

**Distributed Leadership in a Multicultural Context: Case
Study from Vietnam-Finland International School**

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ABSTRACT

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This study seeks to shed light on how distributed leadership is adopted and developed in a multicultural school context. Popular in the Western countries, i.e. the UK, distributed leadership has recently been introduced into Asian schools, especially the international ones, and faces both challenges and opportunities.

Using the case of Vietnam-Finland International School (VFIS), the research looks into the perceptions of teachers and principals of distributed leadership, and how distributed leadership should be developed in this particular setting. Data was collected mainly via individual and group interviews, and essays at two different periods. Qualitative content analysis is applied.

According to the findings, teachers and principals view distributed leadership from three aspects: leadership structure, leadership qualities and operational culture. Three challenges facing the development of distributed leadership are inappropriate decision-making involvement, complicated leadership structure, and lack of competent human resources. Cultural differences is the underlying force behind the first two challenges. Yet to develop distributed leadership is vital for a multicultural environment like VFIS. As a result, a new existence of distributed leadership emerges. To develop it is to build a clear organisational structure, a supportive organisational culture, teams, competent teachers, and multicultural leadership qualities.

The study confirms the complexity of leadership context in international schools in Asia. It results in a new model of distributed leadership where hierarchical and distributive features are both present.

Keywords: distributed leadership, international school, multicultural context, Vietnam-Finland International School

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IB	International Baccalaureate
K-12	Kindergarten to Grade 12
VFIS	Vietnam-Finland International School

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1 INTRODUCTION

There is a widely recognised claim that “school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning” (Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins, 2008, p.28). Whatever educational content and methods chosen in a given school context, its leadership and management is subject to develop and adapt relevantly to fit the operational environment. In light of globalisation, education and school leadership evolve while cultural diversity in schools emerges. Many schools are forced to embrace multiculturalism to thrive. Some schools around the globe, on the other hand, position themselves as global or international learning communities. Similarly, school leadership style prominent in one specific region may now travel and seek adoption and acceptance in a new land.

Distributed leadership has mainly emerged in Western countries (i.e. UK) and has recently been one of the most studied leadership approaches in educational research in these environments, yet it gained little attention in the Eastern countries nor in a multicultural context. Despite the dominance of distributed leadership studies in the Western part of the world, Gumus, Bellibas, Esen, and Gumus (2016) witnessed the steady growth since 2005 in the number of such research in Turkey, China and Taiwan. In the educational landscape of Vietnam, distributed leadership is almost a new term. Only two relevant studies on distributed leadership can be found on Google Scholar and ERIC platforms since 2000 till the time of the present study: (1) A Distributed Perspective on Instructional Leadership in International Baccalaureate (IB) Schools by Lee, Hallinger and Walker (2012), and (2) A Study on Principals’ Distributed Leadership at High Schools in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam by Ho (2015). The first study responded to a call for “more descriptive and analytical studies of distributed school leadership in diverse school contexts” (p.687) by a study of distributed instructional leadership in five International Baccalaureate (IB) schools in Asia. However, this article, together with the second article, did not provide a thorough analysis on opportunities and challenges that face distributed leadership in a multicultural environment. Researchers were not able to generalise their findings into sound

knowledge base. It was affirmed that contextualized research on such leadership approach in particular settings is obviously needed (Lee et al., 2012). In brief, more studies on how successful leadership responds and adapts in culturally diverse contexts will reduce the literature scarcity (Hallinger, 2018).

Founded in 2019, Vietnam-Finland International School (VFIS) provides a promising setting for such study. Owned by a public Vietnamese university, this K-12 school can be considered as a multicultural school. It mixes Finnish educational characteristics in adaptation with worldly recognised International Baccalaureate (IB) programmes and local features in term of operations. Cultural diversity manifests in various school aspects. Its personnel include Finnish, Vietnamese and other nationalities; its student body represents different citizenships. The school offers two mainstream curricula: the international curriculum which is comprised of Finnish national core curriculum 2014 from grade 1 to grade 10 and IB programme for grade 11 and 12; and the bilingual curriculum integrating Finnish and Vietnamese educational content and pedagogical approaches. In term of leadership and management, distributed leadership has been selected for the school operations (VFIS School Handbook, 2018). In the meantime, vivid features of distribute leadership are revealed in Finnish national core curriculum 2014 (cf. Tian & Risku, 2018). Furthermore, VFIS operates as an international Finnish school under the highest governance of a public university of Vietnam. There exists a strong autocratic nature in effective leadership in Vietnamese schools (Truong & Hallinger, 2017). This complicated background raises a doubt of successful application of distributed leadership at VFIS. This can humbly represent the complexity of educational operations in a more and more connected world. In the realm of research, VFIS is a worthwhile case study for investigation to generate timely knowledge of distributed school leadership in a multicultural context.

The aim of the current study was twofold. I aimed to investigate the perceptions of teachers and principals of distributed leadership and how distributed leadership should be developed in a multicultural school. Accordingly, research questions of this study were: (1) In teachers' and principals' opinion, what does

distributed leadership mean?; (2) In teachers' and principals' opinion, what facilitate or hinder the development of distributed leadership in a multicultural school?; and (3) How distributed leadership should be developed in a multicultural context?

The present study is divided into six parts starting with the introduction which covers the aim of the study. The two following sections review existing literature on distributed leadership and international schools whose focus is leadership in such context. Next is a full description on how this study has been carried out. The fifth section presents key findings from collected data. The paper ends by discussions on the reported findings.

2 DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP IN A MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT

2.1 Distributed Leadership

2.1.1 A Historical View on Distributed Leadership Research

Scholars witness that research on distributed leadership has bloomed since the beginning of 2000s (Bolden, 2011, p. 252; Gronn, 2016), yet, this concept might have emerged about half a century ago or earlier (Harris, 2009). Gronn (2000, 2008) claims that the term “distributed leadership” was first introduced in 1954 by Gibb in his research on leadership in social psychology. In Gibb’s words, leadership was “probably best conceived as a group quality, as a set of functions which must be carried out by the group” (Gibb, p. 1954; Gibb, p. 1968, cited in Gronn, 2008, p. 146).

Tracing back to the development of distributed leadership theory in the 20th century, Gronn (2008) listed out a rare number of but considerable contributions of research effort in this new leadership model. In 1948, Bennet and Sheats discussed the removal of sharp discrepancy between leader and member functions in groups and promotion of leadership reflecting a multilaterally shared responsibility. Some years later, in 1954 and 1968, Gibb used the term “distributed leadership” for the first time on discussing leadership as a group quality and group functions that both leaders and followers have influence over each other. Later on, Katz and Kahn (1978) examined the benefits of distribution of leadership in organisations which are decision-making commitment and decision-making quality. Then Schein (1988), taking a practical perspective, proposed that leadership in organisations manifests in different functions, some of which is the leader’s sole responsibility but other functions should be optimally distributed for effectiveness. These authors contributed to a breakthrough in leadership understanding, which challenged the commonly held notion of only one individual

leading an organisation. Yet, these authors were only focusing their research in the field of social psychology or general social sciences.

Since late 1980s, much research on distributed leadership in the school/educational context emerged and sprang up. For the period of 1980-2009, about two-thirds (68%) of distributed leadership articles were published in education/educational management journals (Bolden, 2011). Compared with other leadership models, distributed leadership is also the most studied in the educational context from 1980 to 2014 (Gumus, Bellibas, Esen, & Gumus, 2016). In term of geography, distributed leadership has enjoyed a various degree of interest. Within 1980 to 2009, the vast majority of articles are written by US-based scholars. Ranked second is UK-based, then Canada, Australia and Demark respectively while the other nationalities account for less than 10 (Bolden, 2011).

In particular, 2000s marked the inception of influential studies on distributed leadership and a wide range of understandings of this leadership model including Gronn's (2000, 2002) and Spillane, Halverson and Diamond's (2001, 2004). Researchers of distributed leadership in this period onwards base their models on a number of key theoretical concepts (Bolden, 2011) as follows.

- Gronn (2000, 2002) bases his research on the concepts of distributed cognition and activity theory, his 2008 model adds reciprocal influence, diffusion of leadership functions within groups, distribution of power and influence, dual leadership, sharing leadership, substitutes for leadership, functions of leadership and other related theories.
- Spillane, Halverson, Diamond (2001, 2004) employ the concepts of distributed cognition and activity theory.
- Harries (2009) cites informal leadership in groups and teams, functions of the executive and the informal organisation, social learning theory, distributed cognition and "lateral agency", professional learning communities and complexity and systems.

- Leithwood, Mascall, and Strauss (2009) emphasise organisational learning theory, distributed cognition, complexity science and high involvement leadership.

Furthermore, Woods, Bennett, Harvey, and Wise (2004) add the social context of an organisation as one critical ground to the development of distributed leadership. This consideration resonates with a study by Spillane, Harris, Jones and Mertz (2015) which takes not only social context but also *situated cognition* into account. Altogether, the word cloud below maps out some key theoretical foundations found in literature that have shaped contemporary understanding of distributed leadership (Figure 1).

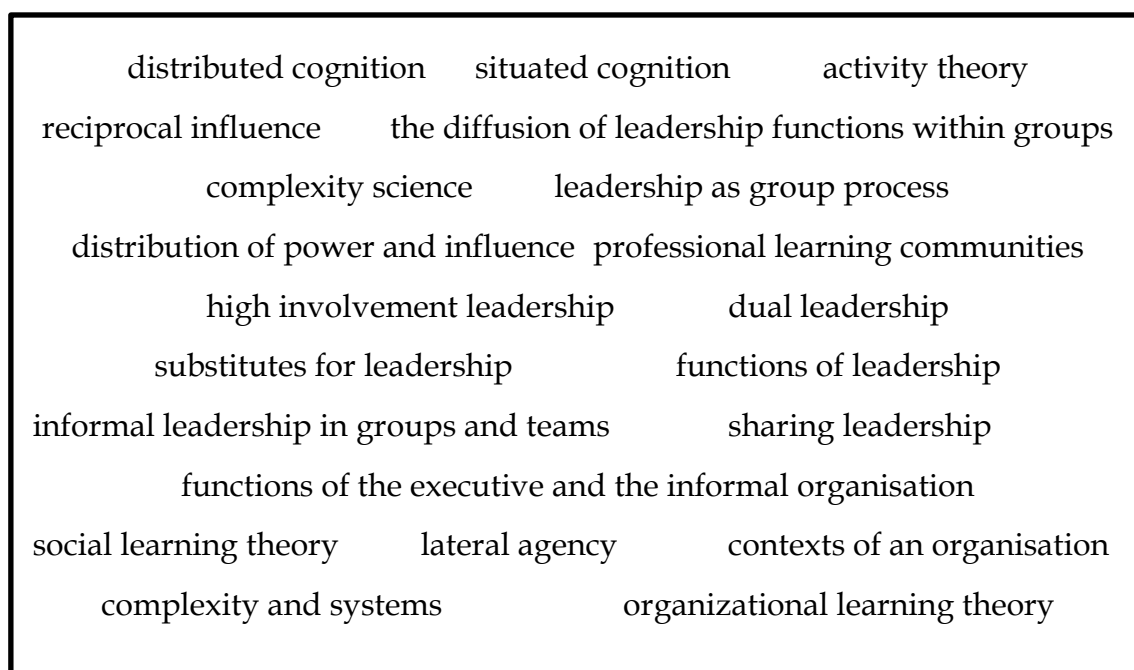


FIGURE 1: Theoretical foundations to the development of distributed leadership in the early 21st century (Bolden, 2011; Woods et al., 2004; Spillane, Harris, Jones & Mertz, 2015)

As a result, various research frameworks of distributed leadership emerged. The table 1 below presents the key frameworks by prominent authors and their contributions to the development of distributed leadership since 2000.

TABLE 1 The key research frameworks of distributed leadership in 2000s (Bol-
den, 2011; Gronn, 2016; Tian, 2016)

Authors	Contribution
Woods, Bennet, Harvey, and Wise (2004)	<p>Distributed leadership is featured by structural and agential dimensions. This framework emphasises the ongoing interaction between organizational structure and personal agency. Importantly, these authors identified six key variables of distributed leadership: external and internal settings, control and autonomy, causes of change and development, dynamics of team working, institutional and spontaneous forms of distributed leadership, and conflict resolution. Their work sheds light on several distributed leadership studies due to its comprehensive literature review in this research realm.</p>
MacBeath, Oduro, and Waterhouse (2004); MacBeath (2005)	<p>The development of distributed leadership comprises of six consequential stages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formal distribution (leadership is structurally delegated, roles and responsibility are officially and vividly recognised) • pragmatic distribution (usually an ad hoc response to external demands, which leads to a negotiation among the team to decide who is entrusted with such leadership roles and responsibilities) • strategic distribution (based on goal orientation, when staff are appointed to fulfil available leadership positions) • incremental distribution (having pragmatic, ad hoc and strategic quality but emerges from bottom-up as people confidently acquire leadership responsibilities in parallel with gaining expertise and experience) • opportunistic distribution (when staff initiates to take leadership responsibilities in addition to typical job description) • cultural distribution (when taking leadership roles and responsibilities becomes natural and spontaneous among all individuals of the organisation) <p>This approach offers a practical application for school leaders by diagnosing the current situation to locate their leadership in the process.</p>
Spillane, Halver-son, and Diamond's (2004); Spillane (2006)	<p>This framework consists of the leader-plus aspect and the practice-centered aspect. Firstly, leadership responsibilities are not only taken care by formally designed leaders but also other individuals, so-called informal leaders. Secondly, leadership practices are enacted by the interaction among leaders, followers and situations; and the roles of leaders</p>

	<p>and followers can be exchanged according to situation. There are three forms of leadership distribution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collaborated distribution (leaders and followers collaborate in time and place) • collective distribution (individuals work separately but interdependently) • coordinated distribution (several members working in sequence and interdependently) <p>This framework offers one of a seminal definition of distributed leadership in school context, followed by several controversial modification and interchangeable usage of some related concepts such as shared, collaborative, democratic leadership.</p>
<p>Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006); Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon, and Yashkina (2007)</p>	<p>Distributed leadership has four patterns to contribute towards organizational performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • planful alignment (deliberate distribution of resources and responsibilities to achieve long-term organizational goals) • spontaneous alignment (unplanned distribution of leadership tasks and functions to attain short-term goals, resulting in positive impact) • spontaneous misalignment (unplanned distribution of leadership tasks and functions, resulting in low effective impact) • anarchic misalignment (leadership tasks performed independently without a mutual goal, causing destructive impact) <p>This framework appeals the interest of policy makers and school practitioners as it connects distributed leadership with school improvement.</p>
<p>Gronn (2002, 2008, 2016)</p>	<p>Revisiting his 2002 model, Gronn's (2008, 2015) combines distributed leadership and solo leadership into a hybrid leadership model. The earlier model discussed the dual nature of school leadership: numerical and concertive. The former feature views leadership as an effort extended to a number of school members, not only formal leaders. The latter values the synergy of individuals' leadership effort over the sum of individuals' actions. The 2008 model criticises the sole existence of distributive pattern. Instead, leadership is considered as the configuration of different degrees of co-existing individualism and collectivism.</p>

In short, these existing frameworks shape a rich knowledge base for distributed leadership research. Yet, these studies investigate distributed leadership in some certain regions, i.e., the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia, which generates more suitable implications for these cultural contexts only. Thanks to globalisation, a phenomenon originated in one place travels. So does distributed leadership. To date, there is a growing number of distributed leadership studies in the Asian context, mainly in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. However, a search on ERIC, Education Resources Information Centre, in April 2020 showed a handful of related publications on educational leadership and distributed leadership in the Southeast Asian countries, having only Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Indeed, more studies on how successful leadership responds and adapts in culturally diverse contexts are needed to reduce the literature scarcity (Hallinger, 2018). This is where motivation of this present research germinated.

2.1.2 Definition of Distributed Leadership

This study applies Spillane's (2006) model of distributed leadership as the starting point. According to Spillane (2006), distributed leadership is defined as the interaction of leaders, followers and situations around specific tasks. In practice, leadership does not rely on the sole responsibility or ability of one individual but should be stretched over these three constituting elements. The roles of leaders and followers are formed based on the given the situation. Meanwhile, Harris (2010) redefines this notion as the expansion of leadership roles. Roles of leaders and other members can be exchanged according to the situation. The situation is best understood as a sociocultural context including artifacts (Spillane et al., 2004).

Interaction between leaders and followers is manifested through leadership tasks where social distribution arises (Spillane et al., 2004). There exist three types of social distribution between individuals, on how they work together towards a leadership task. One type, collaborated distribution, refer to leaders and followers collaborate in time and place. Another distribution labelled "collective" oc-

curs where members work separately but interdependently. The other one, coordinated distribution, means leaders and followers of an organisation working in sequence and interdependently. Robinson (2008) furthers this idea of interaction by labelling distributed leadership as task distribution. As leadership does not fall on the sole responsibility of one individual, those without a formal leadership title could perform it as well (Spillane, 2006). Organisational members can exert power and influence to formal leaders and other members, which refers distributed leadership to as distributed influence processes (Robinson, 2008).

Within the school context, the leadership tasks refer to “identification, acquisition, allocation, co-ordination, and use of the social, material, and cultural resources necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of teaching and learning” (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 11). This echoes with Woods et al.’s (2004) structural dimension of distributed leadership which covers distribution of resources and responsibilities, cultural ideas and values, as well as social relations. In the meantime, these authors equally emphasise the other dimension of distributed leadership which is the agency or agential powers of organisational members. Critically, both of these dimensions (structure and agency) constitute a whole view on distributed leadership.

2.1.3 Distributed Leadership in School Context

Distributed leadership “represents one of the most influential ideas to emerge in the field of educational leadership in the past decade” (Harris, 2010, p. 55) and amplifies its impact until today. A search result with key word “distributed leadership” on ERIC, the Education Resources Information Center, in April 2020 indicates nearly 700 peer-reviewed publications. Of all, five national contexts studied the most seem to be the USA, the UK, Australia, Finland, Canada in the descending order. In Asia, Hong Kong, China, Malaysia and Singapore are four locations that a considerable number of studies on this topic are produced. In this section, I discuss manifestations of distributed leadership in the school context, in which discussions in the European and Asian context are made where relevant.

In describing distributed leadership in the schools, I start with a finding from the 2013 report titled “Distributed Leadership in Practice: A Descriptive Analysis of Distributed Leadership in European Schools” commissioned by the European Policy Network of School Leaders and undertaken by Duif, Harrison, Dartel, and Sinyolo. from the European School Heads Association as it offers the most versatile approach to distributed leadership practice at schools. According to the report, distributed leadership is widely enacted at the European schools, and the perception of school leaders and teachers towards the enactment of distributed leadership practices differs. Many countries such as Finland and Norway have a long-standing teaching culture of teamwork and cooperation, which enables the smoother development of distributed leadership. Others, such as Ireland, has just shifted to this leadership model. A study by O’Donovan (2015) in Ireland reported challenges in executing it within schools in spite of prevailing widespread support.

In European schools, distributed leadership manifests in teachers and school leaders’ influence on school policy and is understood in seven operational dimensions. The influence on school policy covers curriculum content, curriculum delivery, the school budget, HR policy (e.g. employment conditions, recruitment, selection), organisational structure, strategic development planning, and professional development (Duif et al., 2013). The seven dimensions of distributed leadership are school structure, strategic vision, value and beliefs, collaboration and cooperation, decision making, responsibility and accountability, and initiative. Specific aspects of each dimension are illustrated in the following table.

TABLE 2 Seven dimensions of distributed leadership in European schools (Duif et al., 2013, pp. 14-18)

Dimension	Aspects
School structure	Hierarchically decided tasks and responsibilities Formally agreed leadership roles Decision making by professional within predetermined boundaries of responsibility and accountability Formally provided opportunities to participate in decision making by the school structure

	<p>Informal leadership at all levels facilitated by the school structure</p> <p>Regular consultation meeting</p> <p>By the school supported professional development</p>
Strategic vision	<p>Shared vision</p> <p>Common values for all</p> <p>Staff take ownership</p> <p>Students take ownership</p> <p>Students take ownership</p> <p>Learning organization as one of the school goals</p>
Value and beliefs	<p>Mistakes as a learning opportunity</p> <p>Confidence in each other's abilities</p> <p>Mutual respect</p> <p>High standards for professionals</p>
Collaboration and co-operation	<p>Working collaboratively to delivery school results</p> <p>Expressing opinions on a regularly basis</p> <p>Sharing knowledge and experiences with one another</p> <p>Helping one another to solve problems</p> <p>Sufficient time to collaborate</p> <p>Cooperation to achieve the collective ambition</p>
Decision making	<p>Opportunity to make decisions related to the content of work</p> <p>Opportunity to make decision in how to organize work</p> <p>Opportunity to make decisions on a sufficient range of aspects in work</p> <p>It's common that everyone is involved with decision making</p> <p>Decision making from the top</p>
Responsibility and accountability	<p>Being accountable to superior</p> <p>Kept accountable</p> <p>Felt responsibility</p> <p>Taking responsibility without asking</p> <p>Sharing collected responsibilities for each other's behaviour</p> <p>Encouragement to express opinion regardless of formal status</p>
Initiative	<p>Initiatives and ideas mainly from the top</p> <p>Sufficient amount of freedom to contribute own ideas to improve the work</p> <p>Necessity to take the initiative and responsibility due to a lack of direction and lead</p> <p>Assignment all tasks based upon the level of expertise</p>

In the USA, leadership and management are also dispersed within schools through the distribution of administrative, curriculum and instruction tasks (Spillane, Camburn & Pareja, 2007). In exploring the relationship of distributed leadership to student learning, a framework of four dimensions of distributed leadership was condensed by Gordon (2005) based on a 5-dimension model by Elmore and the Connecticut Department of Education (Vlachadi & Ferla, 2013). The first dimension is mission, vision and goals, which should be widely shared and recognized by school members towards student learning. The second dimension, school culture, promotes a culture that is collaborative and open deep and sustainable professional learning. Then, shared responsibly, the third dimension includes shared decision making and development of evaluation of school staff. Finally, leadership practices make up the fourth dimension that requires school leaders to “define, present and carry out their interaction with others in the process of leading” (Vlachadi & Ferla, 2013 p. 41). While having many similarities with the European framework, this model stands out in bring professional development as one important dimension.

On contrary, vision and school culture are not mentioned as a dimension of distributed leadership in Harion and Goh’s (2015) study in the Singaporean context. Their four dimensions are bounded empowerment, developing leadership, shared decisions and collective engagement. The first dimension refers to “the willingness to relinquish a certain degree of authority to subordinates” (Harion & Goh, 2015, p. 707). It has some overlapped aspects with decision making and initiative dimensions in European schools, for example, work-related decision making and initiative to improve school processes and performance. Likewise, the other two dimensions, shared decisions and collective engagement, are included into decision making and collaboration and cooperation in European schools. The second dimension, developing leadership, however, seems not to fall into any category. A study in Malaysian context (Bush & Ng, 2019) reveals six distinctive characteristics of distributed leadership in Malaysian schools: del-

egation, sharing the workload, decision making, trust, consultation and autonomy. It could be implied from these studies that school leaders and teachers in the Southeast Asia do not tap into structural aspects when thinking about distributed leadership.

2.2 International Schools as a Multicultural Context

Originally established around the world to provide education for the “internationally mobile professional elite” (Tate, 2016, p. 19), international schools have a long history of over 100 years (Sylvester, 2002). Globalisation has fuelled the increase and diversity of international schools around the world (Keller, 2014). They vary in terms of size, type, nature, location, student demographics, curriculum, ownership admissions criteria (Keller, 2014; Neufield, 2019).

To date, a clear understanding to cover all different types of “international school” remains missing. An attempt at producing a definition was made, indicating that an international school has “an international teaching staff; an internal student body; a board of governors that represents different cultural views; an international academic curriculum which goes beyond the simple adoption of ‘international’ programmes such as IB or IGCSE, to encourage international understanding; a broad-based non-academic programme which encourages; and facilitates cultural mixing and cross-cultural fertilisation” (Matthews, 1989, as cited in Heyward, 2002, p. 21). As of now, many schools claim it “international” without a multicultural board of governors, this definition might not suit the reality. Instead, researchers look at common aspects to generate key characteristics of various international schools.

- Curriculum: an international curriculum other than national curriculum of the host country and taught in two or more languages (Hayden & Thompson, 2008; Ronsheim, 1970, Terwilliger, 1972)
- Students: a diverse student body, in which some students are non-nationals of the host country (Gellar, 1993; Hayden & Thompson, 2008)

- Teachers and administrators: a diverse body of teachers and administrators, a relatively large numbers of whom are expatriate (Gellar, 1993; Hayden & Thompson, 2008)
- Management, leadership and governance: the school's "status within the local context, curriculum and nature of student and teacher population raise particular issues for management, leadership and governance" (Hayden & Thompson, 2008, p. 28)

Jackson & Holvino (1988, pp. 14-15) identify two characteristics of a multicultural organisation:

- "It reflects contributions and interests of diverse cultural and social groups in its mission, operations, and product or service;
- It includes the members of diverse cultural and social groups as full participants, especially in decisions that shape the organisation;"

Collating characteristics of an international school with those of a multicultural organisation, it could be drawn that international schools represent a multicultural context as they offer education service for the interests of people from more than one nationality; they are operated by teams of diverse cultures and nationalities.

2.3 Leadership in International Schools

Research on leadership in international schools is thin (Lee & Walker, 2018; Lee, Hallinger, & Walker, 2011) despite a growth in number of such school type around the globe. The majority of the current literature on this research realm discusses leadership performed by formally designated school leaders and only a few on middle managers or curriculum coordinators (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018). Depending on the school context, the job title for such school leader is "Director, Director General, Education Director, Executive Director, Head, Head of School, Headmaster, Principal, President, School Head, and more" (Keller, 2014,

p. 902). Due to the unique nature of the international school context, school leaders appear to face various tensions and challenges of “complexity, ambiguity and change” (Keller, 2014, p. 903). Several studies on challenges to international school leaders have been made. In an effort to bringing out these challenges through a contextual lens, researchers found some common difficulties: “achieving coherence and consistency across different educational programmes; managing the complexity of the school’s structural features; recruitment, selection, deployment of staff; ongoing professional development of teachers, managing parental expectations” (Lee et al., 2011, p. 17); micro-political conflicts (Caffyn, 2010); communication and collaboration as a result of cultural diversity (Lee et al., 2012); school board micromanagement and connecting cultural dualities (Keller, 2014).

Given the rare literature on international school leadership and the majority of studies focusing on a single school leader, some others hint distributive patterns of leadership as a solution to unravel the multicultural challenges and complexities. Simkins (2005, p. 16) asserts that “power and authority are and should be constituted and distributed”, which helps the school leader make sense of his international school context. Walker and Lee (2018) offer a “disconnection framework” for IB school leaders to successfully implement innovative educational programmes in Southeast and East Asia. Accordingly, leaders could apply “five disconnection points, namely instrumental, intellectual, cultural, professional, and communicative disconnections, between intent and inaction” through teacher leadership and distributed instructional leadership (Lee & Walker, 2018, p. 465). To illuminate the rationale for embracing distributed instructional leadership in international schools, Lee et al. (2012) analyse the sociocultural and structural complexity inherent in the school context. Though cultural diversity is celebrated in international schools, it also poses “challenges in communication, parental involvement, curriculum and instructional organisation and teamwork” (Lee et al., 2012, p. 676). Structurally, these K-12 schools have an umbrella-like

leadership model of having a Headmaster or School Director on top then a principal at each educational level (primary, middle and high school). Then the leader of each level has their own staff to manage and supervise.

Given a complicated background, such international schools apply three types of distributed leadership strategies: articulation, cross-programme activities and staffing. Articulation strategies comprise of backward mapping (a collaborative inquiry method to “chart missing links in curriculum between different IB programmes” (Lee et al., 2012, p. 677)) and documentation (data and information documented and shared across the programmes and school, i.e., overarching school philosophy, concrete instructional guidelines, technology tool manuals). While the articulation practices are suitable for senior leaders to ensure coherence and consistency, cross-programme activities are carried out by teachers and programme coordinators to familiarise them to the other programmes. Some effective activities reported are cross-programme meetings for professional development, cross-programme teaching and cross-programme cooperation. In regards to strategic staffing, three practices are noticed: (1) teachers with IB teaching experience is prioritised to obtain a community of shared understanding and “common language” towards IB programmes, (2) one individual taking more than one position in different programmes, and (3) position switching.

While these authors introduce how the leading figure of the school should distribute power to the subordinates, Bunnell (2008) and Neufield (2019) introduce a dual culture co-leadership or co-principalship model of which two individuals share the job and responsibilities. This model has emerged in China as a pragmatic response to the modern Chinese international school context where East meets West. With one Asian leader and a Western leader, this leadership arrangement helps tackle a critical challenge when the only school leader (often an expatriate) is alien to the national culture and working norms of the host country where the school is located. In this model, the duo leaders perform “seven areas of responsibilities: school management; staff development; educational programming; school ethos; community relations; school enrolment; school iden-

tivity" (Bunnell, 2008, p. 199). Their tasks are identical in all areas except community relations. The western co-principal takes charge of communicating with foreign-related communities, while dealing with governmental agencies and local media partners. According to Bunnell, this unique leadership arrangement reduce risks, mitigate the possible discrimination in international schools, improve decision making continuity, and increase satisfaction. Yet Neufield (2019) observes challenges to this dual cultural leadership model. First, there might appear tensions related to power, control and trust. Second, the Chinese co-principal has "real" authority. Third, the co-principals experience different communication and interactions with different groups within the school community, for example, foreign teachers and parents closer to the foreign co-principal while Chinese co-principal approached more by local staff and parents. Forth, not only co-principals make decisions on both strategic planning and daily school activities but also external groups such as board of directors and business managers. Fifth, a need for common understandings because of cultural differences and more time for decision-making, building trust and co-principal relationship. Therefore, several strategies and efforts by both co-principals should be made to smooth their leadership practices and mitigate the negative impact by such challenges.

3 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

In this chapter, the context of Vietnam-Finland International School will be described, the research process will be outlined, details about the study participants will be given, methods of data collection and data analysis will be presented, and ethical solutions will be explained.

3.1 The Context of the Study

This study takes place at Vietnam-Finland International School (VFIS), a K-12 school of a public university in the south of Vietnam. It opened in 2019 beginning with Primary School while Middle School and High School of VFIS will start in 2020 and 2021 respectively (VFIS Development Report, 2019).

VFIS offers two study programmes: International and Bilingual. The International programme at VFIS in Grade 1-9 follows the Finnish curriculum. Most of the subjects in the programme are taught in English by Finnish and international teachers. The teaching and learning methods reflect Finnish pedagogical characteristics. In High School, the VFIS International Programme will integrate Finnish curriculum with an international curriculum. VFIS is a candidate school for the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme and pursuing authorisation as an IB World School. IB World Schools share a common philosophy – a commitment to improve the teaching and learning of a diverse and inclusive community of students by delivering challenging, high quality programmes of international education that share a powerful vision. The Bilingual programme in Grades 1-12 follows the Vietnamese curriculum integrated with the Finnish curriculum and Finnish learning and teaching approaches. Mathematics, Vietnamese language, Social Studies and Moral Education will be taught in Vietnamese while the other subjects will be taught in English. At the end of Grade 12, pupils are entitled to take the National High School Graduation Examination.

So far in its first year, over 200 students were enrolled in VFIS, representing 9 countries: Australia, Canada, Finland, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, United Kingdom, United States, and Vietnam (VFIS Development Report, 2019). As of November 1st 2019, 54 students pursue the international programme and 148 study in the bilingual programme for a total of 202 students.

The academic team in the first year of operation is comprised of mainly primary school teachers and headed by the Finnish Head of School and the Vietnamese Vice Principal. The team of full-time teacher staff has seven Finnish teachers, four native English speakers (American, British and Irish) to teach English language and literature, ten Vietnamese teachers, a Filipino teacher and twelve Vietnamese teaching assistants. Despite two programmes (bilingual and international) offered to students, all VFIS teachers work in a collaborative manner. Grade level teams have been formed where teachers share information on a weekly basis and other smaller teams work around specific topics relevant to school life, such as assessment, ICT, skills-based subjects, staff well-being and school events.

The final idea for the research topic and methods were decided in early May 2019. This thesis is a case study which has been a popular tool in many social sciences (Zainal, 2007) and particularly the field of education (Gulsecen & Kubat, 2006). In addition to the curious and complex background of Vietnam-Finland International School, the rationale for selecting it as the study subject was due to my close relationship with the school board of management and my hope to contribute a humble academic effort to the educational development in my home country, Vietnam. This study seeks to understand teachers' and principals' perception of distributed leadership and how to develop it at Vietnam-Finland International School. Additionally, qualitative approach was selected over quantitative approach because the former will utilise the richness of collected data (Elo et al., 2014). Understanding how hectic the preparation phase for its launching in Autumn 2019 could be and how busy people might become, I offered to support them for several periods of short days during my summer holiday and expressed a keen interest to implement a master's thesis research about the school. Then, I

got an approval from VFIS's School Board. This in-time agreement enabled a good start for planning the months-long data collection process. I went back to Vietnam in late with frequent visits at the school and met with its people in persons to collect my data. By prior frequent communication with the school representatives, I was well-informed about the ongoing stage of school development and preparation for its coming launching, especially the prevailing and coming school staff who might be my potential research participants.

3.2 The Participants

The study has 16 participants of different backgrounds and responsibilities. Two serve the leadership role, and the others are teachers. The motivation for inviting both (vice) principals and teachers for this study was derived from my understanding of leadership as a socially constructed matter where exists the interaction between a leader and followers. Of all, there were two Irish, six Vietnamese and eight Finnish; three males and 13 females. Three Vietnamese participants had worked at VFIS for at least 7 months. Other three (two Finnish and one Vietnamese) had been there for four to six months. The rest arrived just before the data collection started nor had no more than three months of work experiences at VFIS. Participants were asked to fill out a short questionnaire about themselves (see *Appendix 1*), and details are summarized in a table. I keep this table for personal use, e.g. referring some texts to the relevant participants.

Furthermore, at the time of interview, their working experiences in a multicultural context varied drastically from no experiences to 20 years of experiences. Being a Finnish, Head of School posed 20 years of work experiences in various multicultural contexts, 26 years as a teacher and 9 years in a leadership and management role. So far, the Vietnamese Deputy Head of School has spent most of her career lifetime as a public University lecturer of Vietnam and had less than one year serving a management role as well as working in a K-12 school. Among the Finnish group, some had worked for international schools while others had not. The same situation was applied for the Irish and Vietnamese group.

3.3 Data Collection

The data were collected through three phases. The first phase was to seek secondary data written in official documents starting in June 2019 to familiarize myself with the school. This is also due to a fact that the school had not opened yet and many international schoolteachers had not started their contract until August. This phase ended with three useful documents gathered: School Handbook (2018), Recruitment Handbook (2018) and Development Report (2019). In these documents, basic information on the school operations was found and curated, which includes a short description on leadership and management approach. Reading this small data helped me to revise my research questions (Zainal, 2007).

The second phase taking place in August 2019 was to organize four face-to-face interviews which are purposeful conversations between two or more people (Morgan, 1997). Interviews encourage participants to share real stories with their own voices (Litchman, 2006). Before the interview I made three one-week visits at the school to seek participants for my interviews. At the same time, VFIS ran their summer school which partly served as a testing phase for the official school year starting in August. The Head of School and Deputy Head of School already confirmed to join the individual interview separately. I was advised to meet with teachers (both Vietnamese and international teachers) in persons and befriend with them to successfully invite them to participate in my study. A good relationship will also enable deeper sharing and a more truthful discussion. To have more diverse opinions on the research topic, I also contacted some international teachers who had not started their work at VFIS yet but arrived in late July. These trips included my daily support for the school activities for example organising parents' event and talk to potential parents about Finnish education.

Two individual interviews were held in a semi-structured format with three themes equivalent to three research questions and featured by eight open questions (see *Appendix 2*). The first theme dealt with the personal understanding of the participant about distributed leadership. The next theme covered questions related to working in a multicultural context. Then final theme was to convey the

idea of distributed leadership development in a multicultural context. Yet quite many further questions arose as the discussions went. I purposefully selected this method due to my inexperience in conducting research and because it facilitates the deep exploration of the discussed issues by follow-up questions (Marginson, 2004). This study aimed at exploring the perceptions of participants of distributed leadership and factors influencing the development of distributed leadership in quite new context, which required a space for individual verbal expressions (Brown, 2017). The language of communication was considered cautiously to ensure both interviewer and interviewee' ability to express themselves at the highest level. Thus, the Finnish Head of School talked in English as she was raised to be bilingual (Finnish and English) while the Vietnamese Deputy Head of School used her mother tongue.

The other two interviews were focus group discussions with teachers. This method was selected to "collect data from multiple individuals simultaneously" while creating an open and less threatening atmosphere to the participants (Onwueguzie, Dickinson, Leech & Zoran, 2009). Two groups were formed based on the language used for communication. One group consisted of all five Vietnamese teachers and the talks were in Vietnamese. All non-Vietnamese made up the other group and they spoke in English. The first discussion lasted one hour ten minutes, while the international group discussion lasted one and a half hours with nine participants. At the beginning of the meetings, each group was introduced the research topic and the objectives of research without any given background information or definitions about distributed leadership, as one research aim was to discover their own notion of this leadership style. I served as a moderator who facilitated the conversation by delivering questions as prompts for their free discussions (Onwueguzie, et al., 2009). To increase the comfort and convenience, eight A5 sheets, each sheet containing one question, were spread on the table, just in front of everyone, as a stimulus material. Similar to the individual interviews, these focus group interviews were also comprised of three main themes featuring issues of three research questions.

Before the discussions actually started, participants of each group read and signed the consent form and privacy note while sitting around a table. These consent forms were then stored in my personal file. All interviews were audio-recorded with my mobile phone. An initial test recording of a few seconds took place to ensure that all participants were audible. These recordings were transferred to and stored in my laptop. The face-to-face interviews went quite smoothly and the data collected were quite impressive. After that, I left Vietnam for Finland in late August.

The last phase of data collection was essay writing in which all participants were encouraged to share their observations on how distributed leadership were developed at VFIS after the first four months of the school year. No prompts were given as I did not want to restrict their own outlook and expressions. Due to the busy nature of the first operations year, the number of entries was quite low but conveyed a subtle finding (see *Findings* section). Several emails were sent out as a kind reminder but only 7 of them returned this task. Luckily, I had at least one entry from each participant category. Of all the collected data, the interviews played the primary role, essays received and other information sought would support and enrich it. I got enough data in mid-January 2020 and started the analysis process with qualitative content analysis approach.

3.4 Data Analysis

I employed inductive qualitative content analysis to analysing the data. Qualitative content analysis is a method for the subjective interpretation of textual data content through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or categories, patterns of words used, their frequency, their relationships, and the structures and communication discourses (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, Vaismoradi et al., 2013), which made it appropriate for investigating meanings in the discussions. Therefore, it enabled me as a novel researcher to understand distributed leadership in the multicultural context as a social reality scientifically (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

First, the data was prepared. The audio recordings of four interviews (two focus group interviews and two individual interviews) were transcribed. I utilised Otter application that offers audio transcription to transcribe the two interview in English. Then I had to double check the text. Otter saved time but the following step familiarised me with the data. With the interviews in Vietnamese, I did manual transcription. Nevertheless, it is was a critical step of the analysis as I could develop a deeper understanding of the data (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcripts comprised of uttered speech by every interviewee and the interviewer, including sounds such as laughter. Intentionally, body language was not reported because no videos had been recorded. In the end, all four interviews produced 47 pages of transcripts (font Arial, font size 11, single line spacing). Meanwhile, seven participants submitted an entry of about a half to over an A4 page, making a total of seven pages of such data. All transcripts were anonymised and all identifiers were removed as agreed in the privacy note.

Next, I read the data repeatedly and actively for the purpose of data self-familiarisation to discover meanings and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006) while classifying all data into three themes based on three research questions (understanding of distributed leadership, working in a multicultural context, and development of distributed leadership in a multicultural context) and noting all interesting and meaningful points throughout the text. Once finishing, I divided up the text into sentences or even a paragraph that delivered a meaningful unit which, later on, would convey an or a limited number of entire concepts. Each meaning unit carried a code of the interviewee and the code of the theme it belonged to. Codes were then formulated based on meaning units (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). This open coding was proceeded on an online Google document in my University email account (see *Table 3*). Throughout this process, each code and meaning unit were revisited and changed when necessary to better suit ideas conveyed by its speaker and the overarching theme.

TABLE 3 Initial Analysis – Open Coding

Participant	Original Text (Translated)	Meaning Condensations	Units	Codes
Theme: Understanding of distributed leadership				
P13	OK, well, in my current school, I understand distributed leadership as setting up structures, whereby various members of this school get to influence decision making. ...	various members get to influence decision making		Shared decision making
P8	Everything we can call principal. The relationship is very open. It is more like your colleagues and your boss. Yeah the same level. ...	Principal is accessible. Colleagues and bosses are the same level.		Easy access to principal
P12	Và các thành viên trong tổ chức có quyền được đóng góp ý kiến và ảnh hưởng tới việc ra quyết định của người lãnh đạo cao nhất. And members of that organisation have their right to contribute ideas and exert influence over the decision making of the highest authority figure. ...	Members to contribute ideas and exert influence		Influence / idea contribution
P15	Có nghĩa là mình sẽ tự định hướng. It means we have the ability of self-direction.	Ability of self-direction		Self-direction

Then, these codes were grouped into sub and main categories (Tracy, 2013). While I went through all the codes, I picked up relevant codes to form a category. This was a challenging step as categories must be constantly checked to ensure consistency and avoid any overlap. Due to inductive approach of this study, careful examination and constant comparison were necessary to ensure my valid inference and interpretation (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). In specific, the research questions provided a significant guidance for this iterative process. Finally, three main overarching themes were modified and reported in the findings to match the final analysis. Consequently, categories in each theme were formed with numerous subcategories accompanying.

The final wording of the first theme is Three Dimensions of Distributed Leadership, dealing with the research question “In teachers’ and principals’ opinion, what does distributed leadership mean?”. With about 80 codes created, which I got three main categories: Different Leadership Positions at Different Levels, Leadership Qualities, Operational Culture. Next, the second theme, Challenges to the Development of Distributed Leadership at Vietnam-Finland International School, is featured by four categories: Involvement of unofficial members in decision making, Complicated Leadership Structure, Human Resources-related Challenges, and Motivation to Tackle Challenges. Then the last theme reflects solutions to the challenges just mentioned: Proposals to Develop Distributed Leadership at Vietnam-Finland International School. There are approximately 50 different codes within this theme, making a total of six solution approaches or eight categories. Further details are reported in the Findings.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

Throughout the research process from the initial planning to result reporting, numerous ethical practices were strictly followed to ensure research quality and integrity (Tracy, 2013). First, research participants were provided with sufficient research information and willing to join. I was allowed by VFIS Board of Management to use the school name in this thesis via email. In the email sent to them asking for approval, I explained my research aim and specified what provided information about the school could appear in the study. Likewise, several days before our face-to-face meetings, all participants received the consent form and privacy note in digital format which entailed the background, purpose and duration of the study, potential benefits and disadvantages to them as well as measures to protect their potential data. Both consent form and privacy note were adapted from the template available to students of University of Jyväskylä. The participants were allowed to ask further questions about the study and suggest any change to these documents. As no one questioned, consent forms and privacy notes were distributed and signed in two copies, one copy of each document

for each participant and one to be stored in my personal file. All agreed that their identity must remain anonymous for free expressions, especially when it was a sensitive discussion. After participants completed a survey for me to collect their demographical details, all names and specific identifiers (i.e. email address) were removed. Their work experiences, nationalities and roles at VFIS were kept for the research purpose. Each was then labeled as Participant with a number (Participant 1, Participant 2,... Participant 16).

Later on, I used several strategies to maintain the trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis process and the validity of results (Elo & Kyngä, 2007). The data collection process was carried in three phases spanning six months, engaging participants of diverse backgrounds (in nationalities, work experiences, international exposure, positions, etc.) to ensure the richness, representation and credibility of data (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Coding process was iterative and reviewed at least once by my peers and my thesis supervisor. The categories were formed and reformed, then had subcategories, which was an effort to cover as much data collected as possible. Moreover, context of the case study was described clearly. I also embedded appendices and a table to demonstrate the link between the data and the findings (Polit & Beck, 2004). Authentic citations were present in the Findings and Discussion sections as trustworthy evidences (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

4 FINDINGS

This chapter starts with a report on the complicated leadership system of Vietnam-Finland International School. Such information was collected from school documents, promotion materials and research participants' interviews and essays. It also includes characteristics of educational leadership in public Vietnamese schools to highlight the challenges facing VFIS and its governing university. Next were findings on the perceptions of research participants on distributed leadership, challenges to the development of distributed leadership at VFIS, and, finally, how it should be developed at this school context.

4.1 Vietnam-Finland International School: A complicated leadership system

Vietnam-Finland International School is an international K-12 school operated by a public university. Like any other international schools in Vietnam, VFIS runs as a company model that has different departments with the academic department placed at the central (Figure 2).

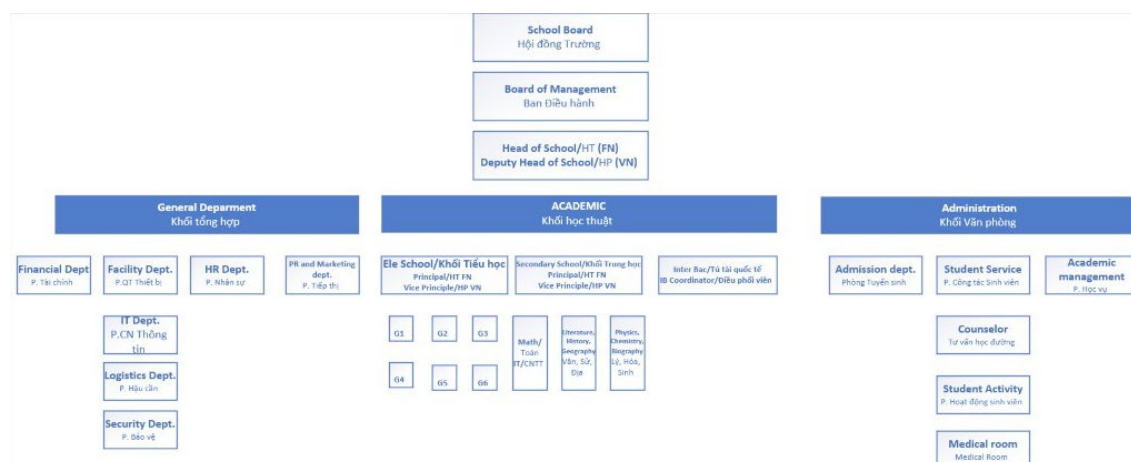


FIGURE 2. VFIS's School Structure (School Handbook, 2018, p. 12)

As a unit of the university, VFIS has a multi-layered school leadership structure. Highest is the school board of which board members are the university's president and some appointed university managers and responsible for long-term

strategies. All board members are Vietnamese. Below this level is Board of Management in charge of short-term planning and daily operations as well as acting as a coordinator when collaboration between VFIS and the university (departments) is needed. Head of School and Deputy Head of School are part of the Board of Management. The former is a Finnish and the latter Vietnamese. They are responsible for the overall daily administrative and pedagogical management. As an independent entity, VFIS plans to employ distributed leadership approach where each individual works as a member of the leadership team.

The Head of School is a change manager and commits to distributive leadership. All school leaders bear in mind that at the heart of learning are the students. All leadership actions aim to build better and more effective learning and teaching. Teacher work is deeply valued and understood. Parents' and students' opinions about school development are also taken into account and the school has a committed Parents' Association. Leadership and management in VFIS are featured by Trust, Transparency, Openness, Respect and Inclusion. (School Handbook, 2018, p.11)

Within VFIS, there existed some conflicts between the leadership commitment and practices. While both Head of School and Deputy Head of School agreed that distributed leadership was beneficial to and should be exercised at a multicultural school like VFIS, some practices they performed were recognised as distributed leadership practices and some were not, for instance, one participant commented that one school leader seems to “stick to everything” (Participant 3, Essay). Furthermore, these two school leaders reported to the higher board of management from the university which operated in a very centralised leadership system (Participant 2, 12 & 13). This insight resonates with what was implied in the research discourse to date about educational leadership in Vietnam. It has been recognised that successful school leadership in Vietnam is characterised by accountability, collectivism, hierarchy, and heavy and powerful roles of school principals (Hallinger et al., 2015; Hallinger et al., 2017; Hallinger & Truong, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2018; Truong et al., 2017). In specific, finance was the most struggling area to deal with from the perspectives of all participants. Almost all expense proposals and budget plans regardless of the amount of money had to be approved by the School Board. Many delays in teaching supplies were the result of this financial control (Participant 2, 3 & 9). Nonetheless, no control by the School Board on the teaching and learning-related issues was reported. It means

the school leaders (Head of School and Deputy Head of School) had their autonomy in such issues and they could exercise distributed leadership within the academic department as planned.

4.2 Three Dimensions of Distributed Leadership

Sixteen research participants offered the richest data for the first theme as they eagerly discussed what distributed leadership meant to them whether they had had exposure to it beforehand or not. From the confession of all participants, I found out that only Finnish participants had practiced distributed leadership and had their basic understanding of distributed leadership before starting their job at this school. All non-Finnish got to know about distributed leadership thanks to their job at VFIS except Participant 15 who did her master's degree in education in Finland. As a result, the non-Finnish explained their perception by combining their own understanding of the word "distributed" and "leadership". However, as the interactions and exchanges exploded, they started co-constructing their own understanding. By comparing and contrasting data from the four interviews, I synthesized their sharing into a synthesis of three aspects.

4.2.1 Different Leadership Positions at Different Levels

Most of participants started their talk with an idea related to a leadership structure in which the top leader(s) must be recognised. To many of them, there exist managers of layered levels of different amounts of power and responsibility. The higher position is, the broader their responsibility. The top leader, for example the Head of School, was responsible for the whole school, vision and planning. Then, there are staff members of no specific leadership title, but all should be asked, have voices in decision making and take lead when necessary. This way, everyone is considered a "leader" of the school, either formal or informal. Later on, the "everyone" was broadened by Vietnamese teachers to include also parents and students. Despite of different layers of leadership, hierarchy should not

exist. Teachers expected they could reach the Head of School easily and any request from them should be solved as soon as possible.

Ensuing that, there should appear a distributive team gathering principals, teachers and parents of different functions who would work on diverse operations and planning activities.

“In addition to that, we are going to implement a team. That is like a distributed leadership team, basically, where we will invite some teachers, and they'll have a rotation of two years. And so on this team, we want to have teachers from all the different divisions of the school, primary, middle school and high school, and then we'll have the principals as well, then we will also invite parents to that, and then that team will be thinking, they can have a certain topic for every year. So one year, it can be the curriculum, another year, it can be the environment, another year, it can be building the brand of the school. Another year, it can be marketing. So basically, they decide what they're going to work on. And also, I think it should be about school welfare. So working on school welfare. And whatever it is that we can do to develop the wellbeing of the teachers and the students.” (Participant 13)

Within the academic department, distributed leadership manifested in a way that teachers worked in grade level teams. For example, in the first year, VFIS only opened its primary level from grade one to grade five. Equivalently, the teachers make up five groups, each led by a Finnish teacher.

4.2.2 Leadership Qualities

In many teachers' perspective, school leaders should have some certain leadership qualities for distributed leadership to flourish. The principal or vice principal should be a democratic leader. In contrast to an autocratic leader, the principal of a distributed leadership system respects everyone's ideas and contribution. The school leader welcomes the participation of all school members in decision making and is willing to delegate power as well as empower others in certain schoolwork. He/she should know who is good at what, and understand the current capacity and potential of staff to assign the appropriate tasks and power to the right person(s). However, principal still has the highest responsibility for the school operations, setting up the school vision and planning. Tolerance by school leaders is expected. In addition, guidelines for schoolwork and personal guidance should be offered generously. The following extract is from a Vietnamese participant talking about a good leader practicing distributed leadership in her opinion.

"The leaders such as our principal delegate power for us to design the detailed syllabus ourselves. It is distributed leadership in my opinion." (Participant 15, Interview)

Likewise, teachers should also possess some certain leadership qualities to well function when distributed leadership is enacted. Vietnamese teachers said they should be self-directed. For them it meant self-leadership. They could perform tasks given with full autonomy and ensure quality of their work. This requires their competencies or proper expertise. Participant 12 reported one challenge which concerns staff performance at the beginning of her leadership term at VFIS. In her word,

"It was a bold example to affirm my opinion. When we delegate power to those who lack of expertise, the organisation has to fix the mistakes." (Participant 12, Interview)

Then, some teachers talked about the willingness to share as a necessary trait. To them, it is to develop their professionalism, competence for working independently. And later on, it helps increase their self-direction.

"And if a teacher has a good teaching method, he/she could share with other teachers. The teacher group sits together to discuss and decide if that shared method could be applied for teaching what knowledge." (Participant 6, Interview)

4.2.3 Operational Culture

All participants mentioned trust and respect as a vivid characteristic of a school culture that embraces distributed leadership. Trust and respect go hand in hand, taking teachers' role at the centre. To all of them, formal leaders (principal and vice principal) must trust teacher's pedagogical decisions and respect how they organise their lessons. A proposal made by teachers should easily find its way to reach the principal or vice principal regardless of the final decision of approval or disapproval.

Another feature to be highlighted is power and responsibility given. Both the Head of School and Deputy Head of School agreed that one or two leaders could not control everything happening in and out of school.

"Only one person is like the person who holds all the strings. Yes, as head of school and vice principal, we were responsible for the whole school, but the actual operations, that the power needs to be distributed." (Participant 13, Interview)

In the meantime, teachers also admitted that they should have full autonomy for some certain work in a way to reduce the huge workload of the highest school leaders. Yet, everyone agreed that power and responsibility was distributed differently. The highest level was on the principal.

When it comes to school-wide decision making, to research participants, everyone's voice matters. Influence is not only the top-down line but also from bottom-up. In term of finance, the international teachers asked for transparency. As such, they wished to know the amount of money for a year and how much they could spend. Interestingly, the Vietnamese counterparts did not think of this issue, they only focused on their roles in teaching, learning and parent involvement issues.

Last but not least, there was a meeting of some minds when several participants addressed a question when and where leadership should be distributed. Leadership could not be delegated equally to everyone at any given time. One participant affirmed that situation and context must be taken into consideration when making decision and distributing leadership. For example, at the early stage of the school development, there were a limited number of staff and each one had to take more responsibility and power on one issue. Task and power delegation were different from when the school got bigger.

4.3 Challenges to the Development of Distributed Leadership at VFIS

The second research question initially dealt with both challenges and opportunities to the development of distributed leadership at VFIS. However, interview data collected revealed varied patterns of challenges. The most typical opportunity discussed by all interviewees was the prevailing nature of cultural diversity set for the school by its investor. Especially, a heterogeneous teacher body including Finish teachers was the main driving force. It required an effort to combine and utilise everyone's expertise and strengths. Nonetheless, cultural differences posed challenges to such effort, which will be reported later on.

4.3.1 Involvement of Unofficial School Members in Decision Making

School members are understood in this thesis as the people who officially work for Vietnam-Finland International School and has an official contract. They include the Head of School, other school managers, teachers and other school staff. Hence, local University people are considered as unofficial members but they did have considerable influence on the school decisions. Being a part of the University, VFIS has received several local University people (mostly managers or head of departments) in their meetings or when big decisions on non-teaching issues are made, i.e. classroom supplies, ICT equipment, and infrastructure. When University people got involved, their role was confusing and distributed leadership did not work because of two reasons. Firstly, they might not understand how a K-12 school operates but how a university is run. Their good practices at the University might not suit for school teachers and young students. It was emphasised by a participant that better communication and understanding between VFIS staff and University people would erase the challenges.

“From the university point of view, the university is used to running a university, which is your students are adults, and the young adults. [...] But really, the small kids aren't your customer. It's the parents who are your customers. And the parents are very demanding. So in that way, I think we have to work together with the university and understanding that our customer base is quite different.” (Participant 13, Interview)

Secondly, it was reported that many decisions made by VFIS people were reconsidered by University people, which caused confusion and delayed actions.

“Sorry, they don't work at the school actually they work for the University. But they make a lot of decisions to do with the school. [...] So sometimes a lot of decisions are made outside of VFIS, but it affects VFIS. [...] And then other things when we have meetings and we decide, okay, we want parking squares are certain arrangements, then we're told by the University yet, don't worry, everything's taken care of. But you look outside the window, and it hasn't been taken care of.” (Participant 13, Interview)

Meanwhile, in terms of some administration work and finance, distributed leadership did not happen between the University and VFIS's leaders. One school leader would ask for full autonomy in non-teaching decisions which were finally made by some University people, the highest leadership level, but she could not get it. At the time of this research, VFIS was still a very young school

aged less than one. As the University is the owner of VFIS, their involvement is necessary according to Participant 10 but it would be decreasing gradually.

4.3.2 Complicated Leadership Structure

The leadership structure of VFIS presented in Section 4.1 was a challenge for the Head of School and Deputy Head of School to develop distributed leadership because it influenced their leadership identity and agency. Although having responsibility and title, in some situations, to get real power to run VFIS or influence over the upper management level was difficult. International staff struggled to communicate directly with the University people as they did not know Vietnamese, the local language. Language barrier caused not only delays (when translation is needed) but also hesitation in correspondence between Vietnamese and international staff. On the other hand, there were times when the Head could not exert her leadership to the subordinates. Though, such governance was understandable to the school leaders because VFIS was totally a new school concept at its time backwards and people all learnt to build it from scratch.

Within VFIS, the sharing of leadership among the leadership team was sometimes unclear. There were four formal leaders of two different systems at the time of this research conducted: Vietnamese and international. Yet, teachers described that only two people were running, the Head of School and the Deputy, and they just did not have enough time to deal with all the things that were brought to them. Some teachers asked for a stable leadership structure.

“However, at VFIS, as we are melting two very different cultures and education systems, we are faced with both opportunities and big challenges. Thus, it is mandatory to have a stable, dedicated leadership that should have positive influence on staff commitment, working conditions as well as motivation.” (Participant 2, Essay)

4.3.3 Human Resources-Related Challenges

The two school leaders stated that their current staff lacked of adequate work experience and expertise needed to run a school like VFIS. It partly made them not really know what they were supposed to do. In fact, there were teachers who

had never worked for a K-12 school prior to VFIS, some with little actual experience with K-12 education. In term of multicultural working environment, their experiences in international schools varied from zero to a considerable extent. Those who obtained appropriate pedagogical competence did not have enough cultural understanding yet and vice versa. This activated a hesitancy of formal leaders in giving full power to other school members. Yet, working in a new environment like VFIS is a big learning opportunity for all and on-the-job learning is necessary.

Particularly, lack of intercultural experiences and understanding of staff created a challenge to the operations of VFIS as well as the development of distributed leadership. This all started by cultural differences. According to the participants, people from Vietnam, Finland and Ireland found they had different expectations on collaboration, behaviours and how people of the other cultures response. Research participants also confirmed their different teamwork styles, ways of listening, sharing, problem-solving and teaching styles in several cases. They all agreed that mutual understanding must be reached and tolerance or even compromise should be shown. Thus, a demand for communication arose. All participants acknowledged the importance of frequent and honest communication and sharing but they seemed to be hesitant to act. Again, language barrier was addressed. It made the Vietnamese and the international staff not really mingle enough to understand each other. Likewise, people different outlooks on one thing. An opinion was reported below.

"I have had no issues with distributed leadership, if I have had anything to say, suggest or ask, I have been able to do all of those things and I have been heard and respected. I can't say this for others, but this is how I feel." (Participant 8, Essay)

When it comes to personal outlook and awareness, differences can exist even among people of the same nationality. One example of conflicting personal outlooks among the interviewees is their answer to the question if distributed leadership existed at VFIS or not. *"Yes but not the whole school"*, said some teachers. Some others were quite critical. One saw the improvement after four months at work. Another agreed and wrote in details as follows.

“I sometimes feel heard, trusted and respected, and sometimes I do not [...] Having worked in Asia for a long time, this is the first school that has given me free reign, and encouraged me, to speak to parents as often as possible. It really creates a much nicer environment and a much better place of learning for children. We are trusted to create all our own lesson plans and to execute the curriculum as we see fit. I always feel comfortable to raise any problems that I see whether that be in a meeting, by email or even in our WhatsApp group. Even if I am not always heard, I still feel like I can happily share my opinion at any time.” (Participant 1, Essay)

4.3.4 Motivation to Tackle Challenges

On talking about the challenges and difficulties placed on them and the school, all interviewees took an optimistic viewpoint on the advantages of distributed leadership to the future success and potential development of VFIS. I labelled this positive thinking as a motivation to tackle all the hustle and bustle now and then. Below is a collection of advantages of distributed leadership synthesized from the interviewees' sharing.

- Reducing the formal leaders' workload
- Increasing everyone's creativity and the organisational creativity
- Utilising expertise of many people then increasing the school performance
- Promoting learning and sharing
- Leading to staff happiness and satisfaction at work
- Helping staff to feel valued, recognise a sense of belonging and the meaningfulness of their job
- Increasing staff commitment and loyalty
- Happy teachers leading to happy students and a happy school

4.4 Proposals to Develop Distributed Leadership at VFIS

The last research question sought suggestions to develop distributed leadership at Vietnam-Finland International School from the perspectives of the research

participants. As mentioned earlier, all participants found it worthwhile and even critical to develop distributed leadership at a multicultural working environment like VFIS. So, this section will summarise strategies and actions proposed.

4.4.1 Clear Organisational Structure

An unclear organisational system might place stress on not only the school leaders but also teachers. It consumed everyone's time and effort, which made every other effort ineffective. Because "VFIS was a new school", many things should be settled down before really implementing distributed leadership schoolwide. Those priorities mentioned were, for example, the school structure, basic rules, how classrooms are set up, procedures to cope with pressures and work with parents. Moreover, some research participants asked for a clarification on the role between the two school leaders, the Head of School and Deputy Head of School. It was addressed because of some confusing leadership practices between the two.

"It is still very challenging, in this school, to even know who the real leader is. ... And that we have principal and vice-principal but the vice-principal has more power than the actual principal." (Participant 9, Essay)

Among the two, one would give sharper feedback and the other less. Yet, things have improved after four months of operation as the two school leaders have improved their cooperation as confirmed by one of the participants in the essay. She also noticed that staff understood their job better. They knew their responsibilities, functions and autonomy given. Additionally, transparent processes and general guidelines are needed to reduce any overlaps as well as confusion while working and collaborating among teachers.

4.4.2 One Distributed Leadership Practice at a Time

A distributed leadership practice was introduced to the teachers. For example,

"I have already introduced the idea of grade level teams, which are made up of teachers who teach the same grade. And the leader in those grade level team is a Finnish person this year." (Participant 13, Interview)

Yet it was not a sustainable way for Finnish teachers to lead all the time. In the future, a Vietnamese or any other international teacher should take over the leadership position as a rotation policy. The rationale behind this option was a fact that the curriculum was unfamiliar to the non-Finnish teachers. Finnish teachers would be the most suitable to take a leadership role in how that curriculum plays itself out in the classroom. Also, Finnish teachers had more training, more teaching experience, some of them 15-20 years, which made them more suited to take lead at the early stage. Other than that, no more distributed leadership practice was addressed in the interviews or essays. The Head of School and Deputy Head planned to expand distributed leadership to the other departments, i.e. General Administration, Admissions, Marketing and Communications. However, above them is the School Board, the highest leadership level consisting of University people, who govern the finance and approve plans proposed by VFIS.

4.4.3 A Supportive Organisational Culture

When discussing an ideal organisational culture to support distributed leadership, everyone stressed on “*not too hierarchical*”, knowing that they would be still supervised by a centralised management level from afar. When staff take responsibility and feel part of the school and respected, they will be working more efficiently. It is equal to some extent but does not refer to doing the same thing. Rather than that, it leans toward the idea of trust and empowerment. Then, respect matters.

“Teachers respect TAs, that teachers respect, for instance, secretarial staff, or administrative staff, or bus monitors.” (Participant 13, Interview)

In addition to equal respect, school culture should promote a mutual understanding. VFIS has non-academic departments, i.e. Admissions, whose people also deal with parents and students. It is very essential that both teachers and non-academic staff understand each other’s job. Although they belong to different departments, their performance is interrelated to the other group’s work.

4.4.4 Multicultural Leadership Qualities

To work effectively in a multicultural working environment, flexibility is the cornerstone according to the majority of research participants. It is the expectation of school leaders towards teachers and vice versa. It was also a core value of VFIS. Teachers hoped their leaders to be understandable demonstrate respect and place trust on them. Both school leaders agreed that they should be the role models as others would implicitly mimic their behaviours. Especially, if they want their teachers to approach them to raise their ideas or brainstorm together, they should demonstrate it first and create a safe environment for open and honest communication. If school leaders want their staff to understand them, they should understand the staff first. Then, the Head of School added another advantage of frequent communication which is to diagnose problems once they have not become apparent.

4.4.5 Programmes to Develop Competent Teachers

In addition to creating clear structures and safe environment for school members to perform effectively and flexibly, concrete programmes to develop teacher professionally should be executed. Individual orientation at the beginning of everyone's work must be carried out, which... entails their responsibilities and familiarise him/her with the school system and the other staff. Group orientation is the next critical phase at the beginning of school year for everyone to get to know each other and start building a team spirit. Not all VFIS staff joined the school at the same time so a whole school orientation would really benefit for both the old and the newcomers.

On the other hand, to many of participants, on-the-job training and guidance must be provided because job description only does not tell the practical and lively aspect of the job. According to the Deputy Head of School, it is not only training about the practical aspect of the job, it can be about new skills, new pedagogical methods or for teachers of little teaching experiences or for those who want to try teaching a new subject. It serves the professional development

purpose. Training topics can vary, ranging from pedagogies and technical skills to universal skills and content. Of all, the Head of School mentioned distributed leadership as one vital training topic. So as is training on intercultural competence. Such training sessions on intercultural competence would aim at removing barriers and challenges the school was facing such as lack of communication, misunderstanding among the teaching team and between the team and the school leaders. It is expected to open teachers' mindset, broaden their horizon, boost their flexibility and adaptability, to name just a few more objectives.

In term of guidance, coaching or mentoring activity was selected as teachers possess different expertise and teaching experiences. The school leaders would serve as coaches and Finnish teachers of more expertise and experiences will work as mentors for the Vietnamese ones.

... "we're going to be teaching already, so are already going to be playing games. And sometimes the games, we're going to lose the games, and sometimes we're going to win the games. But I think the job of the coaches and to reassure the team that look, we are constantly making progress. So sometimes you lose, and then you just live with that. So you can't expect the team to be the top team. From day one, you know, all teams have started from zero, and develop their skills. And of course, all of the team members have come here with a set of skills. But how we train together and share those skills. And different players, different teachers are going to develop faster than others. And possibly some team members will decide, okay, I don't want to be on this team. It's too hard. It's too confusing. ... But the way you develop a team is, is by having the team played together. So they have to spend time together. They have to be in meetings, or they have to communicate with each other, they have to get to know each other. And really good teams, you know, ... Well, you just kind of, yeah, I suppose you need a captain. But actually, at this stage, I feel like we need more coaches,..."
(Participant 13, Interview)

By getting people start working together, accepting differences in the teachers' ability and effort, people would learn by doing and develop together by making mistake or succeed together. As VFIS at the time of this research had too many inexperienced staff, also the fact that it was a new school concept, more coaches were preferred. They did need captain. However, in her word, the captain would emerge herself by revealing her personality suitable for a leading position. Through all of these activities, feedback, especially instant feedback, brings great influence. It encourages teachers to improve and to believe in their capacity, to know their progress and growth, then to dare to take lead.

4.4.6 Teambuilding

One participant did not agree that her teachers made up a well-functioning team yet. Rather, it was only a group of individuals because many did not know what they were supposed to be doing. An ideal team is like a football team playing a match, everyone knows their position and can support teammates with their skills and expertise.

“You know, in the team, you have like, Okay, I'm a defensive player, I'm offensive, I play center. So I feel right now. Okay, we're a team, but everyone's running around after the ball. You know, if you watch the soccer game with little kids, they all run around after the ball, and it's a mess. They're all tripping over each other. And a well functioning team is actually, you know, you have played your position, and the ball is here, but you wait for the ball to come to you, and then you play your path.”
(Participant 13, Interview)

By building a strong team, distributed leadership could be developed at the same time. To build a team, first, a common language of communication must be used. In this case, it is English language. Secondly, orientation helps to a great extent to build personal rapport and working alliance. Thirdly, a coaching and mentoring system could also help this purpose in addition to enhance teachers' expertise. Another strategy is to organise fun events together because teaching seems to be a lonely job and a teacher is in class with only students. Morning coffee get-togethers and efficient meetings for idea exchanges would work as well. All of these activities could facilitate collaboration and mutual understanding.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Examination of Findings

The present research seeks to shed light on how distributed leadership is adopted in a newly established international school in Vietnam as a multicultural context. Flourishing in the Western countries, distributed leadership has gradually sneaked into Asian schools, especially the international schools. The adoption of this leadership approach, particularly in Vietnam-Finland International School, has fluctuated and occurred in a new form. In more details, the data reveal difficulties and challenges in reaching a consensus among participants on distributed leadership understanding and development at VFIS. As a matter of fact, such challenges and difficulties are grounded in the fact that VFIS is a new school, staff new to the school model or concept, and especially cultural differences. Yet, it highlights a demand to exercise distributed leadership at the school and a positive attitude of the majority of participants to make it happen. This section will start with an examination on the divergence recognised. It is followed by an explanation of VFIS complicated context as the core reason behind the divergence and challenges. Then ending is a discussion on distributed leadership development strategies.

5.1.1 Lack of Consensus on Distributed Leadership Understanding and Development

Findings show that VFIS teachers and principals had shaped their own understanding of distributed leadership. In term of leadership structure, distributed leadership was understood as a top recognised leader with all school members including students and parents who may join the decision making or take lead. This understanding is swallow but reflects the leader-plus aspect of distributed leadership to some extent (Spillane, 2006). There was also a sign of practice-centered aspect when participants raised questions on when, where, and who to delegate power. By chance, VFIS teachers and principals conceptualised distributed

leadership in quite similar thinking with Spillane (2006), at a very basic level. Vietnamese participants were the only group discussing leadership qualities or traits for both school leaders and teachers. As they mentioned “democratic”, I recall an ongoing debate by scholars on the related concepts of distributed leadership, of which democratic leadership is sometimes used interchangeably with distributed leadership (Bolden, 2011; Daniels et al., 2019). Trust, autonomy, respect, power given, responsibility and influence were the top key words mentioned, which make up an ideal working environment to nourish distributed leadership.

Findings also reveal distinctive hidden viewpoints perceived by different groups of nationalities. Non-homogeneous cultural backgrounds of the participant group resulted in two slightly different perceptions of distributed leadership. To all Vietnamese participants, distributed leadership characteristics revolved around the role and qualities of the principal and other formal leaders, and if teachers of no formal leadership title are allowed to take lead and influence the higher level’s decision making. Their approach was more passive and they considered themselves as passive or indirect leaders who obey the appointment of formal school leaders. On the contrary, the international participants adopted an active approach and less concentrated on the leadership qualities. They emphasised the responsibility, trust and their own power and autonomy to do the schoolwork. They perceived themselves as “active” leaders and would initiate discussions and question decisions rather than waiting for approval to talk and raise ideas.

Also, participants evaluated the development of distributed leadership development at VFIS differently after four months of actual operations. The differences were reflected in the essays submitted by seven participants. Some argued that it was not distributed leadership. Some recognised patterns of trust and respect as distributed leadership. Others had a neutral perspective, stating that distributed leadership was being developed slowly in a challenging environment. The majority of challenges is shaped by the sociocultural and structural context of VFIS which will be discussed in the next part.

5.1.2 Sociocultural and Structural Context of VFIS Leadership

The leadership of Vietnam-Finland International School was intricate due to and highly influenced by the complexity of its sociocultural and structural context. It is easily implied that VFIS leadership does not follow one approach. Figure 2 indicates a hierarchical leadership approach from the School Board to the school principals, and a more widely distributive approach from the school principals to the other staff. Distributed leadership emerged at the very first year of Vietnam-Finland International School but the hierarchy was also reported. Why did the two contrasting systems occur and mingle? The context of VFIS explains it reasonably.

From the sociocultural aspect, school leadership is driven by values and norms inherent in the national culture of the location it resides in (Hallinger, 2018). Confucianism is a powerful force on the socio-cultural values imprinted in Vietnamese society (Hallinger & Truong, 2016). Confucianism is understood as a system of “ethical and political ideology and a scholarly tradition built on established philosophy of Chinese society” (Truong et al., 2017, p. 79). It frames each citizen in a web of human relationship and undetachable connection to the society and his significant role in building a harmonised and stable community. Confucian dimensions can be equated with the “life-blood that shapes evolution of structures, processes, educational content, and inter-personal relations within the education system” (Hallinger et al., 2015, p. 455). These discoveries resonate with Hofstede’s national cultural dimensions in which Vietnam scores high in power distance and collectivism. Research shows that successful school leadership in Vietnam is characterised by accountability, collectivism, hierarchy, and heavy and powerful roles of school principals (Hallinger et al., 2015; Hallinger et al., 2017; Hallinger & Truong, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2018; Truong et al., 2017). This justifies the hierarchical and centralised feature of the highest leadership level of Vietnam-Finland International School reported in the Findings. To achieve success, school leaders must “adapt their leadership styles in ways that are consonant with the prevailing values and norms in their different socio-cultural contexts” (Hallinger, 2018, p. 11). Hence, school principals in Vietnam play many

hats. They are role models in Vietnamese teachers' eyes (Hallinger et al. 2015). A model of Vietnamese principal leadership, *Có Uy* leadership, proposed by Truong & Hallinger (2017), describes the effective school leadership as a combination of high authority and high morality. Generally, Vietnamese teachers respect authority and school leaders, which is not only intrinsic but also a powerful and obligatory external force (Hallinger & Truong, 2016). Interestingly, Vietnamese teachers in VFIS implicitly revealed such quality (see section 5.2.4.). Furthermore, a finding from literature but missing in this study is the political role of school leaders. A successful headmaster must maintain harmony among school staff, enhance the school's prestigious brand in the public, and manage the school's legitimacy to bureaucratic and political figurers (Hallinger & Truong, 2016). This lack could be a ground for future research on the role of international school leaders in the context of Vietnam.

The intricacy of VFIS's structural context was mainly shaped by cultural diversity. Two apparent cultures have the most influence over VFIS are Vietnamese and Finnish. While Vietnamese account for the biggest group of staff (both teaching and non-teaching), then Finnish (teachers) as the second biggest, compared to the very small number of other nationalities, the main school curriculum is customised from the latest Finnish national core curriculum 2014. Tian and Risku (2018) recognise vivid features of distributed leadership required to successfully implement such curriculum, e.g. teacher autonomy and freedom to create lesson plans.

According to Hofstede's cultural dimension model, two distinctively contrary dimensions between Finnish and Vietnamese cultures are power distance and individualism. The former demands independence, equality, accessible superiors, direct communication, active and collaborative participation, and dislike control. Conversely, the latter group accept hierarchy and expect clear guidance on what to do as well as foster strong social relationships and fear to loose faces. Figure 2 exemplifies an obvious comparison between the two cultures.

These differences explain tensions sometimes existing between the two groups at VFIS and the more critical viewpoint of Finnish teachers over distributed leadership development than the Vietnamese and Irish teachers have. However, many participants reckoned the cultural differences between Vietnam and Finland or other Western countries cause both challenges and opportunities.

In response, only one participant stated the involvement and pressure from parents also affected how she enacted distributed leadership. Parents push pressure on teachers but are not often honest about the concern they have, which creates more problems down the line. The situation at VFIS once again confirmed sociocultural and structural challenges IB schools have to tackle in practices in Asia Pacific region according to Lee et al. (2011).

5.1.3 A Mixed Approach to Distributed Leadership Development at VFIS

In such a complicated context, distributed leadership at VFIS has distinctive features which require relevant strategies to develop. First, implicitly, the way the Head of School and Deputy Head of School lead VFIS and cooperated with each other quite resonates with the co-principalship model emerging in China (Bunnell, 2008; Neufield, 2019). In here, the Head of School is a foreigner while the Deputy Head is a local citizen and their responsibilities were often shared, sometimes clearly, sometimes blurringly which caused confusion. In addition to coming from different cultures, they are expected to deal with a hierarchical system upward and a distributive system downward. Findings revealed conflicting leadership styles among the leadership team from time to time, though the leaders tried to understand each other. A call for better communication, collaboration, and clear task/responsibility allocation among the team is addressed.

Second, like some other international schools in Asia, instructional distributed leadership was observed at VFIS. To develop distributed leadership at VFIS, research participants proposed to have large-group meetings. It resonates with cross-programme activities identified as effective strategies to develop distributed leadership at several IB schools in Asia (Lee et al., 2012). Similarly, other

tactics can be applied: articulation and staffing. Articulation strategies aim at enhancing “curriculum coherence among programmes within a school” through mapping the links in different curricular and documentation (Lee et al., 2012, p. 677). VFIS has three separate programmes with some mutual features to be identified: an international programme embodying Finnish curriculum, a bilingual programme combining Finnish and Vietnamese curriculum and an IB programme for high school students. Then, strategic staffing methods refer to hiring people of related teaching experiences (to be stated as a requirement) and position switching (Lee et al., 2012). The former method was confirmed in VFIS Teacher Recruitment Handbook (2018) while the later could be implied from one school leader’s interview when she mentioned Vietnamese teachers could take over the team leadership role from Finnish teachers in the future.

Third, findings indicate conflicting notions and perspectives of VFIS people. In other words, there was a lack of mutual understanding about what distributed leadership is, what practices are effective and how to do it. Even though there were many ideas proposed on how to develop distributed leadership, a comprehensive guideline will be useful. To this point, the seven-dimension framework for European schools by Duif et al. (2013) combined with American model (Gordon, 2005) and Singaporean model (Harion & God, 2015) might work. The seven dimensions are school structure, strategic vision, values and beliefs, collaboration and cooperation, decision making, responsibility and accountability, and initiatives. A consensus on all dimensions should be reached. The other frameworks ask for which ask for guidance by principals, professional development and leadership capability building for teacher. From a broader perspective, strategies to develop instructional distributed leadership are vital, too.

5.2 Limitations

The limitations of the current study are stated as followed. Since the research process started before the school actually opened, issues and challenges of developing distributed leadership might blend with challenges of setting up a

school. Although I added another data collection round after four months of operations, still, findings might not reflect the whole stories. Secondly, since I examined only one case study and the school selected has a quite unique background featuring mainly two cultures (Vietnamese and Finnish), findings of this study might not be replicated in any multicultural context. Thirdly, half of the data was collected in Vietnamese as I have six Vietnamese participants. These interviews and essays were translated into English afterwards. There might be risks in inaccurate translation or missing some contexts. Additionally, of all non-Vietnamese participants, several are non English native speakers. They might not be able to precisely and fully express themselves during the interviews. Hence, future researchers of this topic are recommended to bear in mind such limitations to produce more well-rounded studies.

5.3 Future Research Recommendations

The recommendations are presently according to the order of limitations addressed. Because VFIS is a young school at the time of this research, a revisited study study is highly recommended when the school's operation becomes relatively stable and the challenges of setting up a new school are not mixed into the challenges to develop distributed leadership practices. Secondly, future empirical research should target at more culturally diverse schools or invite more than one schools of different multicultural contexts, different locations. Thirdly, it is of great value for future researchers to capture interviewees' body languages and facial expressions for revealing more hidden meaning behind their words

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Questionnaire

If you are a Vietnamese, please answer in Vietnamese. Otherwise, please use English only. Nếu bạn là người Việt Nam, vui lòng trả lời bằng tiếng Việt. Nếu không, vui lòng chỉ sử dụng tiếng Anh.

1. Nationality / Quốc tịch:
2. Gender / Giới tính:
3. Working Experience / Kinh Nghiệm Làm Việc * Please follow this format: Teacher - <Number of working years up to now> and/or Principal or Vice Principal - <Number of years up to now> (if any). / Hãy điền nội dung này theo cú pháp sau: Giáo viên - <Số năm kinh nghiệm> và/hoặc Hiệu trưởng / Phó hiệu trưởng - <Số năm kinh nghiệm> (nếu có).
4. Working Experience at the current school / Thời gian làm việc tại trường học hiện tại:
 - ___ 0-3 months / tháng
 - ___ 4-6 months / tháng
 - ___ 7 months or above / 7 tháng trở lên
5. Key Role at the current school / Vai trò ở trường học hiện tại:
6. Highest Qualification / Bằng cấp cao nhất:
7. In total, how long have you been working in an international working environment? / Tổng thời gian bạn đã và đang làm việc trong môi trường quốc tế là bao lâu?

8. Describe your leadership roles and responsibilities in your current school (if any). Hãy mô tả vai trò và nhiệm vụ có tính chất lãnh đạo mà bạn hiện đang đảm nhiệm tại trường học bạn hiện đang làm việc (nếu có).

Appendix 2 Interview Questions

ENGLISH

Q1. How do you understand *distributed leadership* (DL)?

What kind of experiences do you have that are related to DL?

Q2. When working with people of other nationalities,

- What are the advantages?
- What are the difficulties?

Q3. What are the opportunities for or advantages to VFIS if DL is implemented?

Q4. What are the disadvantages to VFIS if DL is implemented?

Q5. How does DL work in a multicultural school like VFIS?

e.g. How leadership is distributed among staff? Do you recognize people who are in leadership positions?

How DL has been facilitated in this school?

If DL has not been working in this school, what hinder its development?

Q6. As an individual, how do you contribute to the development of DL in a multicultural school like VFIS?

Q7. Which kind of organizational culture is conducive for DL in this school?

Q8. In what way could DL be developed in this school?

e.g. How long could it take for DL practices to be developed?

What action(s) or decision(s) should be made to develop it?

What supporting factors are needed to develop DL?

VIETNAMESE

Q1. Bạn hiểu gì về *distributed leadership* (DL)?

Bạn đã có trải nghiệm nào với DL, hãy mô tả trải nghiệm đó.

Q2. Khi làm việc với các đồng nghiệp khác quốc tịch,

- Lợi thế là gì?
- Khó khăn là gì?

Q3. Việc triển khai DL sẽ đem lại những cơ hội và lợi ích nào cho VFIS?

Q4. Việc triển khai DL liệu sẽ gây ra những bất lợi nào cho VFIS?

Q5. DL hoạt động như thế nào trong một môi trường đa văn hóa như VFIS?

VD. Khả năng dẫn dắt và lãnh đạo (leadership) được phân bổ như thế nào giữa các nhân sự trường học? Anh/Chị có nhìn ra ai đóng vai trò lãnh đạo trong trường?

DL đã được triển khai như thế nào trong trường học?

Nếu Anh/Chị cho rằng DL không phù hợp tại VFIS, đâu là yếu tố gây ra trở ngại này?

Q6. Với vai trò của một cá nhân, Anh/Chị sẽ đóng góp như thế nào vào sự phát triển của DL trong một trường học đa văn hóa như VFIS?

Q7. Loại văn hóa tổ chức nào tạo môi trường thuận lợi cho DL?

Q8. DL nên được xây dựng và phát triển như thế nào trong môi trường đa văn hóa như VFIS?

VD. Theo Anh/Chị, mất bao lâu để DL được xây dựng và phát triển tại VFIS?

Hành động hoặc quyết định nào cần được triển khai để phát triển DL?

Các yếu tố hỗ trợ nào là cần thiết cho sự phát triển của DL?

Appendix 3 Categories, Sub-Categories & Codes

Categories	Subcategories
Three Dimensions of Distributed Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different Leadership Positions at Different Levels • Leadership Qualities • Operational Culture
Challenges to the Development of Distributed Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement of Unofficial School Members in Decision Making • Complicated Leadership Structure • Human Resources-Related Challenges • Motivation to Tackle Challenges
Proposals to Develop Distributed Leadership at VFIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear Organisational Structure • One Distributed Leadership Practice at a Time • A Supportive Organisational Culture • Multicultural Leadership Qualities • Programmes to Develop Competent Teachers • Teambuilding