindenwood.edu](mailto:phuffman@lindenwood.edu).

# THE INFLUENCE OF DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP ON EFFECTIVE SCHOOL GOVERNANCE AND IMPROVED SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

A Study Conducted in Two Private Schools in the UAE

Article by Rima Al Hassanieh and Solomon Arulraj David

## Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify the impact of Distributed Leadership (DL) on school governance, leading to an improvement in the overall school performance. This study was conducted in two private schools in the UAE. The review of related literature helped to understand the concept of distributed leadership and its impact on governance, school performance, and organizational hierarchy. The data was collected using a mixed method using surveys and interviews. The data was analyzed using descriptive analysis and moderated regression analysis. The conclusion reached was that DL has a positive impact on the relationship between governance and performance. It was also found that DL was being applied in both schools at varying levels, and each had areas that needed improvement. The most important implication was the connection of DL to governance and performance. The findings offer relevant insights for schools studied, as well as for similar schools.

**Keywords:** Distributed Leadership, School Governance, School Performance, the UAE

## Introduction

Schools can no longer operate under a top-down leadership model, as it will lead to “compromises on students’ achievement, academic freedom and autonomy of teachers” (Shah 2014, p. 9). However, the application of Distributed Leadership (DL) could be the push needed to improve overall school performance. Two schools situated in Al Ain will be studied. One, called School F, received an acceptable rating twice from ADEK, before which they were rated unacceptable. The second, School S, received the rating of good four times in a row. However, both schools strive to improve, to meet international standards and the changing needs of their students.

The leadership in schools “often lack qualifications, interests and predilections which require them to be up to the task in ever-changing organizational life of a school” (Shah 2014, p. 17). As such, their policies often do not reflect the students’ needs. These issues could be resolved through the application of DL. The idea is to empower all capable members of the organization and utilize their full potential. To do so, the leadership team must first agree to this distribution of power. Secondly, these tasks must be given to responsible individuals who will put in the time and effort required. Third, the rest of the staff must accept the power given to these individuals and follow their lead. The main purpose of this study is to identify the impact of DL on school governance, leading to an improvement in the overall school performance. The main research question is ‘What is the impact of DL on school governance and overall school performance?’. More specifically, questions to be asked and answered are:

1. What is DL?
2. How does DL impact school governance and performance?
3. Is leadership being distributed in the schools being studied?
4. Which areas could benefit from the application of DL, leading to an improvement in school performance?

In theoretical terms, this study discusses the impact of DL on governance, leading to an improvement in school performance. In doing so, it adds to the body of work regarding DL, as not much attention has been given to the effect of governance on the distribution of roles and responsibilities in terms of formation and practice of policies being followed. In practical terms, this study has significance to the MoE and ADEK as they work to accomplish the goals in the National Strategy for Higher Education 2030, in regard to designing an effective academic system that works as a global model (Ministry of Education, 2017). This study aims to test whether the concept of DL could help schools improve. The research will focus on finding the extent of distribution of leadership, to pinpoint areas where DL could have a positive influence. The results will not only help the schools being studied improve, but also pave the way for the application of DL in other schools in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and beyond.

This empirical study was carried out in two private schools in Al Ain, in the UAE. A brief contextual background on education in the UAE and school leadership in the UAE would be supportive in this research. UAE is a young country relatively and it has achieved good quality education within short span of time. There are 17 types of school curriculum offered in the UAE (David, 2017a). Demand for schooling in the UAE has been steadily increasing due to the demographic growth, particularly of expats. There is annually 4% student increase in schools and 9% at higher education in the UAE (David, 2017b). School leadership has been widely researched around the world and it is evolving in the UAE. It is worth mentioning some of the recent works on school leadership in the UAE. Abu Afifeh and David (2016) highlighted that some leadership styles have positive impact on students’ learning environment. Al Husseini and David

(2017) indicated the impact of head teachers' instructional leadership on the professional practices of teachers. The technology usage of school leaders has positive effect on schooling (Daraghmeh & David, 2017). Bashaireh and David (2019) pointed out the way appreciative leadership affect the well-being of teachers. Albasha and David's (2019) study offer relevant understanding on how school leaders play important role in supporting teachers in engaging teaching and learning practices. Samkari and David (2019) indicates the ways in which authentic leadership impacts on staff engagements and performance. Baroudi and David (2020) highlight the role of mentors in nurturing leadership skills. Some other UAE based leadership research recommend leadership practices to be attentive to the local culture and context (David & Abukari, 2019).

## Literature Review

**Governance can be defined** as “a set of responsibilities, practices, policies, and procedures exercised by an institution to provide strategic direction to ensure objectives are achieved” (World Bank n.d.). Over time, the way education is viewed has changed and so must the policies that govern it. Throughout this process, the goals to be achieved must be kept firmly in mind. Spillane and Diamond (2015) have identified several functions essential for the success of a school and divided them into three categories. Compass setting (CS) refers to the preferred direction of the school, namely the vision, mission, and policies. Human development (HD) refers to the training and assessment of staff members, and recognition of success from the leadership. Organizational development (OD) refers to the development of an inclusive school culture which prioritizes collaboration, and the acquisition and proper usage of resources (Spillane & Diamond, 2015, p. 3).

While hierarchies are a part of governance, “it is individuals who undertake actions – generating ideas, implementing decisions, administering the system, spending money and so on” (Connolly & James, 2011, p. 502). Therefore, it is the professionals working in the school who are ultimately responsible for ensuring that all policies and practices are followed. Schools must operate in transparency if they are to improve their practices. The staff should be able to accept their faults without fear of extreme reprisals, so they can learn from their mistakes and evolve into more efficient professionals. For this to happen, accepting failure as an aspect of learning must become a part of the school culture (Mulford, 2003, p. 11).

Al-Harathi and Al-Mahdy (2017) have proposed **school performance** can be measured using four aspects. The first is adapting to the ever-changing climate of the educational system. The second is attainment of goals, measured by the academic results of the students. The third is integration, meaning collaboration and cooperation. The fourth is latency, the commitment of the staff towards the school and its progress (p. 803). The culture of the school is mostly responsible for how things are done. The problem with this attitude is that it becomes the reason for why practices never change. Therefore, “the most important job of school leaders is to change the existing school norms” (Alqarqaz, 2014, p. 15). They must ensure that the organization remains flexible, and

the relationships between all stakeholders remain open and continue to flourish (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009, p. 77-78). If a leader is effective, they will have a positive influence, improving the attainment of students (Mujis & Harris, 2003, p. 437). To improve school performance, leaders, middle management, and teachers all need motivation. Therefore, to judge school performance, attention must be given to the performance of those working in the school (OECD, 2016, p. 145). Currently, hierarchies in organizations are resistant to change. As a result, new strategies need to be employed that work laterally instead of vertically. The emphasis needs to be on the sharing of knowledge and skills, so competent and skilled employees can be found throughout the entire organization (Lawler, cited in Woods, 2004, p. 4).

**Distributed leadership (DL)** shifts the focus from an individual leading a team of professionals to “a collective social process emerging through the interactions of multiple actors” (Bolden, 2011, p. 251). It is not “something done ‘by’ or ‘to’ members of organizations”, rather a way of interaction between various leaders at different levels where their experiences and initiatives are combined (Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008, p. 82). The main idea is to share both the responsibilities and the workload across the hierarchy by giving staff at all levels more power. DL emphasizes that using the skills, creativity, ideas, and initiatives of the whole staff would result in more opportunities for change (Woods, 2004, pp. 6-7). The knowledge and skills that matter are those which lead to positive changes in both the instruction and performance of students (Humphreys, 2010, p. 24).

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the principal loses all control. The idea that responsibilities should be distributed does not imply that there is no hierarchy, as DL can take place while working within the hierarchy already present in the organization (Woods, 2004, p. 8). It focuses on the delegation of responsibilities to the staff. According to the principles of DL, the work done by all individuals taking on leadership roles must be acknowledged, regardless of their designation (Harris & Spillane, 2008, p. 31). This does not mean that all work should be divided among the staff, adding unfairly to their responsibilities. As Spillane (2005) stated, what matters is the way leaders and their staff interact with each other, depending on the situation at hand (p. 145). It is the situation that determines who will lead. As Harris (2009) stated, leadership depends on need; the best person to lead is the one who has the expertise needed for the task at hand (p. 29).

The **integration of DL in an organization** cannot happen overnight. Harris (2009) divides the process into three levels. The first is the superficial, meaning simple delegation of tasks and responsibilities. The second is subterranean, referring to the creation of teams, as well as reassignment of responsibilities. The third level is the deepest, in which the culture of the school itself changes (p. 32). The people leading the organization must realize that leadership can no longer be viewed as simply being top-down, and that multiple leaders are possible (Mehra et al. 2006, p. 2). There is a gap between the theory of DL and its practical applications. In theoretical terms, DL can be thought of as a method of distribution where multiple individuals are responsible for leadership roles and all tasks are completed through collaboration (Harris & Spillane,

2008, p. 32). In terms of its practical applications, the main issue is “*how leadership is distributed, by whom and with what effect*” (Harris & Spillane 2008, p. 32). As stated by Harris (2013), the method of leadership distribution is linked to the quality of the outcomes. To what extent the roles, responsibilities and power are distributed depends on the individuals who are a part of the leadership team (p. 8). This is an area that is still being analyzed, as location, culture and norms are all factors that must also be considered.

OECD (2016) has classified five main elements that make up modern governance, all of which can be accomplished through the application of DL. The first element is a focus on the process, rather than the existing structure (OECD, 2016, p. 109). Salahuddin (2011) stated that education is a complex field, that can only flourish when expertise and skills are shared across the school (p. 18). This can become one of the strengths of the school as all ideas will then be considered, regardless of who they came from. The second element is adaptability in terms of feedback and the third is to involve all stakeholders in the establishment of policies and practices (OECD, 2016, p. 109). All policies set for the school must be decided in collaboration with the entire staff, as the application must be harmonious to be effective. The fourth element is alignment of all policies, practices, and responsibilities (OECD, 2016, p. 109). The application of DL ensures that multiple initiatives can be taken simultaneously, as different members of the organization can be given the leadership role. The fifth, and last, element emphasizes the use of research data in informing policies (OECD, 2016, p. 109). Through DL, any data collected through research can be applied in real time to achieve viable results.

Many studies have found links between the application of **DL and school performance**. The schools that allowed teachers to take on leadership roles found that the academic standing of students also improved (Harris, 2003a, pp. 14-15). This shows that when teachers are empowered to act, they feel a sense of ownership and confidence, improving student performance. No organization can flourish without the commitment and contentment of the staff. The more committed the staff is, the harder they will work to achieve set goals, which in turn leads to a more effective school (Hulpia, Devos, & Rosseel, 2009, p. 6). The desired result is that of the “‘improving school’, a ‘school that continues to improve student learning outcomes for all students over time’” (Glickman et al, cited in Harris, 2003a, p. 14).

Distributed Leadership redefines the role of the leadership team. Their main responsibility is to create an open atmosphere where sharing knowledge and skills is viewed positively, so their staff can be productive through collaboration (Harris, 2003a, p. 14). The leadership must give their staff opportunities to lead, rather than leading each project themselves. They must also show their support and provide guidance as needed. “Principals occupy the critical space in the teacher leadership equation and center stage in the work redesign required to bring distributed leadership to life in schools” (Harris 2011, p. 8). Without their active support, DL cannot flourish in any school.

The **role of middle leaders** is changing. They must now become leaders in education, rather than simply implementing decisions made by the leadership (Bufalino, 2017, p. 157). They must take charge at their level, and in doing so help the school progress. The work performed by middle managers depends ultimately on “the capacities, abilities, and attitudes of the leaders” (Bufalino 2017, p. 157). This indicates that no matter how willing the middle management is to take on leadership roles, ultimately it is up to the leadership to allow them to do so. Otherwise, failure is to be expected, resulting in a negative impact on the school’s progress.

**Cooperation and collaboration** are key features of DL. Harris (2003a) found that when teachers work and learn together, the teaching quality improves (p. 15). However, it is not necessary for teachers to only collaborate and lead in terms of teaching methodologies. The “key to successful distributed leadership resides in the involvement of teachers in collectively guiding and shaping instructional and institutional development” (Harris, 2003a, p. 20). Teacher involvement ultimately results from the attitude of the leaders. Without their support, there can be no teacher leaders. The most important factors that must be considered are time and space. Teachers must be able to “team-teach, model and work in other ways that bring teachers together to focus on curriculum and the quality of the work produced” (Crow, Hausman, & Scribner, 2002, p. 197). If there is insufficient time, then providing teachers with leadership opportunities will have no impact on the success of the school. They also need to be trained in areas relevant to their new roles as leaders (Harris, 2003b, p. 320). Without proper training, teachers will be hard pressed to succeed in their new roles, which will negatively impact their self-esteem, as well as school progress.

**School governance** refers to the policies and practices of an organization that help guide it so goals can be reached. DL is the sharing of role and responsibilities by giving staff at all levels more power. When effective leaders implement DL, the confidence and commitment of the staff increases, culminating in school progress. While many studies have been conducted on DL, its impact on school governance has not been studied in detail. World over, most of the policies followed in schools are not set by the principal. They come from either the school board or the government. Therefore, the impact of DL on school governance needs to be analyzed. This study will examine the impact of DL on the relationship between governance and school performance in two schools based in Al Ain. The level of DL in the schools will be ascertained, and areas that need further improvement will be identified so the goals set in the National Strategy 2030 can be accomplished.

## Methodology

Finding the impact of DL on school governance and performance required a quantitative approach, whereas finding areas that need improvement necessitated a qualitative approach. Therefore, mixed method research (MMR) was utilized in this study, as it is effective when more than one viewpoint is required (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007, p. 113). This study operated under the pragmatist paradigm, as the research questions to be answered ranged from generalized to specific. The data was collected

in two schools in the city Al Ain in the UAE. The aim was to determine whether leadership was being distributed, and how it linked to governance and school performance. The population consisted of the employees of the two schools. Sequential mixed method sampling was used to collect data, the survey was done first followed by the interviews.

Surveys were used to collect quantitative data. Three different surveys were employed, one for the top leadership, another for the middle managers, and the other for the teachers. All surveys were conducted online, and it was made clear to all participants that they could choose to opt out at any point by simply skipping questions. The survey was circulated to 155 respondents while 137 completed it (88.38% completion). Since the number of participants from the leadership and middle management were limited, all employees were requested to participate to maximize diversity with necessary option to volunteer to participate. The questions in the survey were modelled after those found in the Distributed Leadership Inventory, DLI (Hulpia et al., 2009, pp. 26-27). All the three sets of the surveys were divided into six sections and asked questions regarding personal information, compass setting, human development, organizational development, distribution of leadership, and school performance. There were 6 demographic items and 32 Likert scale items using five scales such as agree, strongly agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree. At the end of the survey, participants were asked if they would agree to be interviewed as well, which helped to recruit samples for the interview purposefully. The data collected was analyzed using a Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA), as well as descriptive statistics, and used to answer research questions 2 and 3. Standard ethical protocols were followed. Informed consent forms were signed by the respondents, necessary permission was taken from the sites.

Interviews were used to collect qualitative data. The principals, middle managers and teachers were all asked similar questions, so data collected from one could be verified by the other. The questions asked were intended to draw out the interviewees and focused on the distribution of responsibilities within the hierarchy. The data collected was used to answer research question 4. The analysis for each school was done separately, as they had varying strengths and weaknesses. There were three main delimitations in this study, namely number of schools chosen, only one emirate chosen, and data was collected only from school employees. Additionally, the results obtained cannot be generalized for all schools. As the researcher was employed in of the schools, maintaining objectivity was of extreme importance. All data was kept anonymous and confidential, using assigned numbers, rather than actual names. The data gathered was triangulated, i.e. gathered from three sources, so results would be reliable, measured using the Cronbach Alpha test. Trustworthiness of qualitative data was achieved through triangulation in the interviews, as well as performance of a member check.

## Results, Analysis and Discussion

Out of 155 respondents, 137 respondents answered all questions in the survey, making the response rate 88.38%. The independent variables considered are compass setting



(CS), human development (HD), and organizational development (OD). The moderating variable is distributed leadership (DL), and dependent variable is school performance (SP). All variables were measured using a five-point Likert Scale. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 show the influence of CS on SP, with DL as the moderator.

- **Table 1 - Model Summary of CS and SP with DL as moderator**

As seen in Table 1, the R-squared value is high (.612), showing goodness of fit. The Adjusted R square shows that 60.3 % of the variance in SP is due to CS. The standard error is also low (.356).

- **Table 2 - Coefficients of Regression of CS and SP with DL as moderator**

As seen in Table 2, CS ( $B=0.138$ ) is positively related to SP, but the effect is small and not significant ( $p=.138$ ). DL ( $B=0.497$ ) is also positively related to SP but with a higher effect and is highly significant ( $p=.000$ ).

- **Figure 1 Impact of CS on SP, moderated by DL**

Figure 1 shows the true moderating effect of DL on CS and SP. When the level of DL is low, the slope is marginally steep and as CS becomes more effective, SP improves. When the level of DL is high, the slope is like low DL. However, the line is higher meaning the relationship between CS and SP is more effective when level of DL is high. When the level of DL is medium, the slope is low even though the line starts at a higher point when compared to low or high DL. Here, the effect of DL lessens as CS becomes more effective.

Tables 3 and 4 show the influence of HD on SP, with DL as the moderator.

- **Table 3 - Model Summary of HD and SP with DL as moderator**

As seen in Table 3, the R-squared value is quite high (.686), showing goodness of fit. The Adjusted R square shows that 67.9 % of the variance in SP is due to HD. The standard error is also low (.320).

- **Table 4 - Coefficients of Regression of HD and SP with DL as moderator**

As seen in Table 4, HD ( $B=0.439$ ) and DL ( $B=0.497$ ) are both positively related to SP with average effect and are highly significant ( $p=.000$ ).

- **Figure 2 - Impact of HD on SP, moderated by DL**

Figure 2 shows the true moderating effect of DL on HD and SP. When the level of DL is low, the slope is very steep and as HD becomes more effective, SP improves. When the level of DL is high, the slope is again steep, but not as much as for low DL. However, the

line is higher meaning the relationship between HD and SP is more effective when level of DL is high. When the level of DL is medium, the slope is low even though the line starts at a higher point when compared to low or high DL. Here, the effect of DL lessens as HD becomes more effective. Tables 5 and 6 show the influence of OD on SP, with DL as the moderator.

- **Table 5 - Model Summary of OD and SP with DL as moderator**

As seen in Table 5, the R-squared value is again quite high (.654), showing goodness of fit. The Adjusted R square shows that 64.6 % of the variance in SP is due to OD. The standard error is also low (.336).

- **Table 6 - Coefficients of Regression of OD and SP with DL as moderator**

As seen in Table 6, OD ( $B=0.335$ ) and DL ( $B=0.576$ ) are both positively related to SP with average effect and are highly significant ( $p=.000$ ).

- **Figure 3 - Impact of OD on SP, moderated by DL**

Figure 3 shows the true moderating effect of DL on OD and SP. When the level of DL is low, the slope is very steep and as OD becomes more effective, SP improves. When the level of DL is high, the slope is again steep, but not as much as for low DL. The line starts at a higher point meaning when the level of OD is low, the relationship between HD and SP is more effective when level of DL is high. However, the line for low DL and high DL meet towards the end, meaning when OD is highly effective, SP is the same for both low and high DL. When the level of DL is medium, the slope is low even though the line starts at a higher point when compared to low or high DL. Here, the effect of DL lessens as HD becomes more effective.

Research question 2 addressed the impact of DL on school governance leading to an improvement in school performance. The analysis showed that all three parts of governance (CS, HD, and OD) are affected by DL. When DL is high or low, all three become more effective, leading to an improvement in school performance. However, when the level of DL is medium, the slope lowers showing that the level of improvement in school performance is less. This could be due to a confusion in the division of roles and responsibilities, or other factors not determined in this study. What is clear is that when leadership is distributed, school governance improves, leading to better school performance.

The level of DL in each school was examined. Question 23 of the survey addressed the level of distributed leadership directly. DL refers to the data collected when level of distribution was ascertained indirectly. Tables 7 and 8 show the descriptive statistics of School S, while tables 9 and 10 show those of School F.

- **Table 7 - Descriptive Statistics of DL and DL Q23 – School S**

As seen in Table 7, the means are almost identical (DL-Q23=3.8611 and DL=3.8921) for School S. Both show that leadership is being distributed (4=agree).

- **Table 8 - Descriptive Statistics of DL according to Organizational Hierarchy– School S**

As shown in Table 8, the leadership of School S agrees that leadership is being distributed (mean=4.37), although their opinions differ from 'agree' (4) to 'strongly agree' (5) (SD= 0.63106). The middle management also agrees that leadership is being distributed (mean=4.11), and there is consensus (SD=0.25). The teachers also agree (mean=3.84) but mean is least of the three. Also, the opinions of the teachers differ from 'neutral' (3) to 'agree' (4) (SD= 0.49).

- **Table 9 - Descriptive Statistics of DL and DL Q23 – School F**

As seen in Table 9, the means of School F are not the same, with the indirect mean higher (DL-Q23=3.8 and DL=4.0274). However, both show that leadership is being distributed (4=agree).

- **Table 10 - Descriptive Statistics of DL according to Organizational Hierarchy– School F**

As shown in Table 10, the leadership team of School F agrees that leadership is being distributed (mean=4.83) and there is consensus (SD=0.07). The middle management also agrees that leadership is being distributed (mean=4.13) although their opinions differ from 'neutral' (3) to 'strongly agree' (5) (SD=0.78). The teachers also agree (mean=3.99) but not at the same level, as the mean is the least of the three. Also, the opinions of the teachers differ from 'neutral' (3) to 'agree' (4) (SD=0.46).

Research question 3 addressed the level of DL in the schools being studied. The analysis showed that leadership was being distributed in both Schools S and F, but the level of distribution varied. In School S, a few of the teachers said the level of distribution was 'neutral' and feel DL needs improvement. The responses indicated that the level of DL is subterranean, as defined by Harris (2009, p.32), meaning some responsibilities have been distributed. In School F, the response of the middle management ranged from 'neutral' to 'strongly agree'. This shows that the middle management does not feel the level of DL is adequate and could be improved. Here, the level of DL was concluded to be superficial, as tasks are only delegated, but there is no shift in power.

The interviews conducted focused on finding areas that could be enhanced to improve school performance. The analysis for Schools S and F was done separately, as their strengths and weaknesses were different. For School S, the styles of leadership currently being practiced are conducive to DL. However, there is need for more open communication with the teachers, as one stated that it was "autocratic leadership at present" (Teacher2 School S 2020, personal communication, 9 March). When policies

are developed, all stake holders should be included. Currently, the middle management and teachers are only involved with the implementation, and not the planning. The teachers and the middle management do not feel that they interact enough with the principal, with one explaining that “she is accessible but the day to day interaction has been delegated to the vice-principal” (HOD2 School S 2020, personal communication, 10 March). This is not an issue, if the vice-principal and HODs have the power to resolve smaller issue and can confidently bring the larger issues up the chain of command. However, the HODs were not happy with the level of support from the leadership, which must be addressed.

Instructional coaches, like teacher leaders, are already in place and working effectively. The work life balance is adequate, showing leadership is already being distributed, and the principal is open to further changes as well. The HODs and teachers agreed that the environment is safe, but the teachers were feeling pressured. While deadlines must be met, the overall level of comfort the teachers and HOD feel with the leadership team must increase, so DL can help the school improve. In conclusion, leadership is already being distributed in School S, with positive results. However, as always, there is room for improvement. For School F, the leadership style currently being practiced can work with DL, as the principal felt the suitable leadership style “depends on the situation at hand” (Principal School F 2020, personal communication, 8 March). Regarding autonomy, the principal is always included in all decisions, which is not a sustainable model. Real autonomy must be given, so that leadership can truly be distributed. Regarding development of policies, input from different levels is taken, but this could be more extensive. The principal’s open-door policy was appreciated by all and bodes well, but daily interactions with both HODs and teachers create time constraints that could be avoided. All agreed the principal was supportive, and this is conducive to the application of DL.

While some teachers have been given the role of teacher leaders, more work can be done on this aspect. As stated before, the principal is too involved daily and so is unable to achieve a good work/life balance. For DL to be effective, the level of distribution must increase dramatically. In terms of environment, the teachers and HODs feel empowered, with one stating, “our work environment is harmonious” (Teacher4 School F 2020, personal communication, 8 March). The general culture of the school is inclusive, and collaboration is encouraged. In conclusion, DL could help School F become extremely effective and have a huge, positive impact on school performance. For this to occur, change will have to come from the top, i.e. the leadership.

## Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to identify the impact of DL on governance, leading to improving school performance. Research question 1 delved into the concept of DL and showed that it can be applied in any school. Research question 2 explored the impact of DL on the three categories of governance, i.e. CS, HD, and OD (Spillane & Diamond 2015, p.3). The analysis revealed that all three followed the same trends, i.e. DL does moderate the relationship between governance and SP. Additionally, DL has a greater

effect on HD and OD than on CS. Research question 3 ascertained the level of DL in Schools S and F. For School S, the level of DL was classified as subterranean, as delineated by Harris (2009), meaning responsibilities and power are being distributed, but the culture itself has not changed. For School F, the level of DL was classified as superficial, meaning there is some delegation of responsibilities, but true implementation of DL is not taking place. Research question 4 dealt with the discovery of areas that needed improvement. In School S, the areas were found to be open communication from the leadership, inclusion in policy making, and decrease in constant pressure to perform. However, the leadership is open to change and with a little effort, School S could improve enormously. In School F, the principal is too involved, and real DL must occur. However, the environment of the school is inclusive, and with some changes, DL could have an enormous impact on school performance.

This study benefits the entire educational community, not just the two schools. However, each school will have to assess their own strengths and weaknesses. It was found that there is a positive relationship between DL and governance, which leads to effective SP. Through the analysis conducted, the strengths and weaknesses of each school were discovered, so they would have a blueprint of their next steps. Many limitations were encountered during this study, such as getting the target participants to engage during a busy time academically. Another was the use of two schools, which limited population size. Additionally, only private schools were studied, and the school board, parents and students were not included. To overcome these limitations, every effort was made to include participants with different experience levels.

This study goes beyond its predecessors by connecting DL and SP to governance, however further research could provide more data. It could also be conducted in government schools and data gathered compared with these results. The complete analysis could be used by the schools internally, as well as by MoE or ADEK in developing their policies. To conclude, DL has a positive influence on school governance, which leads to an improvement in school performance. The many points of interest found in this study for Schools S and F could potentially apply to other schools. Therefore, this study can be beneficial not only to the schools studied, but to other schools of the region as well.

## References

- Afifeh, K.A.A., & David, S.A. (2016). Identifying leadership styles that influence students' learning environment: Perspectives from five schools in Abu Dhabi, UAE. *Research Demagogue*, 3(1), 40-45.
- Albasha, W., & David, S.A. (2019). Teacher's perspectives on engaged teaching: Study from an American Curriculum School in Dubai, *Specialty Journal of Knowledge Management*, 4(2), 1-13.

- Al-Harathi, A.S., & Al-Mahdy, Y.F.H. (2017). Distributed leadership and school effectiveness in Egypt and Oman: an exploratory study. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 31(6), 801-813.
- Alqarqaz, R.A. (2014). *Collaborative school culture in Al Ain secondary schools: a qualitative study of one female and one male school*, thesis, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates University. Retrieved September 14, 2019 from [https://scholarworks.uaeu.ac.ae/all\\_theses/274](https://scholarworks.uaeu.ac.ae/all_theses/274)
- Baroudi, S., & David, S.A. (2020). Nurturing female leadership skills through peer mentoring role: A study among undergraduate students in the United Arab Emirates. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 74(4), 458-474. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12249>
- Bashaireh, S., & David, S.A. (2019). Appreciate leadership and teacher's subjective well-being: An appreciative tool for an appreciative outcome. *Specialty Journal of Psychology and Management*, 5(3), 46-63.
- Bolden, R. (2011). Distributed leadership in organizations: A review of theory and research', *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 13(1), 40-52. DOI 10.1111/j.1468-2370.2011.00306.x
- BuFalino, G. (2017). Leading schools from the middle: Middle leadership in a context of distributed leadership. *Formazione & Insegnamento*, 15(3), 149-162.
- Connolly, M., & James, C. (2011). Reflections on developments in school governance: international perspectives on school governing under pressure. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 39(4), 501-509. DOI 10.1177/1741143211406560.
- Crow, G.M., Hausman, C.S., & Scribner, J.P. (2002). Reshaping the role of the school principal. *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, 101(1), 189-210. DOI 10.1111/j.1744-7984.2002.tb00009.x
- Daraghmeh, H.A.R., & David, S.A. (2017). Benchmarking of Educational Leaders' Technology Utilization: A study of the attitudes of education leaders in using technology in the UAE. *Education Research Journal*, 7(3), 48-58.
- David, S.A. (2017a). Internationalisation of higher education in the UAE and the implications for undergraduate student's institutional choice for postgraduate studies. *Transitions: Journal of Transient Migration*, 1(2), 235-250.
- David, S.A. (2017b). Knowledge convergence towards economic polarisation: Undergraduate students' postgraduate course choice in the UAE. *International Journal of Knowledge Management Studies*, 8(3/4), 316-328.

- David, S.A., & Abukari, A. (2019). Perspectives of teachers on the selection and the development of the school leaders in the United Arab Emirates. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 34(1), 56-69. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-02-2019-0057>
- Harris, A. (2003a). Distributed leadership and school improvement: Leading or misleading? *Management in Education*, 32(1), 11-24, DOI 10.1177/089202060301600504
- Harris, A. (2003b). Teacher leadership as distributed leadership: Heresy, fantasy or possibility? *School Leadership and Management*, 23(3), 313-324. DOI 10.1080/1363243032000112801
- Harris, A. (2009). Distributed leadership: What we know. In: Harris A. (eds) *Distributed Leadership. Studies in Educational Leadership*. Springer, Dordrecht. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9737-9-2>
- Harris, A. (2011). Distributed leadership: Implications for the role of the principal. *Journal of Management Development*, 31(1) 7-17. DOI 10.1108/02621711211190961
- Harris, A. (2013). Distributed leadership friend or foe? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 41(5), 545-554. DOI: 10.1177/1741143213497635
- Harris, A., & Spillane, J.P. (2008). Distributed leadership through the looking glass. *Management in Education*, 22(1), 31-34. DOI 10.1177/0892020607085623
- Hulpia, H., Devos, G., & Rosseel, Y. (2009). The relationship between the perception of distributed leadership in secondary schools and teachers' and teacher leaders' job satisfaction and organizational commitment. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 20(3), 291-317. DOI: 10.1080/09243450902909840
- Hulpia, H., Devos, G., & Van Keer, H. (2009). The influence of distributed leadership on teachers' organizational commitment: A multilevel approach. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 103(1), 40-52. DOI 10.1080/00220670903231201.
- Humphreys, E. (2010). *Distributed leadership and its impact on teaching and learning*, thesis, Maynooth, National University of Ireland. Retrieved September 15, 2019 from [http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/2041/1/Distributed\\_Leadership\\_Ed\\_D\\_Thesis\\_%28EH%29\\_May\\_2010~2.doc.pdf](http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/2041/1/Distributed_Leadership_Ed_D_Thesis_%28EH%29_May_2010~2.doc.pdf)
- Husseini, A.A., & David, S.A. (2017). The impact of head teachers' instructional leadership role on teachers' professional practices in four private schools in Dubai, the UAE. *Research Nebula*, 6(1), 23-28.

- Johnson, R.B., Onwuegbuzie, A.J., & Turner, L.A. (2007). Toward a definition of mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(2), 112-133. DOI 10.1177/1558689806298224
- MacNeil, A.J., Prater, D.L., & Busch, S. (2009). The effects of school culture and climate on student achievement. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 12(1), 73-84. DOI 10.1080/13603120701576241
- Mehra, A., Smith, B., Dixon, A.L., & Robertson, B. (2006). Distributed leadership in teams: the network of leadership perceptions and team performance. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 17(3), 232-245. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2006.02.003>
- Ministry of Education. (2017). *National strategy for higher education 2030*. Retrieved February 6, 2020 from <https://www.moe.gov.ae/En/MediaCenter/News/Pages/h2030.aspx>
- Mujis, D., & Harris, A. (2003). Teacher leadership – improvement through empowerment? an overview of the literature. *Educational Management & Administration*, 31(4), 437-448. DOI 10.1177/0263211X030314007
- Mulford, B. (2003). *School leaders: challenging roles and impact on teacher and school effectiveness*, OECD. Retrieved September 27, 2019 from <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/37133393.pdf>
- OECD. (2016). *PISA 2015 results (volume II): policies and practices for successful schools*, OECD Publishing, Paris. Retrieved October 21, 2019 from <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en>
- Pont, B., Nusche, D., & Moorman, H. (2008). *Improving school leadership (volume I): Policy and practice*. OECD Publishing, Paris. Retrieved October 15, 2019 from <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/44374889.pdf>
- Salahuddin, A.N.M. (2011). *Perceptions of effective leadership in Bangladesh secondary schools: moving towards distributed leadership?*, thesis, Christchurch, University of Canterbury. Retrieved September 18, 2019 from DOI 10.13140/RG.2.1.1134.5760
- Samkari, H.A., & David, S.A. (2019). The role and impacts of authentic leadership on staff engagement and performance: A study among school leaders and teachers in private schools in the UAE. *Specialty Journal of Psychology and Management*, 5(4), 65-78.
- Shah, S.R. (2014). Empowering EFL teachers through distributed leadership: a critical perspective on leadership practices in an educational institution. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 5(10/1), 9-25. [http://ijbssnet.com/journals/Vol\\_5\\_No\\_10\\_1\\_September\\_2014/2.pdf](http://ijbssnet.com/journals/Vol_5_No_10_1_September_2014/2.pdf)



Spillane, J.P. (2005). Distributed leadership. *The Educational Forum*, 69(2), 143-150. DOI 10.1080/00131720508984678

Spillane, J.P., & Diamond, J.B. (2015). Taking a distributed perspective. In Spillane, J.P & Diamond, J.B (ed.) *Distributed leadership in practice*, Hawker Brownlow Education, pp. 1-15.

Woods, P. (2004). Democratic leadership: drawing distinctions with distributed leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 7(1), 3-26. DOI 10.1080/1360312032000154522.

World Bank. (n.d.). *School good governance*. Retrieved November 1, 2019 from [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/Resources/244362-1193949504055/4348035-1352736698664/SCHOOL\\_GOOD\\_GOVERNANCE\\_FAQ.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/Resources/244362-1193949504055/4348035-1352736698664/SCHOOL_GOOD_GOVERNANCE_FAQ.pdf)

## Model Summary

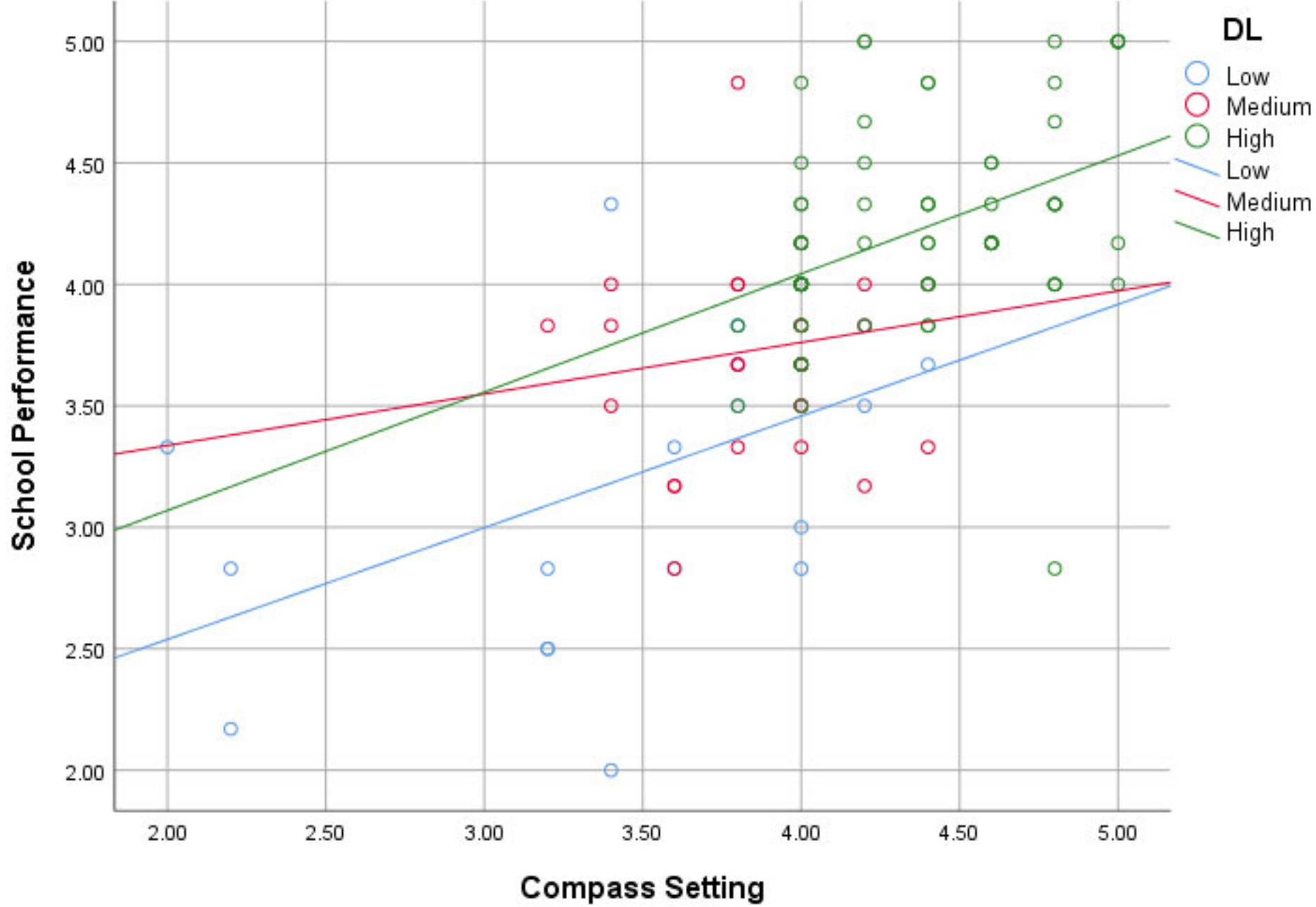
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.782 <sup>a</sup>	.612	.603	.35663

a. Predictors: (Constant), CSxDL\_c, DL\_cen, CS\_cen

## Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.934	.033		118.081	.000
	CS_cen	.138	.093	.124	1.494	.138
	DL_cen	.775	.090	.685	8.589	.000
	CSxDL_c	-.006	.073	-.005	-.082	.935

a. Dependent Variable: School Performance



## Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.828 <sup>a</sup>	.686	.679	.32060

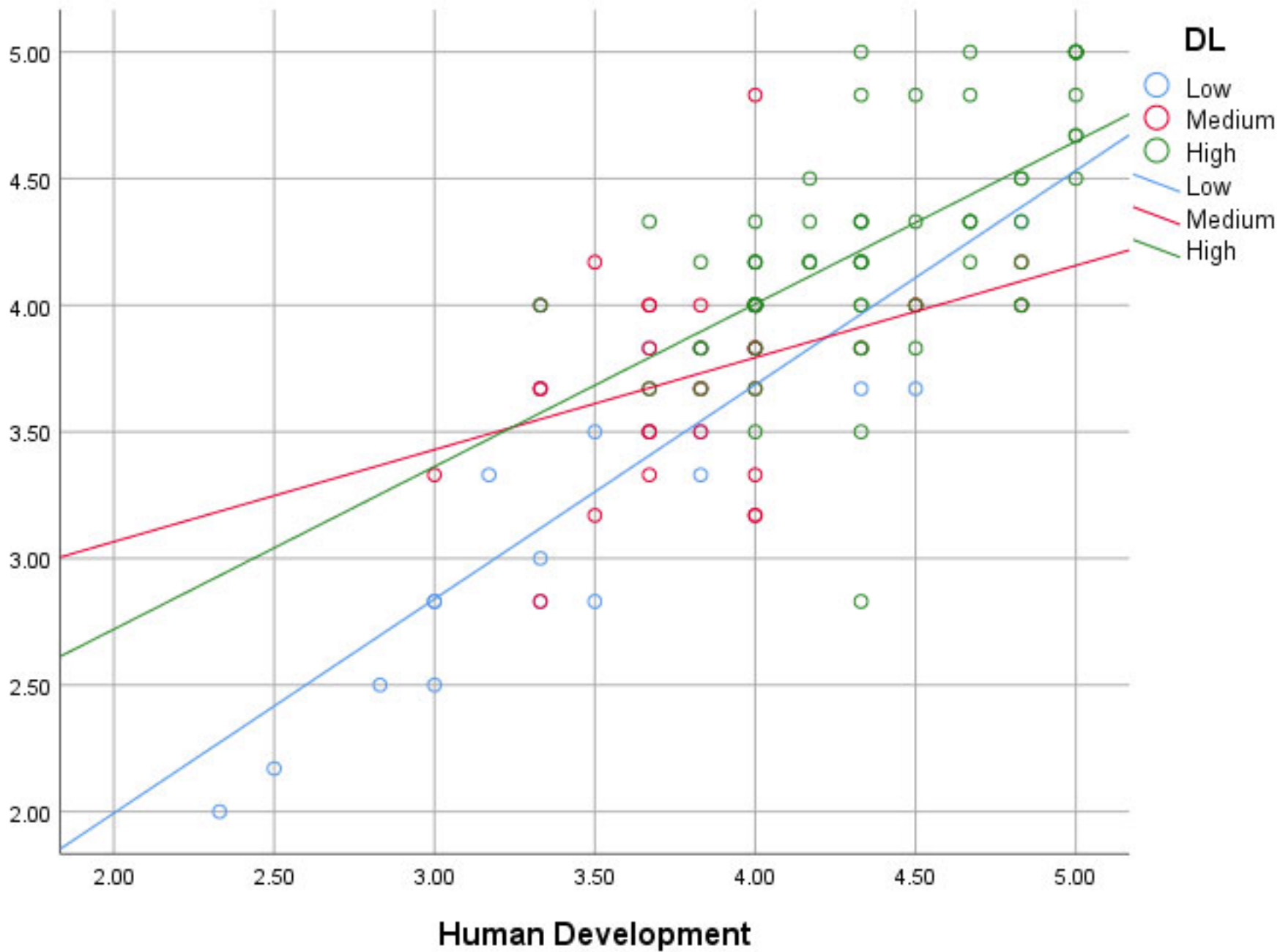
a. Predictors: (Constant), HDxDL\_c, DL\_cen, HD\_cen

## Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	3.954	.031	129.008	.000	
	HD_cen	.439	.080	.419	5.483	.000
	DL_cen	.497	.086	.439	5.767	.000
	HDxDL_c	-.104	.067	-.078	-1.555	.122

a. Dependent Variable: School Performance

School Performance



## Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.809 <sup>a</sup>	.654	.646	.33679

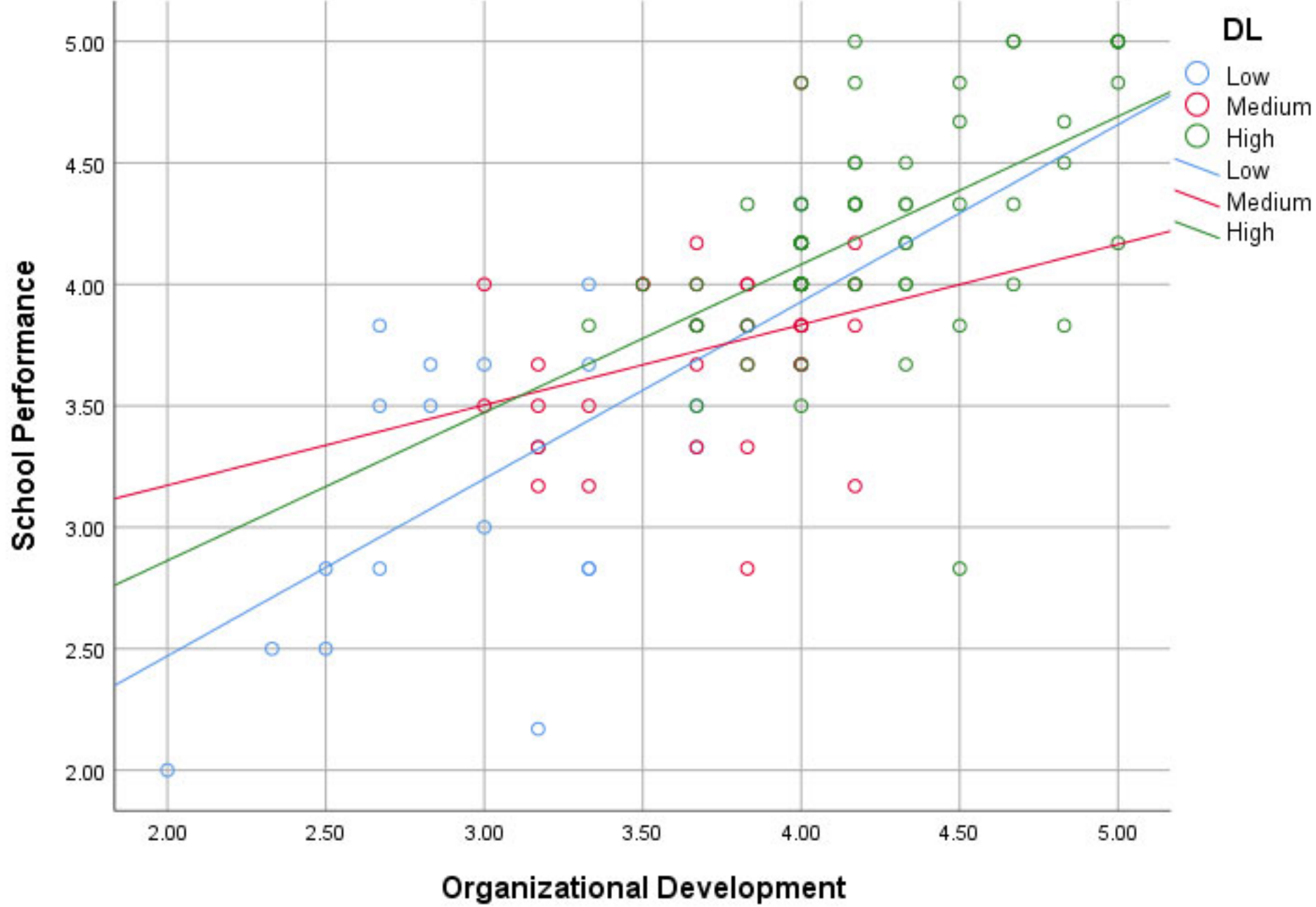
a. Predictors: (Constant), ODxDL\_c, DL\_cen, OD\_cen



## Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
				Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.941	.033		119.410	.000
	OD_cen	.335	.080	.340	4.202	.000
	DL_cen	.576	.091	.509	6.346	.000
	ODxDL_c	-.035	.074	-.026	-.478	.634

a. Dependent Variable: School Performance



## Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
DL – Q23	72	2.00	5.00	3.8611	.67773
Distributed Leadership	72	2.56	5.00	3.8921	.49136
Valid N (listwise)	72				

## Report

### Distributed Leadership

Organizational Hierarchy	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Leadership Team	3	3.67	4.89	4.3733	.63106
Middle Management Team	6	3.89	4.44	4.1100	.25084
Teachers	63	2.56	5.00	3.8484	.49074
Total	72	2.56	5.00	3.8921	.49136

## Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
DL – Q23	65	1.00	5.00	3.80000	.77460
Distributed Leadership	65	2.11	5.00	4.0274	.50384
Valid N (listwise)	65				

## Report

### Distributed Leadership

Organizational Hierarchy	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Leadership Team	2	4.78	4.89	4.8350	.07778
Middle Management Team	5	2.78	4.67	4.1340	.78322
Teachers	58	2.11	5.00	3.9903	.46540
Total	65	2.11	5.00	4.0274	.50384