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## **A Study on Intrasectoral Communication Status among Middle Leaders in Myanmar's International Schools**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the role of intrasectoral communication in shaping the leadership practices of middle leaders in Myanmar's international schools, with particular attention to their participation in decision-making, perceived influence, and contribution to institutional functioning. Adopting an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the research began with a survey of 120 middle leaders drawn from 15 international schools, followed by in-depth interviews with 20 participants to provide contextual understanding of the observed patterns.

The findings indicate a clear distinction between participation and influence. While middle leaders are frequently included in school-level discussions and meetings, their capacity to meaningfully shape final decisions remains limited. Quantitative results suggest that communication practices and institutional support are perceived as moderate overall, yet qualitative evidence reveals considerable variation across schools. Interview data highlight how hierarchical communication structures, ambiguous role expectations, and the dual demands of teaching and leadership constrain middle leaders' effectiveness. In addition, factors such as generational differences, gender norms, and diverse educational backgrounds influence how communication is enacted and interpreted within leadership roles.

Although institutional support is generally perceived as adequate, qualitative insights demonstrate that its practical expression depends heavily on school culture and principals' leadership approaches. Across cases, transparent, collaborative, and inclusive communication practices are consistently associated with stronger professional relationships, improved morale, and more coherent policy implementation. Overall, the study underscores the need for clearer communication structures, targeted leadership development, and more meaningful opportunities for middle leaders to contribute to decision-making processes. By strengthening intrasectoral communication, international schools in Myanmar may enhance distributed leadership practices and improve organizational effectiveness.

**Key words:** Intrasectoral communication, Middle leader, Distributed leadership, international schools Myanmar

### **1. Introduction**

Effective communication is widely recognized as a foundation of successful school leadership, particularly in international school settings where responsibilities are shared across multiple levels and shaped by cultural diversity. In such environments, leadership emerges not only through formal authority but also through everyday interactions, collaborative practices, and shared sense-making among staff. Distributed Leadership (DL) has therefore become a



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central lens in educational research, reframing leadership as a collective practice embedded within organizational routines rather than the work of a single heroic principal (Spillane et al., 2001).

Contemporary scholarship underscores the continuing significance of distributed leadership, with researchers describing it as one of the most influential developments in modern educational leadership theory. Recent reviews emphasize that DL includes both the individuals who contribute to leadership and the practices through which leadership is enacted, shaped by the interactions among people, tasks, and context (Spillane et al., 2001; Harris et al., 2022). Empirical work also shows that distributed leadership can promote collaboration, strengthen shared responsibility, and enhance instructional improvement when schools intentionally cultivate enabling conditions. Lin (2022), for example, demonstrated that teacher autonomy and professional collaboration mediate the relationship between distributed leadership and teacher innovativeness, highlighting the importance of supportive structures in fostering effective leadership practices.

Within these distributed environments, communication functions as a crucial mechanism that transforms shared responsibility into meaningful action. Leadership practices such as motivating language, transparent dialogue, and relational engagement depend heavily on communication to build trust, facilitate participation, and sustain organizational coherence. Research on leadership and emotional intelligence similarly suggests that communication is not simply a technical skill but a relational capability that influences staff morale, engagement, and the overall school climate (Htun et al., 2025). Without clear and inclusive communication, distributed responsibilities risk becoming symbolic rather than genuinely empowering.

Middle leaders hold a particularly important position within this communicative landscape. As key intermediaries between senior leadership and classroom teachers, they play a central role in coordinating information, supporting instructional practices, and ensuring that institutional policies are implemented effectively. Their ability to fulfil these responsibilities depends not only on role clarity and authority but also on their capacity to build relationships, negotiate expectations, and communicate effectively across hierarchical levels. Strong intrasectoral communication therefore contributes to improved collaboration, more coherent decision-making, and stronger alignment across the school.

This study investigates the state of intrasectoral communication among middle leaders in Myanmar's international schools. Specifically, it examines how middle leaders take part in school-wide decision-making, develop professional relationships with teachers and principals, and engage in collaborative practices that contribute to institutional goals. In this study, intrasectoral communication is understood not only as a practical leadership tool but also as an indicator of organizational health, reflecting the extent to which middle leaders feel empowered, supported, and able to influence school improvement.

Despite its importance, communication within schools is often shaped and sometimes constrained by structural and cultural factors. Hierarchical decision-making, limited autonomy, and uneven institutional support may restrict open dialogue and weaken the influence of middle leaders. These challenges are especially pronounced in international schools, where cultural diversity, differing communication norms, and varied leadership expectations intersect. By focusing on Myanmar's international schools, this study adds contextual insight into how these dynamics unfold in practice and how communication patterns affect leadership effectiveness at the middle level.

Despite the growing interest in distributed leadership and middle leadership roles, limited research has examined how communication specifically shapes middle leaders' influence and participation in Myanmar's international school sector. This gap is particularly important given the unique cultural, structural, and organizational characteristics of these schools. Ultimately, this study aims to highlight both the strengths and the limitations of current communication practices in international schools and to emphasize the importance of building more participatory leadership environments. By strengthening communication routines, clarifying leadership expectations,

and supporting middle leaders through targeted development initiatives, international schools may be better positioned to cultivate more cohesive, responsive, and effective learning communities.

## **2. Literature Review (Rewritten)**

### **2.1 Middle Leadership in Contemporary School Systems**

In contemporary international education systems, middle leadership has emerged as a critical factor in driving school improvement and organizational coherence. Recent literature emphasizes that middle leaders are no longer confined to administrative coordination roles; instead, they increasingly function as key facilitators of communication, collaboration, and professional learning within schools. This role is particularly significant in complex or hierarchical school structures, where leadership responsibilities are distributed across multiple levels rather than centralized at the top.

Studies published between 2020 and 2024 consistently indicate that the effectiveness and agency of middle leaders are strongly shaped by interpersonal communication processes and the organizational contexts in which they operate. Middle leaders' ability to enact leadership is influenced not only by individual capability but also by the quality of interaction with colleagues and the structural conditions that enable or constrain their work. As schools continue to adopt more collaborative and distributed leadership models, understanding how communication operates within middle leadership roles has become increasingly important.

### **2.2 Distributed Leadership and the Role of Middle Leaders**

Distributed Leadership Theory remains one of the most influential frameworks for understanding the work of middle leaders in schools. Rather than locating leadership authority solely with senior administrators, distributed leadership conceptualizes leadership as a collective practice that emerges through interactions among multiple actors within a specific organizational context. Recent research demonstrates that when leadership is intentionally shared across staff, schools benefit from stronger professional learning cultures, increased teacher engagement, and greater organizational adaptability (Galdames-Calderón, 2023).

Within this framework, middle leaders play a pivotal bridging role. They translate strategic priorities into classroom-level practices and mediate between senior leadership expectations and teachers' day-to-day instructional realities. However, the literature also cautions that the effectiveness of distributed leadership depends heavily on how middle leadership roles are defined and supported. Gurr (2024) argues that distributed leadership is most effective when schools deliberately establish enabling conditions, including clear role expectations, protected leadership time, access to professional development, and a culture that values collaboration. Without these conditions, middle leaders may be positioned as managers of routine tasks rather than empowered contributors to school-wide leadership.

### **2.3 Communication as a Mediating Mechanism in Distributed Leadership**

Communication consistently emerges in the literature as a central mechanism through which distributed leadership operates in practice. Post-pandemic international studies indicate that clear, open, and two-way communication is associated with stronger collaboration, improved teacher morale, and more effective policy implementation within schools (Brown et al., 2023). For middle leaders, effective communication enables coordination across teams, facilitates feedback processes, and supports alignment between instructional goals and organizational priorities.

Conversely, communication that is overly hierarchical or ambiguous can restrict shared decision-making and limit the leadership influence of middle leaders. Recent studies highlight the importance of structured communication routines such as regular meetings, digital communication platforms, and formal feedback cycles in shaping how middle leaders guide instructional improvement and professional learning (Phebeni, 2025). These routines not only support information flow but also signal the extent to which middle leaders are recognized as legitimate contributors to leadership processes.

#### **2.4 Institutional Support and Contextual Constraints**

Institutional support is another recurring factor influencing the effectiveness of middle leadership. Research across Southeast Asia suggests that even when middle leaders possess strong interpersonal and pedagogical skills, their leadership influence is often shaped and at times constrained by surrounding organizational systems. Heavy teaching workloads, limited autonomy, unclear reporting structures, and insufficient professional development opportunities frequently reduce middle leaders' capacity to engage in meaningful leadership work.

Comparative studies from Malaysia, Singapore, and Myanmar illustrate that schools with clear governance structures, mentoring systems, and supportive leadership cultures tend to grant middle leaders' greater authority and decision-making space. In contrast, schools characterized by rigid hierarchies or vague expectations often limit middle leaders' involvement in strategic decision-making, confining them to operational coordination roles (Gurr, 2024). These contextual constraints help explain why many middle leaders report high levels of responsibility but relatively low levels of influence within their organizations.

#### **2.5 Middle Leadership, Teacher Development, and School Improvement**

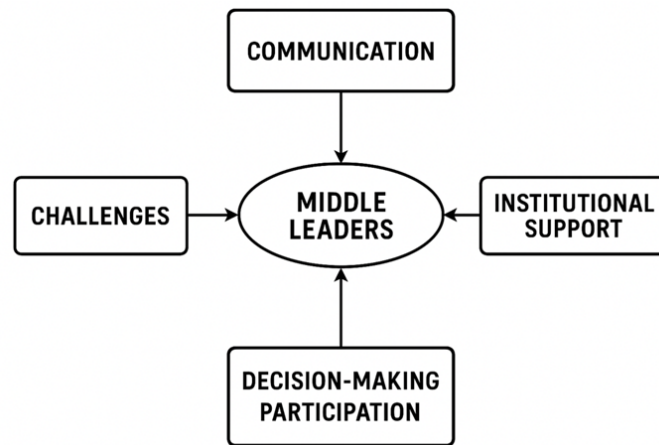
The literature further demonstrates a strong link between middle leadership, teacher development, and overall school improvement. When middle leaders are actively involved in mentoring, classroom observation, feedback provision, and professional learning facilitation, both instructional quality and teacher performance tend to improve (Galdames-Calderón, 2023). However, such practices are sustainable only when supported by effective communication structures and institutional backing.

In contexts where communication is weak or institutional support is inconsistent, middle leaders often become absorbed in administrative coordination, limiting their ability to engage in deeper instructional leadership and long-term school development. These findings underscore the interconnected nature of leadership, communication, and organizational context in shaping school improvement outcomes.

#### **2.6 Implications for Myanmar's International School Context**

Taken together, the literature indicates that communication practices, institutional support, and contextual factors interact to shape the scope and effectiveness of middle leadership. These insights closely reflect challenges reported in Myanmar's international schools, where hierarchical communication patterns, inconsistent feedback mechanisms, and limited decision-making authority are commonly observed. As a result, middle leaders often demonstrate strong relational skills but encounter structural barriers that restrict their influence on broader organizational decisions.

The literature therefore points to the need for reforms that strengthen communication routines, clarify leadership roles, and expand opportunities for middle leaders to participate meaningfully in strategic decision-making. These issues form the conceptual foundation for the present study and guide its examination of intrasectoral communication among middle leaders in Myanmar's international schools.



**Figure 1. Key Elements Shaping the Roles and Experiences of Middle Leaders**

### 3. Methodology (Rewritten)

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to examine the condition of intrasectoral communication among middle leaders and its relationship with leadership practices in Myanmar's international schools. By integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study aimed to capture both the breadth of communication patterns across schools and the contextual experiences that shape leadership practice at the middle level.

An explanatory sequential design was adopted. In the first phase, quantitative data were collected through a structured survey to provide an overview of communication practices, participation in decision-making, and perceived institutional support among middle leaders. The second phase involved qualitative interviews designed to elaborate and contextualize the descriptive survey findings. Although the quantitative component is descriptive in nature, it plays an important explanatory role by identifying patterns that guided the focus of the qualitative inquiry.

#### 3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population comprised middle-level leaders working in international schools in Myanmar, including department heads, grade coordinators, and curriculum leaders. A total of 120 middle leaders from 15 international schools participated in the survey using purposive sampling, ensuring that respondents held formal middle leadership responsibilities.

From this group, 20 middle leaders were selected for in-depth interviews to capture variation in school size, leadership position, and professional experience. This combination of methods allowed the study to identify general patterns in leadership communication while also developing a nuanced understanding of how contextual factors shape leadership experiences.

### 3.3 Data Collection Methods

#### *Quantitative Data*

Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of Likert-scale items. The survey assessed middle leaders' participation in decision-making, perceived effectiveness of communication practices, and levels of institutional support. Items focused on the frequency, quality, and perceived influence of communication, as well as opportunities for involvement in school-level decisions. The quantitative data provided an overview of leadership communication patterns and helped identify key areas requiring further qualitative exploration.

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was developed based on relevant leadership and communication literature and reviewed for clarity and contextual appropriateness prior to administration.

#### *Qualitative Data*

The quantitative survey was complemented by semi-structured interviews designed to explore middle leaders' experiences of communication and leadership in greater depth. The interview questions focused on collaborative decision-making practices, institutional constraints, communication routines, and the perceived influence of middle leaders within their schools. This qualitative phase aimed to provide contextual explanations for the descriptive patterns identified in the survey results.

Open-ended questions allowed participants to reflect on their lived experiences and to describe how communication practices shaped their leadership roles in practice. Interviews were conducted in a flexible manner to encourage detailed responses and to allow participants to elaborate on issues they considered most relevant to their professional contexts.

The interview data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach conducted by the researcher. This involved multiple stages, including familiarization with the data, initial coding, identification of recurring patterns, and the development of overarching themes. Themes were refined through iterative comparison across interviews to ensure internal consistency and alignment with the research focus. This approach enabled a systematic yet interpretive examination of intrasectoral communication dynamics and their implications for middle leadership practice.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Quantitative Findings

The quantitative component of the study was designed to provide an overview of intrasectoral communication practices, decision-making participation, leadership challenges, and perceived institutional support among middle leaders in Myanmar's international schools. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. These descriptive results provide an initial understanding of leadership communication patterns and serve as a foundation for the subsequent qualitative analysis.

Overall, the survey findings indicate that middle leaders are generally involved in school-level communication and decision-making processes. Respondents reported moderate to high levels of participation in meetings and leadership-related discussions, alongside moderately positive perceptions of institutional support and communication effectiveness. At the same time, the descriptive patterns suggest variability in the quality and influence of participation, highlighting areas that required deeper qualitative exploration.

#### 4.2 Communication Practices Among Middle Leaders

Survey responses indicate that most middle leaders are actively engaged in school-wide communication processes. Maintaining positive professional relationships with both teachers and principals emerged as an important aspect of leadership practice, supporting coordination and the implementation of school policies. However, respondents also reported that communication flows within schools often remain hierarchical, limiting opportunities for open dialogue and two-way exchange of ideas.

Several communication-related challenges were identified, including inconsistent communication channels, limited training in interpersonal and leadership communication skills, and cultural norms that discourage open discussion. Linguistic diversity and differences in educational background further complicate communication, occasionally leading to misunderstanding and reduced clarity. These findings suggest that while communication is present, its effectiveness varies depending on organizational structure, leadership approach, and school context.

#### 4.3 Decision-Making Participation and Perceived Influence

The findings show that middle leaders are frequently included in school-level decision-making forums; however, their influence on final decisions is often limited. Although a majority of respondents reported regular participation in decision-making activities, more than 65% indicated limited involvement in curriculum- and policy-related decisions. This pattern suggests that participation does not always translate into meaningful influence.

As shown in **Table 1**, 78% of respondents reported being regularly involved in school-wide decision-making, while 14% were occasionally involved and 8% were rarely involved. These figures indicate that exclusion from decision-making is uncommon. Nevertheless, the data also reveal a clear gap between being present in decision-making processes and having substantive input reflected in final outcomes. This gap highlights a structural challenge in leadership practice, where middle leaders are invited to contribute but are not consistently empowered to shape decisions.

*Table 1: Involvement in School-Wide Decision-Making*

<b>Decision-Making Involvement</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
Regularly Involved	78%
Occasionally Involved	14%
Rarely Involved	8%

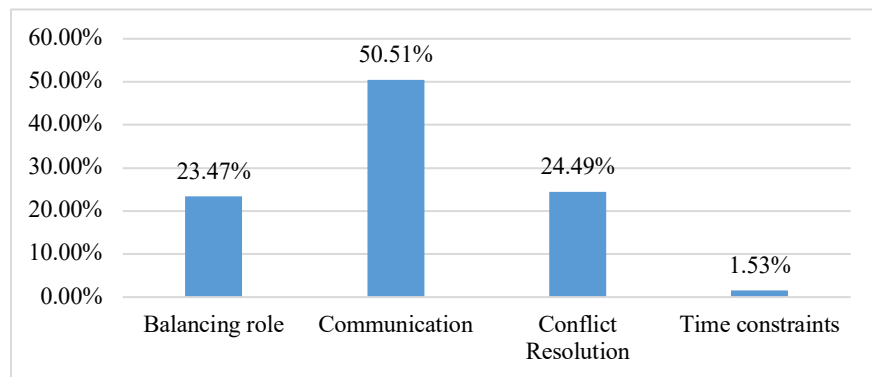
Such partial participation may reduce middle leaders' sense of ownership and engagement with institutional goals. Strengthening decision-making practices that value and integrate middle leaders' contributions may therefore enhance collaborative leadership and organizational commitment.

#### 4.4 Relationships with Teachers and Principals

The survey results indicate that professional relationships between middle leaders, teachers, and principals are generally positive. Approximately 82% of respondents reported maintaining good relationships with both teachers and senior leaders. This pattern suggests that interpersonal trust and collegial interaction are relatively strong within many schools.

These relational dynamics are summarized in **Table 2**, which presents respondents’ perceptions of their working relationships with teachers and principals.

Table 2: Relationships with Teachers and Principals



Positive relationships were associated with regular meetings, informal communication opportunities, and open-door leadership approaches. While such relational factors support coordination and reduce friction in daily communication, strong relationships alone do not necessarily ensure influence in formal decision-making, as structural constraints may still limit middle leaders’ authority.

#### 4.5 Areas of Decision-Making Involvement

Middle leaders reported varying levels of involvement across different operational and leadership domains, as presented in **Table 3**. Their highest levels of participation were observed in curriculum development (68%), professional development planning (61%), and teacher performance review (54%). These areas are closely linked to instructional leadership and teacher support, underscoring the central role middle leaders play in academic and developmental functions.

Table 3: Areas of Decision-Making Involvement

Area	Percentage of Respondents
Curriculum Development	68%
Teacher Performance Review	54%
Professional Development	61%
Budget Planning	32%

In contrast, involvement in budget planning was considerably lower (32%), indicating that financial and resource-related decisions remain largely centralized within senior leadership. This imbalance suggests that while middle leaders are entrusted with instructional responsibilities, they have limited influence over broader governance and strategic resource allocation.

#### 4.6 Institutional Support for Leadership Practices

Perceptions of institutional support for leadership practices were generally moderate. As shown in **Table 4**, the majority of respondents (55.45%) indicated that schools sometimes provide support for leadership development, while 37.27% reported that support is offered often. Only a small proportion experienced very frequent support.

Table 4: School Support for Leadership Practices

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Very often	5	4.55%
Often	41	37.27%
Sometimes	61	55.45%
Rarely	2	1.82%
Never	1	0.91%

The mean score (M = 2.57, SD = 0.656) reflects a moderate level of institutional support overall, suggesting that leadership development is acknowledged but not consistently embedded within school structures. Middle leaders identified mentorship, leadership training, and inclusion in policy formulation as key areas requiring improvement.

#### 4.7 Participatory Practices and Team Involvement

Middle leaders’ approaches to involving team members in decision-making are presented in **Table 5**. While 30% of respondents reported always seeking input from their teams, the majority (68.18%) indicated that they sometimes involve team members. Very few respondents reported rarely consulting others.

Table 5: Middle Leaders Seeking Input from Team Members During Decision-Making

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Always	33	30.00%
Sometimes	75	68.18%
Rarely	2	1.82%
Total	<b>110</b>	100.00%
M ± SD	<b>1.736± 0.501</b>	

The mean score (M = 1.736, SD = 0.501) suggests a moderate level of inclusiveness, where consultation occurs but is not uniformly applied. These findings indicate opportunities to strengthen systematic collaboration and collective ownership within leadership practices.

#### 4.8 Scope of Involvement Across Decision-Making Domains

A more detailed overview of middle leaders’ involvement across multiple decision-making domains is provided in **Table 6**. Mean scores indicate moderate participation across all areas, with slightly higher involvement in budgeting and resource allocation and in setting school goals and policies. In contrast, involvement in curriculum development, teacher recruitment, and implementation of school improvement plans tended to be more neutral.

Table 6: Middle Leaders’ Involvement in Various Decision-Making Areas

Decision-Making Area	Curriculum Development	Teacher Recruitment	Budgeting And Resource Allocation	Setting School Goals and Policies	Implementing School Improvement Plans
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	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<b>Not Involved</b>	1	0.91	1	0.91	1	0.91	1	0.91	1	0.91
<b>Slightly Involved</b>	21	19.09	21	19.09	26	23.64	26	23.64	35	31.82
<b>Neutral</b>	79	71.82	76	69.09	51	46.36	51	46.36	51	46.36
<b>Involved</b>	4	3.64	7	6.36	29	26.36	29	26.36	13	11.82
<b>Fully Involved</b>	5	4.55	5	4.55	3	2.73	3	2.73	10	9.09
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.918</b>		<b>2.945</b>		<b>3.064</b>		<b>3.091</b>		<b>2.964</b>	
<b>SD</b>	<b>0.665</b>		<b>0.689</b>		<b>0.805</b>		<b>0.914</b>		<b>0.918</b>	

Across all domains, the dominant response category was “neutral,” suggesting that middle leaders perceive themselves as present but not decisive in many school processes. This pattern highlights the limits of middle leaders’ authority and influence despite their formal leadership roles.

#### 4.9 Challenges Faced by Middle Leaders

The challenges experienced by middle leaders are summarized in **Table 7**. The most frequently reported challenge was balancing teaching and leadership responsibilities (38.65%), followed by insufficient resources (27.54%) and lack of autonomy (16.91%).

Table 7: Challenges Faced by Middle Leaders

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of autonomy	35	16.91%
Balancing teaching and leadership responsibilities	80	38.65%
Insufficient resources	57	27.54%
Limited support from senior leadership	15	7.25%
Staff resistance to changes	14	6.76%
Managing conflicts among staff	6	2.90%
Other (Please specify):	0	0.00%
Total	<b>207</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
M ± SD	<b>2.996±0.120</b>	

Other challenges, such as limited support from senior leadership, staff resistance to change, and conflict management, were reported less frequently but remain relevant. Overall, the findings suggest that middle leaders face both structural and interpersonal challenges that may hinder their effectiveness, reinforcing the need for clearer role definitions and stronger institutional support mechanisms.

#### 4.10 Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis. This process involved repeated familiarization with the interview transcripts, followed by initial coding to identify meaningful statements related to communication practices, leadership roles, and decision-making experiences.

These codes were then grouped into broader categories that reflected emerging patterns. The categories were reviewed and refined to ensure internal coherence before being developed into clearly defined themes and subthemes. Finally, representative verbatim quotations were selected to illustrate each theme and preserve participants' voices.

This systematic and iterative analytical process ensured that the findings were grounded in the data and analytically robust. Through thematic analysis, three interrelated qualitative subthemes emerged: generational gaps in communication expectations, gendered perspectives on communication dynamics, and the influence of educational qualification on communication competence. A summary of these themes, their conceptual descriptions, and illustrative quotations is presented in Table 8 (Qualitative Coding Summary) to enhance transparency and trustworthiness of the analysis.

### **Subtheme 1: Generational Gaps in Communication Expectations**

Participants from different age groups articulated distinct expectations regarding communication styles, channels, and timing. Younger middle leaders (aged 30–39) expressed a strong preference for structured, timely, and digitally mediated communication. They frequently reported frustration when information from senior leadership was delivered informally or inconsistently.

*“Sometimes I get messages late. I wish we had one proper platform or meeting where everything is discussed clearly.”*

*(Female, 35, Bachelor’s degree)*

Middle-aged leaders (40–49) emphasized the importance of collaborative and transparent dialogue across departments, viewing communication as a means of coordination rather than simple instruction.

*“Middle leaders must connect departments... we need proper collaboration, not just instructions.”*

*(Male, 45, Master’s degree)*

Older leaders (50 and above) highlighted the value of experience-sharing and mentorship, preferring face-to-face communication over digital platforms.

*“We learned by discussing directly, by guiding others. WhatsApp messages can’t replace real dialogue.”*

*(Female, 55, Master’s degree)*

These generational differences suggest that misalignment in communication preferences can contribute to misunderstanding and uneven participation in leadership discussions.

### **Subtheme 2: Gendered Perspectives on Communication Dynamics**

Gender also shaped how middle leaders experienced communication within school leadership structures. Female leaders often emphasized empathy, inclusiveness, and relational trust as central to effective communication.

*“I always try to make sure everyone’s voice is heard... communication must be respectful and supportive.”*

*(Female, 42, Master’s degree)*

In contrast, male leaders tended to frame communication challenges in more structural and task-oriented terms, focusing on the need for clear guidance and formal communication channels.

*“The main issue is lack of clear guidance from the top. We need a strong channel, like regular reporting meetings.” (Male, 48, Bachelor’s degree)*

These perspectives indicate that gender norms may influence how communication hierarchies are navigated and how leadership voices are expressed within decision-making contexts.

### **Subtheme 3: Influence of Educational Qualification on Communication Competence**

Educational background further influenced middle leaders’ confidence and effectiveness in communication. Participants with postgraduate qualifications articulated more reflective and strategic views on communication, emphasizing leadership training, coaching, and systemic improvement.

*“We need training on communication and conflict resolution. Without skills, misunderstandings are natural.” (Male, 50, Master’s degree)*

By contrast, leaders with bachelor-level qualifications highlighted practical communication challenges such as unclear instructions, limited feedback, and insufficient explanation of decisions.

*“We often don’t know why changes are made. That’s the problem we just follow.” (Female, 38, Bachelor’s degree)*

These findings suggest that educational exposure shapes not only communication competence but also confidence in contributing to leadership dialogue.

*Table 8: Qualitative Coding Summary*

<b>Theme / Subtheme</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Illustrative Supporting Quote</b>
<b>Generational Gaps in Communication Expectations</b>	Younger and older staff prefer different communication styles and interpret messages differently. These differences influence decision-making participation and teamwork.	“Older teachers prefer face-to-face meetings, but younger staff respond faster on Messenger or Viber. Sometimes we misunderstand each other because of this.”
<b>Gendered Perspectives on Communication Dynamics</b>	Male and female middle leaders experience communication hierarchies differently. Gender norms affect who speaks up and how decisions are negotiated.	“As a female middle leader, I usually have to explain things twice before they take my suggestion seriously.”
<b>Influence of Educational Qualification on Communication Competence</b>	Higher qualifications contribute to better confidence, clarity, and participation in meetings, influencing how effectively middle leaders contribute to decision-making.	“When I completed my postgraduate diploma, I became more confident to present ideas in meetings.”

#### 4.11 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

In accordance with the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, qualitative findings were used to elaborate upon and contextualize the descriptive quantitative results. The survey data revealed that many middle leaders reported moderate to high levels of participation in decision-making and perceived institutional support. However, these numerical patterns did not fully explain the quality or influence of such participation.

Qualitative findings provided deeper insight into these patterns by revealing how communication confidence, generational norms, gender dynamics, and educational background shape middle leaders’ experiences of participation. Although quantitative data suggested widespread involvement in leadership processes, interview data indicated that participation was often constrained by hierarchical communication practices and uneven institutional support.

Similarly, while institutional support was rated as moderate in the survey, qualitative evidence demonstrated that support was experienced inconsistently across schools and was highly dependent on leadership style and organizational culture. Middle leaders described structural constraints, workload pressures, and ambiguous expectations that limited their ability to exercise meaningful leadership influence.

The integration of findings is summarized in **Table 9 (Mixed-Methods Integration Matrix)**, which illustrates how qualitative explanations clarify and deepen understanding of the quantitative trends identified in the survey.

Table 9: Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Quantitative Finding	Qualitative Explanation	Integrated Interpretation
Many respondents reported moderate–high involvement in decision-making.	Participation varies depending on communication confidence, generational norms, and gender dynamics.	Although numerical participation rates appear high, the <i>quality</i> of participation differs across groups due to underlying communication challenges.
Respondents indicated generally positive perceptions of communication.	Different staff groups use different communication styles (generational and gender-based). Misalignment creates misunderstanding.	Communication seems positive overall, but deeper analysis shows <i>uneven communication effectiveness</i> , affecting collaboration.
Respondents perceived moderate school leadership support.	Middle leaders noted that support levels depend on principal leadership style and school culture.	Institutional support is not uniformly experienced; contextual factors shape how support is perceived and used.
Challenges reported at moderate levels.	Leaders highlighted workload pressure, unclear expectations, and communication gaps.	Challenges are structural and interpersonal; improving clarity and communication may reduce pressure.

#### 5. Conclusion

This study examined how intrasectoral communication practices influence the roles, participation, and everyday experiences of middle leaders in Myanmar’s international schools. Using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the quantitative survey of 120 middle leaders provided an overview of communication patterns, levels of

decision-making involvement, and perceptions of institutional support. The subsequent interviews with 20 participants offered richer, contextual explanations that clarified the interpersonal and organizational dynamics underlying these descriptive trends.

The findings show that middle leaders are regularly included in school-wide meetings and leadership discussions; however, their ability to influence final decisions remains limited. Participation is present in form but not always meaningful in effect. Many leaders shared that although they contribute ideas during discussions, these contributions are not consistently incorporated into policy, planning, or strategic decisions. Communication practices across schools continue to follow hierarchical pathways, and inconsistencies in communication routines combined with generational, gender-related, and educational differences produce uneven experiences of clarity, accessibility, and voice.

Survey results indicated a moderate level of institutional support, yet qualitative accounts revealed considerable variation across schools. Perceptions of leadership support, professional development opportunities, and role clarity were strongly shaped by principal leadership style and overall school culture. These contextual variations help explain why many middle leaders encounter role overload, restricted autonomy, and persistent challenges in balancing teaching responsibilities with leadership duties.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings highlights the interdependence between communication practices, leadership support, and broader institutional conditions. When communication is transparent, inclusive, and collaborative, middle leaders report greater confidence, improved teamwork, and more consistent implementation of school policies. Conversely, unclear communication structures and uneven support mechanisms weaken the potential contributions of middle leaders, even when they demonstrate willingness and formal involvement.

Overall, the study underscores that strengthening communication systems, clarifying leadership expectations, and providing targeted institutional support are essential steps for empowering middle leaders to fulfil their roles more effectively. Enhancing these areas may not only improve leadership practice at the middle level but also contribute to more cohesive, responsive, and high-functioning international school environments.

### **5.1 Limitations of the Study**

While the study offers valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the quantitative phase relied on descriptive statistics, which limits the ability to infer causal relationships among communication practices, decision-making involvement, and leadership support. Second, the sample was restricted to middle leaders from 15 international schools, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other school types or regions within Myanmar. Third, qualitative data were based on self-reported perceptions, which may reflect personal interpretations rather than objective institutional realities. Finally, as the study followed a cross-sectional design, it does not capture changes in communication practices or leadership dynamics over time. Future research may benefit from incorporating inferential statistical analyses, broader sampling, or longitudinal approaches to deepen understanding of middle leadership communication.

### **6. Recommendations**

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the leadership capacity of middle leaders and improve communication practices within Myanmar's international schools.

1. **Strengthen Communication Structures and Protocols:** Schools should establish clearer and more consistent communication systems. Standardized communication protocols, reliable digital platforms, and scheduled cross-department meetings can reduce misunderstanding and promote timely, transparent information sharing. Structured channels also help ensure that communication flows are not solely dependent on hierarchical norms.
2. **Enhance Leadership Training and Professional Development:** Middle leaders would benefit from targeted development programs that focus on communication skills, conflict resolution, people management, and collaborative leadership. Regular workshops, coaching sessions, and mentorship from experienced leaders can strengthen confidence and improve their capacity to navigate complex communication dynamics.
3. **Increase Meaningful Participation in Decision-Making:** Schools should expand the scope of middle leaders' involvement in strategic decisions, including curriculum planning, staff development, and budgeting. Clearer role definitions and participatory decision-making frameworks can help ensure that middle leaders' contributions are substantive rather than symbolic, thereby enhancing ownership and institutional commitment.
4. **Provide Stronger and More Consistent Institutional Support:** Addressing role overload requires providing sufficient resources, protected time for leadership duties, and accessible support systems. Consistent feedback mechanisms and open-door leadership practices can also provide middle leaders with timely guidance and help reduce ambiguity in their responsibilities.
5. **Address Cultural, Generational, and Gender-Related Communication Differences:** Staff development initiatives should include training on intercultural communication, generational diversity, and gender-inclusive leadership. Facilitating dialogue on these issues can improve mutual understanding and reduce communication barriers that may limit contribution or cause misinterpretation.
6. **Foster a Collaborative and Trust-Based School Culture:** Schools should cultivate a culture that values teamwork, mutual respect, and shared responsibility. Recognizing the contributions of middle leaders, promoting interdepartmental collaboration, and encouraging reflective dialogue across the school community can help create an environment where collaborative decision-making becomes embedded in everyday practice.

Together, these recommendations highlight the importance of aligning communication structures, leadership development, and school culture to ensure that middle leaders are empowered, supported, and able to contribute effectively to school improvement.

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