SCHOOL LEADERSHIP NETWORK

GLOBAL MEETING #1
GEM REPORT 24/25
CONSULTATION WORKSHOP
SUMMARY REPORT

2023

School Leadership Network

unesco
Global Education
Monitoring Report

GLOBAL SCHOOL LEADERS

VARKEY FOUNDATION
Changing lives through education

International
Task Force on Teachers
for Education 2030

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Introduction

On 21st June 2023, together with representatives of UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report and Teacher Task Force (TTF), The School Leadership Network (SLN) convened for a Consultation Session.

The School Leadership Network (SLN) comprises over 500 School Principals and 165 educational experts from 57 countries. In its third year, the SLN is collaborating closely with the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report team to contribute to the 2024 report on Education Leadership. Through Consultation Workshops and Sessions, SLN members will share their valuable perspectives on key themes related to the state of school leadership, encompassing both within and outside the school environment.

This year, the focus of school leadership revolves around three crucial skill areas: people, instruction, and organization. The people aspect encompasses skills such as caring, communication, networking, trust-building, and confidence-building. Instruction involves skills like observation, feedback, pedagogy, curriculum development, and assessment expertise. The organization dimension includes skills in data utilization, technology integration, strategic thinking, and resource allocation.

The SLN's first global meeting concentrated on the theme of School Leader Roles and Standards, delving into the three focal areas mentioned above. This summary report highlights the key takeaways from discussions involving school leaders and educational experts across these three areas.

By leveraging the diverse expertise and insights within the SLN, this collaborative effort aims to contribute valuable perspectives on education leadership, fostering positive change and advancing effective school leadership practices globally.

> "In our rural school, we need clear dialogue, active listening, collaborative work, and effective communication as essential pillars to provide quality education to our students."
> School Leader, Uruguay.

School leaders cannot lead schools alone, especially when the responsibilities are large. While they may have the most responsibility and opportunities to exercise leadership, and the biggest expectations are placed on them, other stakeholders in schools must also provide leadership, and there is, therefore, interest in how leadership is distributed.

Members of the network discussed their role, as school leaders, in developing, supporting, and retaining school staff, with a special focus on teaching staff. They discussed current challenges, systemic limitations, and enablers.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

PEOPLE: Developing and support staff

Building Trust

School leaders aspire to build a culture where teachers feel valued, collaborate, innovate, and feel a sense of ownership.

However, they find it difficult to hold their teams together as they grapple with increasing workload post-pandemic, lack of pedagogical autonomy, teacher transitions, school violence, and constant changes in educational laws.

Teacher Retention and Readiness

School leaders recognized the importance of offering teachers ongoing professional development programs, reduced administrative burdens, and comprehensive wellness programs via safe and open dialogues.

However, they find it difficult to deliver this with little to no autonomy in offering better salaries and influencing teacher selection processes. Acute teacher shortages and poor-quality teacher training programs exacerbate these challenges.

Addressing Gender Sterotypes and Biases

School Leaders recognize the importance of inclusive environments where all teachers, regardless of gender, feel supported, respected, and empowered to succeed.

However, school leaders feel ill-equipped to challenge societal stereotypes that perpetuate the notion of teaching as a "woman's job".

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Building Trust

In **Australia**, a school movement centered around distributed leadership has been implemented, fostering the development of initiatives such as establishing a shared agenda. Similarly, in Uruguay, schools arrange weekly meetings to exchange best practices and enhance the collective vision of the school community.

Uruguay also demonstrates how trust can be reflected in autonomy. Teachers are allowed to construct documents, including evaluations, based on their own learning and work projections. This empowers them to make meaningful contributions while receiving the essential support and guidance they need. This practice is also recommended for school principals in **Ecuador**.

Teacher Retention and Readiness

In **Argentina**, School Principals demonstrate a best practice by recognizing teachers as integral individuals, prioritizing the provision of 1:1 feedback and socioemotional tools that address their well-being. This holistic approach significantly contributes to teacher retention and professional development.

Also, **Brazil** showcases the relevance of strengthening teams through training and data analysis, enabling educators to base their actions on the coherence of results. Conversely, the education system in India often faces challenges due to the division between the public and private sectors.

Addressing Gender Sterotypes and Biases

In **Australia**, one example about this takeway is WomenEd that works diligently to support women in educational leadership by providing training and empowering communities. This initiative aims to break down stereotypes based on the roles women occupy in schools.

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INSTRUCTION
Strengthening Teaching and Learning Practices

> **We struggle with the focus (still) on memorization with no room for creativity. Lack of teacher training keeps us stuck in redundant practices.**
>
> School Leader, Nepal

School leadership has undergone significant changes in recent decades, shifting from administrative and bureaucratic roles to more collaborative and results-oriented approaches. However, the specific transformations in the role of school leaders vary across countries and contexts. Some countries have experienced a shift towards school leaders as managers focused on outcomes and accountability, while others have embraced collaborative models with shared responsibilities.

Members of the network reflected on their role as school leaders in classroom observations, providing guidance and feedback on pedagogical practices and assessments and more. They discussed current challenges, systemic limitations, and enablers.

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

INSTRUCTION: Strengthening Teaching and Learning Practices

Support versus "Inspection"

Many school leaders advocated for a shift from an inspection-focused culture to a supportive one that fosters professional growth and collaboration among teachers, promoting a positive learning environment for both educators and students.

School leaders in Iberoamerica in particular face challenges in the field of instruction due to excessive bureaucracy that limits their ability to support teachers,

Burdening Administrative Tasks

School leaders expressed concerns about the excessive burden of administrative tasks, which can detract from their ability to focus on instructional leadership and building relationships with teachers, students, and the broader school community.

School leaders emphasized the design of a clear professional teaching career, the development of effective competencies, the allocation of paid time for training and formative work, and the promotion of networks and collective leadership to share responsibilities and avoid bureaucratic overload.

Excessive Focus on Test Scores

Some school leaders highlighted the negative consequences of an excessive emphasis on test scores, as it may narrow the curriculum, hinder creativity, and lead to teaching to the test, rather than fostering holistic learning and development among students.

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LEADING THE WAY

INSTRUCTION: Inspirational practices

Support versus "Inspection"

In **Uganda**, the significance of School Principals in establishing structures and fostering relationships is emphasized, with dedicated time allocated to ensure teaching and learning remain the primary focus. Emphasizing the importance of context helps to promote greater equity in educational outcomes. Furthermore, in Spain, it is recommended to allocate paid time without students, enabling teachers and school principals to dedicate hours to training and formative work within schools.

Burdening Administrative Tasks

Australia has implemented professional standards for teachers and school principals, establishing a framework for their roles and responsibilities. In **Uganda**, the focus is on enhancing stakeholder capacity and granting greater autonomy to school leaders, relieving them from administrative burdens while providing support to contextualize teaching and learning. Meanwhile, **Spain** has developed a Professional Performance Model that allows leaders to self-assess their competencies and engage in 120 hours of personalized professional development, aligned with their institutional, school, and personal priorities.

Excessive Focus on Test Scores

Uganda emphasizes the need for professional development on instructional leadership to shift the focus from test scores to holistic educational development. **Australia** highlights the importance of revising initial training content, with a particular emphasis on fostering lateral accountability and establishing communities of practice in schools to facilitate transformative learning. **Spain** implements observation and reflection practices, wherein teachers engage in friendly observation protocols and coaching and mentoring meetings. Lastly, in **Chile**, the focus is on creating networks and fostering collegial leadership, enabling principals to share responsibilities and avoid being overwhelmed by bureaucratic tasks imposed by educational systems.

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ORGANIZATION
Effective school management

> ❝
>
> We can organize the challenges of coherence and articulation in daily work on 3 levels: macro in the system, organizational in the school and its processes, micro in the classroom with pedagogical challenges. The lack of coherence leads to incoherent messages about priorities and key objectives, which in turn generates confusion among teachers.
>
> School leader, Colombia
>
> ❞

Education contexts vary beyond governance and accountability. Schools face diverse challenges, such as managing complex resources and adapting to evolving skills. Limited resources demand creative leadership, while emergencies or diverse communities require leaders with a comprehensive understanding of their environment.

Members of the network discussed their role as school leaders in working with existing resources, and policies and creating a culture of learning and belonging.

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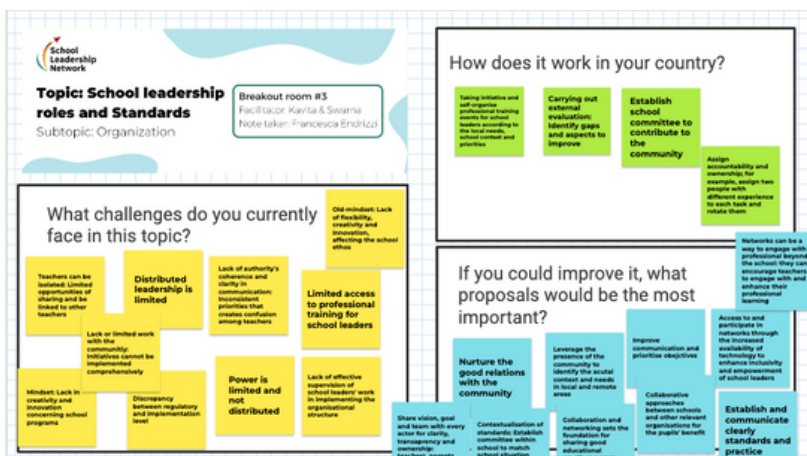
KEY TAKEAWAYS

ORGANIZATION: Effective school management

Community Engagement

School leaders recognize the vital role of community engagement in fostering a positive and supportive learning environment. They understand that by actively involving parents, local organizations, and stakeholders, they can create partnerships that enhance student outcomes. However, they do struggle with creating authentic partnerships with community members to implement community-based projects effectively.

Lack of professional training for school leaders

Many school leaders expressed frustration over the limited availability of professional training and development opportunities tailored specifically to their role. They also pointed to incoherence in the larger system - making prioritizing and setting goals often difficult to communicate and implement at the school level.

Absence of Peer Learning

School leaders often feel isolated in their roles, lacking structured opportunities for peer learning and collaboration. They stress the value of platforms where they can engage with other leaders, exchange best practices, and learn from shared experiences. Through these avenues, leaders hope to gain new insights, broaden their perspectives, and develop strategies to overcome common challenges they face in their leadership roles.

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LEADING THE WAY

ORGANIZATION: Inspirational practices

Community Engagement

In **Indonesia and India**, community engagement is fostered through the establishment of school committees. These committees allow community members to actively contribute to the development of the school by assigning accountability and ownership of tasks. An innovative approach is observed, where two individuals with different experiences are assigned to each task and regularly rotated, promoting a diverse and collaborative community involvement. Similarly, in **Colombia**, an alliance is formed between companies, municipalities, middle-level institutions, and universities, creating a strong network that supports community engagement and collaboration in education.

Lack of professional training for school leaders

In addressing the lack of professional training for school leaders, **Indonesia and India** focus on carrying out external evaluations to identify gaps and areas for improvement. This evaluation process helps in understanding the specific needs and challenges faced by school leaders, providing a foundation for targeted training initiatives. In **Colombia**, efforts are made to generate frameworks for good management, establishing the basis for the work and role of school principals. Additionally, in **Argentina**, emphasis is placed on internal consistency and reconfiguring the profile of school leaders to align with evolving educational demands.

Absence of Peer Learning

Indonesia and India tackle the absence of peer learning by encouraging school leaders to take the initiative and self-organize professional training events based on local needs, school context, and priorities. This approach fosters collaboration and knowledge-sharing among school leaders, promoting continuous professional growth. Furthermore, the increased availability of technology allows for greater access to and participation in networks, enhancing inclusivity and empowering school leaders. In **Brazil**, efforts are made to regulate autonomy for school leaders across both public and private sectors, ensuring that all leaders have the necessary freedom to innovate.

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Ways to Improve Conditions
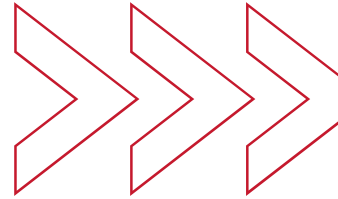
Outlined below are some of the recommendations and suggestions shared by the members as they discussed details of each key aspect.

Key Aspects	School Leadership Network Member Responses
People	• Revamping professional development offered to teachers, with a special focus on well-being (for themselves first!) • Programs to equip school leaders with facilitate skills to build a shared understanding/vision for student outcomes
Instruction	• Increase autonomy given to school leaders and support their role as instructional leaders • Increase access to instructional leadership courses and learning opportunities for school leaders
Organization	• Authorities to establish and communicate clear targets, standards and practices • Incentivize participating in networks and other global platforms to encourage school leaders to learn from other and strengthen practices.

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Next Steps

Where do we go from here?

We are eager to dive deeper into some of these questions and have outlined a few areas of exploration for the network!

01   Further Questions to Explore

To what extent and through what practices does the exercise of leadership contribute to better education outcomes? What social, cultural, governance, or other preconditions are needed for the effective exercise of leadership in education? What factors influence the selection, preparation and development of school leaders?

02   Next Global Meeting

Our next global meeting is scheduled for 16th August 2023 and will focus on the issue of teacher shortages! Please keep an eye out for details on registration!

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Acknowledgements

We sincerely appreciate your ongoing support in our endeavors to nurture a global network dedicated to school leadership. Thank you for being a part of our journey!

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