

CROSS-CAMPUS KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE IN GLOBAL SCHOOL NETWORKS: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY OF CAMPUS GALS AS A VEHICLE FOR GRASSROOTS INNOVATION WITHIN GLOBAL SCHOOLS GROUP

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Campus GALS, an internal cross-campus initiative of Global Schools Group (GSG), as a model for inter-campus knowledge exchange and grassroots innovation in K-12 international education. Grounded in Communities of Practice (CoP), Organisational Learning Theory, and Nonaka's SECI model, the study investigates how knowledge flows across geographically dispersed campuses and how staff-led innovations scale within a networked educational system. A mixed-methods approach was employed, comprising semi-structured interviews with two key informants the Founder of Campus GALS and the Head of School at OWIS Riyadh supplemented by a structured survey of 18 staff members representing diverse roles (Group Leaders, Co-Leads, and Members), experience levels, and staff categories (academic and non-academic). Findings reveal an overwhelmingly positive reception: 83% of respondents rated their experience as Positive or Very Positive, and 72% felt motivated and inspired by their participation. Strong agreement was recorded across three core dimensions: knowledge sharing and cross-campus collaboration (78%), professional growth (78%), and leadership development (61%). Qualitative responses highlight recurring themes of psychological safety, collaborative belonging, and aspiration for broader engagement. Notably, perceptions of leadership opportunity varied by role, with Group Leaders reporting stronger agreement than Members, providing a nuanced empirical account of distributed leadership in practice. The study contributes original insight into cross-campus knowledge dynamics in international school networks and positions Campus GALS as a scalable model for organisations seeking to institutionalise grassroots innovation while preserving local relevance.

Keywords: *Campus GALS, communities of practice, knowledge exchange, distributed leadership.*

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation and shifting pedagogical demands have fundamentally reshaped educational systems, driving a transition from isolated institutional models toward interconnected, collaborative networks (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). In multi-campus international school

systems, this shift presents a persistent tension: maintaining organisational coherence across geographically dispersed campuses while enabling the local adaptability essential to contextually responsive education (Crossan et al., 1999; March, 1991). Research consistently demonstrates that networked professional learning accelerates innovation, enhances institutional effectiveness, and supports improvement through collective problem-solving (Bryk et al., 2015; Wenger, 1998).

Global Schools Group (GSG) exemplifies this challenge. Campus GALS is GSG's internal collaborative platform, enabling staff from multiple campuses to share ideas and contribute to continuous organisational improvement through structured Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). By empowering both academic and non-academic staff to identify challenges, propose solutions, and present ideas to organisational leadership, Campus GALS creates a direct pathway from classroom practice to strategic decision-making (Spillane, 2006). The best ideas from campus-level FGDs are selected by Heads of School and elevated to a network-wide GALS summit, operationalising distributed leadership in an inclusive manner (Gronn, 2002).

Despite growing scholarly interest in professional learning communities and collaborative school improvement (Wenger, 1998; Bryk et al., 2015), empirical documentation of how such mechanisms operate at the frontline practitioner level in K-12 global school networks remains limited. Previous studies have predominantly captured leadership perspectives, leaving a significant gap in teacher-level accounts of school-based collaborative innovation (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). This study addresses this gap through a mixed-methods examination of Campus GALS within GSG, drawing on semi-structured interviews with two senior informants and a structured survey of 18 frontline staff. The study pursues four objectives: (1) to examine how Campus GALS facilitates cross-campus collaboration and knowledge sharing; (2) to explore its role in promoting grassroots innovation and distributed leadership; (3) to analyse how ideas move from campus-level practice to network-wide implementation; and (4) to capture the lived experiences and perceptions of staff directly involved in Campus GALS activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communities of Practice

Wenger (1998) conceptualises learning as a fundamentally social process emerging through shared participation, interaction, and experience within a community. In educational settings, Communities of Practice (CoP) form when educators collaborate toward common goals, developing collective understanding through ongoing dialogue and reflection. Knowledge is not simply transferred but actively constructed through community engagement. Within Campus GALS, FGDs function as structured CoPs, spaces where staff collaborate to address pedagogical challenges, share effective strategies, and construct knowledge collectively across campus boundaries.

Organisational Learning Theory

March (1991) and Crossan et al. (1999) identify a central tension in organisational learning between exploration, the pursuit of new ideas, and the refinement of existing knowledge. Effective organisations must balance both to sustain innovation without instability. In global school networks, organisational learning requires knowledge generated at the classroom level to be systematically captured, shared, and applied across institutional boundaries (Crossan et al., 1999). Campus GALS operationalises this through its structured FGD-to-summit pathway, enabling local experimentation alongside network-wide adaptation.

The SECI Model

Developed by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), the SECI model describes knowledge creation as a dynamic interplay between tacit and explicit knowledge through four stages: Socialisation (sharing tacit knowledge through interaction), Externalisation (articulating tacit knowledge into explicit forms), Combination (synthesising explicit knowledge from multiple sources), and Internalisation (applying explicit knowledge in practice). Within Campus GALS, staff share classroom experiences during FGDs (Socialisation), document strategies in presentations (Externalisation), integrate insights from multiple campuses (Combination), and adapt these within their own contexts (Internalisation). This cycle enables knowledge to travel between individuals and campuses while remaining contextually relevant.

Distributed Leadership and Grassroots Innovation

Campus GALS aligns with grassroots innovation frameworks that prioritise bottom-up idea generation and context-responsive solutions (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Distributed leadership theory positions leadership as a collective practice enacted across individuals rather than vested in singular positions (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006). Cross-institutional collaboration through structured platforms is increasingly recognised as essential for driving systemic educational innovation in global school systems (Dede, 2010; Harris, 2013). Together, these frameworks provide the conceptual foundation for examining how Campus GALS generates, shares, and scales knowledge across GSG.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative semi-structured interviews with a quantitative structured survey. This design enables triangulation across hierarchical levels leadership intent alongside frontline practitioner experience yielding a more complete and credible understanding of the initiative's operation and impact (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Case study methodology frames the inquiry, with Campus GALS within GSG serving as the bounded case

(Yin, 2018). Given the exploratory nature of the study, findings are not intended for broad generalisation but to generate contextually rich and empirically grounded insight.

Participants and Data Collection

Phase 1 comprised semi-structured interviews with two key informants: the Founder of Campus GALS, who provided insight into the design intent and structural logic of the initiative; and the Head of School at OWIS Riyadh, who offered an operational perspective on its implementation. Interview questions addressed knowledge sharing practices, leadership structures, cross-campus collaboration, and scalability.

Phase 2 comprised a structured survey distributed to OWIS Riyadh staff who had participated in Campus GALS (N = 18). The survey included: (1) three Likert-scale statements assessing agreement on knowledge sharing, professional growth, and leadership opportunity; (2) a multi-select emotional engagement question; (3) categorical demographic items; and (4) two open-ended questions on most valuable aspects and suggested improvements. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of survey participants, and Figure 1 illustrates their distribution by role and staff category.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Survey Participants

Factor	Demographic Variable	f	%
Staff Category	Academic	16	88.9
	Non-Academic	2	11.1
Role in Campus GALS	Group Leader	5	27.8
	Co-Lead	3	16.7
	Member	10	55.6
Teaching Experience	2–5 years	5	27.8
	6–10 years	5	27.8
	11–20 years	3	16.7
	More than 20 years	1	5.6
	N/A (Non-Academic/ Non-Teaching)	4	22.2
GALS Sessions Attended	1	4	22.2
	2	5	27.8
	3	9	50.0

N = 18 valid survey responses collected at OWIS Riyadh.

Figure 1. Survey Participant Demographics (N = 18)

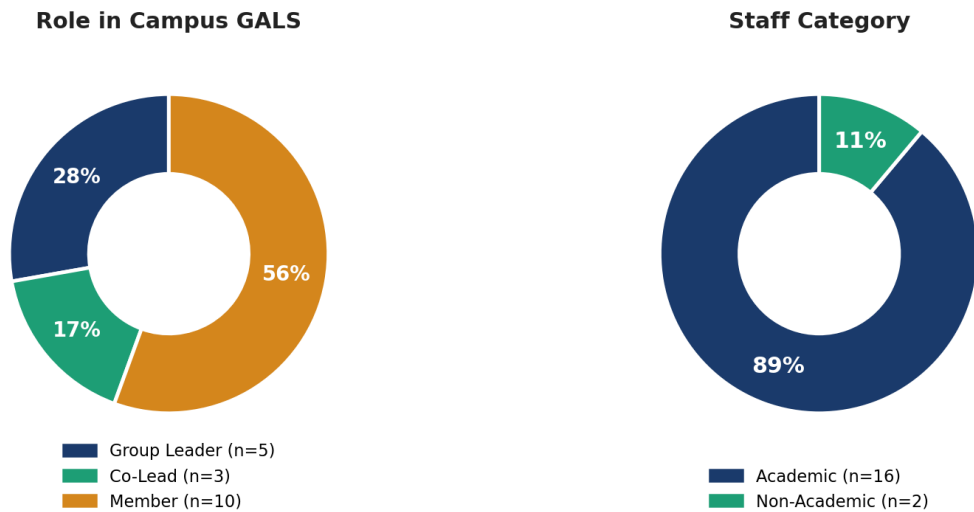


Figure 1: Survey Participant Distribution by Role and Staff Category (N = 18)

Data Analysis

Interview data were analysed thematically using an inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Survey data were analysed descriptively, with frequency counts and percentages calculated for each item. Open-ended survey responses were subject to thematic content analysis and integrated with interview findings to enrich the interpretive depth of each theme. Triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data enhances the credibility and transferability of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Analysis of the combined dataset yielded six interconnected themes. Interview data are triangulated throughout with survey frequencies and open-ended participant responses.

Theme 1: Founder's Vision, A Bridge Between Campuses and Corporate Leadership

The founder of Campus GALS described the event as designed to bridge campus-level staff and corporate decision-making, built on the conviction that powerful ideas originate at the grassroots and must have a structured pathway to reach organisational leadership. This design intent reflects grassroots innovation frameworks (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) and resonates with Crossan et al.'s (1999) emphasis on bidirectional knowledge flows. Survey data confirm this vision has translated into practice: 83% of respondents rated their experience as Positive or Very Positive, and no

respondent reported a negative experience a striking indicator that the initiative's intended culture of openness and inclusion has been largely realised at the frontline level.

Theme 2: Grassroots Innovation and Upward Knowledge Flow

The Head of School at OWIS Riyadh affirmed that the initiative has been effective in enabling grassroots ideas to reach the corporate level. Survey respondents corroborated this. One Group Leader described "leading a team from idea to impact refining our concept and presenting it at a higher level pushed me to think more strategically and confidently." A Member noted that "the exchange of ideas between colleagues was very fruitful, and the idea that we can apply our thinking across all campuses is amazing." These accounts validate the upward knowledge flow mechanism and align with March's (1991) exploration dynamic in organisational learning.

Theme 3: Knowledge Sharing and Cross-Campus Collaboration

Survey data demonstrate strong agreement on the knowledge-sharing dimension, with 78% of respondents (14/18) agreeing or strongly agreeing that Campus GALS helped them share knowledge with colleagues across campuses (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). Qualitative responses reinforce this quantitative picture. One Group Leader described "sharing ideas and shaping them into possible solutions; collaborating with other teachers" as most valuable. Another noted that "teachers and non-academics from different departments shared similar ideas and were all enthusiastic about sharing new innovative ideas." These findings align with Wenger's (1998) CoP framework and the Externalisation and Internalisation phases of the SECI model (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

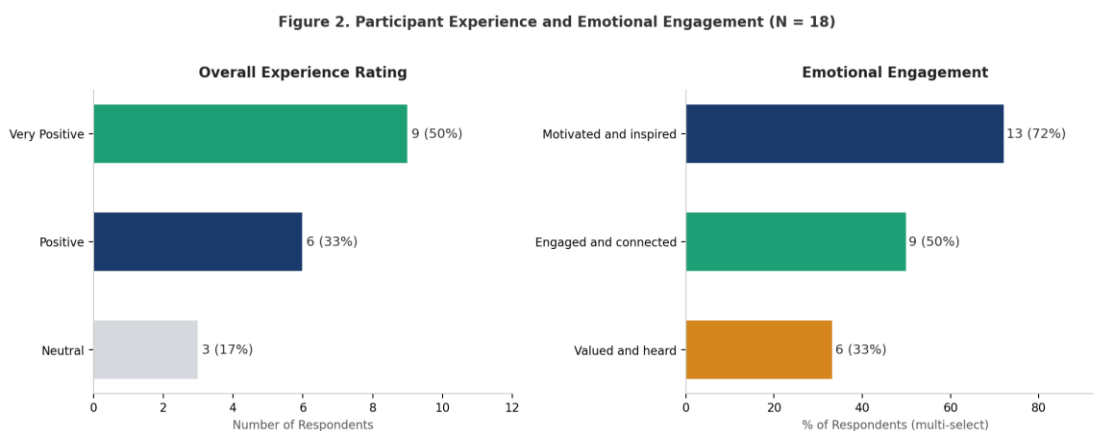


Figure 2: Overall Experience Rating and Emotional Engagement Toward Campus GALS (N = 18)

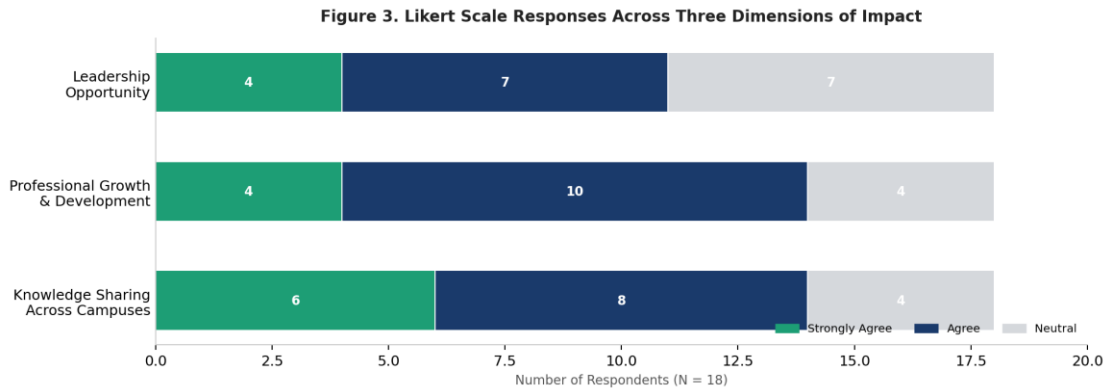


Figure 3: Likert Scale Responses Across Three Dimensions of Campus GALS Impact (N = 18)

Theme 4: Distributed Leadership and Inclusive Participation

Both informants highlighted the initiative's capacity to democratise leadership. The Head of School at OWIS Riyadh stated that every employee gets a chance to take on leadership roles through FGD facilitation. Survey data confirm this at 61% overall agreement on the leadership dimension (11/18), but reveal meaningful variation by role (see Figure 4). Group Leaders reported 80% agreement, Members 60% and Co-Leads 33%. The lower Co-Lead agreement may reflect their intermediate positioning in the GALS structure. Qualitative responses illuminate lived leadership experience: one non-academic Group Leader described the value of "stepping into a leadership role, enhancing communication skills, and representing the school." These findings operationalise distributed leadership theory (Spillane, 2006; Gronn, 2002) while surfacing productive variation that merits organisational attention.

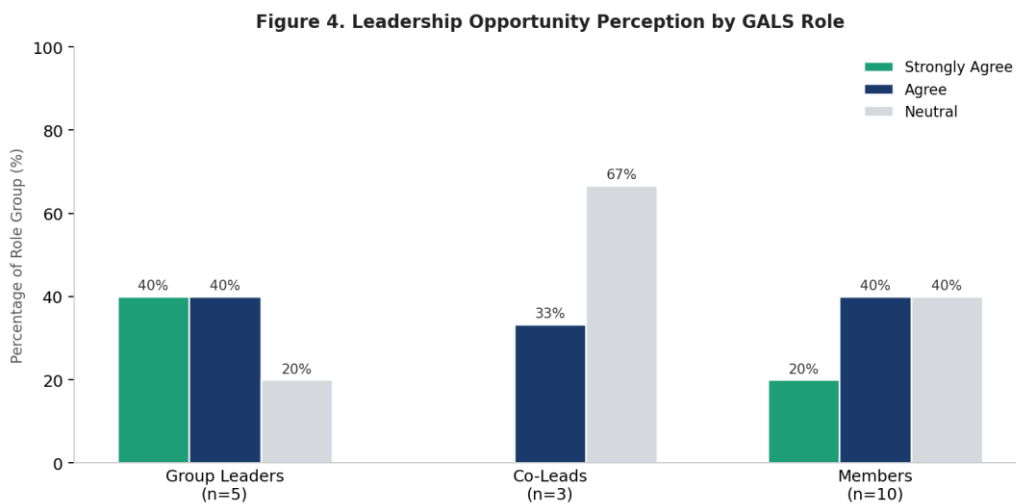


Figure 4: Leadership Opportunity Perception by Campus GALS Role (N = 18)

Theme 5: Professional Growth and Emerging Challenges

Survey data show that 78% of respondents (14/18) agreed or strongly agreed that Campus GALS supported their professional growth and development. Open-ended responses described personal outcomes including growth in "confidence, teamwork, skills, and meaningful connections." Respondents also surfaced constructive challenges including calls for "more structured timelines," "additional brainstorming sessions," and broader access to cross-campus presentations which indicate an engaged community seeking deeper and more sustained participation. These challenges align with March's (1991) exploration-exploitation tension as the initiative scales across a growing and geographically diverse network.

Theme 6: Emotional Engagement and Sense of Belonging

A significant emergent finding is the strong affective dimension of participation (see Figure 2). When asked how they felt about the initiative, 72% selected "motivated and inspired," 50% selected "engaged and connected," and 33% selected "valued and heard." Critically, no respondent selected "indifferent" or "overwhelmed or uncertain." Qualitative accounts elaborated that one respondent described feeling "heard, important, and recognisable" while another described a space for sharing thoughts "without being judged" and a genuine "sense of belonging." This finding is theoretically significant as within the CoP framework (Wenger, 1998), sense of belonging and mutual recognition are foundational to sustaining effective learning communities. The data suggest Campus GALS operates as much as a community-building mechanism as a knowledge management system, with the affective architecture of the initiative playing a critical role in sustaining meaningful participation.

DISCUSSION

The findings across six themes robustly support the integrated theoretical framework underpinning this study. CoP theory illuminates the social and affective dimensions of knowledge exchange within FGDs, now evidenced both qualitatively through rich participant accounts and quantitatively through affective engagement data (Wenger, 1998). Organisational Learning Theory explains how campus-level knowledge is systematically transferred and institutionalised across the network (Crossan et al., 1999; March, 1991), with the 78% knowledge-sharing agreement rate providing direct empirical validation at the practitioner level. The SECI model traces the full cycle of knowledge transformation from tacit sharing in FGDs to explicit organisational presentations and back to contextual internalisation now evidenced through the direct voices of teachers and support staff (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

The role-based variation in leadership experience represents a particularly significant finding. While Campus GALS successfully creates an inclusive participatory culture, the depth of leadership engagement differs across roles. Group Leaders most strongly experience the leadership dimension (80% agreement), while Members, who constitute 56% of participants, report moderate experience (60%). This suggests that while the initiative effectively distributes participation,

intentional structural support may be needed to extend tangible leadership ownership to Members, aligning with distributed leadership theory's emphasis on collective leadership enactment (Spillane, 2006; Gronn, 2002).

The validation of non-academic staff engagement is evident with both non-academic respondents rating their experience as Very Positive with strong agreement on knowledge sharing and professional growth empirically confirms the initiative's cross-departmental inclusivity claim. Furthermore, the near-universal motivational response (72% motivated and inspired; zero indifferent) suggests that Campus GALS has successfully cultivated the affective conditions psychological safety, mutual recognition, and sense of belonging that Wenger (1998) identifies as foundational to effective CoPs. This implies that the initiative's technical structure alone does not account for its success; the emotional architecture of the community is equally critical.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Campus GALS represents an effective and scalable model for knowledge management in global education systems. This mixed-methods study capturing both leadership intent and frontline practitioner experience demonstrates that structured, participatory platforms can successfully institutionalise grassroots innovation across geographically dispersed campuses. The overwhelmingly positive reception (83% Positive or Very Positive; zero negative ratings) and strong agreement across knowledge sharing, professional growth, and leadership dimensions confirm that Campus GALS delivers meaningful value at multiple levels of the organisation.

For educational leaders and network administrators, the study's findings yield several practical implications. First, the initiative's inclusive design extending participation to non-academic staff and across experience levels is a strength to be preserved and replicated. Second, role-based variation in leadership experience points to the need for intentional mechanisms that deepen leadership engagement for Members. Respondent suggestions including additional brainstorming sessions, clearer structured timelines, and broader cross-campus sharing offer a practical roadmap for the initiative's continued development. Third, the affective dimension of participation feelings of belonging, motivation, and psychological safety should be recognised as a deliberate design goal, not merely a by-product. School networks seeking to replicate this model should invest in the relational and cultural conditions that enable genuine community to form, alongside the structural frameworks (FGDs, summits, selection processes).

This study is limited by its focus on a single campus context for the survey component, which constrains the generalisability of findings. Future research should extend this work through multi-campus and multi-network comparative studies, or through longitudinal investigation of how participation experiences evolve over successive GALS cycles. Nonetheless, the study contributes a methodologically robust and empirically rich account of Campus GALS, with direct value for researchers and practitioners in global education leadership, organisational learning, and collaborative school improvement.

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