



The Impact of Educational Leadership on School Change and Innovation

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Abstract: *The study was carried out in Insiza South District which included the schools in Zone A Cluster. The study sought to establish how educational leadership impacts school change and innovation. The motivation of the study therefore was to investigate the role of the school leadership in promoting innovation and changes in Insiza South District, given the hopeful developments in the education sector. More so, the conditions in Insiza South District are different from urban areas and that means the role of urban and rural school leaders are equally different. With that said, the rationale of the study through the use of qualitative research approach was to comprehend the role of rural educational leaders in their implementation of school changes and innovations with the case study being used in Insiza South District. The researcher used interviews as a method of gathering data. Teachers and school administrators participated in this study through face-to-face interviews. The study revealed that the role of educational leaders in Insiza South District borders around: the application of effectivite leadership styles, promotion of positive school culture, collaboration, shared decision making and ensuring quality education so as to promote school change and innovation.*

Keywords: *Educational leadership, School change, School innovation, Curriculum. Zimbabwe*

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1. Introduction

According to Wilson, (2010) education leadership serves as both the catalyst and a mediator for the growth of schools towards long-term progress. School leadership is another name for educational leadership. The educational growth of the students under their supervision is significantly impacted by the school administration. According to Baas (1995) and Chinooneka (2020), a key component of a school's quality is its leadership. In all stages of the school development and improvement processes, school leadership is crucial, claim Day and Sammons (2016). In order to enhance target performance, the school leader makes sure that teachers are inspired, given the right conditions, and captivated (Shava, 2015).

Zimbabwe's highly centralized educational system has a significant impact on the majority of educational characteristics, such as curriculum evaluation standards, materials, and school enrollment rules (Madhlangobe and Madhlangobe, 2014) (Nziramasanga Commission, 1999). Nonetheless, over time, Zimbabwe's centralized educational system has adapted to some decentralized initiatives, such as the establishment of Regional Education Offices, which, according to Madhlangobe and Madhlangobe (2014), refers to the decentralization of the educational system. These centralized inclinations have a significant impact on how educational leadership is developed as well as how teaching and learning outcomes are affected and how schools are changed or improved. The

centralized education policies' appearance of decentralization has given school heads and regional administrative officers a role in school-level supervision. As a result, school administrators are now responsible for empowering teachers, helping to improve the school, and disseminating teacher-generated good practice initiatives (Shava, 2015).

School heads now have increased leadership responsibilities as a result of the decentralization of the educational system; they are in charge of organizing each individual activity throughout the improvement processes. According to Day and Sammons (2013), in addition to the administrative demands of guiding a school to excellence, school leaders' roles are constantly growing, making it challenging for many of them to effectively fulfill all of their responsibilities. In addition to their many other responsibilities, school administrators in rural areas are also tasked with supporting development projects because of the severe economic circumstances in these areas. The difficulties faced by rural populations are distinct from those faced by urban areas because of a variety of issues, such as inadequate infrastructure, which has an impact on school development and performance. According to Shava (2015), direct leadership involvement in curriculum preparation, teacher learning, and professional development has an impact on student results. Therefore, the ability to implement developmental innovations and reforms in rural communities requires strong leadership skills.

Talented leadership has a clear correlation with school performance and achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004). According to Burns (1978), leadership is a persuasive process where a leader persuades a group to achieve a goal that the leader has in mind. By motivating teachers to strive toward the accomplishment of school objectives, educational leaders may ensure that educational goals are met (Shiva, 2015). Therefore, it is the only duty of the school leader to ensure that teachers are fully motivated and equipped to meet the objectives of the institution. Zimbabwe's 2025 implementation of a new curriculum has had an additional impact on school leadership, especially in rural schools. Rural communities cannot meet the requirements of the new curriculum because of the incorporation of Information and Communication Technologies as learning tools, where there are network problems. As was already mentioned, school leadership needs to motivate the staff. With the integration of ICT into the new curriculum, school leadership is having a difficult time because they are sometimes short-staffed with computer-teaching professionals and lack resources like computers.

One of the key benefits of strong educational leadership on school change and innovation is its impact on student

achievement and success. Research consistently demonstrates that effective leadership is positively correlated with improved student outcomes, including higher test scores, graduation rates, and college readiness. Educational leaders who provide clear goals, monitor progress, and support teachers in delivering high-quality instruction can significantly enhance the learning experience and promote academic growth (Sellami et al., 2022). Furthermore, educational leadership influences the overall quality of the learning experience for students. Effective leaders establish a positive and inclusive school climate, where students feel valued, safe, and motivated to learn.

Innovative leaders encourage teachers to adopt teaching styles that foster engagement, creativity, and critical thinking. Methods such as flipped classrooms, blended learning, and experiential education are gaining traction, thanks to leaders who understand the value of adapting pedagogy to meet the needs of today's learners (Myran & Sutherland, 2019). For educational innovation to succeed, continuous professional development for teachers is essential. Leaders play a critical role in ensuring that teachers receive the necessary training to adopt new teaching techniques and technologies. Professional development programs should focus on equipping educators with the skills to navigate and implement innovative approaches in the classroom. This ensures that the entire learning ecosystem can evolve together, with leadership guiding the way (Latchem & Hanna, 2021). By creating a culture that celebrates diversity, fosters student engagement, and promotes collaboration, educational leaders enhance the overall educational experience, leading to increased student satisfaction and a more meaningful and holistic learning journey (Eadens & Ceballos, 2023). The purpose of this study is to examine the role of educational leadership in improving school change and innovation. Specifically, the study aims to investigate the impact of educational leadership practices on school change and innovation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

According to Lederman & Lederman (2015), a theoretical framework is a collection of connected ideas, definitions, and claims that explain or forecast a phenomenon or group of events. Grix, (2004) provides a condensed description of the theoretical framework in research, which is the plan or direction of a study. According to Adom and Hussein (2018), the theoretical framework of a study serves as a guide that the researcher frequently uses to construct his or her own research question. The study adopted the Managerial Leadership Theory and Transformational education leadership theory.

2.1.1 Managerial Leadership Theory

According to Leithwood et al. (1999) and Bush (2010), managerial leadership theory of education assumes that leaders should focus on functions, tasks, and behavior, and that if these functions are carried out competently, the work of others in the organization will be facilitated. Ghasemy and Hussin (2014) state that this style of leadership has certain assumptions, such as a high degree of rationality in the behavior of organizational members, the allocation of authority and influence to formal positions based on the status of the positions within the organizational chart, and a focus on the execution of actions, tasks, and activities proficiently as a means of facilitating the activities of other members of the organization. According to Ghasemy and Hussin (2014), this approach to educational leadership assumes that organizations have a hierarchical structure and that predetermined goals are achieved using logical techniques. The management leadership theory was chosen by the researcher because it supports bureaucratic school leadership paradigms, which are also employed in Zimbabwe's educational system. Therefore, this theory will assist us comprehend Zimbabwe's educational systems and the role that education leaders play in fostering innovation and transformation.

According to Bush (2010), this method is linked to authoritarian, hierarchical, and inaccessible managerial approaches, with the primary authority being regarded as divinely granted and legal. According to Bush (2010), management leadership is crucial for South Africa in the twenty-first century, and the same is true for the educational system in Zimbabwe. Bush (2010) argues that management leadership is crucial to the establishment of a properly run school in order to achieve functioning schools, effectiveness, calm, and order in schools. But according to Bush (2003), imposing the management leadership model on schools prevents teachers from being innovative because they are only expected to carry out changes that are pushed from without, which may result in failure.

2.1.2 Transformational Education Leadership Theory

James MacGregor Burns originally proposed the transformational leadership model for political leaders in 1978, and educational leadership has since adopted it. Transforming leadership, according to Burns (1978), is a process where leaders and followers support one another in reaching higher levels of motivation and morale. It may be summed up as a leadership style that transforms people and social settings while, generally speaking, fostering beneficial and constructive change in followers with the ultimate goal of transforming followers into future leaders. According to Korejan and Shahbazi (2016),

transformational leadership inspires, encourages, and guides individuals to go beyond their capabilities inside the company and to create and innovate in their job. In summary, it encourages a leadership style that inspires workers and the development of an organizational goal that they are inspired to realize. Therefore, inspiring, motivating, and motivating staff members must be the fundamental competencies of any transformative leader.

Allix (2000) also noted that because of its powerful, heroic, and captivating qualities, transformational leadership has the potential to turn into a totalitarian regime. Chance and Segura, (2009) agrees, stating that transformational leadership theory can be used to exert control over educators and is more likely to be embraced by the leaders than the followers. Bush (2007) points out that bureaucrats and politician have a tendency to employ the rhetoric of transformation in order to accomplish their own policy goals. Given that teachers' rights to picket are curtailed and that they are frequently threatened with termination if they do so (VOA; 11-02-2023), the following criticisms of the Zimbabwean education system are accurate. School administrators are required to raise teacher morale regardless of their socioeconomic situation.

2.2 The Role of Educational Leadership

According to Kapur (2019), one of the most crucial objectives of the educational process is the development of students' leadership abilities; therefore, educational leaders must give students the chance to practice these abilities. The development of leadership abilities in schoolchildren must, for the most part, be institutionalized by educational leaders. As a result, educational leaders are crucial community leaders who promote learning across boundaries (Educational Leadership, 2017). The three roles of educational leaders are decision-making, information-gathering, and interpersonal, according to Kapur (2019). According to Kapur (2019), educational leaders' interpersonal roles are centered on giving people the right kind of knowledge and information while also making sure they become interested in and motivated to carry out their responsibilities. According to Ibrahim and Al Mashhadary (2012), educational leaders are crucial in working with all parties involved in education, such as parents, teachers, students, and the community at large, to shape the school's vision, goals, and mission. These should align with the norms and values of the community. Therefore, educational leaders must work to support the growth of the communities' surrounding schools since they are also community leaders. According to Kapur (2019), educational leaders must not only assist their subordinates in accomplishing goals and objectives but also assist them in instilling qualities such as diligence, resourcefulness and conscientiousness and emerging into effective citizens of the country. In the workplace, leaders in the education

sector exchange information with one another (Kapur, 2019). Therefore, it is the responsibility of leaders to communicate information promptly. According to Kapur (2019), leaders must be able to successfully interact with others, provide them with sufficient information, and steer them in the proper path. According to Baydar (2022), educational leaders must make sure that they spread knowledge and learning resources, such as computers and books, among other things, in order to improve student academic performance and meet school goals.

Education is the main foundation of a country's development, and in the era of globalization, the success of an education system depends on its innovation and adaptability (Kozma, 2003). Innovative leadership is key to achieving this goal, especially in educational management. Innovative leadership creates an environment that supports creative ideas, integrates new technologies, and drives transformation in the educational process. In this way, innovative leaders manage change and become catalysts for positive change, increase system efficiency, and ensure that education meets the demands of the times. In facing global dynamics, innovative leadership is crucial to ensuring that education is relevant and capable of producing individuals ready to face future challenges. (Purwanto et al., 2020).

2.3 The role of Educational Leadership in Promoting Innovations and Changes

Innovation and change in education are no longer optional but a necessity to keep pace with the ever-evolving demands of the 21st century. Students today require more than traditional teaching methods; they need skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability. Educational innovation, spearheaded by forward-thinking leaders, is transforming learning environments across the globe (Jassim, 2024). Leadership in this context plays a crucial role in shaping and implementing strategies that promote these innovations and change to ensure they are integrated effectively into schools and institutions (Wong & Ng, 2020). Educational leadership is essential in fostering innovation and change. Hence, leaders must create a vision for the future of learning, one that embraces new technologies, flexible teaching methods, and an adaptive curriculum. Innovative leaders push for curricula that integrate interdisciplinary approaches, real world problem solving, and project-based learning. These methods prepare students for future challenges by promoting critical thinking and collaboration, skills that are essential in a rapidly changing world (Orphanos & Orr, 2014). Technological advancement has revolutionized the way students learn. However, its integration into the educational system requires strong leadership. Leaders in education must navigate the complexities of technology adoption,

ensuring that teachers are trained in its use and that students have equitable access to digital tools. Whether through the introduction of interactive learning platforms, virtual classrooms, or AI-driven personalized learning, innovative leaders are at the forefront of leveraging technology to enhance educational experiences (Ng & Wong, 2020). Leadership in education also influences pedagogical innovation. Modern pedagogy emphasizes student-centered learning, where students take an active role in their education.

Since innovative leaders in education have an impact on classroom results, they open doors that directly affect teaching and learning as well as indirectly influencing practice by fostering organizational environments in schools that support constructive change (Ibrahim and Al Mashhadary, 2012). According to Morris (n.d.), the routes Ibrahim and Al Mashhadary (2012), there are conditions that educational leaders establish to foster creativity and transformation. According to Amabile and Gryskiewicz (2017), both the environment and the individual have an impact on innovation. According to Morris (n.d.), school administrators have a significant impact on encouraging innovation in school organizations by fostering supportive settings. Encouraging settings are closely related to the leadership style and character of the leader. Furthermore, the setting and the traits of the leader are integral in innovation and change in schools.

According to Alkrdem (2020) early research, the leader's relationship style more especially, their capacity to encourage cooperation, trust, and respect among school personnel was essential for promoting knowledge-building techniques and creativity. According to Waldron and McKleskey (2010), distributive leadership can be used by leaders who have positive relationship styles with their subordinates to enable school staff to share decision-making responsibilities. This promotes creativity, as stated by Agbim (2013), who states that leaders who wish to maintain innovation must be receptive to suggestions for enhancement, practical, and able to build teams especially interdisciplinary ones. According to Mavhunga and Mazodze (2014), school leaders who wish to promote innovation must support cross-functional teams or unofficial professional learning communities within their institutions. Thus, the leadership style of the educational leaders is of great importance in influencing innovation and change in the school environment.

2.4 Factors affecting the role of school leadership in promoting innovation and changes in schools.

There are several factors that hinder educational leaders to effective change and innovation in schools. This is

supported by Maksymenko et al., (2021) who state that, there are factors that inhibit steps towards innovation and change, embark on a path towards opposition and immobility. As with educational leaders, it is possible to distinguish between internal and external hindering agents. There are several factors among teachers that restrict change and innovative action, ranging from the perception of innovation as an extra effort, to the rigidity and immobility of the system, which becomes a handicap for undertaking changes in education (Nikolaevna, 2019; Rivas, 2000; Serdyukov, 2017; Cáceres & Flores, 2017).

Furthermore, resistance to change, limited resources, and a lack of professional development opportunities can all impede the adoption of innovative practices. Effective leaders must recognize these challenges and devise strategies to overcome them, whether by securing funding, fostering a growth mindset within their institutions, or advocating for policy changes that support educational reform (Fix et al., 2021). Innovative leaders share several key traits, including a strong vision, resilience, and the ability to inspire others. These leaders are not afraid to take risks and challenge the status quo. They possess a deep understanding of the educational landscape and the courage to implement bold changes. By fostering a culture of collaboration and creativity, they empower teachers and students to embrace new ideas and approaches to learning (Bass, 2000). As education continues to evolve, the role of leadership will become even more crucial in shaping the future of learning. The ability to adapt to new technologies, pedagogical methods, and societal needs will define successful educational institutions. Leaders must stay ahead of trends, continually seeking out new ways to improve teaching and learning. This forward-thinking approach will ensure that educational systems remain relevant and effective in preparing students for the challenges of the future (Ersozlu et al., 2024).

In addition, communication problems in an innovation and change process, the necessary justifications should be provided to encourage acceptance and participation in the innovation. However, Beer et al. (1990) and, Ford and Ford (1995), recognize that it is a mistake to think that people will become implement change just because they have been informed of the process that is taking place. Thus, it is necessary to establish channels for participation of teachers and learners. Nevertheless, it can be acknowledged that the success of the change and innovation is influenced to a certain extent by the degree of information that the target audience and participants possess (Daujotienė et al., 2020; Miralles et al., 2012).

2.5 Strategies on how to improve educational leadership in promoting

innovation and changes in rural school communities in discharging their duties

Prior to implementation of change and innovations, there are a number of attitudes and factors that can influence them, such as recent events that may affect the change process, power relations, the communication system, as well as the experiences and attitudes of the people involved or the result of similar actions carried out (Bianchi, 1981; Pérez, 2021; Pérez-Albo & Gutiérrez-Lacalle, 2020; Traver-Martí & Ferrández-Berruenco, 2016). However, while appreciating all these attempts to reduce resistance, other perspectives need to be considered. It is common to study resistance to change from the point of view of the people who act as agents of change, i.e., conceiving them as the ones who are harmed by the resistance. Nevertheless, it is also useful to understand that resistance to change occurs at the same time because of the behaviours of the people who lead the change processes (Amis & Aïssaoui, 2013; Ford et al., 2008; Lloyd et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2020). In this sense, it is possible to identify a series of actions commonly conducted by people known as *Agents of Change* that lead to the emergence of this resistance.

On the one hand, the chances of successful innovation depend on taking into account considerations such as the degree of personal commitment of teachers, without it change and innovation is impossible (Hosseini & Haghghi, 2021; Jordán & Codana, 2019; Meroni et al., 2017). The level of entrenchment of traditional practices is another thought to be considered (Marcelo et al., 2010), as it may mark the course of events, given that it will be difficult to implement new changes and innovation to this structure in a centre that is totally invested in a way of working and clinging to it (Fehervari et al., 2017).

Additionally, Franco (2013) advocates listening to the motivations of the resistance and showing empathy while providing information on the needs, objectives, and results of the innovation project. Thus, making changes in the implementation of change so that it is less one-sided and more participatory, which will always help to increase the commitment of the participants and reduce feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. Likewise, there are also a number of common characteristics to change and innovation processes that have been successfully implemented in schools and have generated a culture of innovation. Regarding these attributes, Ortega et al. (2007) and, Pizzolitto and Macchiarola (2015), point out that the starting point is the coverage of a need or the solution to a problem or situation. At the same time, the sequenced and progressive implementation of changes is considered important to facilitate their internalization by the community (Brosig et al., 2020). Finally, it is advisable to consider a transversal evaluation process that allows for

change and innovative process to be managed and regulated in each of its phases (Barbosa & Souza, 2021; Walder, 2017).

3. Methodology

Since interpretivism was the study paradigm being employed, qualitative research methods were employed. According to Abbadia (2023), the interpretivism technique is employed in the vast majority of qualitative social science research. Interpretive researchers use techniques that produce qualitative data; while numerical data may be used, it is not their primary source. Using this method, the researcher investigated how educational leadership contributed to innovation and transformation. This entailed evaluating the opinions of educators and educational leaders.

A descriptive research design was used by the researcher. Since understanding the role of educational leadership in fostering innovation and change in schools under Zone A Cluster, Insiza South District, was the primary goal of the study, this was appropriate. Descriptive research emphasizes how and why inquiries while providing a picture of the particulars of an event, social setting, or connection (De Vos, 2002). The researcher started with a well-defined topic and carried out study to understand how education leaders in the Insiza South District's Zone A schools foster innovation and change. Because semi-structured interviews are open-ended, flexible, and adhere to a predetermined topic framework that provides a feeling of order, the researcher used them (George, 2023). Additionally, when the participants can give a more complete picture during the interview, the researcher can follow up on particularly intriguing lines of inquiry. Purposive sampling was employed and a total of fifteen participants were selected from a larger population.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Transformational Leadership

Both the literature review and the interview responses highlighted the significance of transformational leadership in driving positive change and fostering innovations while improving the learning experience. This is aligned to a definition by Cuduz, (2023), who described transformational leaders as those who inspire and motivate others, create a shared vision, promote change, innovation and collaboration. Thus, participants emphasized the importance of leaders who empower and support their staff, fostering a sense of ownership and engagement. In consistent with Wilichowski & Tracy, (2023) transformational leadership is characterized by its emphasis on setting a compelling vision for the future and

inspiring positive change, emerged as a cornerstone of effective educational leadership that can lead to effective change and innovations in schools. In support of the findings Cuduz, (2023) states that, transformational leadership style has been widely recognized for its ability to galvanize stakeholders toward a shared vision of excellence in education through change management and innovative strategies in schools.

Additionally, the findings revealed the importance of transformational leadership, fostering a positive and inclusive environment, empowering teacher leadership, leveraging technology and addressing challenges for effective change and innovations in improving the learning experience. These findings provide valuable insights for educational leaders and policymakers, guiding them in implementing effective strategies to enhance effective change that foster educational innovations and support student success.

4.2 Factors affecting educational leadership on school change and innovation

The study findings reveal that not all change is improvement, but all improvement involves change and innovation. According to Shen (2018) effective change and innovation to any educational institutions is not an easily obtainable goal. During the change process, dynamics in operations may resist the proposed change, such as school culture, the lack of holistic approach, absence of follow-up or support and even the process of change for innovations all present barriers to achieving effective change. There are many barriers to effective innovations. One-way people have the ideas of change; on the other hand, they worry about failure. In support of the findings, Newton & Tarrant (2012) pointed out that resistance is as natural as a phenomenon as change itself. As revealed by the study findings, Plant (2017), cited by Newton & Tarrant (ibid), outlines a number of factors that can fuel resistance and unwillingness to change as follows:

- Lack of resources
- Fear of the unknown
- Lack of information
- Threat to core skills and competence
- Threat to a leadership style
- Fear of failure
- Reluctance to experiment
- Reluctance to let go

These resistances have a great impact on educational leadership and the process on school change and innovation.

4.3 Addressing Challenges and Promoting change and innovation

Addressing challenges and fostering a culture of continuous improvement were recurring themes. Participants acknowledged that educational leaders face various challenges, including resistance to change, resource limitations and external pressures. They emphasized the need for leaders to proactively address these challenges by promoting open communication, providing support, and seeking innovative solutions. Continuous improvement efforts through data analysis, feedback mechanisms, and evaluation processes were seen as key to enhancing effective change and innovations in teaching and learning experience.

Furthermore, the study revealed that promoting a positive and inclusive school culture is vital for achieving positive change and innovative learning outcomes. This is aligned to study findings by Culduz, (2023) who asserts that educational leaders must create a safe and supportive environment where all students feel valued, respected, and included for effective change and innovations in the schools. This involves implementing strategies to address diversity, equity, and inclusion, fostering positive change and effective innovative strategies. A positive school culture sets the foundation for meaningful change, promotes student engagement, and enhances innovation in schools (Lambrecht et al., 2022). Literature revealed that by identifying key factors and strategies for achieving positive change and innovation, leadership is crucial for educational leaders. In support is a study by Culduz, (2023) establishing a clear vision and goal-setting process, prioritizing instructional leadership, fostering collaboration and shared decision-making, and promoting a positive school culture, leaders can create an environment conducive to effective change and innovation in schools. By implementing these strategies, educational leaders can guide their institutions towards enhanced innovations achievement, engagement, and overall positive change management outcomes.

The literature study also identified several challenges faced in implementing innovative leadership in educational management (Kapur, 2019). These challenges include resistance to change, limited resources, and uncertainty in an ever-changing educational environment. The challenges faced in implementing change in the educational environment include several crucial aspects that require careful understanding and strategy, and one of the main obstacles is dealing with change. Individuals and groups in educational institutions often experience discomfort or concern about changes affecting routines or work patterns (Korejan, 2016). Overcoming these obstacles requires effective communication, active participation, and building

support from all educational community members. Apart from that, limited resources are also an obstacle to implementing change. Limited funding, personnel, or infrastructure can limit the ability of educational institutions to innovate or improve (Djafri et al., 2020). Educational leaders must be able to identify and utilize existing resources optimally, while also finding creative ways to overcome these limitations.

Additionally, the availability of resources, be it human, financial and infrastructure is what the research discovered as important for the school leaders in creating an enabling environment for changes and innovations in schools. The findings align with existing literature by Madhlangobe and Madhlangobe (2014) who argue that the rural schools are touted to be lacking teaching staff compared to the urban schools hence the students' academic results in rural areas are poor. The schools in rural communities and in particular schools under Insiza South District are struggling to finance themselves to promote change and innovative developments. The reason given in the research is that the parents are struggling to pay school levies and fees, such that school projects are affected thereof.

4.4 Key factors and strategies for effective educational leadership on school change and innovation

Findings reveal that effective educational leadership plays a critical role in achieving change and innovation leading to positive learning outcomes and fostering a supportive and enriching educational environment. This aligns with existing literature that identifying key factors and strategies, educational leaders can guide their institutions towards enhanced student achievement, engagement and overall success (Culduz, 2023). One key factor revealed is the establishment of a clear vision and goal-setting process. Educational leaders must articulate a compelling vision that aligns with the needs and aspirations of the students, teachers, and stakeholders. This vision serves as a guiding compass, setting the direction and purpose for the institution. This is aligned to a study by Sellami et al., (2022) who propounded that by setting specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals, educational leaders can further refine the vision and provide a roadmap for achieving positive change and innovation in schools.

Furthermore, another critical strategy for effective leadership on school change and innovation is using instructional leadership. This aligns with the findings by Walker & Qian, (2022) who assert that, through instructional leadership, leaders promote change, research-based instructional strategies, provide resources and support for innovative teaching approaches, and engage in

in instructional supervision and feedback to improve classroom practice. Thus, effective leaders demonstrate a deep understanding of teaching and learning practices for effective change and innovation in schools. They set high expectations for teaching and learning, foster a culture of change management, continuous improvement on innovations and support the professional development of teachers.

Additionally, the study revealed that collaboration and shared decision-making are additional key strategies for achieving positive change and innovative teaching and learning outcomes. This is supported by Culduz, (2023) who states that leaders who foster a collaborative culture and involve stakeholders in decision-making processes create an environment that promotes ownership and commitment. A study by Brauckmann, Pashiardis & Årlestig, (2023) revealed that encouraging collaborative problem-solving, team-building, and shared decision-making empowers teachers, students, and other staff members to contribute to effective change and innovation in schools. Hence, this inclusive approach to decision-making leads to more effective change and innovative solutions that address the diverse needs of the learning community.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the discussion, the following conclusions are drawn. Promoting a positive and inclusive school culture is vital for achieving positive change and innovative learning outcomes. There is a direct positive influence of educational leadership on school change and innovation. Therefore, it can be said that the higher the intensity and the application of the managerial, transformational and instructional leadership styles, the higher the level of change and innovations can take place in schools. There is a direct positive influence of educational leadership on school change and innovation. Hence, the strength of educational leadership the higher the level of effective school change and innovation. Collaboration and shared decision-making are additional keys for achieving positive change and innovative teaching and learning outcomes. The study highlights the importance of managerial, transformational and instructional leadership in promoting and supporting educational change and innovation in rural community schools. The findings suggest that transformational and instructional leaders play a crucial role in creating an environment that encourages creativity, risk-taking, and collaboration and in empowering teachers and other stakeholders to participate in the implementation of educational change and innovation initiatives. The study provides valuable insights for educational leaders, policy

makers, and practitioners to better understand the role of educational leadership in promoting and supporting educational change and innovation in schools.

5.2 Recommendations

The recommendations below are proposed on the basis of the findings from the study.

1. The ministry of education should focus on equipping rural school leaders with advanced skills in managing diverse and high-pressure environments that include training in making, data-driven conflict decision resolution, stakeholder engagement in change processes.
2. Training could include change management strategies for resource management, community partnership building, and innovative problem-solving.
3. Implement Tailored Support Systems that address the specific challenges of rural settings and diverse student needs.
4. This could involve creating mentorship programs for new rural school leaders or establishing networks for sharing best leadership practices and best leadership styles that promote effective change and innovation driven in schools.
5. The government should establish support mechanisms that address the isolation and limited resources often found in rural settings. This might include virtual communities of practice, partnerships with nearby institutions, or mobile resource units.
6. Promote Collaboration and Best Practices among school leadership in rural schools
7. The Ministry of education should encourage collaboration in rural schools to share successfully change strategies and innovative practices.
8. The ministry of education should provide support for developing leadership skills that address unique challenges such as resource constraints and stakeholder engagement.
9. This could be facilitated through cross school workshops, joint professional development sessions, and collaborative projects that address common challenges.

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