



# EVIDENCE REVIEW REPORT

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*A Review of Empirical Research on School  
Leadership in the Global South*

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# Executive Summary

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**Around the world, education systems face a learning crisis.** Students enrolled in school are not learning even the most basic numeracy and literacy skills. This is particularly acute in the Global South. At current rates of progress, education systems in some countries in the Global South will take hundreds of years to perform at the current levels of those in the Global North today.

**Investing in school leadership to improve school quality is a policy solution that is potentially cost-effective yet infrequently used.** The strength of leadership at the school level appears to be a critical factor in determining school quality and student learning outcomes. A study that spans over 65 countries found that students led by the top 25% of school leaders had the equivalent of three extra months of learning per year when compared with students led by the bottom 25% of school leaders. This suggests that the efficacy of school leaders can potentially have a large impact on student success.

**Despite this potential, school leadership remains underutilized and under researched. We set out to document the existing evidence base and lay out a research agenda for the future.** This paper summarizes what the authors have learned from the existing research. This report has reviewed more than 70 studies, focusing on the empirical literature from the Global South. The purpose of this report is to summarize the evidence on what is known about: (1) The relationship between school leadership and student outcomes; (2) the status of school leaders in education systems; (3) the availability and impact of training programs that aim to improve school leadership skills and student outcomes; and (4) other enabling conditions, such as policies related to the selection, accountability, and autonomy of school leaders, that impact the quality of school leadership and effectiveness of school leadership training.

The rest of this section summarizes key findings of the study.

**In many countries, school leaders have minimal opportunities to attend pre- or in-service leadership training and are consequently ill-equipped for their roles.** School leader surveys show leaders lack skills required to support teachers in improving their practice. They also lack the key skills required to track and measure progress toward improved student outcomes. School leaders are largely tasked with administrative responsibilities, resulting in often spending less than 25% of their time managing activities related to student learning.

**School leadership training can improve student outcomes and, when successful, is highly cost-effective.** Researchers in Brazil found that the Jovem de Futuro (JdF) 3-year training provided to school and district leaders led to student test score increases in math and Portuguese. The training program cost about 5% of public



expenditures per student for secondary school, while it increased the amount that students learned on average during secondary school by about 30%. In the United States, a study found that the cost effectiveness of training school leaders “was the largest calculated using experimental data.”

**However, not all school leadership training programs that have been evaluated show improved student learning.** The success of school leader training programs depends on factors such as the design of the program and the quality of the implementation. The emerging research base suggests the following are components of training programs that can be effective at improving student outcomes:

- Programs focused on supporting school leaders in their use of student-level learning data.
- Programs working with government schools that focus on the school leaders’ teacher development activities as the main channel through which they influence student math and literacy outcomes.
- Programs that incorporate coaching of school leaders to complement traditional training models.

**The impact of school leadership training programs is also dependent on other enabling conditions, such as policies related to the selection, accountability, and autonomy of school leaders.** School leaders are currently selected primarily based on seniority or political considerations, with marginalized groups often being underrepresented in school leadership positions. Leaders are rarely given autonomy over key inputs that impact student learning, such as the hiring of teachers or design of the curriculum, and they are largely held accountable to administrative deliverables. There have been recent efforts to change policies related to school leader selection, autonomy, and accountability; however, these are rarely coupled with an evaluation of these initiatives.

**Finally, there is a clear need for a robust and targeted research agenda for the field of school leadership in the Global South.** A research area of immediate need is rigorous studies that uncover the key features of school leadership training programs that lead to improved student outcomes. More research must also be done to understand how shifting enabling factors of leader selection, accountability, and autonomy in conjunction with increased access to effective school leadership training can improve student learning and school quality.

# Introduction

## THE GLOBAL LEARNING CRISIS

The world today faces a learning crisis. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #4 calls for committed countries to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” Despite several countries pledging to achieve this goal by 2030, the world is currently far from the pace required to achieve this target (UNESCO, 2016).

This learning crisis is particularly acute in the Global South, defined in this report as lower- and middle-income countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Recent literacy and numeracy assessments show that the average student in low-income countries performs worse than 95% of their peers in high-income countries (Crouch & Gove, 2011). In recent assessments in Ghana and Malawi, more than 80% of grade 2 students were unable to read a single familiar word such as “the” or “cat.” In urban and rural Pakistan, 40% and 60% of grade 3 students, respectively, could not correctly perform a simple subtraction problem, such as  $54 - 25$  (World Bank Publications, 2018).

The World Bank’s World Development Report 2018 (World Bank Publications, 2018) outlines the extent and implications of this crisis. It cites four immediate factors that break down, inhibiting student learning: unprepared students, poor teaching quality, focus on educational inputs that do not drive learning, and weak school management (See Figure 1).

The core of school management is school leadership, which is critical to addressing all four of the key factors the WDR discusses.

## WHY LEARNING DOESN'T HAPPEN



### TEACHERS

*Unskilled and unmotivated*



### LEARNERS

*Unprepared*



### SCHOOL INPUTS

*Do not affect teaching and learning*



### SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

*Not focused on teaching and learning*

World Development Report 2018: *Learning to Realize Education's Promise*, by World Bank





## REVIEWING THE EVIDENCE ON IMPROVING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Reviews of research from the Global North have found that school leadership can play a critical role in improving education outcomes and that initiatives designed to improve school leadership can have positive impacts on teacher and leader practices as well as student outcomes (Herman et al., 2017). In the Global South, there is now evidence of the value of strong school leadership on student outcomes. However, less is known about how to improve the quality of school leadership.

The purpose of this evidence review is to summarize and analyze studies that have focused on the key levers education policymakers can use to increase the quality of school leadership in the Global South. As a UNESCO (2016) report states, “[W]hile there is an abundant and growing literature on school leadership in OECD countries, this field is still to be explored in most developing countries.”

Focusing on empirical studies done in the Global South that aim to measure the causal impact of an initiative through the use of a counterfactual, this report addresses the importance of programs that work to improve school leadership quality. It begins with two brief sections outlining the relationship between strong school leadership and student outcomes (section 2) and the status of school leaders in education systems (section 3). It then looks at the current evidence on the impact school leadership training programs have on student and school outcomes (section 4). From there it moves to understand the enabling factors for successful school leadership and school leadership training programs focusing on school leader selection (section 5) and school leader accountability and autonomy (section 6). It closes with a summary and suggested areas for further research (section 7).

The purpose of this evidence review is to summarize and analyze studies that have focused on the key levers education policymakers can use to increase the quality of school leadership in the Global South.

## THE KEY QUESTIONS THIS REVIEW AIMS TO ADDRESS



### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND STUDENT LEARNING

*What is the relationship between strong school leadership and student achievement? Through what channels do leaders impact students?*

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### SCHOOL LEADER BACKGROUND AND ROLE

*What is the background of school leaders? What is the current availability of school leadership training? What role are school leaders being asked to play in school systems?*

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### SCHOOL LEADER TRAINING AND SUPPORT

*What impact does the professional development of school leaders have on leader quality and student outcomes? What specific leadership training practices have been found to impact student outcomes?*

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### ENABLING FACTORS I - SCHOOL LEADERSHIP SELECTION

*How are school leaders currently recruited and selected for their roles? What does research tell us about how the process for selecting school leaders impacts leadership quality and student learning?*

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### ENABLING FACTORS II - SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AUTONOMY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

*What is the role school leaders currently play in education systems? What types of accountability and incentive systems do school leaders require to function well? What are the decision-making powers that school leaders require to improve management of schools?*

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### KEY FINDINGS, POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS, AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

*What are key areas of future research surfaced by this review that are critical to improving school leadership?*



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# The Relationship Between School Leadership and Student Learning

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School leaders moving from the bottom 25% to top 25% of their quality management score was associated with a large increase in student learning outcomes, equivalent to an additional 3 months of schooling for every year.

An emerging evidence base concurs with the World Development Report's finding that quality school leaders (also referred to as principals, school heads, school directors, headmasters/headmistresses) are critical to ensuring students learn. After studying school leaders in eight countries, Bloom et al. noted that a one-point increase in their scoring on school management practices was associated with a 10% increase in student performance (2015). Leaver, et al. extended this work with evidence from 65 countries participating in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and found that school leaders moving from the bottom 25% to top 25% of their quality management score was associated with a large increase in student learning outcomes, equivalent to an additional three months of schooling for every year (2019). This same relationship has been validated by other researchers in other Global South countries (Crawford, 2017). While this evidence base does not isolate the impact of school leadership on student outcomes, it suggests that the school leader could have a large impact on student success.

The influence of quality school leadership on student achievement is stronger in adverse circumstances. An analysis of school closures during the 2016 Hurricane Matthew crisis in Haiti showed that "for schools experiencing the highest level of infrastructure



damage, one standard deviation of better routine management practices would equate to a 0.43 standard deviation increase in average score on the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) administered at the end of the school year (approximately 8 months later)” (Adelman, et al., 2020). Preliminary evidence from Puerto Rico suggests that during COVID-related school closures, stronger school leaders were better able to utilize distance learning tools and retain students (Bobonis, et al., 2020). Furthermore, evidence from the Global North suggests that the ability of the school leader matters most in schools serving the most underprivileged students (Branch et al., 2012). They find that the spread of school leader quality is twice as high in high-poverty areas compared to low-poverty areas.

A school leader’s impact on student outcomes depends on how their role is defined in the local policy and cultural context. Most broadly, quality school leadership can influence student learning outcomes through both improving the quality of classroom instruction and creating a positive school culture (UNESCO, 2016). Leaver et al. suggested that, in Latin America, school leadership impacts student outcomes through improving teacher selection, teacher incentives, and parental engagement (2019).

Scur et. al showed that school leadership is important for both public and private schools in India, but the mechanisms differ (2018). In public schools, where the hiring and firing of teachers is highly bureaucratic, leaders impact student learning by conducting management practices that influence teachers’ classroom practices. In private schools, school leaders influence learning outcomes through the teacher selection, compensation, and termination policies they design and implement.

In a randomized study on the impacts of school grants and teacher incentives in 350 schools in Tanzania, researchers found evidence to suggest that schools with stronger leadership were better able to utilize the resources provided to impact student learning. They stated, “[T]hese results are consistent with growing recent evidence on the importance of school management in the education production function” (Mbiti et al., 2019). Similarly, in another randomized study on school grants, this time in Senegal, Carneiro et al. (2020) found that schools that improved student outcomes focused on the training of their leaders and teachers, suggesting that school management is a key determinant of school quality for students.

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# School Leadership Background and Role

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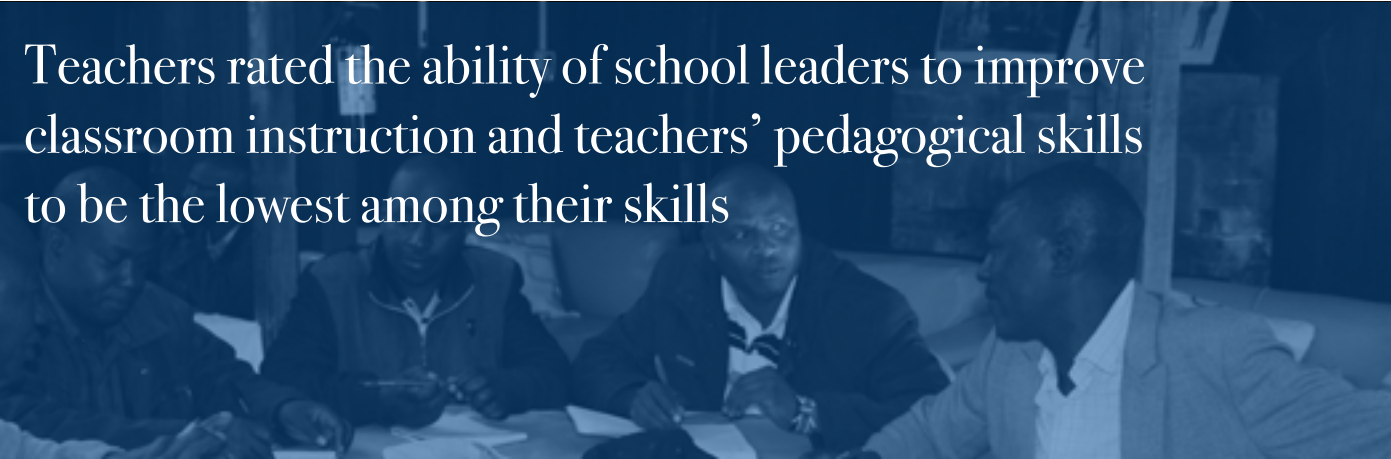
Increasingly, school systems are oriented toward improving the learning levels of students, and this necessitates school leaders' roles to be focused on delivering these outcomes. Yet this is rarely the case. Additionally, school leaders are hampered in their ability to lead toward these outcomes because, among other factors, they have limited opportunities to attend pre- or in-service training. School leaders in underperforming school systems are found to have low-level leadership skills.

## THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADER

The core responsibility of a school should be in ensuring student learning via quality teaching. However, in many Global South countries, the school leader spends less than 25% of their time managing such activities (Adelman & Lemos, 2020). Furthermore, the types of activities that leaders are tasked with vary, ranging from administrative to

political to community-oriented. Leaders in many systems are also asked to be classroom teachers for portions of the day (Pont et al., 2008; Valliant, 2015).

Focusing the leader's role on improving schools for students and empowering leaders to have decision-making responsibility has been a call from school leaders (World Bank Publications, 2018). There is a concern that increasing a school leader's role in student learning may put more stress on school leaders by increasing their administrative and managerial workload and adding pressure to produce documented evidence of successful school performance (Pont et al., 2008). Thus, any increase in the expectations from school leaders must be accompanied by a redefinition of the role of leaders taking into account core instructional tasks as well as the support needed to perform these tasks (Patrinos et al., 2015; Pont et al., 2008, Pont et al., 2015).



## Teachers rated the ability of school leaders to improve classroom instruction and teachers' pedagogical skills to be the lowest among their skills

### CURRENT SKILL LEVELS OF SCHOOL LEADERS

For the past two decades, many educators have consistently voiced the need for improving the skills of school leaders in developing countries. A 2016 UNESCO report highlighted the poor quality of school leadership as a key factor in poor student outcomes. It also stated that the changing expectations of the role that a school leader is now expected to play exemplifies the need for continuous professional development. Similarly, the 2018 World Development Report identified school management and leadership as one of four areas needing improvement in the education systems of the Global South (World Bank Publications, 2018). The Education Commission's 2019 Transforming the Education Workforce report highlights improved school leadership as one of the key elements necessary to leverage the broader education workforce for better learning and more resilient education systems.

A study of school leaders in India and seven other countries found that Indian leaders have substantially lower skills than their peers (Lemos & Scur, 2012). The researchers observed that the gap between India and all other countries is large and consistent. The researchers also studied management practices across the healthcare, manufacturing, and retail sectors and found that relative to the other sectors, the skills of education management is worse.

In Indonesia, a baseline study of the competencies of school leaders indicated that district supervisors, school leaders, and teachers rated the ability of school leaders to improve classroom instruction and teachers' pedagogical skills to be the lowest among their skills (ACDP, 2013). The study also showed that the school leaders had lower confidence in

their ability to innovate and motivate other stakeholders, such as teachers or parents.

This study is also in line with a recent OECD study (2016), which showed that school leaders who were trained on instructional leadership practices were more likely to spend more time on classroom observations and use student performance data for school planning and teacher professional development.

### LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCHOOL LEADERS TO DEVELOP

Recent studies throughout the Global South have found that school leaders receive inadequate training for their role - as little as two days of support per year (Education Commission, 2019; Mangaleswarasharma, 2017; Vaillant, 2015). In Indonesia, school leaders have limited access to continuous professional development. Out of the school leaders sampled, nearly 80% had no central training and approximately 45% had no training at the state or district level between 2009 and 2011 (ACDP, 2013). In India during the 2016–2017 school year, no school leader completed leadership-focused training in as many as ten states (NITI Ayog, 2014). In Kenya, a qualitative study of school leaders indicated the school leaders felt underprepared to execute their roles.

The leaders also emphasized that they rarely draw from knowledge gained from either their advanced degrees or short-term training on school leadership (Lopez & Rugano, 2018). This suggests that it will be important to improve school leaders' access to training and ensure that the training offered is of high-quality.



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# School Leadership Training and Support

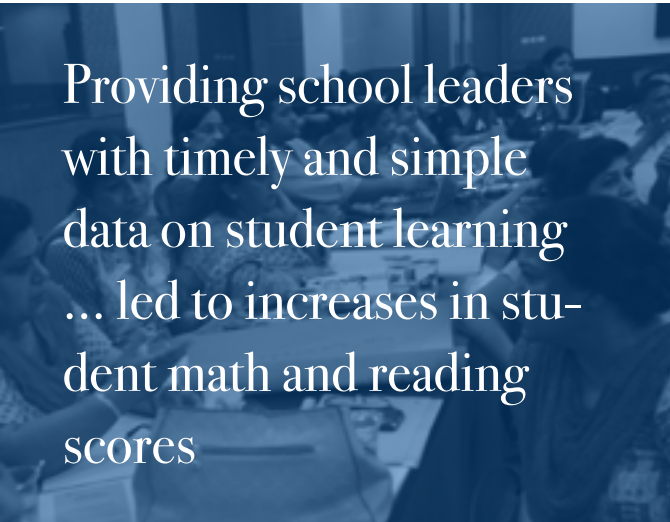
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There are professional development practices for teachers that are known to be linked to improved student outcomes; however, these practices are rarely adopted at scale (Popova et al., 2019). Less is known about the quality and impact of school leadership training in the Global South, but an emerging research base reviewed here is showing the importance of school leadership training on improving student outcomes and leader practice. This review of professional development programs suggests that content that is focused on having leaders prioritize student learning as their key deliverables and that incorporate coaching of leaders are critical for quality initiatives.

## IMPACT OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TRAINING ON STUDENT OUTCOMES

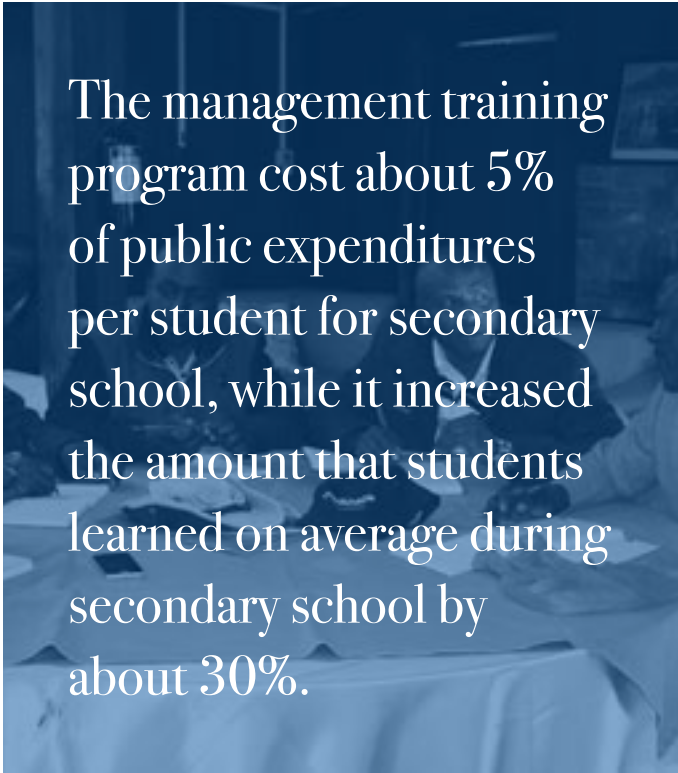
In a randomized study in Argentina, providing school leaders with timely and simple data on student learning at the beginning of the academic year along with the extra capacity needed to use it led to about a 0.35 standard deviation increase in student math and reading scores (de Hoyos et al., 2019). School leaders who received the data were more likely to report using any data to make changes to the curriculum, determine teacher quality, and inform the parents and public than those who did not receive student learning data from the study. The researchers also found that the extra capacity-building offered to school leaders in addition to providing leader student learning data did not have a greater impact on leadership practices or student outcomes, though they question the uptake and quality of this training.



Providing school leaders with timely and simple data on student learning ... led to increases in student math and reading scores

Researchers in Brazil found that the Jovem de Futuro (JdF) 3-year training provided to school and district leaders led to student test score increases of 0.12 and 0.09 standard deviations in math and Portuguese, respectively (Barros et al., 2019). The JdF program provides 21 and 6 days of training to school and district leaders, respectively. JdF focuses on getting school and district leaders to align their goals and use data to drive their schools' improvement planning processes. The study used the arbitrary nature of the phased rollout of the program across various schools over a ten-year period from 2008–2018 to compare outcomes between early and late adopters to isolate the impact of the program on student outcomes. The management training program cost about 5% of public expenditures per student for secondary

school, while it increased the amount that students learned on average during secondary school by about 30%.



The management training program cost about 5% of public expenditures per student for secondary school, while it increased the amount that students learned on average during secondary school by about 30%.

Lassibille et al. (2010) stated that the Amélioration de la Gestion de l'Education à Madagascar (AGEMAD) training of school and district leaders in Madagascar led to gains in student math and first language test scores, though these increases were not statistically significant. The authors found a statistically significant 4.1 percentage point increase in student attendance compared with a control group average of 87%. The AGEMAD study was conducted in 1,200 schools. Leaders at the district, sub-district, and school levels were randomly assigned training and tools to improve management. AGEMAD was a two-year intervention where district and sub-district officials were given 6 days of training over 2 years, and they in turn provided principals and five teachers from each school 3 days of training on the use of tools designed to track student- and teacher-level data. The study was designed to be able to disaggregate the impact of working at the various management levels and found that working with leaders at the district and sub-district levels alone, without also working with the school leaders, did not impact student test scores or attendance.

A randomized study by Muralidharan and Singh on the impact of an intervention aimed to improve school



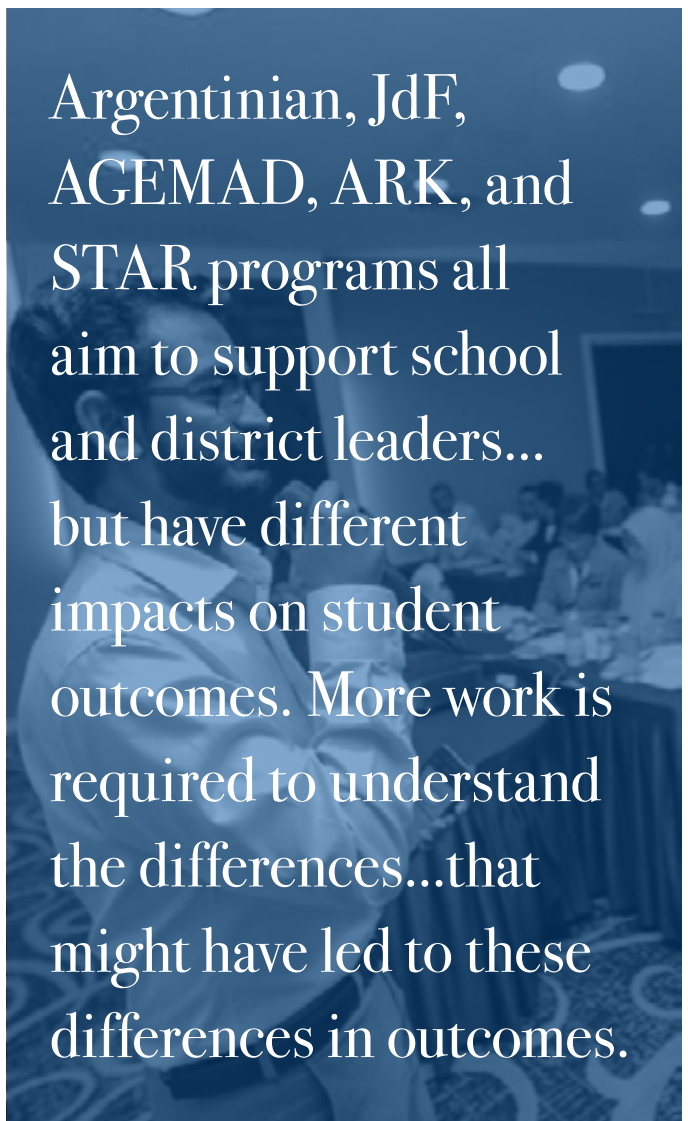
leadership by developing improvement plans in 2,000 schools in Madhya Pradesh, India, showed no positive impact on student learning or any school quality indicators (2018). The intervention, delivered in partnership with Absolute Return for Kids (ARK), consisted of providing feedback on school quality and supporting leaders to create school-specific improvement plans to address key issues. The program led to no measurable improvement in management or teaching practice. The researchers suggest that a lack of accountability or incentives for school leaders and teachers to change their practice was a key factor in these results.

In Ghana, the Ministry of Education's STAR program to support primary school leaders and teachers in repurposing an hour of the school day to teach students at their learning level as opposed to grade level found a 0.11 standard deviation increase in student learning, equivalent to one-third of a year of schooling (Lucas et al., 2020). A randomized evaluation was conducted in 210 schools where some of the schools were supported through the program via teacher training coupled with tools for leaders to use to monitor the program. A second group of schools was supported with the same teacher training and leader tools coupled with additional management training for school and district leaders, and a third set of schools was not supported and served as the control group. The researchers found that schools of both supported groups improved student outcomes at similar levels and had school leaders that were more likely to observe classrooms for more than 30 minutes and give useful teacher feedback according to a teacher survey. Taken together, this suggests that the management training had no auxiliary effect on student or leader outcomes in addition to the impact of the teacher training and leader tools provided. Similar to other studies on school leadership training, researchers suggested that the engagement of national-level policymakers in the program was critical to its success (Nannyonjo, 2017).

The Argentinian, JdF, AGEMAD, ARK, and STAR programs all aim to support school and district leaders in creating stronger school improvement plans and using data for decision-making, but have different impacts on student outcomes. More work is required to understand the differences in the content among these programs; the contexts in which they were delivered; the quality of the programming; and other factors that might have led to these differences in outcomes. One potential explanation

for some of the differences is that training programs that make student-level data analysis less cumbersome, and that are more specifically focused on student learning as opposed to general school quality, are more likely to improve student outcomes. Another potential takeaway is that in government schools, the setting in which all of these studies took place, the school leader exerts influence over student math and literacy outcomes largely via teacher development activities, a finding suggested by other studies (Scur et al., 2018).

Thus, training for government school leaders must have a sharp focus on improving the ability of school leaders to influence teacher practice. Finally, there are likely to be other enabling conditions, such as the incentives for school leaders to change their practice, that impact the effectiveness of leadership training programs.





Reviews of research on school leadership from the Global North have found that school leadership training can have positive impacts on student outcomes (Herman et al., 2017). One of the most rigorous studies from this literature is an evaluation of a principal training program in Texas that led to statistically significant improvements of 0.10 and 0.20 standard deviations in math and reading high- and low-stakes test scores, respectively, after one year (Fryer, 2017). The program trained 29 out of 58 school leaders randomly allocated to the two-year program covering “instructional planning, data-driven instruction, and observation and coaching.” The program also delivered 300 hours of training as opposed to the typical 72 hours/year that school leaders usually received. The change in test score results in Year 2 could not be statistically distinguished from zero, but researchers suggested this was due to the fact that 38% of principals being trained left or were fired after Year 1. Despite the modest student outcomes gains and principal turnover, the researchers stated that the cost-effectiveness of training school leaders was the “largest calculated using experimental data” and could be improved if the training was targeted to leaders who are likely to remain in their positions for the duration of the program.

### **IMPACT OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TRAINING ON SCHOOL LEADER BEHAVIOUR**

Several studies have documented the positive impact leadership training can have on school leaders’ practice. The National College for Education Leadership Program (NCEL) in Jamaica trained 572 leaders from 2012 to 2015. The evaluation of the program found that trained school leaders reported spending more time in areas such as classroom observation and feedback. For example, the percentage of school principals who reported that they conducted observations “more than once or twice a month” prior to the intervention rose from 30% before the intervention to 70% after the intervention. These results were corroborated by the teachers surveyed (Nannyonjo, 2017).

The cost-effectiveness of training school leaders was the “largest calculated using experimental data.”



In an evaluation of a school leadership training program by the Varkey Foundation in Argentina, school leaders reported that their practice changed as a result of the training. Of the more than 1,500 school leaders that participated, 75% strongly agreed that their knowledge improved and 73% planned to implement their learning in their schools (Alonso, 2018; OEI, 2020).

## DESIGN OF HIGH-QUALITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

The authors of this review were unable to find a study that varied the content and mode of delivery of school leadership training programs to determine the impact of design choices. There is also a limited number of studies from the Global South specifically looking at the characteristics of effective training programs. However, what little literature does exist suggests key components to high-quality professional development include that the content is focused on the school leader's role in student success and the mode of delivery couples practice-based content delivery with individualized coaching support.

### *Features of Quality Leadership Training Content*

Given the lack of extensive literature on this topic from the Global South, this review looks to a few key studies from the Global North to shed more light on how programs can focus on student success.

A study by Dobbie and Fryer (2019) of 39 privately-managed, publicly-funded schools in New York City showed that five specific practices accounted for half the variation in the student outcomes measured by test scores. The five factors all fall within the influence of the school leadership: frequency of teacher feedback, school-wide use of student data to influence teaching practice, structures for learning-level teaching provided to students, increased class time, and staff having high expectations of student potential. Similarly, another study in Miami Dade County of 100 school leaders found that overall time spent on instructional leadership activities didn't predict student growth, but time spent specifically on developing teachers in a targeted manner did (Grissom et al., 2013). The study also revealed


that time spent by school leaders on coaching and targeted classroom observations were particularly helpful in raising student outcomes. In contrast, other practices, especially conducting informal classroom and school walkthroughs, were not related to student growth.

Researchers from the World Bank have also come to similar conclusions from their reviews of evidence on school leadership training programs, stating, "(i) innovative training programs rethink the role of principals as key agents of change within schools and can significantly impact learning, (ii) training content, and a principal's role, can vary, but effective programs all focus on student success as their ultimate objective, and (iii) aligning the broader education policy framework on principals is key to maximize the impacts of training" (Adelman et al., 2019).

### *Potential of School Leader Coaching to Deliver Effective School Leader Training*

While traditional models of professional development focus on training workshops as the mode of delivery, coaching for school leaders has been implemented less often but can potentially complement traditional training to improve its effectiveness. The coaching process for educators is one in which instructional experts work to discuss practice in a way that is "(i) individualized, (ii) intensive, (iii) sustained, (iv) context-specific, and (v) focused" (Kraft et al., 2018).

While there is limited research on the impact of coaching for school leaders, research on coaching for teachers points to important learning. A recent study in South Africa found teacher coaching to be twice as effective as teacher training via workshops (Cilliers et al., 2018). Similarly, a study on training science teachers found that twelve weeks of coaching improved student achievement, particularly for students in classrooms of less-experienced teachers. (Alboroz, et. al 2018). Evidence of the positive impacts of coaching has also been found in varying degrees in interventions conducted in Kenya, Malawi, Thailand, and Brazil aimed at improving instructional quality, professional interaction, and sharing of classroom practice (Piper et al., 2015; Sailors et al., 2014; Tolley et al., 2012).

A woman wearing glasses and a school uniform is looking down at a document she is holding. The background is a blurred image of a classroom or office setting.

First, school leaders are well positioned to provide individualized, intensive, and sustainable coaching to teachers. Second, lessons from coaching teachers can be applied to programs that design continuous professional development for school leaders.

Lessons from coaching teachers can be applied to school leaders in two ways. First, school leaders are well positioned to provide individualized, intensive, and sustainable coaching to teachers. Second, lessons from coaching teachers can be applied to programs that design continuous professional development for school leaders. However, when designing programs like these, it is important to keep in mind that the responsibilities of the school leader are plentiful and managing time, energy, and efficacy is needed (World Bank Publications, 2018). Further, as is highlighted in the previous sections, school leaders may not easily identify high-quality instruction to coach the teachers on; thus, a specific focus on the use of student learning data in coaching could be a critical component of success.

Although multiple studies have pointed out that coaching is more expensive and time-intensive than other models, programs have experimented with remote coaching with promising results. Remote coaching includes coaching via phone or videoconference. A study in Brazil evaluated the impact of coaching delivered by Skype, at a relatively small per-student cost, that produced cost-effective impacts on learning compared with other rigorously evaluated teacher training interventions (Bruns et al., 2017).

## Conclusion

This chapter on training school leaders provides an overview of the limited access to training and continuous professional development and the consequent skill gap school leaders currently have in the Global South. Impact evaluations of existing training programs from the Global South point to positive results on leader practice and mixed results on student outcomes. From the studies reviewed here, programs focused on supporting leaders in their use of student-level data to develop teachers and make school-level decisions seem more likely to be effective at improving student outcomes. Lessons from the current literature provide insights into how training context, content, design, and policy will all play a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of such programs.

Understanding the effectiveness of implemented school leadership training programs, coaching practices, or any other initiative will be critical. The research base on this topic is currently limited in the Global South. It is imperative that school leader training programs be accompanied by more intentional research design aimed at disentangling the impact the various elements of the program are having on leader, teacher, and student outcomes.

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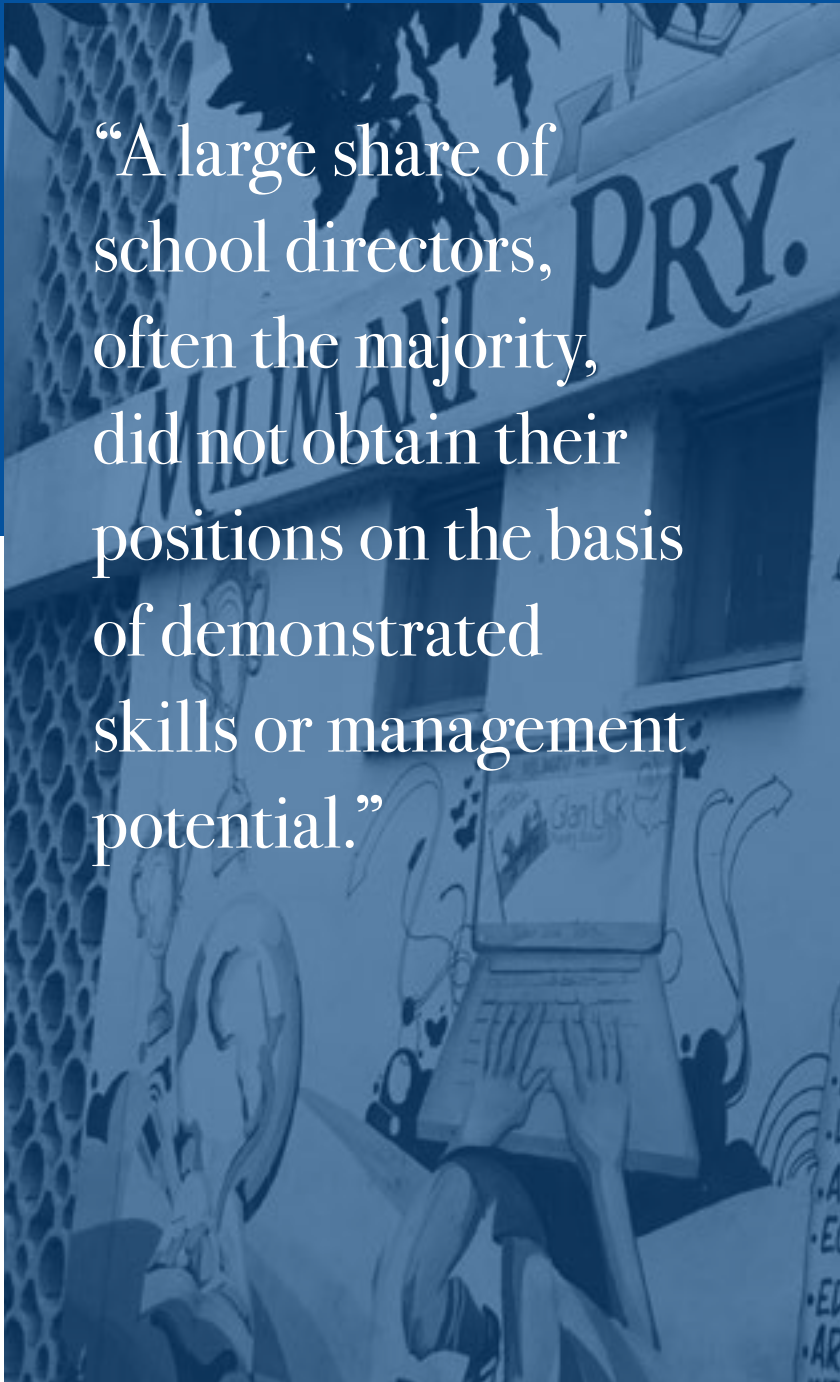
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# Enabling Factors I – School Leader Selection

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“A large share of school directors, often the majority, did not obtain their positions on the basis of demonstrated skills or management potential.”

Given the influential role that principals play in school improvement, it is important to select suitable individuals for school leadership positions (Education Commission, 2019). While Global South research has linked school leadership with student outcomes, comparatively less research has examined the appropriate approach to school leader recruitment and selection (Al-Dhuwaihi & Ahmen, 2019).

## CURRENT SCHOOL LEADER SELECTION DESIGNS

As previously stated, in most countries, school leaders begin their professional careers as teachers. In many African countries, absent formal requirements that principals have school leadership preparation or development, principals are often appointed on their longevity as teachers with the implicit assumption that this will predict their performance in the role of school leader (Asuga & Eacott, 2012). Similarly, Adelman and Lemos (2020) found that in most Latin American countries, “a large share of school directors, often the majority, did not obtain their positions on the basis of demonstrated skills or management potential.”



## Country Spotlight: Kenya

The appointment of school leaders in Kenya is based on teacher experience as well as political and ethnic considerations (Jwan & Ong'ondo, 2011). There is also no specialized training offered to teachers aspiring to be school leaders. Existing training and courses offered by universities, professional associations, and consultants remain informal and haphazard (Asuga & Eacott, 2012).

Asuga & Eacott (2012) surveyed 41 secondary school principals in the Nakuru district of Kenya. These school leaders reported that available training programs are not responsive to the needs of current and aspiring leaders. Jwan and Ong'ondo (2011) relied on interviews, observations, and informal conversations with leaders, teachers, and staff in two case study schools in Kenya, resulting in similar findings. The two school leaders in their study did not feel adequately prepared for their roles, despite the fact that they each had a bachelor's degree, which is a basic requirement for promotion. Taken together, these studies highlight the need for more systematic hiring processes.



## Country Spotlight: Indonesia

For decades, school leaders in Indonesia were appointed by the central government, without stipulation or the expectation that the principal role required any specialist training or preparation (Sumintonoa et al., 2015). Despite the transfer of authority over the training and appointment of school principals to district governments in 2001, district officials continued the practices of appointing school leaders based on personal connection and political influence (Hairon & Goh, 2019).

To prevent the favoritism of certain school leaders, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC, formerly MoNE) focused on systematizing the processes for training, selecting, and appointing principals, issuing two regulations stipulating that a school leader must have an undergraduate degree, at least five years of teaching experience, and demonstrate competence in areas such as management and supervision. Further, they are encouraged to complete a national certification training program called Lembaga Pengembangan dan Pemberdayaan Kepala Sekolah (LP2KS) or the "Agency for School Principal Empowerment and Development" (Ministry of National Education [MoNe], 2007; MoNe, 2009).

Despite these regulations, school leaders in Indonesia continue to be appointed based on political influence. In their examination of school leader selection, Sumintonoa et al. (2015) interviewed 18 public secondary school leaders across four different provinces in Indonesia and found that only two of these leaders had completed LP2KS before they were officially appointed. Three school leaders joined the training program after being appointed to the role. Despite completing the training program, these five still reported feeling underprepared to deliver all that is expected of their role (Sumintonoa et al., 2015). Consistent with these findings, as of 2015, only 7% of public general secondary schools across Indonesia had a leader who has been trained through the LP2KS program (LP2KS, 2015).

These findings suggest that despite the establishment of a national training program as a means of school leader appointment, hiring practices may still be driven by political and personal connections rather than achievement or competence.



## GLOBAL SOUTH-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPROVING SCHOOLS LEADERS' SELECTION

There is limited empirical research on specific considerations that Global South countries should incorporate into their systems for selecting school leaders. In this section, the review will share some hypotheses researchers have put forward on this issue.

A framework of leadership standards or competencies can bring needed uniformity, objectivity, and guidance when identifying the main characteristics, tasks, and responsibilities of an effective school leader (Pont et al., 2008). Global South school systems largely lack a set of criteria that articulate the research-based characteristics related to school leader effectiveness (Education Commission, 2019; Tournier et al., 2019). Clarity on such criteria may allow hiring bodies to recruit and select the most qualified prospective candidates, increasing the likelihood that high-potential candidates are not overlooked (Pont et al., 2008).

It may be the case that in Global South school systems, highly trained and selected teachers are in limited supply compared with the number of school leader positions that need to be filled (Adelman & Lemos, 2020; Bruns & Luque, 2015, Pont, et al., 2008). This may require Global South school systems to assess more for leadership potential than current ability level.

Additionally, many scholars find flaws in the assumption that good teachers can become good leaders without specific preparation or development (Asuga & Eacott, 2012). School leadership requires specialization and a different set of skills than those essential to classroom teachers (Jwan & Ong'ondo, 2011). Therefore, teaching qualifications and experience alone are likely not sufficient for identifying and recruiting effective school leaders.

Quality school leader recruitment involves attracting and identifying viable applicants to fill vacant positions (Al-Dhuwaih & Ahmen, 2019; Education Commission, 2019). This approach focuses on assuming the future performance of a candidate in the role of leader rather than extrapolating from their past performance (Huber & Hiltmann, 2010). School leader selection is the process for assessing how a candidate would fit in a specific position and context (Al-Dhuwaih & Ahmen, 2019).

Finally, there is a disproportionately small share of school leaders in the Global South that are female, pointing to the need to examine a multitude of biases, discriminatory practices, and systemic challenges that leaders from underrepresented groups may face (Gipson et al., 2017).





Researchers in Brazil found that when “secondary schools changed selection mechanisms from political appointment to direct election by the school community, principal tenure increased and student outcomes improved.”

## SCHOOL LEADER SELECTION AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENT OUTCOMES

A few countries in the Global South have moved more toward a merit-based system of school leadership. In Chile, school leaders are now selected by an independent panel on the basis of potential instead of political affiliation (Adelman & Lemos, 2020). In India, some states have started to institute qualifying exams for school leaders (NITI Ayog, 2014). In Egypt, new requirements for school leaders include participating in a job-shadowing internship (World Bank, 2018).

These changes have the potential to impact student outcomes. Researchers in Brazil found that when “secondary schools changed selection mechanisms from political appointment to direct election by the school community, principal tenure increased and student outcomes improved.” (Adelman & Lemos, 2020; Adelman et al., 2019). More studies on the impact of merit-based leadership selection on student outcomes will help policymakers better weigh the potential benefits and costs of moving toward different systems of principal selection.

### Conclusion

Despite changes in a few countries, a recent UNESCO report states that the status quo still remains that most countries in the Global South lack formalized policy guidance on the requirements to become a school leader (Tournier et al., 2019). More work must be done to understand the constraints and barriers to change that these systems face as well as the impact of merit-based selection of school leaders on student outcomes.

Additionally, Global South countries design selection processes that take into account the cultural and policy contexts within which they operate (Hansen, 2010). Education systems are structured in very different ways, impacting the relative success of policies and practices designed to improve principal recruitment and retention (Chapman, 2005; Oplatka, 2004). The need for research from more diverse settings to build our understanding of school leadership recruitment and selection across and within countries in the Global South is critical.



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# Enabling Factors II - School Leader Autonomy and Accountability

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The training of school leaders must be aligned to what is expected from these leaders. The nature of the school leader's role varies greatly across countries depending on policy context (World Bank Publications, 2018). A key component of the school leader policy context is the amount of autonomy and accountability that leaders are given.

A key challenge facing education systems as they manage their school leaders is balancing school leader autonomy with accountability. School leader autonomy relies on the premise that individual school leaders have a more full understanding of school-specific needs, and thus make better resource decisions, thereby raising productivity (Yi, 2015). School leader accountability is needed in theory to incentivize desirable school leader practice, thereby increasing performance (Pont, et al., 2008). An education system can only fairly hold school leaders accountable to the domains over which they have autonomy, or decision-making power.

This section first considers the evidence on impacts of expanding autonomy of schools and school leaders, and then of impacts of increasing accountability.

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SCHOOL AUTONOMY

School autonomy refers to a school's authority to self-govern—to make decisions about human, financial, and instructional resource allocation (Patrinos et al., 2015). Since the 1980s, decentralization efforts have sought to transfer decision-making authority to lower levels of the educational system in many countries around the world (Cheng et al., 2016; Pont et al., 2008). While important differences remain between different countries, the common aim of these movements is to relocate power structures from state or regional offices to individual schools to enable school stakeholders to make their own decisions about resource use and school operations (Cheng et al., 2016). Decentralization relies on the premise that local decision-makers have a better understanding of local needs and thus make better resource decisions, thereby raising productivity (Yi, 2015).

## THE IMPACT OF GREATER SCHOOL LEADER AUTONOMY

School leader authority over personnel management is still rare (Adelman & Lemos, 2020; Blimpo et al., 2015; Scur et al., 2018). A key result of this is that “public school directors are in many cases managing their teachers without formal authority and must employ practices other than high-powered personnel management practices to affect the quality of teachers' work” (Adelman & Lemos, 2020).

Schools with greater autonomy adapt more quickly to changing educational expectations and have the capacity to make instructional changes that may enhance students' learning (Cheng et al., 2016). However, the evidence of the effect of school autonomy on student achievement remains mixed (Pont, 2020; Yi, 2015). The influence of school leader autonomy is dependent on the nature and level of autonomy, the school's existing accountability structures, and the economic and the overall development of the country (Cheng et al., 2016).

The impact of autonomy may vary depending on other elements of the system, including the capacity and interests of local actors. Hanushek et al. (2013) estimated the effect of school autonomy over key elements of school operations based on a dataset from PISA tests spanning 10 years and 42 countries. They found that school autonomy has a positive effect on learning in high-performing countries, but

in low-performing countries, school autonomy could have a negative effect on student outcomes. They conclude that the impact of autonomy varies across countries, depending on the level of economic and educational development.

Without proper oversight, local actors, such as school leaders, with conflicting incentives may not act in the interest of maximizing student learning (Hanushek et al., 2013; Yi, 2015). One example of this was documented in Uganda when schools, on average, received only 13 percent of allocated funds (Reinikka & Svensson 2004). Using a survey tool to track the flow of public resources, the study found that across 250 primary schools, the bulk of funds from a government-run school grant program was captured by local officials and politicians. In another study in Tanzania, Mbiti et al. (2019) found that the impact of providing school grants only impacted student learning outcomes if coupled with rewards for teachers' improved effort. Based on a large-scale randomized experiment across 350 schools and more than 120,000 students, the researchers found no impact on student test scores from providing school grants that doubled per-pupil spending, but significant positive effects from providing both grants and teacher incentives based on student performance.

Increased school leader autonomy relies on the capacity of leaders to understand the functioning and performance of schools. It is possible that school leaders may not be able to understand school and student results enough to know how their schools are performing and to hold school authorities or governments accountable for the resources they are to be provided (World Bank, 2016). Decision-making capacity may be inferior at the local level when the technical capacities of local decision-makers are limited and local communities lack the ability to ensure high-quality services (Hanushek et al., 2013). As a result, policies to enhance school autonomy do not necessarily lead to autonomy in practice.

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SCHOOL LEADER ACCOUNTABILITY

In the education sector, accountability systems provide policies used to measure and hold school leaders responsible for school outcomes such as student achievement. In general, school accountability systems include normed student tests, public reporting of school performance, and rewards or sanctions based on some measure of school performance or improvement (Yi, 2015).

## THE IMPACT OF GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY

Research has reported a positive relationship between strong accountability systems and student achievement; however, this varies widely by context (Pont, 2020; Pont et al., 2008). Empirical evidence on the effect of accountability policies on students' achievement is predominantly found in the United States, and the evidence is very much dependent on context (Yi, 2015).


In many countries in the Global South, holding school leaders accountable for student outcomes or the quality of teaching is rare. In Tanzania, Mbiti (2016) found that only 30% of school leaders report that the most recent visit by their local inspector focused on teaching or learning.

Student performance assessments through international and national examinations have been used to hold schools and education systems accountable internationally in the past few decades (OECD, 2012). Advocates for external, performance-based accountability argue that the public reporting of school performance with rewards and sanctions will increase achievement, while its critics argue that test-based external accountability alone will not lead to improved, long-term student learning outcomes without internal accountability reinforced by professional accountability (Yi, 2015).

In a study of over two million students from 59 countries, researchers found that accountability systems that use comparable tests create incentives for better performance and allow for the rewarding of those who are contributing most to educational improvement efforts (Bergbauer et al., 2018). Based on a dataset from the international PISA student achievement test, the study found that internal testing that simply monitors progress without external comparability and internal teacher monitoring has little effect on overall student performance. Interestingly, the study found that testing and accountability systems are more important for school systems that are performing poorly.



Only 30% of school leaders report that the most recent visit by their local inspector focused on teaching or learning.



There is no  
one-size-fits-all  
approach to school  
leader autonomy  
and accountability.

More accountability for school leaders specifically related to student learning may also improve the impact of the professional development provided to them. Lassibille's reanalysis of the AGEMAD data shows that this training intervention may have more positively improved self-reported principal practices in school heads with nonpermanent status as well as in schools that serve just one grade, though it does not comment on the impacts on student learning for these subgroups of schools (Lassibille 2014).

Simply stated, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to school leader autonomy and accountability. The country's context and local capacity must both be considered when designing and implementing school autonomy and accountability policies (World Bank, 2016).

## CONCLUSION

Researchers have suggested that a combination of school leader autonomy and accountability is associated with better student performance (OECD, 2012). However, these studies, based on PISA results in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries, paint an incomplete picture, as both school autonomy and school accountability play out differently based on the capacity of school systems.

In the Global South, the role of the school leader is quite varied and often not focused on the core teaching and learning practices of the school. School leaders rarely have autonomy over personnel decisions and are not often held accountable for student performance. The mixed results of such systems from the Global North (Cheng et al., 2016) suggest that Global South school systems should couple moves toward greater school leader accountability and autonomy with a focus on capacity-building for leaders. It will also be critical to accompany policy shifts in school leader autonomy and accountability with rigorous testing to understand the impact of changes on leader and student outcomes.



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# Key Findings, Policy Recommendations, and Areas for Future Research

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This paper reviewed the empirical literature on school leadership in the Global South. We outlined the current context of education in these countries—265 million students are out of school, those in schools are performing below their peers, teacher performance is inadequate, and poor management and governance undermine schooling quality. We described the impact strong school leadership can potentially have on addressing the learning crisis, finding that moving from the bottom to top 25% of school management is associated with a large increase in student learning outcomes, equivalent to an additional 3 months of schooling for every year. Finally, we outlined the questions that this paper would address.

This review provides important considerations for those working on improving school leadership in the Global South. The key findings, policy recommendations, and future research areas from each section are listed below.



# School Leadership Background and Role

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## GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THIS REVIEW

*What is the current availability of school leadership training? What is the role school leaders currently play in education systems?*

## KEY FINDINGS

- *School leaders lack requisite skills to improve learning.*
- *School leaders have limited opportunities for their professional development.*
- *School leaders spend less than 25% of their time managing activities related to student learning.*

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

*Provide school leaders with more opportunities for professional development.*

## WHAT FURTHER RESEARCH SHOULD ADDRESS

- *How does the design of a school leadership training program best utilize the current role school leaders play?*
- *Can differentiating training content and mode of delivery by school leader profile lead to improved training effectiveness?*

# School Leadership Training and Support

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## GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THIS REVIEW

*What impact does the professional development of school leaders have on leader quality and student outcomes? What specific leadership training practices have been found to impact student outcomes?*

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

*The design and quality of school leadership training programs when deciding what to deliver.*

*Focus school leadership training programs on supporting leaders in their use of student-level data and developing teachers.*

## KEY FINDINGS

- *The impact of school leadership training programs is dependent on program quality and other enabling conditions.*
- *School leadership training programs have shown the potential to be extremely cost-effective.*
- *Programs focused on supporting school leaders in their use of student-level learning data were more likely to improve student outcomes.*
- *In government schools, the school leader exerts influence over student math and literacy outcomes largely via teacher development activities.*
- *Coaching of school leaders has also emerged as a possible complement to traditional training models.*

## WHAT FURTHER RESEARCH SHOULD ADDRESS

- *What is the impact of large-scale school leadership professional development on student outcomes in different contexts? Through what mechanisms do successful programs lead to improved student outcomes?*
- *What are the characteristics of effective professional development and training programs? What are the political and cultural determinants of successful programs?*
- *What are the key leadership practices that impact student learning in a given context? How can these be determined by policymakers and accounted for in the development of content for school leader professional development?*
- *What is the impact of leadership coaching on school leader practice? What support is required for school leaders to be able to play the role of an effective teacher coach?*

# Enabling Factors I - School Leadership Recruitment and Selection

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## GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THIS REVIEW

*How are school leaders currently recruited and selected for their roles? What does research tell us about how the process for school leader selection impacts leadership quality and student learning?*

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

*Align school leader recruitment and selection with research-based leadership performance standards.*

## KEY FINDINGS

- *Most countries select school leaders based on candidates' longevity as teachers or political considerations.*
- *School leadership requires a different set of skills than classroom teaching.*
- *Recently there have been promising initiatives to move toward more merit- and potential-based systems of school leadership selection.*
- *Merit-based school leader selection is associated with better student outcomes.*
- *Equity and representation in school leadership must be an important point of consideration for education systems.*

## WHAT FURTHER RESEARCH SHOULD ADDRESS

- *While school leaders seem to be largely selected based on longevity or politics, is this changing over time?*
- *What are the enablers of and barriers to a more merit- and performance-based system of selection?*
- *What is the impact of both traditional as well as progressive policies of selection on student performance?*
- *Specifically in the context of the Global South, what are the most effective selection practices given the current teaching pool? How does improved school leadership selection practices compliment the adoption of effective school leader training programs?*
- *How does representation of gender and other dimensions of diversity in school leadership impact leader effectiveness, especially for performance of marginalized students?*

# Enabling Factors II - School Leadership Autonomy and Accountability

## GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THIS REVIEW

*What types of accountability and incentive systems do school leaders require to function well? What are the decision-making powers that school leaders require to improve management of schools?*

## KEY FINDINGS

- *Government school principals generally do not have the ability to hire, incentivize, or terminate the education personnel in their schools.*
- *The impact of increased school leader autonomy has been found to depend on local capacity in the school system.*
- *School leader accountability systems are more effective when student-level data is used to benchmark against other schools and coupled with support to improve practice.*

## WHAT FURTHER RESEARCH SHOULD ADDRESS

- *What are current school autonomy and accountability practices in countries in the Global South? Are these changing over time? What factors lead to changes in these policies?*
- *What is the impact of increased school autonomy and accountability on student achievement in the context of the Global South? What are the conditions necessary to design and implement autonomy and accountability policies that will lead to improved student achievement in the Global South? What are the possible challenges to successfully implementing school autonomy and accountability policies that will improve student performance?*
- *How do school autonomy and accountability practices impact the role of the school leader? What skills and supports do school principals need to effectively lead under increased school autonomy and accountability measures?*

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

*Greater school leader accountability and autonomy should be coupled with a focus on capacity-building for leaders.*

*Policy shifts in school leader autonomy and accountability must be tested rigorously to understand the impact of changes on student outcomes.*



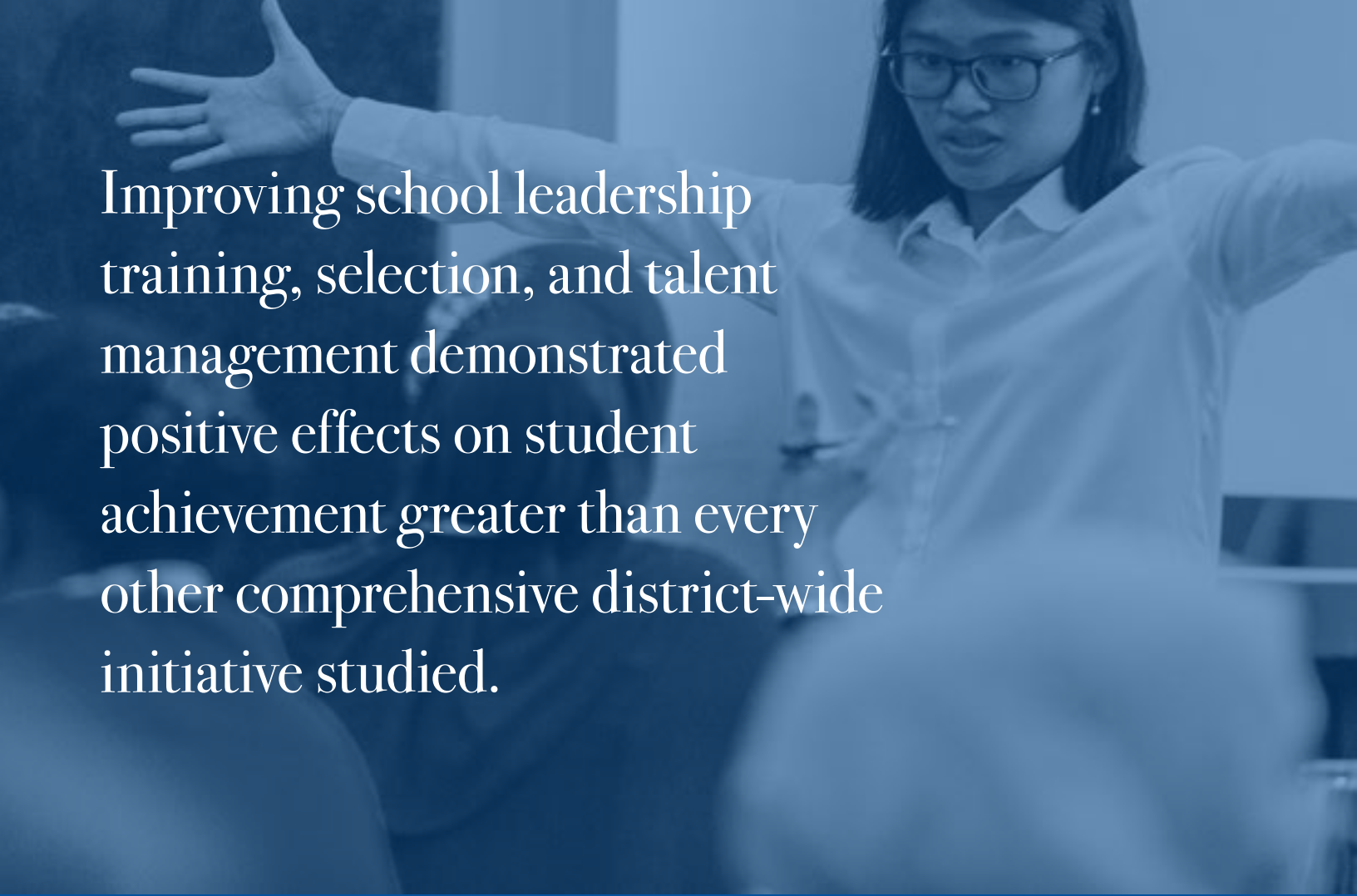
## CLOSING THOUGHTS: MOVING TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO IMPROVING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

This review has looked at the components of the school leader role—selection, support, and talent management—largely independently. However, a recent study from the United States has shown that school systems that work to improve all components of the role is a cost-effective and affordable way to increase student learning and reduce school leader turnover. Improving the principal role was unique in its ability to increase student learning at scale, with the researchers stating, “[W]e found no other comprehensive district-wide initiatives with demonstrated positive effects of this magnitude on achievement” (Gates et al., 2019). Studies that investigate the impact of improving multiple components of the school leader pipeline on student outcomes is a critical area for future research.

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Improving school leadership training, selection, and talent management demonstrated positive effects on student achievement greater than every other comprehensive district-wide initiative studied.

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