African Centre for School Leadership

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WHEN EVIDENCE LEADS:

Transforming School Leadership for Quality Learning in Tanzania From Evidence to Action



The African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL) is a coalition of partners coordinated by ADEA, ESSA, FAWE and VVOB.

ADEA
Ushirika wa Maendeleo ya Elimu Barani Afrika
الرابطة لأجل تطوير التربية في إفريقيا
Association for the Development of Education in Africa
Association pour le développement de l'éducation en Afrique
Associação para o Desenvolvimento da Educação em África

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This evidence brief highlights actionable evidence to support policymakers and practitioners in shaping key decisions on transforming school leadership to improve learning quality in Tanzania.



Key Messages

- Tanzania's evidence base is growing but fragmented, concentrated in a few institutions and dominated by urban, male-led studies.
- Policy and research remain weakly connected with limited translation of evidence into decision-making or practice.
- School leaders face increasing responsibilities amid reforms such as the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) and fee-free education, yet most lack structured leadership preparation.
- A nationally co-created research agenda now defines five priority areas: instructional leadership, ICT integration, inclusion and equity, leadership models and best practices, and partnerships.
- Institutionalising evidence uses, funding local research, and building data literacy are key to translating research into improved leadership and learning outcomes.

Introduction

School leadership is increasingly recognised as a key driver of education quality and equity in Tanzania (EdQual, 2010; Kayombo et al., 2024; Masaki, 2024). Despite this, leadership practice remains under-supported and often disconnected from policy and research. The growing importance of school leadership is driven by ongoing reforms, including the fee-free education policy, the rollout of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), and the expansion of secondary education. These reforms have amplified expectations for school leaders to serve as instructional leaders, change agents, and community connectors. Yet many enter these roles without structured preparation or ongoing professional support, facing gaps in leadership training, limited mentorship, and a lack of standardized frameworks guiding practice (Mbunda et al., 2025; Shuma et al., 2025).

Since 2015, these reforms have heightened the need for effective, evidence-based leadership that uses data-informed decision-making to improve teacher and student performance. The African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL), with support from the Mastercard Foundation, supported the Leaders in Teaching (LiT) initiatives to promote effective school leadership in Africa by conducting the first-ever national mapping of school leadership research and researchers in Tanzania (2025)

This is part of continental mapping exercise on school leadership in Africa to strengthen supportive school leadership systems and improve teaching and learning outcomes. The study examined how research is produced, shared, applied, and culminated in a co-created National Research Agenda for strengthening leadership research and practice.

Methodology and Approach

The mapping exercise used a mixed-methods approach combining evidence generation, stakeholder engagement, and co-creation to ensure national relevance and ownership.

- Document Review: 161 publications (2010–2025) were analysed to identify trends, authorship, and thematic focus.
- Online Survey: 66 researchers reflected on opportunities, needs, and barriers to school leadership research.
- Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions: 58 policymakers, researchers, and practitioners discussed enablers and constraints across the research–policy–practice ecosystem.
- Validation and Co-Creation Workshop: Over 50 stakeholders from government, academia, CSOs, and development partners jointly validated findings and prioritised a National School Leadership Research Agenda.

This inclusive process aligned national priorities, built shared understanding, and generated actionable pathways for embedding evidence into school leadership development.

Key Insights

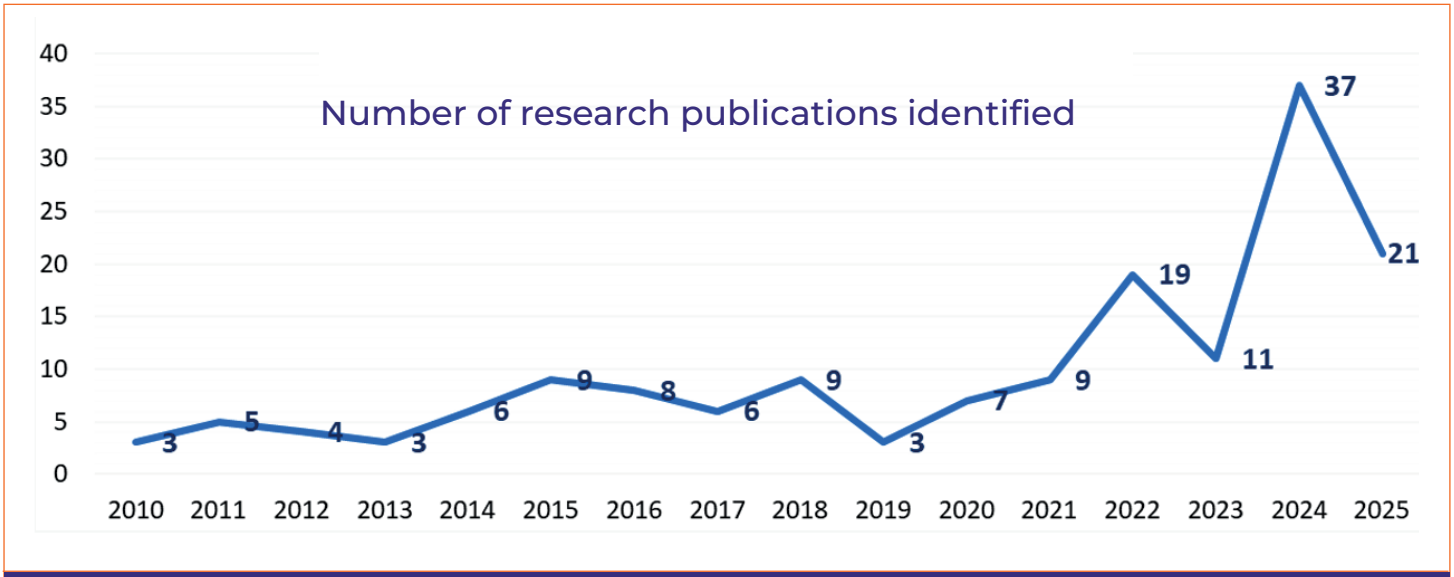
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1. Strengthening Evidence Use and Research Uptake

In Tanzania's school leadership research base is growing rapidly, with a surge in publications since 2022. Figure 1 shows that, 94% of outputs are academic journal articles, with limited grey literature or practitioner-focused materials that could guide policy and practice. Surveys show that only 48% of researchers have published their work, and dissemination mainly occurs through academic seminars or personal networks, with minimal use of policy briefs, open-access platforms, or media engagement.

FGDs noted that researchers produce a lot of data but lack channels to share it, so much of it ends up "sitting on shelves." This underscores the need to strengthen research translation, communication, and engagement mechanisms so that evidence effectively informs policy dialogue, school leadership practice, and ongoing system improvement.

Figure 1: School Leadership Research publications per year (Tanzania)



Note: Total research outputs identified between 2010 and 2025 is 161
***2025 publications searched between January and June

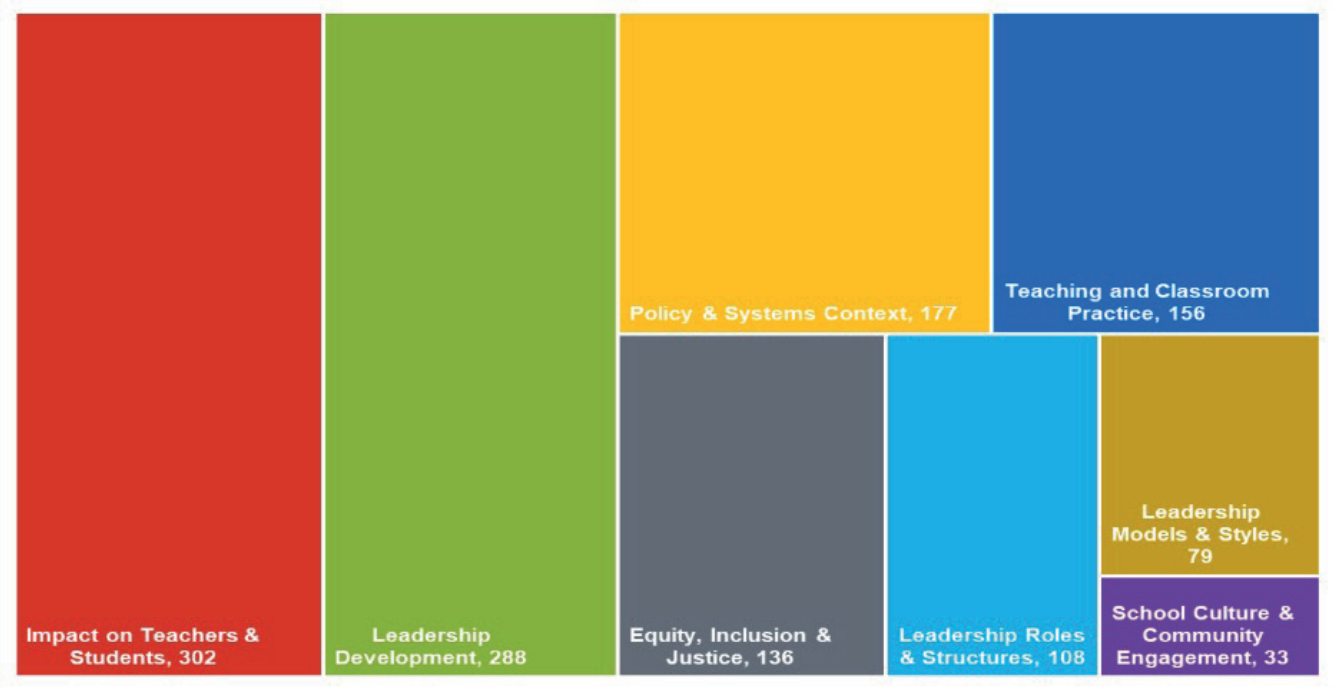
Source: ACSL (2025) Mapping Report

2. Research Focus and Knowledge Gaps

Current school leadership research in Tanzania is narrow in scope. For example, figure 2 shows that most studies examine the impact of leadership on teachers, students, and education systems. While this provides valuable insights into performance outcomes, it leaves critical gaps in understanding leadership models, school culture, organisational structures, and community engagement.

Addressing these gaps is essential to build a comprehensive evidence base that captures the full complexity of school leadership and informs more effective, contextually grounded, policies and practices.

Figure 2: School Leadership Thematic areas



Source: ACSL (2025) Mapping report

3. Gender and Collaboration in Research

The school leadership research landscape in Tanzania remains uneven in both gender representation and institutional participation. Research authorship is predominantly male (62% of first authors) and heavily concentrated in public universities, limiting diversity of perspectives and innovation.

Moreover, regional collaboration remains weak, with only 4% of studies involving partnerships beyond Tanzania, particularly within Sub-Saharan Africa.
Strengthening gender equity, institutional diversity, and cross-country collaboration is vital to enrich the research ecosystem and generate more inclusive, comparative, and policy-relevant evidence on school leadership.

4. Co-creation of a National Research Agenda

To address existing fragmentation and guide future investment, stakeholders came together through a national co-creation workshop that produced a shared research agenda for school leadership in Tanzania.

See Table 1, which identifies five core priorities: instructional leadership, ICT integration, inclusion and equity, best practices and models, and partnerships and collaboration.
In addition, secondary priorities include mentorship and coaching, recruitment and promotion, community engagement, leadership during crises, and data use in decision-making.
This nationally owned agenda represents a strategic framework for coordinated research, policy influence, and leadership development, ensuring that future studies and programmes respond directly to Tanzania's education priorities and contextual realities.

Table 1: Research Agenda Priorities

Priority Level	
Core Priorities (Top 5)	Instructional Leadership
	ICT Integration in School Leadership
	Inclusion and Equity in Leadership
	Best Practices and Models of Effective Leadership
	Partnerships and Collaboration
Secondary Priorities	Mentorship and Coaching
	Recruitment, Appointment & Promotion
	Community Engagement
	Leadership in Times of Crisis
	Data Use in Decision-Making

Source: ACSL (2025) Mapping report

Recommendations

1. Institutionalise Evidence Use

Establish evidence uptake and coordination units within the Ministries of Education for both mainland and Zanzibar (MoEST and MOEVT, respectively), PO-RALG, and ADEM, and integrate research reviews and data use into school leadership training and quality assurance processes.

2. Fund and Empower Local Researchers

Create a National Education Research Fund to support school leadership studies, prioritising women researchers and underrepresented regions, while providing mentorship and policy engagement training for emerging scholars.

3. Strengthen Dissemination, Communication, and Data Literacy

Develop Kiswahili policy briefs, open-access repositories, and Education Evidence Dialogues. Promote concise, practitioner-friendly research formats, and train school leaders and district officers in data interpretation and application using tools like school report cards and dashboards.

4. Foster Collaboration and Regional Learning

Establish a National Research Platform linking universities, CSOs, ministries, and African partners. Encourage cross-country collaboration to strengthen school leadership research and share best practices regionally.

5. Monitor, Evaluate, and Ensure Policy Impact

Track indicators such as gender parity, regional coverage, collaboration rates, and evidence uptake to assess progress and ensure that research informs policy, leadership practice, and system-wide improvements.

Conclusion

Tanzania has built a strong foundation for evidence-driven school leadership. The mapping exercise and co-created research agenda are key steps toward ensuring that evidence generation addresses the nation's priority school leadership needs for policy and practice.

Moving forward, institutionalising evidence use, investing in local capacity, and promoting inclusive, data-driven leadership will transform research from static insight into actionable influence. When evidence informs leadership and leadership drives learning Tanzania's schools can become centres of excellence, equity, and continuous improvement.

About ACSL

The ACSL is a coalition of partners promoting effective school leadership in Africa. It is coordinated by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), ESSA, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), and VVOB – education for development. This continental mapping exercise on school leadership in Africa is part of efforts to strengthen supportive school leadership systems and improve teaching and learning outcomes.

Acknowledgement

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Suggested Citation

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