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### **School Location and Distributed Leadership in the United Kingdom**

Distributed leadership has increased in popularity worldwide (Harris, & Spillane, 2008). Research has been conducted on distributed leadership and its association with the quality of education, teacher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational change, and school climate, across diverse countries (Hulpia *et al.*, 2009; Sun & Xia, 2018). However, the evidence about how school contextual factors influence distributed leadership is limited. According to earlier research, schools with disproportionately high proportions of children from affluent socioeconomic backgrounds, mainly city schools, are more likely to involve teachers in school decision-making than schools in less affluent areas, primarily rural areas. (Liu *et al.*, 2018). This blog explores the extent to which school type influences distributed leadership from the headteachers' perspective.

Researcher highlights how school contexts and headteacher characteristics contribute to school leadership styles and its effectiveness (Leithwood, 2008). However, interventions and methods that work in one school context might not work in another, since no two school situations are the same. In a [recently published study](#), we found important differences in the understanding of school leadership across the countries participating in the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (OECD, 2019a). Our results provide evidence to support the idea that headteachers should give more importance to their particular context when deciding the leadership style that best suits their schools. We believe that it is necessary to complement analyses of international patterns with specific-context research. In doing so, we attempted to answer the following research question in a presentation recently delivered at the BELMAS Annual Conference in Liverpool (July 2022) *"Does school type affect the leadership distribution practices of school principals in the UK?"*

In this ongoing study, we focused on UK data from [TALIS](#) 2018. The main outcome variable is the headteachers' perception of distributed leadership in relation to team leadership in the school; and the predictor of interest is school location (i.e., rural, town and city schools). We used the school location as main independent variable. We conducted three separate multiple regression analyses with distributed leadership as the outcome variable and controlled for many variables in the UK.

The main finding of this study is that headteachers who work in schools located in rural areas tend to report lower levels of distributed leadership when compared to headteachers who work in cities and towns. One explanation of these findings might be that schools located in cities and towns have more staff members, so that headteachers in those schools can distribute leadership roles to others. The other reason might be that headteachers in city schools have more opportunities to develop their social capital not only within but also between schools and, therefore, have a higher propensity to adopt a distributed leadership style (Spillane & Sun, 2022).

These results, however, are based on aggregated data from a national representative sample and cannot be used to identify the mechanisms underlying the patterns we found. Consequently, we believe that a follow-up qualitative study is needed to produce the information that will allow us to refine the theories we currently use to explain these phenomena. Collecting information directly from headteachers in schools located in different contexts, as well as from their students, teachers and other stakeholders is necessary to generate a detailed picture of what is happening in UK schools. This information can then be used as evidence to make better informed policy and practice decisions.

Furthermore, similar mixed-methods studies, using large-scale assessment data from different countries, followed-up by qualitative case studies can lead to a global comparative perspective on the interdependence between leadership styles and school context. The findings are of particular interest to academics, policy-makers and education practitioners in their quest for social justice in education as distributed leadership could potentially lead to school effectiveness and improvement.

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