



RESEARCH ARTICLE

SHARED LEADERSHIP AND ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY IN DIET INSTITUTE: COLLABORATIVE NARRATIVES OF TEACHER EDUCATORS AND PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS

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Abstract

This qualitative case study investigates how shared leadership affects organizational culture, professional values, and institutional performance at a District Institute of Education and Training (DIET), India in line with the principles of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Data were gathered from 40 prospective teachers, 6 teacher educators (Lecturer), and 1 principal using interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). Thematic analysis showed participatory leadership practices like peer-led activities, co-planning and collaborative teaching strengthen institutional identity and promote professional values of empathy, accountability, integrity and proactivity. Student-teachers reported greater belonging and professional self-confidence when involved in participatory decision making and reflective practices. Teacher educators (Lecturer) and principal's perspectives identified mentorship, ethical role modeling, and strategic planning as most impactful in shaping the culture. Despite such strengths, structural constraints e.g., absence of student councils, rigid scholastic schedules and restriction in institutional autonomy were found to harm the full expression of collective leadership. This research contributes to understanding how grassroots practices of leadership by teacher education institutions can enhance effective organizational transformation, complement the National Education Policy 2020, and enhance performance through participative, value-driven engagement.

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Introduction:-

Shared leadership facilitates collaboration among leadership roles by providing opportunities for individuals at any level to inform decision-making and design a collective organization. Specifically in the area of teacher education, shared leadership invites the potential for a culture of co-partnership, respect for one another, professional development, and shared responsibility. District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) model this activity in the sense as being the institutional vehicles that foster a culture of DIET cohesion through shared leadership focusing on the values of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The NEP 2020 promotes "inclusion, ethical

leadership, and experiential learning," which supports shared leadership activity in some way, given DIET's decentralised, collaborative principles. It is the focus of this study to examine the influence of shared leadership practice in the organisation defining identity, professional values and collaborative practice.

Review of Literature:-

Over the past few years, the culture of higher education has seen a drastic transition from authoritarian forms of leadership to more participative and collaborative styles. Shared leadership (SL) is one such method that is slowly emerging as a favorite with power and decision-making functions shared among members at various levels of an institution in a dispersed and liquid state. Within the higher education organizations (HEOs), SL has been proven to boost organizational commitment, encourage collegiality, and improve institutional performance (Alghamdi, 2024; Bolden et al., 2015). A study conducted by Alghamdi (2024) in Saudi HEIs named "Development and Mentoring" as salient dimensions of SL and associated them directly with improved affective commitment among educators. Likewise, Bilal et al. (2019) argued that SL fosters initiative-taking and psychological safety of the faculty of Pakistan's public sector HEIs to the extent that they facilitate active participation and innovation. This shift towards shared leadership is not merely a structural shift but also a cultural one.

Bolden et al. (2015) posit that shared leadership promotes inclusiveness, mutual respect, and sense of community in the academic environment. In the context of student participation, Fidalgo-Blanco et al. (2023) demonstrated the way SL, incorporated within active learning settings, facilitates learners to adopt leadership roles that shift over learning modalities, especially preceding, during, and succeeding the COVID-19 pandemic. On a wider developmental level, SL has been positioned as key in achieving global and national agendas. Kabwe et al. (2023) showed how HEIs in Zambia work with public policy groups to pursue sustainable development agendas and meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through shared leadership models.

Studies by Australian universities also illustrate the extent to which the composition of leadership groups within institutions impacts decision-making and responsiveness. Vogel (2022) and Leslie (2022b) underscored that agile and responsive leadership teams that are rooted in shared leadership norms positively affect institutional performance. Smith (2022), looking back on the COVID-19 pandemic, distinguishes shared leadership from conventional governance approaches, with its capacity to foster resilience and collaborative problem-solving during times of crisis. Building upon this conversation, Göksoy (2015) and Ortíz (2018) speak to the merging of SL with distributive leadership, focusing on democratic engagement, decentralized decision making, and drawing on varied institutional knowledge.

Though these findings identify the general advantages of shared leadership, they also highlight an imperative to investigate its impact on organizational identity, specifically in teacher education institutions. Bamberger and Yemini (2022) believe that these institutions exist in a hybrid space between university and school, coping with contradictory expectations via identity strategies such as aggregation and compartmentalization. Van den Berg (2015) indicates that staff members build their professional and organizational identities by utilizing articulated values and meaning-making processes. This is in line with Cattonar et al. (2007), who assert that institutional culture and leadership practices heavily influence identity formation and professional involvement. Although the identity approach is researched among language teacher education (Yazan & Lindahl, 2022), its organizational aspect is under-researched.

Despite the growing literature on shared leadership and organizational identity, several critical gaps remain. First, while SL has been explored in multiple national contexts and institutional types, limited research exists on how SL influences organizational identity specifically within District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) in the Indian context. Second, previous research tends to generalize prospective teachers' and faculty members' participation in leadership, but narrative, qualitative investigations of how teacher educators and prospective teachers co-construct and experience leadership through formal teacher education institutions such as DIETs are limited. Lastly, while SL is related to developing values like responsibility and empathy, empirical measures of how these values are developed through SL practices in teacher education institutions are limited.

To address these gaps that were recognized, this research seeks to:

- Examine how shared leadership influences organisational identity in a DIET setting;
- Explore how students and faculty experience, enact, and co-construct leadership in academic and institutional spaces; and
- Assess how core values like empathy, integrity, accountability and proactiveness are nurtured through shared leadership.

By taking a collaborative narrative approach from both the teacher educators and the prospective teachers, this study aims to add to the critical understanding of leadership and identity in teacher education, and provide meaningful insights for developing participatory and values-based institutional cultures in DIETs.

Methodology:-

The qualitative research here investigates how shared leadership practices influence organisational identity, professional values, and institutional performance in a District Institute of Education and Training (DIET), aligned with the guiding principles of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. NEP 2020 calls for values including equity and inclusion, collaborative leadership, ethical development, participatory decision-making, and experiential learning—all of which this study focuses on. The study utilized a case study research design with qualitative methods. Data were gathered from 40 prospective teachers, 6 teacher educators (lecturers) and 1 principal from a DIET Institute. Data collection tools used were Semi-structured interviews, Focus group discussions (FGDs) with prospective teachers, teacher educators and Individual interviews with the principal. Thematic analysis was used to code answers and determine emerging patterns.

Analysis

Data analysis was performed utilizing Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic strategy. This entailed:

- Familiarization with the data through reading and re-reading transcripts to gain a rich understanding of the content and context;
- Initial code generation by systematically flagging and labelling significant aspects of the data that are pertinent to the research questions;
- Theme searching by theming together related codes to spot wider patterns of meaning;
- Backing themes by verifying whether the themes were a true reflection of the coded data and the entire data set, refining them accordingly;
- Naming and defining themes by explicitly describing the meaning of each theme and how it is helpful in knowing the research goals; and
- Writing the report by choosing persuasive excerpts, connecting the analysis to the research questions and literature, and furnishing a consistent account of the results.

FGD and interview transcripts were closely read, coded, and grouped into more general themes. Thematic trends were plotted onto the study's three goals. Particular note was taken of each respondent group's unique contributions and strengths. Prospective teachers emphasized strongly on personal leadership experiences, value development, and participatory learning. Their responses were experiential and reflective in content but had less awareness of institutional strategy or systemic barriers. Teacher educators were focused on pedagogical practice, professional collaboration, and Teacher educators - prospective teachers leadership dynamics but provided fewer glimpses of administrative or policy-level planning. The principal provided insights based on strategic planning, systemic problems, and leadership philosophies of institutions, but had few direct classroom level observations. The role variation is natural and aligns with the lived responsibilities of each group.

Findings and Results

This study examined shared leadership practice in a District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) from the perspectives of the prospective teachers, teacher educators, and the principal. Findings are categorized around three objectives and are reported through pervasive themes by various codes and quotes from the respondents. The findings fall in line with the NEP 2020 guiding principles of participatory governance, experiential learning, character formation, and inclusiveness.

Table 1: Codes and themes to examine how shared leadership influences organisational identity in a DIET setting.

Theme	Codes	Sample Participant Statements
Participatory Culture	Co-planning, Open discussions, Student roles	“we lead peer sessions and help with planning events, it feels like our institution.”(Student) “We plan sessions together with students.”(Lecturer)
Distributed Leadership	Rotational roles, Team teaching, Shared responsibility	“Leadership is not a title-it is a daily practice.” (Principal) “We rotate leadership in committees.” (Lecturer)
Institutional Identity Formation	Sense of ownership, Institutional language, Professional belonging	“Now I say ‘our DIET,’ not ‘the DIET’that changed everything.” (Student) “We co-plan curriculum inputs.” (Lecturer)
Structural Limitations	Lack of formal bodies, Rigid structures	“There’s no formal student council, so we have no platform to raise issues.” (Student)

In Table 1, participants emphasized that organizational identity in the DIET has been significantly shaped by a culture of participation, including both teacher educator and prospective teachers' decision -making processes and curriculum planning. Prospective teachers and teacher educator reported feeling a strong relationship with the institute when they shared leadership roles in academic and peer-learning contexts. A Prospective teacher shared, "we lead peer sessions and help with planning events, it feels like our institution," it shows how we can promote institutional ownership. This feeling was reinforced by distributed leadership practices such as committee rotation, team teaching and collaborative event management. Teacher educators insisted that they were encouraged to make decisions and contribute to the plan, and the principal insisted that "Leadership is not a title, it is a daily practice." These perspectives indicate that management is structurally built and culturally supported.

Furthermore, organisational identity was built through language, rituals, and co-created experiences, as seen in students referring to the DIET as “our institute.” However, the study also revealed structural limitations, such as the absence of a formal student council and rigid scheduling frameworks, which restricted wider and more consistent engagement.

Table 2: Codes and themes to explore how prospective teachers and teacher educators experience, enact, and co-construct leadership in academic and institutional spaces.

Theme	Codes	Sample Participant Statements
Co-Construction in Pedagogy	Student-led projects, Co-teaching, Feedback culture	“We co-design exhibitions and lead discussions.” (Student) “I give critique and ask students to evaluate my teaching.” (Lecturer)
Experiential Learning and Reflection	Community drives, Teaching practice, Debrief sessions	“After each group task, we reflect together.” (Lecturer) “Our field work helps us grow as decision-makers.” (Student)
Emergent Leadership	Task delegation, Confidence-building roles	“I was shy, but my teacher gave me a small task—now I lead group work.” (Student) “We identify and support emerging leaders in class.” (Lecturer)
Faculty Mentorship and Modelling	Role modelling, Professional dialogue	“I model leadership as service—not control.” (Principal) “I share my struggles so students learn transparency.” (Lecturer)

In Table 2, Shared leadership in the DIET was frequently described as a co-constructed process rooted in pedagogy. Teacher educators designed student-led activities such as exhibitions, group projects, and co-taught sessions,

enabling leadership development within the academic setting. For instance, one Teacher educator noted, “I give critique and ask students to evaluate my teaching,” fostering a two-way learning dynamic. Another strong theme was the role of experiential learning and structured reflection. Prospective teachers reported that planning field visits and conducting outreach activities allowed them to develop leadership by “doing,” followed by collective reflection sessions guided by teacher educators. The theme of emergent leadership was evident in how teacher educators scaffolded prospective teachers’ growth through incremental responsibilities. A prospective teacher remarked, “I was shy, but my teacher gave me a small task now I lead group work.” Such experiences were essential in building confidence and initiative among prospective teachers. Importantly, faculty mentorship and role modeling shaped prospective teachers’ understanding of leadership as a relational and ethical process. Both teacher educators and the principal emphasized transparency, shared struggles and feedback as key tools to mentor future educators who lead with integrity and empathy.

Table 3: Codes and themes to assess how core values (empathy, integrity, accountability, initiative) are nurtured through shared leadership.

Theme	Codes	Sample Participant Statements
Value-Informed Teaching Practices	Role play, Storytelling, Peer teaching	“We create lesson plans that include ethics and responsibility.” (Lecturer) “I learned honesty when a copied assignment led to a group discussion.” (Student)
Empathy and Responsibility Practice	School visits, Peer support, Mentoring	“Working with different learners in schools taught me empathy.” (Student) “We run peer mentoring sessions.” (Principal)
Integrity and Reflection	Mistake acknowledgment, Feedback loops	“I was appreciated for admitting a teaching error—it built my integrity.” (Student) “We reward honesty over performance.” (Principal)
Initiative and Volunteering	Unprompted participation, Task ownership	“We don’t wait for assignments—we suggest projects.” (Student) “We let students initiate community events.” (Lecturer)

In Table 3, a major finding across all groups was that core values such as empathy, integrity, accountability, and initiative were not taught explicitly, but rather nurtured through shared leadership experiences. Teacher educators embedded value themes into lesson plans using role plays, peer teaching, and reflective pedagogy, while also modeling these values in their interactions. Empathy was particularly emphasized by prospective teachers who described their experiences during school visits and peer mentoring. One prospective teacher reflected, “Working with different learners in schools taught me empathy.”

In the same way, integrity was cultivated in genuine life scenarios, e.g., during conversations about academic integrity, where ethical choice was explored directly and nonpunitive. Responsibility and initiative were promoted by the provision of voluntary leadership roles, particularly in field work and community activities. Prospective teachers indicated that being given tasks even by implication but not explicitly requested also made them feel more self-assured and responsible. For the principal, leadership was primarily character development. Organized mentorship schemes, awards for compassion, and moral challenges debated in the meetings illustrated how the organizational context was consciously tailored to infuse values into leadership culture.

Discussion:-

Deriving insights from the various levels of the institution reveals how shared leadership operates at DIET. The prospective teachers, teacher educators, and the principal of the institution reveal a strong participatory organizational culture which resonates with the NEP (2020) core values of collaboration, inclusivity, and experiential learning (Preethi, 2023; Tayade, 2024). Shared leadership, as described by Pearce and Conger (2003), is supported by these values as they focus on collective and participatory decision making, integration of professional expertise and collective responsibility, which is characteristic of shared leadership. As noted by the prospective teachers, peer-based practices and reflections on them were central to their learning, which aligns with participative learning and ethical leadership as discussed in Locke, Schweiger, and Brown’s work mentioned in Spillane and Mertz (2015) on distributed leadership. The prospective teachers viewed leadership as a dimension of their lived experience that was continuously shaped by their engagement in the classroom and collaboration with peers. Teacher educators drew attention to teaching and mentorship, showing there was shared duty at the instructional

dimension, which resonates with Gronn's concept of distributed leadership whereby roles are allocated to enhance an institution's performance. The principal's inputs seem to align with the macro-level philosophy and strategic plan of the institution, aligned with the NEP 2020 advocacy for multidisciplinary innovation to be driven by institutional and faculty autonomy (Tayade, 2024). However, the study did identify gaps, prospective teachers exhibited limited awareness of the institution's hierarchy, teacher educators were largely silent on comprehensive reforms, and the principal demonstrated low levels of active participation in teaching-related leadership roles.

This gap reflects the leadership development gaps, especially in the context of organizational change, as outlined by Westover (2024). He calls for more purposeful design and proactive mentoring frameworks to fill these gaps, insisting that leadership potential must be developed by purposeful institutional design, not merely by circumstance and experience. In the same manner, NEP 2020 endorses redefining and student-centric educational changes, though, as Preethi (2023) points out, these changes require goal alignment at the institution and at all levels of leadership to the practices which are participatory.

To strengthen shared leadership, this study advocates active institutional policies granting greater autonomy at the grassroots level, purposeful leadership training for faculty to identify leadership roles and enhance facilitation and mentoring skills to include learner representation, and active representation at the learner level. While the triangulated perspectives confirm the possibility of shared leadership impacting organisational identity and institutional values, its sustainability underscores the necessity of systemic structural frameworks (Pearce & Conger, 2003; Spillane & Mertz, 2015) along with NEP 2020 implementation strategies (Tayade, 2024; Preethi, 2023) supporting the bounds of leadership theory

Recommendation:-

1. To form councils and peer mentorship initiatives to provide prospective teachers with ordered roles in institutional process, which facilitates participatory leadership.
2. To Modify the academic schedule, providing flexible timetabling allows room for learner-directed activities and shared planning, facilitating shared ownership.
3. To offer faculty training in facilitative leadership this facilitates teachers adopting collaborative styles and mentoring student leaders to transcend hierarchical structures.
4. To allocate tasks fairly among prospective teachers and teacher educators, facilitates greater participation and avoids leadership monopoly, and encourages shared responsibility.
5. Appreciating teamwork and shared leadership highlights its value and encourages more people to get involved.
6. To Promote autonomy of institutions to allow DIETs to tailor inclusive models of leadership to meet local requirements.
7. To Enhance digital and learning infrastructure to facilitate both prospective teachers and teacher educators in their capacity to lead and innovate.

Limitations and Scope:-

Despite the valuable contribution of this study to understanding the dynamics of shared leadership in a DIET setting, it is critical to recognize its limitations. Being a single-site qualitative case study, the findings are grounded closely in the particular institutional culture, practices, and leadership philosophies of a single DIET. The results, therefore, are not meant to be widely generalizable to all teacher education institutions. Yet, the insights produced might have transferable relevance for analogous settings, presenting reflective possibilities for institutions aiming to develop collaborative leadership consistent with the values of NEP 2020.

Conclusion:-

This research aimed to investigate the impact of shared leadership on organisational identity, professional values, and institutional practices in a District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) in India. Through capture of teacher educators', student-teachers', and principal's collaborative narratives, the research establishes that shared leadership is not just possible in formal institutions of teacher education but also key to enhancing a sense of belonging, ethical practice, and participatory culture. Studies reveal that institutional identity based on empathy, accountability, integrity and proactiveness can be developed if both students and teachers work together through co-planning, reflective dialogue and modelling these values in everyday life. These practices are in line with NEP 2020 that emphasizes on moral education, inclusion and experiential Learning.

This study also reveals the structural hindrance to the achievement of shared leadership. Absence of formal student councils, rigid academic schedule and restricted institutional autonomy all contribute to limited participation of the stakeholders. So to create a more dynamic and democratic leadership culture there is a need for institution empowerment through institutional reform, changes in the attitude, role and practices of all the stakeholders of the institute. To conclude, shared leadership is a transformative organisational culture not just a pedagogical tool. In line with the goals of NEP 2020 shared leadership if followed properly can contribute to India's emerging vision for teacher education that aims to nurture thoughtful, ethical, and well-rounded educators who can inspire and lead in today's changing world. Future studies can build on this research by exploring how local practices and policy efforts shape shared leadership in other DIETs.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of Interest

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