Examining leadership styles and their impact on K-12 school performance in Mauritius: A systematic review

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Abstract: This paper reports on results from a systematic literature review on K-12 educational leadership in the specific case of Mauritius. Using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) methodology, this review identifies and synthesizes empirical studies that discuss significant leadership problems confronted by school leaders, including lack of professional development, change resistance, and limited resources. It also looks at the impact of interventions and current practise in leadership that contributes to school improvement such as those associated with professional development, distributive models of leadership and the purposeful use of ICT. The results suggest that transformational, instructional and distributed leadership styles have significant impact on school culture, academic achievement and organisational efficiency. The review further highlights the need for specific leadership strategies which take into consideration the Mauritian context, directly linking to international objectives related to inclusive and effective education. Policymakers and educational stakeholders should consider these recommendations when addressing leadership practices to enhance the educational sector in Mauritius.

Keywords: Educational leadership, K-12 Education, Leading challenges, Professional development, School performance.

1. Introduction

When it comes to educational institutions it is widely acknowledged that effective leadership is one of the essential components for its success. The style of leadership is a vital determinant in how schools' function and what academic, organization results leaders. In K-12 school, how leaders interact with teachers, students, and the community as a whole will affect whether the school will perform and grow. During the decades, scholars have researched different leadership models such as transformational, transactional, distributed, and instructional leadership on a global scale. Yet, there is still a lack of empirical evidence on the use and effects of these leadership styles in Mauritius higher education. A systematic review is required, therefore, to investigate the influence of leadership styles on K-12 school performance in Mauritius characterized by variables other than proven highly and homogenous ones in a socio-cultural context that remains different from most established neo-liberal economies.

Mauritius despite it being a middle-income country educational lags behind and faces some challenges of their own some have to do with the colonial past while other are more recent ones, such as: resource constraints since maintain quality education can also be costly; a diverse population increase as an increasingly larger number of students in Mauritius do not speak English or French as their first language but even those that do find the medium instruction challenging therefor significantly impacting their academic performance to one extent or another. These trials underscore the crucial importance of adaptive and creative leadership to drive school improvement and elevate student outcomes. In Mauritius, evidence suggests school effects of collaborative and innovative settings are stronger for transformational leadership styles (Ionescu 2015) as distributed leadership which can offer an alternative framework in leading schools (Joolley & Noorani, 2022). Nevertheless, the ability of these

predominant styles in Mauritius—given a degree of centralization but with local autonomy to run schools — need to be researched more significantly.

The purpose of this systematic literature review is to report on the leadership styles practiced by school leaders in Mauritius, and the consequent impact it may have on school K-12 performance. The review will analyse: (1) the experiences of Mauritian school leaders regarding the use of specific leadership styles, (2) the effects on academic and organizational outcomes that different leadership styles might have, and (3) extent to which a well-defined leadership intervention or practice contributes to enhancing overall school performance. The review also informs the broader literature on educational leadership in Mauritius, adding to our understanding about how leadership practices can be implemented effectively to improve teaching and learning, and promote wider educational reforms.

2. Statement of the Problem

A key factor explaining students' performance and school effectiveness is the quality of leadership in schools (Leithwood et al., 2020). In Mauritius, the K-12 system presents various issues from resources constraints to volatile academic performance and shifts in student demographics (Dhurbarayall & Moourghen, 2020). Woven through all of these complexities is the expectation that school leaders will ensure educational institutions lead superior outcomes for all students. Nevertheless, in what way the leadership styles best suited to tackling these difficulties plays a role in the Mauritian context competently is not very clear. Despite the plentiful international research on leadership styles (e.g. transformational side instructional leadership) and their different effect sizes regarding school performance (Hallinger, 2018), there is sparse evidence about how these models are actually practiced within the unique socio-cultural backdrop of Mauritius framework or which into account in studies undertaken from personal territories as may evolve through cultural values or middle policies.

Also, research hints that leadership styles such as transformational leadership which is crucial in creating environments to encourage collaboration, teacher motivation and students success (Bush, 2019). But other styles, such as transactional leadership, might bring the discipline and routine that is needed in some schools. Despite these findings, little has been written on the instructional leadership practices that might work in Mauritian schools. Similarly, most studies undertaken in Mauritius portray how school leaders and leadership of state non-state secondary institutions face contextual challenges such as inadequate professional development programmes and a highly centralized education system which generally constricts their autonomy (Joolley & Noorani, 2022). This absence among localized research, in turn, inhibits the work of educational policymakers and practitioners for making data-informed decisions concerning leadership development and school improvement.

However, there is an existing gap in the knowledge on what leadership styles are being used in our K-12 schools and their effectiveness on school performance hence it becomes relevant to do a systematic review of literature that would cover this specific aspect. The review will conduct a broad synthesis of existing studies to identify which leadership styles are the most effective in producing academic and organizational success within Mauritian schools. This is particularly important because an empirical comprehension of leadership and its implications on school outcomes will guide educational policy and practices of leadership development programs for enriching the quality of education countrywide in Mauritius. It would be difficult for schools in Mauritius to sustainably improve student outcomes and school effectiveness without this kind of insight.

3. Empirical Review

A comparative study aimed at understanding how school leaders in Mauritius are coping with the various challenges linked to Leadership styles in K-12 schools is of utmost importance. It has been evidenced through several studies that the leadership styles such as transformational, transactional and laissez-faire is quite variant based on factors like personal experiences and unique educational environment of Mauritius (Gopinathan, 2018). The roles assumed by school leaders — administrative roles, instructional roles and community engagement — inform their philosophy of leadership, as well.

For instance, in the study of Naidoo and Botha (2020) Mauritian school leaders who embrace transformational leadership often claim to have improved their relationships with staff and advanced notions of a collaborative culture through this leadership style. Furthermore, as experiences, they betake about what impact a leader with stuff been through on his own personal journey and how that had developed for their decisions processes (second way around).

Educational literature has long acknowledged the correlation between leadership styles and school performance. Transformational leadership often results in improved student outcomes and greater teacher satisfaction—clear findings from Mauritius (Ramkhelawon & Ramasamy, 2019). This ultimately leads to promoting a vision, valuing creativity and an empowering school culture conducive to academic and organizational success (Shahhosseini, 2012), which is seen as one of the building blocks toward leading instructional change (Young & Feiman-Nemser). On the contrary, Transactional leadership can lead to academic gains, it may lack in creating and sustaining ongoing improvement which transformational approach bring (Singh & Mohan, 2017). The influence of leadership styles on organizational results goes beyond student achievement to teacher turnover, school climate, and parent engagement. This is important in building school leadership strategies that will be relevant to Mauritian K-12 schools.

Understanding what works in terms of leadership interventions and practice is critical for raising K-12 performance in Mauritius. With respect to enhancing school performance, Mungur and Khedaroo (2021) noted that leadership development programs addressing emotional intelligence, strategic planning, and service within an educational community would have an impact. For instance, certain practices like distributed leadership that allows teachers and administrators to share leadership responsibilities have been seen to enhance teacher motivation and student learning (Joolley & Noorani, 2022). Mauritian schools provide further evidence that leadership practices which focus on professional learning and growth for staff help to cultivate a culture of excellence and innovation (Pillay & Devnath, 2020). Such interventions signal the need for an adaptive leadership approach to guide educators in responding to specific challenges that K-12 schools in Mauritius experience.

4. Methods

To answer the raised research questions regarding leadership styles and its consequence on K-12 school outcome in Mauritius, this study involved a systematic literature review. The systematic review was conducted following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis) approach to ensure a structured, transparent and replicable method. On the other hand, PRISMA is a more complete guideline, which helps avoid some of these problems and allows for finding and reviewing literature that is considerably relevant (Moher et al., 2015) even when screening is used as in Conde et al. The conceptual framework of the systematic review was built based on Mauritian educational leadership challenges and solutions Figure 1, with a PRISMA flowchart representing each phase of the review.

4.1. Systematic Review Process
4.1.1. Identification

The literature was searched from five important academic databases, including ScienceDirect, Scopus, Springer Link, ProQuest and EBSCO Host. These databases were chosen because of their extensive collection on educational leadership research. The search terms were targeted at four main themes to ensure the retrieval of all pertinent literatures: "K-12 Educational Leadership," "Challenges," "Solutions" and "Mauritius." Specific search terms were used; (TITLE-ABS-KEY) (educational leadership AND challenges AND Mauritius); and were combined with Boolean operators at TITLE-ABS-KEY level (e.g., educational management OR leadership strategies OR school performance) to generate a list of synonyms and related terms. This process yielded 1024 articles. Following manual searches and cross-referencing through the literature, 34 additional articles were singled-out from the total number of studies found (n = 33).

4.2. Screening

Articles were selected from the PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009), which were then subjected to a screening process based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. Peer-reviewed journal articles were included in the present review, whereas systematic reviews, book chapters, and conference papers were excluded. To focus on the most up-to-date research, inclusion criteria restricted selection to English published articles from 2010-2024. For this analysis, literature from similar contexts such as other small island states was also utilised in order to further enrich the discussion on leadership in Mauritius. Of these, 986 unique articles remained after exclusion of 72 duplicate records. Although the wider review identified 1097 articles, upon reviewing titles and abstracts for a direct-relevance check, we excluded 842 articles that did not in fact address challenges (of any kind), solutions, or educational outcomes in any form of K-12 settings. This process of article selection resulted in 144 articles to undergo full-text assessment.

4.3. Eligibility

In the eligibility phase, 144 articles were screened for full-text review.

4.3.1. Inclusion Criteria

Articles focusing on empirical data regarding leadership in K-12 education specific to Mauritius (or a country with similar context) were identified. Studies that were not clearly tied to best practices in educational leadership, did not provide empirical research support for the potential intervention or new best practice, and did not address the challenges or proposed solution(s) relevant to these objectives were excluded. Articles that were purely theoretical and did not yield a substantial insight into Mauritian education was also excluded. Therefore, excluding 125 articles yields 19 notable empirical articles on leadership styles and their contribution to school performance specifically in K-12 educational settings within Mauritius (refer to Figure 1 for the PRISMA flowchart).
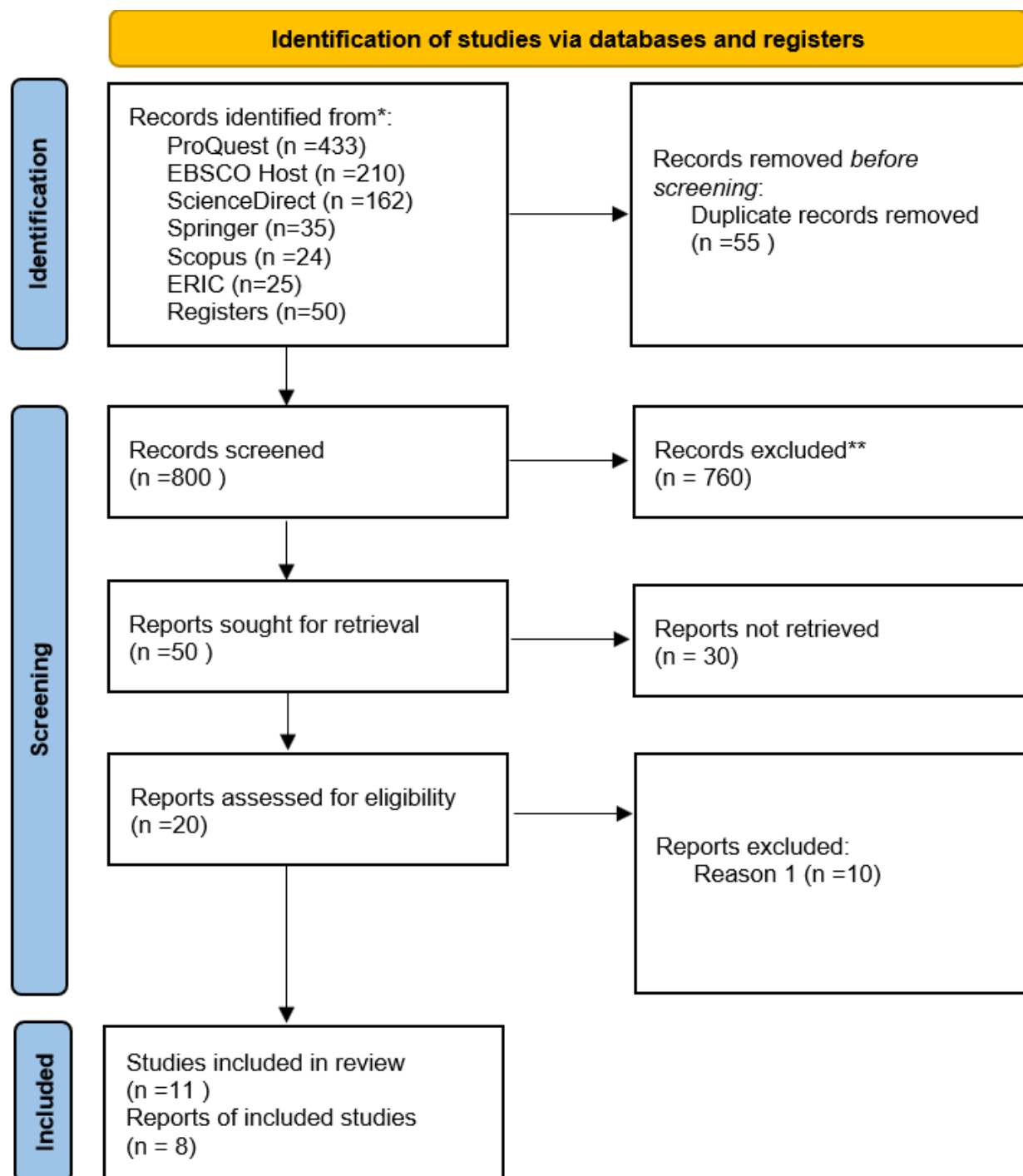
Figure 1.
Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. BMJ 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71
Source: For more information, visit: http://www.prisma-statement.org/

5. Discussions

5.1. School Leaders' Experiences with the Use of Different Leadership Styles in K-12 Schools in Mauritius

The educational environment and outcomes in K-12 schools in Mauritius are heavily influenced by leadership styles. Qualitative experience of school leaders and use of different leadership styles in Mauritius. This work features three major styles of leadership- transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership — with the known empirical research findings stretching the discussion to scrutinize how these styles are exercised by school leaders in dealing with multicultural needs of their schools.

5.1.1. Cultural Dimensions and Transformational Leadership in School-Based Management.

Transformational leadership, which focuses on encouraging and inspiring staff towards achieving a common goal, is one of the most popular forms of leading in Mauritius. Leaders that are using this method in schools have said, "the culture of the school has changed", "teacher morale is up" and there is a "greater sense of purpose" when it comes to improving the school (Moonsammy-Koopasammy, 2020). Principals that are transformational leaders work alongside their teachers to make decisions, resulting in ownership and accountability on the part of all staff members (Beebeejaun-Muslum & Gokulsing, 2019). The empirical body of research demonstrates that leaders employing transformational strategies have a greater likelihood of garnering staff influence toward the implementation of reforms, particularly when the changes occur atypical to the curriculum or are undertaken in resource-constrained school settings. But it can be hard for school leaders to maintain that level of motivation and engagement on an ongoing basis—especially in schools where teachers are overloaded or have few chances to improve professionally (Raghoobur, 2021). Transformational leadership has been praised for fostering a sense of inclusion and empowerment among teachers that encourages both innovation in the classroom and student learning.

5.1.2. Academic Improvement and Instructional Leadership

In Mauritian K-12 schools, leading by example to improve teaching and learning, i.e., having instructional leadership skills is also significant. Chittoo (2018) defined school leaders as those who engaged in strong instructional leadership through curriculum innovation, and a push towards quality instruction and assessment. Leaders say a shift to an instructional model has resulted in better academic outcomes and more consistent practices from one graff institute to the next. Instructional leaders support teachers to systematically implement evidence-based teaching practices and collect and use student outcome data routinely for instructional changes (Zafar & Monteiro, 2021). Nonetheless, to be effective in instructional leadership, especially in schools that are already running on minimal resources or a staff shortage, school leaders have to commit a lot of time and energy quality-assuring teaching and learning (Raghoobur, 2021). The chances are that the leaders end up battling time to try and direct administrative responsibility yet take way from school-based responsibilities to ensure the quality of leadership is effected.

5.1.3. Distributed Leadership & Collaboration

Some K-12 schools in Mauritius are adopting the philosophy of distributed leadership that centres on shared responsibility and consensus decision-making. The leaders that use this type are those who delegate leadership responsibilities typically, to the teachers and subject department heads, as well as other staff members, leading to a more collaborative and de-centralised method of school management (Beebeejaun-Muslum & Gokulsing, 2019). School leaders answered that distributed leadership encourages a more collaborative attitude among teachers, where they feel like they are influential in the introduction to improvement initiatives at the school. This collaborative approach also relieves the administrative workload from school Principals, providing more capacity to think about strategic planning and fostering relationships with their external community (Moonsammy-Koopasammy, 2020). On the other hand, distributed leadership is an effective tool; nevertheless, some leaders struggle with

accountability and maintaining a continuity of decision-making rationale. From some studies, it could be that although distributed leadership fosters teamwork it can also cause rivalry especially if lines of roles and responsibilities are not clearly established (Chittoo, 2018). Also, in schools where the staff has little experience, distributed leadership may result in uneven practices.

Different leadership styles (transformational, instructional or distributed) has their own advantages and limitations as experienced by the school leaders of Mauritius regarding K-12 schools. Transformational leadership leads to a positive school culture and engagement with staff, instructional leadership helps raise student outcomes, and distributed leadership encourages sharing responsibility as educators. But using these styles of leadership effectively to fulfil an end cause the success of a lifespan is good stewardship of resource, circumstance and professional development.

A study of the impact of leadership styles on both academic and organizational outcomes in K-12 schools within Mauritius.

5.1.4. How Transformational Leadership Transforms School Culture

K-12 school culture intervention studies conducted in K-12 schools in Mauritius have shown a significant positive impact of transformational leadership, which focuses on facilitating and encouraging employees to pursue the mutual goal, on both school culture as well as organizational effectiveness. Research has even shown that school leaders who practice transformational leadership help to create a playground of trust, teamwork and high-teacher morale which eventually results in superior school performance (Moonsammy-Koopasammy, 2020). According to Beebeejaun-Muslum and Gokulsing (2019), transformational leaders in Mauritian schools significantly show the way in the development of staff ownership, how they collective response ability and stimulate innovation amongst staff members both on instructional practices as well as administrative procedures. One effectively leadership style was found to improve overall teacher satisfaction and turnover by creating a more supportive and inclusive environment. Whilst this is the case, the effective role of transformational leadership in perpetuating academic results can only be maintained through sustained heightened motivation and professional growth (Chittoo, 2018). While this type of leadership culture is effective in changing school culture, it could improve further to impact student calculus (with direct research on the instruction strategies).

5.1.5. Academic Performance and Educational Leadership

It has been proven to affect academic achievements at the K-12 school level in Mauritius and research on instructional leadership emphasized that it is mostly concerned with improving teaching practices and student learning. These leaders are spending most of their time building curricula, coaching teachers and tracking the progress of students.Quality improvements in academic outcomes on ground (Zafar & Monteiro, 2021) In Mauritian schools, according to Raghoobur (2021), the instructional leaders have a commitment to providing teachers with up-to-date pedagogical tools, ensuring that what they teach is consistent with the curriculum and national educational standards. It is the most common leadership style used in school with explicit academic goals (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, n.d.), as it only directs attention towards student achievement. But there are limits to how much instructional leadership can be expected from school leaders, particularly if they work in schools with constrained resources or high student-teacher ratios where operational control of teaching practices can be more difficult to maintain (Moonsammy-Koopasammy, 2020). However, the consensus from empirical work is that principal instructional leadership improves student achievement, but only when combined with professional development and ongoing teacher support.

5.1.6. Leadership and Organizational Performance: Distributed Hierarchy vs Focused Managerial_Depth

Distributed leadership, transferring significant portions of school-level decision making authority to teachers, department heads and other members of staff as a proven strategy for yielding the desired organizational outcomes in Mauritian schools. Distributed leadership facilitates a collaborative decision-

making process within the organization, where staff feel more responsible and empowered which creates organizational cohesion and increases efficiency (Beebeejaun-Muslum & Gokulsing, 2019). Chittoo (2018) also confirms what school leaders suggest: decentralization of leadership positions allows them to refocus on strategic planning and external partnerships, ultimately increasing the efficiency of meeting school goals. Leadership capacity within schools → approximately rights; For more information, see distributed leadership. As such, although empirical evidence suggests that the distributed nature of school leadership may mean that non-hierarchal approaches to decision-making will promote more positive effects for academic outcomes (Raghoobur, 2021), there is variation in results depending on the capacity and experience from those leaders embedded within the system. This has at times resulted in uneven instructional offerings that may impede student achievement when distributed leadership is the norm. Still, if done right, distributed leadership makes an organization more robust and adaptive in times of crisis as well.

Leadership styles exert a broad range of effects on academic and organizational outcomes in Mauritian K-12 schools. Transformational leadership was found to contribute to a positive school culture, instructional leadership has shown to boost academic results by improving the quality of teaching and distributed leadership plays a role in increasing organizational efficacy through collaboration. There are strengths in the essential aspects of each style, though much like anything universal when it comes to schools, context- and resource-dependency affects the effectiveness of leadership styles as much organizational success as does how well leaders might balance adminstative vs. instructional duties. Given this rule of the organizational context and the potential for school performance gain that accrue, a blended approach which combines elements of all three leadership styles is likely the most effective in the Mauritian educational landscape — to yield minimum academic results alongside maximum SOIQ / pupil outcomes.

5.2. Interventions and Leadership Practices to Enhance School Performance

In Mauritius, the success of practices and interventions for leadership in K-12 education is vital to improve school performance. This thematic analysis works around three themes e.g., professional development for school leadership, collaborative practices and technology in leadership. Role Modeling was found to be associated with higher academic results and organizational effectiveness in Mauritian Schools.

5.2.1. School Leaders Professional Development

An example in point is that the provision of professional development programs for school leaders reveals significant potential effective intervention to improve school performance in Mauritius. Instructional leadership with a focus on the theory and practices does not just happen; Hiatt, Pennell, Irene, Moonsammy-Koopasammy (2020) to ensure that principal know-how to drive academic improvement and create safe schools work benefit from systematic leadership training programs. The literature supports that as school leaders engage in ongoing professional development they are better able to: utilize knowledge of effective teaching strategies (Wenger & Kaser, 1998), serve a diverse student body (Dell'oglio et al., 2012; Planty et al. Structured leadership programs have been shown to make a difference in tangible school outcomes, such as improved professional collaboration and target-driven pedagogical practices: Beebeejaun-Muslum & Gokulsing 2019). Yet, the success of these programs can vary greatly depending on whether the training is relevant to the schools that are engaging with them or generic, which may not fit diversity context specifics.

5.2.3. Collective Leadership Based on Collaboration

One of the key interventions for improving school performance was identified as collaborative leadership practices. This approach focuses on the development of teachers' and staffs issue (Harriet, 2014) to enable for sharing the decision and power with shared responsibility within schools. Research has found that when school leaders encourage collaboration, teachers are more confident in their ability

to be part of school improvement initiatives, and higher student performance is achieved as a result (Zafar, M., & Monteiro N. Indeed, students are learning at higher levels in schools with inquiry teams (Killeen 2014) and better teaching practices and teacher satisfaction/retention rates result when collaborative learning communities are implemented in a school (Raghoobur, 2021). Teamwork helps focus on innovations and adapting to student needs while spurring better performance within the school. Collaborative practices work best when communication is clear and leaders actively shape a culture of broad participation.

5.2.4. Technology Integration on Leadership

And the use of technology in practices of leadership is another critical intervention that has been shown to be successful in improving school performance. School leaders utilise technology give them an ability to simplify bureaucratic activities and enhance the in-cabin communication of the instructors with their learners support an effective ways of working throughout their learning institution (Beebeejaun-Muslum & Gokulsing, 2019). Furthermore, technology can be a helpful tool for instructional leadership by providing leaders with data and information on student performance to make fact-based decisions around curriculum and resource allocation (Moonsammy-Koopasammy, 2020). Studies have found a link between the technology-empowered leadership of schools and positive student academic outcomes, as well as operation efficiency (Chittoo, 2018). But the effectiveness of technology in educational leadership largely depends on proper infrastructural setup, continuous training of staff and a clear vision to use the technology for teaching-learning purposes.

This international case study of K-12 education, in Mauritius, attempts to identify effective interventions and leadership practices which improve school performance. These three areas all contribute to a culture of support and innovation that improve educational outcomes for students as well as organization effectiveness. The effectiveness of these interventions will be maximized when educational stakeholders take into account the unique context and needs at each school, ensuring that leadership practices support continuous improvement and success.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of leadership styles and interventions in K-12 education contexts in the nation Mauritius uncovers a landscape that is fairly uncomplicated therefore creeping into certain practices that are important for academic as well as organizational achievement. Each has unique value in building a positive school climate, improving instruction and facilitating staff teamwork. The way they lead is largely influenced by their professional development.

Focused professional development, collaborative leadership practices and technology integration emerge as important tools to improve school-based educational performance. School leaders play a key role in ensuring that students perform well, and the leaders must engage in continuous learning so as to foster a culture of collaboration and boost teachers' morale. In addition, the intentional application of technology in building leadership supports increases communication and data-driven decisions to drive business practices.

To drive educational excellence in Mauritius, this evidence suggests that policymakers and other educational stakeholders should encourage and resource these leadership practices and interventions. By making those approaches to be characterized by the who, the why and the how of authority about what is going on inside in schools, as we can embed those environments which supports an innovative approach and equity and eventually get life lasting results ensuring quality education indeed does reach to students. Further investigation and assessment of these practices will lead to a greater understanding about which are most effective, informing future endeavors for improving educational outcomes throughout the region.

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations were given:

1. Support improved professional development: Establishing continuous and customized training for school leaders can improve their instructional and managerial abilities as the demands of K-12 education in Mauritius continue to change.

2. Moreover, they should foster a culture of shared responsibility and innovation supporting staff and teacher participation in decision-making process throughout the life of the school operation by implementing collaborative leadership practices which will improve schools performance.

3. Strategic Use of Technology: Incorporation of technology across all leadership practices to enhance communication, coordination between administrative processes, and leveraging data analytics to lead academic success is a top priority for education institutions.

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