



African Centre  
for School Leadership

Prepared by:  
African Centre for School  
Leadership (ACSL)

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# SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA

## A Continental Mapping Report

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



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





## About ACSL

The African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL) is a collaborative initiative working with governments to establish and strengthen school leadership systems that enhance teaching, learning outcomes, and student well-being. Through strategic partnerships, ACSL promotes leadership at various educational levels across Africa, with a primary focus on schools and school leaders.

ACSL functions as a coalition of regional and in-country partners implementing externally-funded initiatives and it is coordinated by four key Pan-African organizations: the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), Education Sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA), the Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE), and VVOB – Education for Development. These partners coordinate their efforts and collaborate to implement ACSL's initiatives across 4 focus areas:

1. **Focus Area 1-** Policy Development and Reform: ADEA contributes to the development of policies that promote effective school leadership standards, career progression pathways, gender equity, and leadership assessments. It also produces evidence-based policy briefs and an online course for policymakers.
2. **Focus Area 2-** School Leadership Professional Development: VVOB provides expert guidance on professional development for school leaders, offering blended and online learning approaches, induction programs for new leaders, and professional learning networks. Evidence-based practice briefs and an online course for professional development providers have also been developed.
3. **Focus Area 3-** Research: ESSA generates new evidence on school leadership, supporting the application of this knowledge to inform policy and practice. It helps identify scalable practices and empowers African researchers to contribute to the growing knowledge base.
4. **Focus Area 4-** Communication, Advocacy, and Sector Coordination: ACSL creates platforms that bring together researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to define a shared agenda, identify knowledge gaps, and drive solutions through learning exchanges and collaborative efforts.

Across all the above focus areas, Gender and Equity are mainstreamed: FAWE ensures gender and equity considerations are integrated across ACSL's focus areas, embedding these perspectives into knowledge products and activities.

ACSL's efforts to build supportive school leadership systems that strengthen teaching and improve learning outcomes are recognised by the African Union in its Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2026–2035 (African Union, 2025), particularly under Strategic Area 2 – Objective 6, which highlights the critical role of school leadership in enhancing educational quality and student outcomes.

### Point of Contact

For further information, please contact:

Nuria Moreno, ACSL Programme Manager - [Nuria.Moreno@vvob.org](mailto:Nuria.Moreno@vvob.org)

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### Disclaimers

The views expressed herein reflect the perspective of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of ACSL and its partners.

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## List of abbreviations

<b>ACQF</b>	African Continental Qualifications Framework
<b>ACSL</b>	African Centre for School Leadership
<b>ADEA</b>	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
<b>AMU</b>	Arab Maghreb Union
<b>ASG-QA</b>	African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>AUC</b>	African Union Commission
<b>AUF</b>	Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie
<b>CAF-Africa</b>	Continental Assessment Framework for Africa
<b>CAMFED</b>	Campaign for Female Education
<b>CBE</b>	Competency-Based Education
<b>CEN-SAD</b>	Community of Sahel-Saharan States
<b>CESA</b>	Continental Education Strategy for Africa
<b>CFSCPT</b>	Continental Framework for Standards and Competences for the Teaching Profession
<b>COMESA</b>	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
<b>CSTL</b>	Care and Support for Teaching and Learning
<b>CTQF</b>	Continental Teacher Qualification Framework
<b>EAC</b>	East African Community
<b>ECCAS</b>	Economic Community of Central African States
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>EDC</b>	Education Development Center
<b>EDT</b>	Education Development Trust
<b>ESSA</b>	Education Sub-Saharan Africa
<b>ESTI</b>	Education, Science, Technology and Innovation
<b>FAWE</b>	Forum for African Women Educationalists
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>FHI 360</b>	Family Health International 360
<b>GEM</b>	Global Education Monitoring Report
<b>GESI</b>	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
<b>GSL</b>	Global School Leaders
<b>HEI</b>	Higher Education Institutions
<b>IGAD</b>	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
<b>IICBA</b>	International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa
<b>IIEP</b>	International Institute for Educational Planning
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>IUCEA</b>	Inter-University Council for East Africa
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview
<b>LEARN</b>	Leveraging Education Analysis for Results Network
<b>LGI</b>	Learning Generation Initiative
<b>LIT</b>	Leaders in Teaching
<b>MIET</b>	Media in Education Trust

<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>PD</b>	Professional Development
<b>PEAS</b>	Promoting Equality in African Schools
<b>REC</b>	Regional Economic Community
<b>SADC</b>	Southern African Development Community
<b>SADCQF</b>	SADC Qualifications Framework
<b>SL</b>	School Leadership
<b>T-TEL</b>	Transforming Teaching, Education and Learning
<b>TaRL</b>	Teaching at the Right Level
<b>TCCA</b>	Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation
<b>TVET</b>	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<b>VVOB</b>	Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance
<b>WA-ECS</b>	West Africa Education Civil Society Platform

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### Executive summary

This report presents a continental mapping of school leadership in Africa, conducted by the African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL). The study responds to growing recognition that effective school leadership is a critical lever for improving teaching quality, learner outcomes, and inclusive education systems across the continent.

### Purpose and Approach

The mapping provides a structured overview of school leadership across four key areas: (1) policy frameworks, (2) professional development, (3) research, and (4) advocacy and sector coordination.

A mixed-methods approach was used, combining desk review, surveys, key informant interviews, and stakeholder validation to generate a comprehensive and evidence-informed analysis.

### Key Findings

- 1. Strong policy recognition, limited implementation:** School leadership is increasingly prioritized in continental and regional frameworks. However, policies remain fragmented, weakly operationalized, and often poorly understood at country level.
- 2. School leadership is not yet recognised as a distinct profession:** In many contexts, school leadership is still treated as an extension of teaching rather than a distinct profession. Clear career pathways, certification systems, and formal preparation programmes remain limited.
- 3. Expanding but fragmented professional development landscape:** A wide range of actors support leadership development across Africa. While there is growing emphasis on instructional (pedagogical) leadership and practical, blended learning approaches, initiatives are often fragmented and not systematically linked to policy, career progression, or accountability systems.
- 4. Growing but uneven evidence base:** Research on school leadership has increased significantly over the past decade. However, it is concentrated in a small number of countries and remains largely descriptive, with limited evidence on impact, especially on teaching and learning outcomes.
- 5. Weak coordination and knowledge translation:** The school leadership ecosystem is characterized by multiple actors and initiatives, but limited coordination. Evidence is not consistently translated into policy or practice, reducing its overall impact.

### Key Opportunities for Action

- Professionalize school leadership through clear standards, certification, and career pathways.
- Strengthen policy coherence and implementation across continental, regional, and national levels.
- Institutionalize professional development, linking it to system reforms and accountability structures.
- Invest in research and data systems, particularly in underrepresented regions and priority areas.
- Enhance coordination and knowledge sharing across stakeholders to scale effective practices.

### Conclusion

School leadership is a critical but underdeveloped driver of education quality in Africa. While momentum is growing across policy, practice, and research, stronger alignment, institutionalization, and investment are needed to translate this progress into sustained improvements in teaching, learning, and system performance across the continent.

### Recommendations

To translate the findings of this continental mapping into action, the following priority recommendations are proposed across four key areas:

#### **1. Strengthen policy implementation and coherence.**

While school leadership is increasingly recognised in continental and regional frameworks, greater emphasis is needed on implementation. Countries should prioritise operationalising existing policies, aligning national frameworks with continental standards, and establishing clear career pathways, competency frameworks, and accountability systems for school leaders.

#### **2. Institutionalise and scale professional development.**

School leadership professional development should move beyond fragmented, project-based approaches toward nationally embedded and system-wide programmes. Effective models, such as coaching, mentoring, peer learning, and blended approaches, should be scaled and aligned with policy frameworks and career progression structures, with particular attention to underserved and marginalised contexts.

#### **3. Strengthen research, data systems, and evidence use.**

There is a need to invest in more rigorous, policy-relevant, and contextually grounded research on school leadership. Priorities include cross-country comparative studies, longitudinal and impact evaluations, and research on cost-effectiveness. Strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems, improving access to data, and enhancing the use of evidence in decision-making are critical to informing policy and practice.

#### **4. Enhance coordination, knowledge sharing, and partnerships.**

Stronger coordination across continental, regional, and national actors is needed to reduce fragmentation and improve alignment. Platforms such as ACSL should be leveraged to facilitate collaboration, peer learning, and knowledge exchange. Mechanisms to translate evidence into policy and practice should be strengthened, alongside efforts to mobilise sustainable financing and long-term partnerships.

#### **5. Advance gender equality and inclusion in school leadership**

Deliberate efforts are required to address persistent gender and equity gaps in school leadership. This includes strengthening gender-responsive policies, removing structural barriers to leadership progression, and ensuring equitable access to professional development and leadership opportunities for women and marginalised groups.

These recommendations are operationalised through the ACSL Continental Roadmap (2026–2030), which provides a coordinated framework for advancing school leadership systems across Africa through collective action.

# 1. Introduction and context to the mapping

## 1.1 Introduction

There is a growing body of international evidence and increasing recognition across Africa that effective school leadership plays a key role in enhancing teaching practices and learning experience (Sliwka et al., 2024). This is because effective school leaders support teaching by, among other things, maintaining open communication with teachers and guiding the application of strategies that enhance student learning outcomes (Estenar et al., 2024). Research further indicates that when leaders engage teachers through shared goals, provide professional support, and empower staff, they contribute to a more positive school climate and support teacher development (Wolfenden et al., 2024).

This evidence aligns with the African Union's Agenda 2063, which articulates the continent's long-term vision of a prosperous, peaceful, and people-driven Africa, supported by well-educated citizens, strong institutions, and transformative leadership. In the education sector, this vision is operationalized through the Continental Education Strategy for Africa, which provides a continental roadmap for transforming education systems across Africa.

The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2026–2035 (African Union, 2025), particularly Strategic Area 2 – Objective 6, recognizes the critical role of school leadership in improving educational quality and student outcomes. The strategy emphasizes that effective school leaders foster inclusive, equitable, and peaceful learning environments, enhance teacher motivation and retention, boost student engagement, and encourage parental involvement. However, it also highlights a major challenge: many school leaders across Africa assume leadership roles without formal training or access to professional development, as these positions are often filled by untrained teachers. Strengthening school leadership is therefore a key lever for improving teaching and learning, enhancing school effectiveness, and ultimately advancing the human capital development envisioned in both Agenda 2063 and CESA.

Pan African initiatives such as the African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL) are part of the solutions to this challenge. The Centre's ambition is to build supportive school leadership systems that strengthen teaching, improve learning outcomes, and promote the well-being of all learners.

[The African Centre for School Leadership \(ACSL\)](#) aspires to function as a large, inclusive coalition that intentionally links and aligns Pan-African, regional, and country-level actors committed to promoting effective school leadership across the continent. ACSL operates as a systems-strengthening platform, aligning existing initiatives, institutions, and communities of practice to reduce fragmentation, promote shared learning, and enable collective impact at scale in partner countries and across the continent.

To deepen the understanding of school leadership and leadership development in Africa, ACSL commissioned a foundational study (Bush, Maringe, et al., 2022), which identified a clear need to strengthen professional development systems for school leaders across the continent, especially in preparing them for the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Awodiji & Naicker, 2025). Lopez et al. (2024) further support the need for leadership training and capacity building in countries such as Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia, where professional competencies are increasingly viewed as central to school improvement efforts.

Bush, Fadare, et al., (2022) explored instructional leadership in six African countries: Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, through 55 interviews and a literature review, emphasising the need for ministries of education to define principals' roles with a clear focus on improving teaching and learning. They recommend that principals engage in targeted instructional strategies like classroom observations with constructive feedback. Their review of 36 studies reveals growing recognition of instructional leadership across Africa.

The study on school leadership in Africa, commissioned by Education International Africa and carried out by Chanda (2025), also confirmed that instructional leadership, centred on principals' efforts to improve teaching and learning, is increasingly promoted in Africa (Bush, 2020). The study indicates that 'the closer leaders are to the core business of teaching and learning, the more likely they are to make a difference to students' learning (Robinson et al., 2008). Its success is most evident in decentralised systems, where principals have autonomy in leadership and management, (Bush & Glover, 2014). However, in centralised systems, where governments encourage or prescribe instructional leadership, adoption often falls short, as principals tend to retain traditional managerial approaches (Bush, 2018) (Hallinger & Lee, 2014).

The ACSL's mapping exercise builds on its foundational study (Bush, Maringe, et al., 2022), and related studies, with reference to the work of the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report, including the 2025 Spotlight Report on Basic Education Completion and Foundational Learning in Africa and the PEER profiles on school leadership in African countries.

The GEM Report's spotlight on school leadership in Africa underscores that improving foundational learning requires a system-wide shift from administrative management to instructional leadership, particularly by school principals and local education authorities. Drawing on cross-country evidence, surveys, and policy analysis, the report highlights persistent gaps in leadership standards, preparation, professional development, and support structures, as well as misalignment between expectations placed on school leaders and the resources and authority they are given.

This analysis is also illustrated through GEM report's PEER profiles at the country level, which provides structured, comparable snapshots of how school leadership is defined, governed, and practised at the national level, covering policy frameworks, role definitions, selection and training pathways, and accountability mechanisms. Together, GEM reports' PEER profiles and the continental Spotlight report on school leadership reveal both common challenges and promising practices across countries, offering a practical evidence base for peer learning and reform.

### 1.2 Mapping report structure

The Continental Mapping report on School Leadership in Africa is organised into six main sections. The first section, introduction, and context for the mapping, presents the background and rationale for the exercise, introduces the African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL) approach and defines the scope and purpose of the continental mapping. It also outlines the objectives, methodology, data collection processes, validation phase, and key limitations of the mapping exercise. The second section, mapping findings, provides a detailed analysis of four thematic areas: (1) continental and regional policy frameworks, guidelines and standards, (2) professional development, (3) research and researchers and (4) advocacy and sector coordination in school leadership Continental and regional education networks.

Within each focus area, findings are synthesised to highlight emerging trends, key opportunities and gaps, and cross-cutting insights on gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) across policy, practice, and evidence generation. The third section concludes the report by presenting key recommendations for strengthening school leadership systems across Africa.

The annexes included in this report present the continental roadmap on school leadership co-created during the validation workshop, the search strings used to support the evidence mapping process, and profiles of stakeholders engaged throughout the mapping exercise.

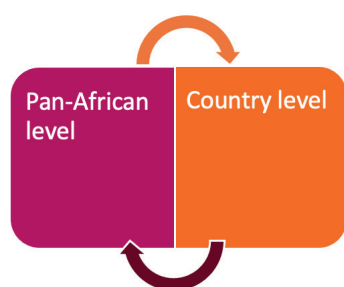
### 1.3 Mapping context

This continental mapping exercise is conducted by the ACSL as a starting point for providing needs-based and evidence-informed technical support to strengthen school leadership across Africa. The mapping exercise is fully aligned with ACSL’s focus areas<sup>1</sup> and overall approach.

#### 1.3.1 ACSL two-pronged approach

The continental mapping aligns with the ACSL two-pronged approach (see Figure 3). At the continental level, the mapping establishes a broad overview of school leadership policies, practices, research, and actors across Africa.

This enables the identification of patterns, trends, and innovations that extend beyond national contexts, while also highlighting challenges that are shared across the continent.



At the country level, the mapping will provide diagnostic insights and tailored roadmaps to support national reform efforts, ensuring that recommendations are grounded in local realities while also aligned with broader regional priorities.

Evidence generated at the country level will also feed into pan-African knowledge products, including policy briefs, practice briefs, and evidence briefs.

Figure 1: ACSL two-pronged approach.

These products will, in turn, inform and guide country-level policy development, programme design, and implementation, reinforcing a continuous feedback loop between continental learning and national action.

#### 1.3.2 ACSL definition of school leadership

To provide a shared conceptual foundation for this mapping, this subsection presents ACSL’s definition of school leadership.

##### 1. School Leadership (the practice)

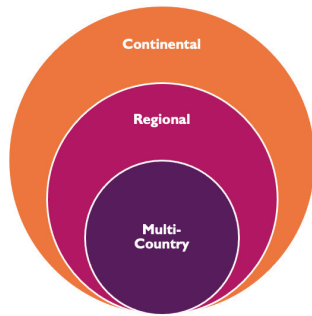
School leadership is a distributed practice involving multiple actors who collectively guide, support, and improve teaching, learning, and the overall functioning of schools. It extends beyond the head teacher to include teacher leaders, school management committees, students, system-level actors, and other stakeholders who influence the education process. Effective school leadership emerges from the interactions and collaboration of these actors rather than the actions of a single individual.

##### 2. School leader (the actor)

A school leader is any individual who exercises influence, responsibility, or guidance to support the effective functioning, improvement, and governance of a school or the education system. This includes formal school-based leaders (head teachers, deputies, teacher leaders), governance actors (school boards or committees), system-level officials (inspectors, district officers, ministry representatives), and other stakeholders (civil society organisations, unions, or coalitions) who contribute to shaping and strengthening school leadership.

<sup>1</sup> ACSL focus areas: 1. Policy Development and Reform 2. Professional Development 3. Research and evidence Generation 4. Communication, Advocacy, and Sector Coordination 5. Gender and Equity

### 1.3.3 ACSL definition of continental mapping of school leadership in Africa



This continental mapping of school leadership in Africa forms part of ACSL’s broader effort to map policies, practices, and research aimed at strengthening school leadership support systems across the continent.

Unlike country-level mapping, which focuses on a single nation, continental mapping looks at Africa-wide initiatives, global initiatives involving African countries, regional or sub-continental initiatives, and multi-country initiatives that are neither regional nor continental in scope.

Figure 2: Continental Mapping Scope

**Continental (Africa-wide) Initiatives:** These initiatives are conceived, coordinated, or endorsed at the African continental level and are specifically designed to strengthen school leadership across Africa as a whole. They are Africa-focused and often linked to African Union institutions, continental networks, or pan-African education platforms.

At this level, we also include initiatives that are designed and led globally, with implementation across multiple world regions, including Africa. While their scope is not Africa-specific, Africa is part of the coverage.

**Regional initiatives:** Involve sub-continental efforts that bring together countries within Regional Economic Communities (RECs), often through shared policy frameworks, collaborative programmes, or professional development networks. The main sub-continental blocs (RECs) in Africa include:

- ECOWAS – Economic Community of West African States: Covers West Africa (e.g., Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire).
- EAC – East African Community: Covers East Africa (e.g., Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo).
- SADC – Southern African Development Community: Covers Southern Africa (e.g., South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Namibia).
- ECCAS – Economic Community of Central African States: Covers Central Africa (e.g., Cameroon, Gabon, Chad, Congo, DRC, Angola).
- COMESA – Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa: Overlaps with EAC and SADC; focuses on economic integration.
- AMU – Arab Maghreb Union: Covers North Africa (e.g., Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania).
- IGAD – Intergovernmental Authority on Development: Covers Horn of Africa (e.g., Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan).
- CEN-SAD – Community of Sahel-Saharan States: Covers Sahel and Saharan regions (e.g., Chad, Mali, Niger, Sudan, Libya).

**Multi-country initiatives:** These refer to activities such as professional development programmes, research and related interventions that operate across two or more African countries without a formal regional or continental mandate. They are typically led by NGOs, donor agencies, universities, or research partnerships.

### 1.4 Rationale for the continental mapping of school leadership

The continental mapping of school leadership provides a comprehensive perspective that extends beyond the scope of individual countries. By examining patterns, trends, and innovations across multiple contexts, it captures shared challenges and contextual differences in school leadership policy, practice and research that may be invisible at the national level. This approach facilitates regional collaboration and learning by identifying networks, communities of practice, and pan-African actors who play a pivotal role in shaping school leadership. It also supports evidence-based policy and strategy formulation at both national and regional levels, enabling the design of scalable interventions that draw on successful practices across contexts.

Additionally, continental mapping helps address gaps where country-level research is limited, promoting cross-country learning, the transfer of effective professional development models, and a more harmonised understanding of school leadership systems in Africa. Ultimately, this approach strengthens the evidence base, informs advocacy efforts, and contributes to more coordinated, culturally responsive, and impactful school leadership reforms across the continent.

Despite numerous initiatives to strengthen effective school leadership in African countries, there may be limited knowledge of and access to existing continental, regional and multi-country programmes. This mapping is needed to identify gaps, avoid duplication, and inform policy and capacity-building strategies. The rationale for continental mapping is further reinforced by the 2025 ADEA Triennale recommendations.

ADEA Triennale 2025 highlighted the strengthening of school leadership as a driver of quality, inclusive, and equitable education, with specific priorities including:

- Strengthening Afrocentric educational leadership through continental standards of effective school leadership.
- Institutionalizing school leadership professional development as a cost-effective investment and key driver for quality and inclusive education.
- Empowering school leaders and holding them accountable for improved learning outcomes, wellbeing, and reduced equity gaps.
- Removing gender and other equity barriers for teachers and school leaders through transparent career ladder frameworks in national education systems.

### 1.5 Goal and objectives of the mapping exercise

The primary goal of the mapping initiative is to develop a clear, shared understanding of school leadership systems, frameworks, and innovations across Africa. In the research areas, the mapping specifically focuses on identifying key themes, trends, gaps, and methodologies, as well as on understanding how local contexts and evidence shape leadership practices in African schools (Bush & Glover, 2003). The specific objectives for each focus area are shown in 3 below.

<p><b>Focus Area 1: Mapping of School Leadership Policies</b> To systematically identify continental policy frameworks, guidelines, and standards , related to school leadership in Africa to establish a comprehensive understanding of the policy environment.</p>
<p><b>Focus Area 2: Mapping of School Leadership professional development</b> To map and analyse school leadership professional development (PD) practices including school leadership PD providers at continental, regional and multi-country levels.</p>
<p><b>Focus Area 3: Mapping of Research and Researchers on School Leadership</b> To identify and assess research, researchers, and research institutions focused on school leadership in Africa.</p>
<p><b>Focus area 4: Mapping of stakeholders in school leadership</b> To identify and understand a diverse range of stakeholders involved in advocacy, education sector coordination and communication in support of school leadership.</p>

Figure 3: Specific objectives of mapping per focus areas.

The mapping exercise will help to:

- Identify and classify school leadership policy frameworks, guidelines, standards, and professional development initiatives across the continent.
- Map and analyse key actors and stakeholders in school leadership, highlighting opportunities for collaboration and advocacy.
- Examine patterns, trends, and innovative research and practices in school leadership across diverse contexts.
- Identify gaps, emerging needs, and opportunities to strengthen school leadership in Africa.
- Generate evidence-based recommendations to inform policy, strategy, advocacy, and scalable professional development initiatives.

## 2. Mapping methodology

This section outlines the methodological approach used to map school leadership in Africa, including policies and frameworks, professional development initiatives, research, and researchers, as well as key actors, networks, and initiatives supporting coordination and advocacy.

### 2.1 Study methodology

The study adopted a phased, participatory mixed-methods design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The methodology combined systematic mapping of research evidence, desk-based document review, and primary data collection, including key informant interviews (KIIs) and an online survey targeting relevant stakeholders. These methods were complemented by stakeholder consultation and validation, conducted through a structured validation workshop to enhance the credibility, relevance, and contextual accuracy of the findings.

Overall, this multi-stage approach enabled triangulation of data sources and methods, strengthening the robustness and reliability of the analysis.

Table 1 below illustrates the phased approach and the scope of engagement achieved at each stage of the study.

Table 1: ACSL mapping approach and the scope of engagement

Phase	Data collection methods	Scope of engagement
Phase 1: Desk review and systematic mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Desk-based document review of policy frameworks, programmes, and grey literature</li> <li>Systematic mapping of research evidence</li> </ul>	Systematic mapping analysed 1,759 publications that met the inclusion criteria (out of 8,041 identified records)
Phase 2: Primary data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key informant interviews (KIIs) with school leadership experts</li> <li>Online survey targeting continental and regional stakeholders</li> </ul> <p>Note: Additional insights were gathered, both formally and informally, at the ADEA Triennale 2025.</p>	Systematic mapping analysed 1,759 publications that met the inclusion criteria (out of 8,041 identified records)
Phase 3: Validation and stakeholder consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multi-stakeholder validation workshop to review and refine findings</li> </ul>	Engaged 97 stakeholders from 18 countries (16 African and 2 non-African), including policymakers, researchers, and practitioners

**2.2.1 Phase 1: Desk review**

The first phase involved a desk review of the literature on school leadership in Africa, drawing on academic and grey sources, policy documents, reports, website information, and programme evaluations. In addition, concerning the review of school leadership research, peer-reviewed publications were prioritised to establish conceptual frameworks, clarify definitions, and identify research gaps.

For mapping of policy, frameworks and PD initiatives, a snowballing technique was used to expand the pool of relevant sources. The review examined key thematic areas, including regional and continental policy frameworks, guidelines and standards, instructional leadership, leadership styles, professional development, and gender equity.

For the mapping of research and researchers, a detailed systematic mapping was utilised, as illustrated below:

**a) Database selection for the mapping exercise**

The mapping exercise utilised school leadership publications drawn from the African Education Research Database (AERD) and EBSCOHOST databases. The [AERD](#), developed by the Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre at the University of Cambridge in partnership with ESSA, is a collection of over 9,000 education research outputs produced by researchers from 46 sub-Saharan African countries (excluding South Africa). It provides a valuable repository of African-led education research that is often underrepresented in global databases. This was then complemented by EBSCOHOST to expand the scope of the search to yield school leadership publications that were subjected to screening and later analysed.

**b) Search protocol for literature review.**

To ensure a comprehensive literature search, we began by identifying relevant keywords, synonyms, and related concepts related to school leadership. These search terms were derived from a review of five major systematic evidence reviews in the field, namely, the works by [Bush et al. \(2022\)](#), Kenneth Leithwood; Jingping Sun (2012); Leithwood (2021), Lumban Gaol (2023) and Walker et al., (2012). The consolidated list of search terms is presented in annex 3.

**c) Inclusivity Criteria**

For this mapping exercise, the scope was limited to publications produced between 2010 and 2025. The search results included studies conducted by African researchers that met predefined inclusion criteria and demonstrated methodological and empirical rigour.

Figure 4 below illustrates the inclusivity criteria applied to determine which school leadership research outputs were eligible for analysis within the African context.

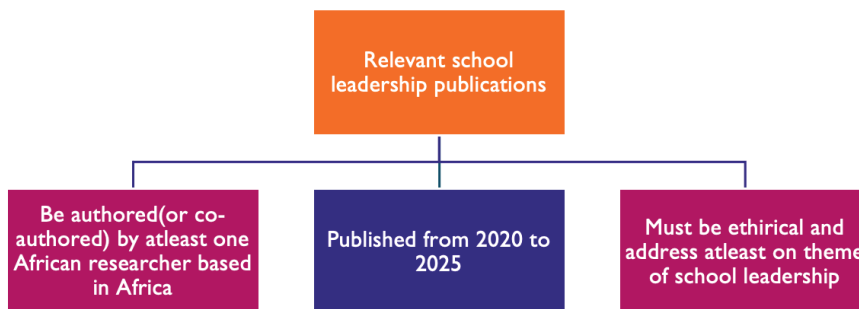


Figure 4: Inclusion criteria of School Leadership Research Outputs in Africa

Next to identifying relevant school leadership research outputs, we collected metadata on each of the outputs for an ecosystem analysis.

### d) Data Extraction and Synthesis

This involved a structured review of each selected publication to capture key metadata. The information extracted included the year of publication, authorship, sex of the author, institutional affiliation, focus area, research methodology, DOI/URL, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) considerations, collaboration patterns, and publication type, among others. This approach ensured that each piece of literature was consistently categorised, enabling meaningful comparisons across multiple dimensions.

Following data extraction, a thematic synthesis approach was used to analyse the publications' content. This enabled the identification of key trends, research gaps, and areas of convergence or divergence in school leadership literature.

### 2.2.2 Phase 2: Primary Data Collection

Building on the desk review, which provides a structured overview of documented policies, practices, and research landscape, the primary data-collection phase explores the lived experiences, perceptions, and priorities of key stakeholders. This approach ensures that the mapping captures not only formal evidence but also the realities of implementation and practice. A sequential mixed-methods design was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, enabling a comprehensive and participatory understanding of the school leadership ecosystem through the following methods:

- **Online surveys:** Distributed to pre-selected school leadership experts (researchers, policymakers, and professional development providers), these surveys collected both quantitative and qualitative data on school leadership across Africa.
- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected pan-African stakeholders, including policymakers, professional development providers, African researchers, and other education actors, to explore survey findings in greater depth, capture contextual nuances, and complement the desk review findings. This method also helped clarify responses and probe emerging issues.
- **Insights gathering during the ADEA Triennale 2025:** Additional insights were gathered, both formally and informally, at the ADEA Triennale 2025. Two sessions focused on school leadership: one brought together providers of school leadership professional development from Ghana, Kenya, Zambia, and Côte d'Ivoire, while a plenary session convened policymakers, including an AU representative and representatives from the Ministries of Education of Uganda, Ghana, and Morocco.

Data collection tools were customised for different stakeholder groups across the continent to ensure relevance and depth.

- Instruments for regional and continental policymakers focused on policy frameworks, strategies, coordination mechanisms, leadership standards, resource mobilisation, gender and inclusion strategies, and the use of evidence to inform regional and national decision-making.
- The tools for professional development providers were designed to capture information on available continental, regional, or multi-country initiatives and programmes that support the professional development of school leaders.
- Instruments for researchers, adapted from Diallo et al. (2024), were used to investigate research priorities, networks, dissemination practices, funding, institutional support, and policy linkages.

Together, these tools offer a holistic understanding of the school leadership ecosystem in Africa, revealing connections among policy, practice, and research, as well as existing gaps and opportunities to strengthen leadership systems.

### 2.2.3 Phase 3: Validation and roadmap development

The findings from the desk review and primary data collection were consolidated into a draft mapping report, which served as the basis for a validation workshop with key stakeholders. This validation process built on the evidence and expert consensus generated through the ACSL foundation phase study, ensuring that the findings were accurate, relevant, and appropriately contextualised across diverse African education systems.

The validation workshop also provided a platform to develop a roadmap for ACSL's continental support to strengthen school leadership across Africa. This process generated a continental research agenda on school leadership, reflecting shared priorities and evidence gaps identified across the mapping exercise. The resulting roadmap was grounded in the evidence generated through the iterative mapping process and aligned with the school leadership outcomes of the ADEA Triennale 2025.

The roadmap will guide future ACSL activities, including the development or revision of policy frameworks, guidelines, and standards on school leadership, as well as the design and delivery of continental exchange and learning programmes for policymakers, school leadership professional development providers, and African researchers.

### 2.2 Study Limitations

This continental mapping provides a broad overview of school leadership development efforts across Africa, including Africa-wide, regional or sub-regional, and multi-country initiatives, based on data collected in 2025. However, the findings should be interpreted within the context of certain methodological limitations, particularly in relation to the systematic mapping of research outputs.

The systematic mapping of school leadership research relied on selected international and African-focused databases, notably the African Education Research Database (AERD) and EBSCOHOST. While these sources offer valuable coverage of African-led scholarship, they do not comprehensively capture all research conducted across the continent. Consequently, some relevant outputs, especially grey literature, institutional reports, practitioner research, and unpublished theses, may be underrepresented or excluded.

Access constraints, including subscription-based databases and uneven digital availability across countries and institutions, further limited the scope of materials reviewed. In addition, variations in the completeness and quality of metadata across databases meant that researcher profiles, institutional affiliations, funding information, and collaboration details were sometimes incomplete or outdated, potentially affecting the accuracy of author, institutional, and network mapping.

Despite efforts to apply a broad, systematic search protocol informed by major reviews in the field, the diversity of languages, terminologies, and conceptual frameworks used to describe school leadership across African contexts posed challenges to comprehensive retrieval. The search was conducted primarily in English and was not fully multilingual, which may have limited the identification of relevant research and documentation from Francophone, Lusophone, and Swahili contexts. In addition, the review prioritised peer-reviewed publications, which may have resulted in the underrepresentation of grey literature, unpublished studies, and locally grounded, policy-relevant evidence. To strengthen coverage, linguistic inclusivity, and contextual representation, future mapping exercises on the continent are encouraged to systematically incorporate national and local repositories, institutional archives, and country-based databases.

In addition, although the ACSL team made extensive efforts to gather comprehensive information on continental policy frameworks and professional development initiatives, the diversity of education systems across Africa and the continuous nature of policy reform mean that some recent developments, informal practices, or locally embedded initiatives may not have been fully reflected.

Finally, time and resource constraints are inherent in conducting continent-wide mapping, limiting opportunities for extensive follow-up, verification, and inclusion of all emerging or recently published research outputs. While triangulation with primary data collection and stakeholder validation helped to mitigate some of these limitations, the mapping should be interpreted as a structured and indicative overview rather than an exhaustive account of school leadership research, policy, and practice across Africa.

### 3. Mapping findings

This section highlights continental-level efforts to strengthen school leadership in Africa. The findings are organised according to the ACSL’s key focus areas, following the structure indicated in the figure below:



Figure 5: Mapping findings structure

Collectively, these elements reflect a shared commitment to promoting effective, contextually relevant school leadership across Africa.

#### 3.1 Continental and regional policy frameworks, strategies, and guidelines

This section presents an overview of continental and regional policy frameworks, strategies, and guidelines shaping school leadership in Africa. It highlights key instruments and actors that define priorities, standards, and approaches across the continent.

##### 3.1.1 Overview of identified continental and regional policy frameworks, strategies, and guidelines.

The mapping findings reveal that school leadership in Africa is guided by a multi-layered continental and regional policy landscape, rather than a single, standalone framework. African Union-led strategies and frameworks establish common priorities, standards, and approaches related to competencies, qualifications, professional development, and quality assurance, positioning school leadership as a key lever for improving teaching, learning, equity, and governance.

Table 3 provides an overview of the key education policy frameworks, strategies, and guidelines identified at the continental and regional levels. The table groups these policies and frameworks not only by their level of coverage and scope, continental or regional, but also by the lead institutions responsible for developing and guiding these strategies, policy frameworks, and guidelines.

Table 2: Continental and regional policy frameworks, strategies, and guidelines

Policy frameworks	Responsible body	Description of the framework
Continental policy frameworks, strategies, and guidelines		
Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2026-2035)	African Union	CESA 2026-2035 is the African Union’s overarching framework guiding Member States to transform education systems to support inclusive, equitable, and quality education aligned with Africa’s development agenda. Objective #6 explicitly indicates the commitment to: “Invest in school leadership including the share of female leaders.” AU acknowledged that guidance on school leadership is limited today for Africa.
Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2026-2035)	African Union	The African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) provides a continental system to compare and recognize qualifications across Africa. It offers a structure to harmonize school leadership qualifications through its guidelines on learning outcomes, recognition of prior learning, and quality assurance, serving as a foundation for professionalizing school leadership across education systems.
Continental Framework for Standards and Competences for the Teaching Profession (CFSCPT) 2019	African Union	Establishes a common reference baseline across AU member states for professional knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, conduct of teachers and school leaders. It supports career paths, linked to credentials, continuous professional development, licensing/ registration of teachers & leaders. The CFSCPT institutionalizes school leadership as a professional specialization within the teaching career path, governed by competence-based standards, CPD, and licensing requirements. It positions school leaders as instructional, administrative, and community leaders, key to improving education quality and accountability across Africa.
Licensing Programme for School Leaders in Africa (not yet started)	AFTRA, in collaboration with the AU Education Division, UNESCO IICBA and Education	Approved by the executive board of AFTRA during its meeting in Lusaka, Zambia on September 12, 2023, the programme will be based on the African Union Continental Framework of Standards and Competences, and Teacher Qualification Framework as pertains to school leadership. This licensing will create a pool of school leaders (head teachers and Principals) who will be recognized across national boundaries.

Policy frameworks	Responsible body	Description of the framework
	International Africa Region	
Continental Teacher Qualification Framework ( <a href="#">CTQF</a> )	African Union	A qualification framework for teacher education in Africa that rests on two pillars: (i) the UNESCO ISCED 2011 classification for education levels, and (ii) the Continental Framework of Standards and Competences for the Teaching Profession (above). It specifies exit competences, levels, benchmarks for initial teacher education, continuous professional development, and professional requirements for registration/licensing.
Strengthening Effective School Leadership in Africa: <a href="#">A framework for policy development</a>	African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL)	A policy-development framework by ACSL with evidence-based insights for developing national school leadership policies in Africa. It covers conceptualisation of school leadership in African contexts, roles & responsibilities, standards & assessment, career stages, certification/licensing, gender/gender barriers, and professional organisation of school leaders.
Fostering gender responsive school leadership in Africa: <a href="#">A policy brief</a>	African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL)	This is a specialised policy brief rather than a full framework. Its focus is on gender-responsive school leadership, promoting women’s representation in school leadership, and removing barriers to gender equity in leadership roles.
Decade of Education 2025-2034	African Union	In the official documentation for the Decade’s launch, the African Union presents: the Decade of Education 2025–2034, and six supporting strategic frameworks (teacher professionalism, TVET, foundational learning, digital learning, research & innovation, financing).
African Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA)	Under the leadership of the African Union Commission (AUC), through	The African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA) does not include a dedicated “school-leadership framework” for primary or secondary schools per se. Rather, it is a framework for higher education institutions (universities, HEIs) and quality assurance agencies.

Policy frameworks	Responsible body	Description of the framework
	the HAQAA Initiative	
The Continental Assessment Framework for Africa (CAF-Africa) (under development)	Under the leadership of the African Union Commission (AUC) — Department of Education, Science, Technology & Innovation (ESTI).	CAF-Africa is designed as a continental learning assessment framework not a governance or leadership standard. It integrates leadership-related enabling factors, such as instructional management, school governance, and accountability, that affect learning outcomes.
Regional policy frameworks, strategies & Guidelines		
SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF)	The SADC Secretariat and Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA)	The SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) is a regional qualifications framework coordinated by the SADC Secretariat and technically managed by the SADC Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA). The framework provides eight qualification levels and guidelines to support comparability, quality assurance, and mutual recognition of qualifications across SADC Member States. The SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) supports the harmonisation of qualifications that may indirectly cover leadership-related professional programmes.
Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) SADC / MIET Africa / UNICEF / UNESCO etc.	Jointly driven by the SADC Secretariat and MIET Africa, with strong support	CSTL is a SADC-driven framework, technically supported by MIET Africa with UNICEF and UNESCO. CSTL promotes a whole-school and multi-sectoral approach to ensuring that learners receive comprehensive care and support so they can fully participate in education. CSTL embeds clear

Policy frameworks	Responsible body	Description of the framework
	from UNICEF, UNESCO, and national ministries	leadership responsibilities related to school climate, child protection, psychosocial support, and coordination with community and multi-sectoral services.
EAC (East African Community) — sectoral policies/ harmonisation	The Sectoral Council on Education and the EAC Secretariat	The East African Community (EAC) supports regional harmonization of education standards through its Sectoral Council on Education and the Education Development Directorate. Leadership responsibilities appear within broader harmonization agendas, including quality assurance, teacher management, school inspection, curriculum standards, and governance reforms. The EAC Secretariat, alongside national ministries, and regional institutions such as IUCEA, leads the development and implementation of these policies across Partner States.

Discussion with stakeholders reveals that of these policy instruments have been developed by the African Union and regional economic communities, in collaboration with partners, reflecting a shared commitment to improving the quality of education across the continent.

### 3.1.2 SWOT Analysis of School Leadership Policy, Frameworks, and Standards in Africa

To synthesise the findings from the mapping of policy frameworks, this section presents a SWOT analysis of school leadership policies, frameworks, and standards in Africa. The analysis highlights key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that shape the development and implementation of school leadership systems across the continent.

Table 3: SWOT Analysis: School Leadership Policy, Frameworks, and Standards in Africa

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong continental recognition: School leadership is increasingly prioritized in frameworks such as CESA and AU-led initiatives, positioning it as a key lever for improving education quality.</li> <li>• Emerging policy architecture: A growing set of continental and regional frameworks (e.g., ACQF, CFSCTP, CTQF) provides a foundation for harmonizing standards, competencies, and qualifications.</li> <li>• Alignment with broader education reforms: Policies increasingly link school leadership to priorities such as equity, quality assurance, and system strengthening.</li> <li>• Pan-African collaboration and coordination: Institutions such as the AU, ADEA, and ACSL are fostering dialogue, knowledge sharing, and policy development across countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fragmented and weakly operationalized frameworks: Policies are dispersed across multiple frameworks and are not consistently translated into actionable national systems.</li> <li>• Limited professionalization of school leadership: Leadership remains embedded within teaching roles, with weak or absent career pathways, certification, and licensing systems.</li> <li>• Low awareness and uptake: Many policymakers and practitioners have limited familiarity with existing continental frameworks.</li> <li>• Policy–practice gap: Existing frameworks do not sufficiently address the practical competencies required for instructional leadership and implementation.</li> <li>• Inconsistent regional approaches: Variations across RECs limit coherence, comparability, and cross-border recognition of leadership standards.</li> </ul>

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professionalization of school leadership: Existing frameworks provide a strong basis to develop structured career pathways, standards, and certification systems.</li> <li>• Policy harmonization and alignment: There is significant potential to align continental, regional, and national policies to improve coherence and scalability.</li> <li>• Integration with ongoing reforms: Leadership can be embedded within key reforms such as competency-based education, digital learning, and foundational learning.</li> <li>• Strengthening gender and inclusion (GESI): Policies increasingly recognize gender equity, creating opportunities to expand women’s participation in leadership.</li> <li>• Leveraging continental platforms (e.g., ACSL): These can support coordination, peer learning, and scaling of effective models.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited implementation capacity: Weak institutional capacity and resource constraints may hinder translation of policy into practice.</li> <li>• Fragmentation of initiatives and actors: Multiple stakeholders operating without strong coordination risk duplication and inefficiency.</li> <li>• Sustainability challenges: Heavy reliance on donor-driven initiatives may affect long-term sustainability.</li> <li>• Uneven development across regions: Disparities in policy development and research capacity may widen inequalities.</li> <li>• Resistance to change: Continued dominance of administrative leadership models may slow the shift toward instructional leadership.</li> </ul>

The SWOT analysis provides a structured synthesis of the key findings from the mapping of school leadership policies, frameworks, and standards in Africa, highlighting the main strengths and weaknesses of the current policy landscape alongside emerging opportunities and potential threats.

Drawing on evidence from continental and regional frameworks, as well as stakeholder insights, the analysis indicates that although recognition of school leadership as a critical driver of education quality is growing, the policy environment remains fragmented, unevenly implemented, and characterised by low awareness and limited uptake among key stakeholders. At the same time, there are clear opportunities to strengthen professionalisation, improve policy coherence, and better align leadership development with ongoing education reforms. Realising these opportunities, however, requires addressing persistent challenges, including limited implementation capacity, coordination gaps, and concerns around sustainability. In this context, the Africa Federation of Teaching Regulatory Authorities (AFTRA) emerges as one of the most significant actors in the field.

**AFTRA’s Role in Advancing School Leadership Professionalisation in Africa**

AFTRA is an intergovernmental entity that brings together ministries of education and national teaching regulatory authorities across African Union member states, working closely with the African Union to advance professional standards for the teaching profession. In this role, AFTRA has played a pivotal part in developing and operationalising the Continental Framework of Standards and Competences for the Teaching Profession, including explicit expectations for school leadership.

Building on this foundation, AFTRA has advanced a continental licensing approach for school leaders that strengthens professional standards, accountability, and cross-border recognition. Through these efforts, AFTRA makes a distinct contribution to enhancing the quality, status, and mobility of school leadership across Africa, while supporting coherent professional pathways for both teachers and school leaders.

### 3.2 School leadership professional development (PD) initiatives in Africa

This section presents an overview of identified PD initiatives implemented by education partners on the continent, including NGOs, that directly or indirectly support school leadership PD in Africa. The initiatives are grouped into three categories: continental, regional, and multi-country. It is important to note that the overview does not fully capture in detail the work undertaken by the identified organisations. It also presents emerging trends in school leadership professional development on the continent.

#### 3.2.1 Identified initiatives supporting school leadership PD in Africa

The overview presents the identified initiatives, including the name of the implementing organisation, a summary of each partner’s work, and how this work links to school leadership. To strengthen the analysis, additional information was gathered from the respective organisations’ websites, as well as through surveys and interviews with key stakeholders, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their contributions to improving school leadership.

Table 4: Identified initiatives supporting school Leadership PD in Africa

Organisation	Summary of Work	Link to School Leadership
Pan-African initiatives		
Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) <a href="https://adeanet.org">https://adeanet.org</a>	A pan-African entity that promotes policy dialogue, partnership, and knowledge sharing to strengthen education systems across the continent	Supports policy frameworks on school leadership and management through the African Centre for School leadership.
African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL) <a href="https://africancentreforschoolleadership.org/">https://africancentreforschoolleadership.org/</a>	ACSL’s mandate is to build supportive school leadership systems that strengthen teaching and improve learning outcomes and well-being for all.	ACSL generates evidence, builds capacity, and fosters collaboration to strengthen school leadership and improve teaching and learning outcomes. In line with this, ACSL provides technical support to the partners selected to implement the Mastercard Foundation’s regional ‘Leaders in Teaching’ programme.
Education International Africa <a href="https://ei-ie.africa/en">https://ei-ie.africa/en</a>	Involved in professional development programmes, promotion of early childhood education, women in education empowerment, the fight against child labour, and responding to the growing commercialization and privatization of education	Also involved in school leadership, professional development, and research
Education in sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA) <a href="https://essa-africa.org/who-we-are">https://essa-africa.org/who-we-are</a>	ESSA works to improve education outcomes by generating and using evidence and data from Africa to inform research, advocacy, and programme design.	ESSA’s work helps ensure that school leadership development initiatives are grounded in local evidence, aligned with policy priorities, and responsive to the needs of education systems and school leaders

FAWE (Forum for African Women Educationalists) <a href="https://fawe.org">https://fawe.org</a>	Advocates for girls' and women's education through gender-responsive approaches.	Promotes gender-inclusive school leadership.
Global School Leaders (GSL) <a href="https://www.globalschoolleaders.org">https://www.globalschoolleaders.org</a>	GSL generates and shares evidence and knowledge to inform policies and professional development for school leaders in the Global South including Africa	Supports preparation and professional development of school leaders globally, including Africa.
IIEP-UNESCO (Africa Bureau) <a href="https://www.iiep.unesco.org">https://www.iiep.unesco.org</a>	Builds institutional capacity for education planning and management in Africa	Provides leadership and management training for education officials.
UNESCO GEM Report <a href="https://www.unesco.org/gem-report">https://www.unesco.org/gem-report</a>	Global monitoring of education progress toward SDG 4.	Provides data and analysis relevant to school leadership professional development, policy and accountability.
UNESCO-International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA) <a href="https://iicba.unesco.org">https://iicba.unesco.org</a>	Strengthens teacher and school leadership professional development and build capacity in education institutions, including Ministries of Education capacity across Africa.	Runs leadership and teacher professional development initiatives to improve educational outcomes in Africa in collaboration with a range of partners.
<b>Regional stakeholders &amp; initiatives</b>		
Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED) <a href="https://www.aku.edu/iedea">https://www.aku.edu/iedea</a>	AKU-IED works to improve the quality of education in East Africa by offering graduate degrees in education as full-time and part-time; tailored professional development courses; educational interventions and influence educational policies by working with communities and other stakeholders.	AKU-IED through its project office implements various donor funded development projects in marginalized communities within Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. The projects aim to enhance school improvement through initiatives in educational leadership, teacher development, gender and special needs education, digital literacy, and the competence-based curriculum
IEPA (University of Cape Coast) <a href="https://iepa.ucc.edu.gh">https://iepa.ucc.edu.gh</a>	Research and professional development institute advancing educational leadership and policy in Ghana and West Africa.	Offers school leadership training and research in West Africa.

Multi-country stakeholders		
<p>Africa Education Watch <a href="https://africaeducationwatch.org/">https://africaeducationwatch.org/</a></p>	<p>Regional civil society platform for education accountability. It works with governments, private sector and civil society to achieve an equitable and accountable education system that assures quality and equal opportunity for all.</p>	<p>Analyse education policy management &amp; reform by drawing on cross-cultural, trans-national and international comparative perspectives in West Africa.</p>
<p>African Centre for Economic Transformation (ACET) <a href="https://acetforafrica.org">https://acetforafrica.org</a></p>	<p>Focus on economic and skills transformation in Africa.</p>	<p>Through its Youth Employment and Skills (YES) projects, ACET helps African countries create an enabling environment for developing youth skills to meet current and future job demands.</p>
<p>Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) <a href="https://www.auf.org/">https://www.auf.org/</a></p>	<p>APPRENDRE, launched in 2018, is a programme supporting teacher professionalization and resource development, providing expertise and a networking platform for education stakeholders across 24 African countries, Haiti, and Lebanon</p>	<p>The program offers assistance to supervisors by offering technical support to Ministries of Education in the 26 eligible countries.</p>
<p>British Council <a href="https://www.britishcouncil.org/">https://www.britishcouncil.org/</a></p>	<p>British council work in education builds stronger connections and collaboration between the UK and other countries, to learn from each other and work together to tackle global challenges.</p>	<p>School leadership has been one of the British Council's priorities in some sub-Saharan African countries such as Rwanda, alongside other key thematic areas</p>
<p>Cambridge Education <a href="https://www.cambridgeeducation.com">https://www.cambridgeeducation.com</a></p>	<p>Provides Technical Assistance on education reform, teacher development, and school improvement.</p>	<p>The Shule Bora programme in Tanzania is an example where Cambridge Education serves as the technical assistance delivery partner, with school leadership support being one of the key outputs of the programme.</p>
<p>CAMFED <a href="https://camfed.org/">https://camfed.org/</a></p>	<p>CAMFED is a pan-African movement addressing poverty and inequality by promoting girls' education and women's leadership, focusing on empowering vulnerable girls and young women in rural Africa</p>	<p>CAMFED's holistic programs support girls to go to school, learn, thrive, and become leaders and change makers in their communities.</p>

<p>CODE (Canadian Organization for Development through Education) <a href="https://www.code.ngo">https://www.code.ngo</a></p>	<p>CODE's mission is to enable students to learn by increasing their access to qualified educators and locally relevant, high quality learning materials.</p>	<p>CODE supports schools in Africa by providing culturally relevant books and offering professional development training to teachers to improve literacy outcomes.</p>
<p>EdTech Hub <a href="https://edtechhub.org/">https://edtechhub.org/</a></p>	<p>Provides governments and partners with practical, timely evidence and technical expertise that supports long-term systems change.</p>	<p>EdTech Hub goal is to empower people by giving them the evidence they need to make decisions about technology in education.</p>
<p>Education Development Centre (EDC) <a href="https://edc.org/">https://edc.org/</a></p>	<p>EDC works with partners worldwide including Africa to advance every person's journey to learn, work, and be well. Through the LEAN focus area, EDC invests in creating learning environments that inspire exploration, curiosity, and innovation. Among other activities, EDC organizes, online courses, and professional development of teachers and school leaders</p>	<p>EDC launched the Leading Leaders in Teaching (LiT) initiative in Liberia, a partnership between EDC, the Mastercard Foundation, and the Ministry of Education, with additional support from the ACSL.</p>
<p>Education Development Trust (EDT) <a href="https://www.edt.org/">https://www.edt.org/</a></p>	<p>EDT aims to improve and strengthen education systems at scale, supporting governments, ministries, and school networks to improve learning for all.</p>	<p>EDT provides school development and system-wide reform to enhance teaching, leadership and learner outcomes</p>
<p>Education.org <a href="https://www.education.org">https://www.education.org</a></p>	<p>Aims to improve the learning of every child and young person by helping leaders access and use the best evidence to guide their national policies and plans.</p>	<p>The organization helps government leaders remove deep-rooted barriers so every child can learn.</p>
<p>Educate! <a href="https://www.experienceeducate.org/purpose-and-vision">https://www.experienceeducate.org/purpose-and-vision</a></p>	<p>Educate!'s mission is to develop young leaders and entrepreneurs in Africa</p>	<p>Educate! partners with schools, teachers, and governments to integrate an employment-focused school subject into national education systems — driving impact for generations of youth at scale.</p>

<p>FHI 360 <a href="https://www.fhi360.org/">https://www.fhi360.org/</a></p>	<p>FHI 360 mobilizes research, resources and relationships so that people everywhere can access the opportunities they need to lead full, healthy lives.</p>	<p>FHI 360 works with community leaders and organizations to strengthen local resilience and well-being</p>
<p>Learning Generation Initiative (Education Commission) <a href="https://educationcommission.org">https://educationcommission.org</a></p>	<p>Empower the education workforce to collaborate both within and beyond the education system to achieve learning for all.</p>	<p>LGI also focuses on strengthening school and system leadership.</p>
<p>LINK Education <a href="https://linkeducation.org.uk">https://linkeducation.org.uk</a></p>	<p>Uses evidence to strengthen education systems, improve teaching and school leadership, engage communities, and challenge inequity.</p>	<p>Link works across every level of the education system to support improvements that are high quality, scalable, and meet the needs of all</p>
<p>New Globe <a href="https://newglobe.education">https://newglobe.education</a></p>	<p>New Globe works with governments on their education programs to increase the capacity and quality of professional development for teachers and school leaders.</p>	<p>New Globe offers tech-enabled, data-driven training, coaching and professional development services to teachers and school leaders</p>
<p>PEAS (Promoting Equality in African Schools) <a href="https://www.peas.org.uk">https://www.peas.org.uk</a></p>	<p>Builds and runs secondary schools in hard-to-reach communities in Uganda, Zambia and work with governments to improve the wider education system. PEAS also started in Ghana in 2023 working with local partners to strengthen government schools through a sustainable school improvement model.</p>	<p>PEAS provides training and support to teachers and school leaders to ensure they are empowered to deliver great education in their schools.</p>
<p>Teach For All <a href="https://teachforall.org">https://teachforall.org</a></p>	<p>Developing collective leadership to ensure all children can fulfil their potential</p>	<p>Develop a critical mass of leaders working collectively to ensure all children have the education, support, and opportunity they need to shape a better future.</p>

Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) Africa <a href="https://teachingattherightlevel.org/">https://teachingattherightlevel.org/</a>	Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) Africa provides support across several key areas. This includes creating awareness and building understanding of TaRL approaches, promoting context-specific practices and processes that respond to local learning needs, and developing human, financial, and material resources to ensure effective implementation.	Additionally, TaRL Africa offers strategic planning and management support to help partners integrate these approaches sustainably and efficiently
T-TEL (Transforming Teaching, Education & Learning) <a href="https://www.t-tel.org">https://www.t-tel.org</a>	Supports teacher and leadership professional development in Ghana with potential to extend its work in additional countries in Western Africa	T-TEL is a Mastercard Foundation partner implementing the Leaders in Teaching (LIT) programme in
Ubuntu Education <a href="https://ubuntu.education">https://ubuntu.education</a>	Provides decolonized, accessible tools for schools and educators in Africa to grow and strengthen their communities, allowing education to transform from the inside, out.	Ubuntu Education offers online courses, including school leadership courses. Additionally, through Ubuntu Hub, school leaders and aspiring leaders across Africa have a dedicated space to connect, access expert-led webinars, participate in intimate live sessions, and explore leadership resources that empower them to grow and excel in their leadership journey.
VVOB – education for development <a href="https://www.vvob.org">https://www.vvob.org</a>	VVOB’s ambition is to strengthen quality education through professional development for teachers and school leaders.	VVOB promotes tailored, blended school leadership professional development models, which are implemented in countries including Rwanda and Kenya.

The mapping shows that professional development for school leaders in Africa is supported by a diverse, multi-layered ecosystem of actors operating at the pan-African, regional, and multi-country levels. Pan African organizations mainly provide policy dialogue, evidence generation, capacity building, and strategic coordination, forming the overarching frameworks that guide school leadership development across the continent.

Regional institutions, particularly universities and specialized educational institutes, offer context specific training, research, and professional support, helping align school leadership development to regional policy priorities and education system realities. Multi country organizations, which make up the largest group of identified stakeholders, contribute primarily through programme implementation, technical assistance, pilot initiatives, and school improvement interventions across several countries.

Together, these actors create a complementary ecosystem of support for school leadership development. However, the mapping also highlights opportunities for stronger coordination and alignment, as school leadership initiatives vary widely in focus, depth, and scale. Enhanced collaboration across continental, regional, and country levels would help to improve coherence, sustain reforms, and support the scaling of effective models.

### 3.2.2 SWOT Analysis: School Leadership Professional Development in Africa

The analysis of these initiatives, combined with interviews, and document review, the current landscape of school leadership professional development in Africa can be summarised through the following SWOT analysis.

Table 5: SWOT Analysis: School leadership professional development landscape in Africa.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diverse ecosystem of actors supporting school leadership development across pan-African, regional, and multi-country levels directly or indirectly.</li> <li>• Strong continental policy frameworks guiding education transformation including school leadership development.</li> <li>• Growing body of research and evidence informing school leadership development policies and programmes.</li> <li>• Increasing use of innovative professional development delivery models such as mentoring, coaching, professional learning communities, and blended learning.</li> <li>• Regional institutions, particularly universities and specialised educational institutes, provide context-specific training and research.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fragmentation of initiatives, with programmes varying widely in focus, duration, and scale.</li> <li>• Limited coordination and alignment among professional development initiatives and stakeholders.</li> <li>• Uneven access to professional development, particularly for school leaders in rural and under-resourced contexts.</li> <li>• School leadership development often remains project-based rather than institutionalised within national systems.</li> <li>• Limited availability of clear professional standards, competency frameworks, and career pathways for school leaders in many countries.</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening collaboration and coordination across continental, regional, and national actors.</li> <li>• Scaling promising pilot initiatives and successful school leadership development models.</li> <li>• Expanding digital and blended learning to increase access to school leadership professional development.</li> <li>• Increasing policy recognition of the role of school leadership in improving learning outcomes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heavy reliance on donor-funded programmes, raising sustainability concerns.</li> <li>• Policy-implementation gaps that limit the impact of school leadership reforms.</li> <li>• Competing education priorities that may reduce attention to school leadership development.</li> <li>• Leadership turnover and political changes that disrupt long-term reforms.</li> </ul>

This analysis reveals key trends shaping the future of school leadership PD in Africa:

- **Pedagogical leadership focus:** Leaders are increasingly expected to act as instructional coaches, supporting teacher growth and linking leadership directly to learning outcomes.
- **Integration into broader reforms:** Leadership professional development is embedded within teacher development and school improvement programmes, reflecting recognition of leadership as a lever for systemic change.
- **Blended and practice-oriented models:** Short, modular, and flexible programmes combining face-to-face, online, and coaching approaches are gaining traction, though digital access remains uneven.

- **Systemic and multi-level approaches:** Effective school leadership professional development engages schools, districts, ministries, and regional organizations, with stronger impact when embedded in formal institutional arrangements and linked to career pathways.

To conclude, the SWOT analysis highlights both the diversity and fragmentation of school leadership professional development in Africa, while the emerging trends point to a clear shift toward instructional (pedagogical) leadership, blended learning, and systemic approaches. Together, they show that the field is moving from isolated, donor-driven projects toward more integrated, evidence-based, and scalable models. To sustain this momentum, stronger alignment with policy frameworks, career pathways, and institutional structures will be essential, ensuring that school leadership development is not only innovative but also embedded, equitable, and transformative across the continent.

### 3.3 Research on school leadership in Africa.

This section explores the scope, distribution, and characteristics of the school leadership knowledge base in Africa and assesses its implications for policy, professional development, and future research across the continent. It builds on the ACSL foundational study ([ACSL 2022](#)), which reviewed empirical evidence on school leadership across the continent and confirmed key insights into pedagogical leadership, professionalization, and regional disparities. Drawing on systematic mapping, survey data, and stakeholder consultations, this exercise extends the earlier work by highlighting publication trends, geographical and thematic patterns, evidence gaps, emerging research priorities, and the role of networks and knowledge-sharing mechanisms in strengthening research impact.

This analysis is important because the strength, accessibility, and relevance of the evidence base shape how school leadership is understood, supported, and institutionalized within African education systems. By identifying what is known, where the gaps remain, and what kinds of evidence are most needed, this section provides a stronger foundation for the continental school leadership research agenda and for wider policy dialogue, leadership development, and systems strengthening efforts.

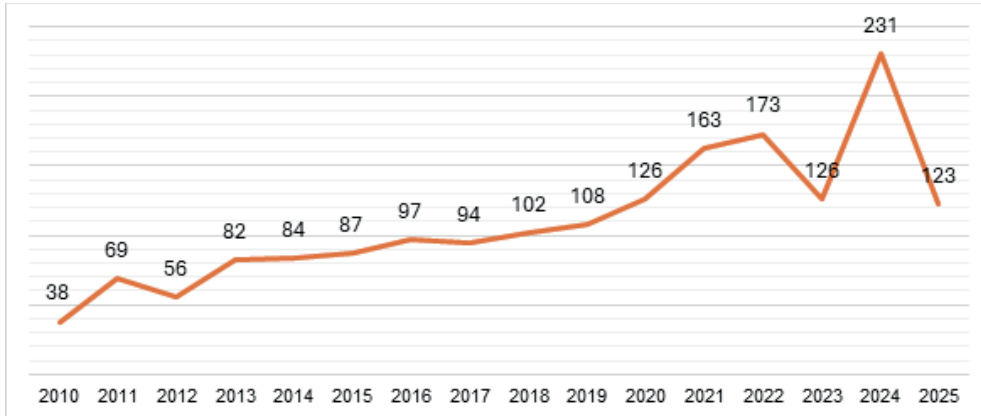
#### 3.3.1 Overview of the research landscape

Over the past decade, the African school leadership knowledge base has steadily expanded, driven by increasing scholarly interest and policy focus on leadership as a key factor for school improvement. This growth likely reflects not only heightened academic attention but also the expansion of education reform efforts, leadership development initiatives, and donor-supported investments in education systems strengthening across the continent. Nonetheless, the evidence remains unevenly spread across different countries and topics, with most research concentrated in a few contexts and notable gaps in practice-focused, inclusive, and context-aware studies. This underscores the importance of adopting a more coordinated continental strategy for producing, sharing, and applying knowledge.

### 3.3.1.1 Knowledge base in the field of school leadership in Africa

The mapping exercise analyzed a total of 1,759 publications that met our inclusion criteria (out of 8041).

Figure 6 below illustrates the annual count of publications on school leadership.



Note: Total research outputs after screening between 2010 and 2025 are 1759.

Figure 6: Pan-African School Leadership Research publications over time.

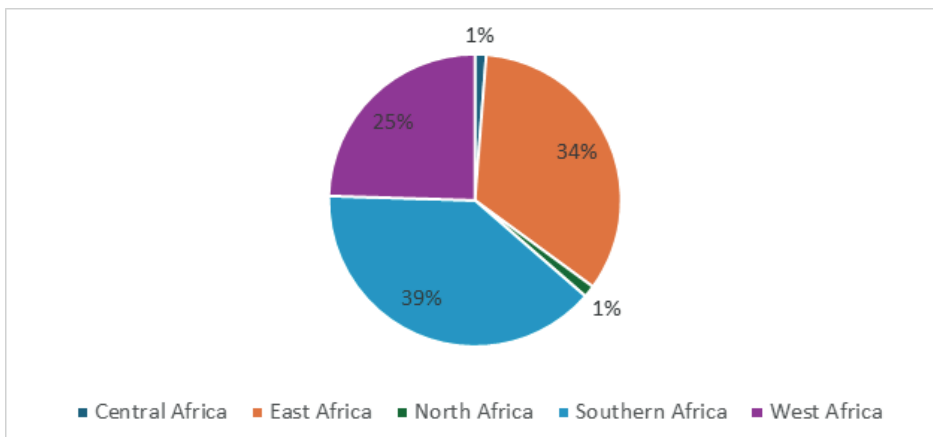
Pan-African school leadership publications have steadily risen from 38 in 2010 to a peak of 231 in 2024, demonstrating sustained growth and heightened scholarly focus on school leadership across the continent.

This upward trend suggests that school leadership is increasingly recognized not only as an administrative function, but also as a strategic lever for improving teaching quality, school effectiveness, learner outcomes, and system reform. At the same time, the increase in publications should be interpreted cautiously, as part of this growth may also reflect improved indexing and greater visibility of leadership-related research in international databases.

### 3.3.1.2 Geographical Distribution of School Leadership Research in Africa

The distribution of publications on the school leadership (SL) landscape in Africa is notably uneven, showing both areas of intense research activity and notable gaps across the continent.

Regional analysis reveals a significant imbalance in the distribution of school leadership publications across Africa (Figure 7). Southern Africa leads with 39% of publications, followed by East Africa (34%) and West Africa (25%). Meanwhile, Central Africa and North Africa remain significantly underrepresented, each contributing only 1% of publications. These variations underline the need for targeted research investments and capacity-building initiatives in underrepresented regions to ensure a more comprehensive African perspective on school leadership.



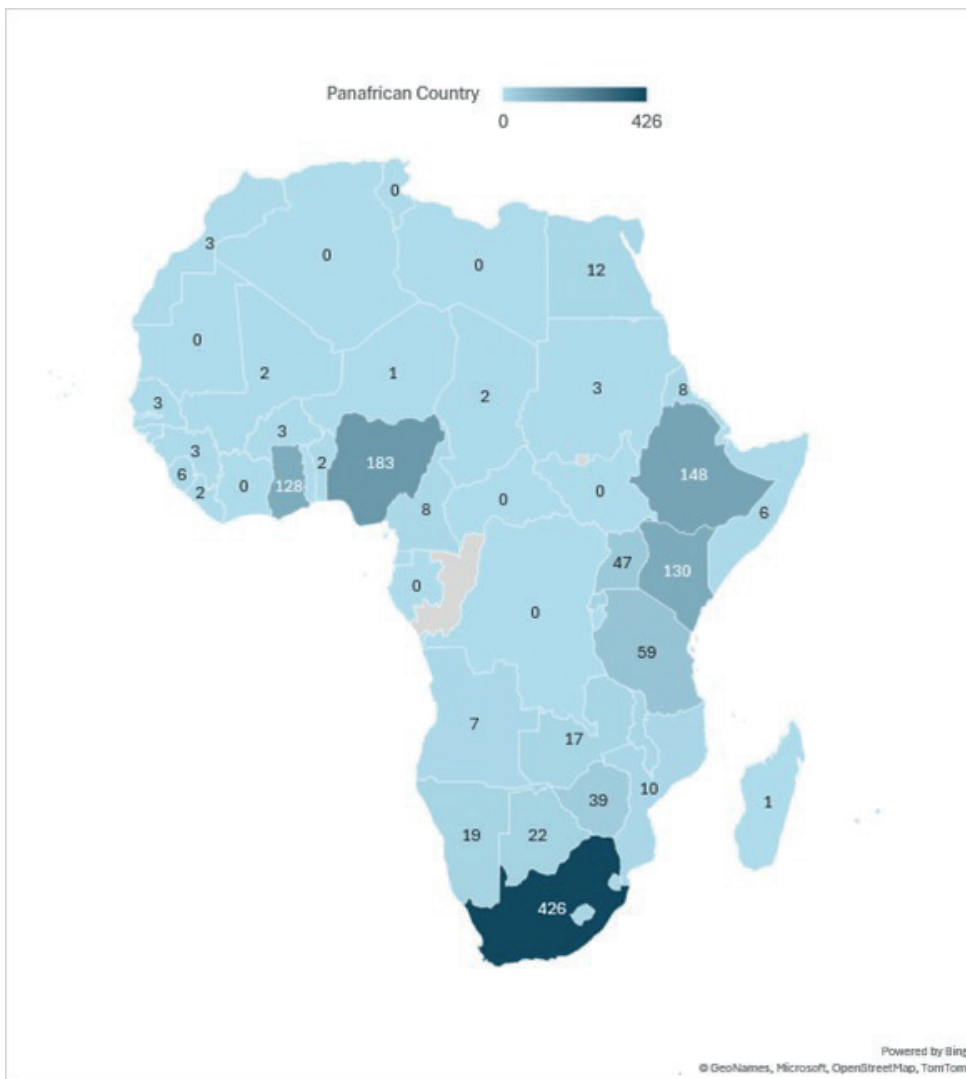
Source: School leadership research outputs from AERD and EBSCO.

Figure 7: Distribution of SL research by region.

Additionally, the national-level analysis of research outputs on school leadership portrays a more detailed view of the continent. Results further show that only a small number of countries account for most of the literature, with South Africa (426 publications) dominating the field, followed by Nigeria (183), Ethiopia (148), Kenya (130), and Ghana (128) (see Figure 8). This confirms the findings of the ACSL foundational studies.

Many countries, particularly in Central and North Africa, and in parts of West Africa, are either minimally represented or entirely absent from the SL research outputs after screening. Several countries have fewer than five publications, while others (e.g., Algeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Morocco, Tunisia, and much of Central Africa) have no SL publications, at least not in our search process, which was conducted mostly in English and using the EBSCO Research database.

Several factors may explain these gaps, including the language of publication and underrepresentation in the databases used for this mapping, which relied primarily on English-language searches through the EBSCO research database. As a result, country-level searches in local repositories, national databases, and grey literature may reveal additional studies not captured in this analysis. Figure 8 below shows a map of Africa illustrating the distribution of SL publications by country, highlighting both research hotspots and underrepresented regions.



Source: School leadership research outputs from AERD and EBSCO.

Figure 8: Geographical distribution of SL research in Africa.

### 3.3.2 Key actors and their role in school leadership research in Africa

School leadership research in Africa is shaped not only by the volume and themes of published work, but also by who produces knowledge, which institutions support it, and whose perspectives remain underrepresented. This subsection, therefore, considers both authorship patterns and the range of organizations contributing to evidence generation across the continent.

#### 3.3.2.1 Gender Distribution of Authors

To illustrate the gender distribution of school leadership researchers, an analysis was conducted of the first authors of publications mapped across a few countries where ACSL is currently active, namely Tanzania, Liberia, Malawi, Sierra Leone, and Uganda. The charts below illustrate the distribution of first authors by gender.

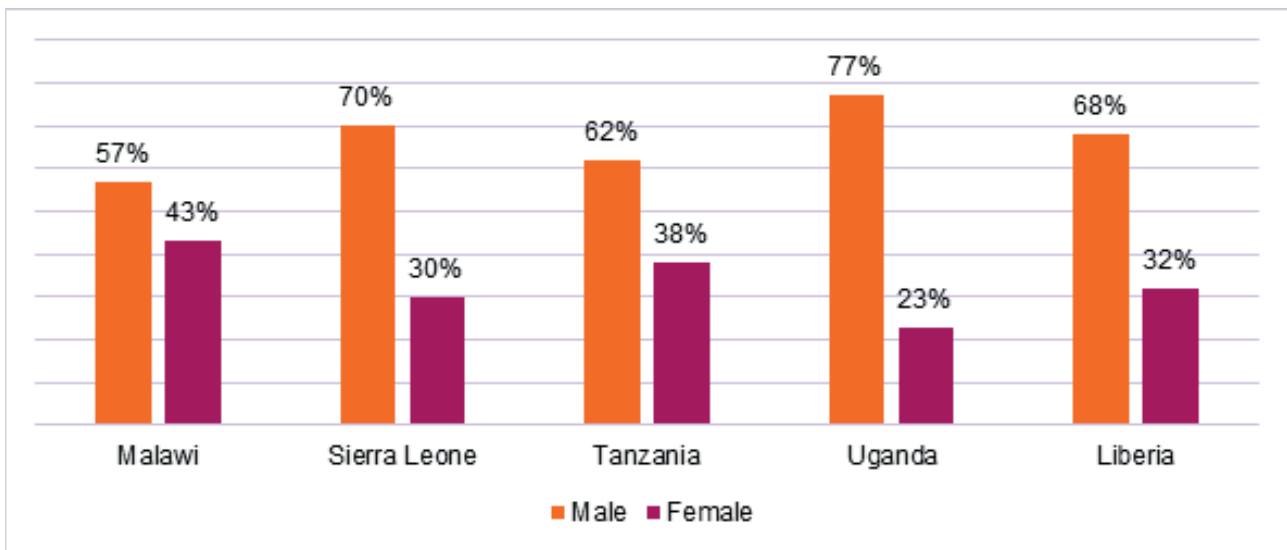


Figure 9: Gender of the first author.

Across all countries analyzed, female authors are significantly underrepresented compared to male authors, highlighting a notable gender imbalance in the production of school leadership research. While this analysis provides only a partial view of authorship patterns, it offers an indicative snapshot of who is contributing to school leadership knowledge production in selected ACSL contexts. The findings point to the need for more deliberate support for women researchers and more inclusive research ecosystems across the continent.

#### 3.3.2.2 Key Contributors of School Leadership Evidence Generation in Africa

To strengthen the mapping of the school leadership evidence base in Africa, a review of selected initiatives was undertaken using publicly available information from organizational websites and knowledge products. The review focused on the extent to which these initiatives contribute to evidence generation, research, documentation, and knowledge creation related to school leadership across the continent.

The exercise uncovered a diverse array of regional, continental, and international organizations contributing to the school leadership evidence base through research studies, analytical reports, monitoring, and evaluation products, learning briefs, case studies, and knowledge syntheses.

As illustrated in Table 4 above, these initiatives generate several types of evidence in the school leadership space, including:

1. Descriptive and program-level evidence: Many organizations, including UNESCO IICBA, AFTRA, FAWE, PEAS, and Ubuntu Education, produce programme documentation and reports describing leadership practices, professional development activities, and policy recommendations.
2. Policy and system-level evidence: Organizations such as the UNESCO GEM Report, ADEA, ANCEFA, Africa Education Watch, and T-TEL generate evidence to inform policy dialogue, leadership standards, and system-level frameworks.
3. Research and evaluation evidence: A smaller group of actors, such as GSL, ACSL, IEPA (UCC), AKU-IED, and VVOB, conduct research or pilot evaluations of leadership interventions, generating emerging evaluations, case studies, and network-level monitoring data.
4. Evidence of innovation and digital leadership: Initiatives such as New Globe, Ubuntu Education, PEAS, and EdTech Hub provide insights into technology-enabled professional development, digital leadership practices, and online learning models.
5. Gender, inclusion, and equity evidence: Organizations, including FAWE and ASNEN, generate evidence on gender-responsive leadership and inclusive education.

Despite these contributions, significant evidence gaps remain. Much of the available research is descriptive or programme-specific, with limited independent or peer-reviewed studies demonstrating measurable impacts on leadership practice, school governance, teaching quality, or learner outcomes. Comparative cross-country research remains rare, and few studies employ rigorous longitudinal or experimental designs. Evidence on scalability, sustainability, and cost-effectiveness is also limited, while fragmented documentation and proprietary data restrict opportunities for shared learning.

Overall, the findings point to a diverse but fragmented evidence ecosystem, in which many actors contribute valuable knowledge, but relatively few generate rigorous, comparable, and accessible evidence that can be used across countries and systems.

### 3.3.3 Thematic Patterns and Research Gaps

The mapping exercise reveals an uneven distribution of school leadership research, with most studies concentrated on a few well-established themes, while several important areas remain under-researched.

#### 3.3.3.1 Commonly explored themes in SL research

Below are some commonly explored themes, highlighting existing evidence and areas where further research is needed to strengthen the evidence base.

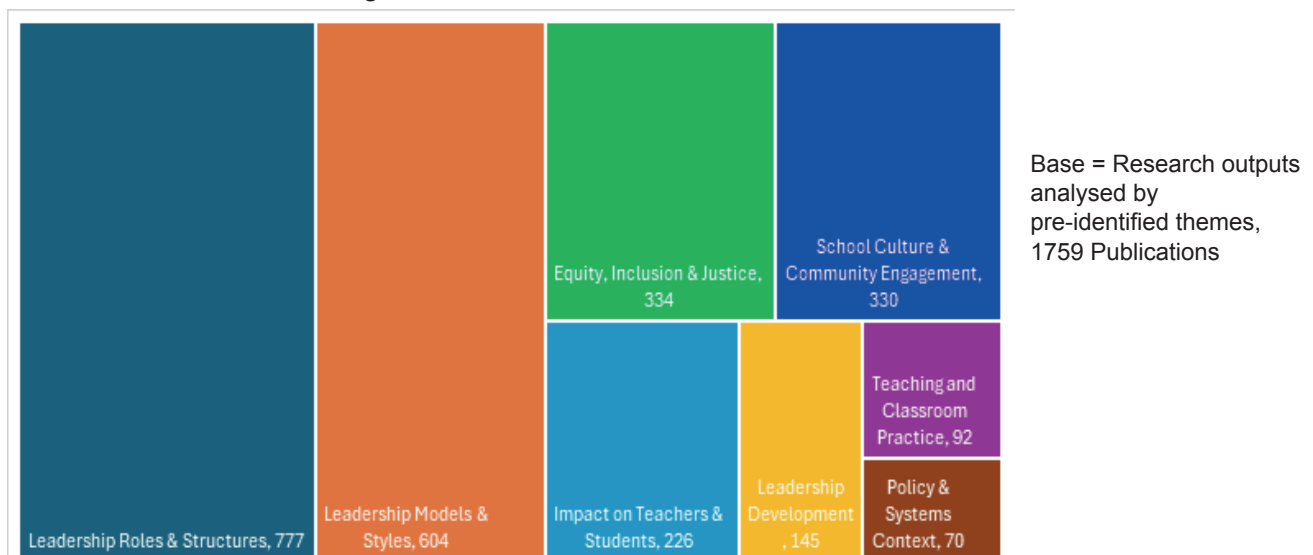


Figure 10: Commonly explored themes in SL research.

The thematic distribution indicates that the evidence base mainly focuses on leadership roles and approaches, rather than how leadership impacts teaching quality, classroom practice, and student learning outcomes. Additionally, there is limited research on school leadership within wider education policy and system contexts.

These patterns suggest that the evidence base remains stronger in describing leadership than in demonstrating its effects. There is relatively limited attention to how leadership shapes classroom practice, school improvement, learner outcomes, and broader education governance processes.

### 3.3.3.2 Under-researched themes across Africa

An analysis of survey results from experts also reveals key themes that are seen as most under-studied in the school leadership field in Africa (see figure 11 below). These include practice-oriented fields like digital transformation and EdTech, teaching and classroom practices, as well as school culture and community engagement. Specifically, 50% of respondents pointed to “leadership in digital transformation/EdTech,» while 44% cited “teaching and classroom practice” as lacking enough research.

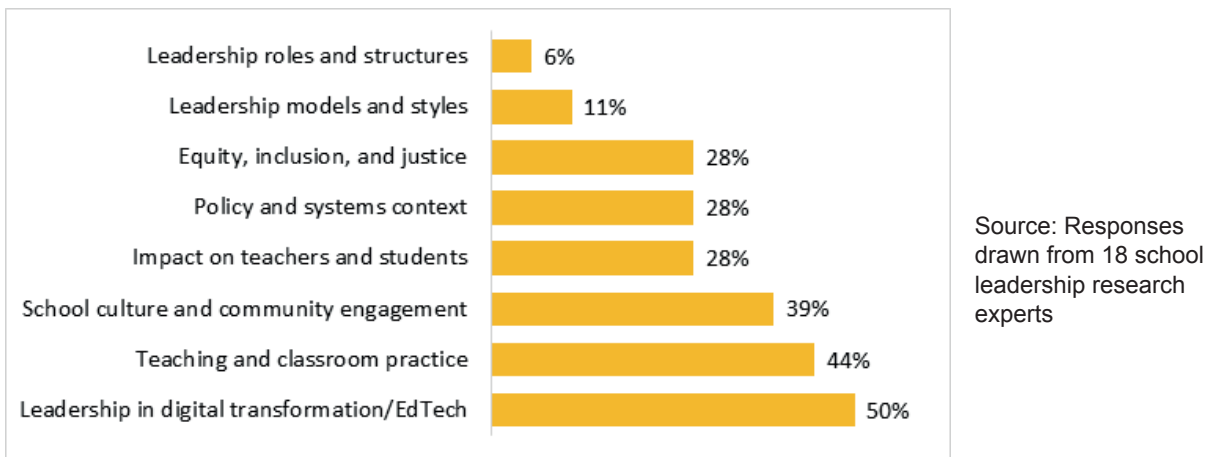


Figure 11: Under-researched SL theme in Africa.

Further analysis (Figure 12) highlights critical gaps in the generation of evidence on school leadership. Results point to a limited availability of cross-country comparative studies, longitudinal data, and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of leadership initiatives, including their cost-effectiveness. The findings also indicate that existing evidence insufficiently addresses rural, marginalized, and fragile contexts, alongside a lack of gender-disaggregated and equity-focused data.

These findings are reinforced by insights from stakeholder interviews, which consistently emphasize the need for more contextually grounded and comparable evidence across countries, as discussed in the following section.

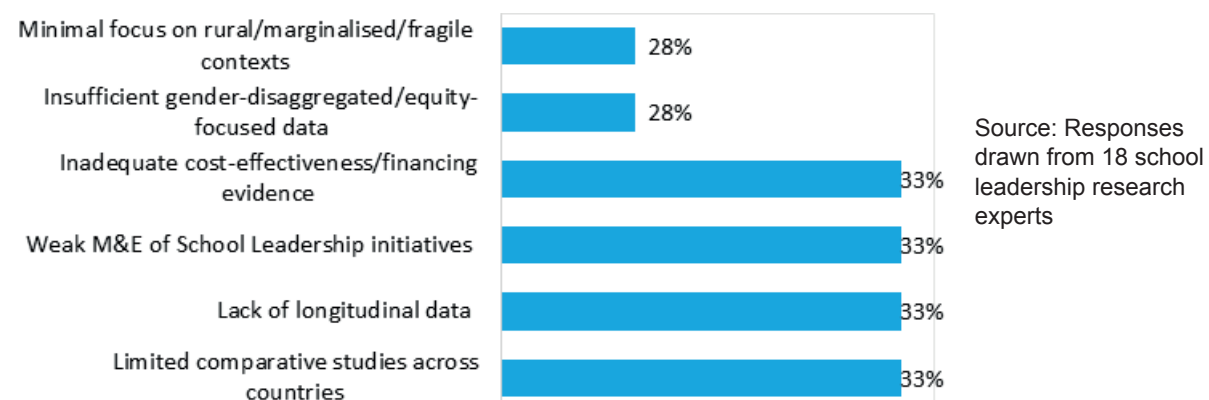


Figure 12: Evidence Gaps in School Leadership in Africa

**Question:** “What are the top 2 evidence gaps in School Leadership research at a continental level?”

The qualitative findings and discussions during the validation workshop reaffirm the importance of contextually grounded, African-based values research in shaping school leadership theory and practice. Participants report that much of the existing school leadership literature is derived from theories developed outside the continent and does not adequately reflect African contexts, values, and lived realities. As one participant noted.

“Much of the literature we read in school leadership is coming from Europe. The theories are good, but they don’t try to develop leadership that is African based. We tend to lose who we are.”

Participants also highlighted the absence of a clearly articulated African philosophy of leadership, observing that leadership development efforts often proceed without a shared conceptual foundation rooted in local knowledge systems.

A participant stated, “We need to define the philosophy of leadership in Africa. We have not done that, yet leadership development continues as if it already exists.”

Collectively, these findings validate the need for research that foregrounds African values, cultural contexts, and indigenous knowledge systems in the development of school leadership theory and evidence.

Taken together, the survey findings, qualitative insights, and validation discussions point to a consistent set of evidence gaps. These include both thematic gaps, such as digital leadership, inclusion, and community engagement, and methodological gaps, particularly the limited availability of comparative, longitudinal, and impact-oriented research. These findings provide the empirical basis for the emerging research priorities outlined in the next section.

### 3.3.3.3 Emerging Research Priorities in School Leadership in Africa

Building on the gaps identified, survey results, stakeholder discussions, and insights from the ADEA 2025 Triennale, urgent and emerging research priorities have been identified to strengthen the evidence base for school leadership across Africa. These priorities were derived through triangulation of the literature mapping, expert survey responses, stakeholder consultations, validation workshop discussions, and wider reflections emerging from the ADEA 2025 Triennale.

Table 5 below summarizes the triangulated research priorities, presenting the synthesized evidence and corresponding emerging or pressing research needs. This framework provides a structured foundation for a continental research agenda that is both evidence-informed and policy-relevant.



Table 6: Emerging Research Priorities on SL in Africa

Research theme	Key insights from existing evidence	What is needed to strengthen evidence
Context-Sensitive and Distributed Leadership Models	Leadership in many schools is enacted collectively through teachers and middle leaders, yet these practices remain weakly theorised and insufficiently documented in relation to local governance, cultural norms, and resource constraints.	Generate robust, context-sensitive evidence on distributed and collective leadership practices and their contribution to school improvement.
Professionalisation of School Leadership	School leadership is often not treated as a distinct profession, with unclear role definitions, limited career pathways, and weak alignment between leadership standards, licensure, policy frameworks, and professional development systems.	Investigate competency frameworks, licensure models, and career pathways to strengthen the professional status of school leadership.  Explore effectiveness of different frameworks and alignment with policy and PD systems.
Pedagogical Leadership and Teaching–Learning Impact	Leaders are expected to influence quality of teaching and learning outcomes, yet there is limited empirical evidence linking leadership practices to classroom change, teacher performance, and learner achievement.	Conduct impact-focused research linking leadership practices to teaching quality, teacher motivation, and student learning outcomes.
Digital and EdTech Leadership	School leaders face increasing expectations to guide digital transformation despite uneven access to technology, limited digital leadership capacity, and persistent digital divides across contexts.	Examine digital leadership competencies and strategies for equitable and effective technology integration in schools.
Gender, Equity, and Inclusive Leadership	Women and other marginalised groups continue to face structural, cultural, and institutional barriers to leadership participation and progression, with limited context-sensitive evidence to inform inclusive leadership strategies. School leadership appointments are often based on years of service rather than leadership competencies, limiting opportunities for youth.	Generate evidence on barriers and enablers for women, youth, and marginalized leaders. Investigate alternative pathways and criteria to promote youth leadership and inclusive succession in schools. Examine how inclusive leadership practices impact school culture, teacher motivation, learner outcomes, and policy frameworks supporting equity.
Leadership Professional Development Models	Leadership professional development is frequently fragmented, short-term, and weakly linked to impact, licensure, or career progression, limiting its effectiveness and sustainability.	Research effective, scalable, and contextually relevant leadership development models (including mentorship, peer learning, school-based action learning, and postgraduate programmes aligned with CPD and policy systems).

Communities of Practice and Peer Learning	There is a strong interest among school leaders in collaborative learning, peer support, and mentoring, alongside limited evidence on how such Communities of Practice function effectively across diverse contexts.	Investigate how Communities of Practice and peer learning models enhance leadership capacity, professional learning, and system improvement.
Leadership in Rural, Fragile, and Crisis-Affected Contexts	School leaders in rural, underserved, conflict-affected, and climate-vulnerable settings operate under complex conditions with limited tailored support and sparse empirical documentation of effective leadership responses.	Study adaptive leadership competencies, support mechanisms, and governance approaches suited to rural, fragile, and crisis contexts.
Afro-Centric Leadership Models and Indigenous Knowledge	Leadership practice often reflects local cultures, values, and collective norms, yet these approaches remain under-represented in formal leadership frameworks and empirical research.	Develop and empirically examine Afro-centric leadership models grounded in African knowledge systems and educational realities.
Policy Architecture and System-Level Enablers	Misalignment persists between leadership policy frameworks, implementation mechanisms, and school-level realities, limiting coherence across leadership preparation, support, and accountability systems.	Examine how policy frameworks and system-level enablers support or constrain effective school leadership.

Note: This table summarizes evidence and priority topics identified through stakeholder interviews, the ADEA Triennale 2025, and survey results

Insights drawn from these sources were also reinforced during the validation workshop in the panel sessions and thematic group work sessions. Participants highlighted the absence of a clearly articulated African philosophy of leadership, observing that leadership development initiatives often proceed without a shared conceptual foundation grounded in African knowledge systems and educational realities. They also noted the weak connection among research, policy, and practice, with much of the existing research remaining conceptual and insufficiently informing leadership practices or policy decisions.

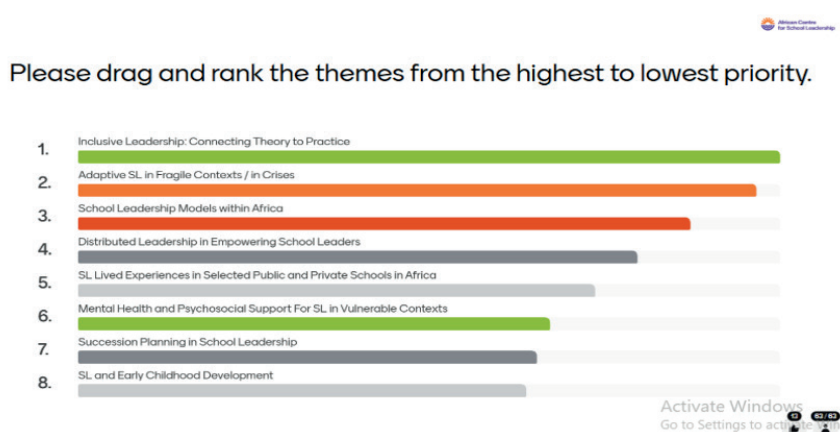
Participants further observed that research incentives in many African universities are closely tied to academic promotion, particularly through publication in international peer-reviewed journals. As a result, research efforts often prioritize publication outputs over practical impact on education policy, leadership practice, and system improvement. Publications on platforms based outside Africa make evidence less accessible to policymakers and practitioners, limiting its influence on professional development and policy decisions.

“One key challenge is that research on school leadership is often published in European or Western-based journals, many of which are inaccessible to practitioners, policymakers, and institutions in Africa.”

The discussions also highlighted limited documentation of effective leadership practices, weak collaboration within research ecosystems, and the need to strengthen practitioner-led research to enable school leaders’ experiences to contribute to the evidence base.

### 3.3.3.4 Co-creation of the Continental School Leadership Research Agenda

Following the school leadership mapping exercise, ACSL led the co-creation of a continental school leadership research agenda. Through facilitated discussions and consensus-building, participants refined and prioritized key research themes, focusing on areas with the greatest potential to inform policy, strengthen leadership practice, and improve teaching and learning outcomes. The prioritization process concluded with participants ranking the eight most critical research themes through participatory voting. The results from the Mentimeter ranking exercise are presented in the figure below.



Source: Results of the Mentimeter Ranking of School Leadership Research Priorities during the continental validation workshop

Figure 13: Priority Areas for School Leadership Research in Africa

The resulting co-created research agenda provides a practical roadmap for the implementation of school leadership research in Africa.

### 3.3.4 Continental Mechanisms for Knowledge Sharing and Research Translation

The mapping exercise explored existing regional and continental mechanisms for knowledge mobilization, dissemination, and sharing related to school leadership across Africa. Findings indicate that knowledge-exchange platforms remain limited and fragmented, constraining the generation, accessibility, and use of evidence across countries.

Furthermore, research on school leadership is often isolated and focused on specific projects, mostly published in European or Western journals, which restricts access for policymakers and practitioners across the continent. Although institutions like the African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have considerable convening power that could be used to promote knowledge sharing, these opportunities have not yet been fully exploited.

This suggests that valuable evidence often remains disconnected from leadership development systems, education reform processes, and day-to-day professional practice. More deliberate and institutionalized mechanisms are therefore needed to strengthen the link between research production, dissemination, uptake, and use.

“The African Union (AU) has a unique convening power that should be strategically leveraged to advance peer learning and collaboration. Key moments, such as AU summits and ministerial meetings, provide valuable platforms to bring together targeted stakeholders to facilitate knowledge exchange and showcase effective practices”.

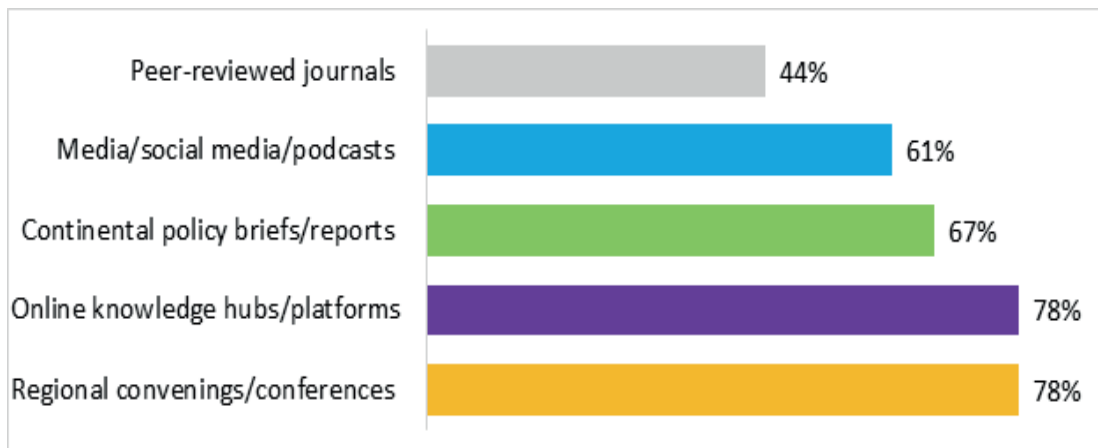
As a result, knowledge sharing across the continent remains constrained by several factors, as illustrated below.



Source: summary of feedback from stakeholder discussions.

Figure 14: Factors affecting Knowledge sharing across Africa.

To address existing barriers, stakeholders proposed several practical strategies, emphasizing more interactive and accessible approaches to knowledge mobilization. Regional convenings and online knowledge hubs were rated highest (78%), highlighting the value of peer exchange and centralized digital platforms for sharing research, policy insights, and leadership practices.



Source: Responses drawn from 18 school leadership research experts

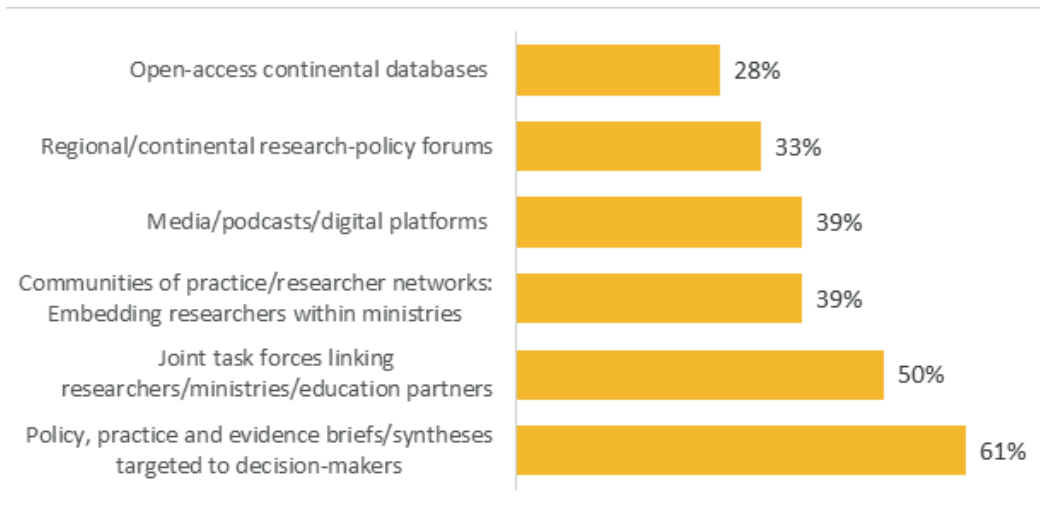
Figure 15: Ways to mobilise SL research, policy and practice knowledge for Impact.

**Question: In what ways can we mobilize school leadership research, policy, and practice knowledge for impact**

Qualitative findings further indicate that research can serve as a critical enabler of system-level change in school leadership when aligned with policy processes and implementation mechanisms. Yet there has been a persistent gap between research production and its translation into policy and practice across various African countries.

“Once we have come up with the research findings we share with them. It’s more like it is research and it’s done and it’s over. Not much is implemented.”

Overall, the findings suggest that research impact depends on deliberate mechanisms that connect evidence to policy design, implementation processes, and professional practice within school leadership systems (Figure 17). Stakeholders highlighted several approaches to strengthen research–policy–practice linkages as shown in the figure below:



Source: Responses drawn from 18 school leadership researchers

Figure 16: Mechanisms to strengthen the link between research-policy-practice across Africa.

### Question: What mechanisms are there to strengthen the link between research-policy-practice across Africa

Across the discussions, stakeholders converged around three guiding principles for effective research translation:

1. Research should be action-oriented and context-sensitive.
2. Translation processes should be collaborative across research, policy, and practice actors.
3. Research approaches should be forward-looking and responsive to emerging system challenges.

Additional approaches identified include:

1. Co-creation: Engaging researchers, policymakers, and practitioners from the outset to ensure relevance to leadership development and policy priorities.
2. Contextualized dissemination: Translating research into accessible formats (e.g. briefs, toolkits, guidelines) and adapting content to local languages and contexts.
3. Alignment with continental frameworks: Linking research outputs to AU, REC, and national leadership standards to reinforce agreed competencies and system priorities.
4. Knowledge platforms and networks: Using regional and continental platforms to support peer learning and inform professional development and policy.
5. Monitoring uptake and use: Tracking how research informs policy and professional development to support learning and continuous improvement.

### 3.3.5 Strategic Insights from the Mapping Exercise: SWOT Analysis

To synthesize the findings from the school leadership research mapping exercise, a SWOT analysis was conducted to highlight the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks shaping the school leadership research ecosystem in Africa. This analysis provides a strategic perspective on the current state of knowledge production and identifies key considerations for strengthening the continental research agenda.

The SWOT analysis also helps clarify the strategic implications of the mapping findings for future ACSL programming, research investment, and cross-country collaboration on school leadership evidence generation.

Table 7: SWOT Analysis: School Leadership Research Landscape in Africa

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The school leadership evidence base in Africa has grown steadily over the past decade, reflecting increasing attention to leadership as a lever for school improvement.</li> <li>A diverse ecosystem of actors (universities, regional organizations, NGOs, and development partners) contributes to evidence generation.</li> <li>Growing recognition of instructional leadership and professionalization as critical drivers of teaching quality and student outcomes.</li> <li>Increasing interest in African-centered leadership models, practitioner-led research, and collaborative learning networks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research output is unevenly distributed across regions, with Central and North Africa significantly underrepresented.</li> <li>Much of the existing research is descriptive or programme-based, with limited comparative, causal, or longitudinal studies.</li> <li>Research outputs are often siloed and project-based, limiting synthesis and shared learning.</li> <li>Weak mechanisms exist for translating research into policy, professional development, and leadership practice.</li> <li>Research outputs are mostly published in international journals limiting access by local stakeholders</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Growing demand for practice-oriented and policy-relevant leadership research.</li> <li>Opportunities to expand research in underrepresented regions and contexts, including rural and fragile settings.</li> <li>Development of regional knowledge platforms, research hubs, and Communities of Practice to support collaboration.</li> <li>Leveraging African Union and Regional Economic Community platforms to strengthen continental dialogue and knowledge sharing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued reliance on externally developed leadership theories and research agendas may limit African-centered frameworks.</li> <li>Limited research funding and capacity in some regions could reinforce regional disparities in knowledge production.</li> <li>Research published in international journals behind paywalls may remain inaccessible to policymakers and practitioners.</li> <li>Weak research–policy–practice linkages may continue to limit the practical impact of research on education systems.</li> </ul>

Source: Synthesized from school leadership research mapping findings, literature review, stakeholder consultations, survey responses and insights from the continental validation workshop.

The SWOT analysis highlights both the growing momentum and the structural limitations shaping the school leadership research landscape in Africa. On the positive side, the steady increase in publications and the engagement of a diverse group of institutions demonstrate that school leadership is increasingly recognized as a critical lever for improving teaching quality, school effectiveness, and learner outcomes. The presence of regional and international actors, alongside growing interest in African-centered leadership models and practitioner-informed research, provides a strong foundation for strengthening the evidence base.

However, the analysis also reveals significant structural weaknesses in the current research ecosystem. The uneven geographical distribution of research outputs suggests that the knowledge base remains concentrated in a limited number of countries, leaving many educational contexts underrepresented. In addition, much of the existing research remains descriptive, with limited rigorous evidence linking leadership practices to improvements in teaching and learning. This limits research's ability to inform policy design, leadership development programmes, and system reforms.

The findings also highlight persistent challenges in research accessibility and utilization. Research outputs are frequently produced in academic or project-based settings and published in international journals that may not be readily accessible to policymakers and practitioners across the continent. As a result, the translation of research into practical tools, policy frameworks, and professional development interventions remains limited.

At the same time, the mapping exercise identifies important opportunities to strengthen the school leadership research ecosystem. Expanding research in underrepresented regions, investing in comparative and impact-focused studies, and strengthening regional knowledge-sharing platforms could significantly enhance the relevance and influence of research. Leveraging continental institutions such as the African Union and Regional Economic Communities may also provide important platforms for collaboration, peer learning, and the dissemination of evidence-informed leadership practices.

Overall, the findings suggest that strengthening school leadership research in Africa will require a more coordinated continental approach, with greater emphasis on collaborative research networks, accessible knowledge platforms, and mechanisms that connect research evidence to policy development, professional learning, and leadership practice. Such efforts will be essential to ensure that the growing body of research contributes meaningfully to improving school leadership and the performance of the education system across the continent.

Future investment should therefore focus not only on generating more research, but also on improving its distribution, accessibility, methodological rigor, and uptake within leadership policy and professional development systems.

### 3.3.6 Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings from the mapping exercise have several implications for strengthening school leadership policy and practice across Africa.

1. Target research investment in underrepresented regions: The uneven geographical distribution of research highlights the need to strengthen research capacity and support evidence generation in underrepresented regions, particularly Central and North Africa.
2. Promote more rigorous, impact-focused research: There is a need for studies that examine the direct relationships among leadership practices, teaching quality, and learner outcomes, including comparative, longitudinal, and evaluation-based research.
3. Strengthen research translation mechanisms: Research findings should be translated into accessible formats such as policy briefs, leadership guidelines, and practitioner toolkits to support uptake by policymakers, school leaders, and education practitioners.
4. Enhance collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners: Closer engagement among these actors can ensure that research addresses real system needs and informs leadership policy, professional development, and school improvement initiatives.
5. Leverage continental and regional platforms for knowledge sharing: Institutions such as the African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) can play a stronger role in facilitating peer learning, cross-country collaboration, and dissemination of effective leadership practices.

6. Integrate research evidence into leadership development systems: Research findings should inform leadership standards, training programmes, mentoring initiatives, and professional learning systems for school leaders.
7. Strengthen knowledge-sharing platforms and networks: Digital platforms, Communities of Practice, and regional convenings can support continuous exchange of evidence, experiences, and leadership innovations across countries.
8. Promote Afrocentric/Afrocentric leadership frameworks: Policymakers and researchers should encourage studies that incorporate African values, cultural contexts, and indigenous knowledge systems to develop leadership models relevant to local education systems.
9. Align evidence with leadership policy and system reform: Research should more deliberately inform leadership standards, competency frameworks, professional development pathways, mentoring systems, and accountability mechanisms within education systems.
10. Strengthen uptake monitoring: Beyond dissemination, there is a need to track how research informs policy decisions, leadership development programmes, and professional practice, to strengthen learning and continuous improvement.

### 3.4 Advocacy and sector coordination in school leadership

The mapping also identified some education networks or platforms that support and advocate for quality education at the continental and regional levels in Africa, and that directly or indirectly contribute to school leadership.

#### 3.4.1 Overview of continental and regional education networks.

Existing education networks, such as the African Union’s Leveraging Education Analysis for Results Network (LEARN), the Africa Network Campaign on Education for All (ANCEFA), the Africa Education and Learning Hub, the Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI) Africa, the West Africa Education Civil Society Platform (WA-ECS Platform) under ECOWAS, the Africa Special Needs Education Network (ASNEN), and People’s Action for Learning (PAL) Network demonstrate promising coordination and advocacy efforts to transform education in Africa. However, none of these networks focuses directly on school leadership.

Table 8: Continental and regional education networks

Network	Description
Africa Network Campaign on Education for All (ANCEFA)	ANCEFA is a pan-African civil society network that advocates for equitable, inclusive, and quality education for all. ANCEFA has regional programme offices for West & Central Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa Focuses on promoting inclusive and quality education for all African children, ensuring sustainable education financing, enhancing transparency and accountability, fostering supportive teaching and learning environments, and strengthening institutional capacity and partnerships.
Africa Education and Learning Hub <a href="https://www.africaeducationhub.org/">https://www.africaeducationhub.org/</a>	The Africa Education and Learning Hub is the digital platform of the Horn, Eastern and Southern Africa (HESA) Learning Collaborative... The hub foster collaboration by creating resourceful partnerships and enabling members to share and learn from each other. It also promotes research & Knowledge by undertaking relevant research to support evidence-based policy advocacy.

<p>The Leveraging Education Analysis for Results Network (LEARN) of the African Union</p>	<p>The LEARN Network brings together the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) implementation clusters on education planning, curriculum and teacher development. It acts as a catalyst for cross-cluster collaboration to address the critical issue for foundational learning in Africa.</p>
<p>Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI) Africa</p>	<p>RELI brings together over fifty East African civil society organizations focused on improving education to ensure that every child learns and succeeds. RELI focuses on the following thematic areas: Equity and Inclusion; Values and life skills; Teacher development and Support/ Learner-centered teaching and Accountability. Strong leadership is essential for the effective implementation of the RELI thematic areas.</p>
<p>West Africa Education Civil Society Platform (WA-ECS Platform) under ECOWAS</p>	<p>The West Africa Education Civil Society Platform (WA-ECS Platform) is an ECOWAS-recognized network coordinated by the Platform Secretariat and supported by national education coalitions across Member States. Its mandate is to strengthen civil society participation in education policy, monitoring, and accountability. The platform does not develop a specific school leadership framework. However, it contributes indirectly to school leadership through community participation mechanisms, governance monitoring, and advocacy for improved school management and accountability in West Africa</p>
<p>ASNEN (Africa Special Needs Education Network) <a href="https://www.asnenafrica.org">https://www.asnenafrica.org</a></p>	<p>Focuses on inclusive and special needs education. ASNEN provides African home-grown model that provides knowledge, information, capacity building and advocacy and support required for inclusion. ASNEN provides training in inclusive education for education actors including school leaders. ASNEN promotes inclusive education based on the UBUNTU philosophy.</p>
<p>People’s Action for Learning (PAL) Network <a href="https://palnetwork.org/">https://palnetwork.org/</a></p>	<p>The People’s Action for Learning (PAL) Network is a south-south partnership of 17 member organisations working to promote children’s foundational learning across Africa, Asia, and America. PAL Network members conduct citizen-led assessments (CLAs) and learning intervention programmes (action) aimed at improving learning outcomes.</p>

### 3.4.2 SWOT Analysis of Sector Coordination and Advocacy Mechanisms for School Leadership in Africa

To better understand how school leadership is coordinated across Africa, this SWOT analysis draws on the mapping findings and stakeholder insights. It looks at what is currently working well, where the gaps are, and what external factors may either support or hinder progress. The aim is to provide a clear picture of the current coordination landscape and highlight where more deliberate effort is needed to strengthen alignment, visibility, and impact.

Table 9: SWOT Analysis: SL Sector Coordination and advocacy mechanisms in Africa.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing ecosystem of continental and regional education platforms that enable dialogue, advocacy, and knowledge exchange.</li> <li>Growing recognition of school leadership as a critical driver of teaching quality and learning outcomes</li> <li>Increasing multi-actor engagement across civil society, research institutions, and policy actors</li> <li>Established advocacy infrastructure with access to policy spaces.</li> <li>Expanding body of research and programmatic evidence on school leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Absence of a dedicated coordination mechanism specifically focused on school leadership.</li> <li>Fragmentation of initiatives and actors, with limited alignment and shared agendas</li> <li>Weak knowledge mobilisation systems, limiting translation of evidence into policy and practice.</li> <li>Limited policy anchoring of school leadership, including unclear standards and career pathways.</li> <li>Inconsistent follow-through from convenings and dialogues</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positioning a “network of networks” model to strengthen coordination (e.g., ACSL as a central convening platform)</li> <li>Strengthening continental and REC-level coordination mechanisms through joint planning and shared agendas</li> <li>Advancing African-grounded leadership models rooted in contextual realities.</li> <li>Leveraging digital platforms and EdTech to scale collaboration and peer learning</li> <li>Strengthening knowledge brokering and evidence use for policy uptake.</li> <li>Integrating school leadership into broader education reform priorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued marginalization of school leadership within broader education agendas</li> <li>Competition and duplication among actors due to weak coordination</li> <li>Donor-driven fragmentation reinforcing short-term, project-based approaches.</li> <li>Slow policy adoption and bureaucratic inertia</li> <li>Inequities in participation across regions, languages, and institutions</li> <li>Weak institutionalisation of coordination mechanisms</li> </ul>

This analysis shows that Africa already has a strong base of networks, institutions, and experience that can support progress in school leadership. There is also increasing recognition of the role that leadership plays in improving education outcomes. However, these efforts are not yet well aligned, and school leadership often remains an implicit rather than explicit priority.

A key gap is the absence of a clear coordination mechanism that brings actors together around a shared agenda. At the same time, research and evidence are not being used as effectively as they could be to inform policy and practice. Many conversations are happening, but they do not always lead to sustained action.

There is a clear opportunity to strengthen coordination by connecting existing platforms, improving knowledge sharing, and creating clearer pathways from dialogue to implementation. If this is done well, it can help move the sector from scattered efforts toward more coherent and sustained change. If not, there is a risk that school leadership will continue to receive limited attention, with efforts remaining fragmented and impact constrained.

### 4 Conclusions and Recommendations

#### 4.1 Conclusion

This continental mapping provides a comprehensive overview of the school leadership landscape in Africa, spanning policy frameworks, professional development, research, and sector coordination. The findings confirm that school leadership is increasingly recognised as a critical lever for improving teaching quality, learner outcomes, and education system performance across the continent. This recognition is reflected in continental and regional policy frameworks, an expanding ecosystem of professional development initiatives, and a steadily growing body of research.

However, the mapping also highlights that school leadership systems across Africa remain fragmented and unevenly developed. While policy commitment is strong, implementation is often weak, with limited translation of frameworks into practice. Professional development initiatives are widespread but frequently project-based, insufficiently institutionalised, and not consistently aligned with policy frameworks or career pathways.

The research base, although expanding, remains unevenly distributed across countries and themes, with a predominance of descriptive studies and limited evidence on impact, cost-effectiveness, and scalability. Furthermore, critical gaps persist in relation to rural and marginalised contexts, gender and equity considerations, and cross-country comparative evidence.

At the same time, sector coordination mechanisms, while evolving, remain insufficiently structured to align actors, consolidate learning, and support large-scale transformation. Across all focus areas, a key challenge is the lack of coherence between policy, practice, research, and coordination efforts, which limits the effectiveness and sustainability of school leadership interventions.

Despite these challenges, the mapping identifies strong foundations for progress. Continental frameworks, a diverse ecosystem of actors, emerging innovations in professional development, and increasing commitment to evidence generation present significant opportunities. Moving forward, the priority is to strengthen alignment, institutionalisation, and coordination across the school leadership ecosystem.

Ultimately, strengthening school leadership in Africa requires a systems approach, one that connects policy, professional development, research, and coordination into a coherent and sustainable architecture capable of improving teaching, learning, and equity outcomes at scale.

#### 4.2 Recommendations

To address the identified gaps and leverage emerging opportunities, the following recommendations structured across four key focus areas: policy, professional development, research, and sector coordination are proposed.

##### A. Policy Development and Reform

Strengthen policy coherence and alignment by ensuring that continental, regional, and national frameworks are harmonised with Afrocentric contexts, creating consistency in standards, competencies, and qualification systems.

Possible actions include:

1. Develop or review school leadership policies, standards, and guidelines to reflect African contexts and values, ensuring they serve as the foundation for coherence and alignment.
2. Shift focus from policy development to implementation: Prioritise the operationalisation of existing frameworks by translating them into actionable national policies, guidelines, and implementation tools.
3. Professionalise school leadership: Establish school leadership as a distinct profession through clear career pathways, competency-based standards, certification, and licensing systems linked to progression and accountability.
4. Embed gender and equity in policy frameworks: Strengthen gender-responsive and inclusive policies that address structural barriers and promote equitable access to leadership opportunities.
5. Integrate school leadership into broader education reforms: Position school leadership as a central component of key reforms, including competency-based education, foundational learning, and digital transformation strategies.

### B. Professional Development (PD)

Institutionalise school leadership development as a system-wide, standards-driven, and equity-focused investment for quality and inclusive education.

Possible actions include:

1. Transition to system-wide programmes: Move from fragmented, donor-driven initiatives toward nationally embedded, sustainable professional development systems.
2. Align with policy and standards: Ensure all leadership development programmes are grounded in national and continental competency frameworks and directly linked to career progression pathways.
3. Scale evidence-based models: Identify and expand promising approaches such as coaching, mentoring, peer learning, and blended learning that strengthen instructional leadership.
4. Expand equitable access: Prioritise school leaders in rural, marginalised, and fragile contexts by adopting flexible, context-responsive delivery models.
5. Leverage digital innovation: Use technology to enhance access, scalability, and cost-effectiveness of leadership development programmes.
6. Empower and ensure accountability: Equip school leaders with the autonomy, competencies, and support needed to drive improved learning outcomes and wellbeing, while embedding accountability mechanisms that track progress in reducing equity gaps.

### C. Research and Evidence Generation

Strengthen the Afrocentric evidence base on school leadership through rigorous, inclusive, and policy-relevant research that addresses critical gaps and builds African research capacity.

Possible actions include:

1. Invest in rigorous and policy-relevant research Promote the use of robust methodologies, including longitudinal and impact evaluations, to generate actionable evidence on school leadership.
2. Strengthen cross-country and comparative research Support comparative studies across countries to generate transferable insights and inform continental learning.
3. Address critical evidence gaps Prioritise research on rural and marginalised contexts, gender and equity, fragile settings, and the impact of leadership on teaching and learning outcomes.
4. Strengthen African research capacity and inclusion Invest in African research institutions and promote inclusive research ecosystems, including increased participation of women researchers and underrepresented regions.
5. Improve monitoring, evaluation, and data systems Strengthen systems to assess the effectiveness, scalability, and cost-effectiveness of school leadership initiatives.

### D. Sector Coordination, Advocacy, and Knowledge Sharing

Enhance collaboration and advocacy by aligning stakeholders, leveraging continental platforms, and promoting knowledge sharing to translate evidence into practice and ensure sustainability.

Possible actions include:

1. Strengthen coordination across actors Enhance collaboration among continental, regional, and national stakeholders to reduce fragmentation and improve alignment.
2. Leverage continental and regional platforms Use platforms such as ACSL and regional networks to facilitate dialogue, peer learning, and joint agenda-setting.
3. Improve knowledge translation and uptake Strengthen mechanisms to translate research into policy and practice through accessible knowledge products and learning exchanges.
4. Promote communities of practice and peer learning Foster sustained engagement among school leaders, policymakers, and researchers through networks and communities of practice.
5. Mobilise sustainable financing and partnerships Strengthen government ownership, integrate leadership into national budgets, and build long-term partnerships to ensure sustainability.

#### 4.3 ACSL Commitment to Advancing School Leadership in Africa

Building on the findings of this continental mapping and the co-created school leadership Roadmap 2026–2030 (See annex 1), the African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL) reaffirms its commitment to contribute to the continental efforts in strengthening school leadership systems across Africa through a collaborative, coalition-driven approach.

This roadmap reflects a shared agenda developed with policymakers, professional development providers, researchers, and other stakeholders across the continent. While implementation is a collective responsibility, ACSL will play a catalytic and coordinating role in advancing these efforts. Its contributions include but not limited to:

- Convening and strengthening the continental school leadership coalition and taskforce.
- Facilitating knowledge exchange and peer learning across countries and regions.
- Supporting evidence generation, translation, and uptake to inform policy and practice.
- Mobilising and aligning resources to support implementation at scale.

Through this commitment, ACSL aims to move from mapping and dialogue to coordinated action, ensuring that school leadership becomes a central and sustained driver of quality, equity, and transformation in African education systems.



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### Annex 1: Profiles of Participants

The Table below presents the profiles of participants engaged during primary data collection and in the validation workshop.

Data collection	Profiles	Gender disaggregation	Geographical coverage
Key informant interviews			
Experts who engaged via the online survey	SL researchers, PD providers		
Validation workshop			18 countries: ADD LIST

### Annex 2: Search strings for school leadership research

Purpose/Themes	Search strings
General Search String	(«school leadership» OR «educational leadership» OR principal* OR «head teacher*» OR «deputy head teacher*» OR «middle leader*» OR «school leader*»)
Leadership Models and Styles	(«leadership model*» OR «leadership style*» OR «transformational leadership» OR «charismatic leadership» OR «distributed leadership» OR «instructional leadership» OR «servant leadership» OR «transactional leadership» OR «paternalistic leadership» OR «top-down leadership» OR «critical educational leadership»)
Professional Development and Roles	(«leadership preparation» OR «continuous professional development» OR «teacher professional development» OR «leadership and staff development» OR «professional practice of superintendent» OR «school leadership development»)
Leadership and Outcomes	(«impact of leadership» OR «school improvement» OR «high-capacity schools» OR «learning outcomes» OR «student outcomes» OR «teacher learning» OR «teacher development» OR «classroom development» OR «school conditions» OR «leadership behaviour»)
Equity, Inclusion, and Culture	(«leadership and equity» OR «social justice leadership» OR «inclusive school culture» OR «culturally responsive leadership» OR «culturally relevant leadership» OR «leadership and gender identity» OR «inclusive» OR «inclusion leadership» OR «values driven leadership» OR «indigenous leadership style» OR «emancipatory leadership»)
School and Community	(«school and community» OR «principal as organizer» OR «school culture» OR «internal administration» OR «building school-government relationships» OR «hierarchically structured collegiality» OR «fund raising»)
For a comprehensive search in databases	(«school leadership» OR «educational leadership» OR principal* OR «head teacher*» OR «deputy head teacher*» OR «middle leader*» OR «school leader*») AND («leadership style*» OR «transformational leadership» OR «instructional leadership» OR «distributed leadership» OR «servant leadership» OR «critical educational leadership») AND («teacher development» OR «student outcomes» OR «school improvement» OR «teacher learning» OR «professional development») AND («equity» OR «social justice» OR «inclusive» OR «culturally responsive leadership» OR «values driven leadership» OR «indigenous leadership style»)



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