

**EXPLAINING THE NEXUS BETWEEN LEADERSHIP AND SCHOOL
EFFECTIVENESS IN JAMAICAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS:
A FOCUS ON THE ROLE OF THE MIDDLE MANAGER**

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ABSTRACT

School leadership plays a critical role in shaping educational outcomes, mainly through the efforts of middle managers who bridge the gap between administration and classroom instruction. This study explores the collaborative dynamics and decision-making processes of middle managers in secondary schools across Jamaica. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected from 16 middle managers (grade coordinators and heads of departments) across eight secondary schools—selected based on their performance classification by the National Education Inspectorate (NEI) and their rural or urban status. The study investigates middle managers’ perceptions of leadership, their role in fostering school effectiveness, and the challenges they face in balancing administrative expectations with instructional leadership. Findings suggest that (a) middle managers serve as critical intermediaries in school leadership, influencing both policy implementation and teacher development; (b) their leadership effectiveness is shaped by school performance levels, institutional culture, and available resources; (c) middle managers in high-performing schools report greater autonomy and professional development opportunities, while those in low-performing schools struggle with systemic constraints and limited support, and (d) the ability of middle managers to drive positive change is influenced by their collaborative practices, decision-making authority, and the leadership structures within their schools. These findings highlight the need for targeted professional development, stronger support systems, and policies that empower middle managers to enhance instructional leadership. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on educational leadership by providing insights into the experiences of

middle managers and their role in improving school performance in diverse educational contexts.

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Breanna and Rainer—you are my most outstanding achievement. Breanna, what started as a friendly competition to inspire you to become Dr. Breanna Julal turned into one of my most profound sources of motivation. Watching you achieve that goal before me filled me with immense pride and pushed me to keep going. Rainer, may this accomplishment serve as a reminder that no dream is too big, and I hope it inspires you to surpass every expectation—to be better, stronger, and wiser than your parents ever were.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The improvement of schools to foster more extraordinary student achievement has long been explored by educational researchers (Berenstein, 1971). Prior to the 1970s, some researchers believed that attending school had marginal effects, based on empirical research at the time; however, the 1970s London studies (Jenks et al., 1972) provided evidence that school effectiveness, in fact, made a significant difference to the core of school purpose – student achievement and progress. These studies led to a shift in focus on school improvement initiatives in the United States (Edmonds, 1978) and the United Kingdom (Reynolds, 1976), as well as a thrust to identify the characteristics of the learning environment of schools that seemed to vary in effectiveness.

Leadership

Educational leadership is described as the professional behavior and practice of leaders in executing their administrative responsibilities while influencing and guiding educators to improve the educational process and learning in schools (Leithwood et al., 2008). Educational leaders include principals, assistant principals, coaches, coordinators, middle managers, and other administrators. Educational leadership in schools is usually regarded as a central element of school improvement and effective functioning (Leithwood et al., 2008; Lipscombe et al., 2021). The hierarchical nature of governance within schools has led to a narrow definition of leadership that focuses almost entirely on the traditional role of a school principal. In the US, the 2002 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, along with its successor, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), resulted in the lens being more focused on the

role leadership must play in school effectiveness (Klein, 2016). Signed into law on December 10, 2015, ESSA presents a renewed focus on school leadership and acknowledges its importance to school improvement and effective instruction (ESSA, 2015).

This follows previous writings that categorically define leadership as not just the sacred preserve of the principal but extends to others in the organizational hierarchy, including middle managers, middle leaders, or senior teachers (Lambert et al., 2007). De Nobile (2021) defines middle leaders as individuals who may or may not be in formally promoted positions but have responsibility for an aspect of school organization and specifies middle leadership as the behavior of individuals that influences aspects of school functioning and other staff members. In the case of formal leadership roles, some studies include teacher leaders who exercise exclusively leadership responsibilities or teachers with a full-time teaching schedule who fulfill leadership responsibilities on top of their teaching job (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Most teacher leaders are partly relieved from teaching obligations to fulfill leadership duties following their teaching duties and are sometimes also called hybrid teachers (Margolis, 2012).

According to Wenner and Campbell (2017), school systems aim at creating teacher leadership roles in combination with teaching responsibilities based on the idea that continuing classroom responsibilities help teacher leaders understand and remember the complexities of teaching (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008). Formal teacher leader roles are attached to a set of bureaucratic expectations and recognized job titles, such as head of department, instructional specialist, curriculum specialist, or data coach (Harrison & Killion, 2007). The

amount of time that teacher leaders are relieved from teaching duties to fulfill leadership responsibilities might differ substantially.

School leadership worldwide has long been identified as a vital factor in improving school effectiveness (Mincu & Liu, 2022). Leithwood et al. (2004) contend that effective leadership is second only to the quality of classroom instruction in determining student outcomes. The lens of change is therefore turned towards school leaders, intensifying their work and forcing them to channel energies into management rather than educational processes (Gronn, 2003). Leadership in which staff share leadership roles appears to improve student achievement more than leadership in which the principal alone makes most school-level decisions (Seashore Louis et al., 2010). This is reinforced by Thompson (2011), who states that the foundational element of the requirements for effective educational leadership in the 21st century is that leadership must be widely shared. He posits that teachers desire to share power. As such, a principal who is inclined to hold onto power and deny access to decision-making is likely to cause team members to become frustrated, alienated, and possibly disloyal.

Sharing leadership positions involving teachers in curriculum planning and the management of school affairs, and consulting teachers about other practical decisions in school, is therefore essential for good school leadership (Thompson, 2011). Harris (2002) emphasizes the importance of conceptualizing leadership in school improvement as involving shared decision-making and risk-taking among teachers and managers. To increase motivation, Bush and Middlewood (2005) state that it is essential to include teachers in organizing schools and the curriculum, which will lead them to work as a team. In fact, as advocated by York-Barr and Duke (2004), the rationale for the intensive study of middle leadership lies in the many ways in which

student learning outcomes may improve by extending leadership opportunities to expand leadership capacity in schools.

The Jamaican Context

Jamaica, like many other Caribbean countries, has been faced with increasing territorial and international competition as it prepares its learners for a global workforce. So, policy documents such as the White Paper (MOE, 2001) assert that national development is hinged on the commitment of leaders to formulate development plans and implement reform measures. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has adopted several policy directions to ensure that ‘Every Child Can Learn, Every Child Must Learn’ (MOE, 2001). This mantra summarizes the MOE’s mission of providing a caring, inclusive, and enabling environment in which every child has access to quality education and is therefore empowered to impact the world around them (MOE, 2001). School effectiveness has, therefore, risen to the forefront of discussions and policy reform initiatives such as the National Task Force Report on Educational Reform (2004), the Education Transformation Program (2010), and the Draft Standards for the Education System in Jamaica (NEI, 2014) point to an alignment with global trends regarding school effectiveness (Dwyer, 2013). In fact, the National Task Force Report on Educational Reform recommended that a National Quality Assurance Authority (NQAA) be established to elucidate how student performance, leadership, and accountability are inextricably linked to school effectiveness (Task Force, 2004).

According to Foster-Allen (2010), the NEI has articulated school effectiveness as encompassing the distinctive traits shared by schools where children, irrespective of socioeconomic background, race, or gender, acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, and concepts to progress successfully to the next stage. Murillo (2005)

suggests that an effective school is characterized by its ability to accomplish the holistic development of all its students beyond what might have been anticipated based on their past performance and the socio-economic and cultural context of their families. There are no universally used measures to capture the effectiveness of educational institutions. According to Dwyer (2013), school effectiveness within the Jamaican context is defined by characteristics from the 2007 Shannon-Bylsma model: (a) Strong leadership, (b) A clear school mission, (c) A safe and orderly climate, (d) Transparent and effective monitoring of student progress, (e) High expectations and (f) Parental involvement.

In line with this model as well as policy recommendations, the Jamaican government established an independent National Education Inspectorate (NEI) to effect changes complementary to the transformation of schools (NEI, 2014). This further led to the creation of a system focused on standards, performance, results, and accountability measures aimed at efficiency and cost-effectiveness (Newman, 2013). This stance is actioned through the NEI's mandate to assess standards attained by students at the primary and secondary levels at key points in their education, report on their progress, and make recommendations to support improvements in the quality of the provision and outcomes for all learners (NEI, 2014). The Chief Inspector's report states that the NEI is therefore charged with contributing to raising student achievement through improving school effectiveness (Foster-Allen, 2010). The NEI essentially determines school effectiveness based on the following: (a) The quality of leadership and management of the learning environment in the school or learning institution; (b) The quality of teaching; (c) The quality of student response; (d) The extent to which students have access to the curriculum; and (e) The quality of the

provisions to support students' safety, health and well-being (National Education Inspectorate Handbook, 2013)

The Chief Inspector's Report (NEI, 2014) also presented the findings of inspections of 205 schools (about 20 percent) across Jamaica and found that 44 % of schools were effective, 5.3 % were 'emerging satisfactorily,' though still ineffective, and 50 % were ineffective. A subsequent report of 653 inspected schools over the period September 2015 to June 2019 highlighted leadership as a critical area for school improvement (NEI, 2019): for leadership, 2% received a rating of exceptionally high, 60% satisfactory, 19% good, 18% unsatisfactory, and 1% in need of immediate support. The Chief Inspector's Report acknowledged that of 653 schools inspected, exceptional leadership was manifest, where the leadership successfully organized, directed, and combined leadership forces to rally faculty and stakeholders to share and respond to the vision for the school (NEI, 2019). In an industry that is obviously purposeful (Sammons, 2007), reports such as this, therefore, necessitate a closer look at all factors that may impact school effectiveness.

Leadership Structure

In Jamaica, formal leadership positions are assigned to the principal and, in schools with more than 600 pupils, the vice principal(s). According to Phipps (2014), Jamaican school leadership essentially operates at four levels: at the base are subject teachers, then middle managers or senior teachers, who include heads of department and grade coordinators who are responsible for managing subject and form teachers. The third level constitutes vice-principals, who supervise all academic staff, and at the top are principals; all four levels of leadership impact the effectiveness of schools.

All Jamaican secondary schools have these teacher leaders or middle managers or senior teachers, who are members of the leadership team and are part-

time, free of teaching duties, to take up a leadership role. The Education Act (1980) pp. 49 classifies middle managers as Teachers with Special Responsibility – “a teacher with special responsibility; being a trained teacher who has been employed as a teacher for not less than three years, and who, on the recommendation of the Board of a public educational institution, has been authorized by the Minister to perform in addition to normal teaching duties such special duties as may be specified.”

(Government of Jamaica, 1981). They are given titles, time, and/or defined duties, and additional compensation for their leadership roles and play a central role in the operation of the school (Phipps, 2014); their roles include (a) leading and managing curriculum development, (b) supporting teachers with appropriate content and pedagogy in the teaching and learning process, (c) monitoring teams of teachers, and (d) working collaboratively in influencing schoolwide policies.

While the inclusion of middle managers is not new, the recognition that schools are too complex to be led by one individual has forced principals to devolve a greater degree of power and responsibilities to middle managers. According to the School Effectiveness Toolkit (2004), when a school is effectively led and managed:

- i. The principal is a goal-directed, visionary, strong, firm, and industrious leader.
- ii. The principal has strong organizational management skills.
- iii. There is a clear pathway toward attaining the school’s goals and vision that is shared and understood by all the school’s different stakeholders.
- iv. There is good, regular communication between the Board Chair and the principal.
- v. Middle managers (Headteachers) hold teachers accountable for the highest possible standard of student achievement.

- vi. Senior, grade level and staff meetings are scheduled to ensure standardization and monitoring of curriculum delivery.
- vii. Department meetings involve a discussion of a variety of issues, such as classroom management, analysis of academic performance, special educational needs, relationships with students, discipline, curriculum coverage, homework policy, and professionalism.
- viii. Leaders know what is happening in the school - what teachers and students are doing and how well.

To gain a deeper comprehension of middle managers, it is crucial to delineate their position within the school management framework (refer to Figure 1). The middle manager under scrutiny in this study is formally designated as a senior teacher, not based on age, but rather due to the specific role they undertake in addressing departmental or grade-level matters; they assist the Principal and Vice Principal in managing aspects of the school. This middle tier consists of heads of departments (HODs), grade coordinators (GCs), and other teachers assigned posts of special responsibility.

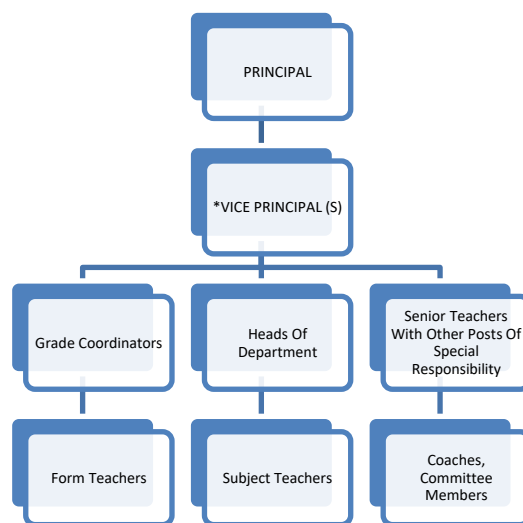


Figure 1: The Basic Leadership Structure in Jamaican Secondary Schools

** A second VP may be appointed in a school of 1000 students or over.*

All middle managers are teachers who hold specialized positions of authority within the school system. For instance, a grade coordinator assumes a distinct role in overseeing a particular grade level within a secondary school. This role encompasses the supervision of all students within that grade level, as well as the form of teachers responsible for individual classes. Consequently, they bear responsibility for all factors affecting student learning and behavior, including the effectiveness of teaching staff. Similarly, a head of department assumes responsibility for a specific subject area. It is regarded as an expert in the content, overseeing teachers in curriculum planning and delivery while also managing student learning outcomes within that subject domain. Other middle management roles, such as Exams, Sports, or Canteen Coordinator, may exist, each tailored to the particular needs of individual schools. This leadership team, consisting of the principal, the vice principals, and middle managers, should have a clear management framework characterized by group cohesion (Bennett et al., 2003), which refers to the openness of the team members, their mutual trust, communication and cooperation (Holtz, 2004), and unambiguous roles known and accepted by all, as well as a shared sense of purpose and a consensus on the school goals (Grubb & Flessa, 2006).

NEI (2014) reports that effective schools recognize the importance of middle management in strengthening the schools' operations and empowering these managers to carry out their roles and responsibilities. Empowered, these managers can articulate the school's vision and hold teachers under their supervision accountable for improvements in students' performance. The school's middle management should also lead in curricula assessment and reviews, ensuring that the curricula are adapted to meet the needs of students (NEI, 2014).

Leadership Barriers

Middle managers are often faced with several barriers that can diminish effectiveness (Harris & Muijs, 2002). Harris and Muijis (2002) identify one of the main barriers to middle management leadership as being the “top-down” leadership model that still dominates in many schools. The potential for shared leadership within a school hinge on whether the head of the institution is willing to delegate authority to the middle management team and teachers, fostering a culture that encourages leadership and autonomy across the entire school community. Creating and sustaining teacher leadership requires not only empowerment but also time and opportunities for continuous professional development. A lack of training has been identified as a major cause of significant problems experienced by schools (Dunham, 1995).

Insufficient support to implement necessary changes poses challenges, as schools require adequate technical, professional, and emotional support for teachers (Harris, 2002). Successful change and innovation require effective direction and leadership. In cases where school improvement falls short, it is often attributed to shortcomings in school leadership or the delegation of leadership to individuals lacking the necessary skills or authority to drive progress (Harris, 2002). Disagreements among staff about the aims and values of the school can render leaders ineffective. Teachers need to participate in planning and decision-making, achieved through “sharing ideas and the open exchange of opinions and experiences” (Harris, 2002).

Range of Current Approaches to Address Gaps

In recent times, through the efforts of agencies such as the National College for Educational Leadership (NCEL) and the Jamaica National (JN) Foundation, various strategies have been implemented to support middle managers so that they can

contribute meaningfully to school effectiveness (Dwyer, 2013). In 2015, NCEL and Church Teachers' College (CTC) collaborated on a one-year leadership training program for middle managers (Bryan, 2015). Similarly, through the JN Foundation iLead program, schools were selected for leadership support, urging middle managers to increase their supervision of and assistance to their younger colleagues as one measure to improve the output of the education sector (Bryan, 2015). Both initiatives operated on the premise that the genesis of the phenomenon of failing schools in society lies with poor leadership and a lack of accountability. Dr. Renee Rattray, director of education programs at the JN Foundation, suggests that many middle managers are elevated to positions of seniority without sufficient preparation. She emphasizes the necessity for on-the-job training and workshops for those designated as senior teachers, as they may lack a comprehensive grasp of their leadership roles, which fundamentally entail driving school improvement (Bryan, 2015).

Rationale

The phenomenon of ineffective middle manager leadership has long been present in Jamaican schools (Phipps, 2014), but no comprehensive research has been done to explore the issues surrounding it. Leadership is often left solely at the feet of principals while an ineffective middle tier of leadership operates. Since research suggests that schools and organizations led by many people sharing the same vision are more effective than one person working in isolation (DeNobile, 2021), this area is selected for investigation because it is vital to assess and evaluate all factors that may impact school effectiveness and re-educate middle managers who often have the mistaken impression that leadership is the sole concern of principals to help them understand the necessity of effective leadership in our schools. Understanding the

issues should enable the implementation of proactive strategies that will help all educators adjust to the challenges of ensuring effective schools.

Summary of Chapter

The improvement of schools to foster more extraordinary student achievement has been a focus for educational researchers for decades. Landmark studies in the 1970s highlighted the significant impact of school effectiveness on student outcomes, prompting a wave of improvement initiatives. Central to these efforts is educational leadership, which extends beyond traditional principal roles to include various leadership positions within schools. Effective leadership, characterized by shared decision-making and collaboration, is crucial for improving school outcomes. In Jamaica, national policies and initiatives emphasize the importance of strong leadership at all levels. Middle managers play a key role in implementing reforms and ensuring accountability, but often face barriers such as insufficient training and support. This study aims to explore the dynamics of middle management leadership in Jamaican schools, providing insights to inform strategies for enhancing school effectiveness. Understanding and addressing these barriers is essential for creating educational environments where every child can succeed.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Education policy and planning are increasingly focusing on how schools operate and how they organize themselves to achieve their primary objective of educating children (School Effectiveness Toolkit, 2004). This area, referred to as school effectiveness research, attempts to understand how the way schools are led, organized, and resourced affects the quality of student outcomes. An effective school, according to Edmonds (1979), is a place where both academically strong and weak students can acquire fundamental skills. Essentially, it can be defined as an organization where its staff continuously learns and improves, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to learn. Its central focus is on equality and quality, providing equal access to resources for all students, fostering a safe environment for both students and staff to grow, and being accountable to all stakeholders (Edmonds, 1979).

Research on the various factors that may affect school effectiveness is essential because student outcomes are positively related to the effectiveness of schools. Once the characteristics of successful schools are identified, other schools can replicate their success (School Effectiveness Toolkit, 2004). Studies about how leadership affects school effectiveness accelerated in the 1970s, with research conducted in England and North America finding student achievement in schools with firm leadership to be greater than in schools with weak leadership (Bamburg & Andrews, 1991). The researchers argued that this situation could not be explained just by the unique individual and social characteristics of the students, but that the real difference between the schools was the leadership behaviors of the school

administrators; hence, educational leadership began to be discussed more frequently in education studies (Krüger & Scheerens, 2012).

Theoretical Framework - Distributed Leadership

Similar to many Caribbean countries, Jamaica acknowledged that despite advancements in education between 1950 and the 1990s, substantial reforms were still necessary to respond competitively to evolving global demands (Task Force, 2004). Jamaican school leadership followed a top-down approach where the principal led, made key decisions, motivated, and inspired. However, global research contends that no single person can effectively lead a school (Leithwood et al., 2004; Coelli & Green, 2012; Dhuey & Smith, 2014; Grissom, Kalogrides & Loeb, 2015), and although the principal is the pivotal figure in promoting the school's vision, school culture is built upon the contributions of a collection of adults all working together on behalf of students (Gale & Bishop, 2014). Murphy et al. (2009) scrutinized the pivotal role those formal leaders assume in fostering the establishment and growth of distributed leadership within educational institutions. Their study delved into the dynamics of an urban middle school. It was selected as one of six cases studied in a comprehensive three-year investigation of distributed leadership spanning two Mid-Atlantic States. It found that a shared voice among staff and other stakeholders is critical. The extent to which this shared voice will redound to opportunities for input in school decision-making is explored in a case study conducted by Bush and Glover (2012) with nine English schools (four secondary, three primaries, and two special). The schools were defined as 'high performing' because they received 'outstanding' Ofsted grades overall and for leadership and management in inspections conducted in 2008-2009. Their research shows that high-performing leadership teams are characterized by internal coherence and unity, a clear focus on high standards, two-

way communication with internal and external stakeholders, and a commitment to distributed leadership.

Research has also shown that when leadership is shared or distributed among staff members, teaching capacity is much stronger than when leadership is maintained solely with the principal (Leithwood et al., 2008). Using a field sample of 119 individuals in 26 engineering design teams from China and the technique of social network analysis, Wu and Cormican (2021) found that shared leadership is positively related to team effectiveness when measured in terms of team task performance and team viability. According to Day et al. (2004), shared leadership enhances the social capital of a team by tapping into team resources such as the knowledge and skills of its members, thereby fostering improved task performance. Katz and Kahn (1978) similarly suggested that when group members exhibit leadership toward others and the collective mission of the group, they bring forth more personal and organizational resources, share information more freely, and demonstrate increased commitment. Additionally, when group members are influenced by their peers, team functioning is enhanced, as evidenced by high levels of respect and trust among members. Consequently, teams displaying these characteristics often achieve higher levels of performance (Day et al., 2004). A few empirical studies support this viewpoint. For example, Carson et al. (2007) found in a study of 59 consulting teams that shared leadership is positively correlated with team performance as evaluated by clients. Ensley et al. (2006) demonstrated in a study of 66 top management teams that shared leadership is a stronger predictor than vertical leadership of new venture performance in terms of revenue and employee growth.

Drescher et al. (2014) provided longitudinal evidence from a study of 142 teams participating in a strategic simulation game, supporting the positive impact of shared

leadership on team task performance. Educational researchers, therefore, recommend a collaborative model involving the participation of school faculty through shared decision-making, defined as a Distributed Leadership (DL) model (Gronn, 2008; Spillane, 2005). A DL model is one in which teachers and principals share leadership roles (Spillane, 2005), including facilitating grade-level curriculum meetings and coordinating professional development opportunities. In this type of leadership, collective work, as well as collective learning by working on goals through communication and interaction, is prominent, rather than individual work (Halverson, 2007). As such, leadership is stretched over a number of individuals, and that leadership is accomplished through the daily interaction of multiple leaders (Spillane, 2005).

Distributed leadership is a theoretical framework helpful in examining how leadership roles and responsibilities are shared and carried out across various departments or positions. This theoretical framework treats leadership as a dynamic organizational quality rather than a fixed or individual quality (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006) and is grounded in concepts from sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991), situated cognition (Brown et al., 1989), distributed cognition (Hutchins, 1995; Pea, 1993), and activity theory (Leont'ev, 1978) that stress the influence of social context on human thought, learning, and practice. DL offers numerous advantages in organizational settings. It involves the sharing and distribution of leadership responsibilities among multiple individuals within an organization, empowering individuals at different levels to assume leadership responsibilities and enhance their skills (Spillane et al., 2004; Bolden, 2011).

Obadara (2013) used a descriptive survey design to determine that there is a significant relationship between distributed leadership and school goal achievement,

the professional development of teachers, instructional program management, practical teaching and learning, and the promotion of school climate. A sample of 200 public secondary schools out of a total of 595 schools in Lagos State as of September 2010, with their principals (105 male and 95 female) as subjects, was drawn for the study using a proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The study developed two sets of questionnaires (Distributed Leadership Questionnaire (DLQ) and Sustainable School Improvement Questionnaire (SSIQ)). The findings revealed significant relationships between distributed leadership and school goal achievement, teachers' professional development, instructional program management, practical teaching and learning, and promotion of school climate. This fosters a culture of continuous learning and growth (Gronn, 2002) and promotes innovative solutions, effective problem-solving, and organizational adaptability (Spillane, 2005).

Given its principles, DL serves as a valuable framework for a qualitative methods study exploring leadership and school effectiveness in Jamaican high schools. In this context, all teachers are integral to the school principal's leadership, aligning with DL's essence, which asserts that effective leadership emerges through collaborative efforts and interactions (Gronn, 2002).

Review of Empirical Articles

What Determines an Effective School?

Over the past 20 years, a considerable number of researchers have attempted to identify the characteristics of effective schools. One of the first studies concerning the influence of school on achievement was published in the mid-1960s by Coleman et al. (1966), who obtained data from over 4,000 schools, 60,000 teachers, and 570,000 students in an attempt to find ways to maximize students' educational achievement and (Coleman et al., 1966). Their findings showed that no particular school

characteristic, apart from social class or socioeconomic status (SES), had a measurable positive impact on student achievement. Referred to as The Coleman Report, the controversial study concluded that family background, not the school, was the primary determinant of student achievement. Ronald Edmonds (1979) refused to accept the Coleman Report as conclusive since he had found schools nationwide where poor (minority) students were achieving. He cited research showing that schools achieving above the norm had strong administrative leadership, high student expectations, and a supportive school climate. A study by Weber (1971) identified several factors that contributed to student achievement at higher-than-anticipated levels, above national norms, and in four inner-city schools in New York City. Subsequent studies have confirmed chief among the practical factors contributing to school achievement are: (a) the tone the principal sets for the school, (b) high expectations, and (c) leadership (Reynolds, 1996). This was also a finding of a leading researcher in the area of school effectiveness, Edmonds (1979), who, over two years, obtained data from over 4,000 schools, 60,000 teachers, and 570,000 students in Michigan and found that the most effective schools were those that had strong leadership, a climate of high expectations, an orderly atmosphere, constant monitoring of student progress, and a schoolwide focus on the acquisition of basic skills. The research indicates that school leaders are considered a leveraging factor in flourishing schools (Cann et al., 2021; Louis & Murphy, 2018).

School Effectiveness and Leadership

Katz and Kahn (1978) defined leadership as the exercise of influence on organizationally relevant matters by any member of the organization, with organizations more likely to be effective when the leadership function is distributed or shared. The distribution of leadership was thought to be desirable because it

strengthened decision-making commitment and improved decision-making quality. It was characterized by the strategies of delegation, shared decision-making, openness to subordinates' influence, and provision of information. DeMatthews et al. (2019) used an exploratory approach to review U.S. policy-related and empirical literature on school leadership for effective inclusive schools. They drew across time from research syntheses in school and inclusive leadership from leading journals in educational leadership, special education, and edited volumes focused on school leadership, analyzing common themes centered on leadership practice, organizational and social conditions, and challenges. Drawing on Hitt and Tucker's (2016) framework for leadership principles, five domains were revealed. These domains include establishing and conveying a vision, facilitating a high-quality learning experience for students, building professional capacity, creating a supportive organization for learning, and connecting with external partners to assist leaders with effectiveness. Their study highlights the need for collaborative relationships to exist with educational leaders.

Price Waterhouse Coopers LLP's (2007) study on school leadership demonstrates the need for school leaders to develop leadership among their staff, nurture their existing talent, and subsequently spread leadership throughout the organization. Their qualitative research in 50 schools throughout England and Wales involved interviewing the head teacher and a number of other teaching and non-teaching members of the senior leadership team in the schools. The findings showed that 95 percent of secondary school leaders and 85 percent of primary school leaders feel they have distributed their leadership responsibilities within their organizations. Conversely, Adey's (2000) questionnaire survey of secondary school middle managers within one LEA showed that 47.9% of the participants rated their influence on whole-school policy as average, and 31.6% claimed that they had "little or no

influence.” These findings resonate with Mercer and Ri’s (2006) inquiry, where middle leaders of four secondary schools situated in northeastern China were demanding an increase in their leadership involvement.

Leithwood et al. (2004) conducted a study in southern Ontario, Canada, using interviews with school and district leaders and teachers from eight schools to identify the engagement of informal non-administrator leaders. A mixed pattern of solo and shared leading was evident, with more colleagues working together on complex tasks rather than simple ones and attributions of leaders tending to match those with formally designated leader status. Thus, in relation to direction setting, once a vision was in place, these informal leaders tended to perform the on-the-ground battle for the hearts and minds of colleagues. If, however, informal leaders were to perform in this way (singly or collectively), there still had to be regular monitoring by principals. Distributed leadership, it seemed, depended on “effective forms of focused leadership – leading the leaders” (Leithwood et al., 2004).

In decentralized education systems, the delegation of decisional power requires a certain level of professional capacity from all involved (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009), and collaborative practices are one of the prerequisites for raising the capacity of a school (Jäppinen et al., 2016). In a study conducted between February and May 2019, Eisenschmidt et al. (2012) interviewed five principals of K-12 schools from Estonia and Finland in order to deepen their understanding of leadership strategies. While the sample was limited, the researchers found that school communities that welcome and encourage teacher collaboration and allow teachers to take on leadership roles are more effective. The general ethos among Estonian and Finnish principals in the sample signaled the importance of sharing leadership and collaborative ways of working. Principals described how providing

opportunities for teachers to take responsibility and participate in decision-making and school development was motivating. Goddard et al. (2015) found that structures for formal and frequent encounters between teachers are the most efficient ways of creating and sustaining collaboration in a school community, and the principal provided examples of the implementation of these teams and groups in practice. This was also evident in the Eisenschmidt et al. (2012) study as Estonian principals referred to more temporary structural solutions (e.g., organizing an event, working with projects, and groups for professional learning) in their professional communities.

In contrast, their Finnish colleagues embedded these structures in the continuation of the workflow in schools (e.g., curriculum development teams). Further, Estonian principals simultaneously seemed to be full supporters of sharing responsibility and also concerned about whether responsibilities could be shared with all due to some teachers' lack of ability or experience. Regarding a similar theme, the Finnish principals brought out a familiar feature of Finnish schools: trust in teachers. They saw all teachers as being capable of taking the initiative and participating in school development, which resonated with the intended school culture that consisted of collaborative practices introduced in the national curriculum. Empirical evidence can also be gleaned from the 'Raising Achievement Transforming Learning Project' (RATL), encompassing more than 300 schools in England (Harris, 2013). The project aimed to facilitate the exploration of innovative approaches to collaboration among schools by enabling the testing of various leadership models (Harris, 2013). The project's final report underscored the necessity of broadening the sharing of leadership responsibilities within and across schools to attain sustainable improvements in education (Harris, 2013).

Javadi (2014) conducted a study in a private international secondary school in Johor Bahru, on the border between Malaysia and Singapore, using a group of fifteen middle leaders who took part in a strictly confidential semi-structured interview. The data analysis suggests that the roles and responsibilities of middle managers in this school were prescriptive. Middle managers were not wholly viewed as subject experts in the strictest sense, and they suffered from work overload, lack of role clarity, and a voice in the senior management team (SMT). Javadi's (2014) inquiry revealed that the Heads of Department (HODs) hold diverse roles with dominant managerial responsibilities. He reports tension in the relationships between the HODs and the senior managers, where most criticisms are directed at a lack of autonomy. The HODs are reluctant to conduct lesson observations and resort to alternative methods such as checking worksheets. Lack of time continues to hamper the work of the HODs at this school. According to Javadi, the majority of the HODs do not perceive themselves as leaders of their departments. None of the middle leaders had received any formal training, relying, instead, on learning on the job. Evidence from this school in Malaysia is mainly consistent with the international literature on middle leadership practice (Bennett et al., 2003).

According to a study conducted by ESHA (2013, p. 3), the majority of school leaders across eight European countries perceive that "school leadership is clearly distributed." It is recognized that leadership distribution is more prevalent in Norway, Sweden, England, and Scotland, while it is less common in Spain, France, and Italy (ESHA, 2013).

School Effectiveness and Instructional Leadership

Günel and Demirtasli (2016) conducted a study that found that according to the students' perceptions, Instructional Leadership was the most effective dimension of a

school. The study used 4472 students from grades 5 to 8 in 13 secondary schools in Trabzon during the 2012-2013 academic year. It aimed to investigate secondary school students' perceptions of their school's effectiveness in various aspects, including a secure and regular environment, high academic expectations, instructional leadership, learning opportunities, monitoring school learning, and positive school-parent relationships. They used the Scale for Effective School (SFES) developed by Günal. In the SFES-Student Form, Part 1 was used to obtain information about students, including parents' education level, number of books at home, opportunities at home, gender, and grade levels. Part 2 consists of 27 three-point Likert-type items regarding variables of effective schools: Positive School-Parent Relationship, Instructional Leadership, Secure and Regular Environment, High Academic Expectations, Monitoring School Learnings, and High Academic Expectations (Günal & Demirtasli, 2016). The researchers used multivariate regression analysis to determine the predictive power of these perceptions on students' year-end academic average grades. The results indicated that a combination of variables related to effective schools, including instructional leadership, high academic expectations, monitoring school learning, positive school-home relationships, and learning opportunities for all students, collectively explained 27% of students' year-end academic achievement scores. In summary, the study explored how students perceive the effectiveness of their school in various areas and found that these perceptions were associated with students' academic achievement, with instructional leadership being a particularly influential factor.

In a six-month inquiry into middle leadership practice at four selected international secondary schools in Malaysia, Javadi et al. (2017) found that the most powerful feature of school A lies in its supervision of teaching and learning. It

conducts formal lesson observations based on mutual agreement and linked to performance management, as well as informal drop-ins, known as ‘learning walks,’ on an ongoing basis. Throughout the academic year, which echoes the systems and mechanisms described by Glover et al. (1998) and Turner (2000), school D tends to place great emphasis on instruction so that all the other aspects of school leadership are either aligned with this or have been affected by it. The formal and informal monitoring models in school D resonate considerably with the systems in place in school A, albeit at a lower degree of rigor due to the young age of this school and its heavy timetable. Monitoring of teaching and learning at school B also receives attention, but this is limited compared to schools A and D, where there are some criticisms. Despite some observed irregularities, such as high teacher absenteeism – seven in one instance – leaving some classes unattended and indicating poor relief management, school B seems to be conscious of the importance of quality instruction and, thus, pays attention to formal lesson observations. One distinctive feature of monitoring in this school is its dual-observer system, where two observers, one essentially being the subject expert, visit a lesson and provide feedback. Although the overall observation timescale is announced, the actual classroom visits remain unannounced, with a view to capturing authentic content delivery and discouraging showcase lessons.

For many years, school principals have been acknowledged as significant contributors to the success of educational institutions. In an age characterized by educational accountability reform and the shared decision-making and management approach in schools, the role of leadership has become increasingly vital (Rice, 2010). Principals are at the core of the leadership team within schools. From existing research on effective schools, we understand that “effective principals’ impact various

school outcomes, including student achievement. They achieve this through their recruitment and motivation of high-quality teachers, their ability to identify and communicate the school's vision and objectives, their skillful allocation of resources, and the establishment of organizational structures that facilitate instruction and learning” (Horng et al., 2009,1). Kouzes and Posner (2017) offer a robust framework for advancing educational organizations. They posit that leaders who Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2017) make extraordinary things happen in organizations. The second practice, Inspire a Shared Vision, means that when a strengths-based approach is embraced, commitment is inspired, and everyone becomes part of the dream.

In today’s current context, where challenges are abundant, collaborative efforts are invaluable. In decentralized school settings, principals have the autonomy to develop two different leadership models: (a) a more hierarchical and directive model or (b) a more inclusive model that brings teachers, in particular, and the local school community into the frame. (Riley & Louis, 2000)

Research on decision-making in Australian primary (Mulford et al., 2000) and secondary (Mulford et al., 2001) schools found that the more positively teachers viewed the decision-making processes in the 18 schools, the higher the degree of influence and control they perceived to be exerted by education staff groups in the school. Ongoing analysis of this database shows that where teachers in secondary schools perceive decision-making as collegial, cooperative, and consultative and providing adequate opportunities for participation, it will be more likely to lead to positive student perceptions about their school and teachers as well as perceptions

about relationships and their performance than where decision making is more top-down, executive, or does not foster widespread teacher involvement.

The right environment for the team to lead is, of course, created by the principal, as revealed in a study conducted by Thompson (2009), which used a sample of one hundred and sixty students to ascertain their perceptions and expectations of leaders. The study identified two critical characteristics: the leader leads a team whose expertise and commitment are critical, indeed indispensable to the attainment of the goals of the organization, and the job of the leader is primarily to create and maintain an enabling and uplifting environment in which team members can confidently pursue the agreed goals.

A study of teachers' perceptions of their working conditions in North Carolina demonstrates that working conditions are highly predictive of teachers' stated intentions to remain in or leave their schools (Ladd, 2009). Of the five domains of working conditions identified—leadership, facilities, empowerment, professional development, and time policies—leadership emerges as the most salient dimension affecting teachers' plans to stay in or leave their schools. Teachers' perceptions of their working conditions, and leadership in particular, are also predictive of actual one-year departure rates and student achievement. Still, the predictive power is far lower than was found for planned departures. This study quantitatively confirms earlier research that identifies leadership as a critical factor in teachers' decisions about where to work. By quantifying the effects in a multivariate model, this study shows the relative predictive value of leadership—more significant than that of other working conditions and comparable to the impact of school demographics, such as the racial mix of the students—on teachers planned and actual departure rates. The study

also suggests that good leadership may be most important in retaining teachers in disadvantaged schools.

A study by Mortimore et al. (1988) used 50 randomly selected London primary schools from a total of over 650, a sample of schools that was later found to be representative of schools throughout London. Similarly, their findings revealed that schools that were effective academically and socially possessed purposeful staff leadership by the head teacher, the involvement of the deputy head, and the involvement of teachers. Essentially, good leadership is essential to teachers, and it affects their decisions about where to work.

Relevant to administration, Cansoy and Parlor (2017) examined the relationship between principals' leadership behaviors, teacher efficacy, and collective teacher efficacy. This quantitative study consisted of 427 elementary, middle, and high school teachers in Istanbul. A positive correlation highlighted the following leadership behaviors: emphasizing common objectives, providing various resources, flexibility in the classroom, high expectations, observation of colleagues, and stress reduction activities. The researchers found principal behaviors strengthened teacher efficacy by fostering cooperation. In another study related to administration, Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) studied how teachers experience principal leadership. Their quantitative study in a suburban district in Minnesota surveyed teachers in 14 districts. Principal leadership behaviors, teacher-teacher relationships, and a sense of efficacy fueled their research questions. Several effective leadership behaviors and actions were revealed: being immersed in the instructional work, creating a sense of trust, and sharing responsibility. Teacher-teacher relationships were stimulated through reflective dialogue, shared norms, and de-privatized practices. Self-efficacy was dependent on context; however, trust and professional community variables were

found to be positive influencers. All of the exemplary practices posited by Kouzes & Posner (2017) were prominent in this study.

Lipscombe et al (2023) conducted a study that identified that middle leadership is distinct from principal leadership and is not interchangeable with teacher leadership, despite some shared features. The study provides a systematic review of the literature on middle school leadership. They consider how middle leaders have defined the responsibilities they hold while also addressing impact and professional development. The authors note that middle leaders operate at the interface between different sources of influence in the school. Their literature review focused on two databases, Scopus and ERIC, and spans the period from 2006 to 2020. Their search identified 175 sources, but, following careful screening, 35 were included in the final review from 14 countries. Using Nvivo, narrative synthesis was utilized to analyze the articles, resulting in four conclusions: (a) middle leadership is difficult to define; (b) middle leadership positions and responsibilities vary considerably and are best understood in context; (c) middle leaders, directly and indirectly, impact teacher practice, team development, school reform and professional learning, although there is limited direct research into their impact; and (d) middle leadership professional learning has not progressed to the point to equip middle leaders for the complexity of their positions adequately. They conclude that school middle leadership is diverse, contextually driven, and essential for advancing teaching and learning.

School Effectiveness and Middle Managers

The term middle leader, middle manager, or senior teacher has evolved into a broad designation for leadership positions held by educators who have responsibilities extending beyond their classrooms. These additional roles may encompass overseeing student well-being, curriculum development, providing support to students, leading a

team or educational phase, and focusing on specific school improvement priorities. Barth (2007), reporting the results of one doctoral student's analysis of more than 250 major reform studies, noted that the most prevalent recommendation for improving our nation's schools was that teachers should take on and share more of the leadership of their schools. Lieberman and Miller (2004) called teachers who take on leadership roles formal or informal change agents who tackle the increasing demands that schools face. The concept of middle leadership in education revolves around the idea of combining the role of a classroom teacher with contributions to strategic leadership objectives.

This "middle layer" of leadership has emerged due to the increasingly hierarchical structure of schools. However, it often remains unclear how much actual authority or autonomy middle leaders possess to make strategic decisions for their schools (Gear et al., 2021). While numerous studies have explored the impact of senior leadership on enhancing educational systems by deploying various leadership styles, there is a noticeable gap in the literature when it comes to understanding what constitutes effective strategic middle leadership. Similar to principals, teachers possess valuable leadership qualities that yield significant results. Gordon et al. (2021) surveyed educators in PK-12 schools to gain insight into informal teacher leaders. Using perceptions from the surveys, they identified who they are, what they do, and how they impact teaching and learning.

Coding categorized leadership activities, personal and professional characteristics, knowledge and skills, relationships with other educators, and their impact. The study revealed that informal teacher leaders engage in mentoring, facilitate team development, and share instructional and classroom management strategies. They construct ideas for school improvement, continuously volunteer, and

support students beyond the classroom level. Personal and professional characteristics identified included being passionate, caring, efficient, persistent, and open to others. Knowledge and skill results centered around teacher leaders being competent with content and being able to consider multiple viewpoints. Teacher leaders' relational characteristics reflected respect, socioemotional relationships, trust, and working relationships. Lastly, their behaviors had school-wide impacts. Within the classroom, they were student-centered, creating classroom communities. Professionally, they empowered colleagues and modeled culturally responsive teaching behaviors. A dedication to continuous school improvement impacted the overall organization. This study exemplified the overarching influence of teacher leaders.

A literature review by Simpson (2021) posits that fostering teacher leadership improves school culture as well as benefits students and teachers. Analyzing 30 articles from 2000-2020, she reported that teacher leadership cultivated a positive school culture through shared decision-making and collaboration. A supportive environment promotes teacher confidence levels and job satisfaction. Students' performance and achievement benefited since teachers were more cognizant of student needs, used research-based instructional practices, and remained student-centered. Trust and parent involvement were also identified factors. Teacher leaders championed their students, advocating equity and showing commitment toward professional learning communities. As leaders seek to build professional capacity in their spaces, attention to these details should be granted.

Consistent with research, a quantitative study done by Parlar et al. (2017) revealed significant, positive relationships between teacher leadership culture and teacher professionalism. Participants were 254 teachers working in primary and secondary schools in Istanbul. Using a relational model, findings indicated that

professional cooperation, 33 administrators' support, and a supportive working environment impacted teacher professionalism. Shared leadership, encouraging participation, and providing opportunities for teacher leadership roles were found to be significant. These variables increase teacher efficacy (Bandura, 1994), which assists with transforming schools into effective learning environments.

Meyer et al. (2023) examine the relationship between leadership goal-setting and school improvement in New Zealand, where schools are legally required to have annual plans outlining school-wide goals. They researched goal-setting in three schools, working alongside school-based inquiry teams of three to six members. Their methods comprised interviews with leaders and teachers, observation of school meetings, and documentary analysis. Their findings highlight the importance of setting clear goals for improvement, but also the need to justify the goals in ways that engage and challenge teacher beliefs. This study highlights key leadership drivers for improvement, which include distributing responsibility and leadership and developing the capability and collective responsibility of middle leaders. They conclude that ownership by middle leaders is critical for success and that a culture of trust is required to promote improvement.

In a 2021 study, Gear aims to address this gap by examining the strategic capabilities of middle leadership. It does so by critically evaluating the effectiveness of middle leadership in a small-scale context, specifically in implementing sustainable changes to a primary school's mathematics curriculum. The research methodology employed is auto-ethnographic, and it uses a documentary approach, with a reflective journal maintained by the primary researcher, who also serves as a middle leader responsible for the math curriculum in an English primary school. The study involved a critical reflection and analysis that delved into the strategic capabilities of middle

leadership within our primary school setting. The evaluation focused on their capacity to plan, initiate, and sustain successful school-wide curriculum changes, particularly in their role as the math curriculum leader. The primary researcher, who also served as the middle leader, documented these experiences. The second researcher, a university lecturer, acted as a critical researcher, maintaining a detached perspective, observing the findings, and sharing insights from outside the current context. The primary researcher was ideally positioned to capture the firsthand experiences of transitioning between the dancefloor and the balcony to engage in strategic decision-making. This study's findings revolve around two primary themes, Leadership Culture and Middle Leaders as Change Agents, and highlight the need for middle leaders to adopt a more strategic approach in the context of curriculum leadership and change management. The study reveals the presence of multiple cultures within the school that require different leadership approaches, such as transformative or situational styles. The first researcher, in the role of the middle leader, initiated curriculum changes by unfreezing the existing curriculum context and seeking input from colleagues. The study emphasizes the challenges faced by middle leaders in balancing strategic oversight with the needs of colleagues. The conclusion emphasizes that middle leaders are more likely to succeed when they adopt a strategic approach, requiring them to identify and develop systems that allow them to view their roles from a strategic perspective, similar to being on the "balcony" rather than remaining solely on the "dance floor."

In a study of empirical data published between 1988 and 2005, DeNobile (2021) identified two key tensions in the role of middle leaders, which were reflected in three fundamental issues that ran through all the writing reviewed for both the main study and the follow-up work. The two tensions identified were, first, between

expectations that their role had a whole-school focus and their loyalty to their department, and second, between a growing school culture of line management within a hierarchical framework and a professional rhetoric of collegiality.

Harris et al. (2012) conducted a small-scale qualitative survey by interview in a city in the south-west of England, with the aim of trying to establish if effective departments in secondary schools had any common characteristics. It used semi-structured interviews with the senior management teams, the departmental members, and pupils of six effective departments. Effective was defined as showing significant added value to pupils' learning in a multi-level school effectiveness analysis. It was found that there were a number of common characteristics to these effective departments, many of which were directly related to the actions and style of the department head. Whilst there has been some argument more recently about the importance of context, the findings are probably broadly generalizable. However, it is essential to note that these are characteristics of effective departments. It is not possible to extrapolate and say that, therefore, ineffective departments do not have these characteristics. All of these departments were marked by a clear and shared sense of vision that largely emanated from and was propagated by the heads of departments. There were a large number of characteristics that could be related to interpersonal skills. The heads of the department exhibited trust in their colleagues, and most teachers in the department were allocated particular responsibilities for which they took the lead on behalf of the whole department.

Middle Managers and Distributed Leadership

The significance of middle leadership within schools has grown considerably. This growth is attributed to ongoing policy changes, heightened levels of accountability, and an increased workload placed on principals. To alleviate some of

this intensification, specific leadership responsibilities have been delegated from senior leadership to middle leaders (Harris, 2012). Fullan (2001) affirms that strong institutions have many leaders at all levels, and consequently, there has been a surge in research exploring the role of middle leaders in schools.

The Leadership for Organizational Learning and Student Outcomes (LOLSO) research of Mulford and Silins' (2001) was designed to require four phases of data collection and analysis conducted over four years and allowed for iterative cycles of theory development and testing, using multiple forms of evidence. Included in this design were surveys of 3,500 Year 10 students and 2,500 of their teachers and principals from half the 20 secondary schools in South Australia and all the secondary schools in Tasmania (a total of 96 Australian schools). Two years later, the South Australian Year 12 students, teachers, and principals were resurveyed. The LOLSO research demonstrated clearly that the best leadership for organizational learning (and a community focus) was a principal skilled in transformational leadership and middle managers and teachers who are actively involved in the core work of the school (shared or distributive leadership). What was shown to be especially important was that staff were actively and collectively participating in the school and that they felt that their contributions were valued.

Larusdottir and O'Connor (2017) conducted a collaborative research study on middle leadership (ML) in Iceland and Ireland, using the theoretical framework of distributed leadership (DL). Unlike most DL studies that focus on leadership as an organizational resource for school improvement, this research centers on teachers. It explores how MLs perceive their leadership role from a DL perspective. The study involved semi-structured focus group interviews in various schools in both countries. A total of 30 teachers in ML positions were interviewed. The Icelandic sample

consists of a total of 15 MLs, 10 of whom were interviewed in 2014 in three focus groups.

The Icelandic database also contains interviews from 2009 where MLs in compulsory schools (6–15) were asked about their perception of their role. The Irish sample also consists of interviews with a total of 15 MLs, comprising three focus groups. This small-scale study found that a form of distributed leadership (DL) is present where tasks are assigned by senior leadership to the middle leadership (ML) team. However, it also reveals practical challenges and difficulties. In both contexts, participants have encountered an increased workload, with more responsibilities delegated to them. This is attributed to the growing workload of school principals, who now assign a more significant number of tasks to MLs, and the reduction in the number of middle leaders due to financial constraints. MLs believe that the focus on management tasks and general busyness hinders their contribution to the overall school leadership. They perceive their role as more managerial than influential, emphasizing position over influence. The findings also reveal a disparity between DL theory in the literature and the actual ML practices in Ireland and Iceland. While a form of DL exists in both contexts, it is predominantly controlled by the Principal rather than being a reciprocal relationship involving teachers in leading school activities. The study suggests the need for a more proactive approach in School Leadership Preparation Programs and Initial Teacher Education to promote a distributed leadership mindset among school leaders and teachers.

Bush and Glover (2012) explore high-performing Senior Leadership Teams as a manifestation of distributed leadership. These are characterized by internal coherence and unity, a focus on high standards, two-way communication with internal and external stakeholders, coupled with a commitment to distributed leadership. The late

1990s saw a move toward middle leaders becoming accountable to line managers for the quality of the work in their responsibility area (Glover et al., 1998; Metcalfe & Russell, 1997). This creates a managerial expectation that they would monitor their colleagues' work (Glover et al., 1998; Wise & Bush, 1999; Wise, 2001). Whilst subject leaders were increasingly recognizing that expectation as one of their responsibilities, many were reluctant to hold members of their team accountable for what happened in the classroom. Most studies found that they still defined themselves as subject administrators, looking after human and teaching resources rather than as managers or leaders (Metcalfe & Russell, 1997; Glover et al., 1998). Some senior staff stated that subject leaders used administration as a refuge to avoid the awkwardness of entering the classroom of another teacher to engage in monitoring. Despite this, they found that in four of the seven schools they studied, formal monitoring and evaluation of classroom work was evident.

Studies that attempt to explore the relationship between distributed leadership and school improvement do so via the juxtaposition of various variables revolving around the school principal and the teachers. The research seeks to determine the presence or otherwise between distributed leadership and teacher affective commitment (Ross et al., 2016), teachers' perceptions of the levels of distributed leadership practices, and the indicators of school effectiveness (Al-Harthi & Al-Mahdy, 2017) who examined teachers' perceptions of the levels of distributed leadership (DL) practices and the indicators of school effectiveness (SE) in Egypt and Oman. The study sampled 635 teachers in Egypt and Oman using the SE index and the DL scale (Özer & Beycioğlu, 2013). The average score of the perceived level of DL practices of school principals and SE indicators was below the agreeableness level. DL was shown to be a positive and significant predictor of SE. The Omani

teachers had a significantly higher perception of the availability of DL in their schools and of their schools' effectiveness than the Egyptian teachers.

Middle Managers and Principals

Bennett (1995) comments that the term 'middle management' implies a hierarchical structure that "assumes a downward flow of authority from the leader, given in order to promote what the leader seeks." This image does not suggest a nurturing environment for leadership at the middle manager level, but rather an assumption of middle manager loyalty to higher leadership. Various studies examine how some principals restrict distributed leadership and subordinate it to managerial authority. Moore et al. (2002), in their study of eight head teachers, note that they sometimes use their authority to coerce staff into their mode of thinking and operating within the school, thereby implementing the cultural and structural reforms required by the government at the local level. They cited one head teacher who masks this process by couching it within a values-laden discourse of collegiality and trust (Moore et al., 2002). Similarly, in Chapman's (2003) case study of a comprehensive school, he notes (approvingly) that a more autocratic approach is used when the leadership team feels that it is necessary to move the school forward. In other situations, the approach has been more democratic. Further examples can be found in Day et al. (2000). Sharing leadership is risky for head teachers. Distributed leadership may not succeed in reinforcing commitment to management agendas, and it is head teachers who are held accountable for meeting government targets. From a management perspective, Wallace points out that a heightened dilemma confronts head teachers; their greater dependence on colleagues disposes them towards sharing leadership. In a context of unprecedented accountability, however, they may be inhibited from sharing because it could backfire should empowered colleagues act in ways that generate poor

standards of pupil achievement, alienate parents, attract negative media attention, or incur inspectors' criticism. (2001).

The strategy most commonly adopted by head teachers to minimize the risks of distributed leadership is to restrict its operation to a minority of senior staff, the Senior Management Team (SMT), as Wallace's (2001, 2002) study of SMTs in primary schools shows. This creates a division among teachers between leaders and followers. Distributed leadership within the limited context of the SMT is more amenable to authority. Even in the school in Wallace's research that most espoused shared leadership, the head teacher asserted her management authority when she was unable to achieve consensus. In consequence, SMT members tailored their contributions to what they thought would be acceptable (Wallace, 2001). Ainley and Bailey (1997) found limited devolution of responsibility in the two colleges which they studied, with middle managers having less power and less opportunity for decision-making than had been the case before incorporation. They state that middle managers are not involved in strategic decisions, but, on the contrary, communicate the details of the decisions that the principal has taken. Collective influence is subordinated to government-driven 'authority' through processes of external regulation by the head teacher and by internalized self-regulation by senior staff.

Middle Managers' Roles and Needs

As the increasing complexity of school management has made it difficult for all tasks to be undertaken by principals and their deputies (Wise & Bush, 1999), middle leaders have assumed a more significant role in schools. They are increasingly seen as crucial to a school's success and as key brokers within organizations where they have a pivotal role through their ability to control and influence the flow of information (Earley & Bubb, 2004) between staff and senior management. Consequently, their

perceptions and understanding of their role and how they function in the middle is significant in that it informs and impacts what it is they need to learn as professionals. The literature highlights a range of tensions with regard to their role and the inherent dilemmas and difficulties in aspiring to fulfill varied and conflicting demands. The culture of the school can form a significant barrier to middle managers. In a meta-analysis of two decades of research on teacher leadership, the Centre for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2005) noted that it is clear that features of school structure and culture that stand in the way of teachers being able to facilitate improvement may prove detrimental to the sustainability of improvement efforts.

Middle leaders occupy what Siskin (1993) called a hermaphroditic role, that is neither fully teacher nor fully administrator, yet operating as a conduit for all the tensions in the relationship between the two (Brown et al., 2000). They operate at the interface between different levels and sources of influence and change within the school. Wise and Bush (1999) found that middle managers in schools had to contend with conflicting views of their role from their senior managers and school staff, which leads to role conflict, where the differing roles the individual is being asked to fill are not compatible. Glover et al. (1998) argued that many do not see themselves as leaders but as people with multiple jobs and tasks, which include the management of personal tensions as well as professional demands. Bennett et al. (2003) discusses middle leaders' reluctance to become involved in the broader whole-school context and also their resistance to having a management role with regard to colleagues' work or performance. These tensions are exacerbated by the fact that many middle managers are time-poor, are preoccupied or distracted by routine administration and crisis management and have little time for strategic thinking: They are busy'

people...little time was found for planning, evaluating, reflecting, or observing (Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989). The issue of time is also echoed by Wise and Bush (1999) in their study of academic middle leaders in U.K. secondary schools, where they argue that the limited management time is wholly inadequate to fulfill all the diverse tasks that now form part of a middle leader's role. The middle leaders in their study also emphasized that their first responsibility was to the students rather than to management and that time and effort used in administration and management is time taken from teaching and learning. Bullock (1988) found in a single school case study that middle managers were under pressure to perform in front of colleagues. The more task-centered duties were considered of greater importance because day-to-day administration work, if ignored, would be quickly observed by other staff.

Research indicates that very few middle leaders appear to have received any management or leadership training. (Busher et al., 1999). Turner (2000) conducted a small-scale study of 20 primary school subject coordinators, whom the authors call subject leaders. They argue that there is a growing consensus about the leadership function of the coordinator. The methodology consisted entirely of semi-structured interviews with the 20 subject leaders. Content analysis identified a total of 51 tasks undertaken by the subject leaders, related to tasks they undertook, should undertake, and which made them effective in their work. Only five came into all three categories: a further 11 were tasks they both did and believed they should do, and eight were tasks that they did not do but should have done and would make them more effective. About half the subject leaders felt that they were undertaking strategic leadership, but only developing a favorable climate within the subject area was seen as crucial. There was great reluctance to get involved in issues around teaching and learning. Half were involved in developing arrangements for assessment, recording,

and reporting on progress. Still, it was not seen as appropriate to ensure curriculum coverage or set clear teaching objectives – what Fletcher and Bell call more directive roles – nor would these contribute to effectiveness. Monitoring was achieved by checking on test scores, assessments, and display work. Training needs, auditing, motivating, and leading by example were seen as necessary, and resource acquisition and management were widely done but not seen as contributing to effectiveness. Subject leaders wanted to spend more time on professional development work with their colleagues.

Aidey (2000) studied the professional development needs of middle managers. It follows up the findings from an earlier survey of secondary high school professional development coordinators (1995) from one English LEA. A particular need identified in the earlier study was for professional development to support middle managers in adapting their roles in light of changing needs and priorities. Within a wide range of development needs identified, three main areas of concern emerged: (a) whole-school issues, including finance, development policy, and priorities; (b) developing departmental policies and budgets within the whole-school framework – shedding the ‘bunker’ mentality and (c) role of middle managers in monitoring and evaluation, and identification of development needs for staff – appraisal was failing to inform the planning of professional development.

This subsequent study carried out in 1997 with middle managers from the same LEA confirmed that professional development priorities for middle managers revolve around training to enable them to fulfill newly accepted aspects of their role - while middle managers increasingly accept responsibility and accountability for the quality of teaching and learning, they feel ill-equipped to carry out these roles and see themselves essentially as line managers responsible for ensuring that whole-school

policies and practices are translated into action at departmental level. Of the top 10 items identified by respondents as essential training needs, eight related to the quality of teaching and learning. This priority is clearly related to external pressures (including the introduction of compulsory appraisal of staff, curriculum changes, Ofsted, and TTA's core purpose of the subject leader), at the same time acknowledged as the most challenging aspect of the middle manager's role, especially where it involves dealing with performance problems. On the one hand, while middle managers recognize that their departmental planning needs to take account of whole-school priorities, at the same time, there is not the same acceptance of the need for them to contribute to whole-school policy-making, planning, and finance, and the fee.

Brown et al. (1998) report on how heads of secondary school departments and their senior staff perceived the role of the head of the department. It drew on eight intensive case studies of heads of department, using work shadowing and interviews, along with extended interviews with senior staff and documentary data from the school, including inspection reports and development plans. The case study data were then discussed with a focus group of 24 heads of department. The findings showed that while heads of department are stated to be the key to improving the quality of the learning process, they are too often bogged down in routine administration. In an audit of the role, as defined by heads of department and deputy head teachers, the authors found that heads of the department identified a number of key challenges to their role – lack of time, space within the department, the need to support failing teachers or non-specialists, personnel management, homework policy, and staff morale. They acknowledged the importance of promoting and encouraging good teaching as the key to good departmental performance. Many potential strategies they identified to improve or sustain improvement, such as teamwork and quality lesson

preparation, were prevented by a lack of time and cooperation. There was little staff development, and responsibilities for resource acquisition varied between bidding for a budget and booking forms for books/videos.

Best Practices

Emergent thinking on school leadership emphasizes that the authority to lead need not be located in the person of the leader but can be dispersed within the school (Day et al., 2000). Current international trends and research findings indicate the emergence of the importance of middle leaders in schools (Adey, 2000; Turner, 2000). Writing on middle leadership in the English context, Turner (2000) suggests that it is vital that a more sophisticated conception of the learning undertaken by subject leaders is developed if the training and preparation of the next generation of subject leaders are to be effective in the 21st century. Issues of leadership and management are no longer the exclusive preserve of the most senior staff in schools, and the need for strong professional middle leadership is incontestable. While the building of a strong, vibrant middle leadership system is critical to the ongoing improvement of the work of schools, it is also an essential building block in the realization of a future cohort of competent, confident, and courageous senior leaders in schools (O'Connor, 2005).

Harvey (1997) examines the impact of the introduction of School-Based Decision Making and Management (SBDMM) in Western Australian schools on the group of staff called third-level secondary teaching administrators (STAs), many but not all of whom are heads of academic departments. Data were collected through a survey, and the paper reports on the statistical analysis of closed questions and quotations from free-response questions. The posts examined have an 80% teaching commitment, with 20% for administration. The administrative responsibilities

included managing student behavior, responding to mail, reviewing documents and drafting policies, budgeting and cost center management, management of physical resources, preparing documents, dealing with the mistakes of other administrators, engaging in whole-school planning, and serving on committees. The author comments that some of these demands, which were seen as ‘administrivia,’ were, however, central to the move to SBDMM. A majority of heads of departments surveyed felt that they were providing educational leadership for their area, were guided by a clear sense of how they contributed to school effectiveness, were paying attention to colleagues’ professional development needs, improving their professional performance, performing significant whole-school roles and achieving high levels of professional satisfaction from their work. However, a substantial percentage of respondents thought they were being too reactive, had a broad range of disparate and disconnected responsibilities, were caught in a crossfire of conflicting expectations between principals, deputy principals, and teachers, and were preoccupied with administrative work at the expense of their capacity to demonstrate educational leadership in teaching programs. Changes in the head of departments’ responsibilities in response to SBDMM were a greater emphasis on departmental staff management, administration and financial management, curriculum management, classroom teaching, school-level planning, policy-making and administration, student management, school and community interaction. Heads of departments were seen positively as pivotal in the move to SBDMM, and the broadening of their responsibilities was beneficial but adverse in that they were not conversant with them. A third view was that the head of the department would be phased out in favor of other kinds of STAs. The extent to which the changing role could be achieved successfully was seen to depend on the broader school context.

There is a lack of research studies that examine the claims that middle teacher leadership is beneficial to schools. Struyve et al. (2014) studied twenty-six Flemish teacher leaders to learn more about the validity of claims made by scholars who promote the concept of teacher leadership and its various benefits. In the conclusion of their article, the authors advise that the field needs a greater understanding of teacher leadership by examining how those practices really take place and how these practices are perceived by the teacher leaders involved.

Research Questions

Bennett et al. (2003) comment that research on middle leaders in England reports mainly on small-scale, free-standing case studies or snapshot surveys and focuses primarily on the role and purpose of middle leaders in post-primary schools. It concerns itself with what can contribute to an effective secondary school subject department (Earley et al., 1989; Harris et al., 2002; Turner, 2000.) Equally, in the Irish context, existing small-scale studies - McGeady (1999), McDonagh (1998), Asofo (1996), Naughton (1994) - are mainly school/situation case-specific and refer primarily to middle leaders' role definition, performance, duties and responsibilities. Suppose school effectiveness requires that leadership comes from more than just principals. In that case, there is a place in the Jamaican context for research on the contribution to school effectiveness by middle managers. While there is a growing recognition of the crucial importance of lifelong learning in education (OECD, 2002), there is no research on the implicit professional learning experiences of those working as middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools. This research study is, therefore, an attempt to fill a gap in current research, to commence a discourse and add to the knowledge base on the issue of leadership of middle managers with a view to

assisting their ongoing professional development. The questions underpinning this study are:

1a. What do middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools undertake the specific roles and functions?

1b. How do these responsibilities contribute to the overall functioning of the educational institution?

2a. What challenges and barriers do middle managers encounter in fulfilling their leadership roles within Jamaican secondary schools?

2b. How do these impediments impact their leadership?

3a. To what extent does the implementation of distributive leadership affect middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools?

3b. How does distributive leadership relate to their leadership practices?

Summary of Chapter

In this chapter, an in-depth examination of the literature on school effectiveness and leadership was conducted, focusing on the perspective of distributed leadership theory. The analysis was conducted within the parameters of a conceptual framework derived from the contributions of Desimone and Pak (2017). This framework serves as a valuable instrument for scrutinizing leadership as a practical approach to achieving school effectiveness. By applying the lens of distributed leadership theory and employing this conceptual framework, the chapter engaged in a thorough assessment of the literature. The literature that forms the foundation of this study provided insights into the essential elements of successful leadership development. It explored the diverse roles and responsibilities of middle managers, investigated the advantages associated with distributed leadership, identified the challenges it

encounters, and emphasized the crucial role of principal leadership in the distributed leadership process.

Based on the findings and arguments presented in the literature, the effectiveness of schools is closely intertwined with the effectiveness of leadership. Principal leadership emerges as a critical factor, as the level of support from principals significantly influences the success of a distributed leadership model. Considering that distributed leadership is an evolving field of exploration, the literature review highlighted gaps in research and policy that require attention. Consequently, this study positions itself within the broader framework of distributed leadership while also addressing specific issues and the context of middle managers in Jamaica.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Research continues to explore middle management leadership and its connection to school effectiveness (Bush, 2013; Hallinger, 2019; Bush, 2023) because of increasing recognition that principals are unable to execute effective leadership by themselves, and it needs to be a shared responsibility (Bush, 2023). This research investigated the nexus between middle managers and school effectiveness by examining schools in the Jamaican secondary school system using a logical, systematic plan. Data came from three sources: inspection reports from the National Education Inspectorate (NEI), surveys, and participant interviews. Specifically, school inspection data was collected from the NEI website, the official inspection arm of the MOE. Available data includes school contextual information (size, demographic composition, socioeconomic status, etc.) as healthy accountability metrics on Leadership and Management, Students' progress, Human and material resources, Teaching and learning, Students' performance, Curriculum and enhancement Program security, Health, safety, and wellbeing. Additional contextual data came from the middle managers and together, they provided the necessary contextual information for the study.

Research Philosophy and Paradigm

This research was guided by Pragmatism, a problem-oriented philosophy that is concerned with resolving problems by using the best available resources to generate solutions to a problem (Creswell, 2014). As such, it adopts the practical view that the best research methods are the most effective in answering research questions (Dewey, 1938). The pragmatism worldview was extended to the exploration of beliefs, context

and motivational factors driving the state of effectiveness of the leadership protocols applied by schools. Dewey (1938) posited that pragmatism advanced beyond the individual, psychological realm towards an emphasis on the individual as well as shared human experience, suggesting that all human experience involves some amount of interpretation – interpreting knowledge and beliefs leads to action and reflecting on actions leads to new ways of knowing and acting (Morgan, 2014), thereby uncovering social realities more clearly than philosophical approaches. Dewey described the methodology of practical inquiry as a formalized extension of ordinary problem-oriented reflective thinking, which provided for a more dynamic view of social life - ‘because we live in a world in process, the future, although continuous with the past is not its bare repetition’ (Dewey,1929).

In the realm of research methodology, a pragmatic approach is adopted, recognizing that individuals in social settings, including organizations, experience action and change differently (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). This approach emphasizes three core methodological principles: an emphasis on actionable knowledge, recognition of the interconnectedness between experience, knowing, and acting, and viewing inquiry as an experiential process (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). In institutional settings where practice is closely linked to knowledge production, pragmatism offers a flexible and reflexive guide to research design, extending beyond objectivist conceptualizations (Biesta, 2010). This worldview allows for the exploration of leadership networks and school effectiveness from multiple perspectives, making it practical and impactful (Creswell, 2014).

The chosen qualitative approach, described as pragmatic, interpretative, and grounded in the lived experiences of people (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012), aligns with the pragmatic worldview. Unlike quantitative studies rooted in post-positivism,

qualitative research is interpretative, allowing for a detailed understanding of central phenomena (Creswell, 2013). This approach focuses on individual voices and reality, capturing environments through rich descriptions and emphasizing the importance of leader behavior in various circumstances (Bryman & Burgess, 2000).

Despite potential disadvantages associated with interpretivism and constructivism, qualitative research is deemed more suitable for understanding middle leadership practices affecting school effectiveness (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). A qualitative research design aligned with pragmatism allows for flexibility, considering multiple perspectives and methods to explore the intricacies of school effectiveness and leadership comprehensively. This approach, therefore, provides rich insights into experiences, perspectives, and contexts, offering a nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play.

The qualitative study's objective is not to develop a theory or conduct ethnography or phenomenology but rather to uncover leadership differences and similarities in school effectiveness within high schools categorized as either high-performing or underperforming. The study aims to comprehend the factors influencing leadership within the context of educational leadership in Jamaican high schools. The chosen qualitative design naturally aligns with the research topic, allowing for inductive exploration and detailed descriptions of the central phenomenon.

Sample

Purposeful sampling is frequently used in qualitative research, especially when participants have a direct relationship to the limited system being studied (Merriam, 2009). When researchers want to pick individuals based on particular standards or traits, they use this sampling strategy (Creswell, 2013; Lodico et al., 2010).

Qualitative research, most often, examines a small population of participants to foster a deep understanding of their values, beliefs, and assumptions about the topic of the study (Creswell, 2014). In addition, to explore reasons and concepts, a qualitative method is used as it is more likely to suit complex social situations and enable the researcher to interpret the findings and provide alternative explanations (Lodico, 2010). The selection process for qualitative designs relies on specific identification processes associated with purposeful sampling techniques (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014) indicates, “The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites (or documents or visual material) that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question.” This ensures the sampling population selected for the research meets the needs of the study (Lodico, 2010).

The significance of a sample size that permits data saturation, redundancy, and answers to research questions is emphasized by Creswell (2013). To ensure a diverse perspective, the intended participants in this study are middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools for whom there is a direct nexus to school accountability. There are 300 secondary schools in Jamaica, and a sample of eight (8) schools were carefully identified. The researcher's previous place of employment was not considered in order to prevent biases and ethical issues. The chosen schools were determined by a set of criteria - two urban and two rural high schools that the NEI classified as performing at a good or above standard, and two urban and two rural high schools that were assessed as unsatisfactory for performing below an acceptable standard – and using the following process. First, the list of schools the NEI has recently inspected and assessed within the last five academic years (publicly available) was downloaded. The National Education Inspectorate (NEI), a local organization entrusted with evaluating educational institutions' performance and making suggestions for

enhancement, makes these classifications based on its evaluations (National Education Inspectorate Draught of Inspection Handbook, 2014). Second, the inspected schools were alphabetically sorted into four (4) lists in order of classification: good or above, unsatisfactory or below, and from those lists, rural and urban schools. A comparative study is made possible by the selection of one (1) school from each category, allowing for the detection of disparities in the beliefs and behaviors of educational stakeholders about leadership and school effectiveness between high-performing and low-performing schools.

The exact number was selected using a random number table, with every 4th school systematically pulled out of the total list, yielding a representative sample of 8 schools across the country. If a school does not agree, the next school on the list will be selected. Once the eight (8) schools were selected, a list of middle managers was requested from each institution. The list was separated to identify only grade coordinators (GC) and heads of department (HOD) from among the middle managers, as these categories of middle managers have direct responsibility for teaching and learning. The 4th GC and HOD from each list were selected, yielding a total of 16 participants (2 Middle Managers per school). Collecting insights from these middle managers offered a comprehensive perspective on leadership and interconnections from both administrative and middle leadership viewpoints, as effective educational leadership is essential for facilitating change and sustaining improvement. The sampling of research participants in this qualitative research is therefore purposive, meaning there is far less emphasis on generalizing from sample to population and greater attention to a sample “purposely” selected for its potential to yield insight from its illuminative and rich information sources (Patton, 2002).

Table 1***Basic Information of Study Participants***

Respondent #	School Type (Rural/Urban)	NEI Performance Level	Years of Experience	Title (GC/HOD)
1	Urban	Good or Above	8 years	HOD
2	Urban	Good or Above	3 years	GC
3	Rural	Good or Above	13 years	HOD
4	Rural	Good or Above	8 years	GC
5	Urban	Unsatisfactory	8 years	GC
6	Urban	Unsatisfactory	4 years	HOD
7	Rural	Unsatisfactory	6 years	GC
8	Rural	Unsatisfactory	3 years	HOD
9	Urban	Good or Above	4 years	GC
10	Urban	Good or Above	15 years	HOD
11	Rural	Good or Above	7 years	GC
12	Rural	Good or Above	6 years	HOD
13	Urban	Unsatisfactory	3 years	GC
14	Urban	Unsatisfactory	3 years	HOD
15	Rural	Unsatisfactory	2 years	GC
16	Rural	Unsatisfactory	10 years	HOD

Data Collection

To gain insights into the work of Jamaican middle managers, a phenomenological approach was embraced. As suggested by Creswell et al. (2014), this approach is particularly suited when the goal is to comprehend the lived experiences of individuals in relation to a phenomenon. The emphasis is not on theorizing from the participants' views but rather on gaining exposure to the experiences of middle managers to identify commonalities as they navigate the phenomenon under examination. With the escalating societal demands for greater accountability, there has been a notable broadening of attention on ethical conduct, encompassing personal, professional, and research-related actions (Zegwaard, Campbell, & Pretti, 2017). To cultivate trust, integrity, and responsible engagement across the professional and research domains, a letter requesting approval was sent to the MOE (Appendix 1). After obtaining IRB approval and site permission (Appendix 2), an introductory letter outlining the purpose and nature of the research was sent to

the principals (Appendix 3). This was followed by a phone call to request a list of middle managers and to schedule a group sensitization meeting with the randomly selected participants via Google Meet.

At the heart of ethical research lies the principle of 'informed consent' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and so during the sensitization meeting, the voluntary and confidential nature of the study was emphasized, participants were informed about the purpose and objectives of the study, the selection criteria, recording and transcribing of interviews, and benefits and potential risks. They were also told how the data would be used and the safety precautions that would be employed, such as anonymity and confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and codes. They were advised of the benefits of participating in the study and informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time and have the right to refrain from answering any interview questions. An opportunity for questions and clarifications was provided, and informed consent forms (Appendix 4), were distributed for completion within one week via confidential cover. A Middle Manager's Demographic Survey instrument was sent via Google Forms to the selected participants before the in-depth data gathering process to gather demographic and quantifiable data, contributing to the study's maximum variation and credibility (Appendix 5).

To delve into the collaborative dynamics and decision-making processes of middle managers, several data collection sources were used. These methods provided a comprehensive understanding of how middle managers navigate their roles, interact with colleagues, and influence school leadership. By incorporating multiple sources of data, the study ensured a well-rounded perspective on the factors shaping their decision-making and collaborative efforts.

Interviews

One of the most popular methods for gathering data in qualitative research is the interview (Ryan et al., 2009). Interviews serve the primary purpose of eliciting information about participants' opinions, behaviors, and experiences related to a specific phenomenon, allowing the researcher to obtain insights into aspects that cannot be directly observed (Patton, 1990). Given that qualitative studies involve human affairs, interviews play a crucial role in reporting and interpreting these affairs through the eyes of specific interviewees, offering valuable insights into situations (Yin, 2011).

The research study used semi-structured rather than unstructured interviews. A semi-structured interview allows participants to respond to questions while also enabling the researcher to follow up and probe to gather additional in-depth responses (Creswell, 2014). Interviews occurred from July through September and were conducted via videoconferencing. Videoconferencing as a communication technology allows for a real-time, online synchronous conversation to occur, with the ability to send and receive audiovisual information. Compared with other online methods for qualitative data collection (i.e., email interviews, online forums, and instant messaging), videoconferencing more closely resembles the in-person qualitative interview. Sedgwick and Spiers (2009) have recommended that video conferencing is the most viable and cost-effective alternative to face-to-face in-depth interviewing to overcome geographical barriers and time constraints. Calendly was used to allow participants to schedule interview sessions at their convenience, and then Google Meets was used for interviews, which spanned three months. The interview schedule consists of open-ended questions, 3 of which are vignettes, allowing interviewees to recount their experiences (Merriam, 2009) freely. The interview matrix serves as a

guide for individual interviews, ensuring discussions remain focused and serving as a roadmap to provide relevant information and insights. The interviews were guided by questions targeted to address each Research Question (Table 1), recorded and then transcribed using Otter.

Prior to each interview, the purpose and confidentiality procedures were reviewed, and participants were reminded that they may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the research at any time. Participants were reminded that data collected would only be used for the dissertation and reviewed safeguards established to mitigate their risk of participation as described in the study limitations section of this chapter. In order to have the interview data captured more effectively, recording the interviews is considered an appropriate choice but sometimes a matter of controversy between the researcher and the respondent. Handwritten notes during the interview are relatively unreliable, and the researcher might miss some key points (Jamshed, 2014). According to Jamshed (2014), the recording of the interview makes it easier for the researcher to focus on the interview content and the verbal prompts. It thus enables the transcriptionist to generate a “verbatim transcript” of the interview.

Vignettes

Given the limited availability of systematic qualitative research on leadership among middle managers in Jamaica, an approach utilizing Vignettes was employed to investigate the characteristics of leadership teams and the distribution of leadership functions. A Vignette, or scenario, is a concise story featuring hypothetical characters and believable situations, employed in both quantitative and qualitative studies to extract participants' perspectives on a particular topic (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014). It entails presenting respondents with scenarios and asking how they would respond to

the depicted circumstances (Bryman and Burgess, 2000). The vignettes are a measure of the decision-making of the middle managers.

Vignettes provide researchers with a flexible and creative means to explore participants' meanings and interpretations of a phenomenon within a specific context or situation. Researchers establish the context and focus by defining parameters for the hypothetical story or scenario, aiding in managing complexity by isolating specific aspects of a social issue or problem (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014). Through open-ended questioning, participants will be prompted to fill in gaps and engage in interpretation processes, offering valuable insights into complex situations.

For this research, vignettes were carefully designed with clear and succinctly phrased questions to ensure data integrity. These selected vignettes presented participants with scenarios that are meaningful, authentic, sufficiently detailed, and directly relevant to the specific issues of interest. While vignettes can be presented in various formats, such as music and videos, written narratives were chosen as an accessible and appropriate format (Bryman & Burgess, 2000). The Vignette approach, having been in use for several decades, provides a foundation for establishing the reliability of this methodology.

Table 2

Middle Managers Interview Schedule and Link to Research Questions

Demographics	Interview Schedule and Vignettes
RQ 1a. What are the specific roles and functions undertaken by middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is your name? 2. How many years of experience have you had in education? 3. What is your current position/title? 4. How many years of experience have you had in your current position?

Table 2 (continued)

Demographics	Interview Schedule and Vignettes
<p>RQ 1b. How do these responsibilities contribute to the overall functioning of the educational institution?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Can you describe a typical day or week in your role as a middle manager, highlighting the specific tasks and responsibilities you regularly undertake in the school? 6. In what ways do you collaborate with teachers, administrators, and other staff members to ensure the smooth execution of your responsibilities, and how does this collaboration contribute to the overall efficiency of the school's operations? 7. Your Principal approaches you with an essential task for the upcoming NEI visit – to articulate a detailed job description that encapsulates the essence of your role and responsibilities. This comprehensive job description will not only guide your daily activities but also serve as a reference point for other middle managers in the school. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. In crafting this job description, identify and elaborate on four crucial aspects that encapsulate the specific roles and functions expected of you as a middle manager. Consider the diverse dimensions of your responsibilities, ranging from curriculum development to staff coordination and beyond. b. Allow your imagination to delve into the intricate details of your role, painting a vivid picture of the multifaceted responsibilities you shoulder as a middle manager in your school setting.
<p>RQ 2a What challenges and barriers do middle managers encounter in fulfilling their leadership roles within Jamaican secondary schools?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Can you share examples of instances where your specific roles and functions directly impacted the overall functioning or performance of the school? 9. How do you see the alignment between your roles and the overarching goals and objectives of the educational institution, and in what ways does your contribution contribute to the school's mission and vision? 10. Reflect on and articulate how your specific roles and functions as a middle manager contribute to the overall functioning of the educational institution. 11. Consider the ripple effects of your daily activities, collaboration efforts, and decision-making within the school's ecosystem. Illustrate how the various facets of your responsibilities align with and enhance the school's mission and effectiveness.

Table 2 (continued)

Demographics	Interview Schedule and Vignettes
<p>RQ 2b. How do these impediments impact their leadership?</p>	<p>12.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What overall rating did the NEI give your school in the last NEI Report? b. What rating did the NEI give your school for Leadership in the last NEI Report? c. What do you think accounted for that rating? <p>13.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Can you identify and elaborate on specific challenges you have encountered in your role as a middle manager within a Jamaican secondary school? b. How do these challenges impact your ability to fulfill your leadership responsibilities? c. In your opinion, what are common challenges that middle managers across Jamaican secondary schools might face in their leadership roles, and how do these challenges vary across different contexts? <p>14. Rose, a middle manager, encounters resistance from teachers when implementing a new curriculum initiative. Describe the potential challenges and barriers in this situation and discuss how Rose could navigate and overcome these impediments.</p> <p>15. Sheryl, one of the middle managers, storms out of the yearly middle managers meeting for the school's reopening on a sour note, claiming she is too frustrated to finish the discussion. The main concerns raised during the discussion were about inadequate teamwork and execution by supervisee teachers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Highlight your suggestions aimed at helping this team. b. Have you ever encountered such issues? c. How did you go about resolving it? <p>16. Michelle is one of the teachers under your supervision. She consistently arrives late for class, and when she does arrive, she only posts assignments on the whiteboard without engaging with the other students. After marking the register, she ignores the other students and either uses her mobile while sitting at the teacher's desk or converses and laughs with a specific pupil. The students in this class are highly disruptive and fail the subject Michelle teaches.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How would you intervene to resolve this matter? b. Have you dealt with a similar case before? c. What was your approach?

Table 2 (continued)

Demographics	Interview Schedule and Vignettes
<p>RQ 3a. To what extent does the implementation of distributive leadership affect middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools?</p>	<p>17. Considering the challenges you mentioned earlier, how do you perceive these impediments affecting your effectiveness as a leader? Can you provide examples of situations where these challenges influenced your decision-making or leadership practices?</p> <p>18. From your observations and experiences, how do you think the collective challenges faced by middle managers influence the overall leadership landscape within Jamaican secondary schools?</p> <p>19. Your Principal informs you that budget constraints will not allow you to implement necessary professional development programs for teachers. How might these financial challenges influence your leadership practices and the potential ripple effects on the school's overall educational quality?</p> <p>20. The recent National Education Inspectorate Report rates your school as failing/succeeding in the area of Leadership and Management.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What are the reasons you would agree/disagree with this rating? b. What suggestions would you give to improve this rating further? <p>21. In your experience, what best practices in leadership, especially at the middle management level, have you identified in your school? Are there specific lessons you have learned that could enhance overall school effectiveness? What systems are in place for succession planning and to help your team members become more capable leaders?</p>

Table 2 (continued)

Demographics	Interview Schedule and Vignettes
<p>RQ 3b. How does distributive leadership relate to their leadership practices?</p>	<p>22. Can you share instances where distributive leadership has positively or negatively influenced your role as a middle manager? How does the extent of distributive leadership impact your leadership responsibilities?</p> <p>23. In your opinion, how does the level of involvement in decision-making and leadership tasks vary among middle managers in schools with varying degrees of distributive leadership? Your school has recently transitioned to a more distributive leadership model. What are the potential effects on you as a middle manager, both in terms of increased responsibilities and changes in leadership dynamics? How might this shift impact the overall leadership culture within the school?</p> <p>24. Your principal invites you to be a part of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) Committee. There are no meetings held, but a SIP is produced and submitted to the MOE.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What concerns would you have with this process? b. How have you contributed to the SIP in your school? c. How do you perceive your contributions to the broader goals of educational leadership and school effectiveness? <p>25. Can you describe how distributive leadership principles are reflected in your daily leadership practices as a middle manager? Provide specific examples of how you distribute responsibilities and collaborate with other leaders.</p> <p>26. From your observations, how do middle managers adapt their leadership practices in response to the presence or absence of distributive leadership within your school?</p> <p>27. Gerald, a middle manager, actively involves teachers in decision-making processes. Describe how this distributive leadership approach might shape the overall leadership practices within the school and contribute.</p>

Field Notes

Field notes are an integral part of many types of research, especially within the realm of qualitative inquiry. Essentially, field notes are the researcher's written record of observations made, experiences had, and insights gleaned while in the field conducting research. Qualitative data collection and analysis usually proceed

simultaneously; ongoing findings affect what types of data are collected and how they are collected. Making field notes as the data collection and analysis proceed is one crucial data analysis strategy. The notes trace the thinking of the researcher and help guide a final conceptualization that answers research questions (or related ones) and offers a theory as an explanation for the answers. These notes support all activities of qualitative data analysis as suggested by Miles et al. (2019): data reduction (extracting the essence), data display (organizing for meaning), and drawing conclusions (explaining the findings).

A researcher journal was used to record these field notes and reflect on all that was being observed during the sensitization meeting and subsequent interviews. Researcher journals are also used to improve the reliability of research. Open-ended responses were recorded via note-taking during the interview. The researcher captured the significant themes and ideas of the participants. Written notes were then verified using the recordings of the interviews (permission to record interviews must be granted by each participant). The researcher employed a process of open coding to identify essential clusters or groups of ideas and, subsequently, axial coding to capture higher-level, emergent themes that illuminate and answer the research questions (Babbie, 2008). The combination of the selected response data and open-ended response data provided a more robust and holistic picture of middle managers' distributed leadership practices. Upon completion of each interview session, a narrative was compiled to capture initial thoughts and reactions and to summarize notes taken during the interviews.

The three-step procedure suggested by Creswell (2013) for content analysis of qualitative data was used in all cases, that is, data organization, data review, encompassing analytical memos and marginal notes, and detailed analysis through

coding. The audio recordings from the interviews were transcribed for the first step in the process, which is coding the data. Each interview session ended with the compilation of a narrative that encapsulates the participants' initial ideas and responses, as well as the highlights of the observational notes. The aforementioned thematic categories were subsequently used to code these. In order to support results, cross-case analysis, comparisons, and generalizations were performed using these coded notes. The researcher then gave a word or more to each word, sentence, or paragraph that they thought had meaning within the raw data. There wasn't a set conceptual framework to direct the information gathered from the 16 middle managers. Instead, an inductive analysis of the data was the first step in the study. Codes were created considering the data's similarities and discrepancies.

According to Saldana (2013), a code in qualitative research is a concise term or brief phrase used to represent and encapsulate a significant, memorable, or evocative aspect of language-based or visual data. These codes facilitate various analytical processes such as pattern recognition, classification, and theory development within qualitative investigations. This format made it simple to complete the analysis's comparison component. Additionally, because it makes data cross-checking easier and increases the likelihood that any data source will validate the others, it guarantees validity and trustworthiness. It also offers a variety of approaches to enhance comprehension of the participants' mindsets. Moreover, triangulation increases trust (Merriam, 2009) and highlights recurring themes in several sources (Creswell, 2013). Next, essential words and phrases from each participant's response were combined to create codes and themes.

The process of classifying data obtained from interviews was crucial in facilitating comparisons and spotting recurring themes and patterns. The codes were

categorized in this second step, and themes that incorporate the elements shared by all pertinent codes were developed. The third stage's ideas and code were organized such that the reader may quickly grasp it. In the final step, the results were interpreted. When analyzing qualitative data, attention was paid to whether the conclusions were internally consistent and relevant. Codes relating to distributed leadership were developed from the literature review, enabling improved analysis of each participant's description. They were used to analyze and evaluate the application of distributed leadership in the context of the schools.

Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative research data is not a separate activity that is undertaken at the end of a project. The aim is to build a logical chain of evidence and to make conceptual and theoretical coherence. An iterative and persistent part of the research process, the analysis begins during the collection of data. The analysis of this study followed a free interplay of techniques incorporating the stages outlined by Miles et al. (2019) to include (a) Defining and identifying data, (b) Collecting and storing the data, (c) Data reduction and coding informed by the structures of the interview guide, (d) Identifying and clustering emerging concepts, themes, and issues, (e) Comparing and contrasting these against each other and with the literature search and (f) Reporting and writing up the findings.

The description of people's lived experiences, events, or situations is often described as "thick" (Denzin, 1989), meaning attention is given to rich detail, meaningful social and historical contexts and experiences, and the significance of emotional content in an attempt to open the word of whoever or whatever is being studied. The Otter transcriptions and interview notes were reviewed, and analytic notes were inserted. The interview responses were then coded, and a narrative was

written to describe connections across the cases. The coding process enables the identification and uncovering of patterns and themes in participants' responses, facilitating the process of understanding and comparing the perspectives of all participants.

Document Analysis

The review and analysis of documents followed a process similar to that used during the interview analyses. Document analysis was used to review the NEI Reports for the eight selected schools. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is a systematic method for examining or assessing various types of documents, including printed and electronic materials, such as those transmitted via computers and the Internet. The data gleaned from the analysis of the NEI reports was examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning and gain an understanding of the context of the schools. Initial reactions and thoughts were recorded through analytic notes, each with a subsection providing a case profile designed to capture the school context. The coding of documents involved identifying theoretical categories based on the literature was used to identify leadership elements. Patterns and comparisons across schools were compared as similarities and differences, as well as emerging themes and actions across the schools became evident.

Document Analysis served as a tool for collecting data, involving a review of the NEI Reports for the eight chosen schools. The data derived from the examination of the NEI reports was examined and interpreted in order to determine its significance and grasp the subtleties of the schools' context. First, feelings and ideas were recorded in analytical notes, each of which has subsections that offer a case profile meant to capture the setting of the school. Document coding includes theoretical category identification based on the literature used to identify distributed leadership

components. Comparisons between schools were conducted as the researcher noticed trends, emergent themes and activities, and similarities and contrasts among the schools.

The researcher utilized qualitative data analysis techniques, including thematic analysis and content analysis, for the examination of interview or focus group data and identified and extracted themes pertinent to collaborative dynamics and decision-making processes from the qualitative data.

Bias and Error

The qualitative analysis approach has limitations in terms of generalizability, dependability, and internal and external validity. Merriam (2009) proposed a number of techniques to increase a qualitative study's internal validity, such as having participants check the data for accuracy, allocating enough time to study a phenomenon, and disclosing the researcher's biases at the onset of the investigation. The intention is to lessen the hazards by using these measures. When a researcher establishes a connection with participants, factors such as the researcher's history, cultural beliefs, and personal biases can all have an impact. Sampling bias and mistakes in the study can also be attributed to an underrepresentation of one group in the sample population, which skews the results in favor of that group. The participants may be reluctant or overconfident, which could lead to biased results.

As with any research methodology, the qualitative analysis approach has limitations with regard to internal validity, external validity, and reliability. Merriam (1998) suggested several strategies to improve the internal validity of a qualitative study, including having the participants review the data for accuracy, spending an appropriate amount of time studying a phenomenon, and clarifying the researcher's

biases at the outset of the study. The researcher will use these strategies with the goal of reducing or eliminating the threats.

Another source of bias and error in the study is related to sampling, as the sample population may under-represent one group of the population. It so may be skewed towards another group in the sample. There may be reluctance or overconfidence on the part of participants, and this may result in skewed results.

Summary of Chapter

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for exploring the link between middle management leadership and school effectiveness in Jamaican secondary schools. Guided by a pragmatic philosophy, this qualitative study collected data from NEI inspection reports, surveys, and participant interviews. Purposeful sampling identified eight schools and 16 middle managers to provide rich, contextual insights.

The study employed semi-structured interviews and vignettes to capture the experiences and decision-making processes of middle managers. This approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of their roles, responsibilities, challenges, and the impact of distributed leadership on school effectiveness. The central aims of this study revolved around assessing the interconnection between school effectiveness and leadership within the Jamaican education system. This chapter has provided an exhaustive exploration of the research design and methodology devised to address these objectives effectively.

Opting for a qualitative design, the study delved into the examination of NEI reports concerning leadership and school effectiveness. This analytical process was geared towards ascertaining the overarching effectiveness of schools. The qualitative analysis unfolded through the implementation of in-depth, semi-structured interviews involving middle managers. These interviews were deliberately designed to yield

profound insights into how leadership is translated into practice within the unique context of each school. By engaging with these key stakeholders, the research aimed to uncover valuable perspectives and understandings that contribute to a comprehensive evaluation of leadership dynamics in the educational landscape.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter presents an analysis of data derived from semi-structured interviews with 16 middle managers from secondary schools in Jamaica. These middle managers provided qualitative data that highlight the nature of their roles, the challenges they face, and the leadership practices they adopt. The analysis contributes to understanding the position of middle managers within the educational system.

The analysis of data is presented in alignment with the research questions, incorporating a thematic approach that integrates responses to vignettes. Vignettes, which depict realistic scenarios based on middle managers' experiences, were used as prompts to elicit detailed reflections on leadership roles, challenges, and decision-making processes. These responses were coded thematically and woven into the broader presentation of findings to provide rich, context-specific insights that enhance the interpretation of the data. The first section focuses on the functions and duties defining the role of middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools, using vignette responses to illustrate how participants navigate responsibilities such as instructional leadership, teacher development, and strategic planning. These accounts help capture nuanced perspectives on role expectations and day-to-day leadership demands. The subsequent section discusses the challenges encountered in the execution of their duties, emphasizing external and internal factors that hinder effective leadership. Vignette's responses provide first-hand examples of these challenges, such as hierarchical constraints, resistance to change, and resource limitations. This allows for a deeper exploration of the tensions between institutional expectations and middle managers' lived experiences. The final section explores how distributive leadership—

characterized by shared responsibilities and collaborative decision-making—affects middle managers' leadership practices and contributes to their professional growth and school-wide efficacy. By integrating vignette data, this section highlights how participants engage in team-based leadership, delegation, and mentorship, as well as the barriers they face in implementing a shared leadership model. The inclusion of these responses ensures that the findings are grounded in real-world leadership dynamics, offering practical insights that can inform policy and practice.

This chapter provides an understanding of the dynamics middle managers navigate in the education sector, highlighting the opportunities and constraints they encounter. Through an analysis grounded in their experiences, the chapter offers insights into how these educators shape and are influenced by their professional environments. The following sections detail data analysis related to each research question and illustrate the implications of these insights for educational leadership in Jamaican secondary schools.

Research Question 1a: What Are the Specific Roles and Functions Undertaken by Middle Managers in Jamaican Secondary Schools?

The analysis of interviews conducted with 16 middle managers from Jamaican secondary schools reveals a multifaceted set of roles and responsibilities that are critical to the operational and academic effectiveness of their institutions. These roles include curriculum oversight, teacher mentorship, student performance monitoring, and collaboration with senior management. Insights from the respondents underscore the essential nature of these duties and their impact on school success.

Curriculum Oversight

Middle managers consistently identified curriculum oversight as a primary responsibility. Key tasks include organizing and facilitating departmental meetings,

reviewing lesson plans for quality and alignment, and conducting classroom observations to uphold teaching standards. These responsibilities are central to maintaining instructional quality and addressing student learning needs.

Respondent #10, with 15 years of experience, provided a detailed summary of their curriculum-related duties: "Planning departmental meetings, reviewing lesson plans, monitoring teaching standards, conducting classroom observations, mentoring new teachers, and ensuring curriculum alignment with national standards."

The significance of curriculum alignment was highlighted by Respondent #7: "If we do not have alignment across the board, we are doing our students a disservice. Every teacher should be on the same page regarding the curriculum." Other respondents elaborated on specific strategies:

- **Providing Feedback:** Respondent #1, a HOD with eight years of experience, stated, "I ensure lesson plans are submitted weekly and provide feedback to teachers to improve instructional delivery."
- **Classroom Observations:** Respondent #3, HOD of 13 years, remarked, "Conducting classroom observations allows me to identify strengths and areas for improvement, which I discuss with teachers during departmental meetings."
- **Using Data to Inform Instruction:** Respondent #10, HOD of 15 years, shared, "Part of my role involves analyzing students' performance data to tailor instructional strategies to meet their needs."

Collaboration also featured prominently in curriculum oversight. Respondent #6, HOD of four years, noted, "I collaborate with teachers to design intervention programs for students who are underperforming." Similarly, Respondent #13 GC of three years stressed the alignment of departmental goals with the School Improvement

Plan (SIP): "I work closely with the principal to align departmental goals with the SIP by creating department Action Plans, from which teachers develop their individual Action Plans."

Professional development was highlighted as a critical component of curriculum oversight. Respondent #6 stated, "I facilitate workshops to train teachers on the latest curriculum updates and instructional strategies." Meanwhile, Respondent #8, HOD of three years, stressed adherence to national standards: "Ensuring that all lesson plans align with national standards is a top priority for me. We use the various examination syllabuses from the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) and follow guidelines from the curriculum arm of the Ministry of Education (MOE)." Several respondents addressed innovative practices to enhance curriculum delivery:

- Respondent #15 with two years experience: "I oversee the implementation of project-based learning to enhance student engagement and critical thinking."
- Respondent #14 GC of three years: "Collaborating with other departments ensures a multidisciplinary approach to curriculum delivery."
- Respondent #12 HOD of six years: "Monitoring the integration of technology in teaching is part of my curriculum oversight responsibilities."

Respondent #16 HOD of 10 years concluded by emphasizing evaluation practices:

"Organizing mock exams and analyzing results help us identify gaps in the curriculum."

Teacher Mentorship and Support

Mentorship emerged as a significant theme, with respondents highlighting its importance in supporting new and less experienced teachers. Middle managers described providing feedback, modeling best practices, and facilitating professional

development initiatives to ensure teaching excellence. Respondent #5 GC of 5 years emphasized the foundational role of mentorship: "Mentoring new teachers is crucial for maintaining high teaching standards and ensuring smooth integration into the school culture."

Peer learning was also emphasized. Respondent #9, GC of 4 years, stated, "I organize peer observation sessions where teachers can learn from each other's best practices." Similarly, Respondent #16 shared their hands-on approach: "I frequently co-teach with new teachers to model effective strategies and provide real-time feedback, which they find very beneficial." Middle managers also provide emotional and mental support to teachers. Respondent #5 explained, "I have frequent conversations with the teachers I supervise to encourage and ensure they are managing situations when they arise and maintaining good mental health." Several respondents described their multifaceted roles in teacher mentorship:

- Respondent #6: "I facilitate workshops to train teachers on the latest curriculum updates and instructional strategies."
- Respondent #4: "We often have peer observation sessions where teachers can learn from each other, and I always encourage feedback from them about what they need to improve."
- Respondent #14: "I often have casual conversations with teachers to understand their challenges and provide immediate support where necessary."

The dual role of mentorship and classroom management was highlighted by Respondent #4, a GC of eight years: "While I focus on guiding teachers professionally, I also help them manage classroom behavior effectively, which is critical for maintaining an environment conducive to learning."

Long-term teacher development and retention also featured prominently. Respondent #2, a GC of 3 years, shared, "My role involves identifying teachers' strengths and helping them develop a personalized growth plan to enhance their professional journey." Respondent #13 emphasized the impact of mentorship on retention: "Supporting new teachers helps reduce turnover rates and fosters a sense of belonging in the school community."

Finally, Respondent #10 summarized the overarching responsibilities of middle managers in mentorship and support: "Helping with discipline, marking lesson plans, teaching, supervising students and teachers, meeting various deadlines, doing walk-throughs, completing reports, and coordinating programs. Every day presents new challenges, but my goal is to make sure that each teacher feels supported and capable of delivering their best in the classroom."

Student Performance Monitoring

Thirteen respondents identified monitoring student performance as a central aspect of their role. Middle managers collaborate with teachers to assess academic performance and implement evidence-based interventions aimed at improving student outcomes.

Respondent #10 shared: "I implemented a literacy intervention program for underperforming students, which significantly improved literacy rates and increased the school's overall performance on national assessments." This highlights the use of data-driven strategies to provide targeted student support and enhance school performance on national benchmarks.

Respondent #11 a GC of seven years, also serving as Internal Exam Coordinator, described their responsibilities: "Making sure students' grades are processed on the school system, ensuring exams are printed and ready, and

maintaining the integrity of the exam.” This underscores the role of middle managers in ensuring academic standards and the reliability of assessment processes.

Respondent #8 noted: “We regularly analyze data from assessments to identify trends. This helps us intervene quickly and adjust our strategies to support struggling students.” By leveraging data analytics, middle managers can address learning gaps and refine teaching practices to meet students' needs.

Respondent #5, a grade coordinator, emphasized transparency in performance monitoring: “I make it a point to share performance data with my team. This way, we can collectively discuss where students are excelling and where they need more support.” This collaborative approach fosters accountability and continuous improvement among staff.

Respondent #3 elaborated: “We organize regular performance review meetings with teachers to analyze students’ progress and adjust our intervention strategies. These meetings ensure we remain proactive in addressing student challenges.” Structured opportunities for collaborative problem-solving are integral to improving student outcomes. Respondent #12 highlighted individualized strategies: “I work closely with subject teachers to design individualized learning plans for students who consistently underperform. This personalized attention often makes a significant difference.”

Respondent #15 stressed engaging parents: “Regular communication with parents about student progress is crucial. When parents are informed, they are more likely to support their children’s learning at home.” This underscores the importance of broader stakeholder engagement in performance monitoring. Respondent #14 noted the role of technology: “Using digital tools to track and report student performance has made it easier to identify trends and provide real-time feedback to teachers and

parents.” Similarly, Respondent #16 stated: “We recently adopted an online platform for performance tracking, which allows us to identify and address learning gaps quickly.”

Respondent #13 highlighted the importance of celebrating achievements: “Acknowledging and rewarding students for their academic progress motivates them and creates a positive learning atmosphere.” Recognizing successes encourages continued effort and engagement. Respondent #15 discussed strategic alignment: “We align our intervention programs with national priorities, ensuring that we address both immediate needs and long-term goals for student achievement.” By using data, fostering collaboration, and engaging stakeholders, middle managers drive initiatives that lead to tangible improvements in student performance. Their multifaceted role underscores their critical contribution to school success.

Collaboration with Senior Management

Collaboration with senior management emerged as a recurring theme, with middle managers frequently aligning departmental goals with broader school objectives. Respondent #12 stressed the importance of this collaboration: “I meet with senior management to discuss school-wide issues and collaborate with staff on professional development initiatives.” These interactions illustrate the role of middle managers as intermediaries, facilitating communication between teaching staff and school leaders to promote coherence and unified action.

Respondent #2, a grade coordinator, highlighted delegation: “Once the directives come from senior management, delegating responsibilities and ensuring support of school programs prevent misunderstandings and improves cooperation.” Clear communication and collaboration ensure alignment with the school’s objectives and clarify staff responsibilities. Respondent #6 added: “Effective communication

with senior management ensures that our departmental initiatives support the overall vision of the school.”

Middle managers also play a critical role in crisis management. Respondent #11 shared: “During times of difficulty, such as during the pandemic, we had to communicate effectively with senior management to implement safety protocols and support our teachers and students. Our ability to work together was crucial.” This responsiveness to changing circumstances underscores the importance of strong communication and teamwork at all levels of school management. By fostering collaboration with senior management, middle managers create a culture of shared purpose and direction, which is essential for achieving educational goals.

Summary

Middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools perform roles that impact schools' academic and operational success. Through curriculum oversight, they align teaching practices with national standards. Their mentorship supports and develops teachers professionally. By monitoring student performance, they employ data-driven interventions to enhance educational outcomes. These functions, along with strategic collaborations, contribute to a cohesive, high-performing school environment. This data highlights the importance of recognizing and supporting middle managers' roles to sustain a culture of improvement and excellence in Jamaican secondary education.

Research Question 1b: How Do These Responsibilities Contribute to the Overall Functioning of the Educational Institution?

Middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools play pivotal roles in ensuring the effective operation and success of their institutions. By fostering cross-departmental collaboration, aligning departmental objectives with school-wide goals,

and promoting a culture of accountability, they contribute to enhanced operational efficiency, improved student outcomes, and a cohesive educational environment.

Collaboration and School-Wide Alignment

The data highlights that collaboration with teachers and senior leadership forms a core component of middle managers' responsibilities. Through regular meetings and cooperative planning, middle managers align departmental activities with the overarching goals of the school. This approach ensures coherence in implementing educational strategies, fostering a unified vision across the institution.

Respondent #12 remarked, "Collaboration happens through regular meetings with teachers to review lesson plans and discuss strategies for improving student outcomes. I also work closely with the Principal and Vice Principals to align departmental goals with school-wide objectives taken from our School Improvement Plan (SIP)." This statement underscores the integrative role of middle managers as liaisons between departmental teams and the leadership hierarchy. Similarly, Respondent #1 noted, "Regular coordination with senior leadership helps to ensure that our goals are not only well-defined but also achievable within the given timelines."

The practical benefits of alignment were emphasized by Respondent #10, who stated, "These collaborations help to make the process of examinations smooth and error-free." This highlights the role of teamwork in operational efficiency and logistical accuracy. Respondent #5 further emphasized, "When we work collaboratively, we can share resources and strategies that benefit all students, creating a more inclusive and effective learning environment."

Collective problem-solving also emerged as a critical component of collaboration. Respondent #4 shared, "We face challenges together, whether it's

managing a sudden influx of new students or addressing behavioral issues. Having regular collaborative meetings allows us to brainstorm solutions and ensure that everyone is on board.” This approach fosters a cooperative atmosphere where teachers feel valued and supported, contributing to school cohesion and productivity.

Similarly, Respondent #6 observed, “Collaboration helps us identify the gaps in our teaching methods and address them promptly. It’s a way to ensure everyone is supported and equipped to perform their best.” Respondent #14 added, “Joint planning sessions with senior management and other departments are instrumental in aligning our teaching strategies and resolving issues that could potentially hinder student success.” These responses reinforce the importance of collaboration in creating a unified and effective educational framework.

The alignment of departmental and school-wide goals was further emphasized by Respondent #3, who stated, “We ensure that every initiative undertaken by the department complements the broader vision of the school. This includes streamlining lesson delivery and monitoring student progress.” This practice enables consistency in educational outcomes and fosters a sense of shared purpose among staff.

Collaboration with teachers and senior management is a cornerstone of middle managers’ responsibilities. By aligning departmental activities with the school’s broader objectives, middle managers enhance operational efficiency while cultivating a collaborative and supportive educational environment.

Contribution to Operational Efficiency and Consistency

The role of middle managers in enhancing operational efficiency emerged as a prominent theme in the data. Through their coordination efforts, middle managers ensure the smooth functioning of daily school activities, ranging from curriculum implementation to the management of school-wide initiatives. By aligning

departmental practices with national standards and school policies, they minimize redundancies and establish clear expectations for staff, fostering a structured and efficient educational environment.

Respondent #10, a Head of Department, illustrated this efficiency, stating, “My leadership resulted in exemplary teachers, a number of whom have been promoted to leadership positions. Ensuring the meeting of curriculum needs, improving discipline, and adding value to the lives of students to function effectively in society.” This statement underscores the strategic influence of middle managers in not only optimizing teaching practices but also contributing to the professional growth and leadership capacity of teaching staff. By focusing on long-term objectives, middle managers play a critical role in shaping the quality and sustainability of their schools’ human resources.

Operational consistency, facilitated by clear communication and structured processes, also emerged as a critical contribution of middle managers. Respondent #3 explained, “I coordinate with teachers to ensure that everyone is on the same page regarding curriculum delivery and assessment deadlines. This clarity prevents confusion and allows us to function as a cohesive unit.” Such proactive communication ensures that all staff members operate within a unified framework, reducing potential disruptions and fostering a collaborative work environment. The seamless coordination of curriculum delivery and assessment schedules contributes to a stable educational experience for students, enabling them to transition smoothly between grades and subjects.

The effective management of limited resources further highlights the strategic role of middle managers in promoting operational efficiency. Respondent #10 stated, “We have limited resources, so it’s crucial that we work together to allocate them

wisely. By coordinating efforts, we minimize waste and maximize impact.” This response shows the resource stewardship exercised by middle managers, ensuring that both human and material resources are used to their fullest potential. Their ability to strategically allocate resources not only addresses immediate logistical needs but also supports the broader objectives of the school community.

Equity in resource distribution was another recurring theme in the data. Respondent #12 noted, “Part of my responsibility is to ensure that teaching aids and materials are distributed fairly across departments. This avoids conflicts and ensures that no group feels neglected.” This approach underscores the importance of fairness in resource allocation, which helps to maintain staff morale and promote a positive working environment. By addressing potential disparities, middle managers foster inclusivity and support among staff, contributing to the collective success of the institution.

Collaboration in resource management was emphasized by Respondent #8, who shared, “I work with other department heads to create a shared repository of teaching resources. This collaboration helps us avoid duplication and saves time for teachers.” This practice of pooling resources reflects a commitment to teamwork and efficiency. By reducing duplication of effort, middle managers not only save valuable time for teachers but also create a culture of shared responsibility and mutual support.

The combined efforts of middle managers to promote operational efficiency through communication, resource management, and collaborative problem-solving demonstrate their pivotal role in the successful functioning of Jamaican secondary schools. Their contributions extend beyond the immediate logistical aspects of school management to include long-term impacts on staff development, resource equity, and the overall quality of the educational environment.

Enhancing Student Outcomes

Respondents consistently emphasized the positive impact of middle managers on student outcomes. By collaborating with teachers to refine lesson plans and implement targeted interventions, middle managers create a structured environment that supports learning and academic achievement. Respondent #11, a GC, explained the holistic nature of their role: “My specific role is crucial because it will contribute to the overall development of students' physical, mental, and social well-being. I organize wellness programs, collaborate with teachers to identify and support at-risk students, and facilitate communication between staff, parents, and external support services.” This highlights how middle managers extend their focus beyond academics, addressing the broader needs of students to ensure well-rounded development.

The use of data-driven strategies emerged as a critical aspect of middle managers' contributions to student success. Respondent #11 emphasized, “Inputting the daily attendance number of students is an important aspect of data gathering as it relates to the functioning of the school.” By monitoring attendance patterns, middle managers identify trends that inform decision-making and interventions. Respondent #8 added, “Tracking attendance and performance trends allows us to identify at-risk students early and implement support measures before they fall too far behind.” These practices underscore the proactive role of middle managers in addressing challenges and supporting students in achieving their full potential.

Student engagement was another area where middle managers made significant contributions. Respondent #9 stated, “I actively seek feedback from students about their learning experiences. This helps me advocate for changes that can improve their academic journey.” By engaging directly with students, middle managers ensure that their voices are heard, and their needs addressed, fostering a

student-centered educational environment. Such efforts enhance the connection between middle managers and students, promoting a culture of inclusivity and responsiveness.

Promoting a Culture of Unity and Accountability

Middle managers are instrumental in cultivating a culture of unity and collective responsibility within schools. By aligning departmental goals with the school's mission, they foster a shared commitment among staff. Respondent #15 highlighted an initiative that strengthens this sense of community: "Conducting devotions invites or welcomes the presence of God in our school because, without Him, we can do nothing, so the school functions much better." This practice contributes to a supportive and cohesive atmosphere, enhancing morale among staff and students.

The importance of collaboration was further emphasized by Respondent #11, who stated, "The ripple effect is remarkable... referrals are made to the relevant agencies to address the needs." This proactive approach ensures that students receive comprehensive support, extending the school's capacity to address diverse needs. Respondent #10 also noted, "When we hold each other accountable for our roles, we foster trust and respect within our team. It's about creating a culture where we support each other to achieve our goals." This reflects the importance of transparency and mutual accountability in building a strong, unified school culture.

Middle managers also play a key role in fostering accountability among students. Respondent #4 described their efforts: "We conduct workshops on positive discipline that involve both teachers and students, ensuring everyone understands their role in creating a conducive learning environment." By empowering students to

take ownership of their behavior, middle managers contribute to a collaborative and respectful school climate.

Mentorship is another crucial aspect of middle managers' responsibilities. Respondent #5 explained, "I see my role as a mentor to guide teachers in their professional growth, which indirectly improves student outcomes." By supporting teachers, middle managers ensure that staff are well-equipped to meet the needs of students. Respondent #7 added, "By organizing regular training sessions and peer reviews, we help teachers develop innovative strategies to engage students effectively." These practices highlight the role of middle managers in fostering continuous professional development within the school.

Conflict Resolution and Crisis Management

Middle managers also contribute significantly to maintaining harmony and managing crises within schools. Respondent #4 noted, "Addressing conflicts among staff or between teachers and students is essential for maintaining a harmonious school environment. My role is to mediate and find solutions that benefit everyone involved." This ability to resolve conflicts ensures that the school remains a productive space for learning and collaboration.

In times of crisis, middle managers play a pivotal role in ensuring the safety and well-being of the school community. Respondent #6 reflected, "During emergencies, my responsibility is to coordinate responses and ensure the safety and well-being of students and staff." This highlights the multifaceted nature of middle managers' roles, which extend beyond academic leadership to include operational and safety concerns.

Summary

The data highlights that middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools are crucial to ensuring the smooth operation and success of the institution. Their roles in fostering collaboration, aligning departmental goals with school-wide objectives, and promoting accountability are key drivers of operational efficiency, improved academic outcomes, and a cohesive school culture. Through inclusive leadership, they create an environment where staff and students feel valued and connected to the school's mission. By employing data-driven strategies, promoting student engagement, and enhancing departmental alignment, middle managers play a vital role in supporting teacher development, advancing student success, and sustaining the school's commitment to excellence. Their efforts cultivate a thriving educational ecosystem, enhancing both individual growth and the overall success of the institution.

Research Question 2a: What Challenges and Barriers Do Middle Managers Encounter in Fulfilling Their Leadership Roles Within Jamaican Secondary Schools?

Middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools encounter numerous challenges that impede their ability to fulfill their leadership roles effectively. These obstacles primarily revolve around resource constraints, the struggle to balance administrative and instructional responsibilities, and resistance to change from staff. The interviews conducted highlighted two key themes: the conflict between administrative and instructional leadership tasks and the barriers faced when implementing new initiatives.

Balancing Administrative and Instructional Leadership

All 16 participants described the challenge of balancing administrative responsibilities with instructional leadership roles. This dual focus often creates role conflict as middle managers navigate supporting teaching and learning while managing daily operations. Time constraints amplify the issue, limiting opportunities for coaching teachers, monitoring student progress, and developing the curriculum.

Respondent #1 stated, “The challenge is real. With limited time and resources, it’s difficult to provide the necessary support for teachers while handling the growing administrative responsibilities.” This highlights the competing demands that restrict middle managers from excelling in either role. Respondent #2 added, “Administrative demands always overshadow the time I have to focus on teaching and learning. I don’t have enough time in the day to do both well.”

The conflict was further emphasized by Respondent #3, who shared, “The pressure to meet deadlines for administrative reports often means that I have to neglect other important areas, like observing teachers and providing feedback.” Similarly, Respondent #4 remarked, “It feels like we are constantly firefighting administrative issues, and there’s just no time left for strategic planning or for engaging in meaningful mentorship with our teachers.”

Participants also noted the impact on areas directly related to academic performance. Respondent #8 explained, “I often find myself in back-to-back meetings dealing with administrative tasks, and when I finally get time to visit classrooms, the day is almost over. I worry that I’m not being the instructional leader that my teachers need.” Respondent #6 shared a similar concern, stating, “There’s a constant feeling of inadequacy because I know I’m not able to give my teachers the time and attention they deserve. I’m often caught up in managing operational tasks.”

Several participants highlighted the lack of support as a significant barrier. Respondent #7 noted, “I feel like I’m just managing chaos. When you don’t have a team supporting you effectively, it’s hard to keep up with the leadership demands, let alone mentor teachers.” Respondent #8 observed, “The unwillingness of some persons to accept and apply constructive criticism, lack of support from some persons, and a hefty workload reflect the compounded pressure that can diminish the effectiveness of middle managers in fostering an environment of growth and support for teachers.”

The toll of this balancing act on job satisfaction and personal well-being was also evident. Respondent #9 commented, “The stress is high, and that wears you down over time. I don’t think people understand how hard it is to juggle everything, and it certainly impacts my own job satisfaction.” Respondent #10 added, “The constant stress of trying to be both an administrator and a mentor leaves little room for self-care, and that ultimately affects my performance in both roles.”

Systemic issues were identified as the root cause of the tension. Respondent #11 remarked, “It’s not just about time management; it’s a deeper systemic issue where the role of a middle manager is expected to handle too much without enough resources.” Respondent #12 stated, “I feel that the role is not properly defined. Sometimes I’m supposed to be a coach, sometimes a disciplinarian, sometimes a manager, and it’s overwhelming.”

Resistance within teams compounded these challenges. Respondent #13 explained, “There’s resistance from some staff to changes I try to implement, and when I face that while juggling administrative work, it becomes incredibly disheartening.” Respondent #14 added, “It’s frustrating when I’m trying to provide feedback to teachers, but some don’t accept it. Then I have to focus on resolving administrative problems, which takes time away from nurturing these relationships.”

Respondent #15 observed, “I try to be supportive and show leadership, but when my day is consumed by reports and meetings, I have little left to offer in terms of leadership. It’s a hard cycle to break.” Finally, Respondent #16 reflected, “The pressure of the role takes a toll on both my personal life and my professional performance. It feels like I’m constantly reacting to situations rather than proactively leading.”

This ongoing tension not only impacts middle managers but also has implications for the broader school culture. Respondent #7 concluded, “The stress level among middle managers is high, and this trickles down to the teachers. It’s hard to support them when we’re barely keeping our heads above water.” The shared experiences of role overload among participants underscore the need for structural changes to reduce administrative burdens and enable middle managers to focus on instructional leadership.

Resistance to Change

Thirteen participants discussed challenges in implementing new initiatives, citing resistance from teachers as a recurring issue. Resistance was frequently linked to inadequate training, increased workloads, and skepticism about the effectiveness of proposed changes.

Participant #1 remarked, “It’s extremely difficult at times; with limited resources, it restricts the number of things that you will be able to accomplish.” This underscores the constraints posed by resource limitations on the implementation of change. Participant #6 emphasized the role of training, stating, “When new initiatives are rolled out without adequate training, it creates anxiety among teachers who fear disruption to their established routines.” Similarly, Participant #8 noted, “Teachers

might resist due to insufficient training on the new curriculum or inadequate resources.”

Communication emerged as another significant factor. Participant #10 explained, “Not being able to complete tasks on time because teachers did not do their assignments, along with miscommunication and collaboration issues, makes it difficult to move forward.” In contrast, Participant #2 highlighted the value of transparency, stating, “When we communicate clearly about the reasons for changes and how they will benefit our students, we often see more buy-in from teachers.”

The importance of involving teachers in decision-making processes was a recurring theme. Participant #7 observed, “When we include teachers in discussions about new initiatives, they feel more invested and are more likely to support the changes.” Participant #4 added, “Teachers appreciate when they are part of the conversation because it makes them feel heard and valued.”

Balancing new initiatives with existing workloads was another challenge. Participant #9 commented, “Teachers are already overwhelmed with their responsibilities, and adding more tasks without adequate preparation can lead to frustration and resistance.” Participant #8 echoed this, stating, “The workload issue is real—teachers are already stretched thin, and introducing new initiatives without sufficient support just adds to the burden.”

Resource allocation was also critical. Participant #12 stated, “Resource shortages often lead to dissatisfaction and resistance, as teachers feel ill-equipped to implement new strategies effectively.” Participant #3 added, “With the right resources, teachers are more likely to embrace new initiatives, but when those resources are scarce, resistance grows.”

By fostering teacher inclusion, transparent communication, and providing adequate resources and training, middle managers can address resistance effectively. Participant #16 concluded, “If we work together with our teachers and ensure they feel supported, change can be implemented more smoothly and effectively.” This sentiment reflects the collective view that collaborative approaches are essential for successful school improvement initiatives.

Summary

The challenges of balancing administrative and instructional leadership tasks, alongside overcoming resistance to change, represent significant barriers for middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools. The dual demands of administrative and instructional responsibilities create time constraints that limit middle managers' capacity to focus on supporting teachers and enhancing curriculum quality. Furthermore, teacher resistance to new initiatives—often arising from inadequate training or concerns over increased workloads—complicates the implementation of necessary changes aimed at improving student outcomes.

Addressing these challenges requires systemic support, including streamlined administrative processes, increased resources, and ongoing professional development. Respondent #11 summarized the collective sentiment: “If we had more support in managing our time and resources, we could really make a difference in our schools.” By tackling these barriers, middle managers can perform their roles more effectively, enhancing both the operational efficiency and academic success of their schools. The insights gained from these interviews underscore the necessity for educational leaders and policymakers to prioritize the needs of middle managers, enabling them to thrive in their critical roles. Overall, these data advocate for a more supportive and structured approach to leadership development within Jamaican secondary schools,

ensuring that middle managers are equipped to meet the challenges they face in today's educational landscape.

Research Question 2b: How Do These Impediments Impact Their Leadership?

The challenges faced by middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools, such as balancing administrative and instructional duties and encountering resistance to change, significantly affect their leadership capacity and effectiveness. These impediments constrain their ability to fulfill their core responsibilities, impacting the broader school culture, staff relationships, and, ultimately, student outcomes. Key themes from the interviews reveal the multifaceted ways in which these challenges undermine middle managers' leadership.

Impact of Balancing Administrative and Instructional Leadership

The challenge of balancing administrative duties with instructional leadership frequently leads to role overload for middle managers, which in turn undermines their effectiveness as instructional leaders. Participants consistently reported that administrative tasks such as paperwork, scheduling, and daily operational management demand a disproportionate amount of time and energy, often overshadowing strategic responsibilities like teacher mentorship, curriculum oversight, and data-driven interventions. This conflict leaves middle managers stretched thin, hindering their ability to dedicate sufficient time and effort to each task.

Respondent #3 stated, "With so many administrative tasks, there's barely any time left to support teachers in the classroom," reflecting the scarcity of time available for direct instructional leadership. This time deficit often results in a reactive leadership style, where immediate administrative demands take precedence over long-term educational objectives. Respondent #4 added, "I'm constantly putting out fires,

which makes it difficult to think about future strategies or teacher development,” underscoring the difficulty of engaging in proactive leadership when daily administrative duties dominate the schedule.

The reduced presence of middle managers in classrooms, coupled with their limited ability to mentor teachers or engage with student-centered initiatives, impairs their capacity to foster a high-quality instructional environment. Respondent #6 observed, “When I’m not in the classroom, I miss opportunities to see what’s actually happening with my teachers and students,” which highlights the disconnect between managerial tasks and classroom realities. As a result, the effectiveness of instructional strategies and teacher development efforts can be compromised, as middle managers lack time to observe, coach, and support teachers in real-time. Respondent #5 similarly remarked on this issue: “I simply don’t have the time to support teachers or see firsthand how they’re progressing properly.”

Furthermore, the strain of balancing administrative and instructional duties can lead to a diminishing of the relational aspects of leadership. Respondent #7 reflected, “These issues can definitely affect the effectiveness of the leader... Sometimes you use moral suasion, but other times you just have to throw the book at some people,” demonstrating the tension between maintaining authority and fostering supportive relationships with staff. Respondent #8 added, “When you are overburdened, it becomes difficult to focus on building relationships with teachers, which is essential for creating a positive teaching environment,” illustrating how the overextension of middle managers erodes their capacity to build collaborative, trust-based relationships with their teams.

The emotional toll of balancing these conflicting responsibilities was also evident in the responses. Respondent #12 shared, “Sometimes I feel like I’m just

going through the motions; I want to be a good leader, but there are too many fires to put out,” a statement that conveys a sense of resignation among middle managers who are overwhelmed by their roles. Respondent #10 noted, “The constant pressure of handling everything takes away from my ability to be reflective or think about the future,” indicating that the relentless demands of administrative duties limit opportunities for professional growth and reflective practice. This lack of time for both personal and professional development can hinder the overall instructional culture of the school.

Impact of Resistance to Change

Resistance to change, particularly from teachers, presents a significant barrier to middle managers’ ability to lead school improvement initiatives. Teachers’ reluctance to adopt new practices, often due to insufficient training or concerns about increased workloads, impedes middle managers in their efforts to implement programs designed to enhance student learning and adapt to evolving educational standards. This resistance creates a stagnant culture, limiting the potential for innovation and improvement.

Respondent #3 expressed frustration: “It’s hard to make progress when teachers aren’t on board with new ideas,” highlighting the challenges middle managers face in fostering collective buy-in for new initiatives. As resistance mounts, middle managers often find themselves compromising the quality of interventions to accommodate staff reluctance, as noted by Respondent #4: “When we face constant pushback, I find myself compromising too much, and that affects the quality of the initiatives we are trying to implement.” Such compromises dilute the effectiveness of the leadership’s strategic efforts and can result in missed opportunities to improve teaching and student outcomes.

The emotional impact of resistance was also frequently mentioned.

Respondent #6 remarked, “Lack of support overshadows your effectiveness and may cause depression, loss of interest, and dedication to the job,” underscoring how the emotional burden of resistance can negatively impact middle managers’ well-being and leadership effectiveness. Similarly, Respondent #7 acknowledged, “When you can’t lead change effectively, it can feel like you are just maintaining the status quo, which is frustrating,” illustrating how unaddressed resistance can lead to a sense of stagnation and frustration for middle managers.

Respondent #9 expanded on this, stating, “It’s frustrating when teachers don’t see the value in the new approaches, especially when we’ve put so much effort into planning,” emphasizing the disconnect between middle managers’ vision for school improvement and teachers’ perceptions of change. This resistance not only hampers the implementation of new initiatives but also fosters a culture resistant to progress, thereby entrenching outdated practices and limiting the school’s ability to improve.

The challenge of overcoming resistance requires collaboration and buy-in from staff. Respondent #11 argued, “Without buy-in from the staff, it becomes much harder to lead change, as there’s no collective energy or drive,” indicating the importance of collective engagement in driving school improvement. However, Respondent #12 elaborated on the emotional toll, stating, “I often feel like I’m in a constant battle—pushing for change but facing resistance at every turn,” which can lead to burnout and frustration.

In contrast, Respondent #14 described a more optimistic scenario: “When teachers are engaged and supportive of the change, it becomes so much easier to implement initiatives successfully,” emphasizing how teacher buy-in can significantly influence the success of change initiatives. Respondent #15 warned, “If we can’t get

teachers on board with new ideas, the entire school's potential for improvement is stunted," a sentiment that reinforces the critical role of overcoming resistance in ensuring school progress. Finally, Respondent #16 concluded, "Ultimately, if the culture doesn't shift, you're stuck in the same patterns, and nothing changes," underscoring the need for a cultural shift to create a sustainable environment for school improvement.

Effects on Leadership Morale and Job Satisfaction

The ongoing demands of balancing administrative duties and addressing resistance from staff create emotional fatigue among middle managers, adversely affecting their morale and job satisfaction. Several participants highlighted feelings of frustration, burnout, and disengagement due to the high demands placed on them without sufficient resources or support. This emotional toll diminishes their enthusiasm for their leadership roles and undermines their ability to lead with energy, which is crucial for inspiring staff and fostering a collaborative environment.

Respondent #3 stated, "It's hard to stay motivated when you feel constantly pulled in different directions without the support you need," capturing the frustration that arises when support is inadequate. Conflicting responsibilities reduce commitment to the role. Respondent #4 echoed this sentiment, stating, "It's easy to get demotivated when you have so many tasks and no one to share the load with." This emotional strain contributes to leadership fatigue, making it harder for middle managers to engage meaningfully with staff and maintain the positive energy required for effective leadership.

The strain also leads to a reduced capacity for relationship-building and mentoring, which are key to fostering a positive school culture. Respondent #5 noted, "I just don't have the time or energy to invest in relationships with teachers as much

as I'd like to," illustrating how the emotional exhaustion from balancing multiple roles impedes efforts to build trust and support among staff. Over time, this fatigue can contribute to higher turnover, as middle managers may seek other positions where they feel less encumbered by competing responsibilities.

A senior teacher (Respondent #6) shared, "My ability is impacted in that I have to use my time to complete tasks," revealing how the expectation to perform duties outside of working hours negatively affects both work-life balance and job satisfaction. Respondent #7 expanded on this point, saying, "I often find myself working late or on weekends, but it doesn't feel rewarding; it just feels like there's always more to do." This further highlights the pervasive emotional toll of balancing administrative duties with instructional leadership.

Emotional fatigue also leads to disengaged leadership, where middle managers struggle to maintain motivation and inspire their teams. Respondent #10 observed, "When you're feeling burnt out, it's hard to inspire others. Staff can sense when you're not fully present, and it affects their motivation too," suggesting that leadership effectiveness diminishes when middle managers are emotionally depleted. This creates a negative feedback loop, where low morale and disengagement among leaders contribute to a broader decline in school morale, affecting both staff and students.

Respondent #12 articulated, "The constant pressure makes it hard to find joy in what I do, and I think that lack of passion is visible to those around me," reflecting how burnout can compromise leadership effectiveness and contribute to a toxic work environment. Similarly, Respondent #13 remarked, "It's exhausting to keep up with all the demands, and at some point, you just stop caring as much about the work."

This erosion of engagement can hinder the development of a positive, collaborative school culture as burnout sets in and reduces the ability to motivate others.

Respondent #15 highlighted how emotional strain impacts the ability to focus on long-term goals: “When you're constantly in survival mode, it's impossible to focus on strategic planning or making improvements. You're just trying to get through the day.” This comment underscores how emotional fatigue impedes the ability to fulfill the responsibilities of instructional leadership, thus potentially compromising the long-term growth of both the school and its staff.

In conclusion, the emotional toll of administrative overload and resistance to change leads to a cycle of disengagement, burnout, and frustration. Middle managers struggle to maintain enthusiasm for their roles, which erodes their effectiveness as leaders. This not only affects their job satisfaction but also undermines their ability to inspire staff and create a positive, collaborative school culture. Over time, these challenges may contribute to turnover and hinder school-wide progress.

Impact on Student Outcomes and School-Wide Performance

The burden of administrative overload and resistance from staff has direct, detrimental effects on student outcomes. As middle managers struggle to balance their administrative responsibilities with instructional leadership, the time and resources allocated to observing classrooms, mentoring teachers, and implementing data-driven interventions for at-risk students are significantly reduced. This lack of focus on student-centered initiatives undermines efforts to address learning gaps and promote high academic standards across the school.

Respondent #2 pointed out, “We're supposed to focus on students' needs, but the constant administrative workload takes away from that,” emphasizing the conflict between administrative duties and the need for instructional leadership. Without

consistent leadership in instructional matters, classroom teaching may suffer, and students may not receive the necessary interventions or support to reach their full potential. Respondent #3 added, “The students get less of the attention they deserve when we’re always playing catch-up with paperwork and scheduling,” further illustrating how the overwhelming administrative load diminishes the ability to focus on teaching and learning.

The effects of this administrative strain are compounded by resistance to change, which can delay or hinder the implementation of necessary instructional reforms. Respondent #4 shared, “It causes delays and backed-up work, leading to frustration,” describing how the cumulative demands of administration and resistance from staff can prevent middle managers from driving effective, timely interventions for students. As a result, instructional quality and the overall school performance may stagnate, directly affecting student achievement.

Respondent #7 noted, “If we can't meet the needs of teachers, how can we expect them to meet the needs of their students?” This statement highlights the interdependence between teacher support and student success. When middle managers are overburdened and unable to support their teachers effectively, the entire educational ecosystem within the school suffers. The inability to provide adequate leadership and guidance to teachers directly affects their ability to implement effective strategies for student learning.

Respondent #10 added, “We try to focus on student achievement, but it often feels like we're putting out fires instead of engaging in proactive measures,” reflecting how the constant strain of administrative tasks inhibits the ability to focus on long-term strategies for student success. Similarly, Respondent #11 explained, “We’re constantly trying to catch up with the paperwork and other responsibilities, and the

students' needs often get lost in the shuffle,” which underscores the impact of administrative overload on the capacity to meet students' needs effectively.

Respondent #12 noted, “There’s not enough time to observe and mentor teachers, which affects how well we can support their efforts to improve student outcomes,” demonstrating how the lack of instructional leadership limits opportunities to improve teaching practices. This, in turn, affects student achievement, as teachers are not receiving the necessary feedback and support to enhance their instructional methods.

The consequences of these challenges are further reflected in Respondent #14’s statement, “If we can't provide guidance and feedback to teachers, it's hard for them to stay motivated, and it ultimately hurts the students,” reinforcing the direct link between teacher support and student success. As middle managers become overburdened and unable to lead effectively, the quality of instruction suffers, which adversely impacts student outcomes.

Respondent #16 emphasized the broader implications: “We need to focus on more than just survival mode. If we don’t have the capacity to be present in classrooms, we risk neglecting the students who need us the most.” This highlights the crucial role of middle managers in supporting both teachers and students and the risks that arise when these responsibilities are neglected due to administrative overload.

In brief, the administrative burdens and resistance faced by middle managers have far-reaching consequences for the school’s instructional quality and student outcomes. The lack of time and resources devoted to instructional leadership undermines efforts to support teachers and monitor student progress, ultimately

hindering the school's ability to foster academic growth and meet its educational goals.

Summary

The challenges middle managers face—including balancing administrative and instructional duties and addressing resistance to change—significantly impact their leadership effectiveness. Role overload and time constraints reduce their capacity for instructional leadership, limiting their ability to mentor teachers and implement student-centered interventions. Resistance to change stifles innovation, fostering a conservative culture that resists improvement efforts. These challenges can lead to leadership fatigue, diminishing middle managers' morale and job satisfaction. Ultimately, these impediments create a ripple effect on the entire school, affecting not only staff relationships and morale but also limiting the school's potential for enhancing student outcomes and achieving higher performance levels.

To enhance the effectiveness of middle managers, schools may need to explore solutions such as redistributing administrative tasks, providing additional resources, and involving teachers more deeply in decision-making processes. Addressing these challenges can enable middle managers to fully exercise their leadership potential, thereby strengthening the overall functionality and success of the school. Ultimately, the insights from these interviews highlight the urgent need for systemic change to support middle managers, ensuring they can lead with efficacy and confidence in the dynamic educational landscape.

Research Question 3a: To What Extent Does the Implementation of Distributive Leadership Affect Middle Managers in Jamaican Secondary Schools?

The implementation of distributive leadership significantly influences middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools by reshaping how they manage their

responsibilities, interact with staff, and contribute to the school's overall goals. Two key themes emerged from participant interviews: the positive effects of shared leadership responsibilities and the drawbacks of centralized decision-making in the absence of distributive leadership.

Shared Leadership Responsibilities

Distributive leadership, a model that delegates decision-making and responsibilities across a broader group, has been identified as an effective strategy for improving middle management and increasing engagement among teachers. Fourteen participants highlighted that sharing leadership responsibilities, particularly in areas such as curriculum planning and instructional oversight, helps balance the workload, fosters teacher involvement, and enhances instructional quality. This shared responsibility not only alleviates the burden on middle managers but also promotes a collaborative culture.

Respondent #10 observed, "Involving teachers in curriculum decisions has improved teacher buy-in and instructional quality." This aligns with data that delegating responsibilities encourages teacher engagement and improves morale. Respondent #5 elaborated: "I have more time to focus on mentoring teachers now that I can delegate some of the curriculum oversight to them. This shift not only lightens my load but also fosters a stronger learning community among us." This perspective reflects how distributive leadership creates an environment conducive to professional development, allowing middle managers to focus on strategic leadership while cultivating teacher growth.

The influence of distributive leadership on professional development was further emphasized by a Head of Department: "Distributive leadership has positively influenced me in that it pulls me out and gives me assignments that I would not have

achieved had I not been given that chance" (Respondent #14). This suggests that shared leadership responsibilities promote growth not only for teachers but for middle managers as well, enabling them to develop new skills and take on more significant roles within the school.

Respondent #12 noted, "Teachers will feel a part of the school, and self-actualization will be heightened, which will build their confidence and their leadership abilities." This aligns with the broader notion that shared leadership increases teacher confidence and leadership potential, which, in turn, strengthens the overall school culture. Respondent #6 supported this by noting, "When teachers have a say, they are more likely to try new methods and bring fresh ideas into the classroom." In turn, these new methods lead to a transformation in teaching practices, benefiting students and contributing to a more dynamic educational environment.

The benefits of distributive leadership extend beyond professional development and teaching practices. Respondent #2 explained, "The more we involve teachers in planning, the more they see themselves as integral to the school's success, which has made a significant difference in their commitment and performance." Similarly, Respondent #14 remarked, "By giving teachers more freedom to shape the curriculum, we've noticed an increase in innovative teaching methods and greater student engagement." These responses illustrate how shared leadership promotes teacher ownership, improving instructional methods and driving student achievement.

Respondent #3 added, "Middle managers can play a pivotal role in creating an environment where teachers feel responsible not just for their classrooms but for the school's overall success." This highlights the expanded role of middle managers in fostering collective responsibility for school-wide outcomes. Respondent #13 elaborated, "When leadership is shared, teachers work more closely together, which

strengthens the entire school community.” This perspective demonstrates how distributive leadership fosters collaboration and unity, which contributes to the overall success of the school.

In sum, distributive leadership facilitates a culture of empowerment, engagement, and collaboration, which positively impacts teacher morale, professional development, instructional quality, and, ultimately, student outcomes. As Respondent #8 aptly summarized, “This leadership model not only enhances teaching but also builds a strong, unified team of educators dedicated to continuous improvement.” By adopting shared leadership responsibilities, middle managers can build a dynamic, positive school culture, fostering both personal and professional growth for staff while improving educational outcomes.

Challenges in the Absence of Distributive Leadership

In contrast, schools with centralized leadership structures, where decision-making rests primarily with senior leaders, present significant challenges for middle managers. Six participants expressed frustration with working in environments where their input was not sought or valued, limiting their ability to implement changes and lead effectively at the departmental level. These middle managers felt excluded from key decisions, diminishing their motivation and engagement.

Respondent #2 articulated the frustration felt in centralized environments: "In schools with centralized leadership models, middle managers' input can be limited, which leads to frustration and reduced motivation among staff." Without the ability to influence decisions, middle managers felt disconnected from the school's strategic direction. Respondent #8 shared a similar sentiment: "Without being involved in the decision-making process, I sometimes feel like my role is diminished to just executing orders rather than leading change." This perspective reveals how centralized decision-

making can lead to disengagement and resentment, further inhibiting middle managers' effectiveness.

The lack of shared leadership also impedes the school's ability to respond swiftly to emerging challenges. Respondent #10 expressed concern: "It has caused some middle managers to feel helpless and leave leadership positions." This highlights how rigid, hierarchical leadership structures can lead to burnout and turnover among middle managers, exacerbating the challenges faced by the school.

A Senior Teacher emphasized the demoralizing effect of exclusion from decision-making: "When we don't have a voice, it can be demoralizing. It affects how we engage with our roles and the energy we bring to our students" (Respondent #6). This insight reflects the broader impact of top-down leadership on both teacher and student morale. Without involvement in decisions, middle managers may feel their expertise and contributions are undervalued, which impacts their engagement and motivation.

Respondent #12 noted, "The inability to influence decisions leaves us feeling powerless. It not only affects how we perform but also influences the morale of the entire department." The feeling of powerlessness is compounded by a lack of collaboration, leading to further disengagement and disillusionment. Respondent #5 echoed this sentiment, stating, "The lack of collaboration and shared leadership often leads to a breakdown in communication between departments, which hinders the implementation of strategic initiatives." This breakdown in communication underscores the importance of inclusive leadership practices for effective school management.

Exclusion from decision-making creates a sense of isolation for middle managers, with detrimental effects on both personal and professional development.

Respondent #7 described this experience: “When we are excluded from key discussions, it feels like our role is reduced to just carrying out instructions rather than contributing to meaningful change.” This sense of isolation can have lasting effects on job satisfaction and leadership effectiveness. Respondent #14 added, "A lack of involvement in decision-making makes it difficult to build a strong leadership team, as middle managers feel their expertise is not valued."

The absence of distributive leadership contributes to a culture of disengagement, frustration, and isolation. Respondent #16 encapsulated this concern: “If leadership is too centralized, we lose out on the collective potential of the team. We need more collaborative decision-making to drive the school forward.” This sentiment reinforces the importance of shared leadership in fostering a motivated, engaged, and effective team of middle managers capable of driving meaningful change within the school.

Middle Managers' Contribution to the School's Mission and Vision

Despite challenges arising from centralized decision-making, middle managers play a pivotal role in advancing the school's mission and vision, contributing to academic excellence, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. All 16 participants underscored the importance of their roles in curriculum oversight, teacher mentorship, and student performance monitoring—tasks that are essential in upholding academic standards and supporting the broader school goals.

Respondent #1 noted, "My role ensures that there is consistency in the curriculum delivery across the department, facilitates professional growth among staff, and fosters a culture of continuous improvement." This statement illustrates how middle managers view themselves as integral to the school's educational mission, ensuring that their work aligns with the school's overarching goals of academic

success and staff development. By maintaining instructional standards and promoting continuous improvement, middle managers create an environment where both teachers and students are encouraged to excel.

Middle managers also contribute to aligning departmental practices with the school's mission, ensuring that teaching and learning remain focused on the long-term academic goals. Respondent #4 observed, "Distributive leadership has been effective in equipping teachers with the skills necessary and enabling them to direct and supervise." This aligns with the notion that middle managers, through effective leadership and delegation, empower teachers to take on greater responsibilities, enhancing the quality of education while supporting student success. Respondent #9 further emphasized, "By aligning our actions with the school's vision, we create a sense of direction that motivates teachers and helps them stay focused on what matters most—student success." This focus on alignment helps ensure that all staff remain unified in their commitment to the school's mission.

Clarity of role and purpose also emerged as a key theme. Respondent #10 shared, "The clearer our roles are in relation to the school's vision, the better we can align our actions to meet those goals. This clarity is crucial in a time where we face so many changes." This statement underscores the importance of understanding how middle managers' roles fit into the larger school framework, especially in dynamic environments that demand adaptability. Respondent #12 added, "When we understand how our work connects to the bigger picture, we can better support our teachers and students in meeting academic targets." This reflects how middle managers see their contributions as critical in linking departmental efforts with broader school objectives, ensuring that every action supports the overall mission.

Even in schools with more centralized decision-making, middle managers continue to find ways to contribute meaningfully to the school's mission. Respondent #6 explained, "Even in a centralized system, we still find ways to contribute meaningfully by aligning our department's goals with the school's mission. This ensures that our efforts are purposeful and aligned with student outcomes." Despite the limitations of a top-down decision-making structure, middle managers remain resilient in focusing their efforts on meeting school objectives, ensuring that their leadership aligns with the mission and vision of the school.

The ability to adapt to change while maintaining focus on the school's goals is another critical contribution of middle managers. Respondent #15 observed, "Being in sync with the school's vision allows us to be adaptable when new challenges arise, ensuring that our departments remain focused on continuous improvement." This adaptability is vital, particularly in an educational landscape where constant change is a given. Middle managers' ability to adjust departmental strategies and teaching practices in response to new challenges helps maintain high standards of education. It supports the ongoing development of staff and students alike.

The ongoing efforts of middle managers to align their work with the school's mission and vision underscore their central role in supporting academic excellence and continuous improvement. As Respondent #14 stated, "The ability to align our work with the school's goals is what makes us effective leaders. We help create an environment where students and teachers alike are empowered to succeed." This perspective highlights how middle managers' leadership practices, grounded in alignment with the school's mission, foster an environment of empowerment and collaboration, ultimately contributing to the success of both teachers and students.

In sum, middle managers' contributions to the school's mission and vision are essential in maintaining academic standards, fostering a culture of improvement, and ensuring that the school remains focused on student-centered outcomes. Through their roles in curriculum oversight, teacher development, and student performance monitoring, middle managers help drive the success of the school. Their ability to align their practices with the broader goals of the institution ensures that the school continues to evolve, improving both teaching and learning outcomes.

Summary

Distributive leadership significantly impacts middle managers by empowering them to share responsibilities and engage teachers in decision-making, enhancing instructional quality, reducing workload, and improving staff morale. However, in schools where distributive leadership is lacking, middle managers face frustrations due to limited input in decision-making, resulting in a less collaborative and efficient work environment. Regardless of these challenges, middle managers remain committed to supporting the school's mission of academic excellence by focusing on curriculum consistency, professional development, and fostering a culture of improvement.

To further enhance middle managers' effectiveness, schools should implement distributive leadership practices more consistently. By involving middle managers in decision-making processes and allowing them to delegate responsibilities, schools can better leverage their expertise, fostering a supportive and collaborative environment that promotes teacher engagement and student success.

Research Question 3b: How Does Distributive Leadership Relate to Their Leadership Practices?

The adoption of distributive leadership among middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools fundamentally shapes and enhances their leadership practices. Two prominent themes emerged from participant responses: the role of collaboration and shared decision-making in promoting a supportive environment and the effect of teacher empowerment on instructional quality and team cohesion. These themes illustrate how distributive leadership fosters a more effective and inclusive leadership style among middle managers, helping them to implement school-wide goals with greater efficiency and teacher buy-in.

Promoting Collaboration and Shared Decision-Making

Distributive leadership plays a critical role in shaping middle managers' practices by fostering collaborative decision-making and collective ownership within departments. All 16 participants emphasized that distributive leadership encourages them to involve teaching teams in shaping departmental strategies, goal-setting, and addressing instructional challenges. This collaborative approach not only distributes responsibility but also ensures that a diverse range of perspectives is included in decision-making, resulting in more comprehensive and practical solutions for departmental and school-wide issues.

Respondent #10 remarked, "When teachers are involved in decisions about curriculum or teaching methods, it creates a sense of shared responsibility, and everyone is more committed to achieving the goals we set as a department." This reflects the importance of collective ownership in fostering an engaged and motivated team. By involving teachers in discussions about curriculum alignment, instructional improvements, and student support, middle managers create an inclusive atmosphere

where all staff feel valued and responsible for the department's success. Respondent #16 added, "Involving everyone in the decision-making process results in a more dynamic and adaptable department, capable of addressing new challenges with creative solutions." This highlights the practical advantages of shared decision-making, which helps departments become more responsive to changing needs and evolving challenges.

Collaboration also improves team dynamics, as indicated by Respondent #9: "Our discussions are rich and varied because everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas. This openness leads to better solutions for our challenges." The willingness to engage in open, honest discussions ensures that decisions are well-rounded and grounded in the collective expertise of the team. As Respondent #8, a Head of Department, explained, "Every voice matters in our meetings, and it allows us to pinpoint exactly what our students need. It's not just about hierarchy; it's about expertise and insights from everyone involved" (Respondent #8). This collaborative approach fosters an environment where teachers feel ownership over their work, which translates into better educational outcomes. Respondent #7 further emphasized, "The diversity of ideas brought forward in our meetings strengthens our approach to teaching, making us more responsive to the needs of our students."

Through shared decision-making, middle managers also experience greater flexibility in their roles. With teachers assuming more responsibility and contributing their insights, middle managers are able to delegate tasks more effectively, allowing them to focus on strategic leadership. Respondent #11 noted, "Distributive leadership is displayed daily by me because we get a chance to work out the best approach for every situation as 'Together Everyone Achieves More.'" This flexibility not only reduces the workload for middle managers but also enables them to concentrate on

mentoring teachers, addressing complex issues, and aligning departmental goals with the broader objectives of the school. Respondent #6 observed, “When teachers take ownership, I can focus on the bigger picture, ensuring that our department’s goals align with the school’s overall vision.”

Shared decision-making also contributes to the smoother implementation of departmental initiatives. Respondent #3 noted, “The more input teachers have in decisions, the more ownership they take in implementing the plans. It allows for a smoother execution of departmental initiatives.” This stresses how shared decision-making fosters greater buy-in, making it easier to execute plans and achieve goals. Respondent #14 echoed this sentiment: “Having teachers actively involved in decision-making gives them a sense of purpose and commitment to the department’s goals, which results in a more motivated and effective team.” This illustrates the positive impact of distributive leadership on teacher motivation and team effectiveness.

Distributive leadership amplifies middle managers’ capacity to lead by involving teachers in meaningful ways. This shared ownership leads to a more engaged, resilient, and adaptable team. Respondent #13 stressed, “When we share leadership, we not only lighten the load but also deepen our collective understanding of our goals and the means to achieve them.” This collective ownership fosters a shared vision that aligns individual efforts with the school's mission, enhancing both morale and effectiveness. Respondent #15 elaborated, “With shared leadership, everyone feels accountable for the department’s success, which improves our overall performance and makes us more adaptable to change.” Moreover, Respondent #2 affirmed, “The collective effort in decision-making fosters trust among staff, which translates into better collaboration and a more supportive teaching environment.”

Respondent #5 shared, “We’re able to have discussions that are less about top-down instructions and more about finding solutions together, which leads to better outcomes.” This highlights how the collaborative nature of distributive leadership makes the decision-making process more inclusive and solution-focused. Respondent #8 noted, “Distributive leadership allows us to function as a cohesive team where everyone has a voice, and we work together to overcome challenges.” Respondent #16 further observed, “By including everyone in the decision-making process, we build stronger relationships within the team. This not only leads to more effective teaching but also enhances the overall atmosphere of the department.” These observations reinforce the notion that distributive leadership not only improves decision-making but also contributes to a positive, collaborative work environment.

Empowering Teachers and Enhancing Instructional Quality

Distributive leadership empowers teachers by allowing middle managers to mentor and support teachers in taking on leadership roles, thereby enhancing instructional quality and promoting professional growth. Fourteen participants highlighted how distributive leadership enabled them to provide teachers with greater autonomy in designing lesson plans, leading projects, and spearheading departmental initiatives. This empowerment boosts teachers' confidence and fosters innovative teaching methods, as teachers are encouraged to explore new instructional techniques and take risks within their classrooms.

Respondent #10 explained, “Distributive leadership lets teachers take the lead on some projects. I’ve seen how this builds their confidence and improves the quality of their teaching because they’re more invested.” This theme underscores how middle managers use distributive leadership to cultivate a sense of professional pride and ownership among teachers. When teachers feel empowered to lead and innovate, they

are more likely to bring fresh ideas and approaches to the classroom, significantly improving student outcomes and the overall teaching environment. Respondent #6 added, “The autonomy given to teachers to lead projects has seen positive changes in both their confidence and the overall quality of instruction within the department.”

Respondent #10 emphasized, “Teachers who are entrusted with leadership roles take on greater responsibility, which boosts their investment in the teaching process and leads to better instructional practices.” This empowerment fosters a culture of collaboration, where teachers work together to improve their teaching, benefiting both their professional growth and the school’s mission.

Distributive leadership also promotes a culture of continuous learning within departments. By giving teachers a platform to share best practices and learn from one another, middle managers support ongoing professional development and knowledge-sharing. Respondent #12 remarked, “It is best to have teachers involved from the start so they feel more a part of these decisions,” emphasizing the importance of collaborative planning. This approach aligns with the goals of Jamaican secondary schools, where enhancing instructional quality is key to achieving academic success. Respondent #4 noted, “When teachers take ownership of the planning and teaching processes, they naturally develop a greater sense of responsibility for student outcomes.”

Respondent #8 illustrated, “We have regular meetings where teachers present their lesson plans, and we critique and improve them together. This collaboration leads to better teaching and learning outcomes.” Middle managers who adopt distributive leadership create a dynamic, collaborative learning environment where teachers continuously refine their skills, leading to sustained improvements in teaching quality and student engagement. Respondent #14 emphasized, “The more we

collaborate and share ideas, the better we get at refining our teaching methods, and the students ultimately benefit from the diverse strategies we employ.” This collaborative environment not only empowers teachers but also positively impacts student learning experiences and outcomes. Respondent #13 observed, “When teachers are empowered to take risks and experiment with new teaching methods, it creates a more engaging and responsive classroom environment that helps our students thrive.”

Moreover, by involving teachers in decision-making and professional development, middle managers create a supportive culture that encourages growth and innovation. Respondent #7 explained, “Distributive leadership has helped us build a community of learners among the teaching staff. The more we share and collaborate, the more we learn from each other, which in turn benefits our students.” This approach fosters an atmosphere where teachers not only feel empowered to innovate but also receive continuous support in their professional journeys.

Respondent #3 further shared, “As we embrace distributive leadership, we are not only improving as educators but also modeling the behaviors we want our students to exhibit—collaboration, innovation, and leadership.” This highlights the broader impact of distributive leadership on the school culture, reinforcing the connection between teacher development and student outcomes.

In conclusion, distributive leadership fosters an empowering environment for teachers, enabling them to take on leadership roles, improve instructional practices, and contribute to the broader goals of the school. As Respondent #3 concluded, “When teachers lead, it strengthens the department as a whole, leading to better instructional quality, stronger team cohesion, and improved student outcomes.” Through distributive leadership, middle managers create a more engaged and empowered teaching team, ultimately enhancing both teacher and student success.

Strengthening Team Cohesion and Accountability

Distributive leadership strengthens team cohesion by fostering trust and mutual accountability within the department. Twelve participants highlighted how shared leadership practices enable them to cultivate a more cohesive team culture in which teachers take collective responsibility not only for their work but also for the overall success of the department. Middle managers emphasized that trust is integral to distributive leadership, as teachers must feel confident that their input is valued and that they have the support of their leaders when taking on new responsibilities.

Respondent #11 noted, “When teachers see that I trust them with important decisions, it builds trust, and we work better together as a team. They know they’re accountable, but they also know I’m here to support them.” This statement reflects the importance of trust in fostering a supportive and accountable team environment. By involving teachers in leadership roles and sharing responsibility, middle managers create a culture in which staff members hold each other accountable and collaborate toward shared goals, ultimately contributing to a more productive and harmonious school environment. Similarly, Respondent #9 remarked, “Trust is key. When teachers feel supported in their decisions, they are more likely to take ownership of their work and collaborate more effectively.” This underscores the role of trust in enabling effective collaboration and fostering a sense of ownership among teachers.

Accountability, as a key component of distributive leadership, was emphasized by several participants. Respondent #12 shared, “I implement a feedback system where teachers reflect on their performance and that of their peers’. This mutual oversight helps us maintain high standards.” Mutual accountability not only promotes consistency but also aligns the team's efforts with the school’s mission and values. This allows middle managers to rely on their teams to independently uphold

high standards, enabling them to focus on strategic planning, staff development, and student outcomes. Respondent #14 elaborated, “Having regular peer reviews and feedback sessions ensures that we stay on track with our goals and maintain a high level of professionalism in our work.” Peer mentoring was also highlighted as a crucial tool for accountability and professional growth, as noted by Respondent #3: “Peer mentoring has been an invaluable tool for maintaining accountability while fostering professional growth in our team.”

Respondent #7 explained, “When everyone knows their roles and holds each other accountable, it makes our work smoother and more effective. It creates a sense of pride in what we do.” The clarity of roles and shared accountability within the team foster an environment where teachers are motivated to perform to the best of their abilities. Respondent #10 echoed this point, stating, “Everyone feels responsible for the department’s success. We work collaboratively, knowing that our contributions matter and that we are accountable to one another.” This collective accountability strengthens team dynamics and boosts overall departmental performance. Respondent #2 further emphasized, “The sense of responsibility in our team is mutual—there is a shared commitment to meeting the department’s objectives, and we hold each other to high standards.” The mutual responsibility and commitment to high standards positively affect team cohesion and contribute to the overall success of the department.

The impact of trust and accountability extends beyond the departmental level. Respondent #15 explained, “When you have a trusted team, the school as a whole benefits because everyone is committed to continuous improvement.” Similarly, Respondent #16 highlighted, “The collaborative nature of our work allows us to find solutions that would have been difficult without input from everyone. It’s not just

about delegation, but about mutual respect and support.” This broadens the impact of distributive leadership by enhancing department-level cohesion while fostering a unified school culture, where collaboration and mutual respect underpin success across the institution.

In summary, distributive leadership profoundly shapes middle managers' practices by promoting collaboration, empowering teachers, and building cohesive, accountable teams. Through shared decision-making, middle managers cultivate a culture of collective ownership that enhances team morale and engagement.

Empowering teachers to take on leadership roles encourages professional growth, fosters innovation, and improves instructional practices. Additionally, distributive leadership strengthens team cohesion by building trust and mutual accountability, allowing middle managers to lead with greater confidence and flexibility. This approach aligns with the goals of Jamaican secondary schools and supports middle managers in achieving departmental success while upholding the school's mission. Respondent #8 captured this well, stating, “When there is mutual trust and accountability, we are all aligned in our efforts, working together toward shared goals.” Through distributive leadership, middle managers are better positioned to leverage the strengths of their teams, overcome challenges, drive continuous improvement, and foster a collaborative, supportive educational environment.

Summary of Results

The results from interviews with 16 middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools provide a comprehensive view of the diverse roles and responsibilities they undertake, as well as the challenges and influences that shape their leadership practices. Key roles identified include curriculum oversight, teacher mentorship, and student performance monitoring. These responsibilities highlight the central role

middle managers play in maintaining educational standards, supporting teacher development, and implementing targeted interventions to improve student outcomes.

Key Themes and Challenges

Several themes emerged that highlight both the opportunities and barriers middle managers encounter in their roles. Collaboration stands out as a critical factor, with middle managers frequently working alongside teachers and senior leaders to ensure alignment with school-wide objectives. This collaboration fosters a cohesive approach to achieving academic goals and helps sustain operational consistency. One participant emphasized, “Working together is essential; it allows us to align our goals and support one another effectively” (Respondent #11). This collaborative dynamic not only strengthens relationships among staff but also enhances the quality of educational strategies developed, as multiple perspectives contribute to decision-making processes. Respondent #14 added, “When we all have a say, it feels less like a top-down approach and more like a collective journey toward our goals.” This sentiment was echoed by Respondent #4, who noted, “The collaboration between all stakeholders creates a sense of unity, helping us work towards a common vision for the school.”

Middle managers also experience significant role conflict, primarily due to the competing demands of administrative duties and instructional leadership. Balancing these tasks often creates time constraints, limiting their ability to engage in teacher mentorship and direct curriculum support fully. A Head of Department noted, “It’s challenging to find the time for mentoring when administrative tasks pile up. Sometimes it feels like we’re being pulled in too many directions” (Respondent #10). This sentiment was echoed by another participant who stated, “By the time I finish with reports and meetings, there’s little time left to actually work with my teachers in

the classroom, which is where I believe I can make the most impact” (Respondent #16). This struggle to balance these responsibilities can lead to frustration and a sense of inadequacy in their leadership roles. Respondent #12 remarked, “It’s hard to find a balance between being in the classroom and managing the department; some days, it feels like something has to give.”

Resistance to change surfaced as a notable barrier, with some teachers hesitating to embrace new initiatives due to a lack of training, increased workloads, or skepticism about the effectiveness of new methods. A middle manager observed, “Some teachers are reluctant to adopt new practices because they feel overwhelmed or doubt the changes will work. We need to communicate better and involve them in the process” (Respondent #13). This resistance underscores the need for adequate support and communication when introducing changes, as well as the importance of teacher involvement in decision-making processes. Respondent #8 elaborated, “If we can show teachers the benefits of these new methods and involve them early on, I believe we’ll see a much smoother transition.” Respondent #16 also added, “Teachers need to feel supported through training and the chance to give feedback, so they don’t feel like they’re being forced into something that won’t work.”

Positive Impact of Distributive Leadership

Despite these challenges, the data analysis indicates that distributive leadership plays a transformative role in enhancing middle managers’ effectiveness. The theme of shared leadership responsibilities emerged as particularly influential, allowing middle managers to delegate tasks, involve teachers in decision-making, and foster a sense of ownership across departments. One participant remarked, “Distributive leadership has allowed us to share the load. It empowers teachers and gives them a stake in what we do” (Respondent #11). This shared approach not only

alleviates some of the administrative burden on middle managers but also cultivates a more engaged teaching staff, which can lead to improved educational outcomes.

Another respondent added, “When teachers have a say in their work, they’re not just following orders—they’re contributing to a vision that we all share” (Respondent #9).

In schools where distributive leadership is implemented effectively, middle managers report experiencing greater empowerment and team cohesion as teachers feel more engaged and accountable for their roles. “When we work collaboratively, it not only enhances our strategies but also strengthens our team dynamics. Everyone feels they have a part to play,” explained a Head of Department (Respondent #10). This collaborative spirit encourages innovative practices, as teachers are more willing to experiment and adapt new strategies when they feel supported and valued. A respondent illustrated this point, stating, “We recently tried a new teaching strategy that came from a teacher’s suggestion, and it has had a remarkable impact on our students’ engagement levels” (Respondent #6). Respondent #5 elaborated, “Teachers are more confident in proposing ideas because they know their input matters, and it leads to a better working environment.”

The data shows that middle managers who practice distributive leadership experience a positive shift in their leadership style, allowing them to focus more on strategic aspects of their positions rather than getting bogged down by daily administrative tasks. As one participant noted, “Distributive leadership gives me a chance to think bigger—about how we can improve as a school, rather than just worrying about the day-to-day” (Respondent #15). This shift not only benefits the middle managers themselves but also has a ripple effect throughout the school, as their enhanced focus on leadership leads to better outcomes for both teachers and

students. Respondent #3 added, “I feel more empowered to make decisions and lead initiatives because the burden is shared, and I have more time to strategize.”

Commitment to the School’s Mission and Academic Excellence

Throughout these challenges and organizational dynamics, middle managers remain deeply committed to the school’s mission of academic excellence and continuous improvement. They view their contributions—such as curriculum alignment, teacher mentorship, and data-driven interventions for student success—as integral to the institution’s mission of delivering quality education. One middle manager stated, “Our goal is to provide the best possible education for our students. Every action we take needs to align with that mission” (Respondent #12). This alignment with the school’s vision fosters a culture of high standards and professional growth, where middle managers continuously adapt their leadership practices to support broader educational goals. Respondent #2 emphasized, “The mission is at the heart of everything we do. When decisions are made, they are always filtered through the lens of how they impact our students’ success.”

The data illustrate that middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools perform a variety of essential roles that contribute significantly to the school’s success. While challenges such as resistance to change, heavy workloads, and lack of support are prevalent, the implementation of distributive leadership has shown positive effects on skill-building and collaboration. These factors collectively influence leadership practices, fostering a mix of resilience, growth, and creative initiative. Respondent #16 expressed a poignant reflection, stating, “Every time we overcome a challenge, it reinforces our commitment to our students and each other. We are in this together.”

The responses indicate that middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools have significant administrative, supervisory, and collaborative responsibilities that contribute to academic integrity, teacher development, and overall school functioning. Challenges include workload, lack of support, and communication barriers, impacting motivation and leadership styles. Distributive leadership plays a pivotal role by empowering staff, enhancing engagement, and supporting the effective execution of duties. As one respondent summarized, “Distributive leadership is crucial; it not only empowers us as leaders but also fosters a sense of community and shared purpose among staff” (Respondent #11). This sense of community is vital in navigating the complexities of educational leadership and maintaining a focus on student success.

Summary of Chapter

In conclusion, the data reveal that middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools navigate a complex landscape of responsibilities, challenges, and leadership opportunities. Their roles extend beyond traditional managerial tasks, encompassing instructional leadership, teacher development, and strategic collaboration. Surprisingly, I initially expected middle managers in high-performing schools to experience fewer leadership challenges; however, many still faced significant barriers due to hierarchical decision-making. Even in schools rated good and above, middle managers expressed frustration with limited autonomy, highlighting a persistent struggle to enact meaningful change within rigid administrative structures. Despite the pressures of role conflict and resistance to change, distributive leadership proves to be a valuable framework, enabling middle managers to share responsibilities, build stronger teams, and achieve alignment with the school’s mission. Their commitment to fostering a culture of continuous improvement and academic excellence underscores their pivotal role in advancing the institution’s goals and sustaining high-

quality educational practices. This comprehensive understanding of their experiences can serve as a foundation for developing strategies to support and empower middle managers, ultimately benefiting the entire educational community.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the complex relationship between leadership and school effectiveness in Jamaican secondary schools with an emphasis on the crucial role played by middle managers. This qualitative research project, through semi-structured interviews conducted with 16 middle managers from eight secondary schools, explored how these educational leaders manage their multiple responsibilities in contributing to institutional effectiveness in the Jamaican education system. The research was based on three major research questions and three sub-questions that explored the roles, contributions, challenges, and practices of middle managers with a unique view toward distributed leadership theory. The results reveal that middle managers who engaged in continuous professional development fostered collaborative relationships, communicated effectively, and demonstrated reflective leadership practices that contributed significantly to improving school culture, instructional quality, and student outcomes. These results align closely with the existing literature on middle leadership, which identifies key factors such as professional growth, collaboration, communication, and adaptive leadership as essential to the success of middle managers (Harvey, 1997; Brown et al., 2000; Harris, 2004; Leithwood et al., 2006).

One of the central results of this study is the critical role of professional development in enhancing the leadership capabilities of middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools. As discussed in Chapter 2, which reviewed the theoretical frameworks and literature surrounding middle leadership, it is widely acknowledged that continuous professional growth is essential for leaders to remain effective, adapt

to new challenges, and refine their skills (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). This study's results resonate with this perspective, showing that middle managers believed the pursuit of professional development opportunities would better equip them to lead their teams effectively, implement innovative instructional strategies, and improve school outcomes.

Chapter 4 presents data on how middle managers who engaged in external training programs gained a deeper understanding of emerging leadership practices. These experiences allowed them to navigate the complexities of their roles with greater confidence and efficacy. For example, these middle managers were more adept at leading curriculum development, improving teacher performance, and fostering a cohesive professional identity within their teams. This finding aligns with Bennett et al. (2003), who argue that middle leaders who invest in their growth are better positioned to drive school improvement and contribute to student achievement. The study participants who actively pursued such development were not only more effective in their leadership functions but also became catalysts for positive change within their schools. They helped create environments that emphasized professional growth and collaborative practices, mirroring the results of Harvey (1997), who underscored the importance of middle managers in fostering environments that encourage shared professional learning.

However, as noted in Chapter 4, the study uncovered significant barriers to accessing professional development, particularly the constraints of time and resources. Many middle managers expressed frustration over their inability to participate in training programs or attend workshops due to financial limitations within their schools. These resource constraints are a recurring challenge in the Jamaican education system, where limited funding often restricts access to external

development opportunities. This barrier reinforces the need for systemic changes that prioritize professional development for middle managers, as this is crucial for enhancing their leadership capacity and ensuring that they can effectively contribute to school improvement.

The concept of distributed leadership was also discussed in Chapter 2, where middle managers are seen as key figures in the school leadership structure. This model of leadership, which relies on the collaborative efforts of leaders at various levels, requires middle managers to be equipped with the right skills and knowledge to support both their teams and the broader school goals. As Harvey (1997) suggests, professional development for middle managers should be a priority in any system aiming to distribute leadership effectively. The study affirms the importance of continuous professional learning—not only for the improvement of individual managers but also for the overall school culture. When middle managers are supported through professional development, they are better able to build strong, collaborative teams that align with school-wide goals and ultimately improve student outcomes.

The results provide several important insights into the nature and complexity of middle management in Jamaican secondary schools. In relation to roles and functions (RQ1a), the study found that middle managers undertake several primary responsibilities: curriculum oversight, teacher mentorship, student performance monitoring, and collaboration with senior management. These results are consistent with the framework for effective school leadership provided by the NEI (2014) and extend the current understanding of how these roles manifest in practice. Referring to their contribution to institutional functioning (RQ1b), the results illustrate that middle managers contribute substantially to operational efficiency through several primary

mechanisms: namely, promoting cross-departmental collaboration, aligning departmental work with school-wide objectives, and fostering a culture of accountability. As participants' responses attest, these contributions bear directly on both teaching quality and student outcomes. They are consistent with prior research by Leithwood et al. (2008) into the critical role of distributed leadership in educational settings.

Investigation into challenges and barriers (RQ2a) elicited a number of essential obstacles, mainly revolving around resource constraints, the difficulty in balancing administrative and instructional responsibilities, and resistance to change. These results conform with the results of earlier research by Harris & Muijs (2002) and bring new insights into specific contextual challenges within Jamaican schools. With regard to the impact of these hindrances on middle managers (RQ2b), it was found that challenges do significantly impact the ability of middle managers to exercise their leadership role effectively, especially in instructional leadership and teacher development. This is felt in terms of reduced time for classroom observation, limited capacity for teacher mentoring, and reduced ability to bring in innovative practices.

The study on the implementation of distributed leadership, RQ3a, demonstrated the varying degrees to which it impacted different schools. Evidence supports the view that when implemented, distributed leadership helped middle managers bring teachers into the decision-making fold and engendered collaborative practices in the schools. This provides support for results from Murphy et al. (2009) but with greater specificity in relation to the Jamaican context. Finally, regarding the relationship between distributed leadership and leadership practices (RQ3b), the study established that distributed leadership underpins the way middle managers do their

job, especially in promoting collaboration, teacher empowerment, and shared decision-making. These results confirm the earlier work of Bush and Glover (2012) but bring new insights into how distributed leadership comes into play in Jamaican secondary schools.

Although a significant objective of the study was to explore differences in leadership experiences based on NEI ratings (high vs. low-performing schools) and school settings (urban vs. rural), the results surprisingly revealed no marked differences. Middle managers across both high- and low-performing schools, as well as in urban and rural contexts, reported similar leadership challenges, responsibilities, and experiences with distributed leadership. This suggests that the presence or absence of collaborative leadership practices is less dependent on school ranking or setting and more influenced by internal school culture and the attitudes of senior leaders. These findings challenge assumptions that high-performing schools automatically exhibit stronger distributive practices and indicate the need for leadership development strategies that are uniformly accessible across all school types.

This chapter systematically analyses these results through the lens of existing literature and the theoretical frameworks, primarily distributed leadership theory. The discussion will be structured in a way to take an in-depth look at each research question, comparing the results with the previous research, and highlighting unique insights that emerge from the Jamaican context. It is in this chapter that the paper looks to extend the current understanding of middle management in secondary education while simultaneously offering insights practically, for educational leaders and policy implementers. This framework gives an obvious idea about a well-

conducted analysis and has very distinct relations to the research questions and, thereby, to the existing literature in the area.

Limitations

Methodological Constraints

Investigating the relationship between middle managers' leadership and school effectiveness in Jamaican secondary schools presents several methodological constraints. This study's reliance on qualitative research methods, while providing rich insights into middle managers' lived experiences, also introduces inherent limitations. Qualitative studies, as outlined by Creswell (2013), are time-intensive and labor-intensive, requiring extensive data collection and analysis. The process of gathering relevant information from websites, journals, and professional networks is often challenging and may not always yield comprehensive results. Qualitative research, while valuable for its depth, lacks the statistical rigor and generalizability of quantitative approaches that could enhance broader applicability.

The study's sample size—limited to eight schools and 16 middle managers—also constrains the generalizability of findings. While the research provides valuable insights, a more extensive and diverse sample could enhance the study's applicability across different school contexts. Additionally, participant availability, even after confirmation, posed logistical challenges, potentially impacting the study's completion timeline and data comprehensiveness.

Researcher bias is another methodological consideration. Given the researcher's prior experience as a school principal in Jamaica, there is a potential risk of bias influencing data interpretation. Creswell (2013) notes that researcher subjectivity can shape qualitative research outcomes, particularly when prior professional experience intersects with the study's focus. While steps were taken to

mitigate this bias—such as employing structured interview protocols and triangulation—complete neutrality remains challenging in qualitative research.

Contextual Limitations

The study's focus on Jamaican secondary schools means its findings may not be fully transferable to middle management leadership in other educational systems, particularly in more resource-abundant settings. While the study offers critical perspectives on leadership development within resource-constrained environments, policy frameworks, cultural expectations, and institutional structures vary widely across countries. These variations may necessitate alternative approaches to middle management development outside the Jamaican context.

The scarcity of literature explicitly addressing middle management leadership in Jamaica further limits the study's scope. Existing research on school leadership tends to focus on principals, leaving a gap in understanding the unique challenges and contributions of middle managers. This lack of existing scholarship made it difficult to establish direct comparisons or draw upon extensive prior research within the Jamaican educational context. Fullan's (2000) discussion on distributed leadership provides a sound theoretical lens. Still, the study's findings indicate that the practical implementation of collaborative leadership in Jamaican schools remains an area requiring further exploration.

The small island context of Jamaica introduces potential selection bias and data contamination issues. In tightly connected educational communities, participants may share experiences or perspectives influenced by common institutional cultures, potentially limiting the diversity of viewpoints captured in the study.

Time Constraints

The study was conducted within a constrained timeframe, limiting its ability to capture long-term trends in middle management leadership. A longitudinal approach would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of how leadership practices evolve, particularly in response to professional development initiatives and policy changes. The Task Force on Educational Reform (2004) underscores the importance of sustained professional learning, reinforcing the necessity of extended research timelines to track leadership development over time.

Furthermore, the limited research window restricted opportunities for follow-up discussions and deeper exploration of emerging themes. While initial interviews provided rich qualitative data, additional engagement with participants over an extended period could have yielded even more nuanced insights into their leadership trajectories and institutional challenges.

Despite these acknowledged limitations, the researcher has taken careful steps to address and manage these challenges to uphold the study's validity and integrity. By acknowledging these constraints, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on middle management leadership while also laying the groundwork for future studies that can build upon its findings with expanded methodologies and broader contexts.

Future Research

Future research into middle management leadership in Jamaican secondary schools would benefit from methodological refinements and broader design considerations. One important direction is the expansion of sample size and diversity. While this study provided valuable insights, increasing the number of schools and participants—especially across a broader range of urban and rural institutions—would

strengthen the generalizability of findings and help capture the varied contexts in which middle managers operate. Bryan (2015) emphasized the importance of inclusive leadership training across different school environments, suggesting that a broader sample could reveal more nuanced differences or patterns that were not evident in this study. Alongside larger samples, mixed-methods approaches could provide a more comprehensive view of leadership dynamics. Combining quantitative tools such as surveys with qualitative interviews and case studies would allow researchers to gather both measurable trends and rich, contextual experiences. This would also align with NCEL's (2015) strategic emphasis on structured leadership assessment, allowing for a deeper understanding of how distributed leadership is enacted across different settings.

In addition to expanding research design, future studies should consider longitudinal approaches to track middle managers' professional growth and the long-term impact of leadership development initiatives. Given that leadership practices evolve and are influenced by changing school environments, a longitudinal study could provide insights into the sustainability of distributed leadership practices and their effects on school culture and outcomes. Comparative studies also offer promising potential. By examining middle management leadership in countries with similar resource limitations or those with more established educational infrastructures, researchers can identify transferable strategies and innovations that might be adapted for the Jamaican context. Understanding how other systems support middle leadership could inform policy development and capacity-building efforts in Jamaica.

Beyond methodological considerations, several conceptual areas merit further exploration. One such area is the role of technology in shaping middle management leadership. As schools increasingly adopt digital tools for communication, instruction,

and data management, research should investigate how these tools affect middle managers' ability to lead, collaborate, and make informed decisions. York-Barr and Duke (2004) noted that leadership is adaptive and context-driven, suggesting that digital integration could significantly reshape traditional leadership models. Similarly, gender dynamics within middle management roles remain underexplored. Research should examine how gender influences leadership styles, authority, and career progression, especially in systems where cultural norms may impact leadership opportunities differently for men and women. Understanding these dynamics is key to fostering more equitable leadership development practices.

Finally, there is a pressing need to evaluate the effectiveness of leadership training programs over time. While many middle managers participate in workshops or development sessions, it remains unclear whether these initiatives lead to lasting improvements in leadership capacity, school culture, or student outcomes. Future studies should assess not only the immediate effects of training but also its long-term influence on leadership efficacy and role fulfillment. Bryan's (2015) call for structured assessments of training programs underscores the importance of moving beyond participation metrics to focus on impact and sustainability. Together, these design and conceptual recommendations point to a rich agenda for future research, one that builds on the current study's findings while pushing the boundaries of how middle management leadership is understood and supported.

Policy Implications

The findings of this study offer significant implications not only for Jamaica but also for broader global conversations on strengthening middle management leadership in education. In many developing and resource-constrained settings, middle managers are essential drivers of instructional quality and school

improvement, yet they often lack adequate institutional support. Jamaica's experience demonstrates the potential of targeted support strategies, particularly those stressing distributed leadership and collaborative practice, to enhance leadership effectiveness. These insights can inform educational policy development in similar contexts worldwide, helping shape leadership pathways that align with both institutional demands and systemic reform efforts.

A central recommendation emerging from this study is the need for structured and ongoing professional development frameworks explicitly tailored to the unique challenges faced by middle managers. Countries with high-performing educational systems often invest substantially in leadership training, focusing not only on headteachers or principals but also on the mid-tier leaders who operationalize school improvement goals. Policymakers elsewhere should consider similar investments, with an emphasis on models of distributed leadership and strategic succession planning. This aligns with NCEL's (2015) approach to leadership development and the distributed leadership principles explored by York-Barr and Duke (2004), which emphasize shared responsibility and capacity-building within schools.

To further support middle managers, institutional accountability mechanisms must be strengthened and paired with robust support systems. Clear performance frameworks should be established that include mentorship opportunities, structured career progression, and support for collaborative leadership. Rather than relying solely on evaluation and compliance, these frameworks should balance accountability with professional growth and empowerment. The Task Force on Educational Reform (2004) emphasized the value of structured, supportive leadership systems that ensure consistency and capacity across the school system.

Cross-national collaboration represents a valuable strategy for advancing middle management leadership. International partnerships between educational institutions and policymakers can facilitate the exchange of ideas, resources, and best practices. These collaborations can yield adaptable strategies for improving leadership in diverse educational settings, mainly when shared challenges—such as limited funding, staffing shortages, or uneven professional development—are present. Finally, in an increasingly digital educational landscape, policy adaptations must consider the evolving role of technology in leadership. Middle managers need not only access to digital tools but also training in how to use them effectively for data-driven decision-making, remote collaboration, and instructional supervision. Building digital leadership capacity is essential to equipping middle managers for modern educational demands and ensuring their success in dynamic and tech-integrated school environments.

Key Findings

This study highlights the complexities of middle management leadership in Jamaican secondary schools, emphasizing the critical balance between institutional expectations and professional growth. The findings suggest that distributive leadership serves as an effective approach for alleviating role conflict and minimizing resistance to organizational change. Collaborative engagement among stakeholders was found to reinforce team cohesion and bolster instructional leadership capacity. Furthermore, sustained professional development emerged as a critical factor in enhancing leadership effectiveness within traditionally hierarchical organizational structures. These outcomes align with Thompson's (2011) study on collaborative leadership in complex systems, reinforcing the importance of shared leadership practices in navigating institutional challenges.

Implications for Practice

To maximize the contributions of middle managers, schools must provide adequate professional development. Training programs should equip middle managers with practical strategies for navigating hierarchical constraints, as recommended by Bryan (2015) and NCEL (2015). Facilitate collaboration and reflection – schools should create structured opportunities for peer learning and leadership reflection, reinforcing York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) findings on teacher leadership development.

Ensure Strong Support from Senior Leadership – Effective middle management requires clear institutional backing, including resource allocation, leadership alignment, and mentorship, as emphasized by the Task Force on Educational Reform (2004).

Final Thoughts

By fostering a culture of shared leadership, continuous learning, and collaboration, schools can unlock the leadership potential of middle managers, thereby improving institutional success. This study advocates for Targeted policy interventions that address middle managers’ leadership barriers, Comprehensive professional development programs tailored to middle leadership roles, and international collaborations that explore best practices in middle management leadership. Moving forward, educational systems must recognize and invest in middle managers as pivotal agents of change. Ensuring they have the necessary tools, autonomy, and professional support will drive meaningful improvements in school leadership and student outcomes.

Future research should continue to explore the evolving landscape of middle management leadership, particularly in relation to digital leadership and gender inclusivity in leadership. The long-term impact of structured leadership programs on

school improvement. By addressing these areas, schools and policymakers can create a more sustainable and effective leadership model that empowers middle managers to drive educational success.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

STUDY APPROVAL REQUEST TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Dr. Kasan Troupe
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Education
2-4 National Heroes Circle
Kingston 4
Jamaica

Dear Dr. Troupe:

Subject: Request for Approval to Conduct Doctoral Study in Jamaican Secondary Schools

I am Janice Julal, a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Educational Leadership Program at Temple University.

I am writing to formally request approval from the Ministry of Education to conduct doctoral research in Jamaican secondary schools. My research will focus on "Explaining the Nexus between Leadership and School Effectiveness: A Focus on the Role of the Middle Manager."

The primary objective of my research is to explore the dynamic relationship between leadership and school effectiveness in Jamaican secondary schools, with a specific emphasis on the role of middle managers. Understanding this nexus is critical for enhancing the educational landscape in both urban and rural settings.

I intend to conduct my research in four carefully selected schools - one urban and one rural high school where the NEI classified its leadership as performing at a good or above standard, and one urban and one rural high school whose leadership

was assessed as unsatisfactory for performing below an acceptable standard. This diversity in settings will allow for a comprehensive analysis of the impact of leadership practices, particularly those of middle managers, on school effectiveness in different contexts.

To be executed during the period January to March 2025, the study will adopt a qualitative approach and employ interviews, surveys, and document analysis to gather comprehensive data on leadership styles, patterns, and the overall effectiveness of middle management leadership in each school.

I am committed to ensuring the highest ethical standards established by Temple University's IRB throughout the research process. All information collected will be treated confidentially, with the identity of the schools, administrators, and participants will be protected in the final report. The research will also be conducted in strict compliance with all relevant regulations, and the findings will be shared with the Ministry upon completion.

I believe that the outcomes of this study will provide valuable insights for educational leaders, policymakers, and practitioners in Jamaica, and I kindly request the Ministry's approval to proceed with this research in the selected schools. Should you require any further information or clarification, please feel free to contact me at janicejulal@yahoo.com or 505-220-5402.

Thank you for considering my request; I look forward to the opportunity to contribute to the understanding of leadership and school effectiveness in Jamaican secondary schools.

Sincerely,

Janice Julal

Dip.Ed., BEd. (Hons), MA. (Dist.), PQP

Educational Researcher

APPENDIX B
MOE APPROVAL



**MINISTRY OF
EDUCATION & YOUTH**

Reply or subsequent reference to this communication should be made to the Permanent Secretary and the following reference quoted:

2-4 National Heroes Circle
Kingston 4, Jamaica
Tel: 876-612-5700-2
Fax: 876-948-7733
www.moey.gov.jm

June 24, 2024

Ms. Janice Julal
1102 Aluminum Way
Mineral Heights
May Pen Jamaica.

Dear Ms. Julal:

Re: Request to Conduct Research

This serves to acknowledge receipt of your correspondence requesting permission to conduct a research project on *“Explaining the Nexus between Leadership and School Effectiveness: A focus on the role of the Middle Manager.”*

The Ministry has approved this request on the condition that the administrations of the selected schools are in agreement. Approval is also granted with the understanding that confidentiality and anonymity are maintained and in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

The Ministry will be notifying the administrations of the institutions of its approval for the research to be conducted and henceforth you will be treating with the institutions.

Kindly acquaint yourself with the guidelines for conducting research in the Ministry’s institutions which can be found at www.moey.gov.jm under “Information Resources”.

Sincerely,

.....
Vivienne Johnson (Mrs.)
Senior Director
Planning and Development Division
for Permanent Secretary

Copy- Regional Director

The Honourable Fayval Williams, MP, Minister • The Honourable Marsha Smith, MP, Minister of State
• Dr. Kasin Troupe, JP, Permanent Secretary



*Every Child Can Learn
Every Child Must Learn*

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER TO SCHOOLS

Dear Principal:

Subject: Request for Participation in Doctoral Study in Jamaican Secondary Schools

I am Janice Julal, a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Educational Leadership Program at Temple University. I am currently conducting a study in Jamaican secondary schools on 'Explaining the Nexus between Leadership and School Effectiveness: A Focus on the Role of the Middle Manager.'

I am writing to inform you that the Ministry of Education has approved my conducting this research. I am excited to include your institution as one of the four selected schools for this study.

The primary objective of my research is to explore the dynamic relationship between leadership and school effectiveness in Jamaican secondary schools, with a specific emphasis on the role of middle managers, as understanding this nexus is critical for enhancing the educational landscape in both urban and rural settings. It will use the following timeline:

- January 2024 - I kindly request a list of the middle managers at your institution; this information will facilitate the identification of key participants for interviews and surveys.
- January 2024 - I will schedule a sensitization meeting via Google Meets to provide detailed information about the study, its objectives, and the role of middle managers; this will ensure that all relevant parties are well-informed and supportive of the research.

- January 2024 - At this sensitization meeting, in compliance with ethical standards, all participants will be required to sign consent forms before their involvement in the study.
- January 2024 - To gather initial insights, a preliminary Google survey will be emailed to you and all middle managers.
- February 2024 - Subsequent to the survey, individual interviews will be conducted via Google Meets. This will allow for in-depth discussions on leadership practices and their impact on school effectiveness.

I am committed to ensuring minimal disruption to the school's routine and will be flexible in accommodating the school's schedule during this research process. All information collected will be treated confidentially, and the identity of the school, administrator, and participants will be protected in the final report. The research will also be conducted in strict compliance with all relevant regulations, and the findings will be shared with the Ministry upon completion.

The outcomes of this study will provide valuable insights for educational leaders, policymakers, and practitioners in Jamaica. I look forward to working closely with you and the middle managers at your institution as we collaborate and contribute to the understanding of leadership and school effectiveness in Jamaican secondary schools.

Should you require any further information or clarification, please feel free to contact me at janicejulal@yahoo.com or 505-220-5402.

Sincerely,

Janice Julal

Dip.Ed., BEd. (Hons), MA. (Dist.), PQP.

Educational Researcher

APPENDIX D
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of the Study: Explaining the Nexus between Leadership and School Effectiveness in Jamaican Secondary Schools: A Focus on the Role of the Middle Manager

Principal Investigator: Janice Julal

Affiliation: Temple University

Contact Information: janicejulal@yahoo.com or 505-220-5402

Dear Participant:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this doctoral research, which will explore the relationship between leadership and school effectiveness in Jamaican secondary schools, with a specific focus on the role of middle managers.

The primary aim of this research is to understand the perspectives and experiences of middle managers in Jamaican secondary schools regarding their leadership roles and their impact on overall school effectiveness.

Your participation will entail:

1. Attending a sensitization meeting via Google Meets to learn more about the study.
2. Completing a preliminary Google survey to provide initial insights.
3. Participating in an interview conducted via Google Meets to discuss your experiences and perspectives.

Participating in this study involves minimal risks; however, there may be emotional or psychological discomfort when discussing specific topics related to

leadership. The benefits include contributing to the understanding of effective leadership in Jamaican secondary schools and potentially improving educational practices.

Your identity will be kept confidential; any information shared will be anonymized, and no personal details will be disclosed in the research findings.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without consequence, and your decision will not affect your current or future relationship with your institution or any affiliated entities.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact Janice Julal at janicejulal@yahoo.com or 505-220-5402

Consent: I have read and understood the information provided above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the study, acknowledging that I can withdraw at any time without consequences. I understand that the information I provide will be used for research purposes and that my identity will be kept confidential.

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Principal Investigator's Confirmation: I confirm that I have explained the nature and purpose of the study to the participant, including the procedures, risks, and benefits. I have provided ample opportunity for questions, and the participant has provided voluntary consent to participate.

Principal Investigator's Name: _____

Principal Investigator's Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX E

PRINCIPAL'S INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your name?
2. How many years of experience have you had in education?
3. What is your current position/title?
4. How many years of experience have you had in your current position?
5. Can you describe a typical day or week in your role as a middle manager, highlighting the specific tasks and responsibilities you regularly undertake in the school?
6. In what ways do you collaborate with teachers, administrators, and other staff members to ensure the smooth execution of your responsibilities, and how does this collaboration contribute to the overall efficiency of the school's operations?
7. Your Principal approaches you with an essential task for the upcoming NEI visit – to articulate a detailed job description that encapsulates the essence of your role and responsibilities. This comprehensive job description will not only guide your daily activities but also serve as a reference point for other middle managers in the school.
 - c. In crafting this job description, identify and elaborate on four crucial aspects that encapsulate the specific roles and functions expected of you as a middle manager. Consider the diverse dimensions of your responsibilities, ranging from curriculum development to staff coordination and beyond.

- d. Allow your imagination to delve into the intricate details of your role, painting a vivid picture of the multifaceted responsibilities you shoulder as a middle manager in your school setting.
8. Can you share examples of instances where your specific roles and functions directly impacted the overall functioning or performance of the school?
9. How do you see the alignment between your roles and the overarching goals and objectives of the educational institution, and in what ways does your contribution contribute to the school's mission and vision?
10. Reflect on and articulate how your specific roles and functions as a middle manager contribute to the overall functioning of the educational institution.
11. Consider the ripple effects of your daily activities, collaboration efforts, and decision-making within the school's ecosystem. Illustrate how the various facets of your responsibilities align with and enhance the school's mission and effectiveness.
12.
 - a. What overall rating did the NEI give your school in the last NEI Report?
 - b. What rating did the NEI give your school for Leadership in the last NEI Report?
 - c. What do you think accounted for that rating?
13.
 - a. Can you identify and elaborate on specific challenges you have encountered in your role as a middle manager within a Jamaican secondary school?

- b. How do these challenges impact your ability to fulfill your leadership responsibilities?
 - c. In your opinion, what are common challenges that middle managers across Jamaican secondary schools might face in their leadership roles, and how do these challenges vary across different contexts?
14. Rose, a middle manager, encounters resistance from teachers when implementing a new curriculum initiative. Describe the potential challenges and barriers in this situation and discuss how Rose could navigate and overcome these impediments.
15. Sheryl, one of the middle managers, storms out of the yearly middle managers meeting for the school's reopening on a sour note, claiming she is too frustrated to finish the discussion. The main concerns raised during the discussion were about inadequate teamwork and execution by supervisee teachers.
- a. Highlight your suggestions aimed at helping this team.
 - b. Have you ever encountered such issues?
 - c. How did you go about resolving it?
16. Michelle is one of the teachers under your supervision. She consistently arrives late for class, and when she does arrive, she only posts assignments on the whiteboard without engaging with the other students. After marking the register, she ignores the other students and either uses her mobile while sitting at the teacher's desk or converses and laughs with a particular pupil. The students in this class are highly disruptive and fail the subject Michelle teaches.
- a. How would you intervene to resolve this matter?

- b. Have you dealt with a similar case before?
 - c. What was your approach?
17. Considering the challenges you mentioned earlier, how do you perceive these impediments affecting your effectiveness as a leader? Can you provide examples of situations where these challenges influenced your decision-making or leadership practices?
18. From your observations and experiences, how do you think the collective challenges faced by middle managers influence the overall leadership landscape within Jamaican secondary schools?
19. Your Principal informs you that budget constraints will not allow you to implement necessary professional development programs for teachers. How might these financial challenges influence your leadership practices and the potential ripple effects on the school's overall educational quality?
20. The recent National Education Inspectorate Report rates your school as failing/succeeding in the area of Leadership and Management.
- a. What are the reasons you would agree/disagree with this rating?
 - b. What suggestions would you give to improve this rating further?
21. In your experience, what best practices in leadership, especially at the middle management level, have you identified in your school? Are there specific lessons you have learned that could enhance overall school effectiveness? What systems are in place for succession planning and to help your team members become more capable leaders?
22. Can you share instances where distributive leadership has positively or negatively influenced your role as a middle manager? How does the extent of distributive leadership impact your leadership responsibilities?

23. In your opinion, how does the level of involvement in decision-making and leadership tasks vary among middle managers in schools with varying degrees of distributive leadership? Your school has recently transitioned to a more distributive leadership model. What are the potential effects on you as a middle manager, both in terms of increased responsibilities and changes in leadership dynamics? How might this shift impact the overall leadership culture within the school?
24. Your principal invites you to be a part of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) Committee. There are no meetings held, but a SIP is produced and submitted to the MOE.
- a. What concerns would you have with this process?
 - b. How have you contributed to the SIP in your school?
 - c. How do you perceive your contributions to the broader goals of educational leadership and school effectiveness?
25. Can you describe how distributive leadership principles are reflected in your daily leadership practices as a middle manager? Provide specific examples of how you distribute responsibilities and collaborate with other leaders.
26. From your observations, how do middle managers adapt their leadership practices in response to the presence or absence of distributive leadership within your school?
27. Gerald a middle manager actively involves teachers in decision-making processes. Describe how this distributive leadership approach might shape the overall leadership practices within the school and contribute to a positive school culture.