



**African Centre
for School Leadership**

School Leadership in Africa

Key Insights from the School Leadership
Continental Mapping | **FACT SHEET**

Produced by: African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL)

A synthesis of emerging insights on policy, professional development, research, advocacy and sector coordination shaping school leadership systems across Africa.

The African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL) is a coalition of partners coordinated by ADEA, ESSA, FAWE and VVOB.



Ushirikika wa Maendeleo ya Elimu Barani Afrika
الرابطة لأجل تطوير التربية في إفريقيا
Association for the Development of Education in Africa
Association pour le développement de l'éducation en Afrique
Associação para o Desenvolvimento da Educação em África



Introduction

This fact sheet presents key insights from the continental mapping of school leadership in Africa conducted by [African Centre for School Leadership \(ACSL\)](#). The study examined the evolving landscape of school leadership in Africa across four areas - policy frameworks, professional development, research and evidence generation, and sector coordination - to identify emerging trends, key gaps, and opportunities for strengthening school leadership systems.

Drawing on a large-scale synthesis of policy documents, leadership initiatives, and 1,759 research publications (from 8,041 screened records (2010–2025), and input from over 97 stakeholders across 16 African countries—including policymakers, researchers, and practitioners—the study identifies emerging trends, critical gaps, and opportunities to strengthen school leadership systems.

The findings are based on a multi-stage, consultative process combining desk reviews, stakeholder interviews, and validation workshops to ensure robust, contextually grounded evidence.

The findings highlight both the growing recognition of school leadership as a critical driver of education quality and the challenges that remain in translating this recognition into coherent, well-supported leadership systems across Africa.

Key System Signals from the Mapping



Growing recognition, uneven system development.

School leadership is increasingly recognised as a critical driver of education quality across Africa, but the systems required to support effective leadership remain uneven and underdeveloped.



Fragmented but expanding ecosystem.

Across policy, professional development, research, and sector coordination, a growing number of initiatives and actors are working to strengthen school leadership. However, efforts remain fragmented and insufficiently aligned.



Professionalisation of school leadership remains an emerging agenda

In many education systems, school leadership is still evolving from a teaching responsibility into a distinct professional role requiring clear standards, structured preparation, and defined career pathways.



Evidence base is growing but underutilised

Research on school leadership is expanding but remains uneven across regions and is not consistently translated into policy reforms, professional development programmes, or leadership practice.

Policy Landscape

- School leadership is increasingly recognised in continental and regional education frameworks as a key driver of teaching quality, learner outcomes, and school improvement.
- However, policy visibility has not yet translated into operational clarity or system readiness, implementation remains uneven, with many countries lacking clear operational guidance to translate policy commitments into practice.
- Policy provisions related to school leadership are often fragmented across teacher policies, quality assurance systems, and broader education strategies.
- In many education systems, school leadership is still treated as an extension of teaching roles rather than a distinct professional track requiring specialised preparation and certification.
- Leadership roles are expanding to include instructional leadership, teacher development, and community engagement.
- Gender equality and inclusion are recognised in many policy frameworks, but specific measures to support women's progression into school leadership remain limited.
- Continental and regional frameworks provide opportunities to strengthen policy alignment and shared leadership standards across African education systems.

School Leadership Professional Development Landscape

- The landscape of school leadership professional development in Africa is expanding, with growing involvement from governments, non-profits, universities, and development partners.
- Leadership development initiatives increasingly emphasise instructional leadership, focusing on strengthening leaders' capacity to support teaching quality and learner outcomes.
- Many programmes incorporate blended learning models, mentoring, coaching, and peer learning approaches.
- However, leadership professional development initiatives remain fragmented and largely project-based, limiting sustainability and system-wide impact.
- In many education systems, leadership development programmes are not formally linked to leadership standards, certification requirements, or career progression pathways.
- Access to professional development opportunities remains uneven, particularly for leaders in rural, marginalised, and resource-constrained contexts.
- Gender-responsive leadership training is emerging but is not yet consistently integrated across leadership development programmes.

Research and Evidence Landscape



Growth of the Evidence Base

The evidence base on school leadership in Africa has expanded significantly over the past decade, reflecting growing recognition of leadership as a key driver of school improvement.

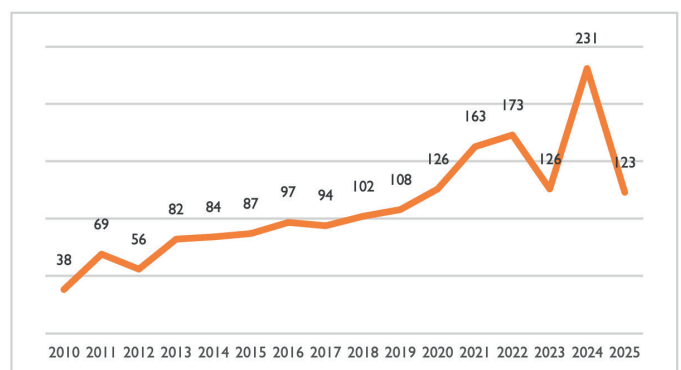


Figure 1: School leadership research output overtime, N=1759 publications



Uneven Geographic Distribution

- Research remains unevenly distributed across the continent, with most studies originating from Southern (39%), East (34%), and West (25%) Africa, while Central and North Africa (1%) remain underrepresented.
- A small number of countries dominate the evidence base, particularly South Africa, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Ghana.



Dominant Research Themes

- Most studies focus on leadership roles, leadership models, and leadership structures.
- Fewer studies examine the impact of leadership practices on teaching quality, classroom processes, and student learning outcomes.



Emerging Evidence Gaps

- Key gaps remain in areas such as digital and EdTech leadership, school culture and community engagement, and leadership in rural and fragile contexts.
- Priority areas emerging from the validation process include leadership linked to classroom practice and learning outcomes; digital leadership; inclusive and gender-responsive leadership; leadership in fragile and rural contexts; and system-level leadership development models.



Figure 2:
Priority Areas for School Leadership Research in Africa



Research Ecosystem and Accessibility

- Knowledge production remains fragmented and often driven by short-term projects.
- Many research outputs are published in journals that are difficult for policymakers and practitioners in Africa to access.



Methodological Rigor and Evidence Use

- School leadership research in Africa remains largely descriptive and programme-based, with limited comparative, longitudinal, or causal evidence on impact



Demand for Contextualised Research

- Stakeholders emphasised the need for Afrocentric leadership models grounded in local contexts and indigenous knowledge systems.
- There is growing demand for practice-oriented and practitioner-led research and stronger knowledge-sharing platforms.

School Leadership Advocacy, Communication and Sector Coordination

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Key Recommendations

- 1. Strengthen policy implementation and leadership standards:** Develop clear leadership standards, competency frameworks, and transparent recruitment and career progression pathways.
- 2. Institutionalise school leadership professional development:** Embed leadership development within national education systems, including preparation programmes, induction, mentoring, and continuous professional learning.
- 3. Invest in research and evidence generation:** Expand policy-relevant research on school leadership, particularly in under-represented regions and emerging leadership areas.
- 4. Strengthen coordination and knowledge translation:** Leverage continental and regional platforms to improve collaboration and ensure research findings inform policy and leadership practice.
- 5. Advance gender equality and inclusive leadership systems:** Address structural barriers limiting women's progression into leadership roles and ensure equitable access to leadership opportunities and professional development.

Conclusion

School leadership is increasingly recognised across Africa as a critical lever for improving teaching quality, learner outcomes, and inclusive education systems. However, recognition alone is not enough. Across the continent, leadership systems remain fragmented, uneven, and insufficiently institutionalised.

Strengthening school leadership will require greater alignment across these areas, alongside sustained investment in leadership professionalisation and evidence of use.

Moving from fragmented initiatives to coherent, system-wide leadership development will be essential for driving education transformation across Africa.



Explore the Full Study

This fact sheet presents key insights from the continental mapping.

For detailed findings, methodology, and the full report, visit the ACSL website.

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Acknowledgment

This fact sheet has been produced by the African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL) and draws on insights from the ACSL continental mapping report produced in March 2026. The authors thank the education stakeholders from across Africa who contributed to the mapping.

ACSL is a coalition of four Pan-African organizations, including, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), Education Sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA), the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), and VVOB – education for development, working in partnership to strengthen school leadership systems across Africa.