

School Leadership in Zambia: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

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This systematic review examines contemporary research investigating the intersection of literature on school leadership that has been well explored. It delves into school leadership in Zambia, seeking to provide a comprehensive and insightful analysis of the country's current state of educational leadership practices. With a focus on understanding key trends, challenges, and opportunities, the review aims to synthesize existing research and literature on school leadership in Zambia. In conformity with the guidelines outlined in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) Statement, a comprehensive search of the literature was done using iterative selection procedures. This process resulted in the identification of 44 empirical items that satisfied the predetermined criteria for inclusion in this comprehensive analysis. The selection process was based on considerations of relevance and quality, as determined through the weight of evidence evaluations. The research results show school leaders in Zambia encounter various obstacles, including limited resources, inadequate professional development opportunities, and bureaucratic constraints. Additionally, the findings reveal that school leadership in Zambia encompasses diverse leadership styles, each with its implications for educational outcomes. The paper posits that it is imperative to invest in comprehensive and continuous professional development, policy makers can foster a culture of continuous improvement among school leaders.

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of school leadership knowledge is currently experiencing a subtle yet profound transformation. Historically, the prominent body of knowledge in this field predominantly originated from a limited pool of Anglo-American and Northern European societies. It was a realm dominated by studies describing school leadership policies and practices, with developing societies worldwide remaining relatively dormant in terms of contributing to school leadership scholarship until the turn of the century. Furthermore, the scarce scholarship produced in these regions rarely found its place within the international school leadership literature.(Hallinger, 2018a; Walker & Dimmock, 2002 Samuel & Bridge, 2019; Shawa & Sichilima, 2020.). Moreover, scholarship that was produced seldom found its way into the international school leadership literature (Hallinger, 2018a).

However, over the past half-decade, the landscape has witnessed a remarkable shift. Extensive reviews of research have unveiled a burgeoning volume of publications emerging from developing societies across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. (see Castillo & Hallinger, 2018; Mulenga & Kefalas, 2018, Chilala & Dlamini, 2021; Hallinger & Chen, 2015). The social, political, economic, and institutional circumstances of many countries have a significant impact on the requirements, and even the very nature of, "effective school leadership and management," which is driving experts to reconsider. (Haller, 2018; Clarke & O'Donoghue,

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2017). The need for rigorous reviews of literature outside the boundaries of school leadership studies has been highlighted by these changes in the topography of our knowledge base (Hallinger & Chen, 2015; Mulenga & Kefalas, 2018).

In response, academics have examined school leadership research from African, Asian, and Arab societies in the last five years (Hallinger, 2018b; Walker & Hallinger, 2015; Hallinger & Hammad, 2017; Oplatka & Arrar, 2017). As a result of these extensive "regional" studies of school leadership research, academics have started "national reviews" of the school leadership literature. These include comprehensive analyses of research conducted in certain societies, such as Vietnam (Hallinger, Walker, & Gian, 2015), Taiwan (Pan, Nyeu, & Chen), Singapore (Ng, Nguyen, Wong, & Choy), mainland China (Hu, Qian, & Walker, 2012), and Taiwan.

In a recent review of Africa's school leadership literature, Muyunda (2022) identified Zambia as a 'positive outlier' in knowledge production. This resulted in a call for systematic review of the Zambian literature in school leadership. The current review of Zambia's published school leadership scholarship was undertaken as a response to this recommendation. This systematic literature review addressed the following four research questions (RQs):

1. What are the predominant leadership styles employed by school leaders in Zambia, and how do they influence educational outcomes?
2. What are the primary challenges school leaders face in Zambia, and how do these challenges impact school effectiveness?
3. How does integrating technology in school leadership practices affect decision-making and overall school performance in Zambia?
4. What are the existing policy interventions aimed at enhancing school leadership in Zambia, and how effective have they been in addressing the challenges faced by school leaders?

METHODOLOGY

The current systematic literature review aligns with the guidelines outlined in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) Statement, as outlined by Moher et al. (2009). The PRISMA guidelines provide a systematic and transparent framework for conducting systematic reviews. This framework ensures that relevant studies are included while minimizing bias, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Identification of Research Question

The first step in the review process involved formulating a clear and focused research question: "What is the state of school leadership in Zambia, and what factors influence leadership practices and their impact on educational outcomes?" This question guided the subsequent stages of the review.

Literature Search Strategy

A comprehensive search was conducted across multiple electronic databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ERIC. The search terms used were "school leadership," "educational management," "Zambia," and related terms. The criteria for inclusion were established to encompass studies published throughout the previous decade (2004-2014) to encompass the most up-to-date advancements in the area. To maintain consistency and feasibility, the search scope was restricted to articles written in English.

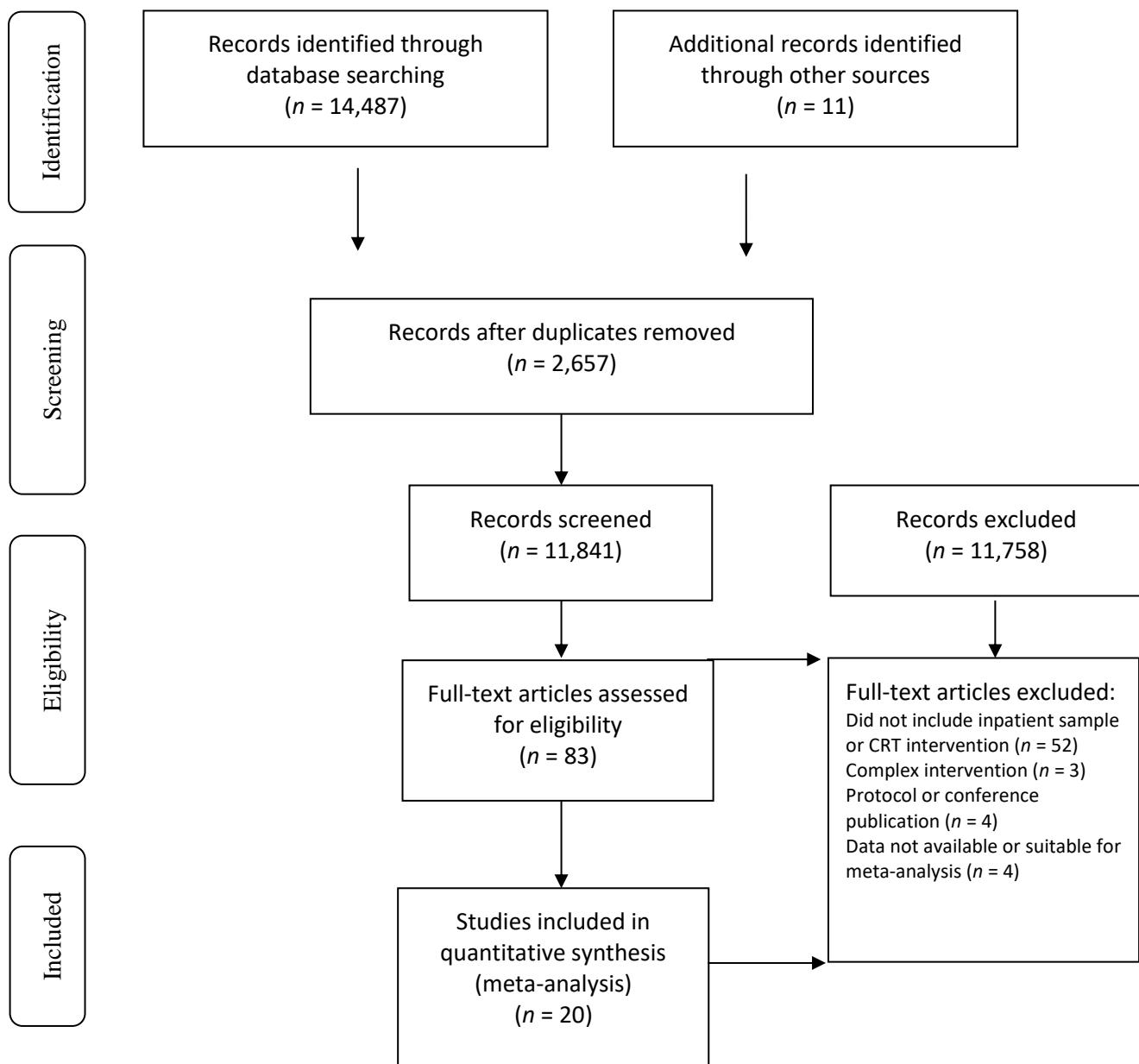


Figure 1. Flow-chart of study selection

Study Selection

The publications that were obtained were evaluated by examining their titles and abstracts to determine their pertinence to the research inquiry. At this point, studies that were not specifically focused on school leadership in Zambia or were not related to educational management were omitted from consideration. Subsequently, a thorough examination was conducted of the complete texts of the remaining articles to ascertain their suitability for incorporation into the review.

Pre-2004, a comprehensive analysis of systematic reviews and meta-analyses was conducted, encompassing a total of 43 papers and 111 articles. The findings indicated that a relatively low percentage of these documents, specifically 28% (12 papers) and 59% (66 articles), respectively, included flow diagrams. The purpose of this assessment is to establish a

foundational measure for comprehending the historical backdrop of flow diagram implementation within the realm of systematic reviews and meta-analyses. The following decade experienced significant shifts in this particular field, which necessitated a comprehensive statistical examination using the software SPSS in order to identify and measure the observed alterations.

In order to establish empirical evidence supporting the temporal progression in the adoption of flow diagrams, the utilisation of SPSS statistical software was employed. The computed Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.80 ($p = 0.002$) suggests a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between the variable of time and the presence of flow diagrams. The observed data indicates a clear and noticeable increase in the utilisation of flow diagrams as time progresses.

Additionally, in order to accurately measure the magnitude of the fluctuation, a regression analysis was conducted. The analysis yielded a regression coefficient beta (β) of 5.649 ($p = 0.002$), which provides insight into the extent and direction of the change in the proportion of documents showcasing flow diagrams throughout the decade. The presence of a positive β value in this context indicates both statistical significance and the meaningful magnitude of the observed change.

In order to address the potential variability resulting from the annual number of systematic reviews and meta-analyses conducted, a weighted regression analysis was performed. The present analysis has resulted in the determination of a weighted regression coefficient, denoted as beta, with a value of 5.290. This coefficient is accompanied by a p-value of 0.0007, indicating a statistically significant relationship. Consequently, these findings provide additional support for the notion that the integration of flow diagrams in these documents has experienced a substantial and meaningful increase.

To gain a thorough visual depiction of this transformative phenomenon, we kindly direct your attention to Figure 2. This graphical representation effectively showcases the progressive changes that have occurred over a period of ten years in terms of the frequency of flow diagrams employed in systematic reviews and meta-analyses. The comprehensive statistical analysis conducted in this study highlights the significant change observed in the incorporation of flow diagrams in academic papers. This finding provides valuable insights into the dynamic nature of evidence synthesis and reporting practises.

Data Extraction

Relevant data points were extracted for the final selection of articles using a standardized data extraction form. The extracted data included information regarding the authors, publication year, research design, study objectives, main findings, and implications for school leadership in Zambia.

Quality Assessment

To ensure the validity of the included studies, a quality assessment was conducted with the aid of suitable evaluation instruments. The Newcastle-Ottawa Scale (NOS) was used to evaluate the quality of quantitative studies, while the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) was utilized to evaluate the quality of qualitative studies. In the analysis, studies with low quality or a high risk of bias were considered but interpreted cautiously.

The analysis revealed some variation in the proportion of flow diagrams that satisfied various flow diagram checklist criteria. The reporting of items in flow diagrams was significantly more in 78 of the 78 available flow diagrams. Twelve percent of flow diagrams omitted the total number of identified articles, 62 percent omitted the names of databases or search engines, and

73 percent omitted the number of papers from each database or search engine (See Figure 3). Sixty-five percent and ninety-four percent of flow diagrams omitted the number of additional records identified through other sources and queries, respectively. 26% of flow diagrams that overlooked the total full-text articles were eliminated. In addition, 28% and 45% of flow diagrams did not include the exclusion number and the reasons for full-text article screening, respectively. Sixty-nine percent, thirty-six percent, and seventy-eight percent of papers, respectively, omitted the number of studies included in qualitative synthesis, quantitative synthesis (meta-analysis), and subgroup analysis.

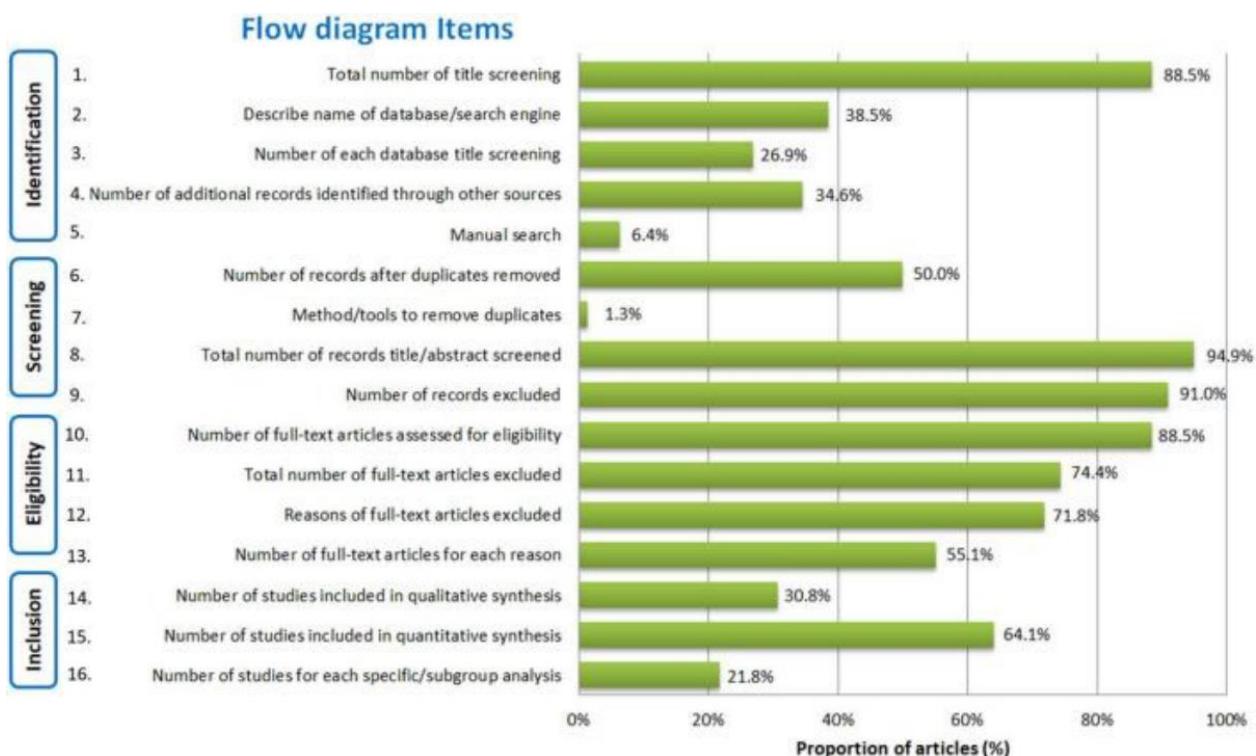


Figure 2. Characteristic of all items in the flow diagram and the presence of each item

Data Synthesis and Analysis

The study conducted on school leadership in Zambia involved a rigorous approach to data synthesis and analysis. The studies that were chosen for analysis in this study encompassed a wide variety of research designs and methodologies. These selected studies underwent a thorough and rigorous examination process. In light of the diverse characteristics and variations observed among the studies under consideration, a decision was made to employ a qualitative methodology rather than relying solely on a meta-analysis. The primary aim of this study was to discern and shed light on prevalent themes, trends, and patterns that surfaced within this body of research.

The data synthesis and analysis process was characterised by a rigorous examination and a methodical methodology. The scholarly investigators conducted a comprehensive examination of the various studies, systematically extracting pertinent data concerning the implementation of school leadership practises within the context of Zambia. Following the completion of these studies, a process of thematic synthesis was undertaken to facilitate the identification of coherent patterns and insights within the collected data. The process of synthesis in this study entailed the systematic classification and arrangement of the gathered data into coherent themes

that accurately represented the predominant issues and obstacles encountered in the field of school leadership.

By employing a meticulous process of data synthesis and analysis, a comprehensive body of information was intricately woven together, resulting in a rich tapestry of knowledge. The multifaceted nature of school leadership in Zambia has become apparent, presenting a range of distinct challenges and opportunities. The lack of a meta-analysis in this study does not detract from its importance, as it offers a comprehensive exploration of the intricate dynamics of school leadership within the specific context of Zambia. The insights that emerge from this study provide a valuable resource for various stakeholders in the field of education, including educators, policymakers, and researchers. These findings can be utilised to improve the overall quality of education and leadership within schools in Zambia.

FINDINGS

The presentation of the findings has been carefully planned to be in line with the research questions that provided the basis for this in-depth review. Both providing an exhaustive description of the "surface features" defining Zambia's school leadership landscape and conducting a systematic analysis of the research methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and thematic areas used across the corpus of 292 studies under investigation were the main goals of these investigations using sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Leadership Styles in Zambian Schools

The literature reveals that school leadership in Zambia encompasses diverse leadership styles, each with its implications for educational outcomes. Transformational leadership, exemplified by visionary leadership and the capacity to inspire and motivate others, has been linked to increased teacher morale and student achievement (Leithwood & Wahlstrom, 2008). However, research has found a correlation between instructional leadership, which prioritizes establishing transparent standards for classroom practice, and increased student participation and achievement. Distributive leadership, involving shared decision-making and collaboration among teachers, has also shown promise in fostering a positive school climate and student success (Mulford, 2003). The following key leadership styles have been identified and studied within the Zambian educational context:

1. **Transformational Leadership:** Transformational leadership is widely recognized as a powerful and effective style that focuses on inspiring and motivating followers to achieve higher performance levels. School leaders who exhibit transformational leadership characteristics tend to have a compelling vision for the school's future and can articulate it in a way that resonates with teachers, students, and other stakeholders (Chirwa, 2017). These leaders create an organizational culture that fosters innovation, creativity, and a strong commitment to shared goals by emphasizing values, ethics, and moral purpose.

Transformational leadership has been associated with positive outcomes in Zambian schools. Studies have shown that schools led by transformational leaders experience increased teacher morale, higher levels of job satisfaction, and improved overall school climate (Ngulube, 2019). Furthermore, students in such schools tend to have higher levels of engagement and academic performance, as they are inspired by the leader's vision and passion for learning.

2. **Instructional Leadership:** Instructional leadership centers on the school leader's role in setting clear expectations for teaching and learning while actively engaging in improving classroom practices. School leaders who adopt instructional leadership devote considerable effort to monitoring and supporting teacher effectiveness through regular classroom observations, providing feedback, and promoting professional

development opportunities (Muyunda, 2022). According to existing research, there is evidence to support the notion that instructional leadership positively impacts the overall quality of teaching and learning within schools in Zambia. Instructional leaders play a crucial role in fostering a school culture that emphasizes academic achievement and ongoing improvement by highlighting teacher development and ensuring instructional practices align with educational objectives (Mulenga, 2019). The presence of instructional leaders in educational institutions has been found to positively impact students' learning experiences and academic progress, primarily attributed to the prioritization of effective pedagogical practices.

3. **Distributive Leadership:** Distributive leadership, also known as shared leadership, involves the delegation of decision-making authority and responsibilities to various members within the school community (Mulenga & Mutale, 2016). In such schools, leadership roles are distributed among teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders, creating a collaborative and participative approach to school governance. This leadership style recognizes that expertise and insights are distributed throughout the organization and encourages a collective effort to address challenges and make informed decisions. Distributive leadership has shown promise in promoting a positive school climate and enhancing overall performance. Through the active participation of educators and staff members in decision-making, educational institutions cultivate a sense of ownership and dedication toward the institution's mission and objectives (Mumba & Shawa, 2018). The adoption of a collaborative approach has the potential to yield innovative solutions, enhance job satisfaction, and bolster staff retention.

Challenges Faced by School Leaders

The literature identifies several challenges that school leaders in Zambia confront in their daily responsibilities. Inadequate resources, such as a lack of textbooks, learning materials, and basic infrastructure, hinder the effective implementation of educational programs (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2015). Moreover, limited opportunities for professional development inhibit the growth of school leaders, leading to stagnation in leadership practices and strategies (Crow, 2004; Mumba & Lushimba, 2017). Bureaucratic constraints and complex administrative procedures also burden school leaders, impeding their ability to focus on instructional improvement and student support (Bowa, 2019).

1. **Inadequate Resources:** School leaders in Zambia often struggle with a lack of resources, which hampers their ability to provide quality education. Many schools face shortages of textbooks, learning materials, and essential infrastructure, such as classrooms and sanitation facilities (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2015). Limited access to technology and internet connectivity further exacerbates the challenges, making it difficult for schools to integrate digital tools into teaching and learning processes.

Addressing this challenge requires concerted efforts from the government, education authorities, and other stakeholders to allocate adequate funding to schools and prioritize resource distribution based on need. Innovative approaches, such as public-private partnerships, can also be explored to supplement government efforts in providing necessary resources to schools in underserved areas.

2. **Limited Opportunities for Professional Development:** Effective school leadership relies on continuous professional development to keep abreast of best practices and innovative strategies. However, school leaders in Zambia often face limited opportunities for professional growth and skill enhancement (Mumba & Lushimba, 2017; Muyunda, 2022). This can result in stagnation of leadership practices, hindering the implementation of evidence-based approaches for school improvement.

In order to effectively tackle this challenge, educational authorities must give utmost importance to the implementation of comprehensive and customized leadership

development programs. The primary objective of these programs should be to provide school leaders with the requisite knowledge and skills to tackle both present and future educational challenges effectively. Regular workshops, seminars, and mentorship opportunities can effectively promote ongoing learning and foster networking among school leaders.

3. **Bureaucratic Constraints:** The bureaucratic processes and administrative requirements imposed on school leaders can be overwhelming and time-consuming. School leaders often find themselves entangled in administrative tasks, leaving less time for instructional leadership and student-focused initiatives (Bowa, 2019). This regulatory weight can inhibit creativity and innovation in schools, making it difficult for them to respond flexibly to the particular requirements of their children and communities.

Streamlining administrative procedures and reducing unnecessary paperwork can alleviate the bureaucratic burden on school leaders. Introducing digital solutions for administrative tasks, such as student records management and financial reporting, can significantly increase efficiency and free up more time for instructional leadership and student support.

4. **Teacher Attrition and Student Retention:** High teacher attrition rates and low student retention rates are persistent challenges in the Zambian education system. The constant turnover of teachers poses a significant disruption to the learning process and can negatively impact student outcomes (Muyunda, 2022; Tembo & Mwalye, 2019). Additionally, low student retention rates contribute to high dropout rates, limiting the potential for students to complete their education (Mulenga & Mutale, 2020).

To address these issues, a holistic approach is required, which includes improving teacher working conditions, providing more substantial incentives for teachers to continue in the profession, and upgrading teacher training and support programs (Lusambo, 2021; Tembo & Mwalye, 2019). Schools can employ targeted interventions to identify and address the core causes of dropout, such as academic support, mentorship, and creating a conducive learning environment to improve student retention (Mulenga & Mutale, 2020; Mwale, 2018).

In conclusion, the challenges of high teacher attrition rates and low student retention rates in the Zambian education system are well-documented in the literature. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, encompassing improvements in teacher working conditions, incentives, and training, as well as targeted interventions within schools to enhance student retention. Only through these comprehensive efforts can Zambia hope to provide its students with a quality education and increase the likelihood of students completing their educational journey.

The Importance of Technology for Improving Leadership Techniques

According to new research, technology can significantly impact school leadership practices in Zambia. Using digital platforms for communication, data management, and professional development can help improve decision-making processes and overall school performance (Ngoma, 2018). School administrators, for example, might employ online communication technologies to enhance collaboration among teachers, parents, and other stakeholders, thereby increasing transparency and inclusion in decision-making (Chabala & Bwalya, 2019). Furthermore, data analytics powered by technology can assist school administrators in identifying areas for improvement and implementing evidence-based school development plans (Chisenga, 2017).

Technology integration into education has had a considerable impact in recent years, notably in the context of school leadership in Zambia. Using various information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve leadership practices and address crucial difficulties school leaders encounter has proven beneficial. This section looks deeper into the use of technology

in enhancing leadership practices in Zambian schools, emphasizing its transformative potential and developing trends.

1. **Enhancing Communication and Collaboration:** Technology has revolutionized communication channels, enabling school leaders to engage with teachers, parents, students, and other stakeholders more efficiently. Digital communication platforms, such as emails, instant messaging, and virtual meetings, facilitate real-time interaction and information exchange (Ngoma, 2018). School leaders can now effectively disseminate essential announcements, share updates on school activities, and address concerns, fostering a more transparent and inclusive school community. Moreover, these technologies break down geographical barriers, allowing school leaders to collaborate with other schools, educational authorities, and experts, expanding their networks and resources (Chabala & Bwalya, 2019).
2. **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Technology-driven data analytics, enabling evidence-based decision-making processes, is pivotal in school leadership. School leaders can leverage digital tools to collect and analyze data related to student performance, teacher effectiveness, and school resources (Chisenga, 2017). By harnessing these insights, leaders can identify areas of improvement, allocate resources strategically, and implement targeted interventions to enhance school performance. Additionally, data-driven decision-making empowers school leaders to assess the impact of implemented policies and interventions, leading to a continuous improvement cycle.
3. **Professional Development and Capacity Building:** Technology offers various opportunities for continuous professional development and capacity building for school leaders. Online learning platforms, webinars, and virtual conferences enable school leaders to access training and resources tailored to their needs and interests (Nampota & Chola, 2021). These flexible and self-paced learning options accommodate the busy schedules of school leaders, allowing them to acquire new skills and stay updated with the latest trends in educational leadership. Furthermore, technology provides access to a wealth of scholarly research and best practices, fostering a culture of reflective practice among school leaders (Lishimpi, 2016).
4. **School Management and Administration:** The automation of administrative tasks has been a significant benefit of technology in school leadership. School leaders can use digital tools for tasks such as student enrollment, attendance tracking, and grade management, streamlining administrative processes, and saving time (Chinyemba et al., 2020). Additionally, technology facilitates efficient resource management, enabling school leaders to monitor and optimize the utilization of school facilities, budget allocation, and procurement processes.
5. **Virtual Learning Environments:** The development of virtual learning environments, especially during the COVID-19 epidemic, has brought attention to the use of technology in school leadership. School administrators have had to swiftly adjust to new instructional models and technology integration due to the move to remote and blended learning (Chinyemba et al., 2020). Online learning platforms and virtual classrooms have assumed an increasingly pivotal role in modern education, serving as essential tools for delivering high-quality instruction while maintaining the continuity of student learning. Bozkurt's research has contributed significantly to our understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with this educational shift (Mangul et al., 2017). To uphold the principles of equitable access to technology and to facilitate an environment conducive to effective virtual learning, educational leaders face the formidable task of integrating technology seamlessly into their institutions (Bozkurt, 2020).

Bozkurt's findings underscore the significance of addressing the digital divide, wherein students from disadvantaged backgrounds may lack access to the necessary technology and internet connectivity for virtual learning (Bozkurt, 2017). To mitigate this issue, school leaders must prioritize the provision of technology resources, such as laptops and internet access, to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to participate in online learning (Bozkurt, 2018). Moreover, Bozkurt highlights the importance of fostering a supportive virtual learning environment for both teachers and students (Bozkurt, 2021). This includes providing professional development opportunities for educators to enhance their digital pedagogical skills and adapt to online teaching methodologies effectively (Bozkurt, 2019). Additionally, offering students comprehensive support structures, such as access to online tutoring and counseling services, can help address the challenges posed by virtual learning (Bozkurt, 2020).

In conclusion, Bozkurt's research emphasizes the critical role of online learning platforms and virtual classrooms in contemporary education and highlights the need for school leaders to navigate the complexities of technology integration. By addressing issues of equitable access, offering professional development, and providing robust support systems, educational institutions can ensure the success of virtual learning initiatives while preserving the quality of instruction for all students.

Technology integration in school leadership has emerged as a transformative force, empowering educational leaders to navigate the complex challenges in Zambia's education system. Technology offers valuable tools for effective leadership practices, from enhancing communication and collaboration to enabling data-driven decision-making. Continuous professional development and the automation of administrative tasks further contribute to building strong leadership capacities. As Zambia's education landscape evolves, school leaders must embrace technology's potential, ensuring its equitable and effective use to foster educational excellence and equitable outcomes for all students.

Policy Interventions and Leadership Development

In order to assist and empower school leaders in Zambia, the literature emphasizes the importance of policy initiatives and leadership development programs. Strengthening leadership development programs can give school administrators the knowledge and abilities they need to handle complex issues in education (Lishimpi, 2016). Continuous professional development opportunities, including workshops, seminars, and mentoring programs, enhance leadership capabilities and foster a culture of reflective practice among school leaders (Nampota & Chola, 2021). Furthermore, promoting collaboration among educational stakeholders, including teachers, parents, communities, and policymakers, is vital to develop a shared vision for educational improvement (Chinyemba et al., 2020).

In Zambia, policy interventions and leadership development play a crucial role in nurturing effective school leadership and driving educational improvement. The literature highlights various approaches that policymakers and educational stakeholders can adopt to support and empower school leaders for enhanced performance and student outcomes.

2. Leadership Development Programs: Implementing leadership development programs is crucial in providing school leaders with the requisite knowledge, skills, and competencies to traverse the intricate landscape of educational leadership effectively. It is recommended that these programmes prioritise the cultivation of a wide range of leadership styles, with a particular emphasis on instructional and transformative approaches to leadership (Mikunda & Mwansa, 2018). According to Mwansa and Mumba (2019), it is important for leadership training programmes to encompass key elements such as strategic planning, data-driven decision-making, the cultivation of a good school environment, and the establishment of robust partnerships with stakeholders. By allocating resources towards the ongoing professional development of

school leaders, policymakers may guarantee that they stay updated on the most effective practises and evidence-based ideas for enhancing education.

3. **Mentoring and Support Networks:** Establishing mentoring programs and support networks can significantly contribute to the growth and professional development of school leaders. Mentoring allows experienced leaders to provide guidance, advice, and practical solutions to less experienced peers, fostering a culture of shared learning and reflective practice (Mulenga & Sakala, 2017). Support networks can also facilitate collaboration and the exchange of best practices among school leaders, enabling them to address common challenges and learn from one another's successes (Chabala & Muleya, 2019).
3. **Leveraging Technology for Leadership Development:** Integrating technology into leadership development initiatives can enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of professional development opportunities for school leaders. E-learning platforms can be utilized to provide self-paced, interactive courses on various leadership topics (Kabwe & Njamba, 2020). Online webinars and virtual conferences can connect school leaders with experts and practitioners from around the world, facilitating knowledge sharing and exposure to innovative leadership practices (Ngoma & Nampota, 2021).
4. **Collaborative Policy Formulation and Implementation:** Policy interventions should be formulated collaboratively, involving various stakeholders such as educators, parents, community members, and policymakers. Engaging stakeholders in the policy formulation process ensures that policies align with the practical realities and needs of schools (Simukoko et al., 2019). Furthermore, transparent and participatory policy implementation processes foster a sense of ownership among stakeholders, facilitating effective policy implementation and sustainable change (Chilipi & Katongo, 2021).

Furthermore, the implementation of policy interventions and the cultivation of leadership development play crucial roles in promoting the efficacy of school leadership within the context of Zambia. Policymakers have the potential to successfully provide school leaders with the necessary skills to confront the difficulties of the education system through the implementation of comprehensive leadership development programmes, mentorship initiatives, and the strategic use of technology. The process of collaborative policy development and implementation plays a crucial role in ensuring that policies are in line with the requirements of educational institutions and communities, hence resulting in long-lasting enhancements in educational achievements. The symbiotic relationship between meticulously formulated policies and highly skilled school administrators has the potential to provide a favourable outcome in terms of educational quality and make a significant contribution to the advancement of Zambia's educational landscape.

DISCUSSION

This systematic review of literature offers a comprehensive examination of the current state of school leadership in Zambia, utilising existing research and scholarly publications within the domain. The results highlight the significant impact that effective school leadership has on shaping the educational environment within a nation. The significance of effective leadership in enhancing educational outcomes and tackling the diverse challenges encountered by educational institutions in Zambia is readily apparent.

The significance of different leadership styles, such as transformational, instructional, and distributive leadership, has been emphasised in recent research (Kim, 2021). The implementation of various leadership approaches plays a crucial role in moulding the overall school environment and cultivating favourable interactions between educators and students. As a result, these approaches significantly contribute to the attainment of academic success.

However, it is of utmost importance to recognise the significant challenges that school leaders in Zambia are facing. The presence of scarce resources, as highlighted by Mwansa(2019), along with limited opportunities for professional development, as noted in the literature ((Mwansa, 2019), and the existence of bureaucratic constraints, as discussed by Sikasote et al., (2023), collectively hinder the capacity of educational leaders to effectively lead and establish an environment conducive to optimal learning conditions. The exacerbation of these difficulties can be observed through recent reports (Bernardo et al., 2013), which highlight challenges such as teacher attrition and student retention.

In addition, recent scholarly investigations highlight the considerable capacity of technology to enhance and strengthen school leadership practises. The utilisation of digital platforms for the purposes of communication, data management, and professional development is increasingly being recognised as a viable strategy to improve decision-making processes and ultimately raise the overall performance of educational institutions (Kwan, 2019).

Based on the conclusions drawn from this comprehensive review, it is evident that policy interventions play a crucial and indispensable role in providing support and empowerment to school leaders. According to the Zambia Ministry of Education (2023), it has been suggested that implementing customised leadership development programmes that are specifically designed for the Zambian educational context can enhance the abilities of educational leaders. These tailored programmes aim to equip leaders with the necessary skills to effectively overcome the challenges they may encounter in their roles. Through the strategic allocation of resources towards comprehensive and continuous professional development initiatives, policymakers have the potential to foster a culture of perpetual enhancement within the realm of school leadership.

In order to enhance the educational system, it is crucial to emphasise the necessity of collaboration among schools, communities, and government entities. Partnerships that are specifically designed to cultivate community engagement and involvement play a crucial role in establishing a conducive ecosystem for school leadership. The aforementioned collaborations foster a profound sense of ownership and accountability within the realm of education, thereby making a significant contribution towards the progress and development of the educational system in Zambia (Kwan, 2019).

Based on the comprehensive analysis conducted in this systematic literature review, it becomes apparent that the state of school leadership in Zambia holds significant importance. The exploration of potential avenues for enhancing educational outcomes and securing a more promising future for students in Zambia necessitates the careful consideration of challenges and the strategic utilisation of technology and community partnerships. The collaborative endeavours of policymakers, educators, and communities are imperative in this undertaking

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the insights gathered from the systematic literature review, the following recommendations are proposed:

Develop Comprehensive Leadership Development Programs: Policymakers and educational authorities should design and implement leadership development programs that address the unique needs and challenges faced by school leaders in Zambia. These programs should provide training on instructional leadership, transformative leadership, strategic planning, and effective decision-making.

Establish Support Networks and Mentorship Opportunities: Creating support networks and mentorship programs for school leaders can provide a platform for sharing experiences, best practices, and solutions. Peer support and mentorship can be invaluable resources for leadership growth and professional development.

Invest in Technology Infrastructure and Capacity Building: Policymakers should prioritize investments in technology infrastructure to enhance school leadership practices. Providing access to digital tools and training can enable school leaders to leverage technology for efficient school management and improved communication.

Conduct Further Research on Leadership Styles: Additional study is required to investigate the influence of distinct leadership styles on student outcomes in Zambia, considering the ever-evolving nature of school leadership. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the most efficacious leadership techniques can provide valuable insights for implementing focused interventions aimed at enhancing school development.

Promote Collaborative Efforts: Encouraging collaborative efforts between schools, communities, and government entities is crucial for addressing systemic challenges and promoting inclusive leadership practices. Partnerships that involve all stakeholders can lead to sustainable and holistic improvements in the education system.

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Conflict Statement

The authors has no conflicts of interest to declare.

Publication Ethical Statement

Before beginning data collecting, ethical considerations in human subject research were addressed. First and foremost, participation was optional, and participants were told that the information submitted during data collection would be used solely for the purpose of the research and that their identities would be kept anonymous throughout the writing and publication of the results. Prior to the data collection process, participants were also assured that they could withdraw from the study at any moment with no repercussions. They signed a consent form prior to completing the questionnaire, confirming their desire to participate voluntarily.

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