

**Distributed Leadership in Higher Education Curriculum Reforms: A Case Study of an  
Undergraduate Program in Cambodia**

By

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## Statement of Originality

I, HAB, Sokchamnan, hereby declare that I am the sole author of the thesis entitled *Distributed Leadership in Higher Education Curriculum Reforms: A Case Study of an Undergraduate Program in Cambodia*. The content and the material presented in this thesis are my original work except those indicated in the acknowledgments. I further declare that I have followed the University's policies and regulations on Academic Honesty, Copyright, and Plagiarism in writing the thesis, and no material in this thesis has been submitted for a degree in this or other universities.

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## Abstract

The evolving dynamics of globalization and fast-changing demands in higher education (HE) have significantly impacted the implementation of Distributed Leadership (DL) in Curriculum Reforms (CR). This effect is particularly noticeable in developing countries like Cambodia, where reforming curriculum is essential for producing graduates who can compete in an increasingly complex labor market and contribute to national aspirations of attaining upper-middle-income status by 2030 and high-income status by 2050. Asian educational institutions may also have cultural expectations around authority and harmony that could add complexity to the implementation of collaborative leadership practices. While DL is argued to be vital to effective CR, little research has explored the implementation of DL in the curriculum reform process within Cambodia's cultural and economic context, leaving policymakers, academic leaders, and educators with a limited understanding of how DL can influence these reforms. Cambodia, therefore, presents a critical case study for examining the roles, power distribution, issues and challenges, and collaborative solutions among curriculum leaders in this reform process.

Therefore, this thesis examines the understanding of DL's implementation within the context of CR in Cambodia's higher education sector, demonstrating how DL in CR can help achieve the country's strategic development goals. Employing a qualitative case study approach, which allows the researcher to construct diverse perspectives from different stakeholders, this study focuses on an undergraduate English language program at a provincial university in Cambodia.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 curriculum leaders working at university, faculty, and classroom levels, complemented by document analysis with the key documents in relation to DL in the curriculum reform process, especially relevant technical meeting minutes and training workshop reports. Thematic Analysis (TA) was utilized to identify

the key themes related to the roles, power distribution, issues and challenges, and collective solutions among curriculum leaders in the reform process.

The findings indicate that DL is a critical catalyst of effective CR, facilitating collaborative planning, development, implementation, and evaluation. Leadership roles were found to be necessarily distributed across different levels: strategic guidance and support by university-level leaders, coordination and management of the reform process by faculty-level leaders, and practical curriculum execution and feedback by teachers who are at the classroom level.

The findings also show the importance of clear power distribution among leaders and highlight that successful DL requires collective decision-making, shared responsibility, and good communication and interactions, and also that follow-up efforts from the higher levels are vital to enable the reform process to move forward. However, this study identifies considerable issues and challenges to implementing DL in this context, including resource constraints, insufficient capacity, limited encouraging and supportive environment, and inconsistent involvement and collaboration of the curriculum leaders. To address these barriers, collective solutions are necessitated with a focus on capacity-building, enhanced communication and interactions, and sustained collaboration and support among the relevant curriculum leaders.

The study underscores the need for institutional policies that promote DL, such as professional development initiatives, to strengthen leadership practices across all levels. Moreover, the active involvement of diverse curriculum leaders is vital for ensuring that CR is comprehensive and contextually appropriate. The findings contribute valuable insights into DL within the context of CR in Cambodia, bridging a gap in the existing literature and offering empirical evidence that can inform policy and practice. The study's implications for policy and practice may inform

strategies to enhance educational quality and accessibility in Cambodia and similar contexts. It also opens avenues for future research, particularly in exploring the long-term impacts of DL on educational outcomes and the sustainability of CR initiatives.

**Keywords:** *Distributed Leadership, Curriculum Reforms, Cambodian Higher Education, Qualitative Case Study.*

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## List of Abbreviations

Annual Work Plan and Budget	AWPB
Curriculum Reforms	CR
Directorate General of Higher Education	DGHE
Distributed Leadership	DL
Education Strategic Plan	ESP
Education University of Hong Kong	EdUHK
Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Foreign Languages	FAHL
Focus Group Discussion	FGD
Higher Education Improvement Project	HEIP
Higher Education Institution	HEI
Human Research Ethics Committee	HREC
Information Communication Technology	ICT
Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport	MoEYS
Professional Development	PD
Program Educational Objectives	PEOs
Program Learning Outcomes	PLOs
Self-Assessment Report	SAR
Special Economic Zones	SEZs
Svay Rieng University	SRU
Thematic Analysis	TA

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins by providing the background of Distributed Leadership (DL) in the context of higher education Curriculum Reforms (CR). This chapter also highlights the research aim and objectives, their significance and originality, and definitions of key terms used in the study. Finally, this chapter gives a preview of the thesis structure.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Curriculum Reforms (CR) refer to the process by which curricula are changed to better equip learners with competencies, knowledge, values, and attitudes that enhance learning outcomes (Gouédard et al., 2020). In relation to this concept, it becomes essential for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to pursue CR as a means of improving educational quality. This strategic approach not only aligns educational goals with evolving societal needs but also ensures that institutions remain competitive and relevant in a rapidly changing academic landscape.

Recognizing the critical role of CR in driving national development goals is essential for understanding its significance within the context of higher education (HE). The concept of CR is particularly relevant in Cambodia, as the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2019-2023 identifies CR as a key sub-sector objective aimed at enhancing the equity and quality of higher education programs to meet both national and international accreditation standards (MoEYS, 2019b). Achieving this objective requires targeted CR efforts within the higher education sector to produce employable graduates who can thrive in an evolving labor market, thereby contributing to Cambodia's aspirations of becoming an upper-middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2050 (MoEYS, 2019a; MoEYS, 2019b; RGC, 2019).

A study by [Adam \(2009\)](#) suggests that successful CR needs contributions from different stakeholders. Internal stakeholders, such as the senior academic management, middle management, teachers, and students, directly engage in the process of curriculum reform. Meanwhile, external stakeholders, such as parents, community, and employers, are involved in the process of consultations. The engaged involvement of all stakeholders can significantly facilitate the success of CR by helping to overcome issues and challenges related to resource shortages, inadequate training for teachers, unclear assessment procedures, and other obstacles. While these issues may persist, the collaborative efforts of stakeholders can lead to more effective solutions and strategies that address these difficulties, ultimately improving the implementation and outcomes of CR. Addressing these issues and challenges requires effective leadership practices in the evolving landscape of higher education development (DeMatthews, 2014).

Based on empirical studies (e.g., [Harris, 2008a](#); [Harris, 2009](#); [Leithwood et al., 2009](#); [Spillane, 2006b](#)), different types of higher education leadership types have been identified, for example, distributed leadership, instructional leadership, participative leadership, transformational leadership, etc. [Spillane \(2006a\)](#) noted that Distributed Leadership (DL) is the leadership practice involving power distributions and democratic communication processes among key stakeholders such as senior leaders, mid-level leaders, and subordinates within a conducive working environment.

Because of its potential to improve CR success, DL has captured the attention of practitioners, researchers, educational reformers, and policymakers to participate in the curriculum development and planning process that includes all stakeholders' needs in the education programs ([Harris, 2008a](#); [Harris, 2009](#); [Leithwood et al., 2009](#)). More importantly, DL can

help educators and other stakeholders build a culture of collaboration and shared ownership.

With this respect, DL is regarded as a powerful tool in the process of curriculum reform in facilitating curriculum leaders to work with key actors for a common purpose, build a collaborative team, arrange a clear work structure, and coordinate complex activities (Wiles, 2009). DeMatthews (2014) claims that a greater DL contributes to curriculum leadership through management and administration processes likely to produce better reform outcomes. Over the years, the DL approach has fostered a collaborative method in curriculum leadership that “emphasizes mutuality between leader and followers” (Kezar et al., 2006, p.76). This approach moves away from the “traditional bureaucratic model” that tightly controls and oversees CR and practice (Cloud, 2010, p.73). This new approach to leadership practice does not define a leader as the sole reformer because it needs collective voices from the grassroots for greater success (Ghamrawi, 2010). While DL has been widely implemented in the higher education sector, it may be a new approach to CR in the Cambodian higher education sector.

Most recently, DL has been introduced to CR in order to improve Cambodia’s educational quality. While Sol (2021) highlights in a systematic review that DL primarily emphasizes the interdependency and interactions necessary to enhance the quality of education in Cambodia, significant challenges remain in its practical implementation. The challenges such as time constraints, cultural factors, professional reluctance, and the risk of ‘getting it wrong’ (Harris, 2014), continue to hinder the effective adoption of DL. These issues and challenges point to gaps in research and practice that this thesis aims to address.

Importantly, one key barrier to implementing DL in CR is the lack of research evidence in the context of Cambodian higher education. This suggests that DL in higher education CR

represents a valuable area for future research within Cambodia's emerging higher education sector.

Noting the above-mentioned issue, the case study focuses on DL in the curriculum reform process of the undergraduate English language program at one provincial university in Cambodia. More specifically, the study explores the roles of curriculum leaders in the curriculum reform process, examines the power distribution, investigates the issues and challenges, and identifies the collective solutions to those emerging issues and challenges of three levels of the curriculum leaders in the process of curriculum reform in Cambodia's higher education.

## **1.2 Research Aim and Objectives**

Numerous studies have provided valuable references and created an empirical foundation for the implementation of DL across various contexts of CR. The previously mentioned contextual information establishes a robust international and local backdrop for studies on DL within the context of CR. Despite this, there is ambiguity surrounding the roles of curriculum leaders, the distribution of power, the issues and challenges faced, and the collective solutions employed at different stages of the curriculum reform process. These uncertainties have resulted in a research gap concerning the extent to which DL can be effectively implemented in the Cambodian context.

The primary aim of this study is to investigate how the implementation of DL facilitates or impedes the curriculum reform process in an undergraduate English program at one provincial university in Cambodia. Therefore, to serve this aim, the specific objectives of this study were set to (1) examine the roles of curriculum leaders, (2) explore their power distribution, (3)

investigate key issues and challenges, and (4) identify collective solutions to address these emerging issues and challenges within the curriculum reform process.

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

The study aims to provide insights into the DL implementation of curriculum leaders in the context of CR in Cambodia's higher education. Regarding the policy and practice, the practical significance of the study is to offer the fundamental knowledge and background for producing a set of guidelines of DL for universities and programs to support all the stages of the curriculum reform process in relation to planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating.

This study also aims to inform the roles, distribution of power, key issues and challenges, and collective solutions to those emerging issues and challenges in the curriculum reform process of the curriculum leaders at university, faculty, and classroom levels in Cambodian higher education. Therefore, the study opens the debates on the conceptual framework of DL that fits the emerging higher education in Cambodia. The framework is used to provide the significance of exploring the three levels of curriculum leaders' involvement in the process of curriculum reform, from planning to developing, to implementing, and to evaluating stages, as the previous studies conducted by [Fung \(2012\)](#) and [Xiong et al. \(2020\)](#) focused only on three stages of the curriculum reform process such as planning, implementing, and evaluating.

In essence, the theoretical significance expands the contribution to the better insights of research in DL in the context of higher education CR in terms of the uniqueness of the proposed conceptual framework in relation to the combination of the literature on the structure of curriculum leaders by some scholars (e.g., [Cardno, 2006](#); [Crowther et al., 2002](#); [Robinson et al., 2008](#); [Xiong et al., 2020](#)) and the curriculum development and planning process by [El](#)

[Sawi \(1996\)](#) to design the framework with the main focus in exploring the DL implementation of higher education institution in the curriculum reform process as well as the context of the framework with the supervision of the parent ministry, Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport and its agent, the Directorate General of Higher Education.

#### **1.4 The Originality of the Study**

One aspect of the study's originality lies in its comprehensive approach, which includes the perspectives of multiple stakeholders on DL implementation in the curriculum reform process. By involving three different levels of curriculum leaders, the research captures a wide range of insights and experiences, providing a more holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with DL. This multifaceted perspective is crucial in identifying the nuanced dynamics and interactions that occur during the implementation of DL in CR.

Moreover, by employing a sophisticated research design that incorporates a qualitative research method, the study aims to build a robust conceptual framework for DL in higher education CR. This framework seeks to explain the relationships among different perspectives and concepts that influence DL implementation's effectiveness. By integrating these diverse viewpoints and methodological approaches, the study not only contributes to the theoretical discourse on DL but also provides policy and practice implications for stakeholders involved in CR.

Research on DL in higher education CR is particularly underdeveloped in the context of Cambodian higher education. Existing literature primarily focuses on developed countries, leaving a significant gap in understanding how DL can be effectively implemented in developing nations like Cambodia. This study addresses this gap by providing empirical evidence and theoretical insights specific to the Cambodian context. The methods employed in

this research, including comprehensive data collection and rigorous analysis, ensure that the findings are both relevant and applicable to the local context. Additionally, the conceptual framework developed in this study is tailored to the unique challenges and conditions of Cambodian higher education, making it a valuable tool for guiding future CR.

Therefore, the content of this research offers a unique contribution to the field of DL implementation in higher education CR in Cambodia, providing a foundation for further studies and informing policy and practice in the region or possibly beyond. By addressing the specific needs and circumstances of Cambodian higher education, this study not only advances academic knowledge but also supports the ongoing efforts to improve educational quality and accessibility in Cambodia.

### 1.5 Definitions of the Key Terms

This study mainly focuses on three primary keywords: Leadership, Distributed Leadership (DL), and Curriculum Reforms (CR).

- **Leadership** is fundamentally centered on the notion of “Making things better,” as emphasized by [Summerfield \(2014, p. 252\)](#). This perspective underscores leaders' critical role in driving improvement and positive change within an organization or group. Expanding on the concept of leadership, [Bass and Stogdill \(1990\)](#) offer a more nuanced definition, characterizing leadership as the dynamic interaction between two or more members of a group. Also, [Bass and Stogdill \(1990, p19\)](#) note leadership as “the interaction between two or more members of a group that involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of the members.” Additionally, [Bass and Stogdill \(1990\)](#) further elaborate on the role of leaders, describing them as pivotal change agents within any group or organization in which leaders are depicted as individuals whose actions profoundly influence others, guiding

and directing the course of events, while being less influenced by the actions of those they lead. This conceptualization of leadership underscores the asymmetrical nature of influence within groups, where leaders play a critical role in shaping outcomes and driving progress.

- **Distributed Leadership (DL)** has different definitions, which have been defined by various authors. [Spillane \(2006a\)](#) defined DL as another method of thinking about leadership practice involving key communications between leaders, subordinates, and their situations. [Harris and Spillane \(2008\)](#) believe that regarding the distributed viewpoint, the effort of the individuals is valued through contributing to the practices of leadership, regardless of their official or unofficial roles and responsibilities in the organization. [Hargreaves and Chambers \(2007\)](#) regard DL as an essence of reconfiguration of the system and institutional redesign demanding horizontal, flatter processes in making decisions. DL is also considered as a comprehensive and systematic method for understanding how leadership deals with people in the complex setting of the institution ([Lee, 2021](#)). Moreover, [Sol \(2021\)](#) emphasizes that, unlike other leadership types, DL is chiefly focused on the interaction and interdependency of leadership practices, regardless of the official or unofficial roles of leadership in the organization.
- **Curriculum Reform (CR)** encompasses a comprehensive process of modifying and enhancing learning outcomes, with the primary goal of equipping learners with a robust set of competencies, knowledge, values, and attitudes necessary for their personal and professional development ([Gouëdard et al., 2020](#)). Furthermore, [Adam \(2009\)](#) elaborates on the complexity of curriculum reform by highlighting that it is shaped by the dynamic interplay between external and internal factors, each of which is influenced by the specific contextual conditions in which the reform takes place.

## 1.6 Thesis Structure

The thesis will examine the implementation of DL in higher education CR at one of the provincial universities in Cambodia. The structure of this thesis is divided into 6 chapters:

- Chapter One (current chapter) introduces the study, presenting a comprehensive background that situates the research within the broader context of CR in higher education in Cambodia. This chapter outlines the research aim, which is to explore the impact of DL on curriculum reforms. To achieve the research aim, it delineates specific objectives, such as identifying roles, power distribution, key issues and challenges, and solutions collectively addressed by the curriculum leaders with DL implementation in the curriculum reform process. The chapter also underscores the significance of the study, highlighting its potential contributions to policy and practice in higher education. Additionally, it establishes the originality of the research by addressing a relatively under-explored area in Cambodian education. Key definitions and terms used throughout the thesis are clearly defined to ensure conceptual clarity.
- Chapter Two provides a thorough literature review, synthesizing existing research on DL, CR, and related educational concepts. This chapter critically examines the theoretical foundations and empirical studies on DL, highlighting its importance and application in various educational contexts. The chapter identifies significant gaps in the current knowledge base, particularly the limited research on DL's application and impact in developing countries like Cambodia. It provides a detailed discussion of the global perspectives of DL in various contexts, ranging from North America and Europe to Asia. The chapter also discusses various theoretical frameworks relevant to DL and CR, which inform the development of the study's conceptual framework. This conceptual framework serves as a foundation for generating research questions that guide the empirical investigation. The chapter concludes by presenting the research

gaps that the study aims to address, thereby establishing the necessity and relevance of the research.

- Chapter Three describes the research methodology, explaining the sampling and analysis within a qualitative research design. The chapter details the rationale for choosing a qualitative case study approach, which is deemed suitable for gaining a deep understanding of the complex phenomenon of DL in the context of CR. The chapter explains the sample selection process, emphasizing the use of purposive sampling to ensure a representative and diverse participant pool. The data collection methods, including semi-structured interviews and document analysis, are described in detail, along with the procedures for conducting these methods. The chapter addresses ethical considerations meticulously, ensuring the integrity and ethical soundness of the research. The chapter also emphasizes the measures taken to enhance the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the study, ensuring that the findings are robust and credible. By providing a thorough explanation of the research design and methodology, this chapter lays the groundwork for the empirical investigation presented in the subsequent chapters.
- Chapters Four and Five focus on the presentation and discussion of the findings. Chapter four presents and discusses the results of the study, organized thematically according to the research questions with respect to the roles and power distribution of the curriculum leaders within the context of CR. Qualitative data are presented through detailed narratives and quotes from participants, tables, and figures. This chapter examines how DL drives and supports the curriculum reform process by facilitating collaboration and shared responsibility among various stakeholders. The chapter utilizes data from semi-structured interviews and supplementary reports to provide diverse perspectives on DL implementation. This chapter also explores the specific

roles of curriculum leaders at different levels—university, faculty, and classroom—and how the power of their roles is distributed among them. Chapter Five interprets the findings in relation to the research questions in terms of key issues and challenges and the collective solutions employed by the curriculum leaders, discussing how the results align with or diverge from existing literature. The chapter describes the collaborative approaches employed by curriculum leaders to overcome obstacles, linking these actions to the principles and functions of DL. This chapter also discusses the issues and challenges faced at different stages of the curriculum reform process, including planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating, as well as the collective solutions employed by the curriculum leaders to address these issues and challenges. By highlighting the practical application of DL in overcoming those emerging barriers, the chapter underscores the effectiveness of DL in facilitating CR.

- Finally, Chapter Six concludes the thesis by summarizing the study's main findings, which include advancing the understanding of DL implementation in higher education CR. The chapter discusses the implications of the findings for educational practice and policy, suggesting ways to support and enhance DL initiatives in higher education CR. The chapter acknowledges the study's limitations, such as the scope of the research and potential biases, and proposes directions for future research to build on the findings and address unresolved questions. The chapter also concludes by emphasizing the significance of DL in driving successful curriculum reforms and the potential impact of the study on improving educational quality and accessibility in Cambodia and countries with similar contexts. This comprehensive conclusion ties together the entire thesis, reinforcing the importance of the research and its contributions to the field.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter reviews the literature in line with the research study. The reviewed literature essentially seeks to investigate the theoretical linkage between DL, CR of higher education, and the three levels of the curriculum leaders in the curriculum reform process, particularly to stress the importance of DL in the reform process. In this study, it is vital to identify the roles of curriculum leaders, explore the distribution of curriculum leaders' power, examine the issues and challenges that the curriculum leaders have faced, and investigate how the curriculum leaders address those issues and challenges collaboratively in the process of curriculum reform of the BA in English program at one of the provincial universities in Cambodia. In accordance with the previous studies (e.g., [Fung, 2012](#); [Oliver & Hyun, 2011](#); [Wan, 2014](#); [Xiong et al., 2020](#)) that will be presented in this chapter, the DL practice of curriculum leaders plays a crucial role in paving the way for the curriculum reform process.

In this chapter, five sections are mentioned as follows:

- To clarify the theoretical indications, the first section begins by considering the literature review related to the curriculum reform process, accompanied by the researcher's hands-on experience.
- The second indicates the global perspectives on DL, ranging from the North American to European and Asian perspectives.
- The third portrays DL in the context of the curriculum reform process, including the structure of leadership of the curriculum reform process, types of DL, characteristics of DL, and the interrelationship between DL and CR, which are discussed in relation to the empirical studies of how DL is applied in the CR in the contexts of the US, Hong Kong, and the mainland China.

- The fourth is related to potential research gaps in the literature to be identified.
- Finally, the last section focuses on the study's conceptual framework, which was constructed in line with the literature review and designed to address the research questions.

## 2.2 The Curriculum Reform Process

To make the CR successful, it is essential to receive support from relevant stakeholders within the organization ([Pegg, 2013](#)). In this regard, people involved are encouraged to work collaboratively and supportively, aiming at the fruitful operation of the curriculum reform process in the institution. However, it is a time-consuming process with complexity, high commitment, and high cost; thus, some HEIs are not committed to updating or reviewing the existing curriculums. Owing to this issue, [Gouédard et al. \(2020\)](#) assert that the concerns of investment with high cost, the vagueness of outcomes, and the stakeholders' contentment also create more obstacles to changing the academic program and demands of high expense on capacity building for teaching staff with necessary skills needed to implement the newly-revised curriculum, the update on new approaches in teaching and learning, assessments, and the development of resources.

The success of CR also hinges on effective change management strategies. [Fullan \(2015\)](#) emphasizes that change in educational settings is complex and requires careful planning, clear communication, and the engagement of all relevant stakeholders. Resistance to change is a common challenge, and understanding the reasons behind resistance can help leaders address concerns and build support for reform efforts ([Kotter, 1996](#)). Moreover, CR should be informed by ongoing research and evidence-based practices. [Hargreaves and Fullan \(2015\)](#) state that sustainable educational change is grounded in continuous learning and improvement.

Engaging faculty members in professional development and providing opportunities for collaboration and reflection are essential for successful CR ([Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009](#)).

With respect to CR, the curriculum development and planning process focuses on identifying what knowledge, skills, and values learners acquire in HEIs, what experiences to be offered in order to achieve the intended learning outcomes, and how to plan, measure, and evaluate teaching and learning ([Richards, 2001](#)). It's very noteworthy to change the curriculum for a period of time to catch up with the current needs of the fast-changing society.

[Pegg \(2013\)](#) states that regarding CR, the worldwide education systems have started the transformation of curriculum to a knowledge-based society. In this context, the change in the program learning outcomes should be related to the trends and demands of the sophisticated world. Many countries regard the change of curriculum as a significant tool to allow HEIs to be well-prepared in the era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and fulfill the needs of the fast-changing society ([Gouëdard et al., 2020](#)).

Children should not be taught in the way their parents used to learn in the past. However, reforming the curriculum is a complicated and time-consuming process, requiring the relevant stakeholders' contribution and satisfaction, particularly the faculty ([Gonzalez, 2015](#)). The changed curriculum has undeniably required a transformation in the teaching and learning process ([Han & Yin, 2016](#)). As something changes, resistance may occur since it forces people to step out of their comfort zone.

Regarding the CR of Cambodian higher education, the major concern still remains for educational quality in the fast-changing environment. Some HEIs are unwilling to make

changes since they may consider it a huge burden. Thus, the CR practice remains problematic, leading to out-of-date curricula implemented in universities where learners are not provided enough opportunities to be exposed to real-life situations, producing poor-quality graduates (Adam, 2009). Furthermore, ADB and ILO (2015) indicated that there is a mismatch between the skillsets needed in the current labor market demands and the skills provided at Cambodian HEIs. These issues can be solved through a clear curriculum reform process to improve educational quality.

Regarding this matter, it is necessary to engage all relevant stakeholders because they will provide all the essential inputs and efforts needed for the newly established or revised curriculum. Therefore, Oliver and Hyun (2011) stressed that to accomplish a better outcome in the process of curriculum reform, the contribution of curriculum leaders is indispensable to share the vision with common sense, take roles and responsibilities between the faculty and administrators, and work actively and cooperatively within the HEI.

To ensure the quality of education, with respect to CR being crucial, El Sawi (1996) identifies four main phases in the curriculum development and planning process. These phases provide a structured approach to creating an effective curriculum.

#### **- Phase I: Planning**

This initial phase focuses on laying the groundwork for curriculum development and planning. It involves the following steps:

- 1. Identifying the issues/problems/needs:** The initial step involves recognizing the specific issues, problems, or needs that the curriculum must address. This step ensures that the curriculum is relevant and tailored to the educational context.

2. **Forming curriculum development team:** A diverse team of experts, including educators, subject matter experts, and stakeholders, is assembled to contribute varied perspectives and expertise to the curriculum development process.
3. **Conducting needs assessment and analysis:** A thorough assessment and analysis of the identified needs are conducted to gather data and insights from relevant stakeholders. This also helps in understanding the gaps and requirements that the new curriculum must fulfill with the needs of staff and facilities to support it.

- **Phase II: Developing content and methods**

In this phase, the focus shifts to creating the content and instructional methods. It includes:

4. **Stating intended learning outcomes:** Clear and measurable learning outcomes are defined, outlining what students should know and be able to do after completing the curriculum. These outcomes guide the entire curriculum development process.
5. **Selecting content:** The content is carefully chosen to align with the intended learning outcomes. This includes selecting topics, materials, and resources that are relevant and effective in achieving the educational goals.
6. **Designing experiential learning:** The curriculum incorporates experiential learning opportunities, including teaching and learning approaches as well as assessment methods. This step ensures that students engage in active learning and practical application of knowledge.

- **Phase III: Implementing**

This phase involves putting the developed curriculum into action through several key steps:

7. **Producing curriculum product:** The curriculum is developed into tangible products, such as compiled textbooks, syllabi, lesson plans, and instructional

materials. This step translates the curriculum design into practical tools for educators.

**8. Testing and revising curriculum:** The curriculum is pilot-tested in real educational settings to gather feedback and identify areas for improvement. Revisions are made based on this feedback to enhance the curriculum's effectiveness.

**9. Recruiting and training facilitators:** Educators and facilitators are recruited and trained to deliver the curriculum. Effective training ensures that they are well-prepared to implement the curriculum as intended.

**10. Implementing curriculum:** The curriculum is officially rolled out in educational institutions. This step involves putting the curriculum into practice and ensuring that it is delivered effectively to students.

**- Phase IV: Evaluating and reporting**

The final phase focuses on assessing the effectiveness of the curriculum and ensuring continuous improvement:

**11. Evaluating Strategies:** Ongoing evaluation strategies are employed to assess the curriculum's impact and effectiveness. This includes collecting data on student outcomes, teaching methods, and overall curriculum performance. For example, conducting surveys to receive student feedback, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), classroom observation, etc.

**12. Reporting and securing resources:** The evaluation findings are documented and reported to stakeholders. This step also involves securing the necessary resources, such as funding and support, to sustain and further develop the curriculum.

Concerning these four phases, [El Sawi \(1996\)](#) emphasizes a comprehensive and systematic approach to curriculum development and planning, ensuring that educational programs are well-designed, effectively implemented, and continuously improved. The researcher was also aware that many studies had adopted other models for CR. However, [El Sawi's \(1996\)](#) model was adopted for this present study because it is the most practical one in the Cambodian context, as it has been applied in the curriculum reform process at one of the provincial universities in Cambodia.

To improve the educational quality in response to the emerging globalization, regionalization, and highly competitive job market demands, the curriculum reform process in the Cambodian higher education context follows the Policy Higher Education Vision 2030 ([Un et al., 2018](#)). The reform approach has been decentralized by endorsing national policies and regulations. For example, the government has implemented four versions of the Education Strategic Plans (ESP): 1) ESP:2006-2010, 2) ESP:2009-2013, 3) ESP: 2014-2018, and 4) ESP: 2019-2023 to reform the higher education curriculum by equipping the learners with knowledge, skills, and values to learn, to live and to work in the knowledge-based society and globalization era ([MoEYS, 2005](#); [MoEYS, 2010](#); [MoEYS, 2014](#); [MoEYS, 2017](#); [MoEYS, 2019b](#)).

In essence, with support from the government of the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS) produced the Cambodian Qualifications Framework (CQF) 2012 as the benchmark for curriculum practices to provide students with the knowledge, cognitive skills, interpersonal skills, and responsibility, communication, information technology and numerical skills, and psychomotor skills ([MoEYS, 2012](#)). Moreover, the Cambodian Directorate General of Higher Education (DGHE) has set one of

the main missions to ensure the growth of 50% of highly qualified graduates in the higher education sector for the job market by 2030 ([MoEYS, 2021](#)).

In addition, based on the researcher's own experience as one of the project team members of one of the five targeted Cambodian universities under the Higher Education Improvement Project (HEIP) supervised by the World Bank, it is realized that HEIP provides funds for the selected HEIs for six years (2018-2024) to implement the project in order for enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education and research mainly in STEM, agriculture and related fields. One of the project's goals is that each HEI must establish partnership programs with local and/or international partner universities or agencies to improve their academic programs by revising existing programs or establishing new programs in response to the current and emerging job market needs.

The aforementioned steps of the curriculum reform process have been implemented in the Cambodian context. In doing so, the quality of academic programs will be optimistically seen to be improved in teaching and learning activities. With this regard, to achieve the curriculum reform process, DL implementation is necessary to lead the way for this reform. Therefore, the global perspectives on DL from different contexts should be raised to guide and support the reform process.

### **2.3 Global Perspectives on Distributed Leadership**

Distributed Leadership (DL) has emerged as a prominent model in the management of educational institutions worldwide, garnering attention for its potential to enhance organizational effectiveness through shared leadership responsibilities. In this regard, DL emphasizes collaborative decision-making and shared responsibility among various

stakeholders ([Karakose et al., 2023](#); [Nadeem, 2024](#)). The application of DL, however, varies significantly across different regions, influenced by socio-cultural and geographical factors. This section aims to delve into these regional applications, providing a comparative analysis of the effectiveness and challenges associated with DL in diverse educational settings. In this sense, [Young and Kim's study \(2024\)](#) expands on the understanding of how DL practices are adapted and assessed in different cultural contexts.

### **2.3.1 Distributed leadership in North America**

In North America, particularly in the United States and Canada, DL has been embraced as a means to democratize educational leadership. The emphasis is on creating collaborative environments where leadership responsibilities are shared among faculty, staff, and administrators. [Harris \(2008b\)](#) and [Spillane \(2006a\)](#) highlight the benefits of this approach in fostering innovation and improving educational outcomes. However, challenges such as resistance to change and the need for extensive Professional Development (PD) remain to be addressed. The approach facilitated collaboration between departments, leading to the development of interdisciplinary programs that better meet student needs.

### **2.3.2 Distributed leadership in Europe**

European higher education institutions have also adopted DL, particularly in the UK and Scandinavia. The European model often focuses on inclusive decision-making processes and empowering faculty members. In this regard, [Leithwood et al. \(1999\)](#) suggest that DL in Europe leads to more sustainable educational reforms. Nevertheless, the bureaucratic nature of many European institutions can hinder the swift implementation of DL practices. This has resulted in increased faculty engagement and more effective curriculum development processes. The UNESCO global monitoring report indicates the collaborative rather than top-

down approaches to achieve the set goals. Moreover, it also underscores the essence of teacher empowerment (UNESCO, 2024). However, the institutions also faced challenges related to aligning DL practices with existing bureaucratic procedures, highlighting the need for organizational restructuring to fully support DL (Leithwood et al., 2009).

### 2.3.3 Distributed leadership in Asia

Distributed leadership, characterized by a collective approach to decision-making and leadership roles, has gained a significant attraction in educational settings across Asia. This model challenges the traditional top-down leadership paradigm, promoting a more collaborative and inclusive approach that leverages the strengths and expertise of various stakeholders within the educational community. Harris and Jones (2015) highlight how DL in Asian contexts often necessitates adaptations to fit local cultural norms, where hierarchical structures are deeply ingrained. Specifically, in their comprehensive overview, Hallinger and Heck (2011) emphasize that while collaborative leadership positively impacts school capacity and student learning, its implementation in Asian schools requires careful navigation of cultural expectations around authority and respect.

For example, Gill and Berezina (2021) highlight that, in Singapore, teachers are entrusted with substantial accountability for key decisions regarding staff development and skills transfer, whereas, in Indonesia and Malaysia, the management and oversight of teacher training are predominantly controlled by government administrators. Furthermore, according to Don et al. (2020), DL practices among teacher leaders in Malaysian and Indonesian schools play a pivotal role in advancing social and economic capital by facilitating effective school improvement, enhancing the quality of human capital, and fostering the growth of state assets, thereby contributing significantly to the overarching objectives of national development and sustainable prosperity.

In many Asian contexts, including the Indochina region, traditional leadership structures are deeply hierarchical. Leadership is often top-down, with higher-level managers or leaders wielding significant authority and making the most critical decisions. This system reflects cultural norms that emphasize respect for authority, seniority, and collective harmony. While it ensures clear roles and responsibilities, this approach often limits the active participation of lower-level employees in decision-making processes. As a result, innovation and creativity can sometimes be stifled, and employees at the operational level may feel disengaged or undervalued. Distributed Leadership (DL) challenges this traditional model by promoting a more inclusive and shared approach to leadership. DL encourages participation and collaboration across all levels of an organization, giving employees at lower levels a stronger voice.

In the Indochina context, this shift can align with the cultural value of collective effort while introducing a modern emphasis on empowerment and inclusivity. By allowing lower-level employees to contribute their insights and expertise, DL not only enriches the decision-making process but also fosters a sense of ownership and accountability. Specifically, [Nguyen et al. \(2018\)](#) emphasize the impact of hierarchical cultural norms on the DL and propose strategies to cultivate shared leadership practices. Their study underscores the critical role of DL in fostering teacher collaboration and the development of professional learning communities within the context of Vietnamese schools. Moreover, [Hallinger and Bryant \(2013\)](#) conducted a regional analysis of leadership practices across Southeast Asia, with a particular focus on Laos, highlighting the growing prominence of DL, which emphasizes the alignment of DL with the collectivist cultural values prevalent in the region, reflecting its increasing relevance in educational leadership paradigms.

However, implementing DL in a region with strong hierarchical traditions presents challenges. Leaders accustomed to centralized authority may resist the idea of sharing power, viewing it as a threat to their control. Cultural norms that prioritize respect for seniority could create hesitancy among employees to voice their opinions freely. Additionally, both leaders and team members may require training to develop the communication and collaboration skills necessary for DL to succeed. Without careful implementation, there is a risk of misunderstanding or misalignment with existing cultural practices. In this sense, DL can bridge hierarchical traditions with modern leadership practices, fostering a workplace culture that values empowerment, collaboration, and innovation.

Moreover, [Hallinger \(2013\)](#) provides a conceptual framework that underscores the importance of contextual understanding in leadership practices, noting that DL can lead to significant improvements in educational outcomes when aligned with local values and traditions.

In this regard, the implementation of DL varies significantly across different socio-cultural and geographical contexts:

- **Socio-cultural influences on DL:** Socio-cultural context plays a pivotal role in shaping the implementation and success of DL. In Western contexts, such as North America and Europe, DL is often aligned with democratic and participatory values. These regions typically emphasize individual autonomy, collaboration, and shared decision-making, which are conducive to the DL model. For instance, research indicates that in the United States, DL fosters a sense of collective responsibility among educators, leading to improved educational institution performance and student outcomes ([Spillane, 2006b](#)). Conversely, in many Asian countries, hierarchical structures and respect for authority are deeply ingrained in the educational

system. In such environments, the transition to a DL model can encounter resistance. For example, a study reveals that while DL is recognized for its potential benefits in China, its implementation is often constrained by traditional top-down leadership practices (Lu, 2022). Thus, the cultural context necessitates a tailored approach to DL that balances respect for hierarchy with opportunities for shared leadership.

- **Geographical and institutional variations:** Geographical factors play an essential role in the DL implementation. Urban educational settings typically have access to a wider array of resources and expertise, which facilitates the adoption of DL. For instance, metropolitan schools in the United States have effectively integrated DL by leveraging the diverse skills of their staff, leading to innovation and improved educational outcomes (Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016). In contrast, rural schools face distinct challenges that can impede the success of DL. These challenges include limited access to professional development and a smaller pool of educators, which can restrict the distribution of leadership roles. Research conducted in sub-Saharan Africa indicates that while DL can empower educators in rural areas, it necessitates substantial investment in capacity-building and support networks to be truly effective (Bush & Glover, 2014).

In this context, DL, with its emphasis on shared responsibility and collaborative decision-making, offers a promising model for managing educational institutions. Its application, however, is deeply influenced by cultural and geographical factors. By understanding and addressing these influences, educational leaders can harness the benefits of DL to create more effective and equitable educational environments. Continued research and cross-regional collaboration are essential to refine the DL model and expand its impact on a global scale.

Therefore, each region's unique cultural context significantly influences the implementation and effectiveness of DL. Understanding these differences is crucial for tailoring DL strategies to fit specific educational environments, ensuring successful leadership and CR. In this regard, DL can play a crucial role in the context of the curriculum reform process.

## **2.4 Distributed Leadership in the Context of the Curriculum Reform Process**

### **2.4.1 Leadership structure regarding curriculum reforms**

Regarding the leadership structure in the curriculum reform process, three important levels are mentioned, namely: 1) University Level, including vice presidents or senior administrators involved in the curriculum matter ([Robinson et al., 2008](#); [Xiong et al., 2020](#)); 2) faculty level, including vice-Deans or department heads, in charge with the academic affairs coordinating within the faculty or department ([Cardno, 2006](#); [Xiong et al., 2020](#)); and 3) classroom level, including coordinators of the programs or lecturers involved, with the responsibility in the curriculum design and instruction ([Crowther et al., 2002](#); [Xiong et al., 2020](#)).

The effectiveness of leadership at these levels is influenced by the leader's ability to foster a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility. [Leithwood et al. \(2008\)](#) argue that DL is characterized by collective leadership practices that enhance the capacity of the institution to implement change. This approach contrasts with traditional hierarchical models, emphasizing the importance of shared decision-making and distributed responsibilities. In this context, examining the leadership roles and power distribution among individual leaders in the curriculum reform process is essential.

### **2.4.2 Types of distributed leadership**

[Spillane \(2006a\)](#) noted that three types of leadership distributions have been identified: 1)

Collaborated Distribution involving the practice of distribution to stretch over the assigned

task of a few or more leaders to co-work in place and time by carrying out a similar leadership habit, 2) Collective Distribution of leaders who work independently but interdependently to apply a leadership routine collectively, and (3) Coordinated Distribution of leaders in the tasks to be executed in a specific order.

In this sense, DL plays a crucial role in distributing or sharing the individuals' powers for the institution's development and staff capacity-building. DL enables the stakeholders involved to upgrade skills or build capacity by co-working in supportive and collective contexts, regardless of their roles or positions in the organization ([Harris, 2008a](#)). Also, DL is applied for better decision-making through stakeholders' involvement from various backgrounds, roles, experiences, skills, and expertise ([Sol, 2021](#)). Furthermore, [Leithwood et al. \(2009\)](#) indicate that DL enables people in the institution to have leadership roles, regardless of their formal or informal positions or responsibilities concerning the character of the assigned tasks.

Thus, regardless of stakeholders' roles or status in the organization, it is stressed that without shared responsibilities, accountability, and resources among people involved, HEI's complex, various, and sometimes challenging goals would be unachievable.

### **2.4.3 Characteristics of distributed leadership**

Distributed Leadership (DL) is very popular among researchers, scholars, practitioners, policy-makers, etc. In this context, to employ DL as the catalyst for institutional change and development, [Harris \(2008a\)](#) claimed that eight DL characteristics are taken into account such as 1) Vision is a unifying force equally shared among all members of the team, 2) Leaders have expertise rather than formal position with respect to the needs of the institution, 3) Collaborative teams are formed for specific purposes regarding the roles, responsibilities, and expertise, 4)

Communities of Practice emerge about the future needs and potential collaborative activities, 5) Individuals recognize themselves as stakeholders 6) The organizational goals are achieved through shared responsibilities, 7) Distributed roles and tasks are shared in various time zones, places, and under different situations, and 8) Enquiry focuses on the change and development to create knowledge and the organization improvement.

Regarding the above-mentioned characteristics of DL, it is very significant to claim that sharing responsibilities and leadership roles is the key to organizational success. In this context, [Kouzes and Posner \(2023\)](#) emphasize that the practice of appreciation plays a central role in fostering a supportive and collaborative leadership environment, which is a fundamental aspect of DL. Therefore, the involvement and power distribution of relevant stakeholders from the university to the faculty and classroom levels is crucial to make the curriculum reform process attainable.

#### **2.4.4 The interrelationship between distributed leadership and curriculum reforms**

Commonly, the concept of leadership is considered to be applied with the top-down approach. However, there is a trend to change to newly emerging redefined roles and responsibilities of institutional leaders ([Glatthorn & Jailall, 2009](#)) regarding the leadership of curriculum leaders. In fact, this is a type of DL approach of power decentralization as the academic staff takes much power in the curriculum reform process. Teachers can use their knowledge and skills to promote DL, supporting curriculum development and planning. Apart from that, noticeably, the collaborative approach has also been enhanced.

Moreover, [Glatthorn and Jailall \(2009\)](#) noted that the demand for leadership of the team and professional learning communities in work related to curriculum matters is so obvious. In this

sense, the main goal of the effective curriculum reform process depends on the good collaboration and communication of the curriculum leaders.

When everyone is involved in the curriculum reform process, they are more likely to feel invested in its success and to work together to ensure that it is effective. DL plays a vital role in institutional development and improvement. In this regard, DL would be an important tool in the stages of the curriculum development and planning process: planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating.

[Harris and Spillane \(2008\)](#) believe that regarding the distributed viewpoint, the effort of the individuals is valued through contributing to the practices of leadership, regardless of their official or unofficial roles and responsibilities in the organization. [Hargreaves and Chambers \(2007\)](#) regard DL as the essence of reconfiguring the system and institutional redesign, which demands horizontal, flatter decision-making processes. Furthermore, DL is also regarded as a comprehensive and systematic method for understanding how leadership deals with people in the complex setting of the institution ([Lee, 2021](#)). [Glatthorn et al. \(2019\)](#) emphasized that “Having educational leaders who understand the curriculum review process, are supportive of change, and are willing to formulate new instructional strategies is a definite key to the success of schools in the future” (P. 127).

Therefore, DL provides clear support and direction for changing the curriculum and the success of the HEIs. In this regard, it is vital to understand the key roles, responsibilities, and distribution of power or authority of the relevant curriculum leaders in the curriculum reform process because it is the main impetus to push and make it effective and efficient.

Regarding the prior studies on the DL of the curriculum leaders in line with the CR, some scholars have revealed some findings. For example, in [Oliver and Hyun's \(2011\)](#) study at one of the US universities, they conducted a research study on CR with the involvement of curriculum leaders from the faculty and administration and found that there are five aspects to be taken into consideration: 1) Shared Vision that DL provides a collectively shared guiding vision co-established by the curriculum leaders involved in the curriculum reform process, 2) Shared Responsibility that DL focuses on responsibilities shared among faculty and administration with extensive collaboration and participation, 3) Collaboration that DL paves the way for the relevant curriculum leader to collaborate during the process of the comprehensive curriculum review in an effort to bring the positive change for the institutions, 4) Cultural Issues and Challenges that DL enables the curriculum leaders to recognize cultural issues affecting the curriculum reform process in the collaborative effort of faculty and administrators through identifying some of the cultural barriers including structure and people, and 5) Senses of Community and Connectedness in which DL provides a strong sense of belonging within the institution for encouraging people to prove loyalty to the institution, to cooperate with one another, and to have a strong sense of connectedness.

In the study of Hong Kong's context, [Wan \(2014\)](#) indicated that to reform the curriculum effectively and efficiently, improving the interaction among the curriculum leaders at the faculty and classroom levels is essential, while leadership is implicitly shared and distributed from the university level. Regarding the classroom level, the stakeholders involved have shared leadership roles and responsibilities, participating in decision-making in the curriculum reform process of the institution.

The study, in terms of the power distribution of curriculum leaders on teacher education program enhancement in Mainland China by [Xiong et al. \(2020\)](#), indicates that curriculum leaders at the university and faculty levels used the top-down approach in the planning process while those at the faculty and classroom levels are essentially involved in the phases of implementation and evaluation. It was also found that those at the faculty level are the key players in connecting the top and the lower levels of the curriculum leaders in the process of curriculum reform. Moreover, regarding the practical perspective, [Xiong et al. \(2020\)](#) also showed that the relevant curriculum leaders are encouraged to redefine their roles and responsibilities in the curriculum reform process of planning, implementing, and evaluation stages.

In another study in the Hong Kong context, [Fung \(2012\)](#) found that the strategies of the leadership of curriculum leaders in terms of the personal, classroom, and school levels were used in the three main steps such as planning, implementation, and evaluation of 'PIE'. It varies depending on maturity, continuity, complexity, and sustainability in the leadership development process, which is categorized as restricted, emergent, and developed.

These prior studies are good lessons learned for effective CR with the involvement of the curriculum leaders concerned. In this context, the active cooperation and shared leadership of the curriculum team are important for the accomplishment of higher education curriculum reforms at the HEIs.

## **2.5 Discussion on Research Gaps**

Previous literature has largely overlooked the comprehensive examination of curriculum leaders' roles across all four main phases of the curriculum reform process: Planning,

Developing, Implementing, and Evaluating, as proposed by [El Sawi \(1996\)](#). Specifically, studies by [Xiong et al. \(2020\)](#) and [Fung \(2012\)](#) have focused primarily on three key stages of the curriculum reform process: Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating (PIE), while neglecting the crucial Developing phase. This omission creates a significant gap in the comprehensive understanding of the full scope of DL implementation, particularly how leaders navigate and influence the development stage, which is vital for the overall success of CR.

Therefore, the present study aims to address this gap by highlighting the roles of curriculum leaders at each of the four stages within the Cambodian HE context. By incorporating all four phases, this study not only expands on the existing curriculum reform framework but also emphasizes the importance of the Developing stage, which has been underrepresented in prior research. This comprehensive approach provides a more complete understanding of CR and the integral role that leadership plays in successfully navigating each phase, thereby contributing to a more robust framework for future CR initiatives.

Contextualizing leadership in Cambodia, the study applies the concept of Distributed Leadership (DL) within the specific context of Cambodian higher education. A prior study by [Xiong et al. \(2020\)](#) suggested extending research to other HEIs in Asian contexts, where common issues and contexts are shared, similar to those in mainland China, and this current study directly responds by examining how DL functions in Cambodia, addressing the significant lack of the regional research. Therefore, it is pivotal to implement the DL in the context of Cambodian higher education curriculum reform for this study to enhance the quality of the curriculum to meet the demands of the current job market.

In addition, the researcher has learned from experiences that the process of curriculum reform has been virtually stated in the government policy documents (e.g., Policy on Higher Education Vision 2030) rather than comprehensively implemented at the HEIs. Most recently,

the 10-year strategic plan of the Cambodian Directorate General of Higher Education (MoEYS, 2021) became the benchmark for educational programs and curricula practices at Cambodian higher education institutions; however, the researcher noticed that the adaptation of the 10-year strategic plan in the study context remains problematic due to contribution and power distribution among stakeholders. Thus, with regard to DL in power distribution, the study highlights how effective power distribution and shared responsibilities among different leadership levels (university, faculty, and classroom) can mitigate challenges related to inconsistent implementation and lack of stakeholder involvement. By emphasizing collective decision-making, communication, interactions, and role clarity, the current study offers practical strategies to improve the adaptation of national policies at the institutional level.

In terms of the practical aspect, it is essential to explore how individual leaders carry out leadership tasks, such as interactions among themselves and followers, and the situation in the curriculum reform process in Cambodian higher education. Therefore, there is a gap in the under-researched topic, particularly DL, in Cambodian higher education curriculum reforms. In responding to the practical implementation challenges, the research addresses gaps related to how leadership implementation and interactions occur during the curriculum reform process within Cambodian higher education institutions. It provides insights into the practicalities and challenges of implementing DL in a developing country context, a largely underexplored area.

## **2.6 Conceptual Framework of the Study**

The study emphasizes how the curriculum leaders' DL practice is implemented in the process of curriculum reform in Cambodian higher education. Thus, the study's conceptual framework is designed in the context of Cambodia. The literature review suggested that the following related areas should be taken into account. Robinson et al. (2007) reveal that leadership in CR is interrelated to producing a good curriculum management system in the educational setting.

The system, including relevant curriculum leaders at the university, faculty, and classroom levels proposed by some scholars (e.g., [Cardno, 2006](#); [Crowther et al., 2002](#); [Robinson et al., 2008](#); [Xiong et al., 2020](#)), is needed to clarify the power of distribution and interaction of curriculum leaders in the process of curriculum reform. Therefore, it is vital to examine the DL implementation in the four phases of curriculum development and planning proposed by [El Sawi \(1996\)](#): planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating.

Through the literature review, Figure 2.1 indicates the conceptual framework, which emphasizes the study context in addition to the elements important to exploring the interrelationship between the DL and CR. Contextualized in the four phases of the curriculum reform process, this framework discloses that curriculum leaders at the university, faculty, and classroom levels form the DL in higher education curriculum reforms in Cambodia.

The study proposes this framework to explore and fill the research gaps highlighted in the previous sections. The framework consists of three interconnected layers: the outer layer representing the national policy context, the middle layer focusing on supervisory agency, and the inner layer, which addresses implementation at the institutional level. Understanding the linkages between these layers is crucial to comprehending how DL operates within the curriculum reform process and how it can address the barriers of power distribution, curriculum leaders' collaboration, and policy alignment. The core component of the framework is the inner circle, which describes the HEI as the main focus of the research study.

- **Outer Layer (National Policy Context):** The outer layer signifies the broader national educational policies and frameworks established by the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS). This layer provides the strategic direction and overarching guidelines for

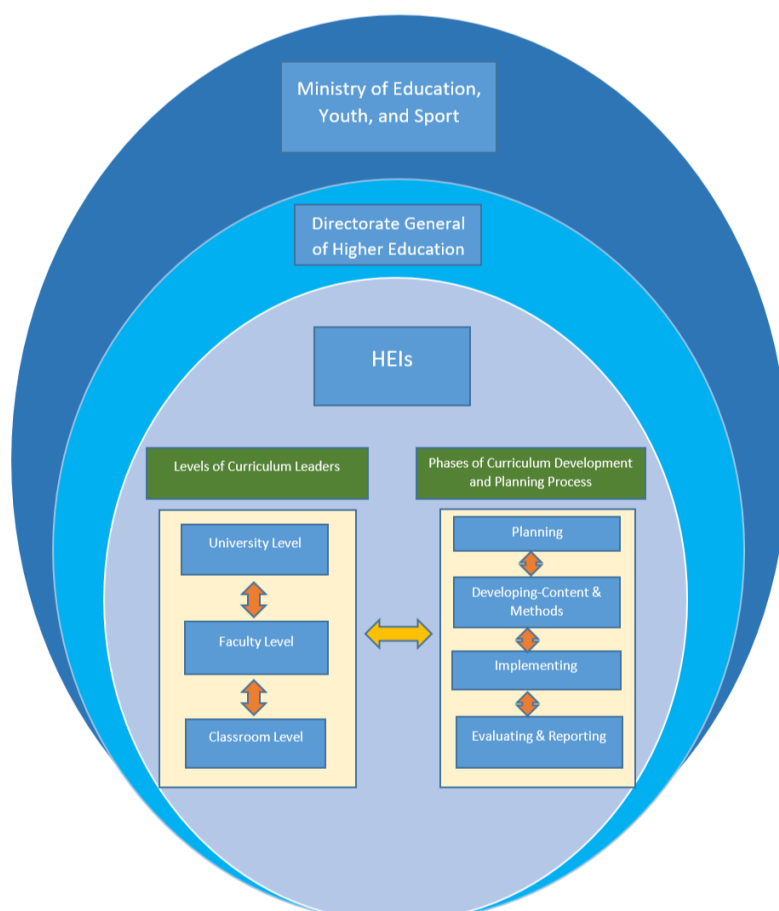
curriculum reforms across all higher education institutions (HEIs) in Cambodia. The national policy documents, such as the Policy on Higher Education Vision 2030 and the Cambodian Qualifications Frameworks, set the objectives and standards for curriculum development. These policies form the foundation upon which all curriculum reforms are based, ensuring alignment with Cambodia's national goals of improving educational quality, meeting national and international standards, and producing employable graduates for the labor market. The outer layer thus dictates the goals and expectations that drive the curriculum reform process at the institutional level.

- **Middle Layer (Supervisory and Regulatory Agency):** The middle layer consists of the Directorate General of Higher Education (DGHE) along with its 10-year strategic plan, which serves as the primary agent of MoEYS and is responsible for overseeing the implementation of national policies within HEIs. This layer functions as the intermediary between the government's strategic vision and the operational realities faced by universities. The DGHE plays a crucial role in translating national goals into actionable plans, providing guidelines, monitoring progress, and ensuring compliance with established standards. It also facilitates communication between the government and individual institutions, helping to align institutional strategies with national objectives. The link between the outer and middle layers ensures that the national policies are properly contextualized and adapted to the unique needs and capacities of different HEIs.
- **Inner Layer (Institutional Implementation):** The core component of the framework is the inner layer, which focuses on how individual HEIs, such as universities, implement curriculum reforms in alignment with the guidelines provided by the outer and middle layers. This layer involves the actual practice of DL, where curriculum leaders at different levels (university, faculty, and classroom) work collaboratively to achieve reform objectives. The university leaders, including vice-rectors and the head of quality assurance,

set strategic directions and allocate resources, while faculty leaders, such as Deans and department heads, coordinate reform efforts within their faculties. At the classroom level, teachers directly engage in the implementation of the revised curriculum, providing feedback and contributing to continuous improvement. The interaction within this layer demonstrates how power and responsibility are distributed among curriculum leaders, promoting a collaborative approach to decision-making and problem-solving.

Linkages among the three layers are interlinked through continuous communication, feedback, and coordination. The national policy layer (outer) establishes the strategic goals that guide the curriculum reform process, while the supervisory layer (middle) ensures that these goals are effectively implemented at the institutional level (inner). The interaction among the layers is dynamic, with policies and guidelines from the outer and middle layers influencing the actions and decisions at the institutional level, and feedback from the inner layer informing potential adjustments to national strategies. This alignment across the layers ensures that curriculum reforms are contextually relevant, practically feasible, and aligned with national development objectives.

The framework highlights the importance of DL in bridging gaps between these layers, emphasizing the need for clear power distribution, role clarity, and collaborative leadership at every level of the curriculum reform process. By connecting strategic vision to practical implementation, the framework offers a comprehensive approach to understanding how DL can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of curriculum reforms in Cambodia's higher education system.



**Figure 2.1:**

***Conceptual framework of the study***

Following the proposed conceptual framework, the study utilizes qualitative research methods. The discussions of the research method, research design, research sample, instruments for data collection, reliability and validity, analysis, research ethics, and trustworthiness are presented in the research methodology section.

In this study, I will explore how the curriculum leaders implement the DL in the curriculum reform process of an English undergraduate program at one provincial university in Cambodia.

The main research question and four sub-research questions are listed below:

How are the curriculum leaders distributed power in the curriculum reform process of an

English language undergraduate program in one provincial university in Cambodia? This guiding research question is further explored, based on the following sub-research questions in the context of the English language undergraduate program:

1. What are the roles of the curriculum leaders in the curriculum reform process?
2. How are their roles distributed in the curriculum reform process?
3. What are the key issues and challenges the curriculum leaders faced in the reform process?
4. How do the curriculum leaders collaboratively address these emerging issues and challenges in this process?

The present study employed a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with 15 curriculum leaders, including two vice-rectors and one head of quality assurance office from the university level, one dean from the faculty level, and 11 teaching staff from the classroom level. Moreover, the study also applies document analysis to identify the relevant documents used in complementing the data collected in the interviews for more comprehensive information.

Data collected from in-depth interviews and document analysis addresses the implementation of DL in higher education curriculum reforms by examining the curriculum leaders' roles, power distribution, key issues and challenges, and collective solutions in the curriculum reform process of the BA in English program at one provincial university in Cambodia. The data collected are collated and discussed to answer the study's research questions.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research design and methods used in this study. Along with its main and guiding questions and conceptual framework mentioned in the previous chapter, the purpose of this study guides the impetus of its design and methodological considerations. This chapter discusses research design, case study as a research strategy, research sample, research methods with instruments for data collection, reliability and validity, data analysis, research ethics, and trustworthiness matters.

### 3.2 Methodological Consideration

The study was planned to build major categories and themes based on the data collected to identify the roles of curriculum leaders, their power distribution, their issues and challenges, and collective solutions in the curriculum reform process of the BA in English program at one provincial university in Cambodia. A qualitative research approach that is informed by the framework and guided by the research questions is adopted in this study.

Qualitative research is often associated with methods like ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and case studies, each contributing uniquely to understanding human experiences ([Creswell & Poth, 2016](#)). In the context of the study, the research approach related to a single qualitative case study was employed, and the aim was to delve into the depth and significance of human experiences and their meanings to individuals. This strives to comprehend and elucidate beliefs and behaviors within their specific contexts, offering a comprehensive, dynamic understanding of the subject in question ([Draper, 2004](#)). Typically, qualitative research begins with data that inform the development of the researcher's theory

([Markham & Silverman, 2004](#)). Its main strength lies in its ability to provide rich, holistic insights with a strong capacity to unveil complexity ([Miles & Huberman, 1994](#)).

Thus, this qualitative case study was used to identify the roles, power distribution, issues and challenges, and collective solutions with diverse perspectives from different levels of curriculum leaders in the curriculum reform process at one provincial university in Cambodia.

However, significant challenges accompany this approach, particularly in instrument development, data collection, and data analysis and interpretation ([Denzin & Lincoln, 1996](#)). Regarding the study, some difficulties emerged with respect to the development of interview questions with different levels, interview skills, and analysis and interpretation of data due to the researcher's new experience.

The qualitative approach also emphasizes the importance of context and the subjective nature of human experiences, which can be effectively captured through in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), and participant observations ([Patton, 2002](#)). The interpretive nature of qualitative research means that data analysis involves identifying patterns, themes, and narratives that provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)). Therefore, the study adopted the thematic analysis of the six main steps [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#) recommended to detect the key themes.

Based on the interview transcriptions from the three different levels of curriculum leaders, key themes related to their roles, power distribution, issues and challenges, and collective solutions were identified to answer the key research questions.

### 3.3 Qualitative Research Design

The study employed qualitative research methods applying semi-structured individual interviews and document analysis to examine how leadership was distributed in the curriculum reform process of the BA in English undergraduate program at one provincial university in Cambodia. A single case study was used to illustrate the issue regarding the qualitative research methods.

As the aim is to grasp the respondents' views and perspectives, qualitative research is a suitable and effective method (Maxwell, 2012). Thus, a qualitative research design is applied in this study. This study employed a case study design, which is defined as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin, 2009, p.18). Therefore, the case study approach aims to enable the researcher to study the issues in real-world contexts and grasp participants' meanings, emic perspectives, and lived experiences (Yin, 2011). In one of the five qualitative approaches to inquiry, Creswell and Poth (2016) asserted that as a good qualitative case study presents a case with an in-depth understanding, the researcher collates various forms of qualitative data, ranging from interviews to observations, to Focus Group Discussions (FGD), and to documents or reports.

In this sense, one data source is normally insufficient to develop this in-depth understanding. Moreover, the qualitative research method also aims to understand the real world view through a constructivist lens. According to Tashakkori and Creswell (2007), the constructivist principle involves constructing realities using diverse data sources. In this context, two main data collection methods, including in-depth interviews and document analysis, were applied in this study.

To gain comprehensive insights, the researcher invited 15 participants from diverse backgrounds with three various levels, including senior leaders, mid-level leaders, and academic staff. Participants were three senior leaders: two vice-rectors and the head of quality assurance; one mid-level leader, the faculty Dean; and classroom-level leaders, teachers concerned. They were asked to share their perspectives on the strategic aspects and practices of DL in the curriculum reform process at a provincial university in Cambodia.

The constructivist paradigm emphasizes the subjective construction of knowledge, recognizing that reality is formed through social interactions and experiences ([Guba & Lincoln, 1994](#)). By engaging with participants in their natural settings, researchers can gain nuanced insights into their experiences and the contextual factors influencing those experiences ([Denzin & Lincoln, 2011](#)). This approach aligns with qualitative research principles, which aim to explore complex phenomena through in-depth, contextually rich data collection methods ([Merriam & Tisdell, 2015](#)).

More importantly, integrating multiple perspectives is crucial in constructivist research, allowing for the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants ([Charmaz, 2014](#)). This process enhances the validity of the findings and ensures that all stakeholders' voices are represented ([Bryman, 2016](#)). This study, including various levels of academic leadership, provides a comprehensive view of the strategic and practical aspects of DL in the CR.

Supporting the constructivist approach, [Vygotsky and Cole's \(1978\)](#) study of social constructivism emphasizes the importance of social interactions in knowledge development. [Vygotsky and Cole \(1978\)](#) argue that learning is inherently a social process, and understanding

the perspectives of different stakeholders can lead to more effective educational practices. With this regard, the study used semi-structured interviews to interact with key stakeholders in the curriculum reform process. Therefore, rapport with the participants was built to enhance the conversational environment and gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of the study.

### 3.4 Case Study as a Research Strategy

A case study aims to shed light on a decision or a series of decisions, encompassing the reasons behind them, their implementation, and the outcomes (Schramm, 1971). This research strategy is frequently selected because it allows for multiple sources of information and provides an "in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the viewpoint of those involved" (Gallet al., 1996, p. 545). Yin (2018) highlights that case studies are especially useful when the distinction between the phenomenon and its context is well-defined, allowing researchers to preserve the comprehensive and significant aspects of real-life events. Baxter and Jack (2008) further assert that case studies facilitate the exploration of complex phenomena within their contexts, allowing for a rich understanding of both the phenomenon and the contextual factors that influence it.

In line with the objectives of this study, employing a case study approach enabled a thorough examination of curriculum leaders' roles, power distribution, key issues and challenges, and collective solutions within the context of the curriculum reforms. Additionally, Stake (1995) notes that case studies are instrumental in uncovering the nuances of interactions among participants, which is crucial for understanding DL in educational settings. Consequently, the case study method proved to be the most suitable strategy for gathering the comprehensive data

and evidence needed to understand the various interactive processes in the implementation of DL in the curriculum reform process.

### 3.5 Research Sample

#### 3.5.1 Site selection

Cambodia is at a critical juncture in its journey toward achieving high-middle-income status by 2030 and high-income status by 2050. Among the five pillars of the Pentagonal Strategy, Pentagon 1—Human Capital Development—stands out as a cornerstone for producing a workforce equipped for a competitive job market (RGC, 2023). Higher education institutions (HEIs) play a pivotal role in this effort, with curriculum reforms serving as a vital mechanism for developing graduates with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to drive Cambodia's economic growth.

The site selected for the study was conducted at the Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Foreign Languages (FAHL) of the Svay Rieng University (SRU). The FAHL has two main disciplines: four-year programs for a Bachelor of Arts in English and a Bachelor of Arts in Translation and Interpretation.

The BA in English program in the Department of English at the FAHL, SRU, was selected for this study due to several compelling reasons. First, it is one of the fully revised programs supported under the Higher Education Improvement Project (HEIP), making it a valuable case for examining distributed leadership (DL) in the context of curriculum reform. Second, this program has been identified as a model for other programs within the university, signifying its strategic importance in institutional reform efforts. Finally, the study's feasibility and accessibility were enhanced by the willingness of relevant respondents in the English program

to participate, particularly since other HEIP-supported programs at different universities primarily focus on STEM fields, leaving the social sciences underexplored.

The decision to select FAHL as the research site is underpinned by two primary reasons. Firstly, FAHL is at the forefront of curricular reforms at SRU, driven by the Higher Education Improvement Project (HEIP). This initiative aims to elevate the quality of higher education in Cambodia by revising and enhancing existing curricula, thus ensuring that they align with the fast-changing society and the evolving demands of the job market. The involvement of HEIP underscores the commitment of FAHL to foster educational excellence and innovation. Secondly, the Bachelor of Arts in English program at FAHL serves as a model for curricular revisions across other programs at the university. This program's success and structure are being used as benchmarks to inform the development and enhancement of curricula in different faculties within SRU. The model BA program emphasizes a balanced approach, integrating theoretical knowledge with practical skills, and is tailored to meet the diverse needs of students and employers.

### **3.5.2 The selected institution**

Svay Rieng University (SRU) is a pivotal institution in Cambodia's higher education landscape and was selected as the main site for this significant study. Located in the southeast part of Cambodia, SRU is strategically positioned near the border with Vietnam, an area witnessing rapid economic development due to the emergence of Special Economic Zones (SEZs). This geographical and economic context provides a unique backdrop for the study, highlighting SRU's critical role in national development and its strategic importance within the Higher Education Improvement Project (HEIP).

SRU was chosen as one of the key institutions for the Higher Education Improvement Project (HEIP), a significant initiative aimed at enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education in Cambodia. HEIP's primary objectives include improving academic programs, fostering research excellence, and producing graduates who meet the evolving demands of the labor market. SRU's inclusion in this project reflects its commitment to educational excellence and its potential to contribute significantly to the country's socio-economic development. The HEIP initiative recognizes the importance of aligning academic programs with the needs of the labor market. In an era marked by rapid technological advancements and shifting economic paradigms, there is a pressing need for educational institutions to equip students with relevant skills and knowledge. SRU's involvement in HEIP highlights its role as a forward-thinking institution dedicated to bridging the gap between education and employers' demands.

The study conducted at SRU highlights the university's efforts to enhance the quality and relevance of education, ensuring that graduates are well-prepared to meet the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly changing world. As SRU continues to evolve and adapt, it remains a beacon of hope and progress, dedicated to shaping the future of Cambodia through better education and research.

### **3.5.3 Permission and access to the site**

Conducting research within an academic institution involves a meticulous process of preparing, verifying, and approving various documents and protocols to ensure the study adheres to ethical standards and institutional guidelines. In this context, the preparation for the study at Svay Rieng University (SRU) included several crucial steps, starting with the verification of related documents and ending with the formal approval from the university

rector. This expanded account details the comprehensive process undertaken to secure the necessary permissions and engage participants ethically and transparently.

The first step in the research process involved the preparation of a series of essential documents. These included the thesis proposal, interview protocols for three levels of curriculum leaders, a consent form, and an information sheet for participants. Additionally, a detailed schedule for data collection and a formal request letter for conducting the research at the university were prepared. Each document was vital in outlining the study's research objectives, methodologies, ethical considerations, and logistical plans.

Once the documents were prepared, they were submitted to the Head of the Research and Development Office for verification. This step was crucial to ensure that all documents complied with the university's research guidelines and ethical standards. The Head of the Research and Development Office meticulously reviewed the thesis proposal to ensure that the research questions and methodologies were clearly defined and scientifically sound.

The interview protocols, designed for three levels of curriculum leaders, were also scrutinized. These protocols outlined the questions to be asked during interviews, ensuring they were relevant, non-biased, and designed to elicit meaningful responses. The consent form and information sheet for participants were checked to ensure they provided clear and comprehensive information about the study, including its purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and the rights of the participants.

Following the verification process, the request letter and consent form were forwarded to the university rector for formal approval. This step was essential to gain the institution's official

sanction to conduct the research. The rector's approval signified that the study met all institutional requirements and ethical standards, allowing the researcher to proceed with confidence. With the formal approval in hand, the researcher began the process of contacting potential participants. The participants were primarily curriculum leaders at three different levels, whose insights were crucial for the study.

They were contacted via phone call or Telegram, a popular communication platform in the country. Each invitation included a detailed message explaining the study, its importance, and what participation would entail. Attached to the invitation were the approved consent form from the university and the consent forms for the participants. The consent forms given to the participants included thorough information about the study and required their signatures to confirm their agreement to take part.

This form also highlighted that participation was entirely voluntary and that participants had the right to decline or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

The meticulous process of preparing, verifying, and approving documents, followed by the ethical engagement of participants, underscores the commitment to conducting research that is both scientifically robust and ethically sound. The involvement of the Head of the Research and Development Office and the formal approval from the university rector ensured that the study adhered to the maximum standards of academic integrity and ethical practice. The researcher fostered a transparent and respectful relationship with the study's subjects by providing detailed information to participants and ensuring their voluntary consent. This comprehensive approach not only facilitated the successful collection of valuable data but also upheld the ethical principles that are fundamental to academic research.

### 3.5.4 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling was adopted as the main method in this study because the researcher targeted ‘to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore...select a sample from which the most can be learned’ (Merriam, 2001, p. 61). In this sense, the primary goal of purposive sampling is to sample participants strategically so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions being studied. Unlike random sampling, where each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected, purposive sampling involves deliberate choice based on who can provide the most relevant information.

This method is particularly useful in qualitative research, where the goal is to gain a deep understanding rather than generalize findings to a larger population (Patton, 2002). Patton (1990) emphasizes that the strength of purposive sampling lies in selecting "information-rich cases" for in-depth study, allowing researchers to learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. Similarly, Maxwell (1997) notes that purposive sampling is particularly useful in qualitative studies where the aim is to understand complex phenomena from the perspectives of those who have experienced them. Purposive sampling is also aligned with the principles of qualitative research articulated by Denzin and Lincoln (1996), who argue that qualitative inquiry aims to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

By selecting participants who have direct experience with the curriculum reforms, the researcher can gain deeper insights into the processes and outcomes of these changes. Creswell and Poth (2016) further support the use of purposive sampling in qualitative research, suggesting that it allows for the intentional selection of individuals who can provide detailed and contextually rich information. This approach is particularly relevant in educational

research, where understanding the experiences and perspectives of different stakeholders is crucial for evaluating the impact of policy and practice changes.

Purposive sampling is a powerful method for selecting participants who can provide the most relevant and insightful data for a study. In the context of the study at Svay Rieng University, this method enabled the researcher to strategically engage the three levels of curriculum leaders directly involved in the curriculum reforms. Focusing on these key respondents allowed the researcher to gather rich, detailed data that comprehensively understood the reforms and their impact.

### **3.5.5 Participants**

In qualitative research, the goal is often to achieve a deep understanding of complex phenomena rather than broad statistical generalization. Thus, smaller sample sizes, like the 15 participants in this study, are generally accepted when they offer information-rich data that can provide valuable insights to address the key research questions. The participants were purposively selected in this qualitative study because of their positions, authorities, working experiences, and involvement in making the curriculum reform happen. They were from three levels of the curriculum leaders of the university: 1) University Level (the Vice-Rector in charge of Academic Affairs, the Vice-Rector in charge of Quality Assurance (QA), and the Head of QA office), Faculty Level (the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanity, and Foreign Languages), and Classroom Level (11 lecturers concerned) (see Table 3.1).

Without those people concerned, curriculum reform was impossible because they played active roles in the curriculum reform process, ranging from planning to developing, to implementing, and to evaluating stages.

In general, people from the university and faculty levels are the key actors involved in the whole process of curriculum reform, but teaching staff are also the key figures in this whole process. In this sense, the chosen lecturers of English who teach under the FAHL and stakeholders involved in the curriculum reform process were selected due to their active involvement in the curriculum reform process. For example, they were one of the groups of stakeholders involved in the needs analysis of the curriculum reform process. Moreover, they were invited to join the faculty meetings to provide more input on curriculum structure, program learning outcomes, course contents, etc. They also attended the workshop on the course syllabi and the development of teaching materials. More importantly, the teaching staff concerned were the direct implementors of the revised program.

The curriculum leaders were invited to express their views on the overall aspects of how the leadership was distributed in the curriculum reform process at one provincial HEI in Cambodia. Data collected from various participant groups represents the university-wide implementation of DL in the curriculum reform process at Cambodian HEIs.

**Table 3.1:**

***Sample description of research participants***

Targeted Respondents	Svay Rieng University
Management Team (Vice-Rector in charge of Academic Affairs, Vice-Rector in charge of Quality Assurance, and Head of Quality Assurance Office)	3
Dean of Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Foreign Languages	1
Lecturers of English	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>

### **3.6 Research Methods**

This section delineates the two principal data collection methods employed in this study, including semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Each method is detailed as follows:

#### **3.6.1 Semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather in-depth qualitative data, which provides diverse perspectives across the organizational hierarchy. This method allows for flexibility in questioning, enabling the researcher to explore topics in greater detail and adapt the interview guide as needed based on the participant's responses. The semi-structured format strikes a balance between the consistency of structured interviews and the spontaneity of unstructured interviews, facilitating rich, detailed data while maintaining a degree of comparability across interviews. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of perspectives relevant to the research questions.

In the selection criteria for the in-depth individual interviews, 15 participants were purposively chosen because of their involvement in the process of curriculum reform in the institution (see Table 3.2). At the university level, the Vice-Rector in charge of Academic Affairs [VR(AA)]; the Vice-Rector in charge of Quality Assurance [VR(QA)]; and the Head of the Quality Assurance [Head (QA)] Office; the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Foreign Languages from the faculty level; and 11 selected lecturers from the classroom level were individually interviewed, regarding the four phases of the curriculum reform.

**Table 3.2:*****Criteria for choosing curriculum leaders in the curriculum reform process***

<b>Curriculum Leaders</b>	<b>The Selecting Criteria</b>
The University Level: Vice-Rector in charge of Academic Affairs [VR(AA)]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deputy head of the curriculum development council of the university</li> <li>- Coordinator of the teaching and learning component for the Higher Education Improvement Project (HEIP) at Svay Rieng University (SRU)</li> </ul>
The University Level: Vice-Rector in charge of QA [VR(QA)]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Working closely with the head of QA to deal with issues related to QA</li> <li>- Supervising, facilitating, and supporting the head of QA to work with the Deans of the faculties</li> </ul>
The University Level: Head of QA [Head (QA)] office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evaluating the program and checking how each program was designed and revised in line with the QA requirements</li> <li>- Following up with each in relation to program evaluation</li> <li>- Collecting and consolidating the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) from each faculty to produce a Self-</li> </ul>

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	Assessment Report (SAR) for the whole university
The Faculty Level: The Dean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Faculty leader in the curriculum development and planning process</li> <li>- Coordinating the program</li> <li>- Developing a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for the faculty</li> </ul>
The Classroom Level: 11 Lecturers of English concerned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Working collaboratively and under the guidance of the faculty concerned</li> <li>- Implementors who have been involved in developing the course syllabus</li> </ul>

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As shown in Table 3.2, curriculum leaders were chosen based on specific criteria at different institutional levels in the curriculum reform process.

- At the university level, the VR(AA) acts as the deputy head of the university's curriculum development council and coordinator of the teaching and learning component in the Higher Education Improvement Project (HEIP) at SRU. Meanwhile, the VR (QA) collaborates closely with the Head (QA) to address QA issues and provides support and supervision to ensure the Head (QA) can effectively work with faculty Deans. The Head (QA) is responsible for evaluating programs to ensure they meet QA requirements, following up on program evaluations, and consolidating Self-Assessment Reports (SAR) from each faculty to create a comprehensive SAR for the entire university.

- At the faculty level, the Dean plays a pivotal role as the leader in curriculum development and planning, coordinating the program, and developing the faculty's SAR.
- At the classroom level, 11 lecturers of English work collaboratively under the guidance of the faculty concerned. These lecturers are involved in implementing and developing the course syllabi, ensuring that the curriculum is effectively put into practice.

The interviews were also conducted on a one-to-one basis, based on the semi-structured interview guide containing key questions and guiding questions developed from the conceptual framework to address the research questions.

An interview guide with open-ended questions was developed to elicit favorable participant responses. Open-ended questions allow the participants to detail their experiences and express their viewpoints freely ([Creswell, 2009](#)). A comfortable and private interview location was thoughtfully chosen to help participants feel relaxed. Each interview was audio-recorded, with key themes from participants' responses also noted by hand. Each interview lasted around 60 minutes to gain individual perspectives on their roles, distribution of power, issues and challenges, and collective solutions to those emerging issues and challenges regarding DL implementation in the curriculum reform process. The interviewer piloted the interview protocol with three respondents, including one from each level, to check the questions' reliability and validity before starting the interviews. The interviews followed by four steps adopted from the structure of the interview guide of [Hennink et al. \(2020\)](#) as follows:

- **Introduction:** The interviewer introduced himself, explained the purpose of the research, informed what would be done with the data collected, outlined the outcomes

of the research, informed the interviewees about the ethical issues related to the confidentiality of the interview and anonymity of the data, requested for the permission of the audio-recording, asked the interviewees to sign for the consent form, and asked interviewees the general questions about their background information. Therefore, this is crucial for building trust and transparency with the interviewees. By informing them about what will be done with the data collected, the interviewer ensures that participants understand the research's objectives and how their contributions will be utilized.

- **Opening Questions:** The interviewer tried to build rapport with interviewees and asked questions broadly related to the key research topic. Questions at this stage are designed to ease the interviewee into the conversation. They might explore general perceptions, experiences, or opinions related to the DL in the context of the CR, helping set the context for more detailed discussions later.
- **Key Questions:** The interviewer designed the key questions to collect the core information to answer the research questions, and kept building rapport to enable the interviewees to feel free, safe, and comfortable to share their perspectives and experiences related to their roles, distribution, issues and challenges, and the ways to collectively address the issues and challenges in the curriculum reform process at the university. The relevant information to be asked related to the roles, power distribution, key issues and challenges, and the solutions to address the identified challenges collectively.
- **Closing Questions:** The closing questions aim to bring the conversation to a broader perspective, asking interviewees about their plans and visions for the future, particularly in the context of the CR. This helps to understand their long-term commitment and perspectives on the ongoing reform process. These questions encourage interviewees

to reflect on their overall experience and thoughts about the future, providing valuable insights into their expectations and aspirations for the CR.

The semi-structured interview approach, with its combination of structured and open-ended questions, is well-suited to explore the complex and multi-faceted process of curriculum reform. By preparing tailored questions for different levels within the university, the study ensures that it captures a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the reform process from various perspectives. Three sets of interview questions were prepared for the study. (See the three samples of interview questions in Tables 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5).

Concerning the conceptual framework and key research questions, the interview questions were developed and categorized into three different versions because the researcher was required to interview the curriculum leaders from the university, faculty, and classroom levels.

Therefore, various perspectives on roles, power distribution, issues and challenges, and the collective solutions to those emerging issues and challenges were identified in the curriculum reform process. Moreover, based on the interview structure recommended by [Hennink et al. \(2020\)](#), the interview questions were generated to follow the four steps: introduction, opening questions, key questions, and closing questions.

In this regard, the introduction section is developed with respect to the understanding of the background, aim, and ethical considerations of the study. Meanwhile, the opening questions are established to build rapport and hook the participants before asking the key questions related to their roles, power distribution, issues and challenges, and the collective solutions to address those matters in the reform process. Before ending the questions, the closing questions

were asked to identify their future plans and understanding of the impacts of the reform process.

**Table 3.3:**

***Sample of interview questions for the university level***

Dimensions	Examples of questions
Opening questions	Can you please briefly describe your working experience and daily work at the university? Please tell me briefly how the university's 10-year strategic plan is related to curriculum reform. Can you tell me what the goals and plans are for the curriculum reform at the university? So far, what programs has the university reformed the curriculum? Do you think why the university should conduct the curriculum reform?
Roles of the curriculum leaders in the curriculum reform process	In reforming the curriculum process, there are four stages such as planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating. What do you think your significant roles in the stages of planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating are? What have you done so far

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in the curriculum reform process at your university?

The distribution of power

How do you interact with others in the curriculum reform process? How are the responsibilities shared among those involved in the curriculum reform process? What are the university's supporting mechanisms for the curriculum reform process?

The key issues and challenges

Can you tell me what the key issues and challenges are in the curriculum reform process at your university? What are the causes of the key issues and challenges in the process?

Collective solutions

How have you overcome the key challenges in collaboration with your subordinates? Why do you need to cooperate with others to deal with those challenges? Please give me a specific example. What do you think the major supports the university should provide to the faculty and teachers to overcome the challenges are?

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### Closing questions

What do you think the key successes of the curriculum reform at your university are?

What are the university's future plans for curriculum reforms in the next 5 years?

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As indicated in Table 3.3, interview questions were developed for university leaders. These questions were formed following the research questions and conceptual framework. The primary aim of the interviews was to identify the roles of university leaders, examine the distribution of power, highlight key issues and challenges, and discuss potential collective solutions in the curriculum reform process. The interviews began with an introduction of the research aim and purposes, followed by opening questions to address the research problem. Subsequently, probing questions were used to guide the participants, while structuring questions helped steer the responses toward specific themes. The interview concluded with closing questions.

According to [Brinkmann and Kvale \(2018\)](#), using a variety of interview questions helps gather extensive and comprehensive data. This approach aligns with their recommendation to employ diverse question types to capture the multifaceted nature of the research focus. By developing a range of questions, the study aimed to elicit detailed and nuanced responses that reflect the complexity of university leaders' roles and experiences in the curriculum reform process.

This methodological approach is supported by the literature on leadership in educational settings. For instance, [Fullan \(2015\)](#) emphasizes the importance of involving educational leaders in the reform process, noting that their strategic vision and decision-making

capabilities are crucial for successful implementation. By targeting university leaders, the study aimed to gain insights into the high-level strategic and operational decisions that shape curriculum reform.

[Spillane \(2006b\)](#) introduces the concept of DL, which is particularly relevant when examining the distribution of power among university leaders. [Spillane \(2006a\)](#) also argues that leadership is not confined to individuals in formal positions of authority but is distributed across various roles and responsibilities within the organization. This perspective is essential for understanding how university leaders share power and collaborate in the curriculum reform process. Meanwhile, [Harris \(2004\)](#) supports the idea of DL, highlighting its role in fostering a collaborative culture within educational institutions. By examining how power is distributed among university leaders, the study aimed to uncover the dynamics of collaboration and shared decision-making that are critical for effective CR.

[Leithwood et al. \(2009\)](#) underscore the impact of leadership on student outcomes, suggesting that effective leadership practices at the university level are instrumental in driving curriculum reforms that enhance educational quality. The interview questions were designed to uncover the leadership practices and strategies employed by university leaders to navigate the complexities of CR.

Additionally, [Hargreaves and Fink \(2012\)](#) discuss the importance of sustainable leadership, which involves addressing long-term challenges and promoting continuous improvement. The key issues and challenges identified through the interviews provide insight into the barriers to sustainable curriculum reforms and the strategies needed to overcome them.

Meanwhile, Bryk et al. (2015) advocate for iterative and collaborative approaches to institutional improvement, involving all stakeholders in identifying and solving problems. By discussing potential collective solutions, the interviews aimed to generate actionable insights that could inform collaborative strategies for curriculum reform at the university level.

Therefore, the development of interview questions for university leaders is grounded in a robust conceptual framework supported by literature on educational leadership, distributed leadership, and collaborative problem-solving. The study draws on established research to ensure that the questions address the critical aspects of university leaders' roles and perspectives in curriculum reforms, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of their contributions and challenges.

**Table 3.4:**

***Sample of interview questions for the faculty level***

Dimensions	Examples of questions
Opening questions	Can you please briefly describe your working experience and daily work at the university? Please kindly tell me briefly how the curriculum reform related to the 10-year strategic plan of the university. Can you briefly tell me the goals and plans for the curriculum reform at your faculty? Do you think why your faculty should conduct the curriculum reform?

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Roles of the curriculum leaders in the curriculum reform process

In reforming the curriculum process, there are four stages such as planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating. What do you think what are your significant roles in the stages of planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating? What have you done so far in the curriculum reform process at your faculty?

The distribution of power

How do you interact with others in the curriculum reform process in your faculty?

How are the responsibilities shared among those involved in the curriculum reform process? What support did you receive from the university for the curriculum reform of the BA in English program? In making decisions in the curriculum reform process, to what extent can you make it? What are the supports you provided to your colleagues for the curriculum reform of the BA in English program?

The key issues and challenges

Can you tell me what are the key issues and challenges you faced in curriculum reform for the curriculum reform of BA in English

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	<p>program are? What are the main causes of the key challenges in the curriculum reform process?</p>
Collective solutions	<p>How have you collaboratively worked with your colleagues and the top management to overcome the key challenges you faced? Why do you need to cooperate with others to deal with those challenges? Please give me a specific example. What do you think the key factors to overcome the challenges are?</p>
Closing questions	<p>What do you think the key successes of the curriculum reform of BA in English program are? What are your future plans in the next 5 years for the curriculum reform at your faculty?</p>

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As presented in Table 3.4, the interview questions were crafted specifically for faculty-level participants, derived from the research questions and the core conceptual framework. The primary objective was to delve into various facets of the curriculum reform process. This included delineating faculty roles, analyzing the power dynamics among them, identifying key issues and challenges, and exploring collective solutions.

The aim was to gain comprehensive insights into the faculty's involvement and viewpoints on curriculum reforms. Fullan and Quinn (2015) highlight the importance of sustainable leadership, which involves addressing long-term challenges and fostering continuous improvement. The key issues and challenges faced by faculty, as identified through the interviews, provide insights into the obstacles to sustainable curriculum reforms and the strategies needed to overcome them. Faculty Deans play a crucial role in fostering a collaborative environment where faculty members can work together on CR. Harris (2008b) notes the concept of DL, where responsibilities are shared among faculty, enhancing collective problem-solving and innovation. With regard to resource allocation and management, Bolman and Deal (2017) discuss the importance of effective resource management in supporting new initiatives and ensuring their success.

Therefore, the development of interview questions for faculty-level participants is rooted in a solid theoretical framework supported by literature on DL, faculty engagement, and collaborative problem-solving. The study draws on established research to ensure the questions address critical aspects of faculty involvement in curriculum reforms, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of their roles and perspectives.

**Table 3.5:**

***Sample of interview questions for the classroom level***

Dimensions	Examples of questions
Opening questions	Can you please briefly describe your working experience and daily work at the university? Please tell me your reasons why you chose the career as a teacher. What are

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	the key factors influencing the curriculum reform of the BA in English program?
Roles of the curriculum leaders in the curriculum reform process	So far what have you been involved in the curriculum reform of the BA in English program? What have you contributed so far in the curriculum reform process at your faculty? What are your roles in planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating stages?
The distribution of power	How do you interact with others in the curriculum reform process for the BA in English program? What inputs did you share in the curriculum reform process of the BA in English program? To what extent, how did you make decisions in the curriculum reform process?
The key issues and challenges	Can you tell me what difficulties you encountered in the curriculum reform process? What do you think what the causes of the key issues and challenges?
Collective solutions	Did you feel support for or not support the curriculum reform of the BA in English

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	program? If yes/no, why? How have you overcome your difficulties in the curriculum reform process?
Closing questions	What do you think the key successes for the curriculum reform at your faculty are? What do you think what needs to be improved, regarding the curriculum reform at your faculty?

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As indicated in Table 3.5, the interview questions were meticulously crafted to focus on the classroom level, aligning closely with the overarching research questions and conceptual framework. This alignment ensured a comprehensive and systematic approach to exploring the curriculum reform process. The primary objective of these interviews was to delve into various facets of curriculum reforms from the classroom level's perspective. Specifically, the interviews aimed to identify the roles of classroom-level leaders, analyze the distribution of power, uncover key issues and challenges faced, and discuss potential collective solutions and strategies to address these issues and challenges.

This approach to interviewing aligns with previous studies, which emphasize the critical role of classroom-level leaders in the successful implementation of curriculum reforms. For instance, [Hattie \(2008\)](#) emphasizes the importance of teacher involvement in educational change, noting that their engagement and professional growth are critical to the success of

reform initiatives. Faculty members are typically the ones who implement changes at the grassroots level, making their input and feedback crucial for effective reforms.

[Elmore \(2000\)](#) introduces the concept of DL, which is pertinent when examining power distribution among faculty members. According to [Elmore \(2000\)](#), leadership extends beyond formal authority figures and is shared among various individuals within an organization. This perspective is vital for understanding how faculty members share responsibilities and influence the curriculum reform process.

The significance of DL is further corroborated by [Gronn \(2002\)](#), who posits that DL fosters a collaborative culture within educational settings. This collaborative culture is essential for tackling the complex challenges associated with CR. By investigating how power is distributed among faculty members, the study aimed to understand the dynamics of collaboration and shared decision-making.

Additionally, previous studies, such as those by [Bennett et al. \(2003\)](#) and [Leithwood et al. \(2008\)](#), have underscored the significance of understanding the distribution of power and leadership dynamics in educational settings. These studies suggest that DL fosters collaboration and shared responsibility, which are essential for effective CR. The interview questions in this study were designed to probe these aspects, aiming to reveal how power is distributed among classroom-level leaders and how this distribution influences the reform process.

Moreover, the focus on identifying key issues and challenges resonates with the findings of [Datnow \(2020\)](#), who argues that understanding the practical challenges faced by educators is crucial for developing sustainable and effective reforms. By discussing potential collective

solutions and strategies, the interviews aimed to contribute to the literature on problem-solving and innovation in educational contexts. This aligns with the work of [Darling-Hammond et al. \(2017\)](#), who advocate for iterative, collaborative approaches to school improvement that engage all stakeholders in the process of identifying and addressing problems.

To sum up, the design and focus of the interview questions reflect a well-established body of literature that emphasizes the importance of DL, collaborative problem-solving, and the practical experiences of educators in the curriculum reform process. By targeting these areas, the study aimed to gather in-depth insights into how CR is experienced and managed at the classroom level, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of the practical implications and dynamics involved.

### **3.6.2 Document analysis**

In addition to interviews, document analysis was utilized to supplement and triangulate the data obtained from the interviews. This method systematically reviews relevant documents, such as official reports, meeting minutes, and organizational records. Document analysis provides a stable and rich data source that can offer historical and contextual insights, helping to corroborate and enrich the interview findings. The documents were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives and their potential to provide comprehensive information pertinent to the study.

The necessary documents were chosen with a checklist based on their importance to the DL practices in the curriculum reform process. The relevant documents were analyzed, for example, the faculty's meeting reports on the curriculum reform process, the faculty's Self-Assessment Report (SAR), the existing curriculum of the BA program, the revised curriculum

of the BA program, report on the program evaluation by the external experts, etc. Document analysis triangulated the research study's data with other data collection methods to minimize bias and create credibility. In this regard, [Bowen \(2009, pp. 29-30\)](#) indicates that there are five functions of document analysis:

“1) Documents can provide data on the context within which research participants operate, 2) Information contained in documents can suggest some questions that need to be asked and situations that need to be observed as part of the research, 3) Documents provide supplementary research data, 4) Documents provide a means of tracking change and development, and 5) Documents can be analyzed as a way to verify findings or corroborate evidence from other sources.”

To ensure the quality of document analysis, the documents were analyzed through thematic analysis, focusing on the textual data to identify relevant themes pertaining to the curriculum reform process. This involves systematically examining the relevant patterns of the documents to extract key points and trends. Codes were assigned to different sections of the documents, which were then grouped into categories and themes. According to [Bowen \(2009\)](#), document analysis is particularly applicable to qualitative case studies, intensive studies producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organization, or program.

In response to research questions in this study, document analysis was employed to get more input and evidence and to complement the answers received from the respondents in the in-depth individual interviews. For instance, in the study, document analysis involves reviewing the faculty meeting minutes and workshop reports, which provide insights into the discussions and decisions made during the curriculum reform process. Shared inputs and collective

decision-making among relevant curriculum leaders took place as reported in the meeting minutes and workshop reports.

### 3.7 Reliability and Validity

The study's reliability was enhanced through multi-stage research to collect and analyze data. The principle of Insider-Researcher Positionality (see [Chammas, 2020](#)) was applied to create a novel research environment, to balance the researcher's roles in the interview process, and to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the participant ([McDermid et al., 2014](#)). Applying this principle provided the insider researcher with knowledge, insights, and experience to enhance the theoretical understanding of institutional dynamics and links to the lived experience of participants and the researcher within the institution ([Brannick & Coghlan, 2007](#)).

Building relationships and understanding between the researcher and respondents can promote familiarity, respect, and rapport while conducting the interviews ([McDermid et al., 2014](#)). Furthermore, the reliability of the study was enriched by the analysis of relevant documents ([Wach & Ward, 2013](#)). Following this suggestion, this study enhanced data reliability by analyzing the ministry guidelines on curriculum reforms in higher education, the university strategic plan, the Self-Assessment Report (SAR), the existing curriculum, the revised curriculum, and the workshop and faculty meeting reports and minutes on CR.

To enrich the validity of the study, participants from different levels and backgrounds were invited to participate in the interviews. Among 15 participants, three senior administrators from the university level have been involved in the curriculum reform process for many years. A middle or faculty-level participant was also invited for the interview because of his direct

involvement and facilitation in the curriculum reform process. 11 teachers from the classroom level were also included in the interviews because they were the direct implementers in the curriculum reform process. Another principle for validating the study, the reflexive approach was used to ethically provide the respondents the opportunity to feedback on the data collected and interpreted for meaningful contribution to the research findings (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023).

Moreover, to enhance the study's validity, the semi-structured interview was used in the Khmer language, the mother tongue of Cambodians. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) claimed that native language usage for interviews enables the researcher to recognize the social and cultural behaviors of the respondents while providing the answers to the questions. Data triangulation with syntheses, such as in-depth interview data and document analysis, enhanced the study's validity. This process helped the researcher refine the most relevant and reliable data. The researcher could classify the data patterns to answer the research questions and establish a coherent discussion and conclusion.

### 3.8 Data Analysis

The in-depth interviews and document analysis were employed in this study to explore how the three levels of curriculum leaders apply DL in the four main steps of the curriculum reform process: planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating for an English undergraduate program in Cambodian higher education.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding and enhance the robustness of the findings, an across-methods analysis was conducted. This involved triangulating the data from the semi-structured interviews and document analysis to identify and integrate the insights gained from

both methods to construct a holistic view of how DL is applied in the curriculum reform process.

### 3.8.1 Interviews

After the interviews with the selected participants, the researcher transcribed the interview data to make transcripts for analysis. Each transcript was sent back to each participant to check and confirm the correct information from their responses. To analyze data from the in-depth interviews, Thematic Analysis (TA) was employed to analyze and interpret qualitative data following six stages ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#); [Nowell et al., 2017](#)). Drawing on the TA, the study analyzes data with six steps as follows:

- **Familiarizing with data:** In the first stage, the researcher immersed himself in the interview data to thoroughly understand its content and context. This involved reading and re-reading the interview transcripts, field notes, and some relevant documents multiple times. The goal was to become deeply familiar with the data's meanings and nuances, enabling the researcher to grasp the underlying themes and patterns. This process also helped identify initial impressions and potential areas of interest that would guide subsequent stages of analysis.
- **Generating initial codes:** During the second stage, the researcher began the coding process by systematically identifying and labeling significant features of the data. This involved breaking down the data into smaller, meaningful units related to the research questions. Each unit, or "code," represented a specific aspect or concept within the data. The researcher used these codes to categorize the data, making it easier to organize and retrieve relevant information later. This stage was crucial for laying the groundwork for more in-depth analysis and theme development.

- **Searching for the themes:** In the third stage, the researcher shifted focus from individual codes to broader patterns within the data. This involved collating and combining related codes to identify potential themes. Themes are overarching concepts that capture important aspects of the data in relation to the research questions. The researcher examined how different codes connected and grouped them into coherent categories. This stage required a balance of analytical thinking and creativity to discern meaningful patterns and insights from the coded data.
- **Reviewing the themes:** The fourth stage involved thoroughly reviewing and refining the identified themes. The researcher revisited the coded extracts to ensure that they accurately represented the data set as a whole. This step was essential for validating the themes and ensuring they were supported by the data. The researcher checked for coherence and consistency, making adjustments as needed to better align the themes with the overall data. This iterative process helped in refining the themes to accurately reflect the participants' perspectives and experiences.
- **Defining and naming the themes:** In the fifth stage, the researcher further refined the themes by defining their scope and boundaries. This involved articulating the essence of each theme and how it related to the research questions. The researcher developed clear definitions and descriptive names for each theme, ensuring they conveyed the underlying meanings effectively. This stage was about giving each theme a distinct identity and ensuring they collectively told a coherent and compelling story about the data.
- **Producing the report:** Last but not least, in the final stage, the researcher synthesized the findings into a comprehensive report. This involved selecting meaningful and illustrative data extracts to support each theme. The report aimed to present a clear and insightful narrative that communicated the key findings and their implications. The

coding and analysis were facilitated using NVivo 12 software, which helped manage and organize the data efficiently. NVivo's features enabled the researcher to conduct a rigorous and systematic analysis, ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings.

To sum up, the data collected from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using Thematic Analysis. This approach involves coding the interview transcripts to identify recurring themes and patterns. The process begins with open coding, where initial categories are identified based on the participants' responses. This is followed by axial coding, where these categories are refined and connected to form broader themes. Finally, selective coding is performed to integrate these themes into a coherent narrative that addresses the research questions. For instance, during the analysis of interviews with curriculum leaders, themes such as "sharing responsibilities," "collective decision-making," and "good communication and interactions" emerged. These themes provided insights into how leadership practices were distributed across different stages of the curriculum reform process.

### **3.8.2 Document analysis**

In document analysis, each chosen document was analyzed to define the degree to which the policy, report, or program it described, addresses each of the identified 'themes' for distributed leadership and curriculum reform process as areas of analysis. Text concerning each theme was highlighted and coded using the qualitative data analysis software (NVivo 12). Following the document analytical framework (see [Wach & Ward, 2013](#)), this study analyzed the chosen documents as follows.

All documents were identified by repeatedly reading the texts to deeply understand the meaning, relevance, and context related to the research themes. Each document was assessed

and scored 3 = Good; 2 = Ok, 1 = Limited, and 0 = 'None' or 'Unclear'. 'Good' documents were based on clarity and consistency to university strategy, academic program, curricula content, or report, which were in line with the needed information and would also give enough evidence to the reader to judge that this component was being applied capably and with adequate resource allocation. An 'OK' score would show the presence of practices or policies in line with the required information but where there was inadequate detail to confidently give a score of 'good'. A score of 'limited' would present only a brief reference to the needed information with little supportive detail or contextual background on the resource allocation or prioritization level. A rating of 'unclear/none' (scoring zero) shows that there is no clear information. Any limited and unclear documents were excluded from the study. The coding of selected documents followed the above-mentioned Thematic Analysis ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#); [Nowell et al., 2017](#)). Moreover, the coding work was also processed by using NVivo 12 software.

Data captured from both interviews and document analysis was finally triangulated to answer and discuss the research questions. For example, both the interview data and document analysis highlighted the importance of "collaborative decision-making" in the planning stage of curriculum reform. Interviews with curriculum leaders emphasized how joint meetings and consensus-building were pivotal, while documents such as meeting minutes confirmed the presence of regular collaborative sessions and shared decision-making practices.

By synthesizing the findings from both methods, the study was able to provide a more nuanced and credible account of the distributed leadership practices in the curriculum reform process. This approach not only strengthened the validity of the results but also uncovered deeper insights that might have been overlooked if only a single method had been used.

### 3.9 Research Ethics

The study strictly followed the principles of research ethics. Particularly, the study maintained the identities of participants concerning anonymity and confidentiality principles. It means that detailed information about the participants was not disclosed in the report. The participants' details were labeled in terms of different levels with the VR (AA), VR (AA), and the Head (QA) for the university level; with the Dean for the faculty level; and with T1, T2, T3...Tn for the classroom level when reporting the findings. In summary, the study was conducted with a rigorous ethical review to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the participants.

This study adhered to ethical guidelines concerning human participants, particularly regarding informed consent and the protection from harm, as outlined by [Bogdan and Biklen \(1997\)](#). The researcher took several actions to ensure these ethical considerations were rigorously observed. Firstly, the ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at the Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK) was necessarily obtained (see Appendix 6), and then the formal approval for the study was also signed and approved by the Rector of SRU, with the researcher strictly adhering to the institution's research guidelines (refer to Appendix 7). Prior to the commencement of the in-depth interviews, informed consent was obtained from each participant, who was fully briefed on the study's purpose, background, scope, procedures, and the measures in place to ensure confidentiality and anonymity (see Appendix 4 for a sample of consent form). Secondly, the anonymity of participants was meticulously maintained throughout the research process. All collected data were treated with strict confidentiality. In essence, key stakeholders, including the Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs, the Vice-Rector for Quality Assurance, the Head of Quality Assurance, the Dean, and the teaching staff, were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. Furthermore, it was emphasized that their identities would remain confidential and

undisclosed, both verbally and in any publications resulting from this study. Finally, participants were also provided with the interview transcripts and were invited to review and amend them during the ongoing reflection and interpretation of the data.

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, insights from both interviews and document analysis were triangulated. For example, interviews with curriculum leaders revealed that “collaborative decision-making” was crucial in the planning phase, while document analysis of meeting records confirmed the presence of structured decision-making processes and regular feedback sessions. Another example is that PD was raised by the teachers from the classroom level to enhance their capacity for the development of syllabi and teaching materials and the enhancement of teaching methods and assessments, while through the document analysis of the meeting report, PD programs were mentioned to build the staff capacity. By cross-verifying these insights, the study provided a more nuanced and credible understanding of how DL operates in the curriculum reform process.

The integrated analysis uncovered deeper insights, such as how faculty leaders’ strategies for fostering collaboration were reflected in formal policies and strategic guidelines or how discrepancies between stated policies and actual practices emerged. For instance, while policy documents emphasized “distributed responsibilities,” interviews sometimes revealed gaps in how these responsibilities were practically enacted at the classroom level, pointing to areas where further improvement could be made.

To sum up, the across-methods analysis in this study not only strengthened the validity of the findings but also provided a richer, more holistic view of the distributed leadership practices in the curriculum reform process. By integrating data from interviews and document analysis, the research captured the complexity of leadership dynamics across different levels of the

institution, offering a comprehensive account of how DL supports CR in Cambodian higher education.

### 3.10 Trustworthy Issues of the Case Study

The qualitative evaluation research criteria generally focus on how well the researcher provides evidence that the descriptions and analysis of the study indicate the reality of the situation or individuals studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). In the qualitative part of the study, in determining its trustworthiness, the researcher adopted Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria as follows:

**(1) Credibility:** Member checking was employed, allowing participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the transcribed data and initial findings. This process validated the researcher's interpretations, ensuring they accurately reflected participants' perspectives.

**(2) Transferability:** Thick descriptions were used to detail the context and participants' experiences, enhancing the study's applicability to similar settings. By providing detailed contextual information, the research findings were made relatable to other educational settings.

**(3) Dependability:** The study incorporated a systematic and transparent coding process, documented with NVivo 12 software. An audit trail was maintained, enabling external reviewers to follow the data's journey from raw material to final themes.

**(4) Confirmability:** In preference to objectivity to show a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the respondents shape the findings of a study and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest. By keeping these biases in check, the study's findings were shaped primarily by participants' insights rather than the researcher's influence.

### 3.11 Summary

This chapter presents the methodological framework of the present study, detailing the context, research design, sample, methods, and procedures for data collection and analysis. Employing a case study strategy facilitated a comprehensive qualitative data analysis. Additionally, the chapter addresses the measures taken to ensure the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the research findings. The subsequent chapters, Four and Five, will provide an in-depth presentation and discussion of the data analysis results.



## **CHAPTER 4: ROLES AND POWER DISTRIBUTION OF CURRICULUM LEADERS IN THE CURRICULUM REFORM PROCESS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The study aims to examine how Distributed Leadership (DL) drives and supports the curriculum reform process at one provincial university in Cambodia. In terms of policy and practice, the study's practical significance is to provide a fundamental background and knowledge to create a set of DL guidelines for HEIs and programs to support all of the stages in the curriculum reform process concerning planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating.

This study also informs policymakers, practitioners, educators, and other relevant stakeholders of the roles, power distribution, issues and challenges, and collective solutions to those issues and challenges in the curriculum reform process. To serve this purpose, the data of the study were mainly gathered from the semi-structured interviews of various levels of curriculum leaders, namely university, faculty, and classroom levels, to allow the researcher to have access to diverse perspectives of the core relevant stakeholders directly involved in DL implementation in the curriculum reform process, followed by the discussion in light of the existing studies. Moreover, reports and minutes of relevant workshops and meetings were collected to supplement the information related to the study's key findings.

In the context of the study, the proposed framework comprises three layers: the outer and middle layers representing the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport and the Directorate General of Higher Education in overseeing the curriculum reform process, respectively. The inner layer, representing the core element of the framework, chiefly focuses on higher education institutions (HEIs).

The existing literature suggests that leadership in curriculum reform is associated with an effective curriculum management system. Previous scholars proposed the curriculum leaders' involvement at the university, faculty, and classroom levels to clarify the distribution and interaction of leadership in the curriculum reform process (e.g., [Fung, 2012](#); [Oliver & Hyun, 2011](#); [Xiong et al., 2020](#)). In this context, the study aims to examine the implementation of DL in the four phases of curriculum reform: planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating.

The conceptual framework demonstrated the study context and the components necessary to explore the interrelationship between DL and the curriculum reform process. It highlighted the curriculum leaders' roles, power distribution, issues and challenges, and the collective solutions they addressed across different levels of the university, faculty, and classroom in higher education curriculum reforms in Cambodia.

To sum up, the study aims to investigate the DL implementation in the curriculum reform process of an English undergraduate program at one provincial university in Cambodia, focusing on the roles, power distribution, and issues and challenges faced by curriculum leaders, as well as their collaborative approaches to addressing those issues and challenges.

This chapter is outlined with the overview and background of the curriculum reform process, the curriculum in the research context, the roles of curriculum leaders, and how the power is distributed among the curriculum leaders in reforming the curriculum of an undergraduate program in English at one provincial university in Cambodia. At different levels, roles and the distribution of power were identified based on their involvement in the curriculum reform process. The key themes related to the roles and power distribution of the curriculum leaders will be presented and discussed in this chapter.

## 4.2 Overview and Background of the Curriculum Reform Process

The curriculum reform process focuses on changing and identifying the knowledge, skills, and values learners should acquire, determining the experiences necessary to achieve desired learning outcomes, and planning, measuring, and evaluating teaching and learning activities; therefore, it is crucial to get involved from relevant stakeholders ([Pegg, 2013](#)). The demand for curriculum change arises from the fast-changing society, and many nations consider it indispensable for HEIs to prepare learners for the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century era ([Gouëdard et al., 2020](#)).

Curriculum reform resistance may appear as it requires people to step out of their comfort zones. In Cambodian higher education, curriculum reform remains a major concern for educational quality, with some HEIs reluctant to make changes due to perceived burdens. This leads to outdated curricula and poor-quality graduates ([Adam, 2009](#)). Furthermore, [ADB and ILO \(2015\)](#) noted that there is a mismatch between the skill set needed in the job market and those provided by HEIs in Cambodia.

To address these issues, the relevant stakeholders' involvement in terms of DL is vital. In this regard, DL plays a crucial role in sharing a vision, defining roles and responsibilities among faculty, administrators, and other people involved, and fostering active cooperation within the HEIs.

The curriculum reform process follows specific stages, including planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating. In the Cambodian higher education context, curriculum reform aligns with the national policies and regulations outlined in the Education Strategic Plans and the Cambodian Qualifications Framework ([MoEYS, 2005](#); [MoEYS, 2010](#); [MoEYS, 2012](#);

MoEYS, 2014; MoEYS, 2019b). The ministry aims educational institutions to equip learners with the necessary knowledge, skills, and values for the knowledge-based society and globalization era (MoEYS, 2017). The Directorate General of Higher Education has set a vision and mission to increase the number of highly qualified graduates for the labor market by aiming for Cambodian HEIs to produce 50% by 2030 (MoEYS, 2021) to prepare the human capital to be ready for Cambodia to be an upper middle-income nation by 2030.

In this context, CR at the HEIs is crucial for ensuring the quality of education. However, it faces challenges like resistance, high costs, and stakeholder satisfaction. Engaging stakeholders and following a clear curriculum reform process can improve educational quality and align programs with the needs of the changing society (Pegg, 2013).

### **4.3 Curriculum Reform Process in the Research Context**

The curriculum reform process for the BA in English program at Svay Rieng University (SRU), a provincial university in Cambodia, emerged through the demand of the current job market, the decrease in the enrolment rate, and the increase in the dropout rate of the existing program.

To enhance the existing curriculum that was not fully revised for more than ten years in service, SRU built a partnership with the oldest and most long-experienced university in Cambodia, the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), under funding support from the Higher Education Improvement Project (HEIP), one of the Cambodian government projects on the enhancement of the higher education sector in Cambodia. The core team of SRU and the Institute of Foreign Languages (IFL), RUPP was established for the sake of the BA in English program revision in response to the rapidly changing society.

In the study, following the framework proposed by [El Sawi \(1996\)](#), there are four main stages of the curriculum reform process to be conducted: Planning, Developing, Implementing, and Evaluating.

- In the planning stage, the issues leading to the need for the program's curriculum reform were identified, and the core team was established to revise the existing program. After forming the team, they started to do the needs analysis by conducting surveys with four relevant stakeholders: Alumni, Teachers, Current Students, and Employers. There was also a collection of useful documents related to the University's 10-year strategic plan concerning the university's vision and missions, the Cambodian Qualifications Framework, and Bloom's Taxonomy. The core team discussed in the meeting to produce the result report of the needs analysis.
- In the developing stage, technical meetings were conducted between the core team of the faculty and teachers concerned to consolidate the result of the needs analysis with the relevant documents to identify and agree on the Program Educational Objectives (PEOs) and the Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs). The curriculum structure and course contents were developed between the core team and the teachers involved. Then, the individual teacher of each course was required to develop his/her course syllabus with the support and guidance of the core team. To support and guide the course instructors, workshops and technical meetings were organized to get and share inputs, guide, and discuss the matters involved in the course structure, course contents, course syllabi, and teaching materials. PD workshops on essential topics, such as teaching methodology, assessments, using Information Communication Technology (ICT) tools, etc., were also provided to the teachers to build their capacity to implement the newly updated curriculum.

- In the implementing phase, teachers who implemented the curriculum were given enough freedom to adjust their teaching and assessment plan to meet the real needs of the students with guidance and support from the faculty. Based on the planned syllabi, course instructors applied their classroom teaching. However, the course syllabus is a living document that teachers can use to modify their teaching techniques, assessment methods, and teaching materials in the process of their implementation with respect to the learners' needs and the real situation, as well as the expected learning outcomes.
- In the evaluating stage, the core team conducted the evaluation for each year of the 1<sup>st</sup> batch of the fully-revised curriculum, currently batch 17 of the BA in English program. The evaluation was conducted through a survey of students and focus group discussions with the selected students and all of the course instructors concerned. The team discussed the results of the evaluation in order to identify the effectiveness and the need for changes in the revised program.

#### **4.4 Roles of the Different Levels of Curriculum Leaders in Each Stage of the Curriculum Reform Process (Planning, Developing, Implementing, and Evaluating Stages)**

This section mainly presents and discusses the data collected from the in-depth interviews with the three different levels of curriculum leaders in line with their roles in the curriculum reform process. The study results indicate the following roles based on their different levels: university, faculty, and classroom.

#### 4.4.1 Roles of university level in the curriculum reform process

Table 4.1 highlights the overview of the university level's perspectives on their roles in the curriculum reform process, including the Vice-Rector in charge of Academic Affairs [VR(AA)], the Vice-Rector in charge of Quality Assurance [VR (QA)], and the Head of the QA [Head (QA)] office who took part in the study. Based on the interviews with the aforementioned curriculum leaders, the results showed that there were two major themes of their roles: (1) Providing comments, guidance, and encouragement and (2) Giving necessary facilitation and support to the faculty.

**Table 4.1:**

##### *Roles of university level in the curriculum reform process*

Levels of the Curriculum Leaders	Roles of the University Level	Stages of Curriculum Reform Process	Key Themes
University Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commenting and guiding the faculty in the curriculum reform process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Developing</li> <li>• Evaluating</li> </ul>	Providing comments, guidance, and encouragement to the faculty
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing encouragement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitating the faculty in the curriculum reform process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing</li> </ul>	Giving necessary facilitation and support to the faculty
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing support for the faculty in the curriculum reform process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Developing</li> </ul>	

##### 4.4.1.1 Providing comments, guidance, and encouragement to the faculty

As mentioned in the interviews, the university level was involved in all stages of the curriculum reform process except the implementing stage. Concerning their roles in the planning, developing, and evaluating stages, they are responsible for commenting, guiding, and encouraging the faculty in the curriculum reform process.

In the planning stage, the VR (AA) and the VR (QA) gave recommendations and feedback on developing the faculty's action plan during the meetings on the discussion of the Annual Work Plan and Budgeting (AWPB). In separate interviews, they responded that they provided input for improving the action plan by advising the faculty to have a clear format of the action plan. For example, the VR (AA) joined the meeting on the AWPB, and he advised the Dean and the team "to have a clear timeline for each activity and who is responsible for each activity," which means that the VR (AA) provided comments for the faculty to improve their action plan in the AWPB. Meanwhile, the VR (QA) also advised the faculty "to add inputs, outputs, and outcomes columns as well as the budget plan for each activity that was not included," which refers to the comments from The VR (QA) for enhancing the faculty's action plan that missed some important components. In response to the advice received from both the VR (AA) and VR (QA) on updating the AWPB, the Dean took action by inviting the team members to a meeting to work on revising the AWPB to have a clear timeframe, responsible person(s), inputs, outputs, outcomes, and budget plan for each activity ([Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Foreign Languages, 2021](#)).

In the developing stage, guidance was provided to the faculty during the workshop on developing course syllabi and teaching materials by the VR (AA), who mentioned in the interview that he presided over the workshop on developing course syllabi and teaching materials. He reminded the faculty "to facilitate the teachers and speed up in developing the course syllabi and teaching materials to be ready for implementing the revised curriculum," meaning that the VR (AA) tried to guide by reminding the faculty and teachers to continue working on the syllabus development and finish it on time.

In the evaluating stage, the VR (QA) and the Head (QA) followed up and commented on improving the academic program, using IQA tools to achieve the set indicators. As mentioned by the VR (QA), he indicated that he had been involved in checking and providing comments on the progress of the academic program to the faculty “in order to achieve the indicators set in writing and developing the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) in the evaluating stage,” referring to the way that the VR (QA) followed up and commented the work of faculty on the progress of the achieved indicators in the process of curriculum reform. Moreover, the Head (QA) also gave comments to the faculty on their Self-Assessment Report (SAR) “to add detailed activities in the syllabi to complete the missing indicators and increase scores in their Self-Assessment Report (SAR),” which means that the Head (QA) tried to give comments on the syllabi as one of the core components of the academic program in order for improving the scores of SAR.

In response to the comments from both VR (QA) and the Head (QA), the Dean invited the team members and teachers concerned to the meeting and discussed, including the clear teaching techniques, assessment methods, and teaching materials for aligning with expected learning outcomes in the course syllabi. In doing so, it could improve the scores of the SAR in IQA for the program ([Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Foreign Languages, 2023](#)). Therefore, based on the key information above, the findings indicate that the university level provided comments and guidance in planning, developing, and evaluating phases.

Regarding another role to provide encouragement to the faculty in the planning stage of the curriculum reform process, the curriculum leaders at the university level motivated the faculty, the Dean, and teamwork to continue their work while they were facing some difficulties in dealing with data collection.

In response to an interview question related to the view about roles in the curriculum reform process, the VR (AA) answered that he encouraged and persuaded the faculty “to continue their work although they encountered some difficulties, they could inform the management team to find solutions,” meaning that the VR (AA) tried to motivate the faculty team to keep on their work in the planning stage although they faced some obstacles. Meanwhile, the VR (QA) shared his answers for one of the roles in terms of providing the encouragement to the faculty “to be focused and motivated and then find the solutions rather than discouraged by some difficulties,” which refers to the way that the VR (QA) tried to encourage the faculty to be optimistic although they encountered with some problems in the planning stage.

Thus, in accordance with these aforementioned codes, the university level also played a significant role in encouraging the faculty to continue to work on the assigned tasks in the planning stage.

The findings reveal that the university level played a key role in providing comments, guidance, and encouragement for the faculty in the curriculum reform process, which aligned with the significant information gathered in the interviews. To reinforce the importance of the university level in providing comments, guidance, and encouragement for faculty during curriculum reform, [Fullan \(2015\)](#) emphasizes that university-level guidance plays a significant role in nurturing innovation among faculty. Moreover, [Gurin et al. \(2002\)](#) assert that universities advocate for inclusivity in curriculum reforms with their encouragement to guide faculty in designing inclusive curricula that foster equitable educational environments, promoting diversity and social justice.

#### **4.4.1.2 Giving necessary facilitation and support to the faculty**

With regard to the role in facilitating the curriculum reform process during the developing stage, the university level played an important role in providing coordination to the faculty by approving the preparation of workshops and technical meetings.

In the interviews with respect to curriculum reform facilitation, the VR (AA) mentioned that he facilitated the curriculum reform process for the faculty by endorsing the requesting letter “to organize the PD workshops and meetings for staff on developing the course syllabi and teaching materials,” which refers to the way that the VR (AA) facilitated the faculty in running the PD workshops for teaching staff’s capacity building. For the VR (QA), he responded before the final approval from the university's rector. The faculty wrote a letter to request to run the workshop on the development of staff capacity, so he also endorsed the workshop preparation “to improve the teachers’ capacity on the course syllabus development and teaching materials,” which means that the VR (QA) also tried to facilitate for the faculty to build capacity for the academic staff. Therefore, one of the important roles of the university level focused on the facilitation for the faculty in the developing stage of the curriculum reform process, especially in building capacity for the teaching staff.

Drawing on the interviews, another pivotal role mentioned by the university level was to support the faculty in the planning and developing stages of the curriculum reform process.

In the planning stage, the VR (AA) raised the way how he provided support to the faculty while they were collecting data from the employers by speeding up in issuing the requesting letters “to the relevant authority to encourage and push the employers to give response to the questionnaires as soon as possible,” meaning that the VR (AA) tried to give support to the

faculty in the data collection process with relevant stakeholders, particularly with the employers. Meanwhile, the Head (QA) also mentioned some support he provided to the faculty, for example, by sharing a sample of action plan with the faculty for their request “to have the idea to make or develop their own action plan with a clear format,” which means that the Head (QA) shared an action plan model and briefly explained the way how to develop it. In the developing stage, the Head (QA) mentioned about sharing the procedural documents, especially the IQA manual and IQA tools to the faculty “to prepare for program evaluation, for example, Self-Assessment Report (SAR),” meaning that the Head (QA) aimed to provide support to the faculty in terms of some necessary documents for them to work on writing SAR for their academic programs. Therefore, supporting the faculty in the planning and developing stage was also the university level's key role in the curriculum reform process.

Based on the above-mentioned significant information received from the interviews with the university level, the key findings of the university level's roles were the facilitation and support necessary for providing to the faculty in the curriculum reform process. [Knight and Trowler \(2001\)](#) discuss how university administrators play a crucial role in providing support to ensure the availability of resources and empower the faculty to pursue curriculum reforms without the constraints of limited resources.

To sum up, in line with the above-mentioned findings related to the roles of the university level in the curriculum reform process, the results suggest that the university level played a very crucial role as the top level in the reform process, as found with two key themes in terms of (1) Providing comments, guidance, and encouragement; and (2) Giving necessary facilitation and support to the faculty. In this sense, it was very helpful to be guided, encouraged, facilitated, and supported by the higher level for the lower level to be confident

in completing the assigned tasks, particularly in the curriculum reform process of the BA in English program at the institution.

In the previous literature, the university level's roles can be found as one of the components to trigger the curriculum reform process with clear responsibilities to support and guide the lower level to success (Fung, 2012; Oliver & Hyun, 2011; Wan, 2014). In this regard, the results suggest that without the encouragement, guidance, facilitation, and support from the top management to the faculty as their followers, it is impossible to get something done and successful in the institutions.

Furthermore, another prior study conducted by Kezar and Lester (2020) emphasizes the vital role of university leadership in driving curriculum reform with top-down encouragement, guidance, and support, leading to improved faculty-led initiatives that originate from the ground up rather than being imposed by top management, are frequently more sustainable because they reflect the specific needs of faculty and foster their greater ownership.

#### **4.4.2 Roles of faculty level in the curriculum reform process**

As indicated in the findings related to the roles of the faculty level, especially the Dean, in the curriculum reform process (see Table 4.2), the results indicate that there were three main roles of the faculty level to play: (1) The key figure in facilitating and supporting the whole curriculum reform process, (2) The key player in providing encouragement and guidance to the teachers, and (3) The middle man in communicating with the top and lower levels in order for the smooth process of the reform. Relating to the roles of the faculty level, the Dean was involved in all the stages, including planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating.

**Table 4.2:*****Roles of faculty level in the curriculum reform process***

<b>Level of the Curriculum Leaders</b>	<b>Roles of the Faculty Level</b>	<b>Stages of Curriculum Reform Process</b>	<b>Key Themes</b>
<b>Faculty Level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitating the overall curriculum reform process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Developing</li> <li>• Implementing</li> <li>• Evaluating</li> </ul>	Facilitating and supporting the whole process of curriculum reform
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing support in the curriculum reform process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing encouragement and guidance</li> <li>• Communicating with the top management and the teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing</li> <li>• Implementing</li> <li>• Developing</li> </ul>	Providing encouragement and guidance to the teachers  Communicating with both university and faculty levels in the curriculum reform process

**4.4.2.1 Facilitating and supporting the whole curriculum reform process**

As the key player in the process, the Dean facilitated the whole curriculum reform process from the first to the final stage. In answering the interview questions regarding the roles in the curriculum reform process, the Dean emphasized that his roles were “to be leader, manager, and facilitator in the four stages with a clear plan and actions,” which means that he was one of the most important figures in the curriculum reform process by means of leading, managing and facilitating in all stages of the curriculum reform.

Moreover, the finding also indicates that the faculty level played a crucial role in intervening to support the teachers. For example, in the faculty group telegram, some teachers raised questions regarding how to develop the course syllabus with a clear and agreed format during the developing stage.

In this regard, the faculty could not comprehensively explain them in the group telegram, so the faculty needed to provide support and intervention for the teachers “by organizing necessary technical meetings to guide and help them be on the same page and the right track,” which means that the Dean tried to take intervention by giving support and guiding the teachers to develop the course syllabi and to be ready for implementing the revised curriculum.

As described in the faculty’s meeting minutes on the updated course syllabus format ([Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Foreign Languages, 2023](#)), the Dean and his core team members presented and explained to the teachers in detail the updates in terms of adding new columns with clear teaching techniques and assessment methods into the course syllabi. Therefore, it can be seen that key roles of the faculty in facilitating and supporting the curriculum reform process were identified, as mentioned by the Dean in the interview.

#### **4.4.2.2 Providing encouragement and guidance to the teachers**

In the interview with the Dean, he pointed out that he was the key player in encouraging and guiding the teachers in the developing stage. For example, in the meetings and workshops with the teachers, the Dean normally provided encouragement “to teachers to be actively involved in the faculty’s activities such as developing the course syllabus, sharing the good teaching resources and experiences to others, etc. by giving more classes to teach and more opportunities in PD programs.” It means that the Dean used these kinds of rewards for teachers

to motivate them to get involved in the faculty's activities. The Dean also provided guidance for some teachers who needed "the support on developing the course syllabus," which he guided the teachers to follow with a clear format.

In the implementing stages, the Dean was also seen with an essential role in providing encouragement and guidance to the teachers in technical meetings "in sharing the prepared course syllabi with their students and applying it with a clear plan and flexibility," meaning that the Dean tried to encourage and guide the course instructors to be ready and flexible in applying the curriculum with regard to students' needs and expected learning outcomes.

In this regard, the result of the finding demonstrates the vital role of the faculty level in encouraging and guiding the teachers to improve their involvement in the developing and implementing stages.

#### **4.4.2.3 Communicating with both university and classroom levels**

Through the interview, the Dean also mentioned that he had a crucial and central role as a communicator and negotiator in interacting with the management team at the higher level and the teachers at the lower level in the developing stage. For instance, in case the teachers need to build their capacity to develop the course syllabi and teaching materials, the Dean took action by requesting the top management to run PD workshops and technical meetings with financial support. In doing so, he worked on "requesting the top management team to approve the PD workshops or technical meetings to train and guide teachers," meaning that the Dean played a key role in communicating and negotiating with the top management for running the workshops or meetings for PD.

Moreover, he also added that after the approval of the workshops, he and the team needed “to disseminate and invite all relevant participants to join, especially the teachers,” which means that the Dean and his team needed to facilitate the participation of the people involved.

Therefore, in the developing stage, the finding indicates that the Dean at the faculty level was the middle figure and played a very important role in dealing with the needs of the relevant stakeholders, particularly the teachers as the key implementers of the curriculum.

Based on the findings related to the roles of the faculty level, it was clearly suggested that faculty level’s roles were vital to facilitate and support the whole process of curriculum reform, to provide encouragement to the teachers, and to communicate with either top management and teachers for the smooth process of the reform.

In accordance with the prior study conducted by [Xiong et al. \(2020\)](#), the result consistently showed the important role of the faculty level to be central between the university and classroom levels to facilitate the whole process of the curriculum reform. Meanwhile, [Fullan and Quinn \(2015\)](#) prove that the faculty level is essential in facilitating the curriculum reform process by fostering a culture of continuous improvement and professional learning within the institution. Furthermore, [Kennedy \(2016\)](#) emphasizes that faculty support is crucial in providing the necessary professional development for teachers, enabling teachers to adapt to new curricular demands and pedagogical strategies, thereby ensuring the successful implementation of curriculum reforms.

#### 4.4.3 Roles of classroom level in the curriculum reform process

As mentioned in the findings related to the roles of the classroom level mainly in the developing and implementing stages of the curriculum reform process (see Table 4.3), the results show that the classroom level was the most important implementer of the curriculum reform process in order to achieve the learning outcomes of the learners. The results indicated two main themes regarding their roles in the curriculum reform process such as (1) Development of the course contents and course syllabi and (2) Teaching in accordance with the plan in the course syllabi.

**Table 4.3:**

*Roles of classroom level in the curriculum reform process*

Level of the Curriculum Leaders	Roles of the Classroom Level	Stages of Curriculum Reform Process	Key Themes
Classroom Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attending the PD workshops organized by the faculty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing the course syllabi</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing course contents and course syllabi</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing the curriculum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directly implementing the curriculum</li> </ul>

##### 4.4.3.1 Developing course contents and course syllabi

Regarding the role in line with the PD programs of the faculty during the developing stage, teachers were invited to participate in the PD workshops and technical meetings in order to build capacity in developing the course contents and course syllabi, organized and facilitated by the faculty. Based on the interviews with teachers concerned, the results show that similar

responses in relation to the PD were provided by the faculty under the support from the university to upskill the academic staff, especially on course content and course syllabus development:

**T1:** "...with clear Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) to align with Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) set in the revised curriculum."

**T2:** "...how to develop the syllabus and to correctly choose the action verbs from Bloom's Taxonomy for learning outcomes."

**T3:** "...inviting me to attend the workshops to learn new teaching techniques and relevant contents in the syllabus development process."

**T7:** "...inviting to join the technical meeting to explain and guide me and other teachers the new format of the course syllabus."

After attending the workshops related to the development of course contents and course syllabi, individual course instructor was required to develop his/hers before the faculty checked and provided feedback for improvement:

**T4:** "...with a clear plan in initiating to develop my course contents and course syllabus for the updated curriculum."

**T8:** "...After the workshop on course syllabi, I had some clues to start developing my course syllabus."

#### **4.4.3.2 Teaching based on the planned course syllabi**

As the direct implementor of the curriculum during the implementing stage, the assigned course instructor for each course was required to share his/her course syllabus with the students in his/her classroom; therefore, they knew what would cover and the learning

outcomes for the course of the study were. He/she needed to teach based the plan in the course syllabus, but it can be flexible in accordance with the real needs of the learners:

**T5:** "...to teach the course in line with the course syllabus developed before the semester started."

**T9:** "...to show the course syllabus to my students at the first session of the semester to inform them what will be covered in the whole course."

Ideally, teacher involvement in terms of course syllabus development and direct implementation of the curriculum. The interviews with teachers involved showed that they were also indispensable people besides the university and faculty levels who played very important roles in the curriculum reform process, compared to the prior literature by some previous researchers. For example, [Alsubaie \(2016\)](#) asserted that teachers are the most essential figures in implementing the curriculum, and they must be well-trained before contributing to the operation of the curriculum. [Carl \(2009\)](#) pointed out that teachers need to be directly involved in developing the course syllabi to implement in the set curriculum. In addition, according to [Darling-Hammond \(2012\)](#), effective curriculum reform relies heavily on the active participation of teachers, who bring practical classroom experience and insights into the process. In this regard, teachers play a very crucial role in the curriculum reform process, as consistently found in the findings of the current and previous studies.

Through the presentation and discussion of the roles of the three levels in the curriculum reform process, it can be seen that the three levels of the curriculum leaders indicated their vital roles in terms of showcasing their indispensability as the catalysts for the continuity of the curriculum reform process.

As found in the prior studies conducted by previous researchers, DL was applied to ensure the effectiveness of the curriculum reform process. Some scholars emphasized the value of individuals in their efforts to contribute to the leadership practice (e.g., [Harris & Spillane, 2008](#); [Leithwood et al., 2009](#)), regardless of their formal or informal roles and responsibilities at their workplace to enable people to have a place in leadership with their expertise within the institution with regard to distributed perspectives.

Therefore, understanding the roles of the individuals, specifically in the curriculum reform process, allows the researcher to build a foundation for recognizing the distribution of powers among the three curriculum leaders at the university, the faculty, and the classroom levels. Additionally, the roles of different curriculum leaders' levels informed the researcher in figuring out the power distribution of the relevant curriculum leaders with DL practice in the context of the curriculum reform process.

In this sense, the roles of curriculum leaders in the curriculum reform process were deemed undeniably as the basic background of the study for identifying the distribution of power in terms of responsibility sharing, collective decision-making, and good communication and interactions among the three levels of curriculum leaders which were found in the findings and would be presented and discussed in the next section of this chapter.

#### **4.5 The Power Distribution of the Different Levels of Curriculum Leaders in Each Stage of the Curriculum Reform Process (Planning, Developing, Implementing, and Evaluating Stages)**

After spotting the major roles of the curriculum leaders in the curriculum reform process, the researcher could use those key roles to identify the power of leadership at either level that

could be distributed in the reform process. In this context, the distribution of power in the curriculum reform process is also the key component to drive and support the smooth process of the reform. The following description of the key themes related to the power distribution of the three levels of the curriculum leaders in the curriculum reform process indicated (1) Sharing responsibilities to empower or be empowered at different levels, (2) Having collective decision-making, and (3) Having good communication and interactions among various levels.

Drawing on these key findings, the significance of the DL implementation appeared to drive and support the continuity and smoothness of the reform process of the BA in English program at the university. However, the key findings or themes seemed not to emerge at all curriculum leaders' levels and all stages of the curriculum reform process since the results indicated certain levels and stages of the process, respectively.

#### 4.5.1 The power distribution of the university level

This section demonstrates the power distribution at the university level with the findings of sharing responsibilities by empowering the faculty level and making decisions collectively (see Table 4.4).

**Table 4.4:**

*The power distribution of the university level in the curriculum reform process*

Levels of the Curriculum Leaders	Power Distribution of the Curriculum Leaders	Stages of Curriculum Reform Process	Excerpts
University Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sharing responsibility with the subordinates by empowering them to make decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planning</li> <li>Developing</li> <li>Implementing</li> <li>Evaluating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>VR (AA):</b> "...to develop their action plan for the curriculum reform process with respect to</li> </ul>

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- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  | the given format.”   |
|  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>VR (QA):</b> “...to manage and facilitate for the whole process of the curriculum reform from the planning to developing, to implementing, and to evaluating stages.”</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having collective decision-making</li> </ul>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>VR (AA):</b> “...to discuss before reaching the agreement with a clear and feasible plan.”</li> </ul>  |
|  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>VR (QA):</b> “...with respect to the agreement between the management team and the faculty for the action plan of the curriculum reform process in the meeting.”</li> </ul>      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having good communication and interaction with the faculty</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>VR (AA):</b> “...the usefulness in organizing the workshops for the teachers who need more guidance and support.”</li> </ul>   |
|  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>VR (QA):</b> “...through the clarification and justification from the faculty about the real and urgent needs for building the staff capacity.”</li> </ul>                       |
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#### **4.5.1.1 The power distribution of the university level in sharing responsibilities**

Through the findings related to the power distribution at the university level, the VR (AA) and the VR (QA) mentioned about the distribution of power by sharing responsibilities with the faculty level to empower the Dean in all stages of the curriculum reform process.

For example, in the planning stage, the top management gave enough freedom for the faculty to develop their action plan to implement the curriculum reform process. In the developing stage, the management team empowered the Dean to lead the faculty team members in developing the syllabus. In the implementation stage, they also empowered the faculty to oversee the curriculum implementation and ensure the process went smoothly. Finally, in the evaluating stage, they provided enough freedom for the faculty level to manage the evaluation of the curriculum and to make further changes if necessary.

Therefore, as mentioned by the VR (AA) in the interview, he stated that the management team provided the power for the faculty “to develop their action plan for the curriculum reform process with respect to the given format,” meaning that the VR (AA) tried to emphasize that empowerment for the faculty was taken into account, especially the initiative of their own action plan. Meanwhile, based on the interview with the VR (QA), he also responded that the faculty was given the power “to manage and facilitate for the whole process of the curriculum reform from the planning to developing, to implementing, and to evaluating stages,” which means that the VR (QA) aimed to stress that faculty had enough freedom for curriculum reform process of their own programs.

#### **4.5.1.2 The power distribution of the university level in collective decision-making**

In the finding of the power distribution in terms of collective decision-making in the perspectives of the university level in the planning stage, the VR (AA) and the VR (QA)

indicated the distribution of power by making decisions collectively to agree the faculty's action plan in the meeting before the approval by the rector of the university for the implementation.

In the interview, the VR (AA) mentioned that the action plan of the AWPB was agreed in the meeting between the management team and faculty who initiated the plan and put it on the table "to discuss before reaching the agreement with a clear and feasible plan," meaning that although the action plan was initiated by the faculty, it was important to take it for discussion with the management team to be agreed from relevant curriculum leader before implementation.

With respect to the response from the VR (QA), he mentioned that the responsibilities were shared among different levels based on their authority. However, some activities needed to be discussed with different levels before reaching an agreement. For instance, he raised the example of agreeing on the action plan of the AWPB of the faculty before starting the implementation "with respect to the agreement between the management team and the faculty for the action plan of the curriculum reform process in the meeting," meaning that agreement of the plan was needed to be taken place before starting implementation.

In terms of good communication and interactions with the faculty during the developing stage, the university level welcomed the request from the faculty to run the PD workshops for the academic staff in building their capacity with the clear explanation and justification from the faculty with the real needs to support their teaching staff. For example, the VR (AA) stated in the interview that he was explained by the faculty "the usefulness in organizing the workshops for the teachers who need more guidance and support." Moreover, the VR (QA) mentioned

that he clearly understood and agreed with the request to run the PD workshops for the teaching staff “through the clarification and justification from the faculty about the real and urgent needs for building the staff capacity.” This means that a clear explanation from the faculty to the management team was required before the PD workshops could be organized.

#### 4.5.2 The power distribution of the faculty level

Table 4.5 illustrates the power distribution at the faculty level in relation to the findings of sharing responsibilities with being empowered and empowering authority, making decisions collectively, and communicating and interacting with both university and classroom levels in the curriculum reform process.

**Table 4.5:**

*The power distribution of the faculty level in the curriculum reform process*

Level of the Curriculum Leaders	Power Distribution of the Curriculum Leaders	Stages of Curriculum Reform Process	Excerpts
Faculty Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sharing responsibility with being empowered by the higher level and providing power to the subordinates to make decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Dean:</b> “...to prepare for the meeting with the management team before implementation.”</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Dean:</b> “...developing the syllabi of the teaching courses and modifying their teaching techniques and assessment based on the real needs of learners.”</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Dean:</b> “...the team and I</li> </ul>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having collective decision-making</li> </ul>		<p>showed and presented our action plan to the management team to get input and reach the agreement before the implementation”</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dean:</b> “...to share inputs and discuss before collectively agreeing on PEOs, PLOs, and curriculum structure.”</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having good communication and interactions with upper and lower levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dean:</b> “...to make request in running the workshop needed for supporting and enhancing staff capacity.”</li> </ul>

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#### 4.5.2.1 The power distribution of the faculty level in sharing responsibilities

As revealed in the interview with the Dean at the faculty level, he stated that in the planning stage, the faculty was empowered by the top management “to take the initiative to develop the action plan for the curriculum reform process of the faculty to prepare for the meeting with the management team before implementation,” meaning that the faculty developed their own action plan to discuss with the management team.

In the developing stage, the faculty empowered the teachers to develop their course syllabi with respect to the given format. Moreover, they also provided the teachers freedom to adjust the teaching methods and assessments in response to the students’ needs in the implementing stage. For example, based on the interview with the Dean, he mentioned that teachers had a

sense of ownership in terms of “developing the syllabi of the teaching courses and modifying their teaching techniques and assessments based on the real needs of learners,” meaning that teachers were provided enough power by the faculty in developing their own course syllabi and changing their teaching and assessment methods clearly aligned with the learning outcomes.

#### **4.5.2.2 The power distribution of the faculty level in collective decision-making**

The key finding of having collective decision-making between faculty and the top management to agree on the faculty’s action plan of curriculum revision before implementation during the planning stage was raised by the Dean in the interview. He stated that “the team and I showed and presented our action plan to the management team to get input and reach the agreement before the implementation,” meaning that the Dean answered the question related to the power distribution that was discussed with the management team was needed to be agreed on the action plan of the curriculum reform process before starting the activities.

In the developing stage, another finding of collective decision-making between the faculty and the teachers appeared to identify the PEOs (Program Educational Objectives), Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs), and curriculum structure during the meetings and workshops before reaching the agreement.

In this regard, the Dean of the faculty stated that the faculty needed to have meetings with relevant teachers “to share inputs and discuss before collectively agreeing on PEOs, PLOs, and curriculum structure,” meaning that the collective decision-making was applied with the people involved, particularly teachers in the developing stage. With respect to the shared

inputs and agreement between the faculty and all the teachers concerned, the Dean invited them to join the meeting and showed the drafts of PEOs, PLOs, and the revised curriculum structure to discuss and get comments and feedback from all people in the meeting before they all agreed to those proposed agendas ([Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Foreign Languages, 2022c](#)).

#### **4.5.2.3 The power distribution of the faculty level in good communication and interactions**

Regarding the good communication and interactions among different levels of the curriculum leaders as another key finding of the study, it was shown that in the developing stage, the Dean mentioned that before running the PD workshops for faculty members, it was essential for the faculty to communicate and negotiate with the top management to get approval for the necessity of building the staff capacity, requested by the teachers. For example, as stated by the Dean in the interview, the teachers had requested the faculty “to get more PD on course syllabus development during the faculty meeting and through the faculty group telegram.” Therefore, the Dean needed to take action to make the PD support happen. He mentioned that he had direct communication and interactions with top management by having a clear concept note with all necessary documents “to make request in running the workshop needed for supporting and enhancing capacity for staff.” It means that it was necessary to communicate and interact with the teachers to identify their needs and with top management for getting their support.

In this context, the Dean at the faculty level is undeniably the key middle figure to have good communication and interactions with both university and classroom levels in the developing stage of the curriculum reform process.

### 4.5.3 The power distribution of the classroom level

The above-mentioned power distribution found at both university and faculty levels indicated how higher levels distributed their power in the curriculum reform process at the institution. This section describes the findings of sharing responsibilities to be empowered, collective decision-making, and good communication and interactions with the faculty level (see Table 4.6).

**Table 4.6:**

*The power distribution of the classroom level in the curriculum reform process*

Levels of the Curriculum Leaders	Power Distribution of the Curriculum Leaders	Stages of Curriculum Reform Process	Excerpts
Classroom Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sharing responsibility by being empowered with a sense of ownership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>T5:</b> "...to be happy and confident to develop my own course syllabus in the new revised program."</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>P7:</b> "...to be told by the faculty to adjust and revise the course syllabus to meet the needs of the learners."</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Having collective decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>T3:</b> "...to present my draft of course contents and syllabus to the faculty and the team"</li> </ul>

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for discussing  
and getting  
feedback  
before  
reaching  
agreement to  
finalize it.”

- Implementing • **T6:** “...to  
revise my  
syllabus  
during the  
implementing  
stage, I  
needed to  
discuss with  
the faculty for  
the change.”

- Having good  
communication  
and interaction  
with the faculty
  - Developing
  - **T9:** “...due to  
the difficulty  
in developing  
the syllabi, I  
and other  
teachers  
requested  
support from  
the faculty  
during the  
meeting.”
- 

#### 4.5.3.1 The power distribution of the classroom level in sharing responsibilities

The power distribution at the classroom level that was involved teachers in distributing the power to the higher level. For example, in the developing stage, teachers were empowered and had a sense of ownership regarding the responsibility to develop the individual syllabi of their teaching courses.

Based on the PD workshop’s report on curriculum revision ([Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Foreign Languages, 2022a](#)), the Dean emphasized that all the course instructors in charge of the teaching courses of the revised curriculum were empowered and responsible for the

individual course of teaching after learning and receiving guidance through the workshops on course syllabus and teaching material development. Moreover, through the interviews with teachers, they mentioned that after the workshops, they felt more confident and had the sense of ownership to be empowered to make their syllabi:

**T5:** "...to be happy and confident to develop my own course syllabus in the newly revised program."

**T7:** "...to enjoy and be well-prepared to develop my own syllabus."

**T10:** "...to be well-organized for my teaching course with the syllabus preparation."

**P11:** "...to be confident with clear teaching plan in the course syllabus."

In the implementing stage, another finding of sharing responsibility based on individual authority was the freedom for teachers to adjust their teaching plan set in the syllabus in accordance with the real needs of the learners and the expected learning outcomes as raised by some teachers in their interviews:

**P7:** "...to be told by the faculty to adjust and revise the course syllabus to meet the needs of the learners."

**T10:** "...as the syllabus is a living document, it is adjustable and changeable with respect to the expected learning outcomes."

#### **4.5.3.2 The power distribution of the classroom level in collective decision-making**

For the key finding in relation to the collective decision-making in the developing stage of the curriculum reform process, the result shows that some respondents from the classroom level informed the researcher about the agreed course contents and syllabi needed to be discussed

by the relevant teachers and faculty in the technical meetings and workshops before the implementation:

**T3:** "...to present my draft of course contents and syllabus to the faculty and the team for discussing and getting feedback before reaching an agreement to finalize it."

**T4:** "...to discuss the draft of my syllabus with the faculty before I finalized it."

In consistency with replies from the teachers in terms of collective decision-making on the course syllabus, the workshop's report on the course syllabus and teaching material development ([Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Foreign Languages, 2022b](#)) indicated that a teacher of teaching methodology course presented his draft of the course syllabus to the faculty and other teachers. Then, he received feedback and comments to improve the action verbs of Bloom's Taxonomy for his course learning outcomes and also to make some changes to his teaching techniques and assessment methods to be clearly aligned with the learning outcomes.

Although teachers could revise their syllabi by themselves during the implementing phase, they needed to inform the faculty about their change and be agreed between the teachers and the faculty. Therefore, the collaboration occurred across levels of the faculty and the teachers in making decisions for the change. Through the interviews with the teachers, they mentioned that:

**T6:** "...to revise my syllabus during the implementing stage, I needed to discuss with the faculty for the change."

**P8:** "...to make some changes to my syllabus, I informed the faculty and discussed with them to make the change."

#### 4.5.3.3 The power distribution of the classroom level in good communication and interactions

In the developing stage, regarding another key finding or theme related to good communication and interactions, teachers could receive PD support to build their capacity by requesting the faculty's support during the faculty meetings or group telegram of the faculty. For example, while teachers were struggling to develop the course syllabi, they directly requested support from the faculty to provide them with PD workshops or technical meetings so that they could develop an understanding of the syllabi with a clear format. In the interviews with teachers, they stated that:

**T9:** "...due to the difficulty in developing the syllabi, I and other teachers requested support from the faculty during the meeting."

**T11:** "...it was helpful to get support from the faculty to run the PD workshops for us as the teachers to be on the same page in developing the syllabi."

Therefore, regarding the interviews with relevant curriculum leaders of the power distribution in the curriculum reform process, the key themes or findings were found in responding to the implementation of DL in higher education curriculum reform, reflecting in the practice to be rather predictable in comparison with prior study of the leadership practice emphasized by [Spillane \(2006a\)](#) on the interactions of leaders, followers and their situation with the aspects, including tools, routines, and structures. For example, the DL implementation in the key finding emerged with the interactions of the curriculum leaders at various levels and their situation regarding the aspects in terms of the course syllabi, the follow-up and guidance of the faculty on the progress of teachers in developing the course syllabi, and the PD workshops or technical meetings provided for the teachers on course syllabus development, representing the tools, routines, and structure, respectively.

Furthermore, the essence of shared decision-making, collaboration, and empowering all stakeholders at the workplace also supported the existing literature raised by some scholars (e.g., [Gronn, 2008](#); [Harris, 2008a](#)). However, the study's key findings were emphasized with the distribution of power and the need for follow-up by the higher levels.

Therefore, it can be seen that the power distribution in this context is about the connection of shared responsibilities with empowerment, collective decision-making, and good communication and interactions among different levels in the institution. For example, as mentioned in the above sections related to the power distribution across different levels, the study's key findings indicate that sharing the responsibilities with teacher empowerment to develop the course syllabus emerged. However, getting comments and feedback from the faculty and the core team for improvement was necessary before finalizing it.

Moreover, before the individual teacher could develop his/her own syllabus, he/she needed the PD workshops by requesting the faculty level. Therefore, the Dean was required to communicate with the top management to get approval to run the necessary workshops or technical meetings to build the capacity of the academic staff. In this context, the linkage of shared responsibilities with empowerment, collective decision-making, and good communication and interactions occurred in the curriculum reform process.

Without the key power distribution elements mentioned in the findings, the curriculum reform process would not have worked properly. In this sense, the curriculum leaders' power distribution focuses on shared responsibilities with empowerment, collective decision-making, and good communication and interactions at different levels. However, follow-up from the higher levels was needed for the effectiveness of the curriculum reform process.

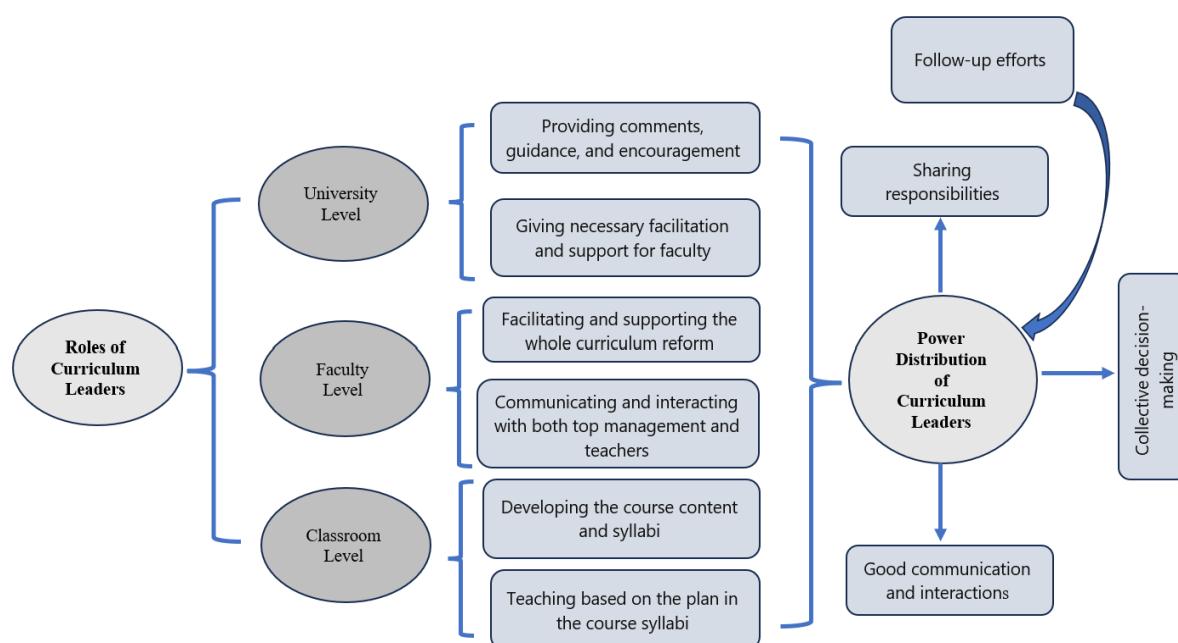
To sum up, based on the key roles and the power distribution indicated in the findings, the following key findings or themes were included: Concerning the roles of the three levels, the university level's roles in the reform process were: (1) providing comments, guidance, and encouragement and (2) Giving necessary facilitation and support for the faculty. The faculty level's roles were found to be as follows: (1) Facilitating and supporting the whole curriculum reform process and (2) Communicating and interacting with both the top management and the teachers. Regarding the final level, the classroom level's roles were: (1) Developing the course contents and course syllabi and (2) Teaching based on the plan in the course syllabi. In terms of the power distribution of the three levels, there were three key findings indicating (1) Sharing responsibilities to empower or be empowered at different levels, (2) Having collective decision-making, and (3) Having good communication and interactions. In addition to the power distribution of their roles, follow-up efforts from the higher levels were found necessary for the effective implementation of the reform process.

With respect to the power distribution of the curriculum leaders in the curriculum reform process, Distributed leadership (DL) involves moving away from strictly hierarchical management structures and towards shared decision-making across organizational levels.

In this sense, DL is applied given the assumptions of lower-level staff capacity and hierarchical, top-down perspective. The successful application of DL depends on whether lower-level staff have the skills and competencies required to participate effectively in shared decision-making; therefore, [Kezar and Lester \(2020\)](#) pointed out that the reform process is most effective when faculty members are empowered as active partners in the process. Moreover, [Harris \(2008a\)](#) asserts that reforms are more widely accepted and effectively implemented when institutions promote a DL model, where responsibility is shared between top management and academic staff, as faculty buy-in strengthens through direct involvement in decision-making.

According to [Harris and DeFlaminis \(2016\)](#), mentorship and targeted training are key components of DL implementation, in which lower-level staff are paired with experienced colleagues, enabling them to gain the necessary skills through practical guidance and active learning. Regarding good communication and collective goals, [Spillane \(2006b\)](#) emphasizes that DL requires good communication and shared goals, which shows that consistent messaging and inclusive goal-setting can shift the mindset from hierarchical power to collective responsibility. Thus, DL emphasizes empowering staff at all levels, even within hierarchical organizations, by building skills, fostering good communication, and promoting collective decision-making.

With respect to the current findings, the researcher identifies the framework of the key findings in relation to the roles and power distribution of the three different curriculum leaders in the curriculum reform process, as shown in Figure 4.1.



*Figure 4.1:*

*Roles and power distribution of curriculum leaders in the curriculum reform process*

In this study, issues and challenges emerged through the roles and power distribution of the curriculum leaders at various levels in the curriculum reform process. As they faced those issues and challenges, it was necessary for them to solve and ensure the continuity of the reform process. Therefore, the emerging issues and challenges they encountered and the solutions to be collaboratively addressed will be presented and discussed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP IN ADDRESSING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF THE CURRICULUM REFORMS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The preceding chapter delineated the distinct roles of three levels of curriculum leaders, elucidating their importance in recognizing power distribution throughout the curriculum reform process. Despite acknowledging these roles and power distribution, various issues and challenges surfaced during their involvement in the reform.

To address these emerging issues and challenges, the curriculum leaders were likely required to work responsibly, collaboratively, and interdependently with collective solutions and showcase the linkage to the Distributed Leadership (DL) functions in the reform process. Therefore, addressing the emerging issues and challenges necessitated a collaborative and responsible approach to leadership, embodying the principles of DL.

In this context, this chapter is structured with the description and discussion of three major sections: (1) Issues and challenges the curriculum leaders encountered in the process of curriculum reform, (2) Collective solutions to tackle those emerging issues and challenges, and (3) The functions of DL in the reform process.

### **5.2 Issues and Challenges the Curriculum Leaders Faced in the Curriculum Reform Process**

Although roles and power distribution were identified, issues and challenges emerged during the four stages of the curriculum reform process. The curriculum leaders faced certain issues and challenges, and the results of the findings will be presented and discussed in the following sections.

### 5.2.1 Issues and challenges the curriculum leaders faced in the planning stage

Curriculum leaders identified several critical issues and challenges during the planning stage, as shown in Tables 5.1 and 5.2. Through in-depth interviews at three levels, relevant curriculum leaders highlighted issues and challenges impeding the progress of reform.

**Table 5.1:**

#### *Issues and challenges that the curriculum leaders faced in the planning stage by level*

Stage of the Curriculum Reform Process	Levels of the Curriculum Leaders	Issues and Challenges by Level
<b>Planning Stage</b>	University Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low capacity of curriculum development and planning team</li> <li>• Budget constraints</li> <li>• Lack of focal points dealing with the curriculum reform process</li> </ul>
	Faculty Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of previous experience in developing the action plan for the curriculum reform process</li> <li>• Having difficulty in forming a team with good cooperation and spirit</li> <li>• Lack of responsible persons in the organizational structure of the faculty</li> <li>• Having conflicting schedules among the team members</li> <li>• Having difficulty in receiving responses from employers in completing the survey questionnaire during the needs analysis.</li> <li>• Taking time to deal with administrative work, especially for the needs analysis</li> </ul>
	Classroom Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited capacity of the curriculum reform process</li> </ul>

**Table 5.2:**

*Issues and challenges that the curriculum leaders faced in the planning stage by category with the key theme*

Stage of the Curriculum Reform Process	Issues and Challenges by Category	Key Theme
<b>Planning Stage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low capacity of curriculum development and planning team</li> <li>• Lack of previous experience in developing the action plan for the curriculum reform process</li> <li>• Limited capacity of teachers in the curriculum reform process</li> </ul>	Insufficient capacity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Budget constraints</li> <li>• Having conflicting schedules among the team members</li> <li>• Taking time to deal with administrative work, especially for the needs analysis</li> <li>• Having difficulty in forming a team with good cooperation and spirit</li> <li>• Having difficulty in receiving responses from employers in completing the survey questionnaire during the needs analysis</li> </ul>	Resource constraints
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having difficulty in forming a team with good cooperation and spirit</li> <li>• Having difficulty in receiving responses from employers in completing the survey questionnaire during the needs analysis</li> </ul>	Limited involvement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of responsible persons in the organizational structure of the faculty</li> <li>• Lack of focal points dealing with the curriculum reform process</li> </ul>	Staffing gaps

### 5.2.1.1 Insufficient capacity

As found in the interviews with the curriculum leaders at the university level, the VR (AA), the VR (QA), and the Head (QA) expressed their points of view on the issues and challenges in the planning stage. For example, regarding the limited capacity of the faculty team in the

curriculum reform process, the VR (AA) raised concern in the interview about the difficulties of the curriculum revision process in the planning stage “due to the lack of the faculty team’s previous experience in conducting the needs analysis,” meaning that he tried to emphasize that the capacity of the faculty team was a challenge in the reform process, especially during the needs analysis. Furthermore, the Head (QA) also mentioned the limited experience of the faculty team “to develop the action plan for the curriculum reform process,” which means that the Head (QA) raised a concern for the faculty team in working on the action plan before the reform process. Another point of view, as mentioned by the Dean, was that “the team and I had a very tough task to deal with the action plan for the curriculum revision,” which made him and the team struggle to develop an action plan and have no clear idea of what to do. Little input was received from the classroom level for developing the action plan of the curriculum reform process due to their limited capacity and knowledge of the process, as raised by some teachers on providing inputs for the faculty’s action plan:

**T2:** “...I did not have enough ability to share the inputs for the action plan of the faculty for the curriculum reform process.”

**T5:** “...my understanding of the curriculum reform process is limited.”

In this regard, one of the issues and challenges the relevant curriculum leaders revealed was the insufficient capacity of the faculty team and teachers involved, which needed to be considered in the planning stage of the curriculum reform process.

### **5.2.1.2 Resource constraints**

Regarding the limited budget, the VR (QA) raised this problem while commenting on the action plan with a careful plan of the budget to be spent because it needed to be allocated to other activities. For example, the VR (QA) mentioned in the interview that “it was quite challenging to deal with the limited budget issue to plan the actions carefully,” meaning that

the VR (QA) emphasized that it was important to have a clear plan with clear activities and budget due to the limitation of budget.

Concerning time constraints, the Dean stressed that “conflicting schedules among the team members because of being busy with other tasks” caused the delay in the planned activities in the planning stage of the curriculum reform. For another time-related matter, he stated that “the administrative challenge that took time for the team to process all the necessary documents in the needs analysis process,” meaning that it was annoying for the team as the technical team to waste their time working on the administrative process during the needs analysis period.

In this context, resource constraints in terms of budget and time were identified through interviews with relevant curriculum leaders, causing difficulties in the planning stage of the curriculum reform process.

### **5.2.1.3 Limited involvement**

In the interview with the Dean at the faculty level, he raised some issues and challenges that he and the team faced, causing some obstacles during the planning stage. For instance, the problem he raised during the interview was the difficulty in forming a team with good cooperation and spirit “owing to a lack of fully committed people to work together, causing the less participation from the team members who focused more on their teaching and other work to get more incomes,” meaning that the members could not fully focus on the assigned tasks because they were concerned for their living.

The issue that could also be a challenge in the planning stage was the limited participation and commitment of some members of the team through the concern raised by the Dean at the faculty level “to work on the needs analysis that some of them did not have enough time to complete due to being busy with other tasks for their living,” which means that some of the team members had to do other tasks to get more earnings to support their families.

In conducting the needs analysis, the Dean indicated the challenge of getting responses from the relevant stakeholders, especially the employers. He mentioned that “it took time to get the employers to fill in the questionnaires, and some did not reply at all,” meaning that they did not want to spend and waste their time completing the questionnaires.

Thus, through the interviews with the relevant stakeholders, especially the Dean, it is also crucial to consider the issue and challenge in relation to the limitation of involvement of the relevant people, who needed to do other work to get more income to support their families.

#### **5.2.1.4 Staffing gaps**

Regarding the organizational structure of the faculty, the issue and challenge of the team members’ participation owing to the lack of focal points in the faculty were mentioned by the Dean that “due to no head of department and course coordinator for the program, all responsibilities belonged to me and the vice-dean,” meaning that the Dean seemed to state that faculty did not have enough responsible persons to work in the process of curriculum reform with clear positions. In this regard, this matter was also raised by the Head (QA) about “the missing positions in the organizational structure of the faculty,” which means that the Head (QA) seemed to note that the focal points of the program for the curriculum reform were not enough to work on the assigned tasks. In this sense, the organizational structure of the faculty was one of the major concerns in the reform process.

Based on interviews with relevant curriculum leaders during the planning stage, the findings reveal four primary themes: (1) insufficient capacity, (2) resource constraints, (3) limited involvement, and (4) staffing gaps. These interrelated issues and challenges suggest that the lack of designated personnel within the faculty's organizational structure, the demanding schedules of team members, and the team's limited capacity have contributed to restricted participation and commitment during the planning phase.

### 5.2.2 Issues and challenges the curriculum leaders faced in the developing stage

As indicated in Tables 5.3 and 5.4, the findings regarding the issues and challenges show what the curriculum leaders encountered in the developing stage, which will be presented as follows.

**Table 5.3:**

#### *Issues and challenges that the curriculum leaders faced in the developing stage by level*

Stage of the Curriculum Reform Process	Levels of the Curriculum Leaders	Issues and Challenges by Level
<b>Developing Stage</b>	University Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N/A</li> </ul>
	Faculty Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delay of planned activities due to conflicting schedules</li> <li>• Limited resources to develop course contents and syllabi</li> <li>• Limited participation and commitment from people involved</li> <li>• Needing to remove some subjects that made some teachers weren't happy</li> <li>• Limited capacity of faculty members</li> </ul>
	Classroom Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of clarity on the format of the course syllabus</li> <li>• Having difficulty in developing the new course syllabus</li> <li>• Taking time to develop and update the course syllabus several times</li> <li>• Having conflicting schedules between joining the workshops and teaching time</li> <li>• Having no incentive to prepare course syllabus</li> </ul>

**Table 5.4:**

*Issues and challenges that the curriculum leaders faced in the developing stage by category with the key theme*

Stage of the Curriculum Reform Process	Issues and Challenges by Category	Key Theme
Developing Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of clarity on the format of the course syllabus</li> <li>• Taking time for teachers to develop and update the course syllabus a few times</li> </ul>	Difficulty in syllabus collection
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited resources to develop course contents and syllabi</li> <li>• Having conflicting schedules between joining the workshops or technical meetings and teaching time</li> <li>• Delay of planned activities due to conflicting schedules</li> </ul>	Resource constraints
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needing to remove some subjects that made some teachers weren't happy</li> <li>• Having no incentive to prepare course syllabus</li> </ul>	Limited involvement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited capacity of faculty members</li> <li>• Having difficulty in developing the new course syllabus</li> </ul>	Insufficient capacity

### 5.2.2.1 Difficulty in syllabus collection

In the developing stage, there were complaints from the teachers regarding changing the new syllabus format since the teachers were required to update it a few times, causing them to be confused. Particularly, some teachers raised this problem and felt unclear about the changes:

**T1:** "...I could not submit the course syllabus on time to the faculty due to the changes in format."

**T4:** "...the format of the syllabus was changed a few times, which made me feel annoyed."

Moreover, they added that it took time for them to revise the syllabi using the changing format.

For example:

**T3:** "...I spent much time changing in accordance with the new format of the syllabus."

**T8:** "...it took time to revise the new syllabi with a new format that needed to add more details."

As a result, the Dean found it difficult to collect the syllabi from the course instructors, who found it annoying and spent much time revising the new syllabi. Therefore, it took time for the Dean to get all the syllabi from the instructors involved.

#### **5.2.2.2 Resource constraints**

In the developing stage, the limitation of resources was a concern raised by the Dean. He indicated that "new textbooks and other necessary resources for teaching and learning were not available in the country and needed to be ordered from overseas and took time to get those resources on time to develop the course syllabi," as those resources were needed to prepare course contents and syllabi.

Regarding time constraints, as revealed by the faculty level, the Dean raised an issue about the delay of planned activities that made the team unable to complete them on time due to the conflicting schedules among the people involved during the developing stage. For example, in the interview with the Dean, he mentioned that "some team members and teachers involved could not join the meetings to discuss the course syllabi based on the action plan inside the institution," meaning that the Dean tried to note that some teachers or team members were busy to attend the necessary meetings or workshop due to their hectic schedules.

Furthermore, some teachers also mentioned issues and challenges in having conflicting schedules between joining the workshops or technical meetings and teaching time. For instance, some teachers mentioned that:

**T12:** "...sometimes, I couldn't join the workshops or meetings because it overlapped with teaching hours."

**T9:** "...Because I had missed my class a few times, I asked the Dean permission not to attend the PD workshops organized by the faculty."

In this regard, the limitation of resources and time was also a barrier in the developing stage of the reform process, as found in the study.

### **5.2.2.3 Limited involvement**

In the developing stage, as mentioned by the Dean regarding the issue and challenge of limited participation and commitment from the teachers, he thought that "some teachers seemed to have no willingness to join the PD workshops in developing course syllabi organized by the faculty because they were busy teaching", causing them to have no clear direction to develop the syllabi.

As a result, this made it difficult for the faculty to collect the course syllabi on time. The Dean also raised the obstacle that "made some teachers unhappy with this reform because their courses were removed from the new program," meaning that some teachers would lose their teaching courses.

Due to the lack of incentive to prepare course syllabi, some teachers mentioned that low motivation emerged. For example:

**T12:** "...I felt less committed to preparing the syllabus because of no incentive or reward."

**T15:** "...it would be better if there were some rewards for teachers in developing the syllabi."

Thus, it can be seen that without willingness, incentives, or individual benefits, the participation and commitment of the relevant stakeholders were limited to completing the assigned tasks, especially the development of syllabi in the developing stage. This is because most of the academic staff needed more income, particularly from teaching.

#### **5.2.2.4 Insufficient capacity**

As mentioned in the interview by the Dean, he raised that "one of the obstacles in the developing stage of the reform process was the ability of the course instructors to develop the course syllabi of their teaching courses," meaning that the Dean realized the teachers struggled with the development of the course syllabi. Meanwhile, some teachers also mentioned their difficulty in relation to the limited capacity to develop new course syllabi:

**T1:** "...It seemed to have difficulty in aligning new teaching methods and assessment approaches to align with the learning outcomes."

**T2:** "...I did not have a clear idea about the new design of the syllabus by introducing new teaching techniques and assessments."

**T5:** "...as assigned by the Dean to develop a new syllabus, I did not have a clear idea to develop it."

**T8:** "...I felt it difficult to develop new syllabi in the new program."

**T10:** "...developing the new syllabus was quite challenging for me."

In this regard, due to the limited capacity of the teachers involved, the development of the new syllabi could also be seen as a challenge for them.

To sum up, in terms of the issues and challenges raised by the curriculum leaders during the developing stage, there were four key identified themes: (1) Difficulty in syllabus collection, (2) Resource constraints, (3) Limited involvement, (4) Insufficient capacity. Furthermore, in terms of the relationship among different key themes of issues and challenges in the developing stage, it was implied that some teachers failed to submit the course syllabi on time due to a lack of necessary resources, being busy with other tasks, the little understanding to develop, and less commitment and participation to work on the syllabi. As a result of the findings through the interviews with relevant curriculum leaders, it was quite challenging to deal with emerging issues and challenges they faced in the developing stage.

### **5.2.3 Issues and challenges the curriculum leaders faced in the implementing stage**

Tables 5.5 and 5.6 highlight the issues and challenges the curriculum leaders faced in the implementation stage, which will be presented as follows.

**Table 5.5:***Issues and challenges that the curriculum leaders faced in the implementing stage by level*

Stage of the Curriculum Reform Process	Levels of the Curriculum Leaders	Issues and Challenges by Level
<b>Implementing Stage</b>	University Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N/A</li> </ul>
	Faculty Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having limited resources</li> <li>• Having the limited capacity to implement the revised curriculum</li> </ul>
	Classroom Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking time to update the teaching materials and assessment tools</li> <li>• Having limited support from the faculty</li> </ul>

**Table 5.6:***Issues and challenges that the curriculum leaders faced in the implementing stage by category with the key theme*

Stage of the Curriculum Reform Process	Issues and Challenges by Category	Key Theme
<b>Implementing Stage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having limited resources</li> <li>• Taking time to update the teaching materials and assessment tools</li> </ul>	Resource constraints
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having the limited capacity to implement the revised curriculum</li> </ul>	Insufficient resources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having limited support from the faculty</li> </ul>	Limited support

**5.2.3.1 Resource constraints**

In the implementing stage, curriculum leaders raised some obstacles, as mentioned in the interviews. Some resources were limited, as mentioned by the Dean, regarding the teaching lab to support teaching and learning. For example, he mentioned that “there was no lab and

limited teaching materials to support teaching and learning,” meaning that the facilities to support teaching and learning were still a concern in implementing the updated curriculum.

Another issue and challenge was the time constraints in developing new teaching materials and assessment tools to meet the needs of the students, improve their learning, and achieve learning outcomes. Some teachers shared some concerns in the interviews as follows:

**T3:** “...It took time for me to develop new teaching materials and assessment tools.”

**T6:** “...I needed much time in developing new teaching materials, especially ICT tools to facilitate my teaching.”

Regarding these matters, there were concerns about the limited resources and time constraints in the implementing phase of the curriculum reform process.

#### **5.2.3.2 Insufficient capacity**

In terms of the limited capacity of the teaching staff to implement the updated curriculum, they needed to use new technology, teaching methods, and assessment approaches to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. For example, some teachers expressed their concerns about their limited capacity in the implementation of the curriculum:

**T9:** “...I and some other teachers had difficulties using the appropriate teaching techniques and assessment to achieve the intended learning outcomes.”

**T10:** “...sometimes, I struggled to make my lesson interesting.”

In this context, the capacity of the course instructors who were the direct implementors of the revised curriculum was still limited, as the concern in the implementing stage.

### 5.2.3.3 Limited support from the faculty

Some necessary guidance from the faculty was limited, mentioned by some teachers in the interviews. As some teachers found it difficult to seek more financial support from the faculty in terms of individual upskilling to improve their teaching capacity, to some extent, they raised concerns about the obstacle in implementing the revised curriculum:

**T3:** "...When I needed some support or guidance, I was not brave enough to talk to the Dean and felt uneasy to ask for financial support from the faculty on developing my teaching capacity."

**T10:** "...I did not feel comfortable asking the Dean directly for financial support on receiving training outside the institution."

Therefore, more support for some teachers was also an issue to be addressed in implementing the newly updated curriculum, as they felt uneasy about getting full support from the faculty. More financial support should be improved to upskill the academic staff with the necessary skills to be ready for implementing the newly updated curriculum.

In short, through these findings shared with the perspectives from the key people in the implementing stage of the curriculum reform process, three key themes were identified: (1) constraints, (2) Insufficient capacity, and (3) Limited support from the faculty. In this context, limited resources and time constraints, limited capacity of the implementors, and insufficient faculty support caused the teachers' limited performance in implementing the curriculum.

### 5.2.4 Issues and challenges the curriculum leaders faced in the evaluating stage

Tables 5.7 and 5.8 indicate the issues and challenges the curriculum leaders faced in the evaluating stage, which will be presented as follows.

**Table 5.7:***Issues and challenges that the curriculum leaders faced in the evaluating stage by level*

Stage of the Curriculum Reform Process	Levels of the Curriculum Leaders	Issues and Challenges by Level
<b>Implementing Stage</b>	University Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N/A</li> </ul>
	Faculty Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflicting schedules with the team members during the focus group discussion</li> <li>• Lack of participation and commitment of people involved</li> </ul>
	Classroom Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflicting schedules or personal issues to get involved in the focus group discussion</li> </ul>

**Table 5.8:***Issues and challenges that the curriculum leaders faced in the evaluating stage by category with the key theme*

Stage of the Curriculum Reform Process	Issues and Challenges by Category	Key Theme
<b>Evaluating Stage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflicting schedules with the team members during the focus group discussion</li> <li>• Conflicting schedules or personal issues to get involved in the focus group discussion</li> </ul>	Time constraints
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of participation and commitment of people involved</li> </ul>	Limited Involvement

**5.2.4.1 Time constraints**

In the interviews with the Dean, time constraint was raised as one of the barriers in the curriculum evaluation stage. The obstacle was related to the conflicting schedules among the members involved, causing the delay of activities at this stage. For instance, the Dean mentioned that “the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with teachers was postponed because some members of the team and some teachers were busy with other events or personal issues,”

causing the delay of planned activities involved in FGD. Therefore, time constraints were also an issue and challenge that caused the delay of the activities in the evaluating stage.

#### **5.2.4.2 Limited involvement**

The issue related to participation and commitment from the teachers involved was one of the obstacles in conducting the activities in the evaluating stage due to the benefits of the individuals who focused on their teaching or other businesses to get incomes to support their families as their salary was limited, compared to those in the developed countries. The more they teach, the more they earn. This means that they could receive a small salary from the government and be paid by the institution with teaching wages.

Therefore, as revealed by the Dean, inviting the teachers to the FGD was quite challenging because some of them informed the Dean that “they were busy and could not join,” causing the activity delay in FGD. Moreover, some teachers also raised the issue of the overlapped time between their personal matters and the FGD, which made them unable to join it. For example:

**T4:** “...I couldn’t join the interview for FGD because I was busy with my personal issues.”

**T9:** “...I asked permission from the Dean not to join the FGD interview due to my health problem.”

Thus, due to personal issues and individual benefits, the involvement of the teachers concerned was limited, causing the delay of planned activities in the evaluating stage.

In this context, two key themes were identified in the evaluating stage: (1) Time constraints and (2) Limited involvement of the relevant people in the evaluating stage. As a result, the delay in evaluating the curriculum occurred and caused a slow process at this phase.

Based on the key findings in relation to the issues and challenges at all stages of the curriculum reform process, the curriculum leaders indicated their points of view in the above-mentioned sections. In this context, five main themes of the issues and challenges in the curriculum reform process were identified: (1) Resource constraints; (2) Limited involvement from the relevant curriculum leaders; (3) Insufficient capacity of the academic staff; (4) Lack of understanding and full support; and (5) Difficulty in syllabus collection.

To sum up, the curriculum reform process requires significant resources, budget, and time with the effort of relevant curriculum leaders, which can be challenging with the consideration of their existing teaching and administrative responsibilities. The limited involvement of the relevant curriculum leaders could cause an obstacle in the reform process. The capacity of some teachers was limited to implement the revised curriculum, which was another challenge.

Faculty members may lack the necessary skills, knowledge, or training in innovative teaching methods, student-centered approaches, or the use of technology in the classroom. This can hinder the effective implementation of the new curriculum. Limited support from the higher levels regarding resources, training, and incentives can obstruct the reform process. Collecting comprehensive and updated syllabi for all courses within the revised curriculum posed a challenge, leading to delays in developing the revised curriculum. Additionally, some faculty members may not fully comprehend the purpose and benefits of curriculum reform, leading to a lack of commitment and motivation.

Drawing on the prior literature, it can be seen that issues and challenges seemed to emerge in the curriculum reform process. As the previous scholars (e.g., [Oliver & Hyun, 2011](#); [Wormley, 2004](#)) mentioned, resource constraints, limited cooperation, and lack of participation from the relevant stakeholders were the key issues and challenges in the reform process.

With respect to the key findings of issues and challenges, compared to those in the prior literature, the limited capacity of the people involved, budget constraints, lack of understanding and full support, and difficulty in collecting the syllabi from the teachers were identified and needed to take action and solve with collective solutions of relevant curriculum leaders. In terms of cross-stage issues and challenges emerging in the curriculum reform process, limited availability of resources, limited capacity of the academic staff, limited encouraging and supportive environment for staff, and limited involvement of relevant people in the curriculum reform process were found.

Thus, the identified themes of issues and challenges in the curriculum reform process align with common barriers faced by educational institutions in implementing change initiatives. Previous literature provides insights into these challenges and offers strategies for addressing them through DL and collaborative approaches.

Regarding limited resources in curriculum reform, [Hallinger and Heck \(2011\)](#) emphasize the importance of effective resource allocation and strategic planning to overcome constraints and support sustainable change efforts. Effective resource allocation involves prioritizing needs, leveraging existing assets, and seeking innovative funding solutions to address financial limitations ([Hallinger & Heck, 2011](#)). Additionally, [Fullan \(2015\)](#) highlights the role of leadership in navigating budget constraints and time limitations, in which leaders must cultivate

a shared vision, promote collaborative practices, and engage in continuous improvement to manage resources efficiently and ensure the success of CR.

Moreover, [Wiles and Bondi \(2014\)](#) stress the significance of stakeholder engagement in addressing resource limitations; thus, involving relevant stakeholders in the planning and implementation process can lead to more effective utilization of resources and increased support for reform initiatives. This collaborative approach can help identify alternative resources and solutions, mitigating budget constraints and time pressures ([Wiles & Bondi, 2014](#)). In this sense, effective resource allocation, strategic planning, leadership, and stakeholder involvement are essential strategies for overcoming the issues and challenges of resource constraints in CR.

Concerning limited participation and commitment, engaging stakeholders and fostering commitment among individuals involved in the reform process is essential for successful implementation. [Gronn \(2002\)](#) highlights the significance of DL in promoting shared ownership and commitment to change initiatives. DL involves delegating leadership roles and responsibilities across various stakeholders, which can enhance engagement and collective responsibility ([Gronn, 2002](#)).

Furthermore, [Bryk and Schneider \(2002\)](#) emphasize the importance of relational trust among stakeholders in the educational reform of the institution, in which trust among teachers, administrators, parents, and students is critical to fostering participation and commitment.

Relational trust builds a supportive environment where individuals feel valued and are more likely to engage actively in the reform process ([Bryk & Schneider, 2002](#)). [Kotter \(1996\)](#)

discusses the role of creating a sense of urgency in securing stakeholder commitment; thus, establishing a compelling need for change helps galvanize all parties' support and participation. This approach involves clear communication about the consequences of inaction and the benefits of the proposed changes, thereby motivating stakeholders to commit to the reform efforts (Kotter, 1996). Hargreaves and Fullan (2015) further explore the concept of professional capital, which combines human, social, and decisional capital to drive educational change; therefore, investing in professional development and creating networks of collaboration among educators can lead to higher levels of participation and commitment. When teachers and other stakeholders have the necessary skills and knowledge, they are more likely to support and engage in the reform process (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015).

Moreover, Wenger et al. (2002) highlight the role of communities of practice in sustaining commitment to change initiatives. Communities of practice are groups of individuals who share a common interest and engage in collective learning. These communities provide a platform for continuous dialogue, mutual support, and shared learning, which can enhance stakeholder commitment to the reform process (Wenger et al., 2002). DL, relational trust, a sense of urgency, professional capital, and communities of practice are essential strategies for overcoming limited participation and fostering commitment among stakeholders in educational reform.

With respect to the limited capacity of academic staff, building the capacity of academic staff through professional development and training is crucial for navigating curriculum reform challenges. Leithwood et al. (2008) underscore the importance of investing in leadership capacity to support organizational improvement; thus, developing leadership skills among

academic staff can enhance their ability to manage change and contribute effectively to curriculum reform efforts.

Additionally, [Darling-Hammond et al. \(2017\)](#) emphasize the need for continuous professional learning opportunities to build the instructional capacity of educators, in which high-quality professional development should be sustained, collaborative, and focused on practical application. By engaging in ongoing learning, academic staff can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to implement new curricula and teaching strategies effectively ([Darling-Hammond et al., 2017](#)). [Joyce and Showers \(2002\)](#) highlight the impact of coaching and mentoring on building the capacity of academic staff. They argue that coaching provides personalized support and feedback, which can help educators refine their practices and improve their effectiveness.

Conversely, mentoring fosters a supportive learning environment where less experienced staff can learn from the expertise of seasoned educators ([Joyce & Showers, 2002](#)). [Guskey \(2000\)](#) discusses the significance of evaluating professional development programs to ensure they meet the needs of academic staff and contribute to their capacity-building. Moreover, [Guskey \(2000\)](#) proposes a model for evaluating professional development that includes assessing participants' reactions, learning, organizational support, and changes in instructional practices.

By systematically evaluating professional development efforts, institutions can ensure they are effective and aligned with the goals of curriculum reform ([Guskey, 2000](#)). [Timperley et al. \(2007\)](#) argue that professional learning should be closely linked to student outcomes, which advocates for professional development that focuses on understanding and addressing student learning needs, as this approach can drive improvements in teaching practices and curriculum

implementation. When academic staff see a direct connection between their professional growth and student success, their commitment to capacity-building initiatives will likely increase (Timperley et al., 2007).

In this sense, investing in leadership capacity, continuous professional learning, coaching and mentoring, evaluation of professional development programs, and linking professional learning to student outcomes are essential strategies for building the capacity of academic staff to navigate curriculum reform challenges.

In relation to the lack of understanding and full support, ensuring clear communication and promoting understanding among stakeholders is vital for gaining support for curriculum reform. Leithwood and Harris (2009) emphasize DL's role in fostering communication and building a shared vision for change. Fullan (2015) discusses the complexities of educational change and underscores the necessity of involving all stakeholders through clear communication and shared goals, emphasizing that successful change hinges on the collective efforts of the educational community.

Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) argue for sustainable educational reform through collaborative practices, stressing the importance of creating a collective vision and leadership's role in maintaining open communication channels. Bryk et al. (2010) highlight how clear communication strategies can lead to more successful and sustainable reforms. Harris (2013) emphasizes the importance of fostering strong communication networks and building a unified vision among all stakeholders. Kotter (1996) highlights the critical role of clear communication in every stage of the change process to ensure stakeholder buy-in and support. Darling-Hammond and Rothman (2011) explore how high-performing educational systems achieve

success, emphasizing the importance of effective leadership and communication in reform processes.

With regard to the difficulty in collecting course syllabi, [Spillane and Camburn \(2006\)](#) highlight the importance of decision-making and information sharing in educational leadership practices. The effective leadership involves creating systems and processes that facilitate the collection and dissemination of information, which is crucial for managing curriculum-related tasks ([Spillane & Camburn, 2006](#)).

In essence, [Robinson \(2011\)](#) emphasizes the role of relational trust in improving information sharing within educational institutions. Trust-building practices, such as regular meetings and transparent communication, can significantly improve the efficiency of information collection ([Robinson, 2011](#)). [Bolman and Deal \(2017\)](#) discuss the structural frame of organizations, which includes designing appropriate structures and processes to support information flow. This involves establishing clear curriculum management roles, responsibilities, and procedures ([Bolman & Deal, 2017](#)).

Additionally, [Lave and Wenger \(1991\)](#) introduce the concept of communities of practice, which can be leveraged to enhance information sharing. By fostering communities where educators regularly interact and share resources, institutions can create an environment conducive to the efficient exchange of information, including course syllabi. These communities promote continuous learning and mutual support, which are essential for effective curriculum management ([Lave & Wenger, 1991](#)).

By addressing these key issues and challenges with insights from previous literature on the DL and organizational change, curriculum leaders can develop effective strategies to navigate the complexities of the reform process and promote sustainable improvements in educational practices. In this context, regarding the CR, the prior studies did not focus on the issues and challenges of the different stages of the curriculum reform process in particular.

However, this study provides a better picture of the issues and challenges of the four different stages of the curriculum reform process. Therefore, concerning the emerging issues and challenges the curriculum leaders faced in the curriculum reform process, it was necessary to work collectively across levels to address those issues and challenges. The collective solutions will be presented and discussed in the next section

### **5.3 The Issues and Challenges to be Addressed by DL**

As the curriculum leaders of different levels faced various issues and challenges in the above-mentioned section, collective solutions identified to address those issues and challenges at the four different stages of the curriculum reform process are (1) Building a partnership agreement with an experienced partner university, (2) Providing PD workshops or opportunities for academic staff and relevant stakeholders, (3) Creating a supportive and encouraging environment in the institution, (4) Having good communication and interactions among relevant curriculum leaders, (5) Having good collaboration and peer support among faculty members, and (6) Allocating all necessary resources and budget.

As a result of the findings, the collective solutions among various levels of curriculum leaders found in the interviews were identified to address the aforementioned issues and challenges.

At different stages of the reform process, the collective solutions will be presented and discussed in the following sections.

### 5.3.1 The collective solutions in the planning stage

As indicated in Table 5.9, the collective solutions were identified in the planning stage of the curriculum reform process. In response to the emerging issues and challenges, curriculum leaders shared solutions that dealt with collaboration and support among different levels. The experiences and suggestions shared by the curriculum leaders in collectively solving the issues and challenges they faced in the planning stage are (1) Building a partnership agreement with the experienced university to work with the faculty team, (2) Having good communication and interaction between top management and the faculty, (3) Creating a supportive and encouraging environment for the faculty level, (4) Allocating necessary resources, and (5) Having a clear the organizational structure of the faculty

**Table 5.9:**

#### *Collective solutions in the planning stage*

Stage of the Curriculum Reform Process	Collective Solutions	Key Themes
Planning Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting the establishment of the partnership agreement between the university and another experienced partner university</li> </ul>	Building a partnership agreement with the experienced university to work with the faculty team
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Having good communication and interaction between the university and faculty levels</li> </ul>	Having good communication and interaction between the top management and the faculty
		Creating a supportive and

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing encouragement to the faculty</li> <li>• Orienting the faculty involved to prepare and develop a clear annual action plan</li> <li>• Coordinating and facilitating the reform process</li> <li>• Engaging in collaborative planning and decision-making</li> </ul>	encouraging environment for the faculty level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocating necessary resources</li> </ul>	Allocating necessary resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working on developing a clear organizational structure for faculty</li> <li>• Producing a clear policy and guidelines for the curriculum reform process</li> </ul>	Having clear responsibilities and roles in the curriculum reform process

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In dealing with the issue of the low capacity of the curriculum review team during the planning stage, the partnership agreement between SRU and RUPP was established to provide support and collaboration for the SRU team to revise the new BA in English program, as mentioned by the VR (QA) that “the top management worked with the faculty team to build a partnership agreement with the experienced university to support and strengthen the capacity of the staff,” meaning that the university level played a key role in providing support for the faculty team to build the partnership with another experienced university to work and collaborate with them in the reform process.

The solution to address the issue related to receiving responses from the employers in the needs analysis survey was about the good communication and interactions between the faculty team and the top management in working together to get the questionnaires filled out by the employers. As the Dean mentioned, “I made the request to the top management to take intervention to get the employers’ responses,” meaning that the Dean needed to inform and

request support from the university. In this context, the faculty team was able to get the employers to complete the questionnaire for the needs analysis through the intervention from the top management.

In dealing with the matter of the faculty team's participation and commitment, creating a supportive and encouraging environment for the faculty level was found in the interviews with relevant curriculum leaders as a crucial catalyst in the planning stage. As the VR (QA) stated in the interview, he mentioned, "I gave them encouragement when they were facing difficulties during the needs analysis," meaning that the top management encouraged the faculty team as they encountered the issues to be addressed by means of spiritual support and encouragement. The Head (QA) also supported the faculty team by orienting the faculty involved in preparing and developing a clear annual action plan, as he also mentioned in the interview.

Consequently, the faculty team continued working on the assigned tasks in the curriculum reform process as it was complicated work. The supportive and encouraging environment was created by the coordination and facilitation of the university level with the faculty level in the reform process, and the involvement in collaborative planning and decision-making emerged in the planning stage, as found in the interviews with the university and faculty levels. In this regard, creating a supportive and encouraging environment with the involvement of relevant stakeholders was vital in the planning stage.

The resources were limited, leading to issues and challenges in the planning stage, so resources must be allocated during the reform process. For example, the Dean mentioned that "all necessary resources should be allocated to support the curriculum reform process; otherwise, it would be stuck and delay the activities in the process," meaning that the Dean was required

to justify the necessity of the resources and budget to the management team to receive the approval for the use of the budget and resources. In this sense, collaborative work and solutions were very important between the university and faculty levels.

To cope with the issue and challenge of having an unclear organizational structure of the faculty, causing insufficient focal points or responsible individuals, it is very crucial to have a clear organizational structure of the faculty and produce a clear policy and guidelines for the curriculum reform process as suggested by the Dean and Head (QA) in the interviews.

To sum up, collective solutions in terms of (1) Building a partnership agreement with the experienced university to work with the faculty team, (2) Having good communication and interaction between top management and the faculty, (3) Creating a supportive and encouraging environment for the faculty level, (4) Allocating necessary resources and budget, and (5) Having a clear the organizational structure of the faculty, are needed to apply among different levels of curriculum leaders in dealing with the issues and challenges emerged in the planning stage.

### **5.3.2 The collective solutions in the developing stage**

Table 5.10 shows that the issues and challenges were addressed collaboratively among different curriculum leaders in the developing stage. Key themes for collective solutions in the developing stage are (1) Having good communication and interactions among relevant curriculum leaders, (2) Creating a supportive and encouraging environment for academic staff, and (3) Allocating necessary resources.

**Table 5.10:*****Collective solutions in the developing stage***

<b>Stage of the Curriculum Reform Process</b>	<b>Collective Solutions</b>	<b>Key Themes</b>
<b>Developing Stage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having good communication and interactions among relevant curriculum leaders</li> <li>• Building a good collaborative environment among relevant curriculum leaders</li> </ul>	Making effective communication, interaction, and collaboration
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing professional development opportunities to the teachers</li> <li>• Having peer support and sharing best practices</li> <li>• Providing support and intervention to the teachers</li> <li>• Providing rewards (incentives) for the outstanding academic staff</li> <li>• Allocating the resources needed by the academic staff</li> </ul>	<p>Creating a supportive and encouraging environment</p> <p>Allocating necessary resources</p>

In dealing with issues and challenges of low capacity of the academic staff, building good communication, interaction, and collaboration among the university, faculty, and classroom levels played a very essential role in providing the PD for the staff to enhance their capacity in developing the course syllabi and teaching materials.

As found in the findings of the study, the Dean at the faculty level mentioned that “I was a key middleman who could communicate and negotiate with the university level to approve on running the PD workshops or providing the PD opportunities to build capacity for academic staff,” meaning that the Dean played a key role to communicate and work collaboratively with the top management to improve the teachers’ capacity in the developing stage, which they

needed to upgrade and upskill their qualifications to be ready for implementing the revised curriculum.

With regard to the issue and challenge of teachers' late submission of course syllabi, it can be seen that providing support and collaboration was able to build a good relationship between faculty and classroom levels within a good collaborative environment, as needed and suggested by the relevant curriculum leaders for the effective process of curriculum reform.

To improve the participation and commitment of the relevant stakeholders in the PD programs, the workshops were requested to be held outside the province of the host institution to get more involvement from the people concerned, as they would be more focused by being away from their work at their university and especially, they would get the allowance and enjoy their time in another province. In the interview with the Dean, he stated that "more participation of the teachers and other stakeholders took place when they organized the PD workshops in another province," which means that organizing outside the province was suggested to encourage people to join and be more focused in the workshops, compared to those held in the institution.

Moreover, the Head (QA) mentioned that "providing rewards for the academic staff's best performance was also needed to improve the participation and commitment of people involved in the developing stage," meaning that incentives such as pay rise of teaching wage, promotion of position, or outstanding working performance certificates should be provided for the highly committed academic staff who work hard for the quality of education in the institution.

Furthermore, providing support and intervention to the teachers was seen as an encouraging way to enhance teachers' performance in the developing stage, particularly in developing the syllabi. Peer support among teachers provided them more confidence to develop the course syllabi with better quality. More importantly, sharing best practices among academic staff also helped to enhance the supportive environment in the curriculum reform process, especially in the developing stage.

Allocating the resources the teachers need would highly motivate them to complete the assigned tasks on time, especially in developing the course contents and syllabi. Based on the interviews with the relevant teachers, they mentioned that:

**T10:** "...I would like to suggest the management team and the faculty support us with the necessary resources to update the course contents and syllabi."

**T15:** "...In order to revise the course contents and develop a good syllabus, the update-to-date resources are really needed."

In this context, the collective solutions found in the study are related to (1) Having good communication and interactions among relevant curriculum leaders, (2) Creating a supportive and encouraging environment for academic staff, and (3) Allocating necessary resources. Therefore, those solutions are essentially needed to improve the curriculum reform process, particularly in the developing stage.

### **5.3.3 The collective solutions in the implementing stage**

Through the interviews with the relevant curriculum leaders, the key themes of the findings, as indicated in Table 5.11, for collective solutions in the implementing stage were revealed:

(1) Continuing to provide professional development opportunities for the academic staff, (2)

Having good collaboration and peer support among the academic staff, and (3) Creating a supportive and encouraging environment for academic staff.

**Table 5.11:**

*Collective solutions in the implementing stage*

Stage of the Curriculum Reform Process	Collective Solutions	Key Themes
<b>Implementing Stage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing more professional development opportunities to the teachers</li> </ul>	Continuing to provide professional development opportunities for the academic staff
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having good collaboration between the faculty team and teachers concerned</li> </ul>	Making good collaboration and peer support among the academic staff
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging peer support among the teachers</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging and supporting the implementors to apply the newly revised curriculum and receiving guidance from the faculty</li> </ul>	Creating a supportive and encouraging environment for academic staff

To deal with the issues and challenges of the limited capacity of academic staff in the implementing stage, carrying on giving PD workshops or opportunities for the academic staff was important, as mentioned by the Dean that “the teachers still needed more training to enhance their teaching skills within the fast-changing society,” meaning that providing more PD programs for the academic staff was needed to build on their capacity to implement the curriculum. Moreover, some teachers also mentioned in the interviews to get more PD opportunities for them:

**T13:** “...I really need more training related to the new course I will teach in the updated curriculum.”

**T14:** "...I was happy to join the workshops organized by the faculty and learn new teaching techniques, especially by using technology."

Another collective solution to cope with the limited capacity of the academic staff in revising the syllabi was to have good collaboration between the faculty and the teachers by providing them support and guidance, especially checking and giving feedback on their syllabi. Furthermore, encouraging peer support among the academic staff was also the solution to share and provide feedback to update the syllabi.

Creating a supportive and encouraging environment for academic staff was helpful in enhancing the participation and commitment among the academic staff to implement the revised curriculum.

To sum up, continuing to provide more PD programs, having good collaboration and peer support, and creating a supportive and encouraging environment for academic staff are the collective solutions needed in the implementing stage of the reform process.

#### **5.3.4 The collective solutions in the evaluating stage**

In dealing with the issues and challenges that emerged during the evaluating stage of the curriculum reform process, collective solutions, as depicted in Table 5.12, were needed to identify and apply in the reform process. In this regard, key themes for collective solutions in the implementing stage are found: (1) Maintaining good communication, interaction, and collaboration among relevant curriculum leaders and (2) Having support from relevant stakeholders.

**Table 5.12:*****Collective solutions in the evaluating stage***

<b>Stage of the Curriculum Reform Process</b>	<b>Collective Solutions</b>	<b>Key Themes</b>
<b>Evaluating Stage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintaining good communication and interaction among relevant curriculum leaders</li> </ul>	Ensuring effective communication, interaction, and collaboration among curriculum leaders
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having good collaboration among the relevant curriculum leaders</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having good support among the relevant curriculum leaders</li> </ul>	Strong support among curriculum leaders

To deal with the matter related to the delay of the evaluating stage, maintaining good communication, interaction, and collaboration among relevant curriculum leaders was the key to resuming the process. For example, the Dean mentioned that “in the evaluation of the updated curriculum, it was important to have good communication and interaction among the university, faculty, and classroom levels,” meaning that he needed to maintain a good relationship with them for the smooth process of the reform as he would inform the top management team about the change of the schedule for the evaluation and prepared all the necessary documents for the new schedule.

With regard to the issue related to commitment and participation among relevant curriculum leaders, providing support from the higher level could help the faculty work smoothly in conducting student feedback and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with students and teachers.

Therefore, regarding the key findings of the collective solutions to the emerging issues and challenges in the reform process, the five major themes were identified: (1) Building a

partnership agreement with an experienced partner university, (2) Providing PD workshops or opportunities for academic staff and relevant stakeholders, (3) Creating a supportive and encouraging environment at the institution, (4) Having good communication and interactions among relevant curriculum leaders, (5) Having good collaboration and peer support among faculty members, and (6) Allocating all necessary resources and budget.

The key findings related to collective solutions to address the emerging issues and challenges in the reform process align closely with the Distributed Leadership (DL) principles, particularly in promoting collaboration, shared decision-making, professional development, and resource allocation to tackle complex educational issues.

**Table 5.13:**

***The collective solutions to address the emerging issues and challenges in the curriculum reform process***

Nº	Issues and Challenges	Collective Solutions
1	<b>Insufficient capacity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building a partnership agreement with the experienced university</li> <li>• Providing PD workshops or opportunities for academic staff and relevant stakeholders</li> <li>• Creating a supportive and encouraging environment for academic staff</li> <li>• Having good collaboration and peer support among academic staff</li> </ul>
2	<b>Limited involvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a supportive and encouraging environment for academic staff</li> <li>• Building a partnership agreement with the experienced university</li> <li>• Having good collaboration and peer support among academic staff</li> <li>• Allocating all necessary resources</li> </ul>

<b>3 Lack of understanding and support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a supportive and encouraging environment for academic staff</li> <li>• Providing PD workshops or opportunities for academic staff and relevant stakeholders</li> <li>• Having good collaboration and peer support among academic staff</li> </ul>
<b>4 Inconsistent collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having good collaboration and peer support among academic staff</li> <li>• Creating a supportive and encouraging environment for academic staff</li> </ul>
<b>5 Resource constraints</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocating all necessary resources</li> </ul>

As indicated in Table 5.13, the issues and challenges that emerged in the curriculum reform process were addressed with collective solutions for the smooth process of the reform, found through the analysis based on the interviews with the relevant curriculum leaders in the three different levels.

Building a partnership agreement with the experienced university was indicated to be able to deal with the issues and challenges related to the limited capacity of academic staff and limited participation and commitment from the people involved.

In this regard, collaborating with external partners, such as universities, can bring valuable expertise and resources to the curriculum reform process. [Spillane et al. \(2001\)](#) emphasize the importance of building external partnerships to enhance educational initiatives and bring diverse perspectives to the decision-making process.

Furthermore, [Wenger et al. \(2002\)](#) discuss the role of communities of practice in fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing. By partnering with universities, schools can create communities of practice that include academic staff and university experts, facilitating the

exchange of ideas and best practices that can enhance curriculum reform efforts ([Wenger et al., 2002](#)). [Bransford et al. \(2000\)](#) highlight that collaborations with universities can provide access to cutting-edge research and pedagogical strategies, which can be integrated into the curriculum reform process to improve educational outcomes.

[Fullan \(2015\)](#) also underscores the importance of external partnerships in achieving sustainable educational change. He asserts that partnerships with universities can provide the necessary support and resources for professional development, helping to build the capacity of academic staff and fostering a culture of continuous improvement ([Fullan, 2015](#)).

[Hargreaves and O'Connor \(2018\)](#) also emphasize the benefits of collaborative professionalism in their work. They suggest that partnerships between institutions can lead to enhanced professional learning opportunities, which can address limited participation and commitment issues by engaging academic staff in meaningful, collaborative activities that support curriculum reforms ([Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018](#)).

To sum up, building partnerships with experienced universities can address challenges related to academic staff's limited capacity, participation, and commitment. External collaborations bring valuable expertise, resources, and diverse perspectives that can significantly enhance the curriculum reform process.

Providing PD workshops or opportunities for academic staff and relevant stakeholders was able to cope with matters related to the limited capacity of academic staff and lack of understanding and support. Offering workshops and professional development opportunities for academic staff and stakeholders is essential for building capacity and fostering continuous learning.

[Leithwood et al. \(2008\)](#) highlight the significance of investing in professional development to support leadership capacity and promote organizational improvement. They argue that ongoing professional development is crucial for equipping academic staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate complex educational reforms ([Leithwood et al., 2008](#)). [Desimone \(2009\)](#) also emphasizes the importance of effective professional development, which should be content-focused, incorporate active learning, be coherent with other learning activities, provide sufficient duration, and include collective participation. Such comprehensive professional development programs can significantly enhance the instructional capacity of academic staff and promote sustained improvement ([Desimone, 2009](#)).

[Garet et al. \(2001\)](#) provide evidence that professional development activities sustained over time and involving active learning are more likely to improve teaching practices and student outcomes. Their research suggests that workshops and training sessions should be designed to engage participants actively and be integrated into a broader framework of continuous learning ([Garet et al., 2001](#)). [Joyce and Showers \(2002\)](#) also underscore the effectiveness of coaching and peer support as integral components of professional development. They argue that providing opportunities for academic staff to receive peer feedback and support can enhance the transfer of new skills into practice, thereby improving overall teaching quality and effectiveness ([Joyce & Showers, 2002](#)).

[Guskey \(2002\)](#) discusses the critical role of evaluating professional development programs to ensure they meet the needs of participants and contribute to their professional growth. To sum up, offering PD workshops and professional development opportunities for academic staff and stakeholders is essential for addressing issues related to limited capacity and lack of understanding and support. Effective PD programs should be comprehensive, sustained,

actively engaging, and evaluated to ensure they meet the needs of participants and contribute to organizational improvement.

Creating a supportive and encouraging environment for academic staff could deal with issues involving the limited capacity of academic staff and lack of understanding and support within the institution, which is crucial for promoting collaboration, trust, and innovation. In this regard, [Leithwood and Harris \(2009\)](#) identified the role of distributed leadership in creating a positive organizational culture that nurtures creativity and growth.

For having good communication and interactions among relevant curriculum leaders, clear communication among curriculum leaders ensures that everyone involved understands the goals and benefits of the reform, thereby increasing participation and support. Therefore, it can deal with limited participation and commitment from the people involved, lack of understanding and support, and difficulty in collecting the course syllabi. Good communication also facilitates sharing and collecting syllabi or other essential resources. [Fullan \(2015\)](#) highlights the importance of clear communication in reducing misunderstandings and developing shared goals, which are crucial for overcoming resistance ([Fullan, 2015](#)).

Furthermore, [Bryk and Schneider \(2002\)](#) emphasize the significance of relational trust in educational settings, which is built through clear and honest communication. They argue that stakeholder trust fosters a collaborative environment where information is freely shared, making it easier to collect and disseminate course syllabi and other essential resources ([Bryk & Schneider, 2002](#)). [Kotter \(1996\)](#) discusses the role of effective communication in leading change. He asserts that transparent and consistent communication is vital for aligning stakeholders with the vision and goals of the reform.

Clear communication helps in addressing concerns, reducing resistance, and ensuring that all stakeholders are on the same page (Kotter, 1996). Robinson (2011) also highlights the importance of communication in her research on student-centered leadership. She suggests that leaders who prioritize open communication create a more inclusive and supportive environment, which enhances the commitment and participation of all involved. This approach can lead to better cooperation in collecting course syllabi and other documents necessary for curriculum reform (Robinson, 2011).

Additionally, Hargreaves and Fullan (2015) discuss the concept of professional capital, which includes human, social, and decisional capital. They argue that effective communication is key to building social capital among educators. When curriculum leaders communicate effectively, they build strong professional relationships that facilitate the sharing of resources and collective problem-solving (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015).

In short, clear communication among curriculum leaders is essential for increasing participation and support, reducing misunderstandings, and facilitating the collection of essential resources. Effective communication helps overcome challenges related to limited participation, lack of understanding, and difficulty collecting course syllabi. To work together to have good collaboration and peer support among academic staff, faculty members share their experiences and support one another, which helps them acquire new skills and improve their overall capacity.

In this context, it could be seen to deal with the limited capacity of academic staff, limited participation and commitment from the people involved, and difficulty in collecting the course syllabi. This camaraderie also encourages participation and a willingness to share resources,

like course syllabi. [Hargreaves and Fullan \(2015\)](#) argue that collaborative cultures create mutual support, enhancing staff capacity and participation ([Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015](#)).

Moreover, [Stoll et al. \(2006\)](#) highlight the importance of professional learning communities (PLCs) in fostering collaboration among academic staff. PLCs provide a structured environment where faculty members can collaborate, share best practices, and support each other's professional growth, thereby addressing challenges related to limited capacity and participation ([Stoll et al., 2006](#)). [Wenger \(1999\)](#) introduces the concept of communities of practice, which emphasizes the role of social learning and peer support in professional development. By engaging in communities of practice, academic staff can collectively address issues such as the difficulty in collecting course syllabi and share valuable resources to enhance their teaching practices ([Wenger, 1999](#)).

[Tschannen-Moran and Hoy \(2000\)](#) discuss the impact of trust on collaboration within educational settings. They argue that trust among faculty members fosters a collaborative environment where individuals are more willing to share resources and support each other, which is crucial for addressing the limited capacity of academic staff and encouraging participation ([Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000](#)). [Little \(2002\)](#) explores the significance of teacher collaboration in improving educational outcomes. She finds that when teachers collaborate, they are more likely to engage in reflective practices and share pedagogical strategies, leading to improved teaching quality and better support for curriculum reform initiatives ([Little, 2002](#)).

[Vescio et al. \(2008\)](#) provide a meta-analysis of the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practices and student learning. Their findings suggest that PLCs positively

influence teachers' professional development and capacity building, which can help overcome challenges related to limited participation and difficulty in collecting course syllabi ([Vescio et al., 2008](#)).

In summary, fostering good collaboration and peer support among academic staff enhances their capacity, participation, and willingness to share resources. Collaborative cultures and structured environments like professional learning communities play a vital role in addressing challenges related to limited capacity, participation, and the collection of course syllabi.

Allocating all necessary resources ensures that the reform process is adequately supported. Thus, this solution could cope with limited availability of resources, budget, and time and limited participation and commitment from the people involved. This increases commitment among staff, who are more likely to participate when they see the institution is fully invested. [Levin and Fullan \(2008\)](#) highlight that sufficient funding and resources are vital for successful and sustained reform implementation. Additionally, [Honig \(2006\)](#) discusses the role of external funding and partnerships in supporting educational reforms. She suggests that external resources can supplement institutional budgets, providing the necessary financial support to implement reforms effectively. This approach can help overcome budget constraints and ensure sustained implementation efforts ([Honig, 2006](#)).

Furthermore, [Darling-Hammond \(2015\)](#) highlights the significance of investing in human resources through professional development and training. She argues that providing sufficient resources for professional growth improves staff capacity and increases their commitment to the reform process. Adequate investment in human resources ensures that staff members are well-prepared to implement and sustain reforms ([Darling-Hammond, 2015](#)).

In summary, allocating necessary resources and budget is crucial for supporting educational reform. Adequate funding and strategic resource allocation enhance staff commitment and participation, ensuring the success and sustainability of reform efforts.

By aligning the identified collective solutions with the principles and findings from previous studies on DL, educational institutions can effectively address emerging issues and challenges and promote successful curriculum reform processes. With respect to the six common key themes of the above-mentioned collective solutions in the curriculum reform process, the connection with the key functions of DL emerged to show its importance in dealing with issues and challenges encountered in the reform process.

#### **5.4 The Functions of the DL in the Curriculum Reform Process**

With regard to the collective solutions mentioned in the above section in addressing the issues and challenges faced during the curriculum reform process, the connection of the Distributed Leadership (DL) functions to those solutions can be seen, which will be described and discussed in the following points.

- The function of Distributed Leadership (DL) in incorporating multiple perspectives and expertise in decision-making processes aligns closely with the importance of good communication and interactions among relevant curriculum leaders. DL promotes a collaborative approach to leadership, where responsibilities and decision-making are shared among various stakeholders. This collaborative model encourages open and good communication, active listening, and a willingness to consider diverse viewpoints. By fostering good communication and interactions among curriculum leaders, DL allows for integrating multiple perspectives into the decision-making process. When

relevant leaders engage in constructive dialogue, share information, and actively listen to each other, they can collectively shape the curriculum to reflect the diverse needs and goals of the educational community. This inclusive approach ensures that relevant stakeholders have a voice in curriculum development, leading to more comprehensive and representative reforms. Ultimately, the connection between the functions of DL and effective communication and interactions among curriculum leaders underscores the importance of collaboration and inclusivity in educational leadership. [Spillane \(2006a\)](#) supports the connection between Distributed Leadership (DL) and effective communication and interactions among curriculum leaders. In this context, the study highlights how DL allows for integrating diverse perspectives and expertise in decision-making processes, leading to more comprehensive and inclusive reforms in education. By fostering collaboration and shared leadership responsibilities, DL facilitates open communication and dialogue among leaders, promoting a culture of collective decision-making.

- The connection between DL and the functions of creating a supportive environment, sharing responsibilities among curriculum leaders, and fostering collaboration and peer support lies in how DL facilitates the effective distribution of responsibilities and decision-making processes. DL allows for establishing a supportive and encouraging environment within an institution by involving various individuals and teams in the leadership process. This inclusivity fosters a sense of community and shared ownership of reform initiatives, promoting a supportive culture where all stakeholders feel valued and empowered to contribute to the curriculum development process. For sharing responsibilities among curriculum leaders, DL ensures that responsibilities are distributed among relevant leaders, enabling each member to take ownership of specific aspects of the reform process. By sharing responsibilities, DL promotes a sense of

accountability and commitment among leaders as they work collaboratively towards common goals and objectives. With regard to fostering collaboration and peer support, DL emphasizes collaboration and peer support among faculty members and curriculum leaders, encouraging teamwork and collective decision-making. By promoting open communication and dialogue, DL creates a platform for sharing ideas, expertise, and best practices, leading to more effective and inclusive curriculum reforms. Overall, the functions of DL align with creating a supportive environment, sharing responsibilities, and fostering collaboration and peer support, as they all contribute to the collective effort and shared responsibility required for successful curriculum reforms. [Harris \(2008a\)](#) supports the connection between DL and the functions of creating a supportive environment, sharing responsibilities among curriculum leaders, and fostering collaboration and peer support. Moreover, [Blackmore and Blackwell \(2006\)](#) assert that peer-to-peer support among faculty is critical to successful reforms; establishing a collaborative culture where colleagues can provide encouragement and share best practices can often be as effective as guidance from university leadership. Such networks create communities of practice that promote continuous improvement and a shared commitment to institutional goals. The study emphasizes how DL enables the distribution of leadership responsibilities and decision-making processes, leading to a more inclusive and collaborative approach to curriculum reforms. By involving various stakeholders in the leadership process, DL promotes a supportive environment where individuals feel empowered to contribute and collaborate towards common goals. [Leithwood et al. \(2008\)](#) provide further evidence of the connection between Distributed Leadership (DL) and the functions of creating a supportive environment, sharing responsibilities among curriculum leaders, and fostering collaboration and peer support. Therefore, this study emphasizes how DL enhances the capacity for collective

leadership and shared decision-making within educational organizations. By involving multiple stakeholders in the leadership process, DL promotes a culture of collaboration and mutual support, leading to more effective and sustainable curriculum reform efforts.

- In relation to improved buy-in and support, DL uses the approach to help generate buy-in and support for the curriculum reform process. When various stakeholders are engaged in decision-making and given opportunities to contribute, they are more likely to feel invested in the outcomes. This can lead to increased support for implementing the new curriculum, as individuals involved in the process are more likely to understand and embrace the changes. The connection between DL and generating buy-in and support for curriculum reforms is closely tied to the functions of involving various stakeholders in decision-making, fostering collaboration and communication, and promoting a sense of shared ownership and commitment. Involving various curriculum leaders in decision-making, DL ensures that diverse perspectives are employed in the decision-making process regarding curriculum reforms. This approach allows for different perspectives and expertise to be considered, leading to more informed and consensus-driven decisions that are likely to garner greater buy-in and support from those involved. In terms of fostering collaboration and communication, DL promotes collaboration and open communication among relevant curriculum leaders, creating a platform for sharing ideas, concerns, and feedback related to the curriculum reform process. By encouraging dialogue and engagement, DL helps build trust and understanding among curriculum leaders, leading to increased support for the proposed changes. By distributing leadership responsibilities and involving curriculum leaders in the reform process, DL cultivates a sense of shared ownership and commitment to the outcomes of curriculum reform. When individuals feel that their input is valued and

that they have a stake in the decision-making process, they are more likely to actively support and advocate for the implementation of the new curriculum. Previous studies support the connection between DL and generating buy-in and support for curriculum reforms. [Spillane et al. \(2001\)](#) emphasize the importance of distributed leadership in building consensus and generating buy-in for educational initiatives. [Gronn \(2008\)](#) explores how distributed leadership can facilitate shared decision-making and collaboration, leading to increased support and commitment to organizational change.

- With Flexibility and adaptability, DL allows flexibility and adaptability in curriculum reforms. As challenges and issues arise, a distributed leadership approach enables different individuals and teams to respond and adapt accordingly. This agility can help address barriers more effectively, ensuring that the reform process remains responsive to emerging needs and changing circumstances. The connection between Distributed Leadership (DL) and flexibility and adaptability in curriculum reform lies in the functions of promoting shared decision-making, sharing responsibilities, and enabling a responsive and agile approach to addressing those emerging issues and challenges. With shared decision-making, DL involves various individuals and teams in the decision-making process, allowing for diverse perspectives and expertise to be considered. This shared decision-making approach enables relevant curriculum leaders to collaboratively identify and address issues and challenges in curriculum reforms, leading to more flexible and adaptive solutions that can be implemented effectively. For sharing responsibilities, DL distributes leadership responsibilities among relevant curriculum leaders, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability for addressing issues and challenges and adapting to changing circumstances. By sharing responsibilities, teams can work together to overcome obstacles and make necessary adjustments to the reform process in a timely and coordinated manner. By enabling a

responsive approach, DL promotes a culture of responsiveness and agility, allowing for quick and effective responses to emerging needs and challenges in curriculum reforms. By empowering individuals and teams to adapt and innovate as needed, DL ensures that the reform process remains flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances. Previous studies support the connection between DL and flexibility and adaptability in curriculum reforms, including a study by [Leithwood and Harris \(2009\)](#), which highlights the importance of distributed leadership in promoting flexibility and adaptability in educational organizations, particularly in response to complex challenges and changing environments, and [Spillane and Sherer \(2004\)](#) which explores how distributed leadership can enhance organizational agility and responsiveness in the face of challenges and uncertainties.

To sum up, DL offers a strategic framework that empowers institutions to navigate the complexities of curriculum reform by fostering collaboration, adaptability, and flexibility. DL enables cohesive leadership to tackle emerging barriers and promote sustainable improvements by leveraging shared decision-making, strategic communication, and collective accountability.

## CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesizes the research findings to address the research questions and provides implications for enhancing Distributed Leadership (DL) practices in higher education curriculum reforms. The chapter is organized into several sections: a summary of the research findings, theoretical implications, policy implications, practice implications, limitations of the study, and future directions for research and practice in the field of DL in higher education curriculum reforms in Cambodia and beyond.

### 6.2 Summary of Research Findings

The primary aim of this study was to examine how DL is implemented in the curriculum reform process of an undergraduate English program at one provincial university in Cambodia. The study's findings elucidate the roles of curriculum leaders, the distribution of power, the issues and challenges faced, and the collective solutions employed to address these issues and challenges, as articulated through the four main research questions of the study.

#### 6.2.1 Roles of curriculum leaders

The study identified distinct roles for curriculum leaders at various levels within the leadership structure of the institution:

- **University level (Vice-rectors and head of QA):** At this level, curriculum leaders provided overarching strategic guidance essential for steering the reform process. Their responsibilities included supporting professional development (PD) workshops that aimed to equip faculty with the necessary skills and knowledge to adapt to new curricular demands. Additionally, they

endorsed and supported curriculum reform activities, lending institutional support that legitimized and facilitated the reform efforts.

- **Faculty level (The Dean):** The Dean played a crucial role in coordinating the reform process at the faculty level. This involved acting as a liaison between the university's upper management and the classroom-level staff, ensuring that the strategic vision and policies set by the university leaders were effectively communicated and implemented. The Dean also provided direct guidance to teachers, helping them navigate the complexities of CR and ensuring that their efforts were aligned with institutional goals.
- **Classroom level (Teaching staff):** Teachers were at the forefront of implementing the revised curriculum. Their primary responsibilities included developing course content and syllabi that reflected the new curricular standards, pedagogical approaches, and assessment methods. Teachers' engagement in this process was critical, as they were responsible for translating theoretical reforms into practical classroom applications that directly impacted student learning experiences.

### 6.2.2 Power distribution of the curriculum leaders' roles

The study underscores the importance of shared responsibilities, collective decision-making, and effective communication and interactions among curriculum leaders across the university, faculty, and classroom levels. DL model facilitated a more collaborative and inclusive approach to CR. By involving leaders at multiple levels, the reform process benefited from diverse perspectives and expertise, fostering a sense of collective ownership and accountability. The effective distribution of power also helped to mitigate potential conflicts and align efforts towards common goals, ensuring a more coherent and unified curriculum

reform process. More importantly, the findings indicated the essence of follow-up efforts to enhance the effectiveness of the reform process.

### 6.2.3 Issues and challenges the curriculum leaders faced

The research identified several issues and challenges that curriculum leaders encountered during the reform process:

- **Limited resources:** One of the most significant barriers was the scarcity of resources, including financial constraints and inadequate access to teaching materials and technological tools. This limitation hindered the ability to fully realize the envisioned reforms.
- **Limited involvement:** Some stakeholders, particularly those at the classroom level, seemed insufficiently involved in the reform process due to individual benefits and other personal issues. This lack of involvement hindered the full engagement necessary for successful reform.
- **Lack of understanding and support:** Understanding and support among different levels of curriculum leaders posed significant challenges. These roots of the problem often resulted in misunderstandings, misalignment of goals, and inefficient implementation of reforms.
- **Limited capacity for staff:** The capacity of staff to effectively engage with and implement the new curriculum was another challenge. This included issues related to the professional development and preparedness of faculty members to develop the new syllabi and adapt to new teaching methodologies and curricular content.

Therefore, the curriculum reform process faced significant challenges that hindered its success. Key barriers included limited resources, insufficient key stakeholder involvement, misunderstandings and limited support among curriculum leaders, and inadequate staff capacity. Addressing these issues is crucial to fully realizing the intended reforms and ensuring their effective implementation. Inconsistent implementation across different levels was a notable issue, highlighting the need for more robust coordination mechanisms.

#### **6.2.4 Collective solutions to address those emerging issues and challenges**

To address these challenges, the study found that several collective solutions were effective:

- **Professional development workshops:** Regular PD workshops were instrumental in building the capacity of faculty members. These workshops provided ongoing training and support, helping teaching staff improve the skills and knowledge necessary for developing the syllabi and implementing effective curriculum.
- **Technical meetings:** Regular technical meetings facilitated better communication and coordination among curriculum leaders. These meetings provided a platform for discussing challenges, sharing best practices, and collaboratively developing solutions.
- **Continuous support from higher-level administrators:** Support from higher-level administrators, including Vice-Rectors and the Head of QA, was crucial. Their involvement provided the necessary institutional backing and resources to support the reform process.
- **Enhanced communication channels:** Improving communication channels among curriculum leaders helped to address misunderstandings and align efforts. Effective communication ensured that all parties were informed, engaged, and working towards the same objectives.

- **Collaborative efforts:** Promoting a culture of collaboration among higher-level administrators, faculty, and teaching staff was key to overcoming challenges. By working together, curriculum leaders were able to pool their expertise, share resources, and support one another in the curriculum reform process.

These collective solutions facilitated a more effective and cohesive implementation of the curriculum reform process, demonstrating the potential of DL to drive meaningful and sustainable change in educational settings.

### 6.3 Implications

Drawing on the findings of the study, several implications for theory, policy, and practice on DL implementation in higher education curriculum reforms, particularly in the context of Cambodia and similar settings, were identified.

#### 6.3.1 Theoretical implications

The findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of DL by highlighting its practical applications in higher education curriculum reforms. The study supports the notion that DL involves shared responsibilities and collaborative decision-making, which are essential for successful curriculum reforms. It extends the theoretical framework by demonstrating how DL can be effectively implemented in a developing country context, where resource constraints and limited involvement are prevalent. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of capacity building, continuous professional development, and good communication and interactions among curriculum leaders, with the addition of the findings with respect to the follow-up efforts by the higher level in sustaining DL practices.

To substantiate the theoretical implications of the findings on DL in the context of higher education curriculum reforms, it is evident that integrating relevant literature aligns with the study. The study highlights key theoretical implications of DL in the context of higher education curriculum reforms (CR). The findings emphasize the alignment and divergence of these implications with empirical studies, offering insights into the application of DL principles. Below is a systematic discussion of the findings in relation to relevant empirical research:

### 1. Collaborative decision-making and shared responsibilities

Empirical studies underscore the value of collaborative leadership practices in fostering institutional capacity for change.

- **Leithwood et al. (2008)**: The current study corroborates the assertion that DL practices enhance collective leadership and institutional capacity. The findings demonstrate that shared responsibilities and collaborative decision-making among curriculum leaders are essential to implementing reforms effectively. This aligns with Leithwood et al.'s evidence of collective efforts driving change in educational settings.
- **Spillane (2006a)**: The study's emphasis on shared leadership tasks resonates with Spillane's typology of leadership distribution—collaborated, collective, and coordinated. These forms of distribution offer practical frameworks for dividing leadership tasks among faculty and administration, which was evident in the current findings.
- **Nadeem (2024)**: The study complements Nadeem's strategies for operationalizing DL by highlighting the importance of a shared vision, defined roles, and fostering collaborative communities. The findings expand these

strategies into the context of curriculum reforms, illustrating how they bridge gaps in higher education leadership.

## 2. Implementation in developing countries

Implementing DL in developing contexts, such as Cambodia, reveals unique challenges and adaptations compared to other global settings.

- **Lu (2022):** The current findings reflect Lu's discussion on DL adaptations in hierarchical structures in Chinese schools. Similarly, Cambodian higher education institutions require restructuring to accommodate distributed decision-making within traditionally centralized systems.
- **Xiong et al. (2020):** Xiong et al.'s identification of curriculum leaders bridging various leadership levels directly aligns with the study's findings. The emphasis on middle-level leaders in curriculum reforms parallels the collaborative roles observed in developing country contexts, emphasizing adaptability in distributed practices.

## 3. Capacity building and continuous professional development

The study highlights the importance of creating environments conducive to professional growth and collaboration among faculty.

- **Harris (2008a):** The findings confirm Harris's assertion that DL fosters a collaborative culture necessary for professional development. The study identifies strategies such as peer support and shared learning communities as central to capacity building in curriculum reforms.
- **Fullan (2015):** The findings align with Fullan's framework on efficient resource management and continuous improvement. The study demonstrates how these

practices sustain DL principles in higher education by providing a structured approach to professional development.

#### 4. Cultural and contextual adaptations

The study emphasizes that DL must be culturally and contextually sensitive to be effective in curriculum reform efforts.

- **Hallinger and Heck (2011):** The findings align with Hallinger and Heck's view that collaborative leadership in Asian contexts must navigate cultural norms around authority. The study confirms that adaptations to local cultural expectations are critical for successful DL implementation.
- **Bush and Glover (2014):** The findings resonate with Bush and Glover's argument that geographical and cultural factors influence DL's effectiveness. In the Cambodian context, such factors require adjustments in leadership practices to meet local needs.
- **Young and Kim (2024):** The study complements Young and Kim's call for culturally sensitive evaluation tools by highlighting the need for frameworks that address the specific challenges of DL in diverse educational contexts.

#### 5. Effective communication and interactions

Effective communication is integral to DL and supports comprehensive decision-making in curriculum reforms.

- **Spillane (2006a):** The findings align with Spillane's research linking DL to improved communication among curriculum leaders. The study demonstrates

that integrating diverse perspectives fosters inclusivity and enhances the reform process.

- **Harris (2008a):** Harris's insights into addressing resistance through effective communication align with the study's findings. The importance of fostering open dialogue and mitigating resistance in hierarchical structures is emphasized as a key strategy in reform efforts.

By incorporating these studies, it can substantiate the findings on the practical applications of DL in higher education curriculum reforms, especially in developing country contexts, and emphasize the importance of capacity building, professional development, and effective communication and interactions in sustaining DL practices. In addition to the previous literature, the finding identified the importance of follow-up efforts in the implementation of DL for the effectiveness of the CR in the context of Cambodian higher education curriculum reforms, which may apply to countries with similar contexts.

### **6.3.2 Policy implications**

The study provides several important policy implications for higher education institutions and policymakers. These implications are crucial for the successful implementation and sustainability of DL practices in the context of CR. Several important policy implications arise from this study.

#### **6.3.2.1 Institutional support**

As institutional support is crucial in the implementation of DL in the higher education curriculum reforms in Cambodia, HEIs may consider the policies to promote institutional

support for DL practices by providing adequate resources and infrastructure to facilitate collaboration and shared decision-making.

Adequate resources are essential for fostering an environment where higher-level administrators, faculty, and the teaching staff can engage in meaningful collaboration and shared decision-making processes. HEIs may be able to institutionalize professional development programs to enhance the skills and competencies of administrators and faculty members involved in the CR.

Professional development is a critical component of effective DL. Institutions may consider establishing comprehensive professional development programs tailored to the specific needs of faculty and administrators engaged in the curriculum reform process. These programs may focus on developing leadership skills, enhancing pedagogical competencies, and fostering an understanding of collaborative decision-making processes. Training sessions, workshops, and continuous learning opportunities can empower faculty members and relevant stakeholders to take on leadership roles with confidence and competence.

By institutionalizing professional development, HEIs may be able to ensure that their staff are well-prepared to contribute to and lead curriculum reform efforts, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of education provided. Additionally, it may be necessary to offer mentorship opportunities where less experienced faculty members are paired with seasoned educators who can provide guidance and support. Institutions might also consider providing access to external training opportunities, such as conferences and seminars, where relevant curriculum leaders can learn from experts in the field and stay updated on the latest trends and best practices in higher education.

### **6.3.2.2 Evaluation and feedback mechanisms**

Robust evaluation and feedback systems are essential for regularly assessing the effectiveness of DL initiatives. HEIs may be able to establish mechanisms to collect and analyze data on the impact of DL practices on CR. This data can provide valuable insights and inform continuous improvement efforts, ensuring that DL practices remain effective and relevant.

### **6.3.2.3 Incentives and recognition**

Developing incentive structures to reward faculty and other relevant curriculum leaders who actively participate in and contribute to DL practices is crucial. Recognizing and celebrating their efforts can motivate others to engage in collaborative leadership roles. Incentives might include financial rewards, professional recognition, and career advancement opportunities.

### **6.3.2.4 Cultural change**

Promoting a cultural shift within the institution that values and supports DL is vital. This involves fostering a culture of trust, respect, and openness, where the relevant stakeholders feel valued and empowered to contribute to decision-making processes. Cultural change can be facilitated through:

- Institutional policies that encourage collaborative practices.
- Initiatives that highlight the benefits of DL.
- Efforts to build a supportive and inclusive institutional climate.

### **6.3.2.5 Policy alignment**

Ensuring that institutional policies related to DL are aligned with broader educational policies at the regional or national level is essential. This alignment can facilitate coherence and consistency in the implementation of DL practices across different levels of the education

system. Policymakers may consider working collaboratively with HEIs to develop and implement policies that support DL and curriculum reform efforts.

### **6.3.3 Practice implications**

Practice implications may provide a roadmap for HEIs to enhance DL practices in CR effectively. By focusing on communication and collaboration, incremental implementation, and leveraging external partnerships, institutions could create a supportive environment for DL. This comprehensive approach ensures that DL practices are not only implemented but also sustained and continuously improved, ultimately leading to more effective and inclusive CR.

#### **6.3.3.1 Enhancing communication and collaboration**

Enhancing communication and collaboration through technology is a cornerstone of effective DL. Digital platforms enable stakeholders to connect and collaborate regardless of their physical location, fostering a more inclusive and transparent environment. By providing professional development resources online, institutions ensure continuous learning and improvement, which is critical for the success of DL practices. Therefore, using technology to facilitate communication and collaboration among stakeholders. Digital tools and platforms can support DL by enhancing transparency, fostering a sense of community, and providing access to professional development resources.

#### **6.3.3.2 Incremental implementation**

An incremental approach allows institutions to manage resources effectively while building momentum for larger reforms. Starting with pilot projects helps identify best practices and potential challenges, making it easier to refine strategies before broader implementation. This

approach also demonstrates the value of DL practices, helping to gain buy-in from stakeholders. Adopting an incremental approach to implementing DL gradually scales up initiatives as resources become available. Starting with pilot projects or focusing on specific departments can build momentum and demonstrate the value of DL practices.

### **6.3.3.3 Leveraging external partnerships**

External partnerships bring in additional expertise and resources that can significantly enhance DL practices. Collaborating with other HEIs, non-profit organizations, and industry stakeholders provides diverse perspectives and insights, enriching the reform process. These partnerships may also offer financial support, making it easier to sustain and expand DL initiatives. Therefore, by implementing these practical strategies, HEIs may be able to foster a culture of collaboration and shared leadership, ultimately leading to more effective and sustainable CR.

## **6.4 Limitations**

While comprehensive, this study acknowledges several limitations crucial for contextualizing its findings and understanding its scope and applicability. These limitations span contextual, methodological, and cultural aspects, each affecting the study's outcomes in various ways.

### **6.4.1 Contextual limitations**

The research was conducted at a single provincial university in Cambodia, focusing specifically on the undergraduate English program. This narrow focus may limit the generalizability of the findings to other programs, universities, or regions. As [Creswell and Poth \(2016\)](#) suggest, case studies often face challenges related to the extent to which their findings can be applied to broader contexts.

The unique characteristics of a provincial university, such as resource availability, student demographics, and institutional culture, may differ significantly from those of urban or internationally renowned institutions. These differences can impact the implementation and outcomes of DL practices. For instance, resources available at a provincial university, such as funding, technological infrastructure, and professional development opportunities, might be more limited compared to well-funded urban institutions. This disparity can influence the feasibility and effectiveness of DL practices. Additionally, the socio-economic backgrounds and educational preparedness of students in provincial universities might affect how CR is received and implemented.

#### **6.4.1.1 Specificity of the educational setting**

The choice of a provincial university in Cambodia, focusing on the undergraduate English program, presents unique characteristics that may not be representative of other educational settings.

Provincial universities often have different resources, student demographics, and institutional cultures compared to urban or internationally renowned institutions. These differences can significantly impact the implementation and outcomes of DL practices. For example, the resources available in a provincial university, such as funding, technological infrastructure, and professional development opportunities, might be more limited compared to those in well-funded urban institutions. This disparity can influence the feasibility and effectiveness of DL practices.

#### **6.4.1.2 Cultural and societal context**

The cultural and societal context of Cambodia plays a crucial role in shaping educational practices and policies. Cambodia's educational system has its own set of historical, political, and social influences that may not be present in other countries.

These factors can affect how leadership is perceived and enacted within educational institutions. In Cambodia, traditional hierarchical structures and respect for authority may influence the acceptance and effectiveness of DL practices. Faculty and administrators might be accustomed to top-down decision-making processes, making the transition to a more collaborative and distributed approach challenging. This cultural context can limit the applicability of the findings to other regions where different cultural norms prevail. Therefore, cultural factors unique to Cambodia may influence the applicability of the findings to other contexts.

For instance, cultural dimensions such as power distance and collectivism play a significant role in shaping leadership practices and may differ significantly across regions. Power distance refers to the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organizations accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.

In high power distance settings, traditional hierarchical structures may hinder the implementation of DL, which relies on more egalitarian and collaborative approaches. Consequently, the effectiveness of DL practices in promoting shared leadership and collaborative decision-making might be limited. Another cultural factor is collectivism, which refers to the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups and prioritize group goals over individual goals.

Cambodian culture is characterized by a strong sense of collectivism, which can both facilitate and challenge the implementation of DL. On the one hand, collectivist cultures may naturally support DL practices because they emphasize group harmony, cooperation, and collective decision-making. On the other hand, the strong emphasis on group cohesion might also discourage dissent and critical discussions, which are essential for effective DL.

When applying the findings of this study to other contexts, particularly those with different cultural norms, it is essential to consider these cultural differences. In cultures with low power distance, where egalitarian values are more prevalent, DL practices might be more readily accepted and integrated into institutional practices. Similarly, promoting DL in individualistic cultures, where personal achievements and autonomy are prioritized, might require different strategies to encourage collaboration and shared leadership. These cultural nuances must be recognized when interpreting and applying the findings to different settings.

#### **6.4.1.3 Program-specific factors**

Focusing on the undergraduate English program also introduces program-specific factors that may not be applicable to other disciplines. The teaching and learning dynamics in language programs can differ significantly from those in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) fields.

Language programs often emphasize communicative and interactive pedagogies, which might naturally align more closely with DL practices. In contrast, programs in STEM fields may have different pedagogical approaches and requirements that could influence the implementation of DL. Therefore, the findings from the English program might not fully capture the complexities and challenges of implementing DL in other academic disciplines.

### 6.4.2 Methodological limitations

The study employed qualitative methods, including interviews and document analysis, which have inherent limitations such as potential researcher bias and the subjectivity of interpretations. While these methods provided in-depth insights, they also introduced potential biases. Researcher bias can occur when the researcher's perspectives, beliefs, or expectations influence data collection, analysis, or interpretation. For instance, during interviews, researchers might unintentionally ask leading questions that steer participants toward certain responses.

In the analysis phase, researchers might focus on data confirming their preconceived notions while overlooking data contradicting their findings. To mitigate this bias, researchers can use strategies such as a reflexive journal and involving multiple researchers in the data collection and analysis process.

The subjective nature of qualitative data is another limitation. Unlike quantitative data, which is often viewed as more objective and generalizable, qualitative data relies heavily on the interpretations of the researcher. These interpretations can vary significantly depending on the researcher's conceptual framework, cultural background, and personal experiences.

To address this issue, researchers can use strategies such as member checking and peer debriefing. Member checking involves sharing findings with participants to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflect their perspectives. Peer debriefing involves discussing the research process and findings with colleagues who can provide critical feedback and alternative viewpoints. These strategies can enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research findings.

#### **6.4.2.1 Self-reported data and social desirability bias**

The study's reliance on self-reported data from participants introduces another set of limitations. Self-reported data can be influenced by various biases, including social desirability bias.

Social desirability bias occurs when participants provide responses, they believe are socially acceptable or favorable rather than their true thoughts or behaviors. This bias can lead to over-reporting of positive behaviors and under-reporting of negative behaviors, skewing the research findings. For example, in the context of DL practices, participants might overstate their involvement in collaborative decision-making processes or understate challenges they face, wanting to present themselves and their institutions in a positive light. This tendency can result in an overly optimistic portrayal of DL practices, which may not accurately reflect reality.

To mitigate the impact of social desirability bias, researchers can use techniques such as ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, reassuring participants that their responses will not be linked to their identities. Additionally, using multiple data sources, such as combining interviews with document analysis, can help to cross-verify findings and provide a more balanced perspective.

#### **6.4.2.2 Document analysis limitations**

Document analysis, another qualitative method used in the study, also has its limitations. While documents can provide valuable information and context, they are often created for specific purposes and audiences, which can influence their content and completeness. For instance, institutional reports might highlight successes and downplay challenges, providing a

skewed view of DL practices. This can result in an incomplete or biased understanding of the implementation and impact of DL practices.

#### **6.4.2.3 Sample size and diversity**

The sample size in this study was relatively small, including a limited number of curriculum leaders at three different levels for one program. This specific focus, while providing valuable insights, means that the findings might not capture the full complexity and diversity of DL practices across various departments and disciplines. A larger and more diverse sample could have enriched the understanding and applicability of the results.

Qualitative research often prioritizes depth over breadth, aiming to explore phenomena in great detail rather than seeking generalizability. However, a smaller sample size can limit the extent to which findings can be generalized to broader populations or different contexts.

Including a larger and more diverse sample would likely provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of DL practices. A diverse sample encompassing various departments, disciplines, and institutional types could reveal a wider range of experiences and practices, highlighting commonalities and differences in DL implementation. This broader perspective would enhance the study's relevance and applicability, offering insights that are more representative of the diverse landscape of higher education. For instance, a larger sample might uncover specific challenges and strategies unique to certain disciplines or institutional contexts. It could also highlight variations in how DL is perceived and enacted by faculty and leaders with different backgrounds, experiences, and roles. Such insights would be invaluable for developing more tailored and effective DL policies and practices that accommodate various academic settings' diverse needs and realities.

#### **6.4.2.4 Potential bias and representation**

A small sample size also raises concerns about potential bias and representation. When the sample is limited, there is a risk that certain perspectives may be overrepresented or underrepresented. For example, if the majority of participants come from a single faculty or share similar viewpoints, the findings may not accurately reflect the diversity of experiences and opinions within the broader institution and leadership population. Ensuring a representative sample is crucial for capturing a holistic view of DL practices.

This involves intentionally selecting participants from different faculties, departments, disciplines, and demographic backgrounds to ensure a wide range of perspectives. While increasing the sample size can enhance the breadth and representativeness of the findings, it also presents practical challenges. Larger samples require more resources, including time, funding, and personnel, to conduct interviews, analyze data, and ensure rigorous research practices. Additionally, managing and analyzing larger datasets can be complex and time-consuming, requiring robust data management and analytical strategies.

In conclusion, acknowledging these limitations is crucial for understanding the scope and applicability of the study. While the findings provide valuable insights into the implementation of DL in higher education curriculum reforms in Cambodia, they must be interpreted with caution, considering the contextual and methodological factors that may influence their generalizability and relevance to other settings.

### **6.5 Future Directions for Research and Practice**

The findings of this study open several avenues for future research and practice in DL in higher education curriculum reforms.

### 6.5.1 Longitudinal studies

Future research may consider conducting longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impact of DL practices on curriculum reform outcomes and educational quality. Longitudinal studies are crucial for understanding the enduring effects of DL practices over extended periods.

Unlike cross-sectional studies, which provide a snapshot at a single point in time, longitudinal studies follow subjects over months, years, or even decades. This approach allows researchers to track changes and developments, providing a comprehensive view of how DL practices influence curriculum reform and educational quality over time. For instance, a longitudinal study could track a cohort of higher education institutions that have implemented DL practices in their curriculum reform efforts.

Researchers may collect data on various outcomes, such as student performance, faculty engagement, and administrative efficiency, at multiple intervals. By doing so, they can identify trends, patterns, and long-term impacts that might not be evident in shorter studies. Such research could also highlight the sustainability of DL practices, revealing whether initial successes are maintained or if challenges emerge over time.

Such studies can provide deeper insights into the sustainability of DL practices and the evolution of leadership roles over time. Longitudinal studies can also shed light on the evolving nature of leadership roles within institutions. As DL practices mature, the roles and responsibilities of faculty, administrators, and other stakeholders may change. For example, faculty members who initially take on leadership roles may develop new skills and competencies, leading to career advancement or shifts in their professional focus.

Similarly, institutional policies and structures may adapt to better support DL practices, evolving how leadership is distributed and exercised. By examining these dynamics, researchers can provide valuable insights into the factors contributing to DL practices' sustainability. This information can help institutions identify best practices and potential pitfalls, guiding their efforts to implement and maintain effective DL strategies.

### **6.5.2 Comparative studies**

Comparative studies across disciplines within the same higher education institution or among different institutions, both in Cambodia and internationally, offer valuable insights into the implementation of DL. Such research is critical for identifying best practices and addressing common challenges associated with DL. For instance, future studies might focus on exploring DL practices across various disciplines within different faculties at Svay Rieng University, or compare these practices across universities in Cambodia, the broader region, or globally. These investigations would provide a more nuanced understanding of DL practices across diverse geographical, institutional, and cultural contexts.

Therefore, researchers could identify common challenges and effective strategies for implementing DL by comparing multiple institutions. These studies may also reveal how cultural, organizational, and contextual factors influence the adoption and effectiveness of DL practices. They could explore how cultural values, educational traditions, and policy environments shape the implementation of DL. By analyzing these differences, they may identify context-specific factors that facilitate or hinder DL practices, providing insights that are applicable to diverse educational settings. These studies can contribute to developing a more comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of DL in higher education.

In addition to identifying best practices, comparative studies may help develop a more nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of DL. This understanding is crucial for designing DL strategies that are adaptable to different institutional and cultural contexts. For instance, what works well in a highly centralized educational system may not be effective in a more decentralized one. By recognizing these differences, researchers and practitioners may tailor DL practices to better meet the needs of specific institutions and communities.

Furthermore, comparative studies may foster cross-cultural learning and collaboration. Institutions could learn from each other's experiences, adapting successful strategies and avoiding common pitfalls. This collaborative approach may enhance the overall effectiveness of DL practices, leading to more robust and innovative curriculum reforms.

### **6.5.3 Integration of technology**

As technology continues to evolve, its impact on DL is becoming increasingly evident. Tools such as collaborative platforms, virtual meeting software, and data analytics are transforming how educational leaders interact and make decisions. In this regard, the potential of technology is used to enhance DL and the challenges that come with it. Technological advancements provide leaders with various tools to facilitate communication, collaboration, and decision-making. For instance, collaborative platforms or virtual meeting software such as Zoom and Google Meet allow interactions without geographical limitations, thus fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose among team members ([Garrison & Vaughan, 2008](#)).

Moreover, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data analytics are revolutionizing leadership practices in higher education. AI can provide educational leaders with insights into student performance, faculty effectiveness, and resource allocation. By leveraging data, leaders can

make more informed decisions, thereby enhancing the DL model. However, the ethical implications of data privacy and the need for digital literacy among leaders pose significant challenges ([Seldon & Abidoye, 2018](#)). AI tools, such as predictive analytics, can identify students at risk of dropping out, allowing for timely interventions ([Siemens & Baker, 2012](#)). For example, the use of learning analytics can track student engagement and performance, providing early warnings to educators and enabling targeted support ([Ferguson, 2012](#)).

More importantly, data-driven decision-making can streamline resource allocation, ensuring that departments receive the support they need to succeed ([Picciano, 2012](#)). However, the ethical implications of using AI and data analytics in education must also be carefully considered. Issues such as data privacy, consent, and potential biases in AI algorithms must be addressed to ensure that these technologies are fair and transparent ([Williamson, 2016](#)). The potential of AI and data-driven decision-making in DL is significant, but educational leaders must navigate these challenges to fully realize the benefits. Investing in digital infrastructure, promoting digital literacy, and establishing ethical guidelines are essential steps in this process.

With this regard, research may be considered to explore the role of technology in facilitating DL practices, particularly in enhancing communication, collaboration, and decision-making among relevant stakeholders. Technology plays a vital role in modern education, and its potential to support DL practices is immense.

Future research may investigate how digital tools and platforms can facilitate communication, collaboration, and decision-making in DL. This exploration may provide innovative solutions to some of the challenges identified in this study, such as coordinating efforts across different departments or faculties and ensuring timely and effective communication among

stakeholders. For example, researchers could examine the use of collaborative software platforms, such as project management tools, virtual meeting spaces, and communication applications, in supporting DL. These tools can streamline workflows, enhance transparency, and foster a sense of community among faculties, administrators, and other stakeholders.

By leveraging technology, institutions may overcome geographical and temporal barriers, making it easier for diverse teams to work together effectively. Investigating the use of digital tools and platforms could provide innovative solutions to some of the challenges identified in this study.

In addition to enhancing communication, collaboration, and decision-making, technology can support DL in other ways. For instance, data analytics tools may provide valuable insights into student performance, faculty engagement, and institutional effectiveness.

By analyzing these data, institutions could make informed decisions, identify areas for improvement, and track the impact of DL practices over time. Moreover, technology may support professional development by providing access to online training programs, webinars, and other learning resources. These digital platforms could make it easier for faculty, administrators, and other relevant stakeholders to develop the skills and knowledge needed for effective DL, regardless of their location or schedule.

Future research may consider identifying practical and scalable solutions for enhancing DL practices in higher education by exploring these and other technological innovations.

#### **6.5.4 Policy implementation**

Future studies may consider examining the effectiveness of policies promoting DL in higher education curriculum reforms. Policy plays a crucial role in shaping the implementation and success of DL practices.

Future research may focus on evaluating the effectiveness of policies designed to promote DL in higher education. This evaluation can provide valuable feedback for policymakers, helping them refine their strategies and develop more effective policies for supporting DL. For example, researchers could conduct case studies of institutions that have adopted specific DL-related policies. By examining the outcomes of these policies, they can identify factors that contribute to their success or failure. This analysis can reveal the strengths and weaknesses of different policy approaches, providing insights that can inform future policy development. Assessing the impact of policy interventions might provide valuable feedback for policymakers and help refine strategies for supporting DL practices. In addition to evaluating existing policies, future research may explore the process of policy implementation. This exploration could reveal the challenges and opportunities associated with translating policy into practice. For instance, researchers may investigate how institutional leaders interpret and apply DL-related policies, how these policies are communicated to faculty and staff, and how they are integrated into existing institutional structures and processes.

By understanding these dynamics, researchers could provide recommendations for improving policy implementation. This knowledge may help policymakers design more practical and effective policies that are better aligned with higher education institutions' needs and realities.

By pursuing these additional research directions, scholars and practitioners may deepen their understanding of DL and its potential to drive meaningful and sustainable CR in higher education.

## **6.6 Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, this study has highlighted the significant role of DL in higher education curriculum reforms, emphasizing the importance of shared leadership, collaboration, and effective communication among three different levels of curriculum leaders. By aligning the conceptual framework with empirical findings, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of DL practices in the context of Cambodian higher education. The implications for theory, policy, and practice offer valuable insights for enhancing DL and achieving successful curriculum reforms. Future research should continue to explore and expand upon these findings, contributing to the ongoing development and refinement of DL practices in higher education in the region and beyond.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: In-Depth Interview Protocol (Classroom Level)

#### Introduction:

The interview is conducted to get information related to the research topic “**Distributed Leadership in Higher Education Curriculum Reforms: A Case Study of an English Language Undergraduate Program in Cambodia**”. The major goal of this study is to examine distributed leadership in the curriculum reform process of an English language undergraduate program at one provincial university in Cambodia.

Data from this study will be used for my doctoral degree in curriculum studies at Education University Hong Kong (EdUHK).

Your **HONEST** responses will be significant for my research study and for examine how curriculum leadership is distributed to drive and support the curriculum reform process of an English language undergraduate program at one provincial university in Cambodia.

To achieve the goal of the study, it is vital to examine the curriculum leaders’ roles, distribution, issues and challenges, and collective solutions to address those emerging challenges in the curriculum reform of the BA in English program at one provincial university in Cambodia. As the interview is recorded, the information you share about the topic and your identification will be kept for privacy and confidentiality. Your participation in this study is genuinely voluntary. In this sense, for the ethical evidence, please sign the consent form for the interview.

Thanks for your kind cooperation. Should you have any questions, please contact me at [REDACTED] or email: [REDACTED]  
Participant code: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Section I: Opening Questions

1. Can you please briefly describe your working experience and daily work at the university?
  - a. Years of working experience
  - b. Positions
  - c. Main responsibilities at his/her faculty/department
  - d. Others:.....
2. Please tell me your reasons why you choose the career as a teacher.
3. What are the key factors influencing the curriculum reform of the BA in English program?

#### Section II: Key Questions

##### A. The roles of the curriculum leaders in the curriculum reform process of an English language undergraduate program

##### Interview Questions:

4. So far what have you been involved in the curriculum reform of the BA in English program?
  - a. Key roles in curriculum reform
  - b. Attending meetings, workshops, and so on
  - c. Providing inputs on PLOs, CLOs, LLOs, teaching methods, teaching and learning materials, assessments...etc.
  - d. Others:.....

5. What do you think why curriculum reform is important to you, students, the faculty, and the university as a whole?
6. What have you contributed so far in the process of curriculum reform at your faculty? Anything you find particularly helpful?
  - a. Planning stage
  - b. Developing stage
  - c. Implementing stage
  - d. Evaluating stage

**B. The distribution of the curriculum leadership in the curriculum reform of an English language undergraduate program**

**Interview Questions:**

7. How do you interact with others in the curriculum reform process for the curriculum reform of the BA in English program?
8. How are the responsibilities shared among those involved in the curriculum reform process?
9. To what extent, how did you make decision in the curriculum reform process?

**C. The key challenges which the curriculum leaders faced in the curriculum reform process of an English language undergraduate program**

**Interview Questions:**

10. Can you tell me what difficulties you encountered in the curriculum reform process?
11. What do you think what the causes of the key issues and challenges?

**D. The ways that curriculum leaders address the key challenges in the curriculum reform process of an English language undergraduate program**

**Interview Questions:**

12. Did you feel support or not support for the curriculum reform of the BA in English program?
  - a. If yes, what kinds of support?
  - b. If no, what not support?
13. How have you overcome the difficulties you faced in the curriculum reform process?
  - a. With the support from the dean. Why do you need this support? Please give me a specific example.
  - b. With the support from the university. Why do you need this support? Please give me a specific example.

**Section III: Closing Questions**

14. What do you think what the key successes for the curriculum reform at your faculty are?
15. What do you think what needs to be improved, regarding the curriculum reform at your faculty?

## Appendix 2: In-Depth Interview Protocol (Faculty Level)

### Introduction:

The interview is conducted to get information related to the research topic “**Distributed Leadership in Higher Education Curriculum Reforms: A Case Study of an English Language Undergraduate Program in Cambodia**”. The major goal of this study is to examine distributed leadership in the curriculum reform process of an English language undergraduate program at one provincial university in Cambodia.

Data from this study will be used for my doctoral degree in curriculum studies at Education University Hong Kong (EdUHK).

Your **HONEST** responses will be significant for my research study and for examine how curriculum leadership is distributed to drive and support the curriculum reform process of an English language undergraduate program at one provincial university in Cambodia.

To achieve the goal of the study, it is vital to examine the curriculum leaders’ roles, distribution, issues and challenges, and collective solutions to address those emerging challenges in the curriculum reform of the BA in English program at one provincial university in Cambodia. As the interview is recorded, the information you share about the topic and your identification will be kept for privacy and confidentiality. Your participation in this study is genuinely voluntary. In this sense, for the ethical evidence, please sign the consent form for the interview.

Thanks for your kind cooperation. Should you have any questions, please contact me at [redacted] or email: [redacted]  
Participant code: \_\_\_\_\_

### Section I: Opening Questions

1. Can you please briefly describe your working experience and daily work at the university?
  - a. Years of working experience
  - b. Positions
  - c. Main responsibilities at his/her faculty/department
  - d. Others: .....
2. Please kindly tell me briefly how the curriculum reform related to the 10-year strategic plan of the university.
3. Can you tell me briefly what the goals and plans for the curriculum reform at your faculty?
4. Do you think why your faculty should conduct the curriculum reform?

### Section II: Key Questions

#### A. The roles of the curriculum leaders in the curriculum reform process of an English language undergraduate program

##### Interview Questions:

5. In reforming curriculum process, there are four stages such as planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating. What do you think what are your major roles in the stages of planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating?
6. What have you done so far in the process of curriculum reform at your faculty?

**B. The distribution of the curriculum leadership in the curriculum reform of an English language undergraduate program**

**Interview Questions:**

7. How do you interact with others in the curriculum reform process in your faculty?
8. How are the responsibilities shared among those people involved in the curriculum reform process?
9. What support did you receive from the university for the curriculum reform of the BA in English program?
10. In making decisions in the curriculum reform process, to what extent can you make it?
11. What are the supports you provided to your colleagues for the curriculum reform of the BA in English program?

**C. The key issues and challenges which the curriculum leaders faced in the curriculum reform process of an English language undergraduate program**

**Interview Questions:**

12. Can you tell me what are the key challenges you faced in curriculum reform for the curriculum reform of BA in English program?
13. What are the main causes of the key challenges in the curriculum reform process?

**D. The ways that curriculum leaders address the key challenges in the curriculum reform process of an English language undergraduate program**

**Interview Questions:**

14. How have you collaboratively worked with your colleagues and the top management to overcome the key challenges you faced? Why do you need to cooperate with others to deal with those challenges? Please give me a specific example.
15. What do you think what are key factors to overcome the challenges?

**Section III: Closing Questions**

16. What do you think the key success for the curriculum reform for the curriculum reform of BA in English program are?
17. What are your future plans in the next 5 years for the curriculum reform at your faculty?

### Appendix 3: In-Depth Interview Protocol (University Level)

#### Introduction:

The interview is conducted to get information related to the research topic “**Distributed Leadership in Higher Education Curriculum Reforms: A Case Study of an English Language Undergraduate Program in Cambodia**”. The major goal of this study is to examine distributed leadership in the curriculum reform process of an English language undergraduate program at one provincial university in Cambodia.

Data from this study will be used for my doctoral degree in curriculum studies at Education University Hong Kong (EdUHK).

Your **HONEST** responses will be significant for my research study and for examine how curriculum leadership is distributed to drive and support the curriculum reform process of an English language undergraduate program at one provincial university in Cambodia.

To achieve the goal of the study, it is vital to examine the curriculum leaders’ roles, distribution, issues and challenges, and collective solutions to address those emerging challenges in the curriculum reform of the BA in English program at one provincial university in Cambodia. As the interview is recorded, the information you share about the topic and your identification will be kept for privacy and confidentiality. Your participation in this study is genuinely voluntary. In this sense, for the ethical evidence, please sign the consent form for the interview.

Thanks for your kind cooperation. Should you have any questions, please contact me at [redacted] or email: [redacted]  
Participant code: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Section I: Opening Questions

1. Can you please briefly describe your working experience and daily work at the university?
  - a. Years of working experience
  - b. Positions
  - c. Main responsibilities at his/her faculty/department
  - d. Others: .....
2. Please kindly tell me briefly how the 10-year strategic plan of the university is related to the curriculum reform.

#### Section II: Key Questions

##### A. The roles of the curriculum leaders in the curriculum reform process of an English language undergraduate program

#### Interview Questions:

1. Can you tell me what the goals and plans for the curriculum reform at the university?
2. So far, what programs has the university reformed the curriculum?
3. Do you think why the university should conduct the curriculum reform?

4. In reforming the curriculum process, there are four stages such as planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating. What do you think your significant roles in the stages of planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating are?
5. What are the university's supporting mechanisms for the curriculum reform process?

**B. The distribution of the curriculum leadership in the curriculum reform of an English language undergraduate program**

**Interview Questions:**

8. How do you interact with others in the curriculum reform process?
9. How are the responsibilities shared among those involved in the curriculum reform process?
10. What are the university's supporting mechanisms for the curriculum reform process?

**C. The key issues and challenges which the curriculum leaders faced in the curriculum reform process of an English language undergraduate program**

**Interview Questions:**

11. Can you tell me what the key issues and challenges are in curriculum reform at your university?
12. What are the causes of the key issues and challenges in the curriculum reform process?

**D. The ways that curriculum leaders address the key challenges in the curriculum reform process of an English language undergraduate program**

**Interview Questions:**

13. How have you overcome the key challenges in collaboration with your subordinates? Why do you need to cooperate with others to deal with those challenges? Please give me a specific example.
14. What do you think the major supports the university should provide to the faculty and teachers to overcome the challenges are?

**Section III: Closing Questions**

15. What do you think the key success for the curriculum reform at your university?
16. What are the university's future plans for curriculum reform in the next 5 years?

## Appendix 4: Consent Form for Participants

### THE EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG Department of Curriculum and Instruction

#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

#### “Distributed Leadership in Higher Education Curriculum Reforms: A Case Study of an Undergraduate Program in Cambodia”

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby consent to participate in the captioned research supervised by **Prof. LIM Cher Ping** and conducted by **Mr. HAB Sokchamnan**, who are staff and student of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the Education University of Hong Kong.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, my right to privacy will be retained, i.e., my personal details will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the attached information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. My participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Name of participant

---

Signature of participant

---

Date

---

## Appendix 5: EdD Admission Letter



21 June 2021  
(App\_No: A12277980)

Dear MR HAB SOKCHAMNAN,

**Admission Offer: Doctor of Education (September 2021 Intake)**

I am very pleased to offer you admission to the following programme in the 2021/22 academic year:

Programme (Code)	: Doctor of Education (A3D045)
Mode of Study	: Full-time
Normative Period of Study	: Three-year
Specialized Area	: CUS - Curriculum Studies
Programme Commencement	: September 2021 ( <i>tentative</i> )
Tuition Fee	: HK\$5,000 (per credit)
Medium of Instruction	: English

### Acceptance of offer

To accept the offer, you must read through the "Guidance Notes on Academic Honesty" and "Personal Information Collection Statement" on <http://www.eduhk.hk/acadprog/OnlineAccept.html> and complete the procedures including online acceptance of offer and full payment of a **non-refundable admission acceptance fee of HK\$15,300**, comprised of HK\$15,000 which will be converted into part of your tuition fee for the first semester, and application fee of HK\$300. This offer will lapse if we do not receive your online acceptance of offer **and** payment of admission acceptance fee by **23/06/2021**.

### Provision of documents

You are required to apply for official transcripts, language test reports, and other supporting documents to be sent directly to the University from the issuing universities / authorities. The required documents should be submitted by **23/06/2021**. Please read carefully the attachment of "Provision of Documents Upon Offer Acceptance" for details.

### Offering of programme / specialized area

The University reserves the right to cancel the programme / specialized area in the event of insufficient enrolment. Should the programme / specialized area not be offered, all fees paid will be refunded.

### Implementation of programme and Course delivery

You will normally complete the programme within 3 years (Extension fee will be charged to students who have to extend their studies beyond the normative period of study) and attend evening/daytime classes on weekdays, weekends and/or during long holidays as decided by the University. Different modes of delivery, teaching and learning activities as well as assessment methods will be adopted as deemed appropriate. You will receive your personal timetable after registration.

### Student visa

If you need a student visa in order to study in Hong Kong, please complete and return the accompanying visa application form "Application for Entry for Study in Hong Kong" together with copies of supporting documents to our Global Affairs Office by **30/06/2021**. Failure to obtain the student visa will result in your not being permitted to register in the programme. The Global Affairs Office will send you the study visa once available. A non-refundable payment of HK\$530 relating to the costs of visa & related processing will be charged into your student account after programme commencement.

香港新界大埔露屏路十號  
10 Lo Ping Road, Tai Po, New Territories, Hong Kong  
T (852) 2948 8888 F (852) 2948 6000. [www.eduhk.hk](http://www.eduhk.hk)

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## Appendix 6: Ethical Approval



29 August 2023

Mr HAB Sokchamnan  
Doctor of Education Programme  
Graduate School

Dear Mr Hab,

**Application for Ethical Review < [REDACTED] >**

I am pleased to inform you that approval has been given by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) for your research project:

Project Title: Distributed Leadership in Higher Education Curriculum Reforms: A Case Study of An Undergraduate Program in Cambodia

Ethical approval is granted for the project period from 29 August 2023 to 15 October 2023. If a project extension is applied for lasting more than 3 months, HREC should be contacted with information regarding the nature of and the reason for the extension. If any substantial changes have been made to the project, a new HREC application will be required.

Please note that you are responsible for informing the HREC in advance of any proposed substantive changes to the research proposal or procedures which may affect the validity of this ethical approval. You will receive separate notification should a fresh approval be required.

Thank you for your kind attention and we wish you well with your research.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Jacqueline Hui (Ms)  
Secretary  
Human Research Ethics Committee

c.c. Professor HO Wing Kei, Acting Chairperson, Human Research Ethics Committee

香港新界大埔露屏路十號  
10 Lo Ping Road, Tai Po, New Territories, Hong Kong  
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## Appendix 7: Research Approval of the Host Institution

### THE EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG Department of Curriculum and Instruction

#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH (FOR UNIVERSITY) “Distributed Leadership in Higher Education Curriculum Reforms: A Case Study of an Undergraduate Program in Cambodia”

My university hereby consents to participate in the captioned project supervised by **Prof. LIM Cher Ping** and conducted by **Mr. HAB Sokchamnan**, who are staff and students of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the Education University of Hong Kong.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, our right to privacy will be retained, i.e., the personal details of the participants/students/teachers will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the attached information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. My students'/teachers' participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that we have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Signature:

Name of Rector:

Post:

Name of University:

Date:



H.E. FUM Saravuth

Rector

Svay Rieng University

29/ August / 2023

## Appendix 8: Sample of a Transcribed Interview with the Dean in the Faculty Level

**R:** Do you think why your faculty should conduct the curriculum reform?

**DEAN:** Curriculum reform is important for students to prepare them for the workplace. As we haven't done for many years and now we have support from the HEIP so we can do it fully by starting from the needs analysis to conduct surveys with relevant stakeholders such as current students, alumni, teachers, and employers.

**R:** In reforming the curriculum process, there are four stages such as planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating. What do you think what your significant roles in the stages of planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating are?

**DEAN:** My role as the dean in these four stages is to work as the manager is very important with a clear plan and actions.

- In planning stage: I coordinated with my team to prepare the action plan for the reform process.
- Developing stage: I work as the manager, facilitator, and leader to make this stage go smoothly
- Implementing stage: I followed up with the teachers to make sure they have implemented correctly. For example, I told the teacher to show the course syllabus to the students and check with students whether they have followed the course syllabus. Besides the follow-up, I normally ask the teachers about any difficulties in implementing the course syllabus.
- Evaluating stage: I have facilitated the evaluation stage on focus group to interview teachers and students.

**R:** What have you done so far in the curriculum reform process at your faculty?

**DEAN:** I have facilitated and led the technical meetings and workshops, preparing the course contents and course syllabus.

### **B. The distribution of the curriculum leadership in the curriculum reform of an English language undergraduate program**

#### **Interview Questions:**

**R:** How do you interact with others in the curriculum reform process in your faculty?

**DEAN:** I have communicated with the top management by informing them the action plan of the curriculum reform of the faculty and then ask them for comments and finally for approval, especially from the rector, otherwise; we can implement it. Because the implementation of the activities needs the budget to spend, it is crucial to get the approval for implementation. While communicating with the classroom level (teachers), we need to disseminate the plan of the reform to them and to have meeting with them to get inputs from them, especially on the workshops that will be conducted.