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# Exploring School Leadership Mechanisms for Enhancing Teacher performance: A case study of Public Secondary Schools of Rumonge District, Burundi

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***Abstract*: This study explored the mechanisms of school leadership used to enhance teacher performance in public secondary schools in Rumonge District, Burundi. This study is guided by instructional and transformational leadership theories, and adopts a qualitative case study design to generate an in-depth, comprehensible understanding of leadership practices in a real school context. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data with fifteen participants, among whom were school heads and teachers, and were complemented by document analysis. To identify key leadership mechanisms and contextual challenges affecting teacher performance, thematic analysis was used. Therefore, the findings reveal that instructional supervision, professional support, teacher motivation, and participatory leadership are the primary mechanisms through which school leaders influence teacher performance. In general, teachers perceived leadership practices positively, particularly when supervision was supportive, recognition was fairly applied, and decision-making was inclusive. However, large class sizes, limited teaching resources, heavy administrative workloads and centralised decision-making structures are contextual challenges which constrained the effectiveness of these leadership mechanisms. The contribution of this study is to the limited empirical literature on educational leadership in Burundi by providing context-sensitive insights into how leadership mechanisms operate in public secondary schools. It offers practical implications for school leaders and policymakers seeking to strengthen leadership capacity for improving teacher performance in resource-constrained and post-conflict education systems.**

***Keywords*: school leadership; teacher performance; instructional leadership; transformational leadership; participatory leadership; Burundi; Sub-Saharan Africa.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

School leadership is widely recognised as a critical factor in improving teacher performance and overall school effectiveness. Teachers are influenced by effective school leaders through supervision, professional support, motivation, shared decision-making, and the creation of conducive teaching and learning environments (Bush, 2020; Hallinger, 2011). In secondary schools, where teachers face increasing demands related to curriculum coverage, learner diversity, and accountability, leadership mechanisms play a decisive role in shaping teachers' commitment, instructional practices, and professional growth (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020).

Globally, empirical studies have demonstrated that leadership practices, including instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership, positively influence teacher performance and job satisfaction (Day et al., 2016; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). In the African context, school leadership has been identified as a key lever for improving teacher effectiveness

in resource-constrained settings, where challenges such as limited teaching materials, large class sizes, and inadequate professional development persist (Bush & Oduro, 2006; Mestry, 2017). Studies conducted in East Africa further suggest that supportive leadership practices enhance teacher morale, accountability, and instructional quality (Mushi & Mtaita, 2021; Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2006).

Despite this growing body of literature, there remains a significant contextual and empirical gap. Many existing studies on school leadership and teacher performance are concentrated in Western or Asian contexts, with limited evidence from Francophone and post-conflict education systems, such as those in Burundi. Moreover, within Burundi, research on educational leadership has largely focused on policy implementation and access to education, paying less attention to the school-level leadership mechanisms through which principals and administrators influence teacher performance in daily practice (Ndayiragije, 2018; Bigirimana & Nkurunziza, 2020). This gap limits a contextualised understanding of how leadership operates in public secondary schools facing unique administrative, socio-economic, and institutional challenges.

In addition, existing studies in the region often adopt quantitative approaches that measure leadership styles and teacher performance but do not sufficiently explore the processes and mechanisms through which leadership practices translate into improved teacher performance. As a result, there is a need for in-depth, context-sensitive research that captures the perspectives of school leaders and teachers within their real working environments.

Against this background, the present study adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore the mechanisms of school leadership used to enhance teacher performance in public secondary schools in Rumonge District, Burundi. The purpose of the study is to examine the leadership practices employed by school leaders, understand teachers' perceptions of these practices, and identify challenges that affect the effectiveness of leadership in enhancing teacher performance. By focusing on Rumonge District, the study provides a grounded analysis of leadership within a specific local context, while contributing insights that may be relevant to similar settings in developing countries.

This study contributes to the field of Educational Leadership in several ways. First, it enriches the limited empirical literature on school leadership in Burundi and comparable Sub-Saharan African contexts. Second, it provides a nuanced understanding of leadership mechanisms beyond formal leadership styles, highlighting everyday practices that influence teacher performance. Third, the findings offer practical implications for school leaders, education administrators, and policymakers seeking to strengthen leadership capacity and improve teacher performance in public secondary schools. Finally, as an international scholarly contribution, the study bridges global leadership theories with local realities, supporting the development of more inclusive and context-responsive educational leadership research.

**Research Objectives**

1. To explore the school leadership mechanisms employed to enhance teacher performance in public secondary schools.

2. To examine teachers' perceptions of how school leadership practices influence their professional performance.

3. To identify challenges and context-based strategies related to the implementation of school leadership mechanisms for improving teacher performance.

**Research Questions**

1. What school leadership mechanisms are used to enhance teacher performance in public secondary schools?

2. How do teachers perceive the influence of school leadership practices on their professional performance?

3. What challenges and improvement strategies are associated with the implementation of leadership mechanisms aimed at enhancing teacher performance?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Conceptualising School Leadership in Secondary Education

School leadership has been widely acknowledged as a pivotal element in shaping school effectiveness and improving teaching and learning outcomes. Bush (2020) defines school leadership as the process through which school leaders influence teachers and other stakeholders to achieve educational goals. In secondary schools, leadership extends beyond administrative duties to include instructional guidance, staff motivation, supervision, and the creation of supportive professional environments (Hallinger, 2011).

Internationally, research has shown that effective school leadership contributes indirectly to student achievement by enhancing teacher performance, commitment, and instructional quality (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020). Leadership practices such as setting clear goals, fostering collaboration, and monitoring teaching practices are particularly important in secondary schools, where subject specialisation and organisational complexity require coordinated leadership approaches (Day et al., 2016).

In the African context, school leadership is often exercised within challenging conditions, including limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and policy pressures (Bush & Oduro, 2006). Despite these constraints, effective leadership remains a critical driver of teacher performance and school improvement (Mestry, 2017). This underscores the need to understand leadership not only as a formal role but also as a set of mechanisms adapted to local realities.

**2. Leadership Mechanisms and Teacher Performance**

Teacher performance refers to teachers' effectiveness in planning lessons, delivering instruction, managing classrooms, assessing learners, and engaging in professional responsibilities (Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2006). Research consistently indicates that school leadership influences teacher performance through multiple mechanisms rather than through direct control (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

Instructional leadership has been identified as one of the most influential forms of leadership. Hallinger (2011) argues that principals who actively supervise teaching, provide feedback, and support curriculum implementation positively influence teachers' instructional practices. Similarly, Robinson et al. (2008) found that leadership focused on teaching and learning has a stronger impact on teacher performance than purely administrative leadership.

Transformational leadership also plays a significant role by motivating teachers, building trust, and fostering professional commitment (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). In this approach, school leaders inspire teachers through shared vision, recognition, and support for professional growth. Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa suggest that transformational leadership enhances teacher morale and job satisfaction, which, in turn, improves performance (Nguni et al., 2006; Mushi & Mtaita, 2021).

Distributed leadership further highlights the importance of shared responsibility and collaboration among teachers and school leaders. According to Spillane (2006), leadership is not confined to the school head but is distributed across individuals and situations. In secondary schools, distributed leadership promotes peer learning, teamwork, and collective accountability, which are essential for sustaining teacher performance.

**3. Teachers' Perceptions of Leadership Practices**

Teachers' perceptions of school leadership are crucial in determining the effectiveness of leadership mechanisms. When teachers perceive leadership practices as supportive, fair, and participatory, they are more likely to demonstrate commitment, innovation, and improved performance (Day et al., 2016). Conversely, authoritarian or inconsistent leadership practices can undermine teacher motivation and professional engagement.

Empirical studies show that teachers value leadership practices that involve them in decision-making, recognise their efforts, and provide opportunities for professional development (Leithwood et al., 2020). In African secondary schools, participatory leadership has been associated with higher levels of teacher commitment and instructional effectiveness (Mestry, 2017; Ngussa & Gabriel, 2017).

In Burundi and similar contexts, where teachers often work under difficult socio-economic conditions, supportive leadership becomes even more critical. Ndayiragije (2018) emphasises that teachers' perceptions of leadership support influence their willingness to remain committed to teaching despite systemic challenges. However, research capturing teachers' voices and lived experiences of leadership in Burundian secondary schools remains limited.

**4. Challenges in Implementing Leadership Mechanisms**

Despite the acknowledged importance of school leadership, leaders face numerous challenges in implementing effective leadership mechanisms. These challenges include limited leadership training, inadequate resources, heavy administrative workloads, and policy constraints (Bush, 2020). In many public secondary schools in developing countries, school leaders are expected to improve teacher performance without sufficient institutional support (Bush & Oduro, 2006).

Studies conducted in East Africa reveal that principals often struggle to balance instructional leadership with administrative responsibilities, reducing their ability to supervise and support teachers effectively (Mushi & Mtaita, 2021). Additionally, resistance to change, low teacher motivation, and unclear accountability systems further complicate leadership efforts (Mestry, 2017).

In Burundi, structural challenges such as large class sizes, limited teaching materials, and centralised decision-making processes may constrain school leaders' capacity to implement leadership mechanisms effectively (Bigirimana & Nkurunziza, 2020). These contextual realities highlight the importance of exploring leadership mechanisms as they are practised, rather than assuming the applicability of leadership models developed in different contexts.

### 5. Research Gap

Although extensive literature exists on school leadership and teacher performance, several gaps remain. First, much of the existing research is concentrated in Western and Asian contexts, with limited qualitative evidence from Francophone Sub-Saharan African countries, particularly Burundi. Second, many studies focus on leadership styles and outcomes but provide limited insight into the mechanisms and processes through which leadership practices influence teacher performance at the school level. Third, teachers' and school leaders' lived experiences within specific local contexts remain underexplored.

### 6. Theoretical Perspective

To address these gaps, the present study adopts a qualitative case study approach, grounded primarily in instructional leadership theory (Hallinger, 2011), transformational leadership theory (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005) and distributed theory (Spillane,2006). These theoretical perspectives provide a framework for understanding how leadership practices shape teacher performance through supervision, motivation, professional support, and shared vision. By integrating these three theories, the study provides a holistic framework for understanding how school leadership mechanisms operate in public secondary schools in Rumonge District. Together, they enable a nuanced analysis of how leadership practices influence teacher performance within a specific local context, while contributing context-sensitive insights that bridge global leadership theories and local educational realities

## III. METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore school leadership mechanisms used to enhance teacher performance in public secondary schools of Rumonge District, Burundi. A qualitative approach was appropriate because it allows for an in-depth understanding of leadership practices, perceptions, and experiences within their real-life school context. The study design enabled a detailed examination of leadership mechanisms as they are enacted at the school level.

### Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in 5 public secondary schools in Rumonge District, located in southern Burundi. The district was purposively selected for its relevance to public secondary education and for the diversity of school leadership contexts. Using the purposive sampling technique, 15 participants were selected, comprising 5 school heads and 10 teachers. Participants were selected based on their professional roles, years of experience and active involvement in school leadership and instructional practices, especially those who are able to express themselves in English. For head teachers**:** Minimum of three years of experience in a leadership position; active involvement in instructional supervision and school management; and teachers**:** Minimum of two years of teaching experience; active participation in school committees or professional development activities; willingness to share experiences of leadership practices. These criteria ensured that participants had sufficient experience and involvement in school leadership and instructional practices to provide rich and relevant data. Their varied perspectives enabled the collection of rich and relevant data regarding leadership practices and teacher performance.

### Data Collection Methods

The semi-structured interview method was primarily used to collect data with school leaders and teachers. This method allowed for deep, understandable exploration while maintaining focus on the research objectives.

**Protocol**: Interview guides were developed separately for teachers and school headteachers. The guides included open-ended questions probing key issues related to leadership practices, teacher performance, and support factors.

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**Procedure**: Interviews were conducted face-to-face with participants expressing their views freely; each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, which allowed sufficient time for respondents to share their reflections and experiences. In addition to the interviews, the document analysis of school records, such as supervision reports, school improvement plans, teacher lesson plans and minutes of staff meetings, was used to complement interview data and strengthen data triangulation.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

To analyse the data, a thematic analysis approach was used. Interview data were transcribed verbatim and analysed through iterative coding, including familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, and identification of themes as outlined by Braun and Clarke's (2006) and were compared across the groups of participants, such as teachers and principals, to ensure credibility and consistency.

**Trustworthiness of the Study**

Trustworthiness was ensured through the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was enhanced through data triangulation and member checking. Dependability and confirmability were addressed by maintaining an audit trail of research procedures and analytical decisions; this was to facilitate reflexivity by keeping a reflexive journal to document biases. Thick descriptions of the research context were provided to support the transferability of the findings. In addition, all participants' consent was obtained through a written form provided in English, clearly outlining the research objective, procedures, potential risks and benefits, the right to withdraw at any time and confidentiality measures.

## IV. FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study based on data collected from semi-structured interviews with five school heads (A, B, C, D, and E) and ten teachers (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, and T10) in public secondary schools of Rumonge District, Burundi. The findings are organised thematically, in line with the research objectives and questions. The analysis reflects participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of school leadership mechanisms and their influence on teacher performance.

**Instructional Supervision and Professional Support as Core Leadership Mechanisms**

One of the most prominent leadership mechanisms reported by both school leaders and teachers was instructional supervision and professional support. School heads indicated that classroom supervision, lesson plan checking, and follow-up discussions with teachers were central to their leadership practice. According to the school leaders, supervision was not intended as a punitive exercise, but as a means of guiding teachers toward improved instructional practices. *" We regularly observe lessons and then discuss with teachers what worked well and what can be improved"* explained Head Teacher A. Head Teacher B noted*, Consistent supervision helps teachers to be more prepared and organised in their teaching responsibilities.* "Teachers largely confirmed this view, reporting that supportive supervision positively influenced their lesson preparation, classroom management, and confidence." *When the Head Teacher gives constructive feedback, I become more organised in preparing my lessons,"* T3*." Supervision helps me reflect on my methods and adjust my classroom management strategy,* indicated T7. However, T1 pointed out, *"Supervision is not always regular due to the heavy administrative workload faced by school leaders."* Despite this limitation, instructional supervision was widely perceived as a key mechanism for enhancing teacher performance. Document analysis corroborated these findings. Supervision reports from three of the five schools showed regular classroom observations (at least once per term), with written feedback provided to teachers. However, in two schools, supervision reports were sporadic, with gaps of several months, reflecting the constraints mentioned by T1. These findings align with instructional leadership theory, which emphasises the central role of school leaders in supervising teaching and learning processes to improve instructional quality (Hallinger, 2011). The positive perception of supervision among teachers supports Robinson et al.'s (2008) argument that leadership focused on teaching and learning has a stronger impact on teacher performance than purely administrative leadership. However, the irregularity of supervision, linked to administrative workloads, echoes Bush and Oduro's (2006) observation that competing responsibilities often constrain instructional leadership in developing contexts. This suggests that while instructional supervision is valued, its effectiveness depends on school leaders' capacity to balance administrative and instructional roles.

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**Motivation and Recognition as Drivers of Teacher Commitment**

Another major theme that emerged from the findings was teacher motivation through recognition, encouragement, and moral support. School leaders highlighted that, given the limited financial incentives in public secondary schools, non-monetary forms of motivation were essential. Head Teacher C said, *we recognise teachers during meetings to appreciate their effort and commitment* '. Teachers emphasised that feeling valued by school leadership significantly affected their commitment and willingness to perform well. *'Encouragement from leadership gives us confidence even when resources are limited*''T2. Teacher (T5) remarked, *''When the school leader recognises my effort, I feel motivated to do more, even under difficult conditions." Recognition is not always applied equally among all teachers" T10.* Therefore, the majority of participants agreed that motivational leadership practices played an important role in sustaining teacher performance, particularly in challenging working environments. Document analysis of staff meeting minutes revealed that recognition practices were documented in three schools, with teachers acknowledged for punctuality, lesson preparation, and student results. However, in two schools, recognition was less formalised and depended on the discretion of the school head. These findings resonate with transformational leadership theory, which posits that leaders enhance performance by inspiring, motivating, and fostering commitment among followers (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). The emphasis on non-monetary motivation is particularly significant in the Burundian context, where financial incentives are limited. This supports Nguni et al.'s (2006) and Mushi and Mtaita's (2021) findings that recognition and moral support improve teacher job satisfaction and professional commitment in Sub-Saharan African schools. However, the concern about unequal recognition raised by T10 suggests that motivational practices must be transparent and equitable to sustain their effectiveness. Without fairness, recognition can become a source of demotivation rather than motivation.

**Participatory and Distributed Leadership Practices**

The findings also revealed the use of participatory and distributed leadership mechanisms in the studied schools. School heads explained that involving teachers in decision-making processes: *'Teachers participate in academic planning and discipline committees to share responsibility.* Head Teacher D reported positive effects ' *'Collaboration with colleagues improves teamwork and accountability, T4*. T6 indicated, *"Being involved in decision-making makes us feel like partners, not just employees.* Nonetheless, limitations existed: T7 said, ''*Participation is sometimes limited to senior staff or committee members, leaving others less involved"*. School leaders acknowledged this challenge, citing time constraints and administrative pressures. Document analysis of committee meeting minutes showed that academic planning and discipline committees were active in all five schools. However, membership was often limited to senior teachers or those with longer service, confirming T7's observation. Therefore, participatory leadership was viewed as a positive mechanism that strengthened collaboration and indirectly improved teacher performance. These findings support Spillane's (2006) distributed leadership framework, which views leadership as a collective practice rather than the sole responsibility of the school head. The positive effects of participation on teamwork and accountability align with Day et al.'s (2016) and Mestry's (2017) findings that participatory leadership strengthens collegial relationships and professional engagement. However, the partial inclusion of teachers in decision-making suggests that distributed leadership remains unevenly implemented in Burundian secondary schools, constrained by hierarchical cultures and administrative pressures. This highlights the need for more systematic and inclusive participatory structures.

**Challenges Affecting the Effectiveness of Leadership Mechanisms**

Despite the presence of various leadership mechanisms, participants identified several challenges that constrained their effectiveness. Some constraints were identified by participants: *'Large classes and lack of materials make it difficult to fully apply leadership strategies',* T8 stated.' *Administrative duties reduced the time available for instructional supervision and teacher support. Reported ''.* Head Teacher E. Teachers, on the other hand, added: 'Even with strong leadership support, systemic challenges affect our teaching effectiveness', said T9. Additionally, centralised decision-making structures were reported to restrict school-level autonomy, making it difficult for leaders to implement context-specific strategies.

Participants also suggested improvement strategies, including targeted leadership training, increased support from education authorities, and the promotion of collaborative professional learning within schools. These strategies were viewed as necessary for strengthening leadership mechanisms and enhancing teacher performance in a sustainable manner.

## V. DISCUSSION

This study explored the school leadership mechanisms used to enhance teacher performance in public secondary schools of Rumonge District, Burundi. The findings are discussed in relation to existing literature and interpreted through the lenses of instructional leadership theory (Hallinger, 2011) and transformational leadership theory (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

**Instructional Supervision and Professional Support**

The findings revealed that instructional supervision and professional support constitute core leadership mechanisms influencing teacher performance in the studied schools. School leaders A&B reported engaging in classroom observations, lesson plan reviews, and feedback sessions, while T3 and T7 perceived these practices as enhancing lesson preparation, instructional delivery, and professional confidence. This aligns strongly with instructional leadership theory, which emphasises the central role of school leaders in supervising teaching and learning processes to improve instructional quality (Hallinger, 2011).

Consistent with previous studies, leadership practices that focus on teaching and learning were found to have a positive influence on teacher performance (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Day et al., 2016). The findings also support research conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa, which indicates that instructional supervision contributes to improved teacher accountability and instructional effectiveness, even in resource-constrained environments (Mestry, 2017; Mushi & Mtaita, 2021). However, as indicated by T1, heavy administrative workloads limited the frequency and depth of supervision, echoing Bush and Oduro's (2006) argument that competing responsibilities often constrain instructional leadership in developing contexts.

**Motivation, Recognition, and Transformational Leadership**

Teacher motivation emerged as another significant leadership mechanism influencing performance. Non-monetary motivational strategies, such as recognition, encouragement, and trust-building, were widely reported by both Head Teacher C and T2. These findings resonate with transformational leadership theory, which posits that leaders enhance performance by inspiring, motivating, and fostering commitment among followers (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

The study's findings support earlier research showing that recognition and moral support improve teacher job satisfaction and professional commitment (Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2020). In contexts such as Burundi, where financial incentives are limited, motivational leadership practices become particularly critical. Similar findings have been reported in African studies, where supportive leadership mitigates the effects of poor working conditions and sustains teacher morale (Mestry, 2017; Ngussa & Gabriel, 2017). Nonetheless, concerns about inconsistent recognition raised by some teachers, like T10, suggest the need for transparent and equitable motivational practices.

**Participatory and Distributed Leadership Practices**

The findings further indicate that participatory and distributed leadership practices positively influence teacher performance by fostering collaboration, shared responsibility, and professional ownership. T4 indicated that teachers who were involved in decision-making processes reported increased commitment and accountability. This supports Spillane's (2006) distributed leadership framework, which views leadership as a collective practice rather than the sole responsibility of the school head.

Consistent with international literature, participatory leadership was associated with stronger collegial relationships and improved professional engagement (Day et al., 2016). Studies in African secondary schools similarly highlight the role of shared leadership in enhancing teamwork and instructional effectiveness (Nguni et al., 2006; Mestry, 2017). However, the partial inclusion of teachers in decision-making, as reported by T7 in this study, suggests that distributed leadership remains unevenly implemented, often constrained by hierarchical school cultures and administrative pressures.

**Contextual Challenges and Leadership Effectiveness**

Despite the presence of positive leadership mechanisms, the study identified significant contextual challenges that limit their effectiveness. Major constraints were reported by T8 and Headteacher E, such as large class sizes, limited teaching materials, inadequate professional development, and centralised decision-making structures. These findings are consistent with prior research indicating that structural and systemic factors often undermine school leaders' capacity to influence teacher performance in developing countries (Bush & Oduro, 2006; Bigirimana & Nkurunziza, 2020).

From a theoretical perspective, these challenges highlight the tension between leadership ideals and contextual realities. While instructional and transformational leadership theories provide useful frameworks, their application must be adapted to local conditions. This supports calls for context-responsive leadership models that recognise the socio-economic and institutional constraints faced by school leaders in post-conflict and low-resource settings (Bush, 2020).

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed for school leaders, education policymakers, and future researchers to strengthen school leadership mechanisms and enhance teacher performance in public secondary schools.

**Recommendations for School Leaders**

School leaders should prioritise instructional leadership practices, particularly regular classroom supervision, constructive feedback, and professional support. As demonstrated in this study, supportive supervision positively influences teachers' instructional practices and professional confidence. This aligns with evidence that leadership focused on teaching and learning has a stronger impact on teacher performance than administrative leadership alone (Hallinger, 2011; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). School heads should therefore allocate sufficient time for instructional supervision by delegating routine administrative tasks where possible.

In addition, school leaders should strengthen motivational and recognition mechanisms. Non-monetary incentives such as verbal appreciation, public recognition, and professional trust were found to enhance teacher commitment. These practices are consistent with transformational leadership principles, which emphasise inspiration, recognition, and individual support as drivers of performance (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). To avoid perceptions of favouritism, recognition practices should be transparent and inclusive.

Furthermore, school leaders should promote participatory and distributed leadership by involving teachers more systematically in decision-making processes. Evidence from this study shows that teacher involvement enhances ownership and accountability. Distributed leadership has been shown to foster collaboration and sustained teacher performance in secondary schools (Spillane, 2006; Day et al., 2016). Establishing functional committees and professional learning communities can institutionalise shared leadership practices.

**Recommendations for Education Policymakers and Administrators**

At the policy level, the Ministry of Education and district education authorities should invest in leadership capacity development. Targeted professional development programmes focusing on instructional and transformational leadership competencies would strengthen school leaders' ability to support teachers effectively (Bush, 2020; Mestry, 2017). Such programmes should be context-sensitive and responsive to the realities of public secondary schools in Burundi.

Policymakers should also address structural constraints that limit leadership effectiveness, including large class sizes, inadequate teaching resources, and excessive administrative workloads. Reducing bureaucratic demands on school leaders would enable them to focus more on instructional leadership and teacher support (Bush & Oduro, 2006). Additionally, greater school-level autonomy could allow leaders to implement locally appropriate strategies to improve teacher performance (Bigirimana & Nkurunziza, 2020)

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future studies should consider mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to examine the long-term effects of leadership mechanisms on teacher performance and student outcomes. Expanding research to other districts and educational levels would enhance the generalisability of findings. Further qualitative research exploring teachers' and students' lived experiences could also deepen understanding of how leadership practices operate in diverse Burundian school contexts (Yin, 2018).

## VII. CONCLUSION

This study examined the school leadership mechanisms used to enhance teacher performance in public secondary schools of Rumonge District, Burundi, using a qualitative case study approach. The findings revealed that instructional supervision, teacher motivation, and participatory leadership are key mechanisms through which school leaders influence teacher performance. Teachers generally perceived leadership practices positively, particularly when they were supportive, inclusive, and focused on professional growth.

However, the study also identified significant contextual challenges, including limited resources, large class sizes, heavy administrative workloads, and centralised decision-making structures, which constrain the effective implementation of leadership mechanisms. These findings highlight the importance of adapting global leadership theories, particularly instructional and transformational leadership, to local realities.

Overall, the study contributes to the limited empirical literature on educational leadership in Burundi and similar Sub-Saharan African contexts. By foregrounding leadership mechanisms rather than leadership styles, the study offers context-sensitive insights that can inform leadership practice, policy reform, and future research aimed at improving teacher performance and strengthening public secondary education systems.

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