

Leadership Succession Planning, Talent Identification and Development, Professional Capacity Building, Employee Retention and Organizational Support as Drivers of Sustainable Educational Leadership in the Ghana Education Service

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Abstract

Sustainable educational leadership thrives in an environment in which succession planning, talent identification and development, professional capacity building, retention strategies and organizational support are an integrated system. This article re-examines these five interconnected drivers when applied to educational administration within the Ghanaian context and summarizes empirical research, policy reports and literature on similar low and middle-income environments. Using a structured literature-synthesis ($n \approx 29$ strong sources), the paper identifies common obstacles including informal succession, weak talent pipelines, episodic training, rural attrition, and fragmented HR systems and identifies pragmatic policy levers, which can be aligned with national priorities. The findings indicate that an integrated, sequenced approaches (codified career pathways, mentored acting appointments, school-based sustained CPD, targeted rural retention packages and strengthened HR analytics) are more likely to yield durable leadership improvement than isolated interventions. The discussion connects theories (transformational, instructional and distributed leadership) to practice and end up with prioritized policies and future research recommendations.

Keywords: Leadership Succession Planning; Talent Identification; Talent Development; Professional Capacity Building; Employee Retention; Organizational Support; Sustainable Educational Leadership; Ghana Education Service.

How to Cite: Duodu-Okyerere, S., Peprah-Mensah, J., Okor, D. D., Darko, K. K., & Antwi, S. (2026). Leadership Succession Planning, Talent Identification and Development, Professional Capacity Building, Employee Retention and Organizational Support as Drivers of Sustainable Educational Leadership in the Ghana Education Service. *African Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 9(4), 143–155. <https://doi.org/10.52589/AJESD-Q4SS2DPA>

INTRODUCTION

Schools do not operate in a vacuum as their operation and functioning is supported by leadership. One of the determinants that have not been sufficiently valued in the persistence of reforms is the quality of leadership. In the case of irregular, opaque and politically-based appointments, schools lose continuity in vision, institutional knowledge and the impetus required to improve instruction ((Owusu-Ansah Afram et al., 2024)). This paper asks a simple but consequential question: how do succession planning, talent identification and development, professional capacity building, employee retention, and organizational support interact to produce sustainable educational leadership within the structures of the Ghana Education Service? To answer this, the paper synthesizes Ghana-specific studies and relevant comparative evidence, then suggest practical, evidence-informed measures that the system can realistically adopt (White et al., 2025).

This systemic perspective recognizes that leadership is exercised at multiple levels including classroom, school, district and national and that sustainable change depends on alignment across those levels rather than isolated reforms (Owusu-Ansah Afram et al., 2024; Khosa & Van Wyk, 2023). In practice, that means the processes described in this paper such as succession planning, talent spotting and staged development, long-term professional learning, retention strategies, and coherent organizational support must be designed so that each reinforces the others because clear career pathways make talent investments worthwhile, capacity building makes successors effective and retention incentives protect the returns on development (White et al., 2025; Sinyolo, 2025). The visibility of HR systems and foreseeable incentive frameworks at the system level, lessens the room to make ad-hoc or politically motivated appointments and aid in maintaining the institutional memory in the face of a change in leadership (UNESCO, 2024; Frontiers in Education, 2025). Likewise, local realities in Ghana like rural-urban differences, housing limitations and district resource inequalities determine the retention and development levers that will be viable and economical on the ground (T-TEL, 2025). Concisely, sustainable educational leadership demands systemic thinking by way of creating the pipeline, equipping the supports and safeguarding the individuals that the system has trained to be leaders.

Figure 1 below presents the integrated conceptual model that structures the remainder of this paper; succession planning and talent identification create the pipeline, professional capacity building equips candidates, retention strategies protect investment and HR infrastructure maintains the system.



Figure 1: Integrated Drivers of Sustainable Educational Leadership (Conceptual model): Succession Planning → Talent Identification → Professional Capacity Building → Retention Strategies → HR Infrastructure.

Background: The Policy and Institutional Setting in Ghana

Ghana's recent Education Strategic Plan (2018 - 2030) and the guidance that the Ministry of Education has generated in Ghana focus on the process of professionalization, equal staffing

and increased standards of school leadership (Tahiru, R. et al, 2026). The Ghana Education Service has organizational units responsible for staff development, postings and transfers and welfare, which are structures that support career management and capacity building formally, however, reality is messier due to the fact that organizational reshuffles, uneven implementation capacity across districts and pressure on limited budgets create recurring gaps between policy intent and classroom outcomes. Furthermore, international syntheses also point to the need for coherent HR systems if leadership pipelines are to function reliably (UNESCO, 2024). It is against this background that the conflict between policy aspiration and administrative reality takes a special significance in the context of leadership sustainability. Although the Education Strategic Plan provides a promise of merit-based appointments and enhanced professional development opportunities, the ability to convert these promises into foreseeable career patterns will need to be more than the formal framework; it will need coordination, data integrity and uniform enforcement between regional and district offices (T-TEL Leaders in Teaching Ghana, 2025). Where posting decisions are delayed, development opportunities unevenly distributed or welfare mechanisms inconsistently applied, the credibility of the system's leadership pipeline is quietly weakened. Evidence from global reviews suggests that leadership reform succeeds when HR functions such as recruitment, appraisal, promotion, mentoring and retention are integrated rather than compartmentalized (UNESCO, 2024). In the Ghanaian context, therefore, strengthening coherence across these administrative levers is not simply a bureaucratic refinement, however, it is a strategic imperative for ensuring that professionalization efforts under the Ghana Education Service translate into durable improvements at the school level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framing: Three Complementary Leadership Traditions

Three strands of leadership theory help us understand what systems should do.

- a. Transformational leadership emphasizes vision, motivation and the capacity to inspire change which are qualities that enable leaders to mobilize staff around new priorities (Leithwood et al., 2021).
- b. Instructional leadership focuses squarely on improving teaching and learning through activities such as lesson observation, feedback and curriculum alignment; it links closely to the pedagogical components of leader professional development (Ng & Szeto, 2022).
- c. Distributed leadership reframes leadership as a set of practices distributed across formal and informal roles in a school, which reduces dependence on single office-holders and builds resilience into the system (Harris & Jones, 2021; Gunter et al., 2023).

Collectively, these traditions imply a practical blueprint where systems must find the right people (talent identification), prepare them for role-specific tasks (development and CPD), create predictable pathways for promotion (succession planning), keep the workforce motivated to stay (retention), and provide the institutional scaffolding for these steps to take effect (organizational support).

Succession Planning in Education Systems

Succession planning is not merely a process of filling positions in an institution, but a strategic process of identifying key positions, mapping the potential successors and carefully developing those applicants with role-specific assignments and evaluation. As it has been proven internationally, when succession pathways are codified, it becomes less likely to have disruptions when a leader departs because handovers are scheduled and the successors are ready (UNESCO, 2024). Succession in most LMICs and in a number of districts in Ghana is still reactive, based on seniority or informal selection, undermining continuity of reforms (Cobbinah, 2025). This is not just a semantic difference between strategic succession and reactive replacement, however, it determines the viability of educational reform in the long term. In organizations where succession planning is institutionalized both in policy and practice, leadership transitions are developmental events and not institutional shocks.

Formal acting assignments, mentorship and competency-based selection standards enable future leaders to internalize the demands of the position and take full responsibility. Conversely, systems that revert to seniority or informal patronage tend to create sudden shifts in vision and management approach that disrupt current instructional efforts and demoralize the staff (UNESCO, 2024). This reactive pattern may inadvertently disrupt the continuity of reforms, even in cases where the national policy is sending the opposite message, within districts with different capacity and oversight (Hoque & Zheng, 2024). Enhancing the succession planning process is less of a formality in bureaucracy and more about preserving the institutional memory, preserving the gains of reform and making sure that the quality of leadership is not a matter of chance.

Talent Identification and Development

The discovery of leadership potential cannot be reduced to classroom excellence alone. Research points to competencies such as instructional judgement, interpersonal skills and the ability to cope with change as separate factors associated with high classroom performance (Richardson & Khawaja, 2025; Suwardi et al., 2025). Early identification can be done through the provision of aspiring leaders with staged roles such as acting posts, co-facilitation of professional learning, short secondments with structured feedback and mentoring. In places where these pathways are present, there are richer, locally based pools of talent in the systems. The acknowledgment of this difference has significant implications on the manner in which systems conceptualize merit and readiness. An educator can be an outstanding classroom practitioner but not be ready to take on relational, administrative and strategic school leadership. On the other hand, there are educators who demonstrate the initial indicators of organizational acumen, conflict management knowledge and systems thinking that cannot be observed through the classroom observation only (Richardson & Khawaja, 2025; Suwardi et al., 2025). It is because of this reason that talent identification processes can be enhanced by the application of multidimensional criteria that represent both leadership dispositions and pedagogical competence. Formalized experiences like acting appointments with supervision, professional learning communities, coordinating curriculum work, or even a brief district secondment are safe spaces where would-be leaders can explore and develop their potential. When such experiences are combined with purposeful mentoring and reflective feedback, they do not serve only as exposure but as speeding agents of development. With time, this kind of intentional development eliminates the need to rely on outside recruitment and builds internal leadership pipeline in a system, making sure that promotion is not based on presumption or seniority, but rather on proven ability.

Professional Capacity Building (CPD) that Sticks

Short workshops create awareness for most workers; this is because practice is transformed by sustained and school-grounded learning. Cascade models that develop local facilitators have the ability to reach further, however, their success relies on continued coaching, implementation fidelity and accountability mechanisms (Lewis et al., 2024). In comparison to training events that happen once, instructional coaching, peer lesson study and reflective professional learning communities yield greater gains to instructional leadership (Kraft et al., 2022; Kennedy et al., 2023). This difference is essential since professional learning that is episodic hardly enters the practices of classroom and school leadership.

New structures or tools can be presented at workshops, however, if they are not followed up in a systematic way, they tend to disappear in the shocks of day-to-day administration. Long-term, institutionally embedded models, in turn, incorporate learning in the rhythm of teaching and administration through observational cycles, feedback dialogue, collaborative enquiry and practice refinement (Kraft et al., 2022; Donohoo et al., 2023). Cascade methods may also be especially useful in resource-intensive systems as they develop local facilitators and do not rely on external consultants, however, their performance depends on the attentive consideration of mentoring, tracking and the quality of the transmission across levels (Lewis et al., 2024).

In cases where accountability mechanisms and coaching structures are poor, the cascade models are prone to content dilution and imbalanced implementation. When designed thoughtfully, school-based coaching, peer lesson study and professional learning communities not only transmit knowledge but also develop reflective habits and shared responsibility both of which are core to sustainable instructional leadership.

Retention: The Rural Challenge and Career Incentives

Contextual factors are influential in teacher and leader retention patterns. The fact that leaders are overwhelmed with administration duties and do not have supportive networks makes the remote schools lose employees to urban centers (Mann et al., 2023). Specific allowances on hardship, housing, transport assistance and career recognition will all help increase the chances of retention (Friedman & Farah, 2024). Other non-financial rewards like explicit promotion channels, career advancement and publicity are also important (Kelley & Tang, 2022).

Retention, therefore, is not a homogeneous policy issue since it is heavily conditioned by geography, workload and professional climate. In distant or disadvantaged districts, teachers are frequently faced with inadequate infrastructure in addition to social isolation, increased administrative workloads and reduced chances of peer exchange. These pressures build up over time and result in burnout and subsequent migration to urban areas where professional and personal resources are easily accessible. Ghanaian evidence suggests that properly structured hardship allowances, staff accommodation plans and transport facilitation can significantly decrease attrition, especially when instituted on a regular basis and not periodically (Boakye & Amankwaa, 2025).

However, monetary rewards do not usually buy loyalty. Leaders tend to stay in the same position where they see equity in the promotion, availability of further professional growth and noticeable appreciation of their efforts. The existence of clear career progression pathways is an indication that rural or high-need postings are not dead ends in the career of the leader, but rather steps in a larger leadership process. In this regard, retention policy should be

incorporated with succession planning and talent development; once teachers have a plausible future in the system, the calculus of staying changes from obligation to opportunity.

Organizational Support and HR Infrastructure

Transparent recruitment, efficient HR information system, consistent posting or transfer policies and working welfare are not glamorous but critical elements that facilitate organizational support and HR infrastructure. Systems capable of tracking vacancies, tracking career progression and measuring the contribution of leadership programs are better placed to spend scarce incentives where they are most likely to make a difference (UNESCO, 2024). In addition to personal capability and drive, the sustenance of educational leadership finally depends on the silent infrastructure of organizational assistance. Open recruiting processes minimize the sense of favoritism and builds more confidence in the process, and the fact that posting and transfer policies are well defined makes educators plan their careers with an acceptable level of confidence. Equally, strong human resource information systems enable one to know the vacancies in real time, the trends in promotion and attrition and to match deployment decisions with reality and not anecdote. Though this kind of administrative mechanism might seem procedural, it has a direct impact on morale, equity and institutional credibility (UNESCO, 2024).

With HR data collected and analyzed in an organized manner, the policymakers are in a better position to detect the gaps in leadership, forecast retirements and determine whether the succession or the professional development programs are yielding quantifiable returns. According to international syntheses, consistent governance and informed decision-making boost the strategic distribution of scarce incentives and development resources (Cobbinah, J. 2025). The Ghanaian context is such that building up the HR infrastructure is not just an efficiency reform, however, it is an investment in a stable leadership framework, whereby, talent management, retention strategies and succession planning will be carried out in a transparent and accountable institutional context.

METHODOLOGY

This article follows a structured literature-synthesis approach. Searches covered academic databases (ERIC, Google Scholar, Web of Science), institutional repositories, and official policy documents using strings such as “leadership succession Ghana,” “teacher retention Ghana rural,” and “professional development Ghana.” The inclusion criteria focused on English-language sources (2000-2025) with priority for 2021–2025 for empirical in-text citations that had an empirical or policy interest in the five areas of focus while editorial op-eds and unauthorized opinion pieces were excluded. Out of an original sample of about 220 documents, full-text screening led to the identification of 29 strong sources that constitute a combination of peer-reviewed research, government strategy publications, and program evaluations that were utilized to elicit mechanisms, outcomes and lessons to practice.

RESULTS - SYNTHESIZED FINDINGS

Table 1 below summarizes the thematic distribution of the 29 included sources and Figure 2 provides a visual distribution of the same classification.

Table 1: Summary of Synthesized Literature by Theme (n = 29)

Theme	Source count (n = 29)
Professional CPD	9
Succession Planning	8
Retention	6
HR systems	4
Talent pipelines	2

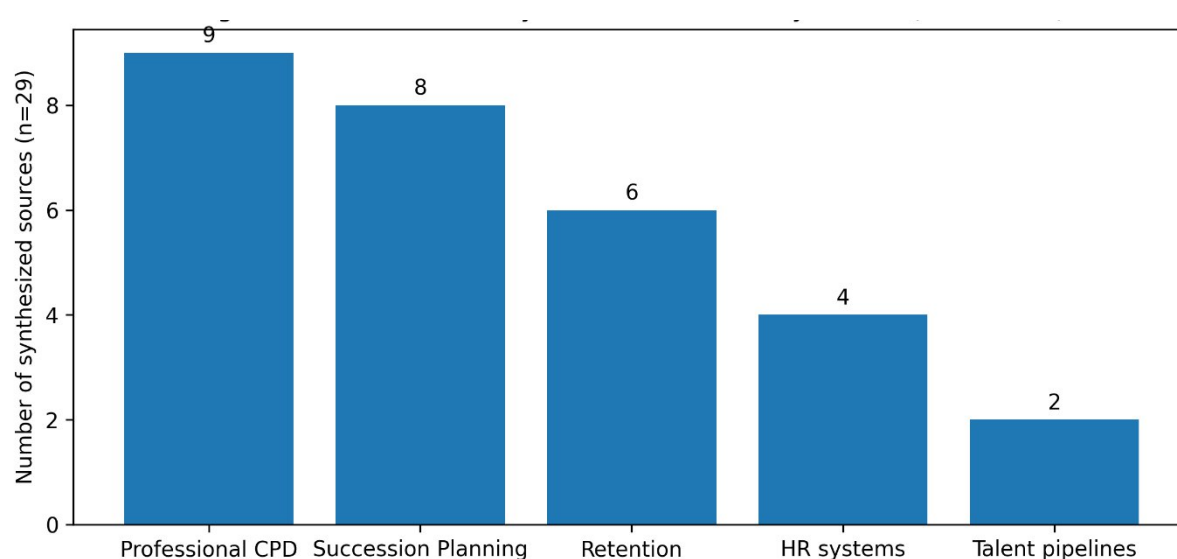


Figure 2: Distribution of synthesized sources by theme (n = 29). Themes: Professional CPD (9), Succession Planning (8), Retention (6), HR systems (4), Talent pipelines (2).

Succession Planning

Ghana has policy frameworks that specifically acknowledge the need to have planned leadership transitions, which are implemented in diverse ways. In areas that have implemented structured acting appointment programs with mentoring and evaluation components, the handovers are less problematic, and initial results indicate that continuity of school improvement work is improved (Cobbinah, 2025; White et al., 2025). The difference between the commitment to policy and field level implementation is especially apparent in the succession planning area. Despite the fact that national frameworks recognize the need to have structured leadership transitions, the districts vary significantly in how or whether these intentions are implemented.

Succession in certain places is more of a procedural matter in that, vacancies are being filled but without planning or written hand over procedures. Elsewhere, more deliberate strategies have been introduced, such as supervised acting assignments, mentoring plans and performance-based evaluations that are aimed at assessing the preparedness to assume

permanent leadership positions (Abdul-Mumin et al., 2023; *Frontiers in Education*, 2025). Where these kinds of structured mechanisms exist, transitions are less disruptive. New leaders come to office with a background of exposure to institutional routines, better expectations, and existing relationship with employees.

This continuity aids in protecting the continuity of instructional reforms and it minimizes the institutional memory that is usually lost with sudden leadership transition. The emerging lesson here is thus straightforward but significant in that, succession planning yields measurable benefits when it is treated not as an administrative formality but as a developmental pathway embedded within the broader leadership pipeline.

Talent Pipelines and Early Exposure

Programs which intentionally subject potential leaders to supervised acting, facilitation and cross-posting work experience, raise a candidate who is better equipped to handle complexity in leadership. However, standardized evaluation instruments and open-ended selection systems remain rare. Talent pipelines cannot be developed by just identifying high potential individuals; it is the creation of deliberate opportunities that involve practical hands-on leadership experience.

Programs in which future leaders are placed on supervised acting positions, participate in the facilitation of professional learning or are rotated through schools or administrative units expose them to the challenges of decision-making, staff management, and instructional oversight. The experiences enable the candidates to face the challenges in the real world in a conducive setting and develop confidence and hone their problem solving and interpersonal skills. Although these are the advantages, in Ghana, there are still many districts that do not have standardized assessment instruments or clear criteria of selection to take part in such programs.

The lack of clear standards may lead to unequal opportunities, unequal development of skills, and the feeling of favoritism. In the absence of these safeguards, the early exposure promise is reduced, and the system may end up giving rise to leaders who are not equally equipped to handle the duties of their position. Enhancing evaluation procedures and setting up objective and merit-based standards are thus essential measures in developing a robust, locally based leadership pipeline that matches experience with quantifiable competence.

Professional Development that Endures

Cascade training has a broader reach and its effectiveness depends on the quality of follow-up coaching and the presence of peer learning structures. Prolonged school-based PD involving coaching and collaborative inquiry has more connections with instructional change compared to brief training. The effectiveness of professional development depends less on its breadth and more on its depth and continuity. Although cascade training can be used to train large numbers of educators by creating local trainers, the final effect of training will depend on the quality of the follow-up training, such as coaching, mentoring, and accountability mechanisms (Borghans & Luyten, 2024).

In the absence of these reinforcements, the knowledge transfer process can be diluted, and the practices that have been presented at the first sessions might not be implemented (Goddard et al., 2023). Conversely, long-term professional development within a school that entrenches coaching, collaborative inquiry and reflective practice into the everyday lives of teachers brings

about more significant and sustained change. The joint lesson planning, peer observations, and problem-solving workshops are the activities that help teachers and leaders to transform theoretical instructions into practical strategies that enhance the quality of instruction (Harris et al., 2022). These strategies enhance not only personal leadership competence but also the overall school effectiveness, which makes professional development cumulative and not episodic.

Retention Patterns

Rural attrition has been a thorn in the flesh because combined packages of housing, allowances and targeted recruitment have had a significant impact in reducing turnover in areas where they have been tested. Leaders also value career opportunities and appreciation as significant retention factors (Friedman & Farah, 2024; Larsen & Mensah, 2024). Rural attrition is still a problem that has questioned the viability of education leadership especially in geographically isolated or low-resource districts. In Ghana, there is evidence that educators and school leaders tend to exit such regions because of social isolation, inadequate infrastructure and the cumulative burden of administrative work (Nguyen et al., 2023; Mann et al., 2023).

In a few cases where well-thought-out incentive packages have been introduced, which includes housing, hardship allowances, and specific recruitment, the level of turnover has reduced, which proves that practical support can have a substantial impact on retention (Friedman & Farah, 2024). In addition to material rewards, the sense of professional development and the feeling of career advancement is also a determining factor. Leaders are more likely to remain in challenging postings where they perceive a good promotion ladder, skill building, and recognition of their efforts in improving the school (Larsen & Mensah, 2024).

This implies that retention strategies can be best implemented when both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards are incorporated and personal progression is connected with the needs of the system. Basically, retention policy should be in sync with talent development and succession planning; by securing experienced, motivated leaders in place, the system is able to maintain institutional knowledge and make sure that investments in capacity building have long term returns.

Organizational Enablers

The coordinated governance of the service, ministry and teacher-registration bodies through HR information systems assists in making better decisions. The lack of cohesion between agencies compromises career management and implementation of incentive schemes (UNESCO, 2024). The key to policy implementation into practice is the presence of strong organizational enablers. Effective human resource information systems enable administrators to trace the staffing trends, career development, and to distribute professional growth and incentive resources accurately.

This coordination of governance throughout the Ghana Education Service, the Ministry of Education, and teacher-registration institutions makes decision-making more strategic, which minimizes the occurrence of duplication of efforts and makes sure that scarce resources are allocated where they are most required (UNESCO, 2024). On the other hand, the fragmentation of agencies undermines the entire system, introducing gaps in the career management aspect, discrepancies in the postings and transfers, as well as unequal application of retention or incentive schemes.

This kind of fragmented administration not only kills the morale of the staff, but also erodes the effectiveness of leadership programs in the long run. Enhancing organizational coherence is, thus, not an administrative polishing, but it is a vital facilitator of sustainable leadership, and is necessary to make sure that talent development, succession planning and retention strategies are functioning as an integrated and mutually reinforcing system.

DISCUSSION

These findings highlight a systems fact that there is no lever of policy that is adequate. Talent development without succession planning results in vacancies being filled by unprepared people in that, talent development without retention incentives will result in the loss of trained personnel and professional development without organizational mechanisms will not transfer individual learning to the school level. According to Amponsah, N., and Danso Mensah, D. K. (2024), these results point to one of the major principles of systems in which single interventions seldom produce a lasting effect. Without the intentional development of talent, succession planning may lead to a situation where vacant positions are filled with people who are not ready to handle the complexity of the job, which negatively affects the quality of instruction and the confidence of the staff.

In the same manner, without retention strategies to accompany professional development initiatives, the same initiative may lose the same individuals that have been invested in by the system, thus, effectively dissipating organizational knowledge and capacity. Even high quality training programs cannot work without organizational processes including effective career progressions, mentoring frameworks, and strong HR systems since individual learning cannot be converted into long term school-wide changes. Collectively, these dynamics show that sustainable educational leadership can only happen when succession, development, retention, and organizational support are working together, and not competing against each other.

The most promising approach is an integrated one that sequences interventions such as codifying career pathways. Identifying talent early, providing staged, mentored development, deploying targeted retention packages for high-risk contexts and strengthening HR systems to monitor progress and adapt policy. This integrated stance echoes international recommendations that combine autonomy, accountability and sustained capacity building (UNESCO, 2024).

The evidence suggests that the most effective strategy is an integrated approach, in which interventions are deliberately sequenced and mutually reinforcing. Codifying clear career pathways ensures that staff understand progression opportunities and expectations, while early identification of leadership potential allows the system to nurture talent before critical vacancies arise. Staged, mentored development provides practical experience and feedback, preparing aspiring leaders for the complex realities of school administration. Complementing these measures with targeted retention packages in high-risk or underserved contexts helps safeguard the investment in human capital, while strengthened HR systems enable ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and policy adaptation. This holistic approach aligns with international best practices, which emphasize the combination of professional autonomy, transparent accountability, and sustained capacity building as the cornerstone of resilient educational leadership (UNESCO, 2024).

Real life limitations should also be considered. Budgets are limited and alterations in the staffing policies need political goodwill. With that said, cost-effective, yet high-impact

interventions like formalized mentoring, more explicit selection of acting posts and school-based PLCs are affordable and can be implemented gradually as the system develops the capacity to implement more significant changes.

Concurrently, it is important to acknowledge the practical limitations that define reform initiatives. There is a lack of financial resources, and any changes to staffing policies are frequently pegged on complicated political dealings that may delay the process. However, there are possible interventions that can be done with low costs but still provide significant benefits even in these limitations. Formal mentoring programs, clear guidelines on how actors are chosen, and the creation of school-based professional learning communities (PLCs) are specific interventions that can be used to boost leadership capacity in the short term. These programs can be implemented in stages, delivering concrete benefits in quality of leadership and employee growth and development as the system slowly develops the infrastructure, skills, and political goodwill to implement more extensive and comprehensive changes.

Recommendations

1. **Codify leadership career pathways** with clear competencies, selection rules and transparent promotion criteria (Glover & Zahidi, 2024).
2. **Institutionalize mentored acting appointments** so short-term placements become deliberate development steps evaluated against published rubrics (White et al., 2025).
3. **Invest in school-based, sustained CPD** such as coaching, PLCs, and lesson study rather than one-off workshops (Kraft et al., 2022; Harris et al., 2022).
4. **Design targeted rural retention packages** that bundle housing, allowances and local recruitment incentives (Friedman & Farah, 2024; Larsen & Mensah, 2024).
5. **Strengthen HR analytics** to monitor career flows and evaluate interventions (UNESCO, 2024).

CONCLUSION

To sum up, sustainable leadership at Ghanaian schools requires a combination of reasonable HR policy, viable development and retention strategies. Gradual, carefully observed reforms and incorporating the five drivers mentioned herein, will probably result in stronger leadership pipelines than ad hoc ones. Sustainability of leadership in Ghanaian schools depends on the conscious coordination of human resource policies with the real development, retention, and organizational support strategies.

Piecemeal or isolated interventions are not likely to produce lasting effects, rather, incremental, closely observed reforms that would concomitantly tackle succession planning, talent identification, professional capacity building, retention, and institutional enablers would build the environment of sustainable leadership pipelines. With these drivers integrated into coherent, system-wide practices, the Ghana Education Service will be able to develop a cadre of school leaders who are competent, prepared and supported, motivated, and committed to maintain educational improvements in the long run.

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