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2024/5 Global Education Monitoring Report

Leadership in education

School leadership competences in Sub-Saharan Africa

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ABSTRACT

With this study on school leadership competences in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), we explore unique characteristics of leadership and leadership competences that are relevant in Sub-Saharan African educational contexts, and we describe and further develop the concept of Ubuntu school leadership. The study is based on data collection and research on school leadership approaches and practices in Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia. Through narrative interviews, inquiry and qualitative analysis of the collected data, the research explores leadership characteristics drawing on knowledge from Sub-Saharan African contexts. The data show that school leaders demonstrate adaptability, prioritizing community engagement and inclusive decision-making. Despite facing resource constraints and organisational challenges, they employ innovative strategies, seeking solutions within their communities. Empowering leadership practices are emphasized, highlighting the role of leaders in inspiring student's academic success and personal growth. Continuous professional development and mentorship are identified as crucial for leadership development. Overall, the research underscores the resilience and adaptability of school leaders, who navigate challenges, empower their teachers and communities, and contribute to holistic well-being. The principles of Ubuntu emerge as guiding principles for inclusive and transformative leadership in African educational contexts. The study draws implications on how these school leadership competences and the Ubuntu school leadership approach can be promoted through policy and practice. In addition, it provides suggestions for further research on the topic.

TABLE OF CONTENT

Abstract	1
Table of Content	2
1. Introduction	3
2. Literature review	3
2.1. School leadership and leadership models in Africa	4
2.2. Ubuntu school leadership	6
3. Methodology	8
3.1. Data collection	8
3.2. Research context	9
3.3. Participants	10
3.4. Data analysis	11
3.5. Ethical considerations	11
4. Findings	11
4.1. Identifying challenges	12
4.2. Seeking solutions in and through communities	13
4.3. Empowering leaders in and outside the school	14
4.4. Raising expectations and commitment to organisational goals	16
4.5. Leadership development	17
4.6. Ubuntu school leadership	19
5. Conclusion	22
Implications and recommendations for policy and practice	23
Acknowledgements	25
References	26

1.Introduction

School leadership is recognised as key factor in enhancing student learning outcomes and wellbeing. Although school leaders do not interact directly with learners in the classroom, they play a crucial role in ensuring that the school learning environment is conducive for effective learning (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, exercising leadership and realising its potential depends on context. In Africa, over the last decades countries have made substantial improvements in ensuring access to basic education; however, progress on access to quality education for all has been lagging. One of the critical factors is the availability of resources. Education leaders may be forced to be more creative in constrained environments. In the African context, Mbiti et al. (2019) confirmed that stronger leadership is more likely to exploit effectively resources required to impact student learning.

While most studies on school leadership competences in Africa align with international school leadership models, the concept of Ubuntu school leadership emerged in a scoping review of empirical research on school leadership in Africa, highlighting some unique competences and aspects of leadership (Bush et al., 2022). This study now aims to explore Ubuntu school leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa, probing the unique leadership characteristics, competencies, and development relevant in this context. It seeks to leverage Ubuntu's conceptual framework and underscoring the role of community engagement to inform leadership theory and practice. The study builds on narrative interviews and inquiry with school leaders in Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia to generate insights for policy action and recommendations for practice.

2.Literature review

The future prosperity of Africa and the world is closely linked to the well-being of Africa's youth, projected to make up nearly 40% of the global population under 18 by mid-century. Capitalising on this demographic opportunity is thus time sensitive. Education is a critical tool for developing Africa's human capital, breaking cycles of poverty, and fostering socio-economic progress (UNICEF & African Union Commission, 2021). Investments in education can lead to a skilled workforce meeting evolving labour market demands (African Union, 2023). However, despite expanded access to basic education in Africa over the past two decades, progress towards ensuring quality education remains slow, with poor learning outcomes affecting 87% of Sub-Saharan African children by age 10 (African Union, 2023).

The World Bank (2018) report identifies challenges in education systems across Sub-Saharan Africa attributing the learning crisis to unprepared students, poor teaching quality, focus on ineffective inputs and weak school management. Effective school leadership preparation and development is deemed crucial in addressing these issues, (also see for example (Eacott & Asuga, 2014; Hallinger, 2018; Moorosi & Bush, 2020). Indeed, school's success is largely accountable to school leaders' proper leadership and management skills. School leaders hold the

key for motivating teachers, improving the school's capacity and building a favourable climate within schools - all of which contribute to improving educational quality (Pont et al., 2008). Bush et al. (2022) explain that effective leadership can be defined as leadership that leads to the achievement of school goals, especially those relating to student outcomes. The authors in their review of empirical research on school leadership in Africa found that first, school leadership in Africa is almost identical to headship, rather than reflecting a shared approach. Second, effectiveness is strongly influenced by the extent of devolution to school level. Third, effectiveness depends on the nature of leadership enacted by principals and others. While the interactions and behaviours required for effective school leadership are described by leadership styles, the competencies and practises expected of school principals are frequently outlined in dimensions or formal standards documents. These standards describe the essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes that school leaders must demonstrate if they are to provide effective school leadership. And they are an array of expectations and competencies and can be utilised to map training needs and generate professional development for school leaders (Peeraer et al., 2014). The Education Commission (2019) and Global School Leaders (2020) advocate reorienting school leaders through leadership training and support to improve learning outcomes, particularly in underperforming systems.

It is important to note divergencies in understandings of school leadership depending on context. There tends to be an over reliance on Western models and approaches that are not grounded in African epistemologies (Eacott & Asuga, 2014; Moorosi, 2021). Hallinger, (2017) suggests more research needs to be done in understanding how school leaders in developing countries carry out their roles. There is need for more research to be done on school leadership in Africa (Asuga et al., 2016; Hallinger, 2019). Educational leaders in Africa must draw on their own experiences for actions to support school improvement while continuing to benefit from high quality research of which there is a paucity conducted from various paradigms in Africa (Loomis & Akkari, 2021).

This literature review will first explore specific school leadership approaches on enhancing the quality of education, with a focus on quality of education in Africa. Therefore, the review will delve into the understanding of school leadership in the African context, examining its connections with international models and competences. Additionally, the review will explore the emerging Ubuntu school leadership model for Africa.

2.1.School leadership and leadership models in Africa

Next to teaching, research has shown a strong connection between school leadership and student outcomes and wellbeing. Given this, it is important to understand school leadership within the African context. Leadership is a contested term and there are varied definitions as well as leadership theories in the literature (Bush, 2003; Bush & Glover, 2003; Leithwood & Duke, 1999). The role of school leaders and understandings of their work have evolved over time, and this is also true within the African context. School leaders are no longer perceived primarily as managers, instead their role as leaders is highlighted contributing to the visions of organisations they lead. The term "school leadership" reflects changes in the role of school leaders over the last twenty to thirty years (Pont, 2020). In education systems across the globe a shift can be seen in how the role of school leaders is understood from more

management and administrative functions to engaging in collaborative efforts with teachers and a focus on improvement of learning (Glatter, 2014; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). This distinction aims to delineate leadership from management, which mainly involves executing decisions and ensuring organisational efficiency. However, it is acknowledged that management constitutes one dimension of leadership (Bush, 2003). Further literature indicates a shift from perceiving school leadership as an individual responsibility towards a more collaborative approach, driven by task complexity among other factors (Bush & Glover, 2003; Du Plessis & Eberlein, 2018; Mthiyane et al., 2019). Kelchtermans & Piot (2013) propose a definition wherein school leadership refers to a social influence process enacted by one or multiple members within an organisation, aiming to achieve essential and desirable organisational objectives.

Various leadership models have been explored in literature (See for example (Bush, 2020; Leithwood & Duke, 1999)). The literature on school and educational leadership within the African context highlights the following tenets as important to leaders such as the importance of setting direction, empowering, and developing teachers, and leading teaching and learning (Bush et al., 2022b; Global School Leaders, 2020). Bush et al., (2022) in their review on empirical research on school leadership in Africa found the three main styles of leadership most prevalent are instructional leadership (Bush et al., 2021; Ndambuki, 2020; Robinson et al., 2008), distributed leadership (Gronn, 2000; Spillane et al., 2001), and transformational leadership (Bush, 2020; Salem, 2016; Shields, 2011). While these models and approaches are not African-centric and theorised primarily by scholars in the West, school leaders on the continent have found them useful in supporting their work. There are more recently emerging critical leadership frameworks such as decolonising leadership (Khalifa et al., 2019; Lopez, 2020) and transformative leadership (Shields, 2010, 2023).

Instructional leadership aims to centre leadership efforts around the fundamental aspects of teaching and learning. Its primary emphasis lies in improving teaching and learning by prioritising teacher development and cultivating favourable school environments (Ndambuki, 2020; Robinson et al., 2008). Bush et al. (2021) define specific techniques for instructional leadership, such as monitoring, particularly through classroom observation, with constructive criticism intended to promote positive change rather than undermine teacher confidence. However, this approach is typically more applicable in decentralised school settings, where school leaders have significant autonomy in determining their leadership and management strategies (Bush & Glover, 2013).

Distributed school leadership model, like participative leadership (McCarthy, 2003), centres on collective leadership rather than individual leadership. It involves the sharing of leadership responsibilities among diverse individuals within an organisation, particularly relevant in professional learning communities and the evolving educational landscape (Harris, 2013). This implies that leadership within the school involves not only formal leaders but also teachers, parents, and even students. In practice, this leadership approach bears resemblance to delegation, often associated with middle and senior leaders holding formal roles within the school (Bush & Ng, 2019). Different terms are employed to depict this distribution of leadership, such as participative, collaborative, shared, or democratic.

While the model encompasses both teachers and school leaders, Grant (2006) advises that the success of teacher leadership hinges on the support provided by principals.

Transformative leadership as advocated by Shields (2011), which revolves around school leaders' capacity to challenge oppressive practices and bring about substantial and profound changes, not just within organisational settings but also at societal and systemic levels. This approach emphasises the role of leaders as catalysts for positive and impactful transformations. As a specific type of transformative leadership, transformational leadership approach focuses on inspiring and motivating individuals within a school, with principals creating visions and encouraging actions aligned with that vision. It involves transforming organisational behaviour, culture, and individuals. There is a significant difference between transformational leadership and transformative leadership as espoused by Shields (2011). Whereby, transformative leadership is more general and aiming at creative change in individuals and organisations, transformational leadership highlights the leaders influence in inspiring individuals. Shields (2011) further emphasis on challenging normalised beliefs and addressing social injustices can be seen as a key aspect of transformational leadership. Although this leadership style was overall criticised to be centred on the heroic and charismatic feature of the headteacher (Bush, 2020) there is evidence that for its effectiveness there is a need for more collaboration, trust and support among school actors to be able to move in the same direction (Salem, 2016).

Within the field of leadership studies, pivotal and emerging perspectives have garnered attention for their significance in shaping contemporary understanding. These include culturally relevant approaches (Johnson, 2007; Khalifa et al., 2019; Lopez, 2013), which underscore the importance of acknowledging and integrating cultural contexts into leadership frameworks. The previously explored leadership models offer valuable insights into specific aspects of leadership but lack a comprehensive view of school leadership. The notion of decolonising leadership, as articulated by Lopez (2020) holds significance in addressing historical power imbalances and colonial legacies within leadership paradigms. It emphasises the need to dismantle colonial influences and create leadership frameworks that are inclusive, equitable, and representative of diverse voices and perspectives.

2.2.Ubuntu school leadership

Educational leadership scholars from Africa and the global South continue to call for leadership frameworks grounded in local Indigenous epistemologies and move away from policy and practices borrowed from the West that do not necessarily represent or serve educational leaders in these contexts.

The concept of Ubuntu is attributed to Black Africans from all geographic locations on the continent, popularised in South Africa. There are other terms given to the overarching philosophy in other countries such as gimuntu (Angola), bantu (Congo), medemer (Ethiopia), biako ye (Ghana) utu, munto or mondo (Kenya), umunthu (Malawi) (J. Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019; J. R. Mugumbate et al., 2023). Different communities may emphasise different aspects of the philosophy but there is a common foundation that shapes relations, knowledge, values and practices. (Mbiti, 1969) one of the early leading scholars on the topic noted:

What happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group, community or country happens to the individual. People, country, environment, and spirituality are intricately related. The individual can only say: 'I am because we are and since we are, therefore, I am' (p.106).

The notion of community has always been a central tenet in the Ubuntu philosophy. Mbigi (2000) argues that community is the most important aspect of Ubuntu. In the context of school leadership, Ubuntu undergirds the importance of fostering community engagement, cooperation with community members and building shared goals in terms of supporting students and advancing positive community relationships. It emphasises on interconnectedness, community, and shared humanity. On the continent of Africa calls for school leadership approaches grounded in African Indigenous knowledges are taking hold as educational leaders and policy makers recognise the importance of context and communities that schools serve. Samkange (1980) suggest Ubuntu as indigenous African philosophy focused on humanity, the sanctity of life and people-centred status. In contrast to Eurocentric ideas of self-actualisation which prioritise the individual over the group, Ubuntu philosophy emphasises the group. It is seen as being of service to collective or inclusive decision-making and as laying the foundation for the service orientation through which the views of the group supersede those of the individuals and those of the leaders in the school. Mbigi (2000) explored the concept of Ubuntu, highlighting its influence on interpersonal relationships, ethical conduct, and communal well-being. This philosophy underscores the idea that individuals thrive when they contribute to the well-being of the community, promoting a sense of shared responsibility and interconnectedness.

In school leadership, scholars suggest that while it is the responsibility of the school to develop students' knowledge, abilities, and values, this can only be done by working effectively with parents, the community, and other stakeholders. Some argue that in the African setting, this is considerably more than mere economic trade, but relational pathways of interdependence and trust, and that the school's potential is dependent on the quality of long-term connections with external stakeholders and reputation in society at large (Anani-Bossman, 2021; Davis, 2021; Woermann & Engelbrecht, 2019).

Educational leaders and school leaders exploring various frameworks and models have recognised the importance of context and connecting with cultures within that context and the need for leadership practices grounded in local indigenous knowledges (Khalifa et al., 2019; Lopez & Rugano, 2018). Ubuntu philosophy has been advanced as a workable framework for educational and school leaders on the African continent not only because of the values but also because it is African indigenous knowledge. Research has shown that effective leadership practices and effective leaders have strong engagement with community, respond to the needs of students within the community, engage in collaboration to enhance student educational outcomes (Abaya & Normore, 2014). Ubuntu as a philosophy foregrounds notions of interdependence and in the effective running of schools (Msila, 2008). Moorosi & Komiti (2020) suggest that Ubuntu philosophy and approaches have significant implications for leadership development, inclusive policies, and practices within schools.

3. Methodology

The main objective of this study is to contribute to the school leadership discourse and praxis in Sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting the experiences that shape school leaders' work, how they make sense of their leadership approaches and the possibilities of alternative approaches and understandings, grounded in African epistemologies, contexts, and experiences. It draws on data collected and research conducted in Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia with both elementary and secondary school heads. Overall, the following question will guide the study:

How do school leaders in Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia understand and integrate African epistemologies and contexts into their leadership practices, and what alternative leadership approaches emerge from these experiences?

3.1. Data collection

The research conducted in all contexts employed a qualitative research approach that included narrative interviews and narrative inquiry. Narrative interviews and narrative inquiry involved obtaining stories and experiences from school heads about their leadership practices, approaches, and understandings.

The research was guided by sense making (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) and decolonising (Battiste, 2014; Lopez, 2020; Smith, 2012) theoretical frameworks. Sense-making is about understanding one's context and events (Weick, 1995) and decolonising education helps us to better examine and understand educational policies and practices within post-colonial contexts. Sensemaking enables us to turn the ongoing complexity of the world into a 'situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action' (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). Convergences between these approaches served the purposes of the research.

The following questions guided the data collection:

1. What challenges and successes have school leaders experienced in their roles as school leaders (Kenya, Ghana, and Zambia)?
2. How do school leaders understand and make sense of their leadership roles (Kenya, Ghana, and Zambia)?
3. What unique characteristics of leadership, leadership competencies and leadership development do school leaders see as relevant in Sub-Saharan Africa? (Ghana and Zambia)

Sub-questions and probing questions were asked during the interview process to further elucidate and support these overarching questions. Narration, as a process, essentially involves verbally recounting life experiences in a chronological and meaningful manner within specific temporal and social contexts (Elliott, 2005). In Ghana and Zambia, school leaders were also invited to share their reflections on the concept of Ubuntu and how the Ubuntu philosophy might support their work as school leaders.

Given the emergence of Ubuntu as a framework to understand school leadership (Davis, 2021) within the African context, the research employed a 'grounded theory' approach utilising qualitative methods and narrative inquiry/interviews. Grounded Theory is a qualitative research methodology that seeks to derive theories or concepts directly from participant-generated data (Bocharova & Kamińska, 2022; Wacheux, 1996).

3.2. Research context

Data collection took place across three distinct countries: Ghana in West Africa, Kenya in East Africa, and Zambia in Southern Africa. These countries encompass diverse geographical, economic, and educational landscapes within their respective areas. In Kenya, interviews were conducted in Nairobi (located in the south-central region), Embu (in the eastern region), and Eldoret (in Uasin Gishu county, part of the Rift Valley region). These locations differ significantly in their settings and economic pursuits, hosting a mix of industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services. The educational systems in these areas showcase a blend of urban and rural setups, featuring well-established institutions in urban centres alongside more resource-limited schools in rural areas.

In Zambia, data collection occurred with school leaders from the Central Province of Kabwe. This region is primarily dependent on agriculture but also supported by mining and other industries. Educationally, this province reflects a mix of urban and rural schools with varying levels of resource availability and infrastructure. In Ghana, data was collected from school leaders in the Central region as well. This region relies on agriculture, mining, and services as key economic activities. Educationally, there are differing facilities between urban and rural schools, leading to disparities in resource allocation.

In secondary schools across Ghana, Zambia, and Kenya, school leadership structures reflect the unique cultural and contextual differences of each country.

In Ghana, the role expectations of the school head as outlined by the Ghana Education Service include (a) creating a vision of success for the school, (b) organizing and evaluating instructional programmes, (c) improving the quality of learning, (d) building and maintaining relationships, (d) providing a safe school environment, (e) managing human resources, and (f) managing school finances (Amakye & Ampah-Mensah, 2013). Further there's a strong emphasis on collaboration between school leaders and parents, rooted in cultural values of communalism and respect for elders. Leaders engage parents in decision-making processes, recognising them as vital partners in education (Ampiah & Marfo, 2007). Selection of school leaders is based on qualifications, experience, and performance, overseen by the Ghana Education Service (GES) for public schools, while private schools have independent processes. Professional development programs, like the Leadership in Education Programme (LEP), are provided by the Institute of Education Studies (IES) in partnership with the Ministry of Education (Education Act, 2008).

In Kenya, school leadership balances traditional hierarchical structures with increasing parental involvement. Instructional leadership is identified by the Teacher Service Commission (TSC) as the standard leadership practice. Although there is no definition provided to give a framework to the term, the Teacher Professional Development (TPD) programme outlines seven standards for instructional school leaders in Kenya, and school leaders are trained

in each standard through a TPD programme offered through the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI). The seven standards include: 1) Promotes Professionalism; 2) Pedagogical content and understanding of Competence Based Curriculum (CBC) as well as its implementation; 3) Leads in environment that promotes assessment and reporting; 4) Building positive inclusive environment; 5) Promoting comprehensive school health and safety; 6) Leads in developing collaborative professional learning community; 7) Leads in financial literacy. Recognising parents as crucial stakeholders aligns with Kenyan cultural emphasis on family and community ties (Onyango-Ouma & Lutomia, 2018). Leadership positions are filled competitively, with the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) responsible for appointments. Professional development programs, like the school-Based Professional Development and Support (SBPDS) program by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), focus on enhancing leadership and instructional skills (Teacher Performance Appraisal and Development Policy, 2018; The Basic Education Act, 2013).

In Zambia, Instructional Leadership is the main approach promoted for school leaders. This leadership style focuses on creating effective teaching and learning environments, ensuring high-quality instruction, and driving academic improvement. School leaders are tasked with a variety of responsibilities, including managing school operations, interpreting, and implementing policies, managing staff, ensuring standards through Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and managing resources. These concepts: vision, mission, communication, guiding, monitoring, planning, community participation, curriculum development, supervision, distribution of work, school culture, goals, focus on learning, assessment and evaluation are used to describe effective school leadership and high-quality teaching and learning environments (Kalabo, 2017). School leadership practices and policies highlight the importance of involving parents. Collaboration with parent-teacher associations (PTAs) reflects cultural norms valuing community involvement in education (Chishimba, 2016). Appointment of school leaders is based on qualifications and performance by the Ministry of General Education, overseen by the Teaching Service Commission. Professional development programs, such as the Zambia Educational Leadership Enhancement Project (ZELEP), offer training in strategic planning, financial management, and curriculum implementation to school leaders (Education Act, 2011).

3.3.Participants

The data collection occurred during different periods: initially in Kenya from 2018 to 2019, in Ghana from 2022 to 2023, and finally in Zambia in 2023. A total of 65 school leaders across the three countries participated in the research.

The participants in all locations were selected by convenience sampling, drawing on collaborators' relationships with school leaders in those regions. The PI and collaborators carried out the interviews in Kenya and Zambia. In Ghana interviews were carried out by collaborators from the University of Education Winneba.

In Ghana and Zambia, the participants included leaders from both secondary and elementary schools, while in Kenya, only leaders from secondary schools were interviewed. In the selection of participants, it was important to

include female school leaders to ensure representation but also to capture any differences in leadership (Moorosi et al., 2018). In Kenya and Zambia 25 school leaders participated in the study while in Kenya it was 15 school leaders. Among these school leaders who participated in the study, 40% were female leaders. The largest number of women who participated were in Ghana due to the intentional work of the research team. This is however not representative of women participation in educational leadership roles, which is significantly less.

3.4.Data analysis

The process of data analysis employed various methodologies, primarily utilising open coding, axial coding, and selective coding techniques (Saldaña, 2021). This multifaceted approach necessitated a thorough and iterative review of the transcribed data. The initial phase involved open coding, after reading and re-reading of the data and identifying emergent themes. Axial coding was used to interconnect and establish relationships between the themes that emerged during open coding. From this a selective approach was used to identify the most significant and recurrent themes. Themes that emerged in response to the research question after various levels of coding are elaborated on in the findings' sections.

3.5.Ethical considerations

Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Toronto where the PI is located. Because the research did not include observations or site visits but was focussed on collection of stories and narratives from individual school leaders, institutional approvals were not necessary. Following ethics approval all participants were given information about the purpose of the research, signed consent forms, and assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. Participants were able to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. All interview transcripts and recordings are kept in secure locations and will be destroyed at the appropriate time.

4.Findings

The findings from the data are organised around the themes that emerged from the data analysis. The process involved reading the transcripts over and over, using open coding initially to look for themes and axial coding to make connections between themes that emerged from the questions that guided the data collection.

The analysis of school leadership in the diverse contexts of Ghana, Zambia, and Kenya sheds light on the complex dynamics and challenges faced by educational leaders. These leaders demonstrate a keen awareness of the diverse needs of their stakeholders and employ various strategies to address them effectively. Through negotiation and prioritisation of these needs, they navigate the constraints of limited resources while striving to foster higher expectations and commitment towards organisational objectives. In exploring the concept of Ubuntu within educational leadership contexts across Zambia, Ghana, and Kenya, variations in comprehension emerged, highlighting diverse interpretations and applications of this philosophy. While more widely recognised in Zambia,

Ghanaian school leaders exhibited varying degrees of familiarity, with some initially unaware but able to draw connections to their own practices upon explanation.

4.1. Identifying challenges

In response to the question on challenges they experienced, school heads offered a deeper understanding of their challenges and their contexts and experiences. There were convergences in challenges that they experienced in all three contexts such as economic issues around payment of school fees, lack of resources, student discipline, challenges supporting teachers as well as challenges unique to their own experiences. A school head in Ghana noted that his main challenges are “working with his teachers, to keep them motivated and keeping student discipline up”. While another school head in Ghana spoke of challenges with discipline and the impact of social factors in the community, the principal further defined leadership as influencing followers and supporting students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. He expressed concerns about discipline challenges but stressed the need to provide formal education to children as they are the future.

Most of the children here come from poor homes, broken homes, less endowed environments. Discipline is a big headache for me at the moment; so, because of that it has not given me the opportunity to put some of the interventions that will bring the expected result. You see the first and foremost is that I want my children to at least acquire formal education; They are our future. We must nurture them and give them the required knowledge and skills. I should be able to turn our children into people that will help to develop Ghana.

Inadequate funding was a recurring theme in all three contexts. A school head from Zambia pointed to social issues that impacted student performance.

I am concerned about the lack of impressive results by the students due to the long distances that they come from home to school which impacts their concentration after a tiresome walk and on empty tummies. We have as a school tried to enhance the XXXX program (name deleted to protect the school) where we encourage students to come and get a meal and it is a small way as a school we provide where possible. We also have challenges with lack of infrastructure to accommodate most learners from pre-grade to Grade 7 which results in most of the children experiencing delays in getting admitted into school and we have to apply for funding and engage parents. Little funding in helping to run the school smoothly. There is also a lack of teaching staff, there are challenges sometimes with vandalism, and poor sanitation.

One head teacher in Zambia noted challenges with teachers’ attitudes “Some challenges have been with teachers’ attitude towards work for example, truancy and not very competent with methodologies and late coming”. This was

seen across all three contexts: school heads indicated that sometimes it was difficult to get teachers on board and be as efficient as they would like them to be.

About the relation with central levels of government, a school head in Zambia noted challenges with policy makers. This was a consistent theme in all three contexts – frustration with government officials in allocating adequate resources. He noted:

My challenges as principal of the school are the policy makers who do not consult when they are making policy decisions, hence it becomes difficult to implement certain policies. In most cases they make policies that only suit the pupils who are in urban places without considering those who are in typical rural areas. Learning and teaching resources are sometimes not enough to support effective teaching and learning. For example, technological studies in schools without computers. In rural areas human resources are not enough as compared to the number of classes, which leads to failure to teach effectively by teachers.

4.2. Seeking solutions in and through communities

What has been clear with school leaders is that they understand their contexts and adjust their leadership practices accordingly. In response to the question: “How do school leaders understand and make sense of their leadership roles?” responses were varied as to be expected in all three contexts. While there was no overarching leadership framework that school leaders used, they were familiar with well-known leadership frameworks such as instructional leadership, distributed leadership and transformational leadership and others such as authoritarian, and democratic leadership. Their leadership approaches were primarily shaped by their contexts, community requirements, and student needs. Rather than adhering to a specific leadership theory, they described their practices based on what seemed practical to them.

At the level of the school, community engagement is embedded in not only leadership philosophies, but practical strategies to deal with challenges. School heads see their roles as inextricably linked to community. In Kenya one school leader of a boarding school noted challenges with students’ ability to pay fees.

We are a boarding school ... and some students who attain the required education to attend but do not have the ability to pay fees... So, we have to look for scholarships to support them. In collaboration with the Board of Management I have been able to raise some funds. We have well-wishers who want to support the children and ask how they can help. We are doing partnerships to sponsor some children. I set up an endowment fund that seeks to raise funds to meet the welfare needs of the students as well as specific needs of teachers that require capacity building and all that sort of things.

The school leader as a member of the community also ensures there is personal rapport with parents and the community. A Kenyan female principal, situated in a semi-rural area, emphasised community engagement by participating in local events, attending functions, and building personal connections with parents. She addressed challenges like poverty, slums, and student issues, focusing on infrastructure improvement and empowering both parents and teachers.

I get involved in the community, go to church, and plant trees. I attend functions such as burials and engagements. I try to get to know parents one-on-one, build rapport with them and go down to their level. I give water or soda. There is poverty in the community, slums close by, and some have no power at home. I have the principal's breakfast and dinner, dinner after exams. I recognise students. I try to improve school infrastructure and empower the parents. One of the challenges I have as a principal is to manage the finances. It is quite hard sometimes to collect fees. I also have to pay attention to drugs, teenage pregnancy among the girls, students living with HIV transmitted at birth. I also empower teachers.

4.3. Empowering leaders in and outside the school

There are varied approaches and how school leaders make sense of their work. What we see as important here is the understanding of their context including the teachers they work with, the staff, students, and communities. These sentiments collectively embody crucial components of effective leadership in the studied educational contexts. A profound comprehension of the African context is evident.

While participants in Ghana and Zambia were asked directly about leadership competencies they saw as important, other participants alluded to essential competences in their response to other questions. School leaders were prompted to articulate their perspectives on their roles and to delineate the aspects they deemed crucial and indispensable in their capacities as educational leaders. The prevailing understanding of competencies leaned towards viewing them as tasks intrinsic to the responsibilities of a school leader. This included a spectrum of management and leadership competencies such as, adept financial management, effective delegation, meticulous record-keeping, proficient goal setting and planning, sound decision-making skills, fostering staff encouragement, monitoring teachers, cultivating innovativeness, and actively promoting inclusive learning environments. In essence, the participants predominantly conceptualised competencies as practical skills integral to the successful execution of their roles, revealing a task-oriented approach to leadership in the educational context of Sub-Saharan Africa.

In addition, it transpired that school leaders are instrumental in empowering their stakeholders to reach their full potential. Through mentorship, collaboration, and a commitment to excellence, leaders inspire both students and staff to achieve academic success and personal growth. A male principal from Zambia highlighted his approach as cultivating leadership in other teachers, enhancing instruction, and facilitating changes in teaching and learning

processes. He emphasised the importance of humane treatment towards both teachers and students. Another school head in Ghana noted:

My goal was not to come and become so authoritative but to learn from my colleagues to work together with them and to fulfil the mission why I was brought here. I engage in issues concerning discipline, extra-curricular activities, clubs and societies; these are all under my jurisdiction but there is always room for improvement. I would say I am more democratic than authoritative, and I consult a lot. For anything I do, I consult my colleagues and hear their ideas plan and implement whatever we have to do.

One school head in Kenya talked about his strength in leadership in terms of his ability to work with staff. He noted:

I believe in the strength of people, not their weaknesses...Like now I have a staff of 85 teachers and 120 staff and support staff. What I realize is that if I focus more on their weaknesses, there will be no achievement. So, I focus on the strengths, the individual strengths to transform the institution and take it to the next level. I think leadership is about transforming yourself and transforming other people; and I think I can say for the three years at XXXX (name of school not revealed) I was in a new environment, but I observed I see what was acceptable and what I needed to change. I made sure everyone was engaged. But I still discovered that I needed to do a lot of capacity-building and develop people.

While not identifying a specific leadership style this school head sees collaboration and support for teachers and staff as central to his role. A female school head in Zambia articulated her approach to leadership in this way:

I would describe my role as a head teacher as inclusive and sensitive to the needs of those that I lead. I see everyone as important, and I try to ensure that all stakeholders have a say in the running of the school. I do not view myself as the sole holder of the knowledge, I try to bring all stakeholders on board.

The notion of being inclusive by school leaders was evident in all three contexts in different ways. Another school head from Zambia noted that he “receives advice from the students, the community, teachers, support staff and the management team, although the final decision is however his”. A strong commitment to community needs is demonstrated, with leaders prioritising local issues such as poverty and challenges of students with issues such as school fees, reflecting a holistic approach to education. Some head teachers saw their role as being instructional leaders. A school head from Zambia presented herself as an instructional leader who “provides support and works alongside teachers”. She noted:

My role as a headteacher is more of an instructional leader. These are the things that I do: I work alongside teachers to provide support and give guidance. I encourage teamwork as much as possible for us to achieve the school set goals. I establish best practices in teaching by sharing information using meetings and classroom demonstrations. I delegate to teachers who are capable and motivate teachers so that they remain energised and inspired. I use strategies to make everyone participate and I interpret government practices.

The head teacher went on to say that in addition to being an instructional leader she would also describe her leadership approach as “democratic, strategic and transformational” a combination that has helped her to “involve all stakeholders”. A dedicated focus on supporting working collaboratively is apparent through initiatives aimed at empowerment and acknowledgment. Additionally, the collaborative engagement with teachers underscores the commitment to enhancing overall education quality. The distinctive nature of these leadership styles emerges from a nuanced understanding of their context, highlighting both the differences and shared aspects in the perceptions of community within these educational settings.

4.4.Raising expectations and commitment to organisational goals

Successes were often linked to instructional and academic goals and building positive and authentic relationships with the communities that they serve.

I give them advise, talk to them, and try to find out the root cause of their truancy. Then I counsel if I need to. For those who seem to be incompetent with methodologies we have continuous professional development meetings and sessions where challenges are discussed, and teaching demonstrations done. The immediate supervisor monitors their performance. I go around and check to make sure lessons start on time.

One head teacher in Zambia suggested that she created a “disciplinary committee to deal with student discipline” and “engage in public/private partnerships and fundraising ventures to deal with financial challenges”. What was notable about this school head was that she made efforts to work with the community to solve some of the challenges and she reached out to an NGO for help with the poor water situation and sanitation. Her experiences reinforced the notion that school heads in these contexts are juggling many different needs and this was evident in the data from all three contexts.

School leaders also shared their successes. One school head in Zambia noted that her joyful moment is “when she brings everyone on board towards a plan” and when “above all the results are good”. Focus on “good” academic results was consistent in all three contexts. Another noted “it was good to see students with good qualifications and “seeing struggling staff and students pull through”. Another spoke of the “joy of being appreciated all around by the

community, staff, parents, and students". These sentiments were expressed by school heads also in Ghana and Kenya.

4.5. Leadership development

The characteristics of leadership that school heads thought were important varied across each context and among participants. There oftentimes was an overlap between how they made sense of school leadership competencies and underlying leadership characteristics. Highlighted competences and characteristics included the ability to work with others, being approachable, ability to work with stakeholders, empathetic, emotional intelligence, teamwork, organization, to name a few.

In terms of preparation for school leaders, there were varied interpretations of leadership competencies that needed to be developed, based on school leaders' own experiences. One school head in Ghana noted that he would like to further develop leadership competences in "management of finances, human resources and technology". Competences in financial management were mentioned consistently throughout. Communication was another leadership competence highlighted by school heads. One school head in Zambia noted in addition to "good communication skills, organizational skills, ability to appreciate and motivate staff, and working well with stakeholders". Another listed "empathy, decisiveness, fortitude, self-discipline, and emotional intelligence". While another listed "leadership skills and ability to adapt and innovate". The data indicates a broader need for the development of general leadership skills, encompassing a wide range of competences essential for effective school leadership. Additionally, emotional intelligence is identified as a specific focus within leadership development, emphasizing the critical role of understanding and managing emotions effectively in a leadership context.

Within this category, school leaders expressed a need for training before stepping into the principalship, emphasising the significance of preparatory leadership training. Notably, participants highlighted a lack of formalised training opportunities, underscoring the necessity for structured leadership development programs. The recognition of an ongoing need for leadership development on the job became apparent, with a particular emphasis on the value of mentorship as a valuable professional development method and approach. The data also suggests a prevailing dependence on colleagues for leadership learning, indicating a demand for more formalised leadership programmes. Additionally, leaders expressed a desire for structured connections with other head teachers, emphasising the value of networks for collaborative growth.

A comprehensive analysis of the data revealed that most participants would have liked some formal leadership training before taking up their roles either as deputy principal or principal. One school principal in Kenya noted:

Yeah, they don't necessarily have a leadership package designed for the principals. What we have is called XXXX [name of the programme removed] where they have programmes, certificate programmes that run for a week or two weeks at most. We had one where there was a course intended for principals, deputies, and senior teachers. But it was like a onetime activity sponsored by XXXX [name of the partner organization]

removed] Some of us have benefitted from that ...but most times you get a letter saying you are promoted from teacher to principal. So, I think some training is needed, especially for those in the field who have been teaching and would like to transition to the position of principal. Basically, what I currently do is call upon a friend and basically, they are just mentoring me. We need financial training and administrative training. As I have said we don't have foundational training in leadership.

This need for leadership training and development was consistent across all three countries. One head teacher from Zambia noted, "I did not receive formal training to become a school principal...Through workshops and orientation meetings for principals I came to know and understand roles of the school principal". A female principal said, "when I became a principal, I did not receive training, instead I used my experience and knowledge which I gained from being a teacher", while another said that he "attended courses on management at a university". What emerged from the data is that school principals sought other ways of getting the knowledge they needed through reliance on other school principals to act as mentors and finding workshops and seminars on their own.

One school head in Ghana noted that they "created a WhatsApp group so they could interact with their colleagues and ask questions when needed". Another principal from Ghana noted:

I have been reading. I have personally decided to be reading about leadership and observing other people too. When I was a teacher, I would intentionally go to the office and observe how they do things, and how things are organised there, and I learn. I remember I had a friend, a former Assistant Head of XXXX [name of the school removed], Mr. XXXS [name removed]. I used to ask him questions and ask how things are done. After talking to people and seeing how others do things, I apply them.

The idea of using mentors to support their leadership training and development has been a consistent theme. Being exposed to best practices was also an important aspect of the desired leadership development. School leaders express a strong desire to be exposed to exemplary practices, emphasising the importance of learning from successful leadership models. This included skills in a positive school culture, highlighting the crucial role of creating an environment conducive to effective learning. They also noted the need for capacity building underscoring the importance of capacity building not only to school heads but to empowering teachers. It emphasises the role of leadership development in fostering a supportive environment that enhances the capabilities of the entire school community. In the current educational landscape, school leaders predominantly receive workshops and engage in discussions with colleagues as part of their leadership development.

Challenges identified in the data, closely intertwined with leadership training and development, include issues such as financial constraints, delayed government funding, students' inability to pay school fees, concerns related to drugs and poverty, limited parental involvement, difficulties in managing teachers, motivating teaching staff,

addressing literacy challenges among students, and grappling with government policies lacking adequate resources and implementation guidelines. These challenges underscore the intricate nature of the environment in which school leaders operate and highlight the crucial role of robust leadership development programs in effectively addressing these multifaceted issues.

4.6.Ubuntu school leadership

The concept of Ubuntu was more widely known in Zambia than in Ghana. In Kenya a direct question on Ubuntu was not asked, but emerged during data analysis as school heads spoke about relationships with the schools they lead and the community. It was clear that they felt that community engagement – an integral tenet of Ubuntu philosophy – was essential to their school leadership practice. One school head in Ghana when he was asked if he is aware of the philosophy of Ubuntu said “no”. When it was explained to him, he noted “Yes, we share respect for one another here and we work together”. Another who was aware of the concept of Ubuntu explained it this way in relation to his own leadership practice:

I believe that this theory stimulates teamwork. You know the whole issue of leadership is about people, it's about teamwork and relationships. If you cannot relate and work well with other people you cannot go anywhere because if people don't understand you and appreciate your philosophy, they cannot follow you. For you to be able to succeed you must get the support of the people. For me, leadership is about the ability to convince people to follow you and that means relationships. My ability to relate with people is important. Teamwork is key. You must understand that we work with the concept of consultation and delegation and it's all within this theory. You know the concept of sanctions and rewards and I believe in these two concepts. Even students are given the opportunity to come and talk to me. This is what is happening here. So, all in all I give people the opportunity to relate to me and the environment thrive for all of us. This sounds like part of the Ubuntu philosophy.

Another school leader in Ghana said he did not know the term, but when he researched it “humanity” was a part of it.

You are a leader because all the others are. I think it dovetails with my philosophy and principles. We work for the interest of humanity and the interests of educational stakeholders: parents, students, teachers, workers, educational practitioners, managers, from headquarters and all those things. So definitely, you have helped me to understand the concept.

Another school principal suggested that “Ubuntu” means collaboration to him. He noted that they have a term in Ghana called “mpuntu” which sounds similar.

I am thinking we are doing some of that in the school [referring to Ubuntu]. I am thinking it is linked to “mpuntu”, meaning teamwork. It means you cannot do what you think is right without working together with the people. Discussing, assessment, looking at whatever we can do as teachers and school heads in the school. So, we are working together by involving all of them to find out exactly what we can do to help the school and bring us to where we need to be. I think we are using Ubuntu.

Yet another school principal in Ghana suggested:

That word comes from South Africa, Zulu language. Sometimes you are practising it, but you don’t know it. It’s about leadership where you believe in teamwork, you believe in collective decision. You believe in shared responsibilities. When you respect your followers, they also respect you. There is dignity. We are doing here what you explain Ubuntu is. We are working together. Even if I am not here and you come here, you see them working. When we get any information, we come together, share ideas before we draw conclusions. We all come together, and we share responsibilities. This is what we do. I like the approach of Ubuntu because we see ourselves as workers and we work together. And when we work together there is no problem and they will not hide, they will come and tell me.

In Zambia where the term Ubuntu is more widely known responses were slightly different from Ghana in that school leaders made connections to their practice right away. The following are some of the ways the Zambian school leaders talked about Ubuntu.

Yes, the Ubuntu philosophy is about caring for another. It is collectivism instead of individualism. This means for me when I have a challenge I can seek help from others. It promotes teamwork. It enhances unity.

I am aware of the African philosophy of Ubuntu. It means we are one, so this brings helping each other in every situation. People have to share what they have, which is good and that can bring development because no one will be lacking. As a head teacher, I will treat everyone equally including supportive staff and students and parents.

The philosophy of Ubuntu operates on the belief of an African way of doing things other than following the Western world. It advocates African leadership of genuine concern for all and benefitting the community where one is serving. This philosophy would help my school to collaboratively mobilise resources to benefit the school by providing adequate

resources. All learners will be taken care of. The community runs the institutions by supporting leadership put in place.

The philosophy of Ubuntu, I am very much aware about, and it supports my work in that I perform my duties in line with being considerate of others having their interest at heart, respecting, the values, and culture of everyone. Being empathetic and kind.

I have heard of Ubuntu philosophy in a cooperative that I belong to. This is where people bring their resources together to do one thing to benefit all. In the same way the Ubuntu philosophy can work at the school level if everyone realises that they have something to offer in order to achieve at the end. People have knowledge and different skills that are required to in a school. People have acquired different competencies that when brought together a lot of things can be achieved. People are connected differently and if their connections can be tapped into a lot can be achieved. For example, at the school two teachers had connections to people who filled our potholes in the school yard for free, built our pavement and painted it at a very cheap price while the other provided transport. All in the Ubuntu philosophy. Everyone has something to offer.

Ubuntu is an African philosophy that places emphasis on being self through others. It can help me in running my school once I consider others to be part of me and that my achievements come through the work of others.

Ubuntu promotes indigenous education to our people. Knowing that the kind of education differs from place to place. This learning what is relevant to our society and within the context.

Yes, I am aware of Ubuntu philosophy. This is the philosophy which encourages indigenous teaching and learning. It will assist my work as a principal because teaching and learning will be easy in that the students will be able to grasp the concepts because it will not be foreign to them.

School leaders across the studied regions highlight various ways in which they envision Ubuntu philosophy supporting their leadership practices, such as fostering unity among staff, working collectively for the betterment of the school and community, building teamwork and collaboration, and promoting inclusivity. In Ghana, a term known as "mpuntu" is mentioned, reinforcing the local interpretation and application of Ubuntu as a form of inclusive leadership. Overall, these perspectives underscore the diverse and region-specific understandings of Ubuntu and its potential impact on educational leadership in different African contexts.

From the school principals understanding of Ubuntu and connections to their practice it is clear that there are connections to leadership theorising and practice in areas such as community engagement, interpersonal relations and interconnectedness, community support to share resources, using the community as an asset, working collaboratively with parents and the community.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, the analysis of school leadership in Ghana, Zambia, and Kenya provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics and challenges encountered by educational leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa. Through a rigorous process of data analysis, which involved both open and axial coding, several key themes emerged in response to the research question.

Initially, it became evident that school leaders possess a nuanced understanding of their roles, which is deeply influenced by the unique contexts of their communities. They demonstrate a strong commitment to addressing local needs, with a particular focus on issues such as poverty and access to education. Leveraging available resources and fostering partnerships within the community, they actively seek innovative solutions to challenges like inadequate funding and infrastructure deficiencies. Despite facing various obstacles, including economic constraints and disciplinary issues, these leaders employ resourceful strategies to navigate challenges effectively. By engaging stakeholders and fostering a sense of ownership within the community, they maximize the utilization of local resources and promote inclusivity within the educational environment.

Furthermore, school leaders play a pivotal role in empowering stakeholders to achieve their potential. Through mentorship, collaboration, and a dedication to excellence, they inspire both students and staff to attain academic success and personal growth. By nurturing leadership qualities in others and fostering a culture of respect and support, these leaders exemplify the transformative impact of empowering leadership practices. Amidst the challenges of school leadership, moments of success serve as sources of inspiration, underscoring the profound influence of effective leadership on student outcomes and community well-being. These instances highlight the interconnectedness and communal nature of achievement, reinforcing the values of unity, support, and collective responsibility embodied in the concept of Ubuntu.

Lastly, school leaders recognize the importance of ongoing development and capacity-building to meet the evolving demands of their roles. While formalized training programs may be lacking, leaders express a desire for structured leadership development initiatives and mentorship opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge.

The research findings underscore the importance of ongoing leadership development for school leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa, emphasizing support in management, decision-making, and fostering inclusive environments. The Ubuntu philosophy emerged as a key framework, advocating for community engagement and teamwork, resonating even with those unfamiliar with the term.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The findings of the research can inform educational policy makers, professional development providers, researchers, and school leaders in advancing educational leadership praxis in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The findings indicate the need for ongoing leadership development for school leaders before they enter principalship and while on the job. School leaders indicated the need for support in areas such as general management, financial management and decision-making skills, but also on how to foster staff encouragement, support teachers, cultivate innovativeness, and actively promote inclusive learning environments. From the conversations with school leaders, it is clear that in addition, school leadership competences and practices are identified that stem from their experience in dealing with specific challenges and their ideas on success. Specific characteristics of leadership and leadership competencies are identified that they see as relevant in Sub-Saharan Africa. In line with Ubuntu philosophy, they highlight approaches and competences where they can assess both challenges in their schools and communities and seek for resources and solutions within the same communities, and therefore the essential capacity to be able to communicate well and engage with the community, including parents. They see the importance of working together, in teams, and to motivate teachers and promote leadership in their teachers. While not all participants, especially in Ghana, were familiar with the term Ubuntu, all of the participants saw value in the concept of Ubuntu school leadership. The concept can serve as an umbrella for these types of school leadership approaches and competences that are relevant to the context. Such competences can be translated in school leadership standards and competence frameworks and be taken up into related policies that promote effective school leadership. Instead of borrowing leadership frameworks from other contexts that are conceptualized outside of Africa, school leaders, school leadership professional development providers and policy makers can draw on their own local knowledge to inform school leadership practice and professional development. While there is overlap and alignment with other school leadership approaches and models such as instructional, distributed, and transformational school leadership, a decolonizing perspective on leadership and taking ownership of the indigenous concept of Ubuntu school leadership will be empowering to school leaders and can lead to improved engagement and outcomes for students and communities.

The research findings also indicate that it is important to think about how to organize and deliver professional development. School leaders themselves see the need to develop leadership within teachers and within communities as well. And apart from a clear need for formal training programmes, research participants saw great value in mentoring and coaching from peers and the richness and insights to be found in networks of leaders which allows them to be exposed to

exemplary best practices. Again, these notions align with the concept of Ubuntu where insights and solutions are to be sought within communities where success is linked to building positive and authentic relationships. When designing and developing school leadership professional development offerings, professional development providers can integrate such modalities and seek for complementarity between more formal and informal components of professional development, including elements of peer coaching and mentoring. Technologies can be blended into school leadership offerings, when equitable access is guaranteed, allowing for more exchange and collaboration between school leaders.

The research findings build a compelling case for how the Ubuntu philosophy supports school leaders in navigating challenges within their specific contexts. This underscores the necessity for in-depth qualitative research to develop robust case studies in other contexts and to address the knowledge gaps surrounding Ubuntu as a model for school leadership. Further research should delve deeper into the concept of Ubuntu leadership in schools, incorporating viewpoints from school leaders, teachers, students, parents, community members, and other relevant stakeholders. This inclusive approach aims to provide a holistic understanding of 'practicing Ubuntu.' By validating assertions such as enhanced collaboration and engagement in decision-making among school actors due to Ubuntu-inspired leadership practices, and by comparing these outcomes with those in other contexts, the research can highlight the unique benefits and applications of Ubuntu leadership.

While assessing the role of gender was not a research objective for this study, it is clear that efforts must be made to close the leadership gender gap. In all contexts there was a larger percentage of men in school leadership roles especially at the secondary level. While reasons for this were not explored in this study, this is an area for continued examination. According to Segkulu & Gyimah (2016) the number of female school leaders in Ghana is relatively small compared to their male counterparts. Factors accounting for the low representation of women in school leadership positions include socio-cultural barriers, unavailability of female teachers who are qualified to take up headship positions and discrimination against female teachers when it comes to headship positions (Alhassan & Duorinaah, 2020; Segkulu & Gyimah, 2016). A focus on leadership development must include an intentional approach to include women in these trainings and programs. Anulika (2022) suggests that in Sub-Saharan Africa women continue to be judged against men when it comes to leadership, and while efforts are made towards sustainable development goals in Zambia on gender equity more needs to be done to promote women in leadership in education. In Kenya while female teachers make up more than 60% of the teaching workforce in primary schools, most of them do not hold instructional leadership positions (Mberia, 2017). Research by Gatwiri & McLaren (2016) in Kenya reveals that women are

often viewed more negatively than men in leadership roles. Mulwa (2005) suggests that there is considerable scepticism over the role of women in leadership of schools.

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