



EXPLORING UBUNTU SCHOOL LEADERSHIP DIMENSION IN RWANDA

2026

Working paper

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List of Abbreviations

ACSL	African Centre for School Leadership
CBC	Competence Based Curriculum
CIDUT	Community Involvement Dimension of Ubuntu School Leadership Tetrad
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
LEAD	Learning through Assessment and Data
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PD	Professional Development
REB	Rwandan Basic Education Board
RNEC	Rwandan National Ethics Committee
SL	School leadership
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USL	Ubuntu School Leadership
UST	Ubuntu, Servant, and Transformational Leadership

Executive summary

School effectiveness in Rwandan and African contexts is affected by numerous challenges such as high repetition and dropout, poor teaching quality, unprepared learners, unproductive educational inputs, and weak school management. Necessary measures are needed to tackle these challenges and improve school leadership effectiveness. Such effectiveness is characterised by improved teaching and learning, enhanced relationships within and outside the school, clear strategic direction, and adequate school management. Ubuntu school leadership (USL) has emerged as a suitable model for addressing school leadership challenges and improving overall leadership effectiveness in the African context, hence the need to explore its applicability in school leadership professional development (SLPD).

This study provided valuable insights on USL dimension of fostering stakeholder collaboration in the Rwandan education context. Adopting a phenomenological qualitative research design underpinned by interpretivism, findings were derived from sixteen (16) purposively selected education stakeholders in high performing schools in Huye District of Rwanda. Individual and focused group interviews were utilised for data collection, and data were analysed thematically.

Participants gave varying insights into the practices and potentials of USL in Rwandan education context. Ubuntu is widely appreciated among education stakeholders, and the success enjoyed by effective school leaders was attributed to stakeholder cooperation, involvement and participation. Key Ubuntu competencies identified by the participants were humanism, generosity, empathy, integrity, honesty, open communication, communism, and collaboration. These competencies align with USL dimensions in other African contexts, with generosity emerging as an Ubuntu competence that is exclusive to the Rwandan context.

Although findings show that the standards of effective school leadership reflect Ubuntu principles and are sufficient for improving leadership effectiveness, there is the need to ensure flexibility, and to translate Ubuntu competencies such as empathy, mentoring, modelling, and peer learning into actionable leadership practices to better achieve the standards for effective leadership. Lack of resources and link between schools and the world of work were major hindrances to implementation of leadership standards. Effective school leaders were however

able to address these challenges and other contextual specific challenges by harnessing USL competencies such as two-way communication and collaboration. Findings also upheld the need to forge an intersection between indigenised and global values by explicitly integrating USL practices into the curriculum. In contrast to other African contexts, gender equality and training for school heads have slightly improved in Rwanda. However, there is need to consolidate on these gains. Furthermore, the study upheld the need to extend leadership professional development efforts to all stakeholders. In the face of contextual challenges, successful school leaders adopt various measures to improve school leadership and enshrine Ubuntu tenets among stakeholders. The Ubuntu competencies (empathy, mentoring, modelling, and peer learning) have positively affected school leadership effectiveness and could serve as modalities for instilling school leadership competencies. These findings attest to the view that USL can serve as a major guiding principle for enhancing school leadership in Rwanda and beyond.

Based on the findings of this study, policy makers and implementers should provide sufficient resources for school leaders in Rwanda, and they should also explicitly integrate Ubuntu in the school curriculum to improve teaching and learning practices. Furthermore, facets of Ubuntu such as peer learning, empathy, gender equality, and mentorship should be emphasised in professional development efforts which should involve all education stakeholders. School leaders on their part should emphasise mentorship, peer learning and community engagement in their daily practices. Additionally, they should seek new ways of engaging all stakeholders including world of works through two-way communication. Finally, further research is needed to appreciate the applicability of Ubuntu in school-world of works collaboration and other levels of learning.

Keywords: Ubuntu, indigenous school leadership, Rwanda, stakeholder involvement.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore Ubuntu school leadership (USL) dimension of fostering stakeholder collaboration in the Rwandan context. Despite the importance of leadership in school effectiveness, African schools continue to witness leadership challenges (Pansiri et al., 2021) evidenced by unethical practices (Ugwu & Pansiri, 2022). While Eurocentric scholars argue that poor leadership in Africa is caused by lack of organisational, economic, and political abilities (Dimkpa, 2015), Afrocentric scholars (Makore et al., 2022; Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012; Ugwu et al., 2022), blame practices of unsuitable Westernised leadership systems. These contrasting views motivate the desire to find a non-adversarial intersection between Westernised and Afrocentric leadership practices (Msengana, 2006; Msila, 2012; Nkambule, 2023; Pansiri et al., 2021; Ugwu et al., 2022).

In Rwanda, like elsewhere, school leaders are charged with the responsibility of overseeing different activities in their schools such as engagement of internal and external stakeholders for school improvement (Cheriyen et al., 2021), teacher support, and effective utilisation of resources (Bush et al., 2022). Nevertheless, Karareba & Clarke (2019) argue that attempts by Rwandan school leaders to achieve the country's education agendas continue to be undermined by colonial legacies. Following the deficiencies of Westernisation (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012), it is becoming necessary to create a leadership system with indigenous identity that is suitable for the development of Rwandan and African educational systems—towards reclaiming indigeneity.

Ubuntu leadership has emerged as an Africanised leadership model, with indigenous identity, capable of solving school leadership challenges in Rwanda and the African continent at large (Davis, 2021; Elonga Mboyo, 2019). Some of these leadership challenges in the Rwandan context include high repetition and dropout (Ministry of Education, 2024), poor teaching quality, unprepared learners, unproductive educational inputs, and weak school management (Bush et al., 2022). Ubuntu leadership philosophy is capable of fostering collaboration, respect, empathy, inclusion, and positive change (Chetty & Price, 2024), and it is relevant in equipping learners with skills and cross-cultural competencies needed to succeed in the fourth industrial revolution (Pansiri, Mphathiwa, et al., 2021). This study

therefore explored Ubuntu school leadership (USL) dimension of fostering stakeholder collaboration in Rwandan schools.

This study seeks to investigate the conceptualisation and application of Ubuntu School Leadership (USL) within the Rwandan educational context, with particular attention to how it aligns with or diverges from existing understandings of Ubuntu-informed leadership across other African settings. The primary research question guiding this inquiry is:

“What are the key dimensions and characteristics of USL as perceived by stakeholders in Rwanda, and how do these align with or differ from existing understandings of USL in other African contexts?”

In support of this overarching question, the study further explores several secondary questions:

- How do the current standards of Effective School Leadership reflect Ubuntu principles?
- How can Ubuntu leadership be effectively adopted to achieve the standards of effective school leadership?
- How can Ubuntu leadership competencies be integrated into School Leadership Professional Development (SL PD)?

2. Literature review

The quest to improve education quality in any education system can be readily achieved through effective school leadership (Day & Sammons, 2014; Laila, 2015; Ndlovu, 2017). This is because school leaders play a crucial role in creating conditions for effective pedagogy, and so no school can sustainably improve its education quality without effective school leadership (Bantwini & Moorosi, 2018; Lauterbach et al., 2025; Leithwood et al., 2020; Musingambeho et al., 2023; VVOB, 2019). However, the leadership style or model adopted by school leaders can either translate to success or failure (Aghahowa, 2021; Crawford, 2017; Lacerda, 2015; Ojokuku et al., 2013). Lopez et al. (2024) identified numerous Western leadership styles that are applied by African school leaders. Some of these styles include pedagogical leadership, distributed leadership, and transformational leadership. This confirms Muller (2017) argument that these existing leadership theories and practices may be ineffective in Africa

due to the continent's collective and humanistic cultures. This is supported by the fact that quality education remains out of reach for many learners on the continent (UNESCO & African Union, 2023; Zickafoose et al., 2024), necessitating the need to develop context relevant competencies that will improve education quality through leadership.

According to Makore et al. (2022) school leadership and management systems in post-colonial Africa are influenced heavily by Eurocentrism, thereby undermining the African context where such leadership practices are applied. Consequently, there is a shift towards contextually relevant leadership models characterised by African values such as moral virtues, collectivism, and humanism (Ugwu et al., 2022), that can translate to improved educational outcomes for African learners (Moorosi & Bush, 2020). Ubuntu offers a theoretical framework for conceptualising such leadership in a culturally relevant manner (Davis, 2021).

2.1. Dimensions, characteristics and practices of Ubuntu leadership

The term Ubuntu, which loosely translates to '*a person is a person through other people*' (Davis, 2021; Fagunwa, 2019; Iwowo, 2015; Nkambule, 2023; Pansiri, Mphathiwa, et al., 2021), is underpinned by the notion that human existence lies in the collective existence of humanity (Bulawa & Mhlauli, 2021; Fagunwa, 2019). This implies that community strength emerges from community support, while happiness and success are attainable through community commitment, self-sacrifice, altruistic living, and communal living (Asimwe, 2023; Msila, 2008).

In the Rwandan context, Ubuntu stands for '*generosity*'. It is also closely related to '*Ubumuntu*' with emphasis on the concept of '*humanism*'. However, in terms of leadership, Brubaker (2013) argued that Ubuntu describes an act where leaders show their followers that they are '*human*' and deserve to be treated with '*humanness*'. Ubuntu therefore advocates for humanistic and moral considerations underpinned by collective endeavour and community-oriented preferences (Eyong, 2019). Core principles of Ubuntu include interdependence, empathy, communalism, compassion, fairness, equity, dignity, inclusivity, hospitality, reciprocity, harmony, responsiveness, and sense of shared destiny among individuals (Laloo, 2022).

In terms of leadership, Ubuntu promotes collective, rather than individual interest, reinforces social relations, and encourages closer affinity between an organisation and their

stakeholders (Eyong, 2019). In South Africa, a study by Mbhele (2015) showed that Ubuntu has the potential to improve school leadership by promoting human dignity, trust, and collectivism. In Senegal, Davis (2021) portrayed Ubuntu as strong connection between school, parents, and the entire local population to promote school effectiveness. Similarly, studies in different African contexts, such as Nigeria (Adewale, 2020) and South Africa (Olatubosun & Nyazenga, 2020), show that Ubuntu enhances positive relationships between organisations and community stakeholders, and its tenets are applied by different practitioners to build organisational reputation (Anani-Bossman, 2021). The positive relationship engendered by Ubuntu is achieved through school leadership that respects diversity, serves as role model, draws teachers and the community into leadership practices, and is sympathetic and empathic to problems and concerns of different stakeholders (Naicker, 2015).

Elonga Mboyo (2019), using narrative data from head teachers in two urban primary schools in Democratic Republic of Congo, showed that Ubuntu has unique operational pattern of raised expectations and commitment to organisational goals, assessing available resources, and understanding, negotiating, prioritising, and attending to the needs of others. This implies that Ubuntu seeks for service to entire school community using available resources. In other words, Ubuntu advocates for commitment to be just and equitable to all by weighing and balancing legal and professional imperatives within ethical and democratic context with an ultimate responsibility to the people and public interest (Asamoah & Yeboah-Assiamah, 2019). Similarly, findings from a study involving participants from Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia showed that Ubuntu philosophy can support leadership practices by fostering unity, collectivism, teamwork, collaboration, and inclusivity (Lopez et al., 2024).

In Rwandan context, Brubaker (2013) argues that Ubuntu leadership is significantly and positively related to leadership effectiveness. However, the argument does not provide a guideline that can engender effective school leadership using the tenets of Ubuntu. Through this study, Ubuntu leadership model has been better contextualised; making the model more pronounced in school leadership professional development (SLPD) and in the entire African leadership systems as suggested by Olatubosun & Nyazenga (2020). A similar argument by Lopez & Rugano (2018) suggests that education leaders in developing countries face unique problems different from their Western counterparts and as such leadership theories and practices must be contextualised for effectiveness.

2.2. Relating Ubuntu to standards for effective school leadership in Rwandan context

Professional standards, benchmarks, and frameworks for leadership play important roles in setting out skills and competencies for school leaders. The standards function as instruments for accountability, certification, accreditation, and development (McMahon & Torrance, 2023). Gallie & Keevy (2014) previously argued that only few countries in Sub-Saharan Africa had developed professional standards for school leadership, with countries like Namibia struggling to move from policy promulgation phase to implementation. However, countries in Africa are increasingly developing such standards. Cameroon, for instance, recently updated its Professional Standards for Educational Leaders to embrace several tenets of Ubuntu such as diversity, equity, equal opportunity, and involvement of educational community among others (Ashu et al., 2021).

Unlike most countries in Africa, Rwanda has a comprehensive set of standards for effective school leadership (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020a). The standards include creating strategic direction, leading learning and teaching, managing the school as an organisation, and collaborating with parents and wider community (Lauterbach et al., 2024; Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020a). An important facet of these standards that reflects Ubuntu tenets is collaboration with wider community. School leaders are expected to ensure collaboration by mobilising parents and wider community to support the realisation of school vision, mission, and goals (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020a). However, there is limited understanding of how Ubuntu philosophy can be translated into actionable leadership practices that could aid in achieving the standards for effective leadership in the Rwandan educational context. By exploring USL through the lens of stakeholders, the standard of leadership in Rwanda is expected to be better adapted (Lopez et al., 2024). Furthermore, it is expected to lead to increased ownership, better implementation, and improved education quality (Iwowo, 2015).

2.3. Implementing Ubuntu school leadership

USL is seen as a school leadership framework that responds to current and future educational environments as nations seek to adapt their education systems to their contemporary needs (Lopez & Rugano, 2018). However, empirical studies that explore models and manifestations

of Ubuntu leadership by incorporating its key dimensions for managerial application have remained elusive (Eyong, 2019). It is therefore necessary to develop a comprehensive model or framework that will aid in the adoption of USL.

While scholars such as Mhlauli et al. (2021) suggested the infusion of Ubuntu into school curriculum, Nkambule (2023), in a study involving 9 teachers in South Africa, recommended three strategies for implementing USL. They include supporting collective knowledge exchange; forging non-adversarial intersection between indigenous and mainstream or Western-oriented leadership practices; and moderating the incorporation of contextually relevant ethical grounding which considers the sustenance of teacher knowledge sharing culture, teacher curriculum delivery, learner performance, and overall school effectiveness. The second recommendation is supported by other bodies of evidence (Msengana, 2006; Pansiri, Mphathiwa, et al., 2021).

In a similar context as Nkambule (2023), Msila (2012) described how a school leader applied distributive leadership sandwiched with Ubuntu principles to transform the fortunes of a school previously known for poor performance by re-energising and retraining staff, and redefining leadership using values and morals that are reflected in USL. Mbhele (2015) in a study involving South African teachers showed that many teachers view role modelling and trust as important values in implementation of Ubuntu, with group activities such as music, storytelling, theatrical acting and sports, acting as suitable strategies for USL implementation. Amidst other challenges such as the ongoing re-colonisation that dwindle community interaction (Mokhutso, 2022; Tusasiirwe et al., 2021), Msila (2014) argued that introduction of alternative leadership style such as USL is accompanied with employee resistance. The study outlined the need to assist employees to adapt to such leadership through professional development. It is therefore necessary to integrate USL in continuous professional development (CPD) during its design, development, implementation and evaluation.

Ukpokodu (2016) developed five principles for effective implementation of Ubuntu transformative pedagogy by teachers in the classroom. These principles include *“understanding self and others, building positive relationships, getting the class to work together, nurturing the minds of students, teaching with love and care, and utilising learners’ linguistic resources in promoting meaningful learning”* (Ngubane & Makua, 2021, p. 7). The

principles conceptualise Ubuntu as a revolutionary approach for restoring learners' humanity through genuine love and care in educational practice (Zhu, 2019). For Ukpokodu (2016), Ubuntu competence is the ability and willingness of educators to embrace humanness by showing awareness that his/her humanity is intricately correlated to the humanity of others.

A study by Lopez et al. (2024) involving three African countries- Kenya, Ghana and Zambia, gave useful insights into the implementation of USL. Findings from the study showed that USL can be implemented by identifying challenges hindering school effectiveness, seeking solutions to these challenges through the community, empowering leaders within and outside the school, and raising expectations and commitment to school goals. Major leadership competencies highlighted in the study which includes organisation, teamwork, empathy, ability to work with all stakeholders, and being approachable are reflective of Ubuntu principles. In Rwanda, Brubaker (2013) developed a 12-scale item for measuring Ubuntu-related leadership. The 12-item scale contains Ubuntu competencies, such as providing valuable counsel and resources for followers, working with the community, involving stakeholders in decision-making, and showing respect, fairness, empathy among others. The study (Brubaker, 2013) recommended that more studies should be done to explore the multidimensionality of Ubuntu as a leadership construct.

Adopting Ubuntu does not signify supremacy of African leadership models over Westernised ones; rather, it seeks to weaken Western ideologies that draw from individualism, Euroscepticism, and exclusivity (Ngubane & Makua, 2021), by embracing both Eurocentric and Afrocentric ideologies that are suitable for the African context. In addition, non-adversarial intersection between Western and indigenous leadership practices can add impetus to leadership roles in education systems faced with unique challenges such as limited resources and other nuances such as gender inequality (Nkambule, 2023). The USL implementation framework developed in this study does not displace Eurocentric leadership ideas completely; rather it re-produced the existing models to be better adapted to Rwanda and the entire African continent.

2.4. Role of Ubuntu in school leadership professional development

Development opportunities for school leaders and teachers have proven to be indispensable in education sectors across sub-Saharan Africa (Nyirahabimana & Magagura, 2023). On one

hand, leadership and management training constitute a major step in unleashing the potential of school leaders to improve school quality (Uworwabayeho et al., 2020), while on the other hand, CPD is necessary in improving institutional performance and learning outcomes (Banik & Saha, 2023; Faizuddin et al., 2022; Owusu-Boateng, 2022). The skills acquired through CPD influence leadership approaches, improve existing practices and engender new initiatives aimed towards improved outcomes (Mukingambeho et al., 2023). Effective school leadership can therefore be achieved by reorienting school leaders' roles through professional development opportunities (Bush et al., 2022). Nonetheless, the effectiveness of CPD depends on its ability to engage participants by fostering a positive mindset that encourages the development of requisite skills, competencies, and knowledge (Germuth, 2018).

In Rwanda, several efforts have been made towards improving the competencies of school leaders through CPD. These efforts can be seen in the CPD Diploma in Effective School Leadership programme (University of Rwanda College of Education, 2023), the Learning through Assessment and Data (LEAD) programme (VVOB, n. d.), and the national teacher CPD framework (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2019) among others. The CPD programme have utilised models of shared leadership to improve the competencies and skills of educational leaders across different education levels (Nyirahabimana & Magagura, 2023). Existing evidence (Lauterbach et al., 2024; Mukingambeho et al., 2023; Uworwabayeho et al., 2020) shows that this CPD have yielded positive outcomes, but there is still a lot of room for further improvements (Uwamariya & Andala, 2022). The need for further improvements is made obvious in the suggestion by Ministry of Education (2024) to enhance education quality by providing in-service training to about 3,787 educators to enhance their practices. Furthermore, findings from the study conducted by Mukingambeho et al. (2023) underlined the need to incorporate all stakeholders and school community in CPD programmes so that they will have a common understanding of their roles in promoting school leadership effectiveness.

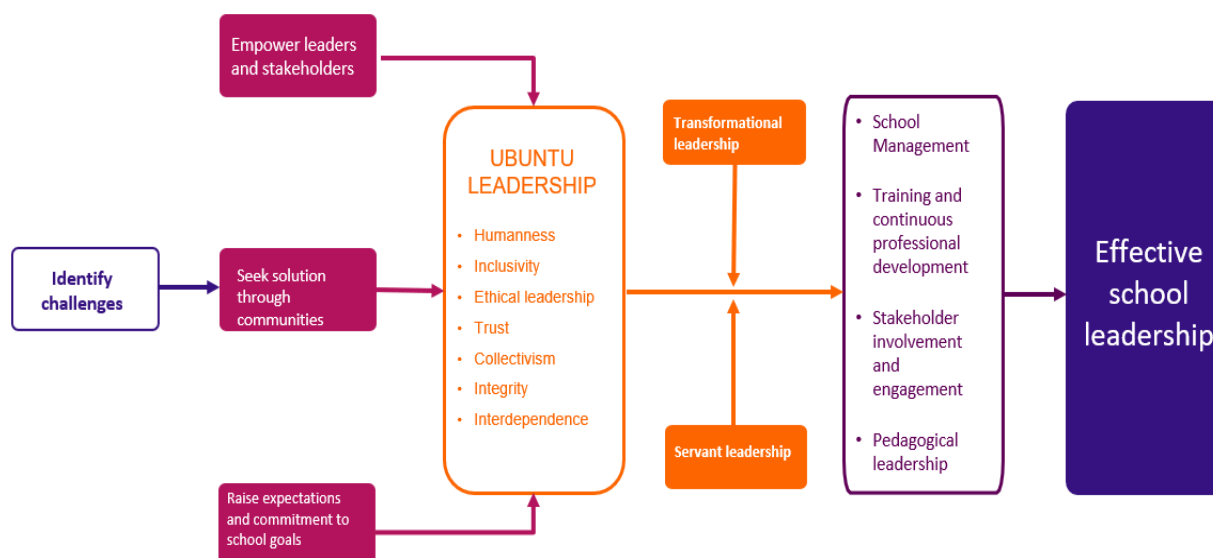
A study in Rwandan context (Lauterbach et al., 2024) showed that compliance to CPD programmes is imperfect due to lack of ownership, suggesting the need for optimisation of such programmes by exploring underlying mechanisms for enhancing their effectiveness. Perhaps incorporating the competencies of Ubuntu into existing CPD programmes could help

to address underlying challenges especially as the hallmark of Ubuntu is to develop the skills of all stakeholders (Asamoah & Yeboah-Assiamah, 2019). More so, achieving the purposes of CPD is sensitive to contextual factors (Gallie & Keevy, 2014; Stevenson et al., 2016). It is therefore necessary to consider different factors such as culture, existing philosophies, and gender in the design and implementation of CPD programmes. A similar view is held by Lopez et al. (2024) who argued that SLPD should draw on local knowledge, such as Ubuntu and gender nuances, to inform both school leadership practices and PD efforts. Ubuntu, which emphasises the richness of people's cultural heritage, can therefore go a long way in providing principles for school leadership practices (Msengana, 2006) such as training and CPD. By implementing Ubuntu principles in SLPD, education stakeholders will be developed to position humanness and equity at the forefront of teaching and learning (Ngubane & Makua, 2021), leading to school leadership effectiveness.

2.5. Theoretical and conceptual framework

Following suggestions by researchers such as (Msengana, 2006; Nkambule, 2023; Pansiri et al., 2021) to form a non-adversarial intersection between Eurocentric and Afrocentric leadership models, this study was informed theoretically by three interconnected theories- Ubuntu philosophy, transformational and servant leadership theories. While Ubuntu advocates for collective approach to leadership, servant leadership theory asserts that leaders should focus on the needs of others by acknowledging their views, involving them in decision making, and building a sense of community within different stakeholders (Kolzow, 2014; Ugwu, 2021). On the same hand, transformational leadership theory assumes that leaders must work together with followers to identify needed changes, and to inspire them to execute the needed changes in an organisation (Campos, 2020). It views leadership as a process of inspiring others to be committed to shared goals and to solve organisational issues through innovative means developed via coaching and mentoring (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This theory, therefore, supports Continuing Professional Development, which is a key focus area that the current study aims to integrate within the framework of Ubuntu School Leadership. Following the theoretical framework and reviewed literature, this study was guided by the conceptual framework depicted in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for promoting effective school leadership through UST



Source: Researchers’ conceptualisation; Lopez et al. (2024).

From the figure, it was assumed that USL can be adopted by identifying challenges in schools, seeking solution through communities, empowering school leaders and stakeholders, and raising expectations and commitment to school goals. As further reflected in the figure, effective school leadership can be promoted through a combination of Ubuntu, servant, and transformational (UST) leadership. Following proper integration of these leadership competencies, it is assumed that UST leadership can be applied in different facets which are captured in the standards of effective school leadership in Rwanda including school management, CPD, involvement of internal and external stakeholders, and pedagogical leadership. Furthermore, UST leadership will invariably lead to the implementation of VVOB (2018) dimensional model of effective school leadership which revolves around enhanced pedagogy, improved organisational efficiency through restructuring, and enhanced relationship within and outside the school.

By defining vision, direction and values through a contextually adjusted model that captures unique needs, challenges, and experiences in Rwandan education system, school leaders will build trust among stakeholders leading to high expectations, student learning and wellbeing, and achievement of educational goals (VVOB, 2018). Finally, the conceptual framework could play significant roles in achieving the African Centre for School Leadership theory of change which advocates for effective school leadership through stakeholders’ collaboration and strong partnerships at the regional and country levels (African Centre for School Leadership, 2024). It was therefore assumed that through proper adoption and integration of UST model

which also advocates for stakeholder collaboration, there could be enhanced school leadership underpinned by social justice, improved school environment, stakeholders' wellbeing, and improved learning as highlighted in the African Centre for School Leadership (2024) theory of change.

2.6. Summary of reviewed literature and identified research gaps

This literature review has highlighted the need to adopt Afrocentric leadership models such as Ubuntu in order to improve school leadership practices in Rwanda and Africa. The dimensions and characteristics of Ubuntu school leadership have been explored in other contexts, but not in the Rwandan context, underpinning the need to explore the concept and practice of Ubuntu in the Rwandan education system. Such study is necessary because Ubuntu promotes humanness, respect, fairness, equity, inclusivity, and collectivism.

Some education ministries in African countries, including Rwanda, have developed standards for effective school leadership. Some parts of these standards reflect Ubuntu principles. However, there is need to explore the views of education stakeholders on how the standards of effective school leadership reflect Ubuntu principles as reflected in the first research question.

Contextual factors have been identified to play a significant role in implementing leadership standards. Hence, there is a need to explore how leadership standards can be better adapted using Ubuntu principles in the Rwandan context to promote effective school leadership. This need is captured in the second research question. While some literatures showed how Ubuntu can be implemented, others pointed to the need to develop a context relevant Ubuntu implementation framework, while some others highlighted the need to combine Afrocentric leadership philosophies such as Ubuntu with Eurocentric philosophies that reflect Ubuntu principles. It is however pertinent to develop a comprehensive framework, informed by empirical evidence from different education stakeholders, for implementing USL to achieve the standards of effective school leadership. Using Rwandan context, this study seeks to develop USL implementation framework that will aid in adoption of the USL approach in Rwanda and beyond.

CPD for school leaders is instrumental to leadership success. Several efforts have been made towards CPD in the Rwandan context. However, there is need to explore how Ubuntu can be

employed in enhancing such efforts not just in Rwanda but in other countries in Africa. The third research question therefore seeks to explore how USL can be applied in school leadership training and CPD.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach underpinned by interpretivist paradigm. In line with this paradigm, the qualitative approach helped to develop rich, detailed and in-depth data instead of limiting the participants to fixed responses (Maree et al., 2007). Phenomenological research design was adopted to explore and understand the essence of USL from the perspective of those that experience it (Ataro, 2020).

3.1. Sampling procedure

Rwanda was the target population because of the aim of this study. The specific population of this study was stakeholders in education such as officials of REB, school leaders, teachers, learners, and parents. The listed stakeholders were chosen because Ubuntu as a leadership model entails the involvement and engagement of different stakeholders to achieve a common goal. Secondary schools were chosen because this level of education is pivotal in equipping learners with useful skills for contributing meaningfully to the society and for higher education (Nwakpa, 2017).

The sample size for this study was sixteen (16) participants. Fifteen were selected purposively from four high performing schools in Huye district, tagged A-D, while one participant was selected purposively from REB. The sample size was appropriate because 9-17 interviews are enough to achieve saturation in a qualitative study (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). High performing schools were chosen because of the researchers' assumption that performance is enhanced by engagement and involvement of relevant stakeholders as reflected in Ubuntu principles. They were therefore better placed to provide valuable insights that led to the development of USL framework. These schools were selected based on academic performance in Mathematics in National examination. Academic performance which indicates improved teaching and learning is easily measurable and easily accessible, and it indirectly affects other performance metrics, including stakeholders' wellbeing and social justice (Shahjahan et al., 2021). Mathematics was chosen against other subjects because it is instrumental in the

understanding of other subjects, making it one of the most important subjects for science and arts learners in secondary school curriculum (Alzahrani et al., 2017; Seikano et al., 2024).

Due to contextual nuances such as gender (Lopez et al., 2024) and school location (Sumida & Kawata, 2021), mixed schools were selected from rural (A & B), semi urban (C) and urban (D) areas and from male and female-headed schools in Huye district. Schools A & B were headed by females and the rest by males. Purposive sampling was used to identify and select information-rich participants related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). The selected participants are described in Table 1. It was assumed that those involved in school leadership were better placed to provide valuable insights on the concept and practice of Ubuntu leadership.

Table 1: Description of school participants

Participants	Descriptions	Urban	Rural	Semi-Urban	Total
Head teachers	They are at the helm of affairs of school leadership in their schools	1	2	1	4
Teachers	Responsible for teaching and learning among other roles	2	1	1	4
Students	Head boys and head girls who were involved in school leadership	2	2	2	6
Parent	Vice president of school general assembly	0	0	1	1
REB Official	Part of the Teacher Training and Management Department	1	-		1
Total		6	5	5	16

3.2. Study instruments

The instrument for data collection was the interview guide containing semi-structured questions designed in line with literature and research questions posed in this study. Data were collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews which is suitable for phenomenology (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). This created a safe and comfortable atmosphere, allowing the interviewer to assess the facial expression, body language and other non-verbal cues of the interviewees (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021). While other participants were interviewed individually, focus group interviews were adopted for the learners because they felt comfortable to discuss the subject of the study with the interviewer.

3.3. Data collection procedures

Interviews were conducted in the natural settings of the participants by two members of the research team who are professors that are well versed in data collection. Participants were allowed to choose their preferred language for the interviews. Fifteen of the 16 participants preferred to be interviewed in Kinyarwanda which is the only local language in Rwanda. They were duly interviewed by a member of the research team who is proficient in the language. The interviews were recorded to get a precise account of their conversation with the interviewees (Al-Yateem, 2012). In addition to the voice recording, the researchers also took written notes to verify the recorded audio and to aid in data analysis (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

3.4. Data analysis

The recorded interviews were first transcribed and then translated (for those conducted in Kinyarwanda) to ease data analysis. Manual thematic data analysis strategy, used in phenomenology to make meaning of the lived experiences of research participants (Creswell, 2013), was adopted in this study. It involved identification of themes or patterns within qualitative data set (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The analysis was used to organise complex data by identifying themes through “*careful reading and re-reading of the transcribed data*” (Dawadi, 2020, p. 62). Data was approached inductively by two members of the research team. This inductive approach allowed the findings to be influenced by the research questions that guided the study. The findings were also influenced from raw data analysis and not from prior models or expectations (Azungah, 2018). Each member actively engaged with the data through familiarisation, note taking and coding. Themes were generated based on what they considered to be important issues for exploration. Both researchers discussed the themes generated and adjusted based on individual interpretations of data. Themes were then refined to gain consensus (Braun & Clarke, 2013) presented as findings of this study.

3.5. Ethical considerations

The ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Rwandan National Ethics Committee (RNEC). Permissions were also sought from the district officials and the gatekeepers of the selected schools. Additionally, informed consent was obtained from each of the participants before data collection. The participants and their institutions were represented with pseudonyms, presented in Table 2, to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Letters A and B represent the two selected rural schools. The semi urban school is represented with letter C while the urban school is represented with D. The participants were also informed of their right to wilfully withdraw. Interview transcripts and recordings were kept safely and transmitted in line with Rwandan data protection law (Republic of Rwanda, 2021).

Table 2: Pseudonyms for the participants

Head teachers		Teachers		Learners		Parent		REB	
Tag	Gender	Tag	Gender	Tag	Gender	Tag	Gender	Tag	Gender
HA	F	TA	M	SA1, SA2	M, F	PC	M	EO	Male
HB	F	TB	M	SC1, SC2	M, F				
HC	M	TC	M	SD1, SD2	M, F				
HD	M	TD	M						

4. Findings

The findings of this study are presented using the themes and sub-themes that emerged during data analysis. Apart from the first theme which was developed from the initial questions posed before delving into the research questions of this study, other themes are aligned to the research questions, thereby providing succinct answers to these questions.

4.1. Widespread appreciation of Ubuntu in Rwandan schools

To obtain a holistic view of participants' views on leadership, they were asked to share their perspectives on successful schools and effective school leadership. All the participants argued that a successful school is a school of excellence that strives to meet the standards of providing quality education. Such quality education is evidenced by improved academic performance, students' wellbeing, discipline, availability of necessary resources, and professional development among others. Additionally, there were convergences among all sets of participants that excellence could only be achieved in schools where there is effective leadership that ensures stakeholders' collaboration and cooperation. HA, for instance, noted that a successful school has a competent leader with skills and values needed to collaborate with all parties to ensure that their needs are met.

He/she [school leader] must have the knowledge and skills of managing the school, having needed values, and always looking for things that can help the school to improve...Success can be best achieved in schools when you ensure that these three parties at least work closely together: the student, the teacher and the parent. Also, the school administration and the community in which the school is located must have good interaction and complement each other.

In addition to stakeholder collaboration and cooperation, TB noted that successful schools are led by persons who embody three aspects: good leadership, good management and humanity. According to TB, leadership deals with ability to influence others, management deals with coordination of human and material resources, while humanity deals with showing empathy by understanding the needs of relevant stakeholders and finding ways to meet those needs.

From the foregoing, successful schools in Rwanda are led by school leaders who show collaboration, cooperation and humanity. This coincides with the view that Ubuntu advocates for humanistic consideration coupled with reinforced social relations, and community-oriented preferences (Eyong, 2019). Stakeholders' involvement, which comprises collaboration and cooperation, has been identified as an important facet of USL (Chetty & Price, 2024; Lopez et al., 2024) and servant leadership (Kolzow, 2014). Specifically, the collaborative nature of SL in Rwanda aligns with the findings in Senegal where school effectiveness was attributed to Ubuntu, manifested through strong connection between school, parents, and the entire local population (Davis, 2021). It is therefore necessary to ensure efficient collaboration between relevant stakeholders in any school leadership endeavour in the Rwandan context. This was why EO argued that to be successful in school leadership, *“you must know how to work with the community and other people”*, since the *“school is an entity set up in a community”* and leaders must work with interested partners in shaping the vision of a school.

Additionally, participants were asked to share the views on the meaning of Ubuntu in their context. Recurring words such as humane, empathy, generosity, kindness, compassion, humility, honest (*impfura*), loyalty, communication, collaboration, love, righteousness (*Ubupfura*), integrity (*Ubunyangamugayo*), forgiveness, and honour were used by the participants to show their appreciation of the meaning of Ubuntu. These views, which are reflected in the words of HD below, resonate with existing meaning of Ubuntu in the Rwandan (Brubaker, 2013) context.

The concept of Ubuntu centres on integrity, which encompasses perseverance, kindness, and acknowledging the value of every individual. It emphasizes that all our actions, whether it is constructing infrastructure or anything else, should ultimately serve people.

Additionally, the views coincide with core principles of Ubuntu in the South African context such as empathy, compassion, responsiveness, harmony and shared destiny (Laloo, 2022). On the other hand, TB linked Ubuntu to the spirituality of Rwandans using the term *“Imana y’i Rwanda”* which translates to God of Rwanda. The participant therefore likened a person with

Ubuntu to spirituality and things that “God” bring using terms such as kind-hearted, generous, and peaceful. This shows the in-depth nature of Ubuntu within the Rwandan culture.

Ubuntu entails eschewing acts such as segregation and individualism, whilst embracing acts such as collectivism and compassion. This view is held by EO who highlighted that Ubuntu involves putting the interest of the community above personal and family interest. He also went further to enumerate the importance of Ubuntu in the education process.

You must have the humane [which] becomes the baseline when it comes to the school as the teacher [referring to everyone involved in the education process]. A teacher should be considered as a friend...someone with passion, love, who cares, with concern, with responsibility. So, it becomes paramount that every teacher should be a person with *Ubumuntu* (Ubuntu). You can be *Umuntu mubi* because maybe you are selective. There is *Umuntu mwiza* – who considers a person, a person. Everyone needs something; you have to help – *Umuntu mwiza*. So, we expect a teacher to be *Umuntu mwiza*.

Supporting the views of EO, HB noted that the love and compassion that accompany Ubuntu leadership are essential for achieving good outcomes in schools.

Ubuntu helps leaders understand the needs of students and staff, fostering a more compassionate and effective learning environment. Even outside of schools, without Ubuntu, it’s hard to achieve anything. In schools, where many people need that compassion and love to study and work effectively, Ubuntu is essential for achieving good outcomes.

From the foregoing, it is evident that Ubuntu is widely practiced in high performing schools in Rwanda through humanness, collaboration and stakeholder engagement. Additionally, the concept of Ubuntu, described with different words such as humanity, generosity, love, and empathy, has shared meaning in Rwanda and other African contexts (Asiimwe, 2023; Eyong, 2019; Lopez et al., 2024; Msila, 2008). As argued by PC and HA, Ubuntu encapsulates the very soul of Rwanda, and it has the capacity to address leadership challenges in education since everyone will see each child as his/her own, and teamwork will be enhanced.

Despite the wide appreciation of Ubuntu in Rwandan context, HC argued that the Tutsi genocide affected Ubuntu culture in the country, leading to loss of sense of love and compassion among citizens.

There was a degradation of Ubuntu during that period of genocide. This degradation of Ubuntu led to people losing their sense of love and compassion. Normally, people trust other people, but now we question whether we are truly the same, or whether we are still human, this is a challenge.

This view shows that the Rwandan genocide is an important factor that limits the adoption of Ubuntu principles in Rwanda. Similarly, EO noted:

People still may have some stigma kind of thing because if I know that my dad or my Mum or my grandfather or my other stepfather or whoever is a person who is very well known for having committed eem... genocide...you see... You fear to come and teach people Ubuntu when your father was a sort of a slaughtering killer.

The erosion of Ubuntu principles in the Rwandan society has led to increasing level of individualism as opposed to communalism. Using an illustration of how an adult will see a child loitering on the street during school hours and take no action, HC stated that individualism is gradually taking over the Ubuntu culture as people are increasingly becoming self-absorbed and self-focused. This typifies Eurocentric idea of self-actualisation where individual interests are prioritised over the group (Lopez et al., 2024).

Nowadays, if you touch someone else's child, people immediately think you are trying to harm them. They might see you as a villain. Do you agree? However, I think today, if you see a child on the street who is late for school, you might just ignore it. People are becoming increasingly self-centred. It is incomplete progress, what we call progress but is not progress. You find that people are becoming more self-absorbed and self-focused, and this extends to their children as well.

In conclusion, this theme has answered the primary research question which explored the key dimensions and characteristics of USL in the Rwandan context. Several Ubuntu competencies were presented by the participants including humanism, empathy, integrity, honesty, open communication, communalism, and collaboration. These competencies align with USL

dimensions in other African contexts such as South Africa (Laloo, 2022), Ghana, Kenya, Zambia (Lopez et al., 2024), Nigeria, Cameroun (Eyong, 2019) and Senegal (Davis, 2021). Additionally, they are reflective of the conceptual framework developed in this study which advocates for effective school leadership through community efforts and guided by Ubuntu competencies such as humanness and integrity. However, the description of Ubuntu using the term “generosity” is exclusive to the Rwandan context, and this has further expanded the meaning of Ubuntu in the African context. Nevertheless, the Rwandan society is increasingly becoming more individualistic and self-centred, with the Tutsi’s genocide having a prominent role to play in this regard. It is therefore necessary to take appropriate measures aimed at re-instilling Ubuntu principles in the Rwandan society.

4.2. Ubuntu principles and current standards of effective school leadership

This section presents the findings from the first research question posed in this study. Two major themes were identified to address how the current standards of effective school leadership in Rwanda reflect Ubuntu principles. They include dynamic leadership standards and Ubuntu as a major component of standards of effective school leadership.

4.2.1. Dynamic leadership standards

Before ascertaining the place of Ubuntu in the five standards of effective school leadership, participants were asked to describe these standards. Findings showed that the selected head teachers, one teacher (TA), and the education officer (EO) had a good understanding of these standards. In addition to clearly stating them, HB also highlighted the importance of delegating responsibilities to achieve these standards.

What I remember about the school leadership standards is that there are four key ones: Setting the school direction: The school must have a vision, mission, and goals; aligning teaching and learning with these goals; involving parents and the broader community; organizing the school effectively: A school leader cannot do everything alone and must delegate responsibilities to teachers.

The in-depth knowledge of the school leadership standards by the school heads attest to the fact that they have been trained on the subject. HD noted:

But according to the standards, they are the standards that we have been trained in; we have been told in different trainings. Even in terms of school goals, I think that it is the school's guidance, otherwise we should have it all the time, it is in the large strategic plan, it is in the annual action plan, and these are things that are done from year to year...methods of leading learning and teaching are...So that's why, I can't say that I don't know and that's what we do every day. Finally, the management of school resources, the welfare of students, the welfare of staff are things that we already know are part of the responsibilities...

Although the school heads showed good knowledge of these standards, they had varying views on their sufficiency in improving school effectiveness. While HC and HA noted that they were sufficient, the other two head teachers, HB and HD, argued otherwise. According to HB, the leadership standards should be made more flexible to allow leaders to address their individual challenges.

The standards are in place, but there could be more flexibility. For example, Ubuntu should be integrated into the standards, allowing room for leaders to address individual challenges and provide personalised support. A listening service in schools could help with this, offering a space for people to express their problems.

Similarly, HD was explicit about the particular area (career guidance) he needed improvement as it had impacted his learners negatively. Additionally, HA who alluded that the standard is sufficient, went further to note that they are temporarily sufficient, and they should evolve hand-in-hand with the dynamism of education. Such dynamism aligns with transformational leadership which promotes the ethos of Ubuntu (Nkambule, 2023) and allows leaders to solve organisational issues through innovative means (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

On the contrary, other stakeholders consisting of teachers, parents and learners could not succinctly highlight the standards of school leadership, but they were able to relate it to their practices when the standards were presented to them. SA2 and SC1, in rural and urban schools, provided insights on their lack of knowledge of leadership standards, but they related them to their practices as follows:

To add, I didn't realize that involving parents and the community was a standard practice. Here, parents are involved in helping students who are struggling, and they collaborate with the school to ensure their children succeed (SD2).

You see, I had little information. Another thing I might say about it is leading learning. As a doyen or doyenne (head boy or head girl), we have time to talk to students and tell them that learning is important. Just as they are able to attend classes, you understand that we as leaders play a role in making the students aware that they should learn (SC1).

The views above outline the need to increase awareness of stakeholders on the standards of effective school leadership. This will guide relevant stakeholders to hold leaders accountable whilst contributing their own quota towards achieving the leadership standards. Additionally, the standards should be dynamic so that it can be regularly adjusted in line with contextual needs. A similar view is held by SC1 who noted that regular evaluations should be conducted to ensure successful integration of the standards into leadership.

4.2.2. Ubuntu as a major component of the standards of school leadership

To ascertain the place of Ubuntu in the standards of effective school leadership, participants were asked if the standards are in alignment with the principles of Ubuntu. Apart from HC, the other participants explicitly opined that Ubuntu is part of the standards of effective school leadership as there can be no effective teaching and learning without Ubuntu competencies. HA noted:

It [Ubuntu] definitely has a connection, if someone takes a moment to think about it and research it, he/she will definitely find it because it is completely compatible. In order for a child to be able to learn, a teacher to be able to teach, a parent to be able to work with educators and a head teacher to be able to manage his/her school, all of the aforementioned must have "Ubuntu". In order to succeed "Ubuntu" is needed.

Agreeing with HA, SC2 and HD further noted the important part Ubuntu plays in community collaboration which is part of the five standards of effective school leadership.

Then there is the 5th point that deals with the way of interaction with parents and our wider family that is what I started with in the first questions. That is to say, Ubuntu must be exposed to everything. All of them are necessarily related because the implementation of all standards does not work without Ubuntu principles. It's what I said before, that is, you can't help teachers without Ubuntu, you can't help students without Ubuntu, you can't motivate teachers in a good way without Ubuntu, you can't connect with parents without Ubuntu, that's why Ubuntu is base of all these in general (HD).

Yes, the principles of Ubuntu emphasise humanity and consideration for others, which align with the guidelines that encourage cooperation between parents and teachers (SC2).

These views underpin the importance of collaboration between parents and wider community to ensure the realisation of school vision, mission, and goals (REB, 2020). While PC highlighted the role of Ubuntu competencies such as empathy in achieving the standards of effective school leadership, HC who echoed that the standards are not ideal, noted that there is no system to ensure that Ubuntu principles are being implemented.

In conclusion, the findings from the first research question demonstrate that Ubuntu is a crucial part of the standards of effective school leadership, especially in promoting community collaboration. However, there is the need to ensure flexibility, and to translate Ubuntu competencies such as empathy into actionable leadership practices to better achieve the standards for effective leadership.

4.3. Ubuntu: A model for achieving the standards of effective school leadership

In line with the second research question, this section presents findings on how Ubuntu could be useful in implementing the standards of effective school leadership. Three major themes emerged under this research question: Challenges of USL implementation, harnessing Ubuntu for leadership effectiveness, and harmonization for holistic education.

4.3.1. Challenges of USL implementation

Two major sub-themes emerged under this theme: lack of resources and bridging schools and world of works.

Lack of resources

Effective school leadership entails proper management of human and material resources to achieve quality education. Availability of resources was highlighted by some participants, such as TD in semi-urban school, as one of the hallmarks of successful school. Although participants were not asked a direct question on the availability of resources in their schools, a good number of the participants highlighted that lack of resources was one of the factors that could hinder the implementation of USL in Rwanda. For instance, HB in rural area noted: *Lack of resources can sometimes prevent us from helping students or staff, which can create frustration and reduce empathy.*

TB in the same school as HB also noted that USL implementation can be greatly hindered by lack of institutional competence.

One thing that I think should be considered is whether the country has put in place enough institutions to promote Ubuntu in schools. Are these institutions competent enough to ensure that Ubuntu is integrated into school governance? That's something we need to think about. Because even if a leader has Ubuntu, they might not have the necessary support or resources to implement it effectively, which can hinder their efforts. Communication challenges and lack of facilities might also be obstacles. We need to ensure that institutions have the right resources to support Ubuntu-based leadership in schools.

These views were supported by EO who gave an illustration of how the school feeding program in Rwanda is affected by lack of space, as many schools do not have playgrounds. Additionally, SC1 and SC2 in semi-urban schools also noted that in implementing the guidelines for school leadership, the capacity of each school should be considered since not all schools have the relevant resources. This underpins the need to create a dynamic school leadership standard that will allow each school leader to address context-specific challenges. Following the same line of thought with SC1 and SC2, PC mentioned that access to essential

resources is a major contextual factor that should be considered in implementing the standard of effective school leadership.

A key aspect that should be focused on is ensuring that each individual, within their respective category, has access to the essential resources they truly need. This enables them to perform their required tasks effectively while also having the necessary support to carry out their responsibilities.

Finally, HD in urban school also alluded to the lack of resources using an analogy of teachers working too hard even on weekends without breaks and bonuses. It is therefore evident that availability of resources should be considered as a major contextual nuance in the Rwandan education system, and in school leadership practices in other countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Lopez et al., 2024).

Bridging schools and world of work

In 2015, Rwanda shifted to competence-based curriculum (CBC) to enable school graduates cope with job-related demands and become problem solvers (Nsengimana, 2020). This aligns with a general objective of Rwandan education which is to transform the country's population through human capital development and skills acquisition (Republic of Rwanda, 2003). Industries are essential in preparing students for employment and they can collaborate with institutions in the enhancement of students' skills (Balasubramani, 2019).

Although the current theme resonated from only two of the participants in this study, the researchers noticed that throughout the interviews, the participants gave in-depth illustrations of the need for collaboration between different stakeholders including school management, teachers, parents, students, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other members of the community. However, there was no mention of any form of collaboration between the schools and industrial stakeholders. This shows that in addition to challenges such as lack of resources (Nsengimana, 2020); poor or no linkage to world of work could be one of the factors hindering the implementation of CBC. Poor linkage of schools to world of work was also observed in South Africa (Ramasimu, 2023), showing that this may be a general problem in the African education system.

In support of the views above, HC opined:

We should establish systems that allow students to participate actively in their learning process. This means helping students learn by putting their knowledge into practice. How can they apply what they learn? When I studied in Germany, I travelled there for research - there was a school teaching automotive engineering right next to a car factory. A student would study theory on Monday and observe car manufacturing, then by Saturday; they would be designing a new car model different from those being produced. This is how education and industry intersect. In Rwanda, I am not sure about the gap, but it seems industry and education is separate. We need to bridge this gap, allowing industry to show us their challenges so we can teach students how to solve them. This collaboration should exist to make things work.

HC went further to note that teachings should be tailored *“to connect children with what they will do in future, by designing curricula that align with future job requirements”*. The result will be an education sector where collective efforts lead to a connection between education and employment. Similarly, SA1 in rural community also noted: *“Here at school, we come to study chemistry and physics. Being able to find “X” is also good; but after school there is another life to be trained. The fact that we are not able to receive it here at school is something that would be a hindrance in life outside.”*

Bridging the gap between education and world of work is necessary in developing graduates that will contribute meaningfully to the Rwandan economy. This is because when industrial stakeholders are involved in education, structures and systems for collaborative learning and problem solving among students as reflected in the standards of effective school leadership (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020a) will be established. It is therefore necessary for education stakeholders to explore means of closing the gap between schools and world of work.

One major Ubuntu competence that school leaders can use to bridge the gap between schools and other stakeholders, including world of work, is two-way communication. School stakeholders such as families, teachers, students and administrators have numerous expectations which can only be fulfilled through excellent verbal and non-verbal communication skills (Glaze, 2014).

As noted by HD, communication is important in establishing a collaborative relationship between the school and the community, and such communication must converge towards the learners.

We are based on the fact that our primary partners are the students we raise, that is, everything we do must converge towards the child...It goes with what I have already said which is communication, which is the relationship among school members. So, I understand the Ubuntu that goes along with the collaboration and communication of the school administration, teachers, different employees, who participate in that school.

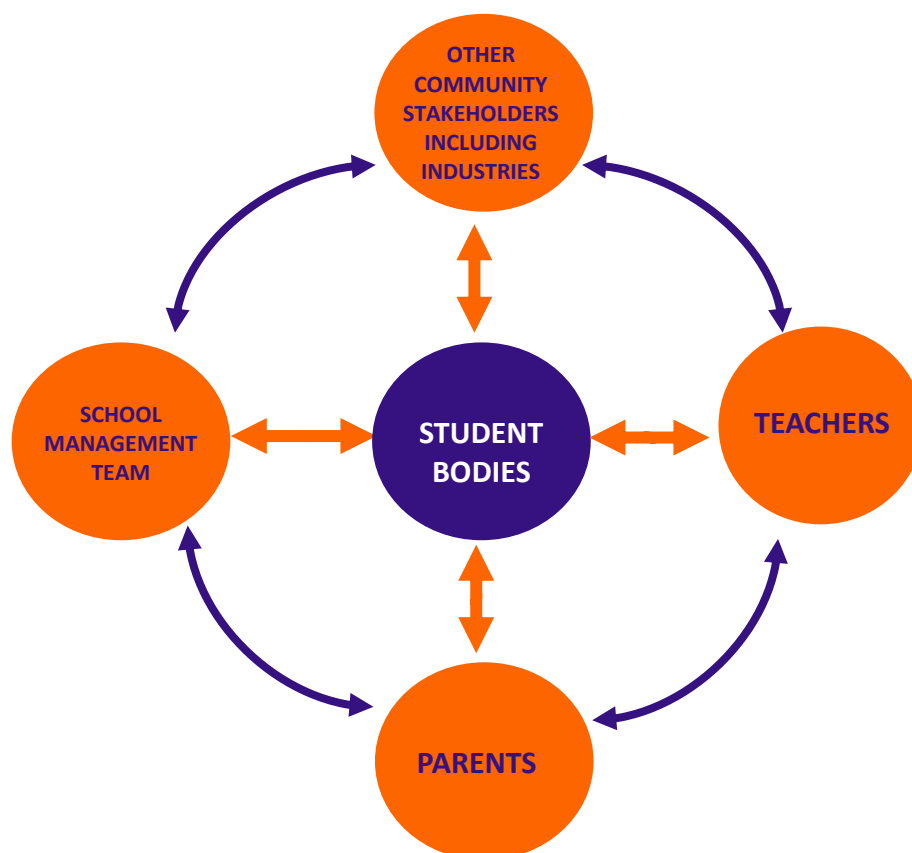
TA also noted the need to establish two-way communication, which centres on the learners, among education stakeholders.

We share topics with our students, giving them a year-long lesson plan, telling them what you want and listening to them and they tell you what they want. For me, what I want is to win, and I tell them about the obstacles that are there, and they tell me about the obstacles that they see.

These views led to the development of Community Involvement Dimension of Ubuntu School Leadership Tetrad (CIDUT) as depicted in

Figure 2. CIDUT advocates for a collaborative process characterised by two-way communication between all stakeholders. Just like every education endeavour, and as suggested by the participants, learners are central to CIDUT framework.

Figure 2: Community Involvement Dimension of Ubuntu School Leadership (USL) Tetrad (CIDUT)



In other words, using the CIDUT, schools can ensure that all stakeholders collaborate through two-way communication that centres on the learners. This will encourage active listening and open dialogue where school leaders, teachers, parents, students, world of works, and other members of the community can express their concerns suggestions and thoughts and also contribute to school effectiveness. Additionally, communication with stakeholders, as reflected in the CIDUT model, is also part of the behavioural competencies highlighted in the National Teacher CPD framework in Rwanda which advocates for regular and accessible information to learners and their families (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020b).

4.3.2. Harnessing Ubuntu for leadership

In the face of resource constraints and other challenges such as poor performance and high dropout rates, school leaders in Rwanda have navigated these contextual issues by applying Ubuntu tenets. Using several lived experiences, the participants noted that Ubuntu competencies can be applied to enhance school effectiveness. EO shared a narrative of how

a school neighbour who had big pieces of land provided it for a school to cultivate vegetables without demanding for rent from the school. This was possible because the neighbour attended a meeting in the school and knew about the challenge. Other members of the school community went further to contribute money for insecticides and weeding. This narrative aligns with the conceptual framework developed in this study which entails identifying challenges and seeking solution through the community. Similar narrative was presented by TD in an urban school.

If there is cooperation and understanding from everyone, issues can be addressed more effectively. Everyone needs to be empathetic and considerate when making decisions, especially when dealing with children who face challenges, such as poverty... Yes, when we identified students who couldn't afford lunch fees, we held a meeting with the students and raised funds to cover their costs. The school also worked to find additional support for these students.

These narratives show the need to bring the school community on board and get them involved in solving schools' problems. School leaders in Kenya, Ghana and Zambia used a similar pattern to address the challenges they faced in their schools (Lopez et al., 2024). This involved identifying challenges and seeking help from the community to address the challenges. A perfect way to seek help from the community was identified by HC. He noted that his school was committed to ensuring effectiveness through multifaceted approach which included meticulously planned and executed parent and teacher meetings. Additionally, the school had well-established essential structures such as Parent-Teacher Committee, internal audit and tender committee. The school further prioritised regular parent meetings with specific sessions dedicated to action plan preparation, review of ongoing activities, and meticulous evaluation of progress.

HA described how empathy, a facet of Ubuntu, was applied to prevent possible dropout of a student. Although the act committed by the child deserved expulsion, a different punishment was issued when it was discovered that the child's parent could not afford to take him/her to another school. A similar narrative was also shared by PC who noted:

They chose to put themselves in the child's shoes and considered the potential negative outcomes if the child were to be expelled. After all, the child was sent to

them for help and guidance. The child came to grow and develop. In this instance, I believe there was a display of Ubuntu in empathising with the student's situation and deciding to help them change instead of expelling them.

It is therefore necessary to critically analyse the potential impacts of punishment given to students as such could have a lifetime negative effect on the learner and the society at large. Ubuntu competences could therefore be leveraged when selecting corrective measures for learners who need improvement.

As a USL competence, consultation can be used to transform a school with low academic performance. This was illustrated by HC who changed a low performing school to a high performing one, evidenced by their performance in National examination. The head teacher consulted relevant stakeholders, and they set goals together. By combining continuous assessment, frequent monitoring and follow-up, and individualised pedagogy, the challenges faced by the learners were identified and addressed leading to improved performance. While this approach was learner-centred, Msila (2012) used a teacher-centred approach to transform a poor performing school in South Africa. This supports the view by TB who noted that *“creating a culture of Ubuntu in schools starts with teachers”*. The head teacher improved school performance by organising workshops on stakeholders’ expectations, instilling Ubuntu values in educators, and forming collaborative committees (Msila, 2012). In the two cases, stakeholder consultation was the first step, and this was probably what informed the choice of either applying Ubuntu principles on the teachers or learners. It is therefore necessary for school leaders to critically consult relevant stakeholders to identify challenges and proffer solutions to the identified issues. Such consultation and involvement which underpin USL do not only help in making informed choices, but they also enhance stakeholders’ ownership which translates to efficient implementation as noted by HC. *“Additionally, we should raise awareness among all stakeholders in education, teachers, parents, and others, while also reviving our culture. This means fostering a sense of ownership.”*

Students also provided illustrations of how they could contribute to addressing leadership challenges using the values of Ubuntu. SA2 illustrated:

Another example, here in the school there are clubs, there are students who get together, they have something called *“Agaseke”*. Agaseke has a policy called *“one*

hundred per student policy". Where every child in the school gives a hundred coins but the one who has more may give it. Then they will help the helpless child. They would pay him/her for school fees. This activity is a good activity because there are children who spend a whole year completing one grade of ordinary level which has had a positive effect. It is a "one hundred per student policy".

SD1 and SD2 echoed: *"When I arrived at this school, I noticed that students had trouble expressing themselves in interviews. We organized debates and public speaking sessions to help them improve"* (SD1). *"As student leaders, we advocate for students and help solve their problems"* (SD2).

SA1 in the same school as SA2 noted that as leaders who represent others, they do not ignore the various problems that students face such as theft. SC2 also narrated how the student leaders organised debates and public speaking sessions to help students who had trouble expressing themselves. A critical look at the *"Agaseke"* policy shows that learners have the ability to influence their parents to contribute to school development. This is because most learners probably collect the money they donate towards the program from their parents or guardians. It is therefore necessary to include student bodies in decision making and any other multifaceted approach aimed at improving school effectiveness as reflected in the CIDUT framework. This view is held by TA who noted:

There is also listening to the children, the children also giving us ideas and often they are useful ideas. All of this can help the school achieve its goals in management, learning, teaching and working with parents in general... And all the decisions you make should be shared with them [learners] so that they can see if there is anything that might harm them.

4.3.3. Harmonization for holistic education

Similar to findings in South Africa which advocated for non-adversarial intersection between indigenous and Western-oriented leadership practices in implementing USL (Nkambule, 2023), findings from this study alluded to the need to balance Western and indigenised practices for school effectiveness in Rwanda. This view was raised by TA, a teacher in a rural school, who was concerned about the possibility of Ubuntu conflicting with global policies such as those that promote the use of ICT. HC noted that *"before we become intellectuals,*

knowing mathematics, English, and other subjects, we should first be human and understand human values". He went further to note that "many teachers lack this sense of Ubuntu in their work. They seem more like hired workers, just doing their job for the pay check, without feeling a true sense of responsibility. In such cases, they do not truly understand what their role should entail". Highlighting the need for an intersection between Ubuntu and other facets of education, PC noted:

It is essential to strengthen this type of leadership and, more importantly, to underscore the aspect of Ubuntu. We need a more comprehensive approach that not only prioritises academic results but also focuses on introducing Ubuntu values and creating a nurturing environment for students. These point to the necessity of a holistic evaluation of school performance, one that considers both academic achievements and the cultivation of Ubuntu values, to ensure a well-rounded education system.

PC's view confirms the validity of the Ubuntu-Globalisation Leadership (UGL) Model developed by Pansiri, Mphathiwa, et al. (2021) which advocates for the adoption of different forms of globalisation using Ubuntu tenets. The model focuses on collaboration, underpinned by ethical values, in developing a learner with the requisite skills to compete globally. Following a similar line of thought, two student leaders, during their focus group interview, shared similar views with PC and Pansiri, Mphathiwa, et al. (2021) on the need to balance education using global and indigenised tenets.

You don't know how to live outside; you don't know the behaviour, what you should avoid, how you should be with others...You feel that having Ubuntu in the current curriculum are things that help young people outside; and other people who left the school. You feel it would help in life (SA1).

I also feel that Ubuntu should be included, because this is what we are learning, we call ourselves children because we are still students, but it is as if we are the future generation. We are the Rwanda of the future. So, if you are going to be a leader or another adult, a parent, but you don't have Ubuntu I don't think it would be worth anything. Yes, we have knowledge, but they say, knowledge without humanity is

useless. "*Science sans conscience n'est que ruine de l'âme*" - you need to have Ubuntu and knowledge (SA2).

In addition to the role of Ubuntu in developing the affective domain, SA1 emphasised the importance of incorporating Ubuntu in the curriculum. Although the majority of the participants highlighted that Ubuntu is reflected in the curriculum as cross-cutting issue, they further noted that it is necessary to make it explicit. "*It should be explicit, not implicit. Currently, it is included implicitly, but it needs to be explicit and clear. One should possess these values; those who do not meet these standards should not be educators or teachers*" (HC).

Also, those principles can be included in the curriculum... As in any lesson that teachers teach, there should be cross-cutting issues also Ubuntu principles can be included. It would be good to be included in it, because it would help Rwandan society, starting from young children, returning to the values . For a person to have Ubuntu, there must be a culture of loving each other, that of loving the country, you will not love the country without Ubuntu, and loving each other; children start when they are young, Rwandan society starts from the ground like that in the early years and starts to build itself based on Ubuntu because it has been there since time immemorial (HA).

The views of HA that Ubuntu should be taught to young children to return them to Rwandan values are similar to Ubuntu leadership practices of Bakalanga people of Botswana. According to Bulawa & Mhlauli (2021), children in Bakalanga were involved as observers or practical participants to learn the spirit of interdependence and collectivism. Their involvement was intended to inculcate the spirit of Ubuntu so that they can pass it to the next generations. According to TB "*children should be taught Ubuntu from a young age, as they are like raw materials that need to be shaped into compassionate individuals*". By explicitly integrating Ubuntu into the curriculum as suggested by the participants and Mhlauli et al. (2021), educators will develop a more humanistic approach to pedagogy, while learners will be educated on the common good of the community, making humanism to be at the centre stage in the African context. Additionally, integrating Ubuntu into the curriculum could have Rwandans to live beyond the Tutsi genocide, and rekindle Ubuntu tenets that existed in the pre-genocide era.

4.4. Integrating Ubuntu into school leadership professional development

The third research question explored how Ubuntu leadership competencies can be integrated into SLPD. These Ubuntu competencies which were identified in the previous research questions include collaboration, consultation, honesty, humanness, communism, integrity, two-way communication and empathy. Two major themes emerged from this research question including consolidating on gains and peer learning, modelling and mentoring. The first theme, consolidating on gains, has two sub-themes: gender equality, and inclusive and continuous training.

4.4.1. Consolidating on gains

Efforts towards SLPD in Rwanda, such as the diploma in effective school leadership, generated mixed reactions. However, findings from this study align with the view (Lauterbach et al., 2024; Mukingambeho et al., 2023; Uworwabayeho et al., 2020) that CPD efforts have impacted SL in the country, whilst also concurring with existing evidence (Uwamariya & Andala, 2022) that further improvements are needed. Two major sub-themes emerged to address this theme as presented in the following sections.

Gender equality

Following the view that CPD is sensitive to context (Stevenson et al., 2016), it is pertinent to note that the convergences observed in this study show that gender and school location may no longer be major contextual nuances that should be considered in SL practices in Rwanda. The majority (87.5%) of the participants submitted that gender differences previously had an impact on SL development efforts in Rwanda, but not anymore. HD noted:

So far there are no restrictions and I think the leaders especially receive a lot of training; so I think that there are no obstacles, gender is not a problem until now, we can be led by a woman, we can be led by a man, you can see that it is men, it is women, all of them enter the profession in a good and equal way.

Agreeing with HD, PC in semi-urban school noted:

In our traditional cultural context, it was evident that the female gender frequently encountered marginalisation and constraints. Prescribed norms dictated clear boundaries delineating permissible conduct from that which was prohibited for

women. However, contemporary society is witnessing a paradigm shift towards gender equality. This cultural metamorphosis mirrors a broader societal evolution, transitioning from entrenched gender stereotypes and limitations towards a more inclusive and equitable approach that acknowledges the potential and entitlements of both genders, with a specific focus on empowering women who have historically faced disadvantage.

These views show that Rwanda has a robust legal framework that promotes women's participation in decision-making and power-sharing (Rwanda Revenue Authority, 2023). However, it contrasts the views of Lopez et al. (2024) that SLPD should draw from gender nuances to inform PD efforts. Nevertheless, three participants, SC1, SC2, and TB noted that gender stereotyping is an ongoing issue that needs to be continually tackled. *"Yes, many girls are discouraged from becoming leaders due to traditional beliefs that girls should not be educated"* (SC1). *"I wouldn't say it is still a challenge, but there is still a perception that boys can speak more confidently than girls in public"* (SC2).

Similarly, TB noted:

Yes, it still poses a challenge in many places. For example, parents may send their children to certain schools based on cultural or gender biases, such as sending their daughters to all-girls' schools run by nuns. Or when a female DOS (Director of Studies) is assigned, people might think, *"Now that we have a female DOS, things will be easier."* This is still a mind-set rooted in culture, and we need to work on changing that. In schools, why is it that the head boy always gives the speech on Parents' Day, while the head girl is rarely given the opportunity, even if she has better grades? This reflects how culture and gender biases still influence leadership roles in schools.

The views above show that there is a gap between the legal framework and the prevailing state of women's rights due to social norms and customary laws (Rwanda Revenue Authority, 2023). It is therefore necessary to consolidate on the gains made so far on gender equality by continuously advocating for social justice and inclusivity for male and female. Additionally, gender equality could form part of the curriculum on Ubuntu, should the REB decide to incorporate Ubuntu in CPD content and the national curriculum.

Inclusive and continuous training

In response to question on how to implement USL through SLPD, there were convergences among the majority of the participants that training could act as a major modality for imparting USL competencies as noted by the head teachers.

In order for Ubuntu principles to be included in these standards, there may be training or before the training there may be people like one or the other by preparing something like a syllabus that could be trained on. Trainings can be given to teachers or school leaders but also those principles can be included in the curriculum. Except that the principles of Ubuntu may be used but people who do not know that they are using them (HA).

We could organize training sessions to discuss the importance of Ubuntu and how it can benefit the school. Teachers could pass on these values to students during morning assemblies, for example (HB).

Yes, it could be incorporated as a taught subject, prioritized in teacher training schools. They should begin by telling aspiring teachers, "Professional deontology will be your guiding principle as an educator/teacher". At that point, it should be integrated into the curriculum of TTCs (Teacher Training Colleges) and other educational schools like former KIE (Kigali Institute of Education) and UR (University of Rwanda). They should teach this subject thoroughly. Once that is accomplished, we should also instil these values in children from an early age (HC).

Policy contains different instructions and responsibilities for each person. The way he/she should put it into practice is the reason why I said something about training, it is not something that a person has to do no matter what he/she experiences (HD).

The views of the head teachers highlight the importance of training in inculcating Ubuntu tenets, the need to incorporate it in the curriculum for school leadership development institutes and learners, and the role of students' assemblies in instilling Ubuntu principles. Other stakeholders, including EO gave credence to the fact that regular and continuous training/ reminders for all stakeholders will be relevant in instilling Ubuntu principles. PC noted: *"I believe that when a lack of knowledge is identified, we should provide training and*

capacity building for all relevant parties, including leaders, parents, teachers, school leaders, and students in general, to enhance their understanding.”

Upon establishing the positive impact of training, CPD, and meetings in inculcating Ubuntu tenets, the participants were asked to share their views on PD practices within their schools. Findings showed that trainings on SL were mostly organised for school leaders while other stakeholders, including teachers who interact most with the learners, are usually left out. Additionally, HC mentioned that he was only trained when he assumed his leadership position, demonstrating the non-continuous nature of such trainings.

To clarify, I was not trained by XXX [name purposely removed]. Instead, it was the district that provided training for us as new employees entering the profession. They essentially gave us an orientation, saying, you are about to start your job...Since you are new, here is what you will be doing.

PC in the same school as HC also noted:

It is my belief that the organisation of these [training] sessions is not optimal because the knowledge and skills taught during these sessions should be applied at various levels of the school's hierarchy. Nevertheless, we have noticed and discussed that certain members of the leadership team are unaware of these training sessions, despite all of them holding leadership positions.

HC further noted that since educational programs are constantly evolving, there is the need to keep stakeholders informed about these changes regularly. He argued that the traditional train-the-trainer approach is ineffective due to “*information dilution*”, suggesting instead the use of a zoning system for collective training. On the same hand, HD suggested the re-establishment of permanent training centres.

There are times when the head teacher is trained, the assistant is trained, the bursary is trained, but the teachers will implement all the things that the school leaders are asking them to do and you will find that they are not trained or only a few, others are left. Earlier in the past years there were permanent training centres where teachers would go to this centre and be trained on something, on this and that domain.

Through regular training, stakeholders will be better positioned to make significant impact towards improving school effectiveness.

While PC mentioned that meetings at the village level could help motivate parents and provide an explanation of *“their responsibilities regarding education”*, SC1 mentioned that leadership training can help prepare students for future roles in the community. This necessitates the need to bring students at different levels of learning closer to leadership through student bodies such as school parliament and students’ representative council as reflected in the CIDUT framework. More so, TC highlighted that in addition to training, there should be follow-up to ensure the implementation of what is taught.

In summary, findings from the second sub-theme show that there is existing training, majorly for head teachers in Rwanda. It is therefore necessary to consolidate on the gains made through training and CPD that involves all stakeholders. EO mentioned that a potential challenge of having regular refresher courses is time shortage, especially for teachers and head teachers who are always in school overseeing school activities. Remote training could therefore be adopted for relevant stakeholders, while approaches such as morning assemblies, student bodies and explicit infusion in the curriculum can be used to inculcate Ubuntu values in learners.

4.4.2. Peer learning, modelling and mentoring

In addition to leadership training for all stakeholders, the participants identified peer learning, modelling and mentoring as effective modalities for implementing Ubuntu competencies through SLPD. Training and PD efforts are hindered by challenges including lack of resources and time shortage as noted by EO. Just like the case of lack of resources which was addressed by school leaders in high performing schools using Ubuntu tenets, successful school leaders also devised alternative means for leadership development in the absence of regular training for all stakeholders. The majority of the alternatives they adopted embody Ubuntu principles.

TA illustrated two cases involving a confrontational teacher and non-repentant teacher. These two teachers refused to change their negative attitudes despite numerous efforts by the school head. However, adopting peer mentoring which embodies Ubuntu, the teachers changed their attitudes when they were mentored by their colleagues. These cases typify guidance from peers who offered advice and feedback to the teachers; supportive

intervention from the management who had the option of resorting to formal disciplinary measures; and positive change from the teachers who reflected on the guidance provided and eschewed their negative behaviours. HD also illustrated the application of Ubuntu to improve leadership skills using the case of a head teacher who was almost dismissed due to poor performance.

Outside of this school, as we mentioned, there was a situation where we saw a head teacher performing poorly in school management at a school called XXXX [name of school removed]. They were about to dismiss him. We asked the district to leave him to us and give him to us. In a few days, as collaborating leaders, we went and talked to him, and mentored him. Now he even surpasses us in performance appraisal and operations. This is a success; we achieved through collaboration and consultation.

The illustrations above show the ability of peer mentoring to remove hierarchical power differentials, leading to greater emphasis on mutual learning (Lorenzetti et al., 2020). Additionally, these findings confirm the value of mentorship approach in professional development, suggesting a prevailing dependence on colleagues for leadership learning and need for more formalised programs (Lopez et al., 2024).

TB noted that communalism which accompanies Ubuntu allows Rwandans to value helping and visiting each other. HB in the same school as TB gave an illustration of how these values were used through mentorship to achieve positive impacts. *“Recently, a teacher took in several students who were struggling to study at home during exam time. He housed them, and they all passed their national exams with excellent results.”*

It is therefore evident that in USL, mentorship can occur between stakeholders in the same hierarchy and those in different hierarchies.

Peer learning was also identified as a major technique used by effective schools to enhance leadership practices. The knowledge exchange that accompanies peer learning was identified by Nkambule (2023) as a major step in implementing USL. A case of peer learning was demonstrated by HC who noted that collaboration with more advanced schools can serve as an avenue for learning. *“We are also collaborating with schools that we perceive to be more*

advanced in their operations. We visit these schools to observe their practices and then return to implement what we have learned, incorporating methods that we had not previously utilised.”

The view above shows that the practices of poor performing schools can be improved through peer learning involving high performing ones. Another head teacher, HD, noted:

I think there is something basic like this that people can use. Cooperation requires cooperation with different authorities, as I have often said, that is, what we call peer learning, we are doing day by day, as many times as possible. As of today, I would like to give you an example: yesterday we visited XXX [school name removed] and we are going to learn how we can develop ICT Integration in education. This is what it means: when we go to exchange with the leaders of the school, converse with their teachers, ask questions and how they answer us, there is definitely a way for these two schools to create solidarity and cooperation so that no school is left behind.

Finally, role modelling was identified for its potential to inculcate Ubuntu competencies amongst different stakeholders. SA1 noted: *“The conduct of school administrators and student representatives sets an example for all students. It encourages people to have Ubuntu or the values we have mentioned above and makes younger students take an example from their elders.”*

This view shows that Ubuntu leadership creates positive relationship that serves as role model and is empathic to the problems of different stakeholders (Naicker, 2015). HD also noted that *“when the school administration meets with the teachers, they are encouraged to care, they are awakened and there is a flow up so that these [Ubuntu] principles can be seen. This achievement is seen through the behaviour of the students which reflects Ubuntu in general”*.

Finally, the importance of listening in USL was emphasised by HC who noted:

The priority is to listen to people, especially children. In today's world, which is increasingly facing challenges, school must become a place where children can find respite from their many problems. It should be an environment, where they can relax, settle down, and be able to choose their subjects. Our role should be to guide

them in their learning process. We need to assist students in obtaining basic school materials. A child should not lack a pen when they come to school; we should help with that. We should also support the school feeding program to ensure children can study effectively. As Maslow's hierarchy of needs tells us, how can we expect a child to absorb knowledge when their basic needs, like food, are not met?

It is therefore necessary to create a safe space for learners to share their views and challenges as this will help an educator to identify the specific needs of the learners. This view is held by SD1 who noted that someone with Ubuntu would understand what students and teachers need and will work to help them, while SD2 noted that such person would set realistic goals by considering everyone's ability. Actively and effectively listening plays a major role in this regard, and this can be achieved through the CIDUT framework.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

This study explored USL with focus on its dimension of fostering stakeholder collaboration. Adopting a phenomenological qualitative research design, findings gave varying insights into the meaning and practices of USL in Rwanda, and its potentials in improving SL professionalism. Ubuntu is widely appreciated in the Rwandan context with participants using various terms such as humaneness, integrity, love, loyalty, generosity, collaboration and empathy among others to show their understanding of the concept. In their local language, Ubuntu carries concepts such as being *impfura* referring to a person who is righteous, loyal, communicative, collaborative, and loving; *Ubupfura* referring to integrity and *Ubunyangamugayo* connoting forgiveness, and honour. Additionally, participants attributed the success achieved by leaders in high performing schools to stakeholder cooperation, collaboration and participation, which are major USL competencies. These competencies are the values of *Umntu mwiza* (an attitude of moral integrity, social responsibility, and relational harmony) and *Ubumuntu* (an attitude of love and inclusiveness). It is therefore necessary to ensure efficient collaboration between relevant stakeholders in any school leadership endeavour in the Rwandan context.

In line with the first research question which explored the reflection of Ubuntu in the current standards of effective school leadership, school heads showed a better understanding of the leadership standards than other stakeholders. This was because most school leadership trainings focus on school leaders and not on other stakeholders. Additionally, two major themes emerged from the first research question. The first theme which is dynamic leadership standards provided evidence on the need for flexibility of the standards to allow leaders address their individual challenges. Additionally, the second theme showed that Ubuntu principles are embedded in the school leadership standards but there is the need to translate Ubuntu competencies such as empathy into actionable leadership practices to better achieve the standards for effective leadership.

Findings from the second research question which explored the implementation of leadership standards using USL showed that school leadership is faced with contextual challenges such as lack of resources and low linkage to world of works. Successful school leaders are however able to navigate these challenges by harnessing USL competencies such as collaboration and

two-way communication. Additionally, there is need to forge an intersection by explicitly integrating Ubuntu principles into the curriculum. This will allow school leaders to adopt a more humanistic approach, while learners will imbibe the tenets of Ubuntu from an early stage.

Finally, findings from the third research question gave rise to two themes and two sub-themes. In contrast to views that SLPD in Africa should draw from gender nuances, findings showed that this may no longer be the case in Rwanda where gender equality has improved. Additionally, there is need to improve on SLPD efforts which are majorly focused on school leaders by extending them to other stakeholders. In the face of resource constraints and time shortage, successful school leaders have adopted various modalities such as mentoring, modelling and peer learning to improve school leadership and enshrine Ubuntu competencies such as collaboration, open communication and empathy among stakeholders.

In conclusion, this study underlined the importance of integrating USL competencies in different facets of school leadership in Rwanda. Tenets of USL such as stakeholder involvement, peer learning and mentorship are necessary for navigating contextual nuances and other challenges of school leadership in Rwanda such as low performance, marginalisation and high dropout rates. The principles of Ubuntu have indeed emerged as guiding principles for enhanced leadership in Rwandan and African educational contexts (Lopez et al., 2024).

The following recommendations arise from the findings of this study:

1. It is necessary to explicitly integrate Ubuntu principles in the curriculum of teacher training institutes and learners in different levels of learning in Rwanda. This will help to form an intersection between Ubuntu and Western oriented competencies. Local terms, such as *Ubumuntu* and *Umuntu mwiza*, could be used to improve the understanding and appreciation of the concept of Ubuntu in the Rwandan context. This is because the citizens of the country attach great value to their language as evidenced by 15 of the 16 participants that opted to be interviewed in Kinyarwanda in this study.
2. The teacher training institutes curriculum should integrate Ubuntu concepts, practices and principles in different levels of learning in Rwanda (*impfura*, *Ubupfura* and

Ubunyangamugayo). This will help to inculcate the values of Ubuntu in Rwandans and also to form an intersection between Ubuntu and Western oriented competencies.

3. Ubuntu should be made the hallmark of every SLPD efforts. Additionally, policies should reflect the importance of involving all stakeholders in SLPD with virtual workshops being considered as alternative to physical workshops because of time, reach and resource constraints. More so, SLPD policies should emphasise the importance of collaboration, empathy, role modelling, mentorship, and peer learning in improving leadership efficiency.
4. Schools should be supported with adequate and relevant resources to run school-based professional development and training programs for all their stakeholders. This will increase the level of participation and engagement in improving school effectiveness in their context.
5. Stakeholder participation, engagement and involvement through parents and students' bodies should continue to be emphasised in school leadership in Rwanda. There is need for enhanced participation, engagement and involvement of world of work within the communities so that they could help learners translate their knowledge to practice as reflected in CBC.
6. Education policy should emphasise empathy, gender equality, and equity (values of *Umuntu mwiza* and *Ubumuntu*) amongst schools in different locations. Additionally, schools should be encouraged to embrace Ubuntu tenets by assisting each other in leadership development through peer learning, since the overall aim of education is to produce holistic learners that will have positive impact on the society.
7. Further research should be carried out to explore and inform the applicability of Ubuntu in linking schools to the world of work. Additionally, the applicability of Ubuntu in areas of child development such as guidance and counselling also needs to be explored.

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