

Impact of learning-centred leadership practices on quality instruction of public primary schools in Gasabo District, Rwanda: A scoping review

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Abstract

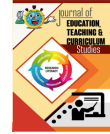
School leadership plays a crucial role in shaping quality teaching and learning globally, with growing emphasis on models that go beyond administration to actively promote instructional excellence. Learning-centred leadership, which prioritises student learning, teacher development, and supportive school environments, is a key focus in Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP 2018–2024). This scoping review applied Arksey and O'Malley's framework alongside PRISMA-ScR guidelines to analyze literature from 2017 to 2025, examining how learning-centred leadership affects quality instruction in public primary schools in Gasabo District, Rwanda, with studies screened for relevance and rigour. Findings indicate that learning-centred leadership significantly enhances instructional quality. Effective instructional supervision strongly correlates with improved teacher performance, and targeted professional development fosters both teacher growth and student achievement. Transformational and democratic leadership styles were identified as most effective in promoting teacher commitment and positive school outcomes. Furthermore, a positive school culture and collaborative learning environments contribute substantially to academic success. However, systemic challenges such as limited school leader training, administrative burdens, resource constraints, and inconsistent supervision impede these leadership benefits. The review concludes that addressing these barriers through focused professional development, resource investment, and streamlined administrative demands is essential for sustained instructional improvement. These insights offer valuable guidance for Rwanda's educational reforms aimed at empowering school leaders to enhance teaching quality in public primary schools.

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Introduction

Quality instruction is fundamental in ensuring students acquire essential competencies for academic and professional success. It serves as a cornerstone for achieving desired learning outcomes and contributing to societal progress and economic development (REB, 2013; MINEDUC, 2013; Engin, 2020; Sumardi et al., 2020). Quality instruction involves teaching and learning practices that lead to effective learning,



understanding, and skill development in students, enabling them to acquire the necessary competencies required in the market (Hesari & Pourshafei, 2025).

On the other hand, learning-centred leadership is one of the modern educational leadership approaches of the 21st century that prioritises student learning and academic achievement (Beach, 2020). School leaders who use this leadership style take students to a complex globalised world of competencies and take the school to unequalled excellence (Linda et al., 2020; Mbatuyimana & Hesbonopiyo andala, 2024). A learning-centred leadership style is identified to promote quality instruction when implemented effectively (Aslan et al., 2023). Quality instruction in developing countries can only be promising if school leaders adopt a learning-centred leadership (Engin, 2020; Sumardi et al., 2020).

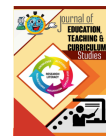
Martin et al. (2023) presented empirical studies from the United States of America, saying that quality instruction in schools is closely linked to the leadership style employed by the headteacher. Similarly, Mukamana and Tuyisenge (2025) emphasise that if the school leadership style is centred on teaching and learning, the quality instruction of that school is certainly outstanding. It is a fact that learning-centred leadership significantly enhances quality instruction by fostering differentiated teaching approaches that address diverse learner needs.

In addition, Choi et al. (2019) affirm that a learning-centred leadership style ensures teachers receive professional support, apply evidence-based teaching strategies, and utilise assessment techniques that promote student engagement and learning outcomes. Sankalaite et al. (2023) demonstrated international evidence from the Netherlands and Belgium, which confirms the need for learning-centred leadership in primary education to improve aspects of quality education such as academic performance, behaviour, health, and social development.

Similarly, Wright et al. (2023) confirm the above point, saying that the joint between learning-centred leadership style and quality instruction is grounded in its ability to empower teachers and enhance classroom practice at the start of the leadership appointment. As Wright put it, Fernando et al. (2024) confirm that effective school leadership style results in primary quality instruction as it helps identify any early learning gaps or challenges that may need targeted interventions in educational leadership.

Subsequently, Eryilmaz and Sandoval (2021) highlight research from high-performing education systems (Finland, Japan, Singapore, Canada, China, and others), underscoring the role of learning-centred leadership in driving quality instruction through policies and teacher professional development initiatives focused on innovative pedagogical methods. Linda et al. (2020) confirm that these systems allow timely support and remediation to ensure that schools deliver quality education and that students are equipped with essential skills.

According to Aryeh-Adjei (2021), learning-centred leadership is not common in Africa because headteachers focus on administrative duties rather than being learning-centred. Yet again, traditional views from Ghana prioritise respect and reporting structures over actively shaping teaching and learning practices in schools. On the contrary, Diame (2023) argues that headteachers should be actively involved in the school function and use a learning-centred leadership style to foster academic and social cohesion. In this frame, Ombao et al. (2025) suggest that headteachers in developing countries, including African countries, employ a leadership style that fosters the entire school's excellence regardless of barriers.



In Rwanda, the national education policy recognises the significance of school leadership in improving quality instruction. For example, the Rwanda Ministry of Education (MINEDUC, 2019) has identified professional leadership standards to enhance school management and instructional effectiveness. Likewise, the Rwanda Education Board (REB, 2022) has introduced performance indicators for headteachers to strengthen school leadership practices. Despite these efforts, studies highlight ongoing disparities in quality instruction across schools, with persistent challenges related to professional development, resource management, and instructional supervision (Simpeze et al., 2022; Nirere et al., 2024).

In Gasabo District, Nyandwi and Hesbon (2024) and Gatsinzi et al. (2020) reveal inconsistencies in quality instruction, attributed to factors such as inadequate professional development, overcrowded classrooms, and variations in school leadership practices, which impact quality instruction. Habyarimana et al. (2022) conducted a critical analysis of factors hindering quality education; some of those factors include school health and nutrition services and internal inefficiency. They therefore recommend a combined effort of different parties to promote quality education in schools.

Evidence from various educational contexts highlights the critical role of school leadership in enhancing quality instruction. Studies locally and globally show that leadership focused on teaching and learning improves instructional practices, teacher performance, and student outcomes. Traditional leadership models, however, struggle to address educational challenges in Africa, including Rwanda. In Gasabo District, poor instructional quality remains a concern. This scoping review aims to synthesise literature from 2017 to 2025 on the impact of learning-centred leadership in Gasabo's public primary schools, providing a foundation for addressing these challenges with evidence-based strategies.

Methodology

This scoping review followed Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) five-stage framework, a well-established approach for mapping existing literature and identifying gaps. This framework is enhanced with PRISMA-ScR (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews) guidelines to improve transparency and replicability.

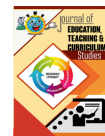
Identifying the research question

The guiding research question was: How does learning-centred leadership influence quality instruction in public primary schools in Gasabo District, Rwanda? The review aimed to synthesise existing literature to inform the understanding of learning-centred leadership practices and their relationship to quality instruction, providing relevant insights for Rwanda.

Identifying relevant studies

A comprehensive search was conducted for literature published between 2017 and 2025 across multiple databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR, and ResearchGate, as well as grey literature from the Rwanda Education Board (REB) and the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC). Search terms were used in various Boolean combinations, such as:

Learning-centred leadership is a leadership approach that focuses on fostering a learning culture within schools by supporting teacher learning, shaping vision, promoting collaboration, and building systems that facilitate effective teaching and learning. Unlike traditional models, it emphasises capacity-building for all school stakeholders to enhance instructional effectiveness (Alanoglu, 2023).



Public primary schools are schools funded and operated by government entities, providing foundational education from primary 1-6 to all children in a district or region, open without tuition fees.

Transformational leadership theory: A leadership model where leaders inspire and motivate their team through vision, intellectual stimulation, individualised support, and modelling of high moral standards, driving improved performance and innovation. Jaroliya and Gyanchandani (2022) explain that this theory is particularly relevant to educational settings where leaders foster individuals' interest in the quality of institutions.

Quality Instructional reflects the degree to which teaching practices effectively support student learning, encompassing teachers' content knowledge, use of research-based strategies, ongoing assessment, and adaptability to students' cultural and academic needs. Grissom et al. (2021) describe quality instruction as a wide set of objectives, which can be assessed through various indicators that provide insights into the overall effectiveness of teaching and learning. In other words, quality instruction denotes all teaching and learning practices that promote effective student learning, leading to high learning achievements.

Pragmatism paradigm: Dube et al. (2024) explain the pragmatism paradigm as a flexible, practical research philosophy that values the use of methods and theories best suited to answer the research question, whether qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods. It focuses on practical outcomes and real-world effectiveness rather than strict adherence to traditional paradigms. The pragmatism will facilitate an extensive study of the impact of learning-centred leadership on instructional quality, as it examines the nature of knowledge and its potential to address community issues. The review was restricted to publications between 2017 and 2025 and limited to the English language to maintain consistency and ensure accessibility for analysis.

Study selection

The study selection process involved two screening phases:

Title and abstract screening

1. All retrieved records were imported into an Excel spreadsheet.
2. Duplicates were removed.
3. Titles and abstracts were independently screened against the inclusion criteria.

Articles that did not meet criteria (e.g., wrong setting, unrelated topic) were excluded at this stage.

Full-text screening

4. Articles that passed Step 1 underwent full-text review.
5. The same applied inclusion and exclusion criteria in detail.
6. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

Inclusion criteria were:

- (a) studies conducted in Rwanda or in comparable low to middle-income educational contexts,
- (b) focus on public primary schools,
- (c) examination of learning-centred leadership and quality instruction, and
- (d) availability in full-text. Both peer-reviewed articles and policy documents were included to capture a broad spectrum of evidence from different backgrounds worldwide.



Exclusion criteria

- (a) Studies in private schools only
- (b) Studies outside the education sector
- (c) Conference abstracts without full papers
- (d) Publications before 2017

Charting the data

A standardised extraction template was used to record study details, including author, year, context, design, sample size, key findings, and recommendations. The data were independently screened and extracted, with discrepancies resolved through consensus to ensure reliability.

Collating, summarising, and reporting results

Data were analysed using thematic synthesis to identify patterns, challenges, and research gaps. Descriptive statistics summarised study characteristics, while narrative synthesis integrated qualitative and quantitative findings.

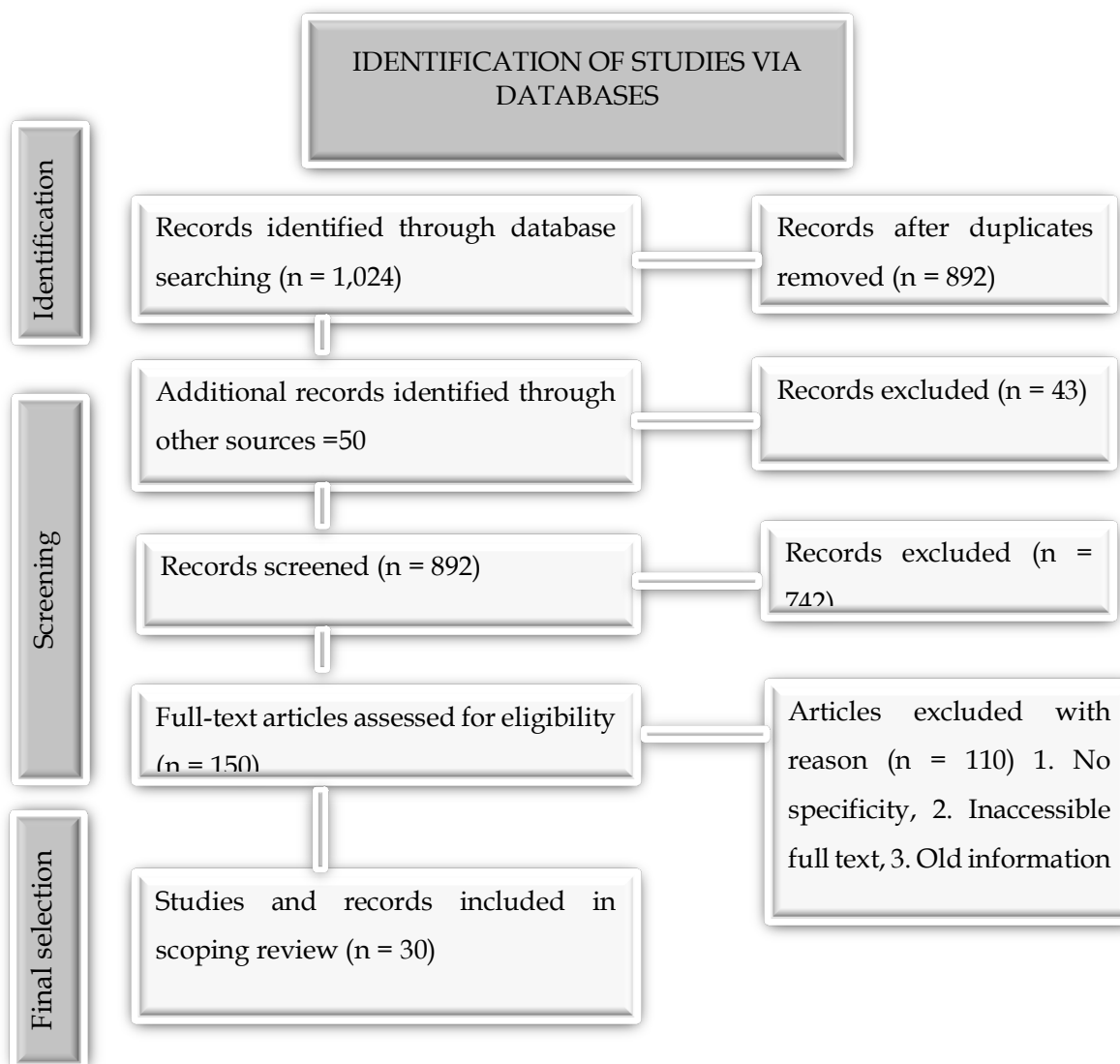
Policy implication

Findings from this review can inform Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP 2024–2029) by providing evidence-based recommendations to strengthen headteachers' capacity in learning-centred leadership. Specifically, the results highlight the need for targeted leadership training, increased resource allocation for instructional improvement, and policies that reduce administrative burdens to allow school leaders to focus more on teaching and learning.

PRISMA flow diagram

The review process began with the identification of 1,024 records across four databases: Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR, and ResearchGate, and 50 additional items from grey literature sources. After removing 132 duplicates, 892 unique records remained for screening. Title and abstract screening excluded 742 records that did not meet the inclusion criteria. The remaining 150 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, with 110 further excluded due to irrelevance, lack of a focus on public primary schools, or unavailable full texts. This resulted in 30 studies included in the final synthesis. Additional items from grey literature sources were screened and excluded ($n = 47$). The process remained with 37 relevant studies and grey literature sources as detailed in the PRISMA-ScR flow diagram below.

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram of data identification



Source: The researcher (2025)

Search strategy

A thorough literature search was conducted to examine learning-centred leadership and its impact on instructional quality in Gasabo District's public primary schools. The search covered peer-reviewed articles, grey literature, government policy documents, and institutional reports published from January 2017 to January 2025. Multiple databases were used, including Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR, and ResearchGate, to capture scholarly articles, theses, and conference proceedings. Additionally, national sources such as the Rwanda Education Board, Ministry of Education, and National Examination School



Authority provided policy documents and reports. Grey literature from educational organisations and unpublished theses relevant to school leadership and instructional quality in Rwanda were also included.

Findings

This section presents findings from the scoping review, organised into thematic areas reflecting the relationship between learning-centred leadership and instructional quality in public primary schools in Gasabo District, Rwanda. The reviewed studies highlight diverse leadership dimensions ranging from instructional supervision and professional development to leadership styles and practices and their influence on teaching quality, teacher commitment, and student outcomes. By synthesising evidence from both local and national contexts, the themes illustrate how leadership practices can either strengthen or hinder instructional effectiveness, depending on their design, implementation, and contextual fit.

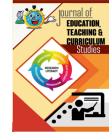
First and foremost, Theodomir and Claire (2022) investigated the effect of instructional supervision on teachers' performance in Gasabo District, Rwanda. The study found a robust positive correlation between instructional supervision and teachers' classroom performance ($r = 0.913$, $p < 0.01$). This relationship indicated that effective supervision practices enhanced teachers' preparation, delivery, and assessment in class. The findings highlighted that when school leaders implemented consistent supervision, teachers demonstrated improved pedagogical skills and higher student engagement.

Besides, Mukingambeho et al. (2024) reported that in Gasabo District, effective leadership practices such as lesson observation, feedback provision, and collaborative lesson planning directly influenced teacher motivation, instructional improvement, and student learning outcomes. However, the study also revealed gaps in supervision, including a lack of pre-observation conferences, vague and non-specific feedback, and minimal follow-up after observations, which limited the potential impact of the supervision process.

In contrast, Nirere et al. (2023) found that in other districts, instructional leadership was often ineffective. School leaders demonstrated weak professional behaviours, limited engagement with teachers' classroom practices, and inconsistent implementation of supervision frameworks. This reduced the likelihood of significant improvements in teaching quality, suggesting regional disparities in leadership effectiveness across Rwanda.

In the same line, Sibomana and Ndayambaje (2024) examined the relationship between teacher training and student performance in Kicukiro District. They reported a high positive correlation between teacher training and student performance ($r = 0.940$, $p < 0.01$) and between teacher training and teacher professional growth ($r = 0.890$, $p < 0.01$). The study concluded that when teachers participated in regular, targeted professional development, they demonstrated greater instructional competence and students achieved better academic results.

Along with this, Nzarugarura and Ndagijimana (2025) studied professional development for school leaders in Rubavu District. Their findings showed that participation in professional development was strongly associated with effective leadership ($R = 0.992$, $R^2 = 0.983$, $p < 0.01$). However, the study identified major barriers to participation, including insufficient funding, time constraints, and logistical challenges, which reduced the frequency and quality of professional development engagements, thereby limiting their overall impact.



At a national scale, Uworwabayeho et al. (2021) identified the perception of mathematics teachers on professional development to improve instruction and learning outcomes in Rwanda. In the same line, Anand et al. (2023) evaluated a large-scale professional development programme that trained 525 school leaders. While the programme did not produce a statistically significant average effect on student test scores across all schools, public primary schools recorded improvements equivalent to 0.11 standard deviations compared to government-aided schools. This suggests that context-specific factors, such as school governance type, influenced the effectiveness of leadership training programmes.

Coupled with what is mentioned above, Ombao et al. (2025) conducted a systematic review of 44 studies on leadership styles and their effects on school outcomes. The review identified transformational and democratic leadership styles as the most effective for enhancing teacher performance, learner success, and overall school achievement. Transformational leaders inspired teachers to adopt innovative teaching strategies, while democratic leaders fostered shared decision-making and collaboration, creating a more supportive professional environment.

Conversely, Musabwayire and Sikubwabo (2024) assessed the influence of leadership practices on teacher commitment. Their regression analysis revealed that motivation ($\beta = 0.469$), supervision ($\beta = 0.368$), evaluation ($\beta = 0.495$), and training and development ($\beta = 0.081$) all had a statistically significant positive effect on teacher commitment ($p < 0.05$). The findings suggested that leadership practices targeting both professional support and accountability were critical to sustaining teacher dedication to their work.

Hence, Sibomana (2022) and Nsengumuremyi and Imaniriho (2025) investigated instructional leadership practices among school principals and found that they moderately engaged in core leadership functions, including supervision, setting instructional goals, and providing resources. While these practices supported teaching and learning to some extent, the moderate level of implementation indicated room for improvement in fully embedding instructional leadership principles into school operations.

Though, Nyandwi and Hebson (2024) explored the effect of school cultural practices on learners' academic performance in Gasabo District. The study reported a strong positive relationship ($R^2 = 0.793$, $r = 0.916$, $p < 0.01$) between positive cultural practices and academic performance. Elements of school culture such as shared goals, established school symbols, commonly understood norms, and positive teacher-learner relationships were identified as key drivers of improved learning outcomes.

Nkundimana and Mugiraneza (2024) evaluated the impact of peer learning competencies in schools. The results indicated substantial improvements in student outcomes: grades (93.1%), problem-solving skills (91.5%), conceptual understanding (94.5%), collaboration (92%), and metacognitive skills (94.5%). The study also found a strong positive correlation between peer learning and academic competences ($r = 0.860$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that collaborative learning structures can significantly enhance academic performance.

Beforehand, UNESCO (2020) reported that many school leaders in Rwanda have not received formal training in learning-centred leadership, limiting their capacity to drive instructional improvement effectively. Then, Bush (2023), MINEDUC (2018), and Huber and Muijs (2022) documented systemic barriers to effective instructional leadership, including administrative overload, inconsistent teacher



evaluation frameworks, and shortages of essential teaching resources such as ICT tools and learning materials. These factors reduce the time and attention leaders can devote to instructional quality.

Discussion

This section discusses the key findings of the scoping review on learning-centred leadership and its influence on instructional quality in public primary schools in Gasabo District, Rwanda. The discussion is organised around thematic areas that capture the multifaceted relationship between leadership practices and educational outcomes. Drawing on evidence from diverse local and national studies, the themes explore how instructional supervision, professional development, leadership styles, school culture, and systemic factors contribute to or hinder the improvement of teaching quality, teacher commitment, and student achievement. By synthesising these findings, this section highlights both the promising strategies and persistent challenges facing school leaders in their efforts to enhance instructional effectiveness and school success.

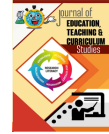
The evidence from Gasabo District and other regions consistently points to a strong positive link between instructional supervision and teaching quality. Theodomir and Claire's (2022) correlation of $r = 0.913$ confirms that consistent, well-structured supervision directly improves teachers' classroom delivery, preparation, and assessment practices. This finding aligns with the work of Mukingambeho et al. (2024) who emphasise that leadership actions such as lesson observation, constructive feedback, and collaborative planning enhance teacher motivation and student learning.

However, the data also expose weaknesses in supervision processes. The lack of pre-observation conferences and vague feedback limits the depth of instructional improvement. Nirere et al. (2023) further by showing regional disparities: in some districts, weak professional conduct and inconsistent supervision frameworks undermine teaching quality. Collectively, these studies suggest that while instructional leadership has high potential, its impact depends heavily on the quality, structure, and consistency of its application.

Quantitative evidence strongly supports professional development (PD) as a critical factor for both teacher growth and student outcomes. Sibomana and Ndayambaje (2024) demonstrate near-perfect correlations between teacher training and both student performance ($r = 0.940$) and teacher development ($r = 0.890$), confirming PD's dual benefit. For school leaders, Nzarugarura and Ndagijimana's (2025) findings ($R = 0.992$, $R^2 = 0.983$) highlight that leadership effectiveness is significantly boosted by PD participation.

Nevertheless, PD uptake faces systemic obstacles—limited funding, time constraints, and logistical barriers reduce its frequency and quality. The national-scale evaluation by Anand et al. (2023) reinforces that the effectiveness of PD is context-dependent: public primary schools showed modest but notable gains ($0.11 SD$), whereas other school types saw no significant improvement. This underscores that PD design must be context-specific, sustained, and resource-supported to have a transformative impact.

The review by Ombao et al. (2025) identifies transformational and democratic leadership as the most effective in driving teacher performance, learner achievement, and overall school success. Statistical evidence from Musabwayire and Sikubwabo (2024) further dissects the drivers of teacher commitment: motivation ($\beta = 0.469$), evaluation ($\beta = 0.495$), supervision ($\beta = 0.368$), and training and development ($\beta = 0.081$) all contribute significantly ($p < 0.05$).



Yet, Sibomana's (2022) findings caution that in practice, principals only moderately engage in core leadership functions, suggesting that the benefits of effective styles are not fully realised. The implication is that leadership training should not only promote effective styles but also ensure leaders have the capacity and accountability to apply them consistently.

School culture emerges as a powerful determinant of student achievement. Nyandwi and Hebson's (2024) results ($R^2 = 0.793$, $r = 0.916$) show that shared goals, school symbols, and strong teacher-learner relationships have a direct and significant influence on performance. Similarly, Nkundimana and Mugiraneza (2024) report exceptionally high improvements in key learning competencies, conceptual understanding (94.5%), collaboration (92%), and metacognitive skills (94.5%), through peer learning structures.

The statistical strength of these findings suggests that, beyond formal leadership roles, fostering positive cultural norms and structured collaboration among students and staff can be a low-cost, high-impact lever for boosting instructional quality.

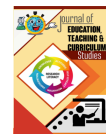
Despite the promise of learning-centred leadership, systemic barriers persist. UNESCO (2020) identifies the absence of formal training for many school leaders, which limits their instructional leadership capacity. Resource shortages, administrative overload, and inconsistent teacher evaluation frameworks (Bush, 2023; MINEDUC, 2018; Huber & Muijs, 2022) divert attention away from instructional quality. Moreover, district-level disparities in leadership capacity exacerbate nationwide inequalities in teaching quality.

These constraints suggest that leadership interventions must be paired with systemic reforms reducing administrative burdens, standardising evaluation frameworks, and ensuring equitable resource allocation to create an enabling environment for instructional leadership to thrive.

The discussion underscores that learning-centred leadership plays a critical role in advancing instructional quality and student outcomes. Adequate instructional supervision, ongoing professional development, and the adoption of transformational and democratic leadership styles emerge as pivotal drivers of teaching excellence and teacher commitment. Additionally, positive school cultural practices and collaborative learning environments further enhance academic achievement. However, systemic barriers such as limited leader training, administrative overload, resource constraints, and uneven leadership capacity across districts restrict the full realisation of these benefits. To achieve sustained improvements in instructional quality, it is essential to complement leadership development with supportive policies, adequate resources, and equitable systems that empower school leaders to implement best practices across Rwanda's public primary schools consistently.

Research Gaps

A key gap identified in the literature is the lack of knowledge for school leaders in learning-centred leadership. While school leaders are expected to play a central role in improving teaching and learning, many lack the necessary leadership skills due to insufficient preparation (UNESCO, 2020; Bush, 2023). This gap hinders their ability to mentor teachers, use data for instructional improvement, and create effective teaching environments. Addressing this gap through assessing the influence of learning-centred leadership on quality instruction is essential for enhancing school leadership effectiveness and quality instruction in Rwandan public primary schools, particularly in Gasabo District.



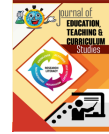
Conclusion

This scoping review reveals that learning-centred leadership can significantly improve instructional quality in Rwanda's public primary schools, particularly in Gasabo District. School leaders who actively implement practices such as regular lesson monitoring, individualised teacher mentoring, and data-driven decision-making demonstrate positive impacts on teaching and student learning outcomes. However, challenges such as insufficient formal training, excessive administrative duties, limited teaching resources, and inconsistent teacher evaluation frameworks continue to impede progress. To address these issues, it is recommended that school leaders institutionalise regular lesson observation schedules with structured pre- and post-observation conferences to provide timely, specific, and actionable feedback to teachers.

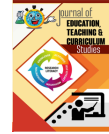
The Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) should develop and mandate comprehensive, ongoing professional development programmes focused explicitly on learning-centred leadership competencies, including instructional supervision and data use for decision-making. District education offices reduce administrative burdens on school leaders by delegating non-instructional tasks where possible, enabling leaders to prioritise instructional leadership activities. Schools and districts invest in essential teaching and learning resources, such as ICT tools and instructional materials, to support effective classroom practices. Teacher evaluation systems should be standardised and aligned nationally to ensure consistent, fair, and constructive assessments that promote continuous professional growth. Researchers and policymakers collaborate to monitor and evaluate the implementation of these leadership initiatives, using data to refine strategies and scale successful models across the region. By implementing these targeted actions, stakeholders can create a supportive environment that empowers school leaders to lead instructional improvements effectively and sustainably across Rwanda's public primary schools.

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