African Centre for School Leadership

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THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS

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MAPPING OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP LANDSCAPE IN UGANDA REPORT

Prepared by:
African Centre for School Leadership and
the Ministry of Education and Sport, Uganda.

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

ADEA Ushirika 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
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List of abbreviations

ACSL	African Centre for School Leadership
ADB	African Development Bank
AERD	African Education Research Database
ASSHU	Association of Secondary School Head-teachers in Uganda
CBC	Competence Based Curriculum
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
ESC	Education Service Commission
KCCA	Kampala Capital City Authority
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
NCDC	National Curriculum Development Centre
NTC	National Teacher Council
PEAS	Promoting Equality in African Schools
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TETD	Teacher Education Training and Development
TTI	Teacher Training Institution
UMI	Uganda Management Institute
UNATU	Uganda National Teachers' Union
UNITE	Uganda National Institute for Teacher Education


South Sudan
Open_Water
Region Boundary
District Boundary
NORTHERN
EASTERN
WESTERN
CENTRAL
Democratic Republic of Congo
Kenya
United Republic of Tanzania
Rwanda
Lake Victoria

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About ACSL

African Centre for School Leadership is an African initiative promoting the ideals of effective school leadership policy and practice. It is coordinated by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), Education sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA), Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE) and VVOB

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

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Executive summary

This mapping provides an overview of Uganda's school leadership ecosystem using a mixed method approach that combined desk-based evidence synthesis, metadata analysis of 53 research publications, primary data collection with 36 stakeholders, and a participatory two-day validation workshop. This approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of both the formal policy environment and the lived realities of school leaders and institutional actors.

The desk review examined national legislation, policy frameworks, implementation guidelines, and programme documentation. It was complemented by a structured analysis of research outputs (2010–2025), coded across thematic areas such as leadership practice, instructional leadership, policy context, leadership development, and equity. Metadata including authorship, institutional affiliation, gender, and research methods revealed trends and gaps within Uganda's school leadership evidence base. Primary data collection added depth by incorporating perspectives from MoES departments, ESC, UNITE, UNATU, NCDC, UNESCO, the World Bank, UMI, Makerere University, Kyambogo University, district inspection offices, and practicing school leaders from five districts of Kampala, Mityana, Hoima, Kyegegwa and Mubende. The subsequent validation workshop, attended by 31 participants, confirmed the findings and helped identify priority actions.

Across all data sources, findings indicate that Uganda has a strong policy and governance framework for school leadership, anchored in national legislation and strategic frameworks such as the Education Act (2008), the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Framework (2019), and the National Teacher Policy (2018). Leadership roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined within a decentralized system from national, district, and school levels. However, that gives a significant gap in translating these policies into practice, including inconsistent supervision, limited operational guidance, and uneven enforcement, particularly within the private education sector.

The report further highlights that while professional development opportunities for school leaders are expanding, the system remains fragmented. A range of programmes delivered by government, universities, NGOs, and development partners provide training in leadership and management. Nonetheless, induction for newly appointed headteachers is limited and inconsistent, mentoring structures are weak, and access to training varies across regions. Much of the provision remains dependent on donor-funded initiatives rather than being fully institutionalised within national systems.

At the school level, headteachers are expected to fulfil complex roles that combine instructional leadership, administrative management, and team coordination. In practice, leadership responsibilities are often distributed among senior staff, including deputy headteachers and directors of studies. However, heavy administrative workloads and limited preparation constrain the ability of school leaders to focus on instructional leadership, which is essential for improving teaching quality and student learning outcomes.

The research landscape on school leadership in Uganda remains limited and uneven. Only 53 studies were identified over a 15-year period, with most conducted by academic institutions. There is limited engagement of government and practitioners in research production, and key thematic gaps persist, particularly in leadership development systems, equity and inclusion, classroom practice, and system-level dynamics. Gender disparities are also evident, both in research authorship and in leadership representation.

Although multiple stakeholders are actively engaged in school leadership including the Ministry of Education and Sports, universities, development partners, and professional associations coordination remains inconsistent. While platforms for dialogue and knowledge exchange exist, challenges such as fragmented communication, incomplete data (especially on private schools), and limited inclusivity reduce the overall effectiveness of coordination mechanisms.

Equity remains a critical concern within the school leadership system. Female leadership is underrepresented, particularly in rural areas, and issues related to disability and inclusive education receive limited attention in both research and practice. These gaps highlight the need for more deliberate and systemic efforts to promote inclusive leadership and equitable participation across the sector.

Overall, Uganda has the foundations for a strong school leadership system but faces persistent challenges related to fragmentation, uneven implementation, limited coordination, and insufficient focus on equity. Strengthening school leadership will require coordinated policy operationalisation, institutionalised induction and mentoring, aligned and practice oriented professional development, stronger research uptake, and more inclusive stakeholder engagement.

1. Introduction



The Leaders in Teaching (LiT) initiative, supported by the Mastercard Foundation, adopts a holistic, multi-partner approach to strengthening teaching and learning across the continent. Under LiT, the LEAD pillar focuses specifically on reinforcing national school leadership systems through policy engagement, professional development, research, and sector coordination.

In Uganda, VVOB and PEAS are jointly implementing the LEAD Pillar, which focuses on strengthening education leadership and management as a key component of improving learning outcomes. This work seeks to strengthen the leadership capacities of key education actors, including Headteachers, Deputy Headteachers and Director of Studies (DOS) as well as education officers at district and county levels, in alignment with national education priorities and ongoing reforms.

VVOB works closely with the African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL) for several activities of the LIT initiative in Uganda. The ACSL is a pan-African coalition coordinated by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), Education Sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA), the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), and VVOB. The Centre brings together policy, research, and practice partners to promote effective school leadership as a cornerstone of improved teaching and learning, student well-being, and equity across education systems in Africa. As such, ACSL is committed to advancing effective school leadership as a cornerstone of quality education across the continent.

One key activity under the LiT–LEAD programme in Uganda is the mapping of the school leadership landscape. This exercise seeks to develop a comprehensive understanding of the current system by examining existing policies, initiatives, professional development programmes, research, and key stakeholders involved in school leadership.

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The mapping focused on four core areas:

1. Policy frameworks
2. Professional development provision
3. Research and researchers
4. Knowledge mobilisation, communication, advocacy, and sector coordination

The process combines a desk review with primary data collection. This includes surveys, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and a national validation workshop to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the findings. Through this analysis, the exercise aims to generate a diagnostic overview that highlights system strengths, identified gaps and opportunities for improvement. It also seeks to surface effective models that can be scaled to strengthen school leadership across the country. The findings from this mapping will inform national school leadership reforms, promote regional collaboration, and enhance alignment among stakeholders.

2. Methodology

The mapping exercise is designed as a mixed-methods approach combining desk-based evidence synthesis, metadata analysis, primary data collection, and a national validation workshop (More on the ACSL approach to mapping here). This multi-pronged approach ensured both breadth and depth, allowing for systematic analysis while capturing lived realities, motivations, and institutional considerations that shape school leadership research in the country.

2.1. A desk review

The desk review served as the primary entry point for understanding school leadership frameworks, policies, and practices. The GEM Report UNESCO (2024) provided an initial analytical reference for examining national policy priorities and professional development initiatives related to school leadership. The review focused on legislation, policy frameworks, implementation guidelines, and programme outputs relevant to education leadership. A snowballing technique was used to identify additional policy documents, evaluations, and grey literature cited within core sources, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the sector.

To further contextualise the review for research publications, a mapping of 53 research publications (2010–2025) was conducted. The analysis was organised around five thematic areas: policy and practice; instructional leadership; leadership styles and school performance; leadership development and training; and gender and inclusive leadership. Publications were drawn from the African Education Research Database (AERD), international indexing services such as google scholar, and online database, local repositories from different universities and platforms.

To ensure inclusion, a set of key search terms was generated to guide the identification of relevant research publications. Search terms combined keywords related to school leadership, headteachers, principals, instructional leadership, transformational leadership, teacher leadership, and Uganda (ACSL, 2025). Each publication was reviewed to extract metadata covering authorship, gender, institutional affiliation, research focus, methodology, publication type and attention to equity dimensions such as gender, disability and rurality. The review also employed a thematic coding framework aligned with eight domains of school leadership research, allowing comparison across studies.

2.2. Primary Data collection

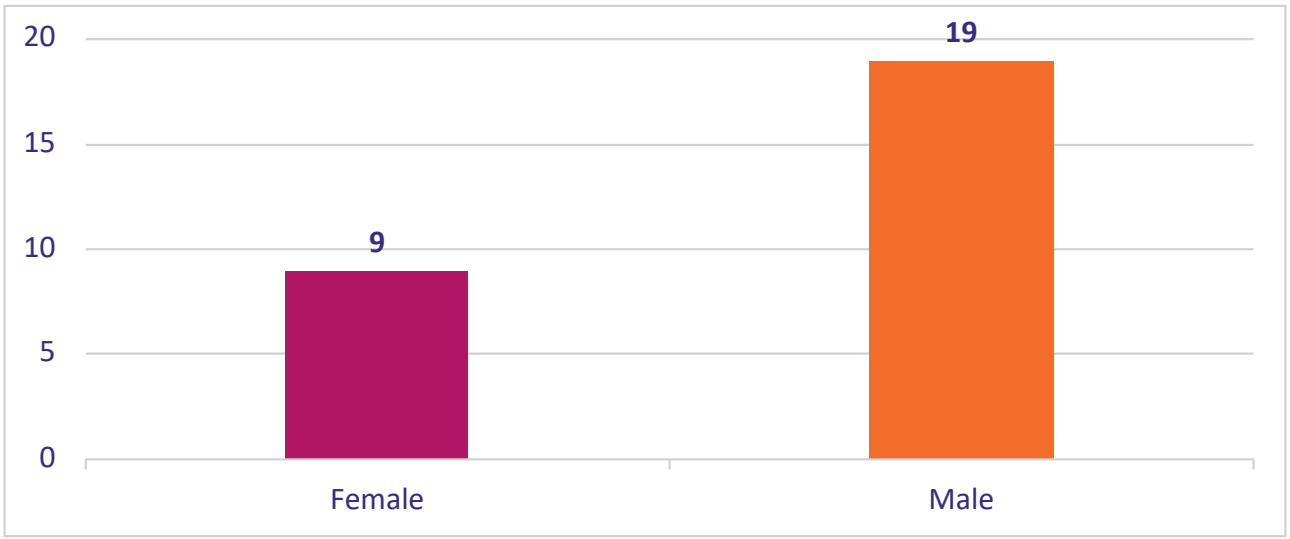
The study engaged a diverse range of stakeholders across Uganda's education sector, including policymakers, Ministry officials, education inspectors, researchers, Universities/institutions, development partners sand practicing school leaders. This approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of leadership development and system functioning from multiple institutional perspectives.

Interviews were conducted with senior and technical representatives from the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), the Education Service Commission, Uganda National Institute for Teacher Education (UNITE), the Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU), the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), the UNESCO country office, and the World Bank. Additional insights were drawn from academic leaders based at the Uganda Management Institute (UMI), Makerere University, and Kyambogo University, as well as from the school inspection directorate within the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA).

To complement these perspectives, a Focus Group Discussion was held with practicing school leaders. Participants included head teachers, deputy head teachers, and directors of studies from schools located in Hoima, Kampala, Mityana, and Kyegegwa districts. This discussion provided grounded, practitioner-based insights into the realities of school leadership across different contexts.

As shown in Figure 1, a total of 28 participants were involved in the primary data collection, including 11 female respondents.

Figure 1: Participants' representation in the interviews



Source: ACSL (2026) Mapping Report

2.3. Validation of the mapping findings

The combined findings of the desk review and primary data collection were subsequently validated through a two-day workshop that brought together approximately 31 participants (23 male and 8 female). Participants included key education stakeholders from the MoES, government agencies, universities, development partners, civil society organisations, representatives from school governance bodies and private school associations.

The main objectives of the workshop were to validate the preliminary findings of the mapping exercise, identify key gaps and opportunities in strengthening school leadership systems, define priority research areas, and develop a roadmap for action to guide future initiatives. The workshop also provided an opportunity to gather additional insights and generate concrete, actionable recommendations in response to the identified gaps.

Through collaborative discussions, plenary and group work, participants reflected on existing policies, leadership development practices, research gaps, and sector coordination mechanisms. The workshop further served as a platform to collectively identify priority actions to strengthen school leadership and improve education outcomes in Uganda.

2.4. Limitation

This mapping exercise provides valuable insights into school leadership in Uganda, drawing on a desk review and additional data collected in 2026. The review of research publications focuses on work published between 2010 and 2025. However, the findings should be interpreted with caution due to several limitations:

- **Database coverage bias:** Not all relevant research outputs may have been captured, particularly grey literature.
- **Search term limitations:** The keywords, subject terms, and search strategies used may not have fully captured all relevant work on school leadership.
- **Limited representativeness:** The findings reflect the views of selected participants and may not represent the entire stakeholder population, despite engagement with approximately 45 stakeholders across the study.
- **Subjectivity of responses:** Participant perspectives may be influenced by personal experiences or a tendency to provide socially desirable responses.

- **Limited regional coverage:** Local and regional variations may not be fully reflected.
- **Time and resource constraints:** These limited both the number of participants engaged and the depth of data collection.
- **Sensitivity of study topics:** Some of the topics discussed during the study were sensitive in nature, which may have influenced the level of openness among participants.

As a result, certain perspectives or information may have been withheld, potentially affecting the completeness of the findings.

3. Key Findings

This section presents the key findings from the mapping exercise, structured around policy and system landscape for school leadership; practices, and professional development initiatives for school leaders; research and sector coordination, advocacy, and communication in the field of school leadership.

3.1. Policy and system landscape

This section outlines the governance structure, policy frameworks, and institutional arrangements that shape school leadership in Uganda. It examines how authority, accountability, and leadership roles are defined across levels of the education system and how school leaders are recruited, regulated, and supported.

a) Structure of educational leadership in Uganda

Education leadership in Uganda operates within a decentralised system that spans national, district, and local levels, allowing for national policy oversight while enabling localized implementation and community engagement.

National Level

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) is responsible for setting education policies, standards, and strategic direction. Led by a cabinet minister and supported by three state ministers; Primary, Higher education, and Sports. The ministry is further administered by a Permanent Secretary who over sees the day –to- day operations, MoES is mandated to oversee curriculum development, recruitment of educators, teacher education, school inspection, and supervision of secondary schools to ensure compliance with national standards.

District Level

Uganda's 145 districts serve as the primary units for education implementation based on the decentralization policy. The Resident District Commissioner (RDC) serves as the representative of the central government at the district level and is responsible for ensuring that government policies and programs are effectively implemented. The Local Council V (LCV) provides political leadership and oversight of district governance, including the delivery of education services. The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) heads the district civil service and coordinates the implementation of government programs across all sectors, including education. The District Education Officer (DEO) provides technical leadership for education services, guiding the implementation of the MoES policies and offering support to schools within the district. Inspectors of Schools carry out routine monitoring, supervision, and inspection of schools to ensure quality assurance and compliance with national education standards. Together, these district-level actors form an important link between the MoES and schools, supporting policy implementation, coordination, supervision, and accountability within the education system.

Sub-County, Parish, and Village Levels

At the sub-county or town council level, the Senior Assistant Chief Administrative Officer (SACAO) or Town Clerk provide overall administrative leadership and oversees the implementation of government programs, including the delivery of education services. This structure plays a central role in supervising service delivery, supporting schools, and working closely with headteachers to ensure effective implementation of education policies and local education activities.

At the Parish-level, the Parish Chief coordinates government activities at the grassroots, including education-related interventions. In collaboration with Local Council II (LC II) leader, the Parish Chief supports community mobilization, monitors school attendance, and helps identify and report challenges affecting education delivery while at the village level, the Local Council I (LC I) Chairperson promotes community participation in education. This includes encouraging school enrolment and regular attendance, supporting learner welfare, and addressing community-level issues that may affect children's access to education.

School-Level

Secondary schools are led and managed through interconnected leadership and governance structures:

- **Board of Governors (BOG).** In line with the Education Act (2008), the Board of Governors (BOG) is responsible for the overall management of the school, including ensuring the implementation of the MoES policies and guidelines, providing strategic direction for school development, overseeing the proper use and accountability of financial resources, supporting staff management processes in collaboration with relevant authorities, monitoring academic performance and general school operations, and serve as a link between the school, government, and other stakeholders.
- **Headteacher:** strategic leadership, and management. The school leader is responsible for implementation of MoES policies, academic, administrative, human and financial management, community engagement and ensuring effective day-to-day school administration.
- **Deputy Headteacher:** Supports daily operations and discipline. Two positions, one deputy in charge of administration and another one in charge of discipline.
- **Director of Studies:** Leads curriculum implementation, academic planning and supervises teaching and learning.
- **Senior Teachers / Heads of Department / Subject Leaders:** Provide instructional leadership, mentor colleagues, and coordinate curriculum delivery.
- **Master Teacher / Principal Master Teacher:** Lead teacher development, monitor teaching quality, and implement professional standards.
- **Proficient/Professional/ Senior Teachers:** Take on leadership responsibilities within departments, guide peers, and support school improvement initiatives.
- **School Assembly:** Supports communication, unity, and moral development.
- **Student Leadership (Prefectorial Body):** Represents learners and supports discipline and co-curricular activities.

In terms of autonomy, headteachers' mandates and responsibilities regarding academic and administrative matters are carried out in accordance with regulations of the MoES. They are guided by the ministry in organising the school's academic curriculum and syllabus, as stipulated by the 2008 Education (Pre-Primary, Primary, and Post-Primary) Act. Regarding the administration of school funds, headteachers manage finances under guidance and are required to submit financial reports to the Ministry and the Board of Governors, in line with the 2020 Performance Management Guidelines for Tertiary Institutions and Schools.

b) Policies, framework and guidelines for school leaders

The policy environment for school leadership in Uganda is specifically anchored in the national education policies, statutory frameworks, and regulatory guidelines that define the roles, responsibilities, and accountability of school leaders at all levels. The policies are also anchored in Uganda Vision 2040, which positions education as a key driver of national transformation and human capital development. Vision 2040 envisages an education system capable of producing a skilled, innovative, and globally competitive workforce to support industrialization and socio-economic development (National Planning Authority [NPA], 2013). Relatedly, the Education Sector strategic plan 2020 – 2025 outlines key priorities for education; quality, access, ICT integration, Stakeholder engagement, gender equality, and inclusivity.

Under Statutory Framework, the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, Article 30 provides for the right to education. The operationalisation of this right is supported by the Education (Pre-Primary, Primary and Post-Primary) Act, 2008 provides the statutory foundation for the governance and management of education institutions in Uganda. The Act formally defines a head teacher to include a headmistress, headmaster, principal, or director of a school, and explicitly outlines their duties and responsibilities.

These include:

- Overall leadership and administration of the school.
- Supervision of teaching and learning.
- Management of staff, learners, and school resources; and
- Ensuring compliance with national education policies and regulations (Government of Uganda, 2008).

The Handbook on Teacher/Instructor/Tutor Education and Training Policies (2010) operationalises the Act by providing guidance on training and management of teacher's teacher (teacher education, recruitment, deployment, confirmation and crosscutting issues) . While primarily focused on teachers, the Handbook reinforces the leadership role of head teachers in mentoring, supervising, and supporting teacher professional growth.

Professional accountability is further reinforced through the Education Service Teachers' Professional Code of Conduct (2012), which sets ethical and professional standards for all educators, including head teachers. The Code emphasizes integrity, professionalism, learner welfare, and responsible use of authority, thereby framing school leadership as both a managerial and moral responsibility (MoES, 2012). The Education service teacher's code of conduct is further complimented by Uganda public service standing orders 2010 as amended. It serves as a comprehensive guide for the administration of public services; including covering policies, procedures and regulation that governs public officers' employment, conduct and benefits.

The most explicit articulation of expectations for school leadership is provided within the regulatory guideline of the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Framework and Costed Implementation Plan (2017). This framework applies to teachers and school leaders and includes a dedicated section on Standards for School or Institutional Leadership.
The framework identifies progressive leadership proficiency levels:

- Junior / Developing Leader
- Proficient Leader
- Exemplary / Transformational Leader

These levels describe the evolving competencies required for effective school leadership and provide a national benchmark for leadership development and appraisal. Institutional leaders and managers are expected to demonstrate competence in the following key areas:

- **Providing Leadership:** School leaders are expected to plan and drive institutional improvement, ensure compliance with policies, promote a culture of excellence and professionalism, champion innovation, articulate a clear vision, manage risks, and foster professional learning communities within schools.
- **Demonstrating Initiative:** Effective leaders are proactive, innovative, and future-oriented. They are expected to analyse information critically, explore new models of practice, add value for staff and learners, and make informed decisions that address both current and emerging institutional challenges.
- **Promoting Teamwork:** Leadership standards emphasize delegation, supervision, team development, recognition of achievement, and support for continuous professional development. Collaboration and shared leadership are viewed as central to sustainable school improvement.

The CPD Framework further maps leadership growth across six competence areas (see Table 1) — managing self, providing leadership, facilitating transformative change, working with people, effective use of resources, and achieving targets illustrating progression from task-oriented leadership to strategic, collaborative, and transformational practice (CPD Framework, 2017).

Table 1: Standards for various proficiency levels of institutional leaders and managers

Competence Area	Typical of Junior / Developing Leader	Typical of Proficient Leaders	Typical of Exemplary/ Transformative Leader
Area 1: Manage self and personal skills	Promotes CPDs for colleagues. Some attempt at building collaborative learning with other institutions	Proactively identifies own professional needs or those of colleagues in response to national initiatives. Develops professional communities	Models exemplary leadership, promotes and extends CPDs based on need, builds collaborative learning cultures with other institutions, acts with integrity & professionally
Area 2: Provide leadership	Focuses on completing tasks rather than collaborative decision making. Develops effective structures and is performance driven in approach	Focuses on developing teams rather than merely completing tasks. Develops effective structures for best performance. Seeks to develop strategic leadership and clear communication	Develops effective structures and is highly creative, inclusive, strategic, collaborative, professional and performance driven in approach. Creates and sustains culture of collective involvement, feedback and clear communication. Learns and promotes innovation
Area 3: Facilitate transformative change	Plans and leads change in and across different areas of development. Identifies barriers and seeks solutions to them. Supports change management aimed at improving performance	Leads change and engages with stakeholders to facilitate it. Uses a range of methods or models to manage change and remove barriers. Focuses on performance improvements	Highly innovates and supportive of change management. Effectively manages barriers to change. Establishes and implements systems of reporting and improving performance in the institution
Area 4: Working with people	Selects a few colleagues or stakeholders to consult when making key decisions. Supports workforce and its welfare	Consults colleagues and stakeholders when making key decisions. Implements work force plans demonstrating secure knowledge of principles of strategic leadership	Consults extensively with colleagues and stakeholders when making decisions. Sensitive to group needs and dynamics. Models' exemplary leadership with commitment to workforce and its welfare. Builds leading edge multi-professional teams, networks & learning communities

Area 5: **Effective use of resources**	Contributes to the administrative support and maintenance of accurate financial, physical, technological and human resources	Manages financial, physical, technological and human resources to achieve desired goals according to management principles Supports wellbeing initiatives for learners, staff and other stakeholders	Strategically leads and monitors financial, physical, technological and human resource use and wider developments under highest standards. Manages priorities, expectations and risks. Supports and ensures wellbeing initiatives for learners, staff and other stakeholders
Area 6: **Achieve targets**	Contributes to project and the attainment of targets. Selectively consults colleagues and other stakeholders	Plans and manages projects with a focus on achieving targets. Promotes effective use of business management processes. Selects a few people to consult on institutional targets	Continuous and consistent focus on achievement of targets. Articulates high expectations and sets stretching targets. Monitors and manages wider expectations outside of the institution. Aggressively markets services and achievements

Source: *CPD Framework (2017)*

c) Professional development in policies and plans

The National Teacher Policy (2018) emphasises leadership development as part of career progression and envisages all school leaders attaining postgraduate qualifications in administration, governance, leadership, and management. Headteachers and principals are required to participate in CPD programmes in leadership and management, as outlined in the CPD Framework (2017).

The Teacher Incentive Framework (2017) links leadership development to motivation, recognition, and retention, while the 2016 Harmonised Framework for Initial Teacher Training specifies initial training requirements for headteachers at early childhood, primary, and secondary levels, including the duration of training programmes, minimum academic qualifications, training modules (covering standard teacher training plus management), years of experience, and probationary periods. The 2010 Handbook on Teacher/Instructor/Tutor Education and Training Policies emphasises high-quality training to strengthen headteachers' management and leadership capacities.

Headteachers and principals are required to participate in continuous professional development (CPD) programs in leadership and management to support school improvement goals, as outlined in the 2017 Continuous Professional Development Framework and Costed Implementation Plan. These skills can be developed through supported work experience or targeted training courses.

Prior to appointment, headteachers must complete administrative and management courses and undergo appraisal. The 2017 Teacher Incentive Framework further recommends that headteachers receive support from the board of governors in overseeing management of the school, and teacher unions to familiarise themselves with all critical government systems, either before assuming a new position or during their probationary period.

d) Career pathways and accession to leadership

Headteachers in Uganda are classified as civil servants, with their terms and conditions of service governed by multiple public service instruments, including the Education Service Commission Act (2002), the Education Service Commission Regulations (2012), the Employment Act (2006) and the public service (teachers) act (1970). Appointments may be on fixed-term or permanent contracts, renewable based on satisfactory performance, with salary progression largely determined by years of service and additional qualifications.

According to the **Competency profile of secondary school teachers (2016),** headteachers must hold a degree and formal training in institutional management and leadership prior to deployment, such as a Master in Institutional Management or a relevant postgraduate diploma.

- Minimum qualifications for headteachers in secondary schools; bachelor's degree in education, 2 teaching subjects,12years, and other relevant Qualification e.g. master's in administration, Competency profile of secondary school teachers (2016).
- According to the Harmonized framework for initial teacher training in Uganda (2016), Secondary school headteachers must have a master's degree (Level 7), a diploma in educational management, and demonstrated outstanding teaching and leadership experience (e.g., as Head of Department or other leadership roles), with a minimum of twelve (12) years teaching experience and 3 years as deputy headteacher.
- Deputy Head Teachers should have a bachelor's degree in education, two teaching subjects, and at least 9 years of experience, including 3 years at the level of Principal Education Officer.
- The head of the department must hold a bachelor's degree in education, be qualified in two teaching subjects, and have three years of service as a Senior Education Officer (Harmonised framework for initial teacher training in Uganda, 2016).

Recruitment of head teachers, deputy head teachers, and other school leaders in Uganda is mainly coordinated by the Education Service Commission (ESC) in collaboration with the Ministry. According to the ESC and MoES, recruitment is merit-based, open, and free of charge, meaning no candidate should pay bribes or unofficial fees during the process.

Advertisement of vacancies

- Vacancies for head teachers and deputies are publicly advertised through the ESC website, national newspapers, and district offices.
- Each advertisement specifies qualifications, experience, and documentation requirements

Application and shortlisting

- Candidates apply online or through regional recruitment designated centres.
- Shortlisted applicants are invited for interviews and competency-based assessments.

Appointment and posting

- Successful candidates receive appointment letters from the ESC.
- They are deployed to specific government-aided schools.

For private schools, the 2008 Education (Pre-Primary, Primary, and Post-Primary) Act (Article 13, section 33, (g)) requires headteachers to be registered teachers with at least a graduate degree for post-primary schools.

As described in the 2016 Harmonised Framework for Initial Teacher Training, Senior teachers from government aided schools are typically promoted into headteacher positions after attaining the required competence levels and leadership training. For the case of private schools, the promotion for school leaders is not clear. Appointments of secondary school headteachers are made by the ESC in accordance with the 2008 Education Act, the 2002 Education Service Commission Act, and the 2012 Regulations. The Commission considers the qualifications, experience, and merit of candidates, giving priority to qualified public officers. If a post cannot be filled through direct appointment or promotion, it may be advertised for external candidates, with circulation regulated by the Commission. The Ministry of Education and Sports, district or Principal or Municipal education officers, town clerks or Headteachers may recommend candidates. The Education Service Commission notifies successful applicants and issues letters of appointment. The Permanent Secretary, chief administrative officer, or town clerk further assesses suitability for the type of school in question. For government and grant-aided institutions, the government appoints and deploys headteachers in consultation with any authority (Education Act 2008)

The National Teacher Policy (2018) recognises professional associations, such as the Head Teachers' Associations of Uganda, as platforms for advocacy, sensitization, negotiations, policy dialogue, and representation, emphasizing the importance of a collective leadership voice in shaping education reforms. The 2020 Performance Management Guidelines for Tertiary Institutions and Schools introduced stronger accountability mechanisms, including extended probation periods and rigorous performance assessments. Policy discussions have also proposed placing headteachers and deputy headteachers on performance-based contracts to strengthen accountability and improve learning outcomes, reflecting a shift toward results-oriented school leadership.

e) Gender and equity considerations

The 2016 Gender in Education Sector Policy aims to promote gender equality in governance, human resource management, and school management, including the Board of Governors (BOG) and Parents and Teachers Associations. During the recruitment, women and people with disabilities are encouraged to apply.

Table 2 summarises the key policy, legal, and regulatory frameworks shaping school leadership in Uganda. While these frameworks exist, respondents consistently highlighted the absence of a dedicated national school leadership policy or competency framework, resulting in inconsistencies in leadership preparation and professional development. The policy landscape is highly fragmented, with no stand-alone policy for school leaders and multiple overlapping documents that create confusion and limit coherence. Alignment across policies is weak, and stakeholders often lack a comprehensive understanding of existing frameworks. Institutional arrangements further compound this fragmentation, as numerous regulatory bodies operate with limited coordination, reducing overall system coherence.

These challenges extend to implementation and monitoring, where scattered guidance makes policies difficult to operationalise and oversight mechanisms remain unclear or inconsistent. Awareness of policy provisions is also limited among practitioners. For example, qualification requirements are referenced across different documents without clarity or consistency, and many school leaders serve in acting positions for extended periods without meeting formal criteria. In addition, recruitment processes are not clearly defined, making it difficult for aspiring school leaders to navigate entry pathways. Overall, the lack of a coherent and harmonised framework undermines effective school leadership implementation, accountability, and development.

Table 2: Policy Frameworks and their role in School Leadership

Policy Framework	Role in School Leadership
Education (Pre-Primary, Primary and Post-Primary) Act, 2008	Provides legal framework for school governance, defines roles and responsibilities of headteachers, deputy headteachers, and heads of department.
Handbook on Teacher/Instructor/ Tutor Education and Training Policies, 2010	Provides guidance on teacher training, recruitment, deployment, and reinforces leadership responsibilities of headteachers.
Education Service Commission Act, 2002 & Regulations, 2012	Regulates recruitment, appointment, deployment, promotion, and performance management of school leaders.
Teachers' Scheme of Service	Defines career progression, qualifications, and service conditions for teachers and school leaders and ensuring professional standards are maintained
Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP)	Guides strategic planning and sector development, linking leadership roles to national education priorities.
National Qualification Framework (NQF)	Sets professional standards for leadership competencies and aligns qualifications with career progression pathways.
Gender in Education Policy, 2016	Promotes gender equality and inclusion in school governance, recruitment, and leadership development.
Harmonised Framework for Initial Teacher Training, 2016	Defines pre-service training requirements for school leaders, including duration, academic qualifications, skills and modules on management and leadership.
Teacher Incentive Framework, 2017	Links leadership development to motivation, recognition, and retention of headteachers and deputy headteachers for better performance and strengthen leadership outcomes.
Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Framework & Costed Implementation Plan, 2017	Establishes progressive leadership standards, competency levels, and professional development, and pathways for institutional leaders.
National Teacher Policy, 2018	Establishes teacher development and leadership standards, including CPD requirements for school leaders for effective school management
Performance Management Guidelines for Tertiary Institutions and Schools, 2020	Strengthens accountability mechanisms, probation periods, and performance assessments for school leaders.

3.2. School leadership practices and professional development

This section explores current initiatives in school leadership development, including in-service and induction programmes; outlines the structure and reach of the School Leadership Programmes; highlights the key providers involved in delivering leadership development; and identifies remaining gaps and opportunities for improvement.

a) School leadership practices

Headteachers in Uganda are expected to balance instructional leadership, administrative management, and team coordination. Effective leadership practices focus on improving teaching quality, strengthening school management systems, and fostering staff engagement. This includes clarifying the school mission, monitoring classroom instruction, and promoting teacher collaboration (Namanya & Bagiwa, 2025; Najjuma Damali, 2022).

Findings from the interviews indicate that, due to the breadth of responsibilities, leadership functions are often distributed among the senior leadership team. Tasks are typically shared with deputy headteachers and directors of studies, while the headteacher retains overall oversight. As one respondent noted, “As a Headteacher, you must delegate. You must give guidance. Even when I am not at school, the school runs.” (Male headteacher).

Leadership development programmes increasingly recognise systemic constraints, such as heavy administrative workloads, inconsistent induction, and limited mentoring opportunities and aim to equip school leaders with practical strategies for improving school management, instructional supervision, and staff engagement. Participants also emphasised the importance of distributed leadership structures, particularly collaboration between the headteacher, deputy headteacher, and director of studies.

Across the schools represented in the study, leadership responsibilities were generally organised as follows:

- **Head Teacher:** Strategic leadership, financial management, and human resource management
- **Deputy Head Teacher:** Administration and student discipline
- **Director of Studies:** Curriculum implementation and academic supervision

Such collaborative arrangements were considered essential for ensuring effective school management and leadership. Headteachers in Uganda are expected to perform a complex role that combines pedagogical leadership, administrative management, and team coordination. In practice, this involves not only setting the school’s strategic direction and improving teaching quality but also ensuring effective day-to-day management and staff engagement.

The findings also point to emerging gendered patterns in school leadership. Schools led by women were perceived to perform better in some contexts, particularly in urban areas. While this observation requires further research, it suggests the potential influence of leadership styles that emphasise collaboration and close attention to school processes. At the same time, gender disparities persist, with male leadership more prevalent in rural settings.

b) Leadership preparation and professional development

This section examines the structures, pathways, and practices that shape leadership development, highlights current strengths, identifies gaps, and outlines opportunities for improvement. Leadership preparation is understood as a continuum that begins with pre-service education, continues through early career induction, and extends into ongoing professional development while in leadership roles.

i. Pre-service leadership preparation

In Uganda, school leadership preparation is not structured as a standalone undergraduate pathway but rather emerges as a career progression following initial teacher education and classroom experience. Teaching experience is typically a prerequisite for appointment to leadership roles such as deputy headteacher or headteacher. The formal pathway begins with foundational teacher education through Teacher Training Colleges/universities (Diploma and Grade V programmes), Bachelor of Education degrees, and Postgraduate Diplomas in Education (PGDE). While these programmes prepare educators for classroom practice, they do not include dedicated leadership training. As a result, aspiring leaders often pursue specialised qualifications in educational leadership and management at the postgraduate level as required with the Competency profile of secondary school teachers (2016).

Evidence from primary data suggests that leadership pathways can also be informal, particularly in private schools, where individuals may transition into leadership roles based on demonstrated leadership potential, sometimes shortly after completing university. One participant described a progression from classroom teacher to leadership roles, highlighting how leadership responsibilities can evolve organically through experience and performance.

> *I studied at the same school where I later returned for school practice. After practice, the director asked me to remain as a government-paid teacher. One year later, the school introduced a new leadership position Dean of Students and I was appointed. The rationale was that I had good rapport with learners and discipline issues. One year later, the senior teacher retired, and responsibilities increased. I was gradually prepared to take on deputy head teacher roles. For me, leadership came naturally. Once I am entrusted with responsibility, I commit fully. I am very passionate about discipline and student welfare, and I believe leadership is about putting learners first. (Male, Deputy headteacher)*

The most common entry point into formal leadership development is the Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management. This qualification provides foundational training in educational administration, human resource management, curriculum leadership, school finance, planning, monitoring and evaluation, and organisational behaviour. These programmes are often delivered in flexible formats such as weekend, evening, or in-service modes allowing practicing teachers to upgrade their qualifications while remaining in post.

At a more advanced level, master's degree and PHD programmes in educational leadership and management offer deeper preparation for instructional and system-level leadership. These programmes typically cover areas such as instructional supervision, strategic planning, change management, education policy, governance, ICT integration, and applied research. Delivery formats are increasingly flexible, with a growing use of blended and distance learning approaches. However, structured practicum experiences and mentored leadership components remain uneven across institutions.

Master's and postgraduate-level leadership qualifications are offered by the following institutions:

Makerere University	Uganda Christian University
Kyambogo University	Busitema University
Muni University	Gulu University
Uganda Martyrs University	Cavendish University Uganda
Kabale University	Mountains of the Moon University
Victoria University	Kampala University
University of Kisubi	Islamic University in Uganda
Aga Khan University (Institute for Educational Development, East Africa)	Ndejje University
Uganda Management Institute	

In addition to formal qualifications, alternative pathways also contribute to leadership development. Fellowship-based initiatives, such as one offered by Teach for Uganda, promote "teaching as leadership" by combining intensive training with ongoing coaching and professional support. While not formally accredited as leadership qualifications, such programmes help build foundational leadership competencies among educators.

A wide range of institutions offer postgraduate and master's-level qualifications in educational leadership and management, reflecting a strong academic base for leadership development in Uganda. However, practical school-based leadership experience, structured mentoring, and clearly defined induction pathways remain less systematically embedded within formal qualification routes.

ii. Induction

Formal induction for newly appointed headteachers remains limited and inconsistently applied across the system. Where induction support exists, it is typically delivered through short courses or donor-supported initiatives rather than institutionalised national programmes. As a result, many new school leaders assume their roles with limited structured guidance during the early stages of headship.

iii. In-service leadership development

In-service training represents the most active and developed area of school leadership professional development in Uganda. It is delivered by a diverse range of actors, including government agencies, universities, non-governmental organisations, and teacher unions.

1. Education Leadership and Management training

Under the Uganda Secondary Education Expansion Project (USEEP), the Ministry of Education and Sports, with support from the World Bank, partnered with the Uganda Management Institute (UMI) to deliver regional Educational Leadership and Management training for headteachers and deputy headteachers, particularly in Northern and West Nile regions. USEEP targets underserved communities to improve access to lower secondary education and includes a component focused on strengthening teacher support systems and establishing a national CPD framework.

UMI was contracted to facilitate capacity building for school leaders in government, government-aided, and selected private secondary schools. The training, implemented during 2024–2025, sought to enhance leadership and management competencies to improve school administration, governance, and the overall learning environment. In Western Uganda alone, the programme trained 870 participants, including 398 headteachers and 455 deputy headteachers, contributing to a total reach of approximately 6,600 school leaders across the

2. The Leadership for Education for Sustainable Development (LEAD-ESD)

Leadership for Education for Sustainable Development (LEAD-ESD) is a regional programme that falls within UNESCO's 'Education for Sustainable Development towards achieving the SDGs' or 'ESD for 2030' programme in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and Seychelles. It aims to support capacity building for policy makers, heads of institutions, teacher educators, and TVET educators in Eastern Africa to respond to regional sustainable development concerns and opportunities, the Africa 2063 Agenda, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The LEAD-ESD integrates educational leadership development with sustainability principles, supporting school leaders to align their leadership practices with broader social, environmental, and developmental goals. The course is a six-month programme. In Uganda, the programme is implemented in collaboration with MoES, Kyambogo University, and Uganda Management Institute (UMI), combining policy guidance, academic expertise, and practical leadership training to equip school leaders to drive sustainable development in their schools and communities.

3. The Certificate in Educational Leadership and Management (CELM)

Delivered by Aga Khan University – Institute for Educational Development, East Africa (AKU-IED, EA) in 2014, the CELM programme provided specialist leadership training to 823 secondary school headteachers nationwide. The three-month programme covered eight modules: 1) relative practice 2) leadership and concept models 3) designing, monitoring and evaluation of school programmes 4) managing change 5) strategic planning 6) developing action plans 7) pedagogical leadership, and 8) managing resources.

The programme also established a national network of senior educators, strengthening peer learning and mentoring. A strong gender equality strategy was embedded, promoting inclusive leadership practices and addressing gender and age dynamics among participants.
Key expected outcomes included:

- Strengthened leadership and management capacity of 823 headteachers.
- Improved access to classroom-based assessment tools.
- Enhanced financial management and fundraising capabilities.
- Improved management of public education institutions.

4. Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management (DELM)

Building on CELM, the Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management (DELM) is a fully funded programme jointly offered by Muni University and Aga Khan University under the Foundation for Learning (F4L) project (2022 – 2027), with financial support from the Government of Canada. The programme has been particularly impactful in the West Nile region, providing school leaders with both theoretical grounding and practical experience in transformational leadership. DELM emphasises mentorship, gender sensitivity, succession planning, and the development of a shared vision, equipping headteachers to foster inclusive, collaborative, and change-oriented school cultures.
The DELM adopts a hands-on approach, with approximately 60% of the programme dedicated to practical implementation in participants' own schools and 40% focused on theoretical learning. Participants attend two weeks of on-campus training at the university before returning to their schools to apply the leadership practices in real contexts. During this period, university staff provide mentorship and supervision in the field, ensuring ongoing guidance and reflection on practice.

The programme ran for two years and successfully trained 35 primary school headteachers across five districts. Participants reported improved leadership capacity, strengthened mentorship skills, and enhanced ability to implement transformational practices within their schools.

5. KAWA Uganda Leadership and Management Training

Kisubi Associated Writers Agency (KAWA) Uganda delivers leadership and management training through workshops, webinars, and blended learning modules. The programme focuses on use of ICT in education and leadership, strategic planning, communication, resource management, transformational leadership, and digital leadership. It supports headteachers and deputies to develop school ICT policies, manage digital records and data, plan and budget for technology, and build collaborative digital cultures through peer mentoring.

6. School Leadership Development Programme (SLDP)

PEAS implements a comprehensive School Leadership Development Programme for leaders within its school network. The programme includes workshops, mentorship, peer learning, action research, annual school improvement planning, inspections, and structured self-reflection. An annual leadership conference further supports professional learning and network-wide knowledge exchange. The SLDP is embedded within the PEAS model, reflecting the organisation's emphasis on empowered, accountable leadership as a driver of student outcomes and school sustainability.

7. The Effective School Leadership for the Competence-Based Curriculum (ESL4CBC_2026)

CPD course, targets school leaders responsible for implementing the CBC. The programme integrates face-to-face sessions, digital skills development to support blended learning, gender-responsive leadership training, and remote coaching. These components aim to strengthen school leaders' capacity to effectively manage and sustain curriculum reform. In terms of content, the course focuses on enhancing the interaction between school leadership and the world of work, as well as strengthening the support that school leaders provide to teachers implementing project-based learning approaches. The programme is implemented under the Belgian government -funded Learning Agriculture and Entrepreneurship Practically initiative by VVOB. It is currently delivered at the Muni, Mubende, and Unyama campuses of UNITE. The programme is in its pilot phase and has not yet been formally accredited.

8. Teacher union–led initiatives

Teacher unions, notably the Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU), have contributed to leadership development through short courses and workshops, including training on performance management for headteachers.

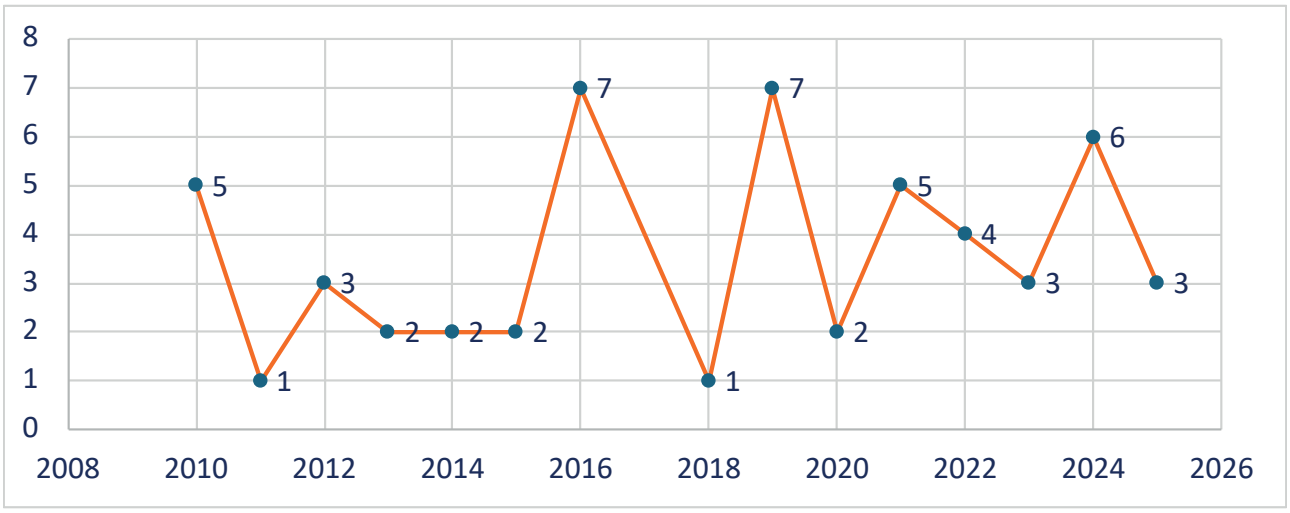
3.3. Research and researchers in school leadership

This section presents an overview of research and researchers on school leadership in Uganda. It explores the main themes covered in the literature, highlights key researchers and institutional networks involved, and examines the motivations and funding sources behind existing studies.

a) Overview of included studies

The mapping exercise ultimately included 53 publications that met our inclusion criteria. Figure 2 shows a trend analysis of annual count of publications on school leadership.

Figure 2: Number of school Leadership research publications per year

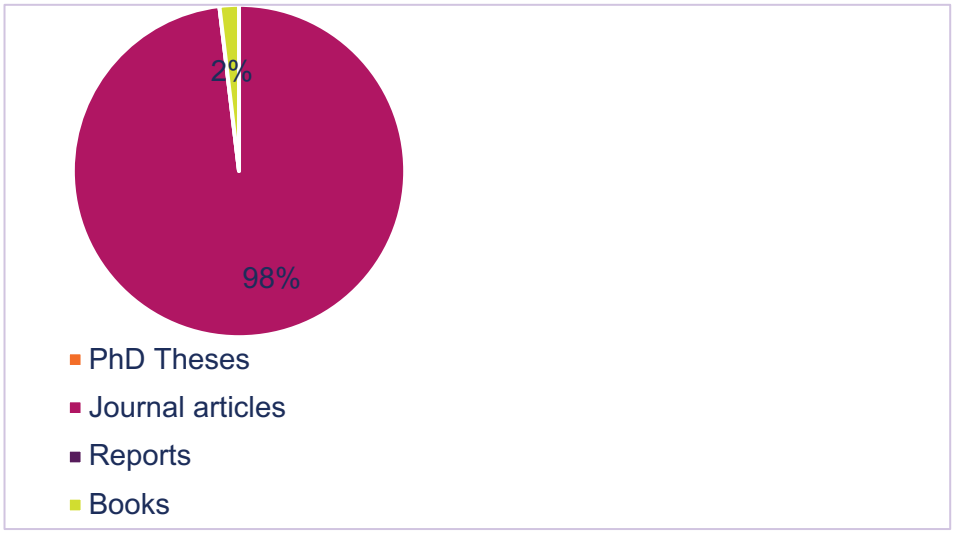


Note: *Total research outputs identified between 2010 and 2025 is 53.*
****2025 publications searched between January and November*

Overall, SL publications in Uganda are low and vary widely from year to year, with no steady growth over time. Key trends include several years of very low output in the early 2010s, followed by brief peaks around 2016 and 2019 that were not sustained. In recent years, publication numbers have increased slightly but continue to fluctuate, indicating that research output remains inconsistent.

The mapping exercise identified 53 publications that met the inclusivity criteria. Of these, 98% were journal articles, while only 2% were books or book chapters, as shown in Figure 2. This distribution indicates that school leadership research is predominantly disseminated through journal articles rather than longer-form publications.

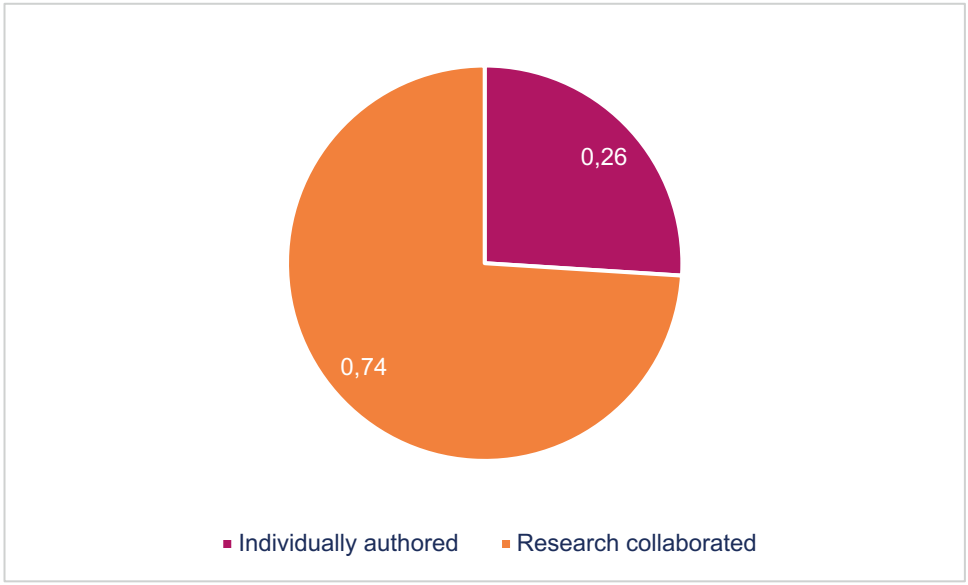
Figure 3: Distribution of publication types



Source: ACSL (2026) Mapping Report
Note: Base = Total research outputs analysed, 53

While gathering data on researchers' institutional affiliations, collaboration patterns were analysed in Uganda's school leadership research. Figure 3 displays publications by collaboration status, revealing that roughly 26% were authored alone and 74% were collaborative.

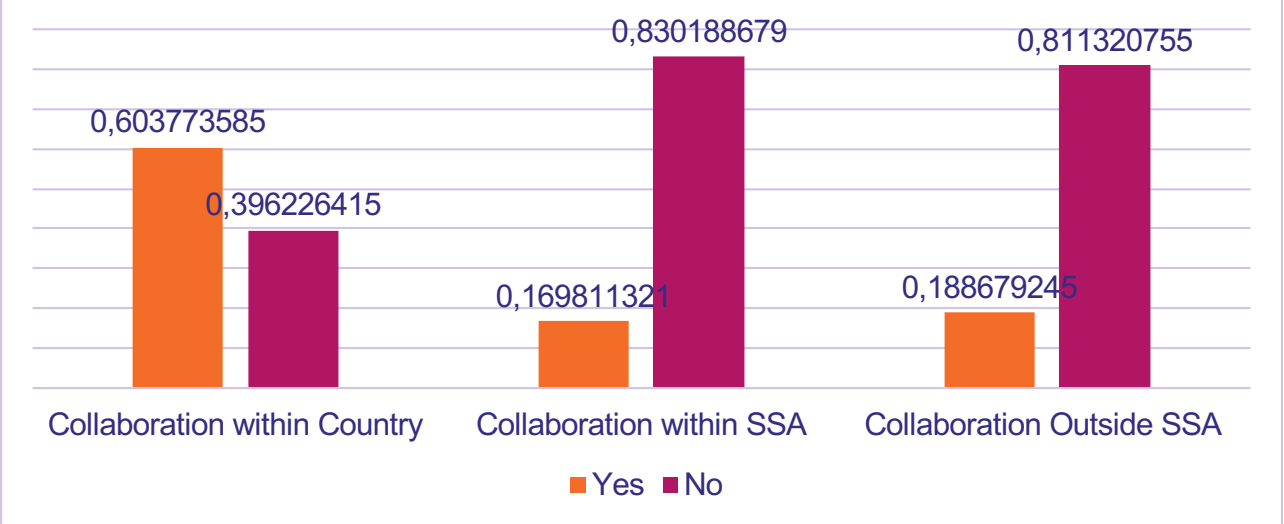
Figure 4: Collaboration in school leadership research



Source: ACSL (2026) Mapping Report

Figure 5 reports the results considering collaborations within the country, within the African countries and with researchers based outside of Africa.

Figure 5: Forms of Collaboration in school leadership research



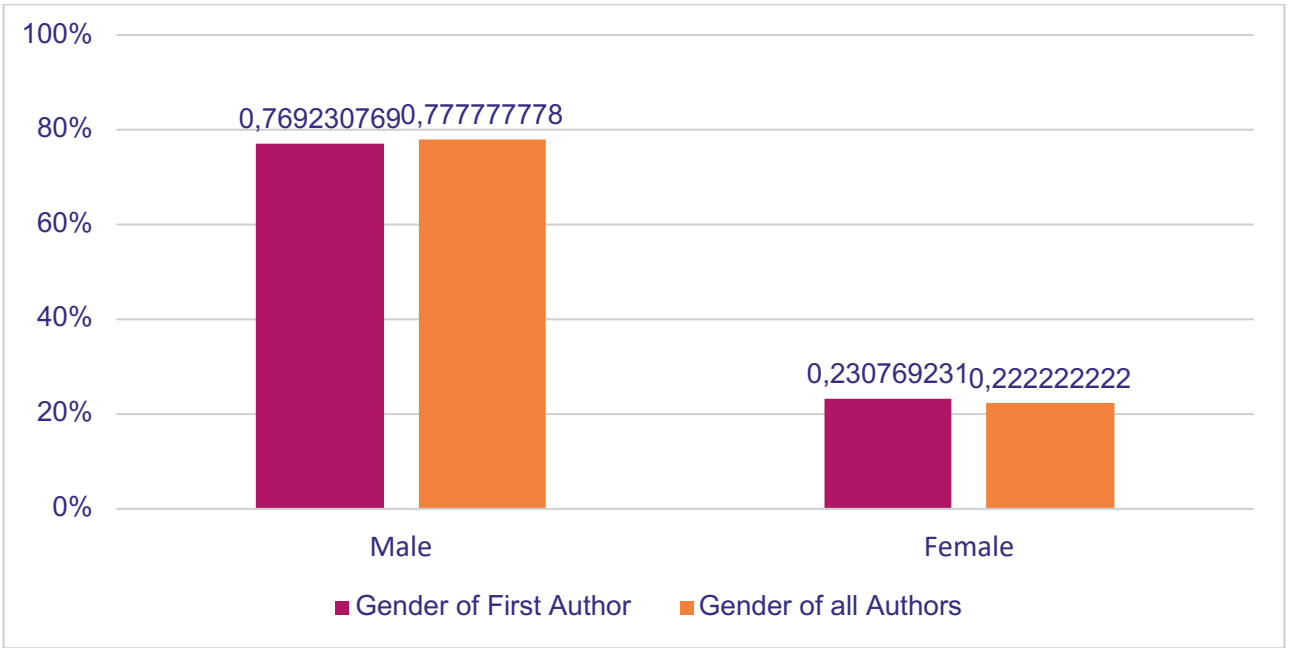
Source: ACSL (2026) Mapping Report
Note: Base = Research outputs involving a collaboration

The data shows that most research collaborations happened within the country (60%), with fewer international ones. For international collaborations, school leadership researchers in Uganda worked more with colleagues outside Africa (19%) than with those within Africa (17%).

i. Actors within the SL research space

The study examined authorship data to evaluate the gender distribution among school leadership researchers. Analysing the gender of first authors in publications from Uganda shows a notable imbalance. The charts below display the gender distribution of both first and all contributing authors.

Figure 6: Gender of first and all authors



Source: ACSL (2026) Mapping Report

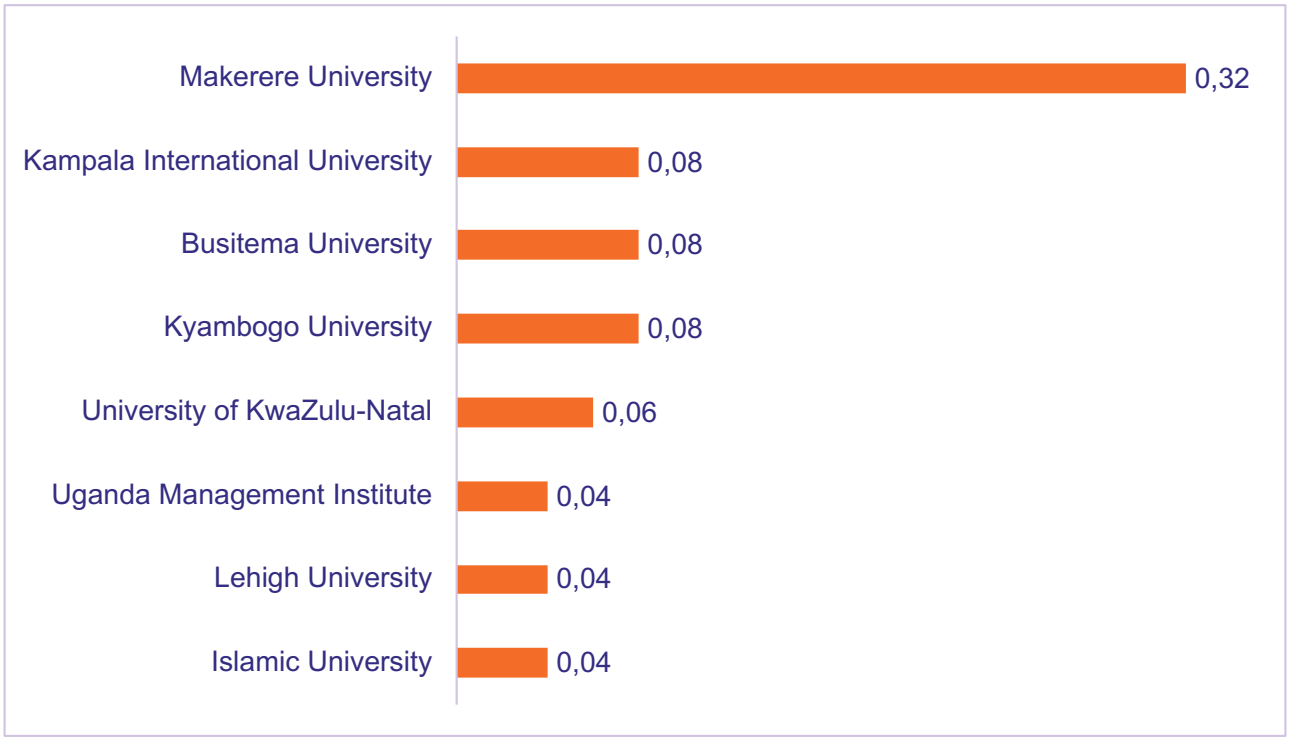
A gender analysis of first authors in Ugandan publications reveals a significant disparity: male researchers account for 77% of first authors, while female researchers account for 23%. This pattern highlights gender disparities across the research landscape, including in the field of school leadership.

ii. School leadership research by institutions

The study further collected and analysed data on the authors' institutional ties. Findings show that most research on school leadership in Uganda has been conducted by academics, with Makerere University contributing just over a third of the published work.

Non-academic institutions, including government ministries, contribute only a small share, indicating that most school leadership research in Uganda is produced within academic settings. This highlights the key role that universities and other higher education institutions play in advancing knowledge in this area. At the same time, it highlights an opportunity to involve more non-academic actors, such as education authorities, CSOs, the government, and quality assurance bodies, in research and evidence sharing. These actors are directly involved in school management and policy implementation, and their insights could strengthen the linkages among research, policy, and practice. Figure 7 presents the top institutions affiliated with the researchers and their research outputs included in this mapping.

Figure 7: Affiliated research institutions in school leadership



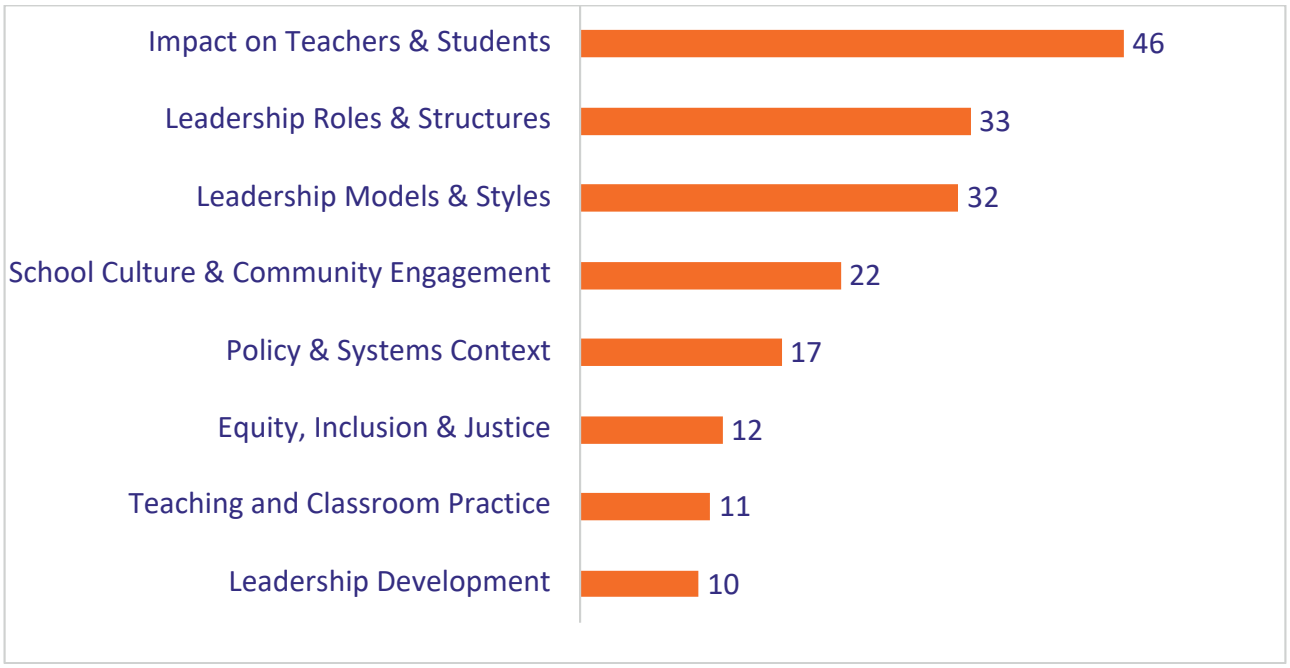
Source: ACSL (2026) Mapping Report

An additional assessment of the type of academic institution shows that 70% of the analysed publications were produced by authors affiliated with public universities. It is also noted that approximately 20% of the first authors are affiliated with institutions based outside Uganda, among them the University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa), Lehigh University (USA), Brigham Young University (USA), University of South Africa (South Africa) and University of Saint Joseph, Moi University, Eldoret (Kenya).

b) Thematic areas identified

Each of the 53 research outputs was coded against eight thematic areas using related keywords: (1) leadership development, (2) the impact of school leadership on teachers and students, (3) policy and systems context, (4) teaching and classroom practice, (5) equity, inclusion, and justice, (6) leadership models and styles, (7) leadership roles and structures, and (8) school culture and community engagement. Figure 8 below presents the thematic analysis of the 53 research outputs reviewed. The results indicate that at least 88% of the publications were linked to more than one theme, highlighting the multidimensional nature of school leadership research in Uganda.

Figure 8: Analysis of the research outputs by theme



Source: ACSL (2026) Mapping Report
Note: Results show the frequency at which a certain theme has been explored (reflected in the frequency of its associated keywords)

The findings reveal that studies on leadership roles, styles, and teacher-related outcomes are well-focused, whereas evidence on leadership development, equity, classroom practice, and system-level dynamics is comparatively weak. This subsection provides a detailed discussion of all eight themes, as derived from the reviewed publications.

i. Impact on teachers and Students

Instructional leadership, defined as actions by school heads that directly support teaching and learning, is a core theme in Ugandan secondary school leadership research. Effective instructional leadership practices shape teachers' pedagogical effectiveness and cultivate positive learning environments. For example, qualitative findings from Wakiso District indicate that school leaders who clarify mission, monitor instruction, and foster a supportive climate motivate teachers to improve classroom practice (Ssemakula, 2024). However, instructional leadership is unevenly applied in practice, constrained by heavy administrative workloads and limited leadership preparation (Ssemakula, 2024).

Research also links transformational leadership behaviours to academic outcomes. In public and private secondary schools, transformational attributes, including idealised influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration, predict better performance at the Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) and Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE) levels (Sengendo & Eduan, 2024). Beyond academic performance, leadership style diversity, including transformational, supportive, and participative styles, positively influences teacher morale and job performance, while transactional and bureaucratic styles show more mixed effects (Nakabugo et al., 2015; Najjuma Damali, 2022).

ii. Leadership roles and structures

National policy and systemic frameworks critically shape school leadership in Uganda. Despite comprehensive policy frameworks, including the 2008 Education (Pre-Primary, Primary, and Post-Primary) and the 2020 Performance Management Guidelines for Schools, gaps persist in translating guidelines into actionable support, systematic supervision, and professional development for headteachers. Performance appraisal systems, including target setting, monitoring, and feedback, are central to leadership accountability but face challenges in their consistent implementation and alignment with practice.

iii. Leadership models and styles

Transformational leadership is the dominant conceptual framework in Ugandan secondary school leadership research and consistently predicts student performance. Its components, idealised influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration, promote shared vision, motivation, and collective effort (Sengendo & Musinguzi, 2024).
Democratic and participatory leadership approaches are associated with student discipline outcomes and teacher engagement, underscoring the value of inclusive decision-making (Namanya & Bagiwa, 2025). Although transactional and bureaucratic styles are less emphasised, evidence suggests they still play a role in teacher supervision and compliance.

iv. School Culture and Community Engagement

Leadership style influences school culture, teacher morale, and student behaviour. Supportive and participatory leadership fosters a positive school climate, whereas reliance on transactional leadership focused on routine compliance has mixed or moderate effects on teacher morale (Najjuma Damali, 2022). Community engagement is less explicitly addressed in the core studies but is implied in leadership practices that promote collaboration and participatory decision-making, particularly in schools led by female headteachers.

v. Policy system context

National policies provide the framework for leadership practice but face implementation challenges. The Education Act (2008) and the 2020 Performance Management Guidelines define headteachers' roles, set expectations for instructional supervision, and require them to report to governing bodies. Evidence indicates gaps in translating policy into actionable support, systematic supervision, and professional development. Performance appraisal practices are unevenly applied, with inconsistencies in training, monitoring, and alignment between policy and practice, highlighting the need for stronger, context-responsive systems.

vi. Equity, Inclusion, and Justice

Gender emerged as a cross-cutting theme, revealing persistent disparities in leadership representation and experience. Female headteachers are significantly underrepresented, particularly in rural districts (Okello & Abbo, 2020; Nsubuga, 2022).

vii. Barriers to female leadership

Cultural and societal norms that limit women's leadership opportunities. Limited access to mentorship and professional networks. Work-life balance pressures. Despite these challenges, women in leadership often demonstrate collaborative and participatory practices that prioritise teacher support and student welfare, though their authority can be undermined by biases and resistance.

viii. Teaching and classroom practice

Instructional leadership directly influences classroom practice by shaping teachers' pedagogical effectiveness. Practices such as monitoring instruction, providing guidance, and fostering supportive environments improve teaching quality (Ssemakula, 2024). Transformational leadership behaviours, such as intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration, also influence classroom outcomes indirectly by motivating teachers, promoting engagement, and supporting continuous professional improvement.

ix. Leadership development

Research mapping highlights emerging clusters of school leadership scholarship from institutions such as Uganda Christian University, Makerere University, and the Islamic University in Uganda. Studies focus on instructional and transformational leadership, novice headteacher competencies, and professional formation (Sengendo & Eduan, 2024; Ssemakula, 2024). Digital leadership and ICT use in school management, though less studied, have potential to improve administrative efficiency, monitoring, and data-informed decision-making.

Evidence suggests that systematic leadership development, mentoring, and professional support are critical to enhancing headteachers' capacity and school effectiveness.

c) Gender equality and social inclusion indicators in school leadership research

Alongside the thematic analysis, the data also allowed an evaluation of inequality indicators, focusing on gender, disability, and rural location. This helps to understand how much these factors are addressed in school leadership research. Findings reveal a high awareness of rural equity but limited focus on gender equity. Disability and inclusive education are still overlooked areas. Out of 53 publications, only three specifically focus on gender, and about 15 (28%) discuss rural school contexts.

Figure 9: Inequality indicators in school leadership research



Source: ACSL (2026) Mapping Report
Note: Base = Total research outputs analysed, 53

Table 3: Existing evidence and gaps in equity indicators in school leadership research

Equity Dimension	Visibility	Existing evidence	Key Gaps
Rural Context	Moderate; 15 publications explicitly focus on rural schools	Examines practical, context-specific challenges: teacher performance and retention, headteacher leadership styles, community engagement, implementation of programs (e.g., HIV support, school meals)	Rural-focused research is still a minority; many studies adopt national or urban-centric perspectives, potentially overlooking local dynamics and solutions
Gender	Limited; 3 out of 53 publications focus centrally on gender	Focus on women's under-representation in leadership; barriers such as societal norms, lack of mentorship, perceived corruption	Rare exploration of gendered leadership styles, leadership strategies for gender-based violence, improving girls' access and achievement, experiences of male educators, intersectional challenges (e.g., rural women leaders); gender often reduced to workforce parity

Disability & Inclusive Education	Virtually absent	Not addressed; assumes a "typical" student and teacher population	Leadership practices for inclusive school cultures, implementation of inclusive education policies, resources and adaptations for learners with disabilities, teacher/leader training in inclusive pedagogy, parental involvement; critical disconnect with policy commitments

Source: ACSL (2026) Mapping Report

The literature shows an implicit hierarchy of equity issues: rurality is most acknowledged, gender is recognized in a limited way, and disability remains largely overlooked. Equity indicators are often examined in isolation, with little focus on intersectional dimensions, such as rural women leaders or inclusive practices in low-resource environments. Most research concentrates on leaders' experiences, training, and retention, with limited exploration of how leadership practices affect equitable learning outcomes for marginalised students.

The evidence highlights a clear imbalance in how equity is addressed within school leadership research. While rural contexts receive moderate attention, gender is only superficially explored, and disability and inclusive education remain largely neglected. This suggests that current research priorities do not fully align with the breadth of equity challenges present in education systems.
Moreover, the limited intersectional analysis, such as the experiences of rural women leaders or inclusive leadership in low-resource settings, reveals a significant gap in understanding how multiple forms of disadvantage interact. As a result, existing studies provide only a partial picture, often focusing on leadership roles and systems rather than their direct impact on equitable learning outcomes.

Going forward, there is a critical need for more integrated, context-sensitive, and outcome-oriented research that captures the complexity of equity in school leadership and better informs inclusive policy and practice.

3.4. Stakeholders and sector coordination in school leadership

School leadership in Uganda is shaped by a diverse range of stakeholders, including government institutions, development partners, civil society organisations, and professional associations. Responsibilities for policy formulation, implementation, regulation, and oversight are distributed across multiple actors, reflecting a complex but comprehensive governance structure.

At the centre of this system is the MoES, which serves as the primary policymaker and regulator for pre-primary, primary, secondary, and technical education. Within the Ministry, several departments play distinct yet complementary roles, including quality assurance, teacher development, and oversight of secondary education. Beyond the Ministry, national bodies, professional associations, and decentralised structures contribute to the development, regulation, and support of school leadership.

Table 4 provides an overview of the key government and sector institutions involved in school leadership and their respective roles.

Table 4: List of government institutions and their roles

Institution	Key role
Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES)	Main policymaker and regulator for pre-primary, primary, secondary, and technical education
MoES - Directorate of Education Standards.	It is the quality-assurance arm of MOEs: sets, defines, reviews standards; inspects schools and institutions; monitors achievement of standards; advises the Minister on quality control. Don't get enough funding, not sufficient work
MoES - Teacher Education, Training and Development Department Education Standards.	Responsible for training teachers, tutors, and instructors; policy, coordination, regulation of teacher education (pre-service, in-service) and oversight of Colleges of Education / TTIS etc.
MoES - Secondary Education Department	This department is in charge of government and government-aided secondary schools: policy formulation, guidance & oversight, technical guidance, review of programs in secondary education.
MoES - Directorate of Education Standards (DES)	Monitors and ensures the quality and standards of education and institutions across Uganda.
National Council for Higher Education	Accrediting institutions, approving academic programs, monitoring quality, advising government, maintaining a qualifications framework, not for short courses
Education Service Commission (ESC)	An independent government body also describing roles of principals and appointing personnel
National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC)	Develops, reviews, and updates curricula and educational materials for Uganda's schools and institutions.
Uganda National Teachers Union	Represents and advocates for teachers' rights, welfare, and professional development in Uganda.
Association of Secondary School Headteachers of Uganda	Brings together secondary school headteachers to promote leadership, collaboration, and effective school management.

National Teacher Council (In ascent)	Once established will bring together secondary school headteachers to promote leadership, collaboration, and effective school management.
Uganda National Institute for Teacher Education	Trains, develops, and upgrades teachers to enhance the quality and professionalism of education in Uganda.
Local governments/ District Education Offices	Support, supervise, and inspect schools locally and working with MOEs to provide inspection and EMIS data

Source: ACSL (2026) Mapping Report

Coordination and knowledge exchange across these stakeholders take place through a range of national and sub-national platforms. These include the Education Sector Annual Reviews, National Teachers' Symposium, World Teachers' Day forums, and meetings of the Education Development Partners Group. In addition, technical working groups (TWGs) on secondary education often supported by development partners provide a structured platform for policy dialogue, coordination, and review of sector priorities. Regular sub-county education meetings and annual engagements of headteacher associations further support coordination at local and professional levels.

These platforms facilitate dialogue among policymakers, practitioners, and development partners and support the sharing of research, experiences, and emerging practices in school leadership. However, stakeholders noted that participation is not always fully inclusive. In particular, private schools are often less integrated into national coordination mechanisms, limiting both the availability of comprehensive data and opportunities for sector-wide collaboration. For example, while public schools are generally captured in the Education Management Information System (EMIS), coverage of private schools remains incomplete.

The presence of multiple actors addressing different aspects of school leadership ranging from policy development and system strengthening to research and professional development—provides a strong foundation for coordinated action. Nevertheless, several challenges persist. These include fragmented communication, uneven enforcement of policies (especially in the private sector), a limited supply of qualified school leaders, and potential conflicts of interest in the provision and regulation of education services. While coordination mechanisms exist and are generally functional, their effectiveness in ensuring alignment across all stakeholders remains uneven.

Stakeholders also highlighted several priority areas that require greater attention in national discussions on school leadership. These include integrating ICT into education, leadership responses to climate change, strengthening governance and accountability frameworks, and improving succession planning for school leaders. As one development partner put it "School Leadership development has not been seen as an important theme to be discussed by the Education Development Partners." (Male, development partner)

Overall, Uganda's education sector benefits from a wide range of coordination platforms and active stakeholder engagement. However, strengthening inclusivity, improving data systems, and enhancing coherence across actors will be critical to ensuring a more effective and unified approach to school leadership development.

4. Discussion, conclusion and recommendations

Drawing on a mixed-methods approach that combined desk-based evidence synthesis, metadata analysis of research publications, primary data collection with key stakeholders, and a participatory validation workshop, this report provides a comprehensive overview of the school leadership landscape in Uganda. By integrating multiple data sources and perspectives, the analysis captures both system-level structures such as policies, professional development programmes, and research trends and the lived realities and institutional dynamics that shape school leadership in practice.

Overall, the findings indicate that Uganda has established a relatively strong policy foundation for school leadership, supported by a growing range of professional development initiatives delivered by government institutions, universities, NGOs, and development partners. However, insights from all data sources consistently point to persistent challenges of fragmentation, uneven implementation, limited coordination, and insufficient attention to equity and sustainability. The following discussion synthesises key findings and presents actionable recommendations to address these gaps.

4.1. Discussion and recommendations

Policy and Implementation

Uganda's policy framework for school leadership is extensive but fragmented, with no standalone school leadership policy. While policies seem comprehensive on paper, implementation remains uneven, monitoring systems are inconsistent, and school leaders have limited autonomy. In addition, the policy landscape is characterised by overlapping and, in some cases, outdated or superseded frameworks, making it unclear which policies are currently in force or take precedence. Gender and inclusion considerations are formally acknowledged but rarely operationalised, and policy guidance is seldom translated into actionable tools.

Recommendations – Policy Actions:

- Develop a standalone National School Leadership Policy to unify guidance and clarify roles.
- Revise qualification and service frameworks to align recruitment and career progression with leadership competencies.
- Strengthen decentralisation and accountability structures to enable school-level decision-making.
- Institutionalise governance standards to build capacity of BoGs and regulatory bodies.
- Establish coherent monitoring and regulatory systems to ensure consistent policy implementation.
- Constitute coordination committees to align reforms and reduce duplication across institutions.

These actions directly address fragmentation, weak accountability, and limited operationalisation of policies at all levels.

Professional Development

While Uganda has expanded access to leadership training through flexible delivery models, programmes remain fragmented, insufficiently practice-oriented, and inconsistently aligned with national priorities. Formal induction is largely absent, mentorship is limited, and coordination between providers is weak.

Recommendations – Professional Development Actions:

- Create a national registry of school leaders and training programmes to improve planning and coordination.
- Institutionalise structured induction programmes for new headteachers to support smooth transitions.
- Expand practice-oriented in-service training aligned with national priorities (e.g., CBC) to build applied competencies.
- Develop structured mentorship, peer learning, and Communities of Practice to strengthen continuous professional support.
- Align university and tertiary leadership programmes with national standards to ensure quality and relevance.
- Strengthen inspectorate and district coaching to provide local mentoring and support.
- Engage BoGs and governance bodies in leadership development to reinforce accountability.
- **Implement** systematic assessment of leadership competencies to track progress and impact.

These actions are designed to enhance leadership capacity, ensure alignment of training with national priorities, and embed continuous support systems for school leaders.

Research and evidence

Research on school leadership in Uganda is limited, uneven over time, and largely descriptive. Critical gaps exist in distributed leadership, leadership development effectiveness, equity and inclusion, digital leadership, and crisis management. Dissemination and uptake of research are weak, limiting evidence-informed decision-making.

Recommendations – Research Actions:

- Prioritise school leadership as a distinct national research focus.
- Promote applied and action-oriented research to generate policy-relevant evidence.
- Strengthen research capacity and mentorship for early-career researchers.
- Establish open-access digital repositories to improve visibility and access to evidence.
- Adopt sustained engagement platforms for dissemination to enhance research uptake.
- Integrate gender and inclusion considerations to support equitable leadership practices.

National research agenda

1. Digital skills and ICT integration
2. Instructional leadership
3. Accountability and transparency
4. Effective leadership models and practices
5. Gender (cross-cutting theme)

These actions aim to strengthen the evidence base, improve access and utilisation of research, and ensure that leadership development strategies are informed by robust, contextually relevant data.

Stakeholder coordination

Coordination across stakeholders remains weak, with multiple actors operating in silos. This results in fragmented interventions, duplication of efforts, and limited inclusion of community actors and civil society in decision-making processes.

Recommendations – Coordination Actions:

- Strengthen coordination between MoES, NGOs, and universities to reduce duplication.
- Institutionalise inter-level dialogue platforms for national, district, and school-level communication.
- Enhance communication and policy translation to make policies actionable for practitioners.
- Promote collaboration between public and private education actors in leadership development.
- Establish a national platform for coordination, knowledge sharing, and monitoring.
- Adopt ICT tools to improve supervision, monitoring, and leadership support.

These measures address fragmentation, improve alignment, and strengthen accountability across all actors in the school leadership ecosystem.

4.2. Conclusion

Uganda has made significant strides in establishing the foundations of a school leadership system. However, fragmentation across policy, professional development, research, and coordination continues to limit impact.

The action-oriented recommendations outlined above directly address these challenges by:

- Consolidating and operationalising policy frameworks.
- Strengthening leadership capacity through aligned, practice-oriented professional development.
- Building an applied and accessible research base.
- Enhancing coordination and accountability across stakeholders.

Supported by the implementation roadmap in the Annex, these actions provide a clear pathway to a more integrated, sustainable, and equitable school leadership system—one that equips leaders with the capacity, support, and autonomy required to drive improved teaching, learning, and educational outcomes across Uganda.

Encouragingly, the development of a national school leadership research agenda marks an important step towards greater coherence. Moving forward, there is a need to prioritise school leadership as a distinct research area, strengthen research capacity and mentorship, and promote applied and action-oriented studies. Improving access to evidence through open platforms, strengthening feedback loops, and adopting more inclusive and intersectional research approaches will be critical to ensuring that research effectively informs policy and practice.

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6. Annex: Roadmap to School Leadership reform

Reform Areas	1- 6 Months	6 -12 Months	12 - 24 Months	2 - 5 Years	Goal
Policy Reforms					
Adopt a standalone National School Leadership Policy framework	Identify existing policies and frameworks related to school leadership	Organise stakeholder consultations to review policies and identify gaps	Develop a standalone school leadership policy	Roll out the policy and leadership training programs for both pre-service and in-service school leaders	Harmonised national school leadership framework aligned with education reforms
Revise qualification and service frameworks for school leaders	Commission literature review and gap analysis	Organise technical seminars and workshops to draft the framework	Validate and pilot the revised qualification framework	Roll out the framework nationally	School leaders equipped with core leadership competencies
Strengthening decentralisation and accountability structures in school leadership governance	Conduct situational analysis supported by SWOT assessment	Develop decentralization strategy and submit for MoES validation	Begin implementation of the approved strategy	Consolidate implementation of decentralization reforms	Effective and responsive decentralized leadership system
Institutionalise governance standards and strengthen leadership capacity within regulatory structures	Conduct institutional review of the Directorate of Education Standards and policy departments	Prepare reports and present findings for validation	Develop or revise legal instruments to strengthen enforcement powers	Implement strengthened governance mandates	Strong governance and accountability systems in secondary schools
Establish a coherent monitoring and regulatory system for school leadership	Review existing monitoring and inspection tools and regulatory mandates	Validate proposed revisions with stakeholders	Develop and pilot leadership monitoring tools	Roll out monitoring systems nationally	Coherent monitoring and regulatory systems supporting leadership effectiveness
Constitute a coordination committee at institutional level to oversee school leadership reforms	Define institutional mandate and structure	Establish membership and operational guidelines	Operationalize coordination mechanisms	Sustain coordination and reporting system	

Professional Development					
Align leadership programs offered by universities and tertiary institutions with national standards	Map leadership courses currently offered by universities and institutions	Co-create and harmonise leadership training curricula	Verify and validate harmonised training standards	Adopt and implement harmonised leadership training programs	Leadership programs aligned with national standards
Strengthen mentorship support for school leaders through inspectorate and district offices	Conduct needs assessment and stakeholder consultations	Develop work plans and Terms of Reference for mentorship programs	Engage stakeholders and initiate mentorship support systems	Full implementation and continuous support	Effective mentorship support for school leaders
Strengthening capacity of Boards of Governors (BOGs) in school leadership and governance	Conduct rapid needs assessment on BOG effectiveness	Organise validation workshops on governance needs	Harmonise governance training curriculum	Train BOG members and monitor implementation	Improved governance and leadership oversight in schools
Establish Communities of Practice (CoPs) to strengthen mentorship and peer learning among school leaders	Identify existing CoPs and assess their capacity and scope	Build capacity of CoPs and co-create mentorship guidelines	Establish monitoring mechanisms and increase visibility of CoPs	Continuous monitoring and mentorship support	Strengthened peer learning and leadership development
Develop mechanisms for assessing school leadership competencies	Map existing leadership competency frameworks and practices	Develop school leadership competency framework and assessment tools	Validate competency framework and tools	Deploy tools nationally and monitor implementation	Competency-based leadership development system
Ensure leadership development programs respond to the needs of secondary school leaders	Conduct needs assessment of secondary school leadership challenges	Integrate findings into leadership training and professional development programs	Implement leadership development programs tailored to secondary education	Continuous evaluation and improvement	Leadership development programs aligned with needs of secondary school leaders

Sector coordination					
Strengthen coordination between MoES departments, NGOs, and universities to avoid duplication of school leadership initiatives	Conduct policy analysis to identify coordination gaps and overlaps	Establish a National School Leadership Coordination Committee	Develop coordination structures, systems, and tools and begin rollout	Monitoring, learning, evaluation, and periodic review	Efficient and effective secondary school leadership practices
Institutionalise inter-level dialogue forums for school leadership coordination	Identify and define the different coordination levels (national, district, school)	Develop Terms of Reference and link the forums to existing coordination frameworks	Establish dialogue forums and documentation mechanisms	Implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and continuous learning	Sustained ownership and shared responsibility for school leadership development
Improve communication strategies and policy translation mechanisms for school leadership policies	Review existing communication strategies to identify gaps	Develop stakeholder engagement plans and a comprehensive communication strategy	Translate policies into user-friendly formats and disseminate widely	Implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and learning	Improved policy compliance and evidence-based decision-making
Strengthening collaboration between public and private education actors in leadership development	Conduct stakeholder analysis and profiling	Establish formal partnerships between national leadership teams and education stakeholders	Implement joint leadership initiatives and information-sharing mechanisms	Implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and learning	Strong partnerships supporting leadership development
Adopt ICT tools to enhance monitoring, support supervision, and leadership impact	Conduct gap analysis on ICT infrastructure, skills, and policies	Provide capacity building and ICT infrastructure for digital monitoring	Roll out digital monitoring tools and ensure maintenance and continuous capacity development	Implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and learning	Evidence-based decision-making and improved monitoring of school leadership performance

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

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