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**The Making of a Champion Leader: Insights from the Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management Program in Uganda, West Nile Region**

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**Abstract**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to examine the educational leadership development of 35 headteachers who participated in the Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management (DELM) program, a collaboration between Aga Khan University and Muni University under the Foundation for Learning (F4L) project. The study aimed to identify the professional development needs essential for enhancing leadership capacities in low-resource educational settings in Uganda.

**Methodology:** We employed a mixed-methods approach using purposive sampling and transformational leadership theory as the framework. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires capturing demographic characteristics, professional experiences, and participation in professional development. Qualitative data were obtained from semi-structured interviews, which were transcribed and thematically analyzed to explore the DELM program's impact on leadership practices.

**Findings:** Findings revealed that DELM participants demonstrated significant alignment with transformational leadership principles, including improved communication skills, inclusive practices, and the ability to inspire professional development within their schools. The DELM program addressed critical gaps by equipping headteachers with practical skills in mentorship, gender sensitivity, and strategic succession planning. However, challenges such as resource limitations, resistance to change, and dual responsibilities highlighted the complexities of implementing these principles. Despite these hurdles, headteachers exhibited resilience and innovation, fostering collaborative, ethical leadership practices that promise lasting impact on school culture and student outcomes.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** Thus, we recommend for structured mentorship programs and succession planning to support the continued adoption of transformational leadership practices. Further, we recommend for continuous professional development opportunities tailored to the challenges of low-resource settings and policy interventions promoting leadership development. These measures will sustain and expand the impact of the DELM program, contributing to improved educational outcomes and broader leadership reforms in similar contexts.

**Keywords:** *Leadership, Development, Mentorship, Succession, Policy*

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## INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership significantly impacts student outcomes, teacher retention, and overall school performance, especially in low-resource settings where leadership development opportunities are often scarce (Klar & Huggins, 2020). Effective headteachers are crucial for fostering positive learning environments, enhancing educational quality, and ensuring organizational stability. However, in many developing contexts, there is limited access to professional development and structured training, which hampers leadership succession and continuity (Edmonstone, 2018).

The Foundation for Learning (F4L) project, a collaboration between Aga Khan University and Muni University, aims to address these gaps through the Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management (DELM) program. This initiative seeks to enhance the leadership capacities of headteachers (heading pre-primary schools and those heading primary schools), equipping them with the skills needed to drive positive change and foster excellence in their institutions. The program emphasizes practical leadership skills, strategic management, and the creation of a supportive network among school leaders.

### Problem Statement

Effective educational leadership is critical for improving student outcomes, teacher retention, and overall school performance, particularly in low-resource educational contexts. Ideally, headteachers should engage in continuous professional development to enhance their leadership capacities, focusing on strategic management, mentorship, and succession planning. Leadership development programs tailored to the unique challenges of low-resource settings are essential to ensure sustained school improvement and educational excellence (Bush & Glover, 2019; Gurr, 2023).

Access to structured leadership development programs remains limited in many developing countries, including Uganda, where headteachers often enter their roles with minimal formal training and inadequate professional support (Bush, 2020). This lack of preparation hampers their ability to effectively implement educational policies, leading to resource mismanagement and poor school performance (Mpaata & Mpaata, 2018). Compounding the issue is the absence of succession planning and mentorship, which threatens organizational stability by leaving schools without qualified successors (Watts, 2023). Research by Arinaitwe et al. (2020) highlights that rural schools in Uganda face significant challenges in retaining teachers due to unfavorable working conditions and limited career development opportunities, resulting in high turnover rates that adversely affect student outcomes.

This gap between the ideal leadership development model and the existing situation in low-resource settings results in challenges such as instability in school management, inadequate school improvement, and decreased teacher retention and student achievement. This study examines how the Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management (DELM) program, a joint initiative by Aga Khan University and Muni University under the Foundation for Learning (F4L) project, addresses these gaps by equipping headteachers with the skills needed to drive positive change and foster excellence in their institutions.

By exploring the program's impact on headteachers' leadership practices, this manuscript provides insights into the critical professional development needs in low-resource educational settings. We do so as we respond to the questions below.

### *Main question*

How does the DELM program foster transformational leadership among headteachers in low-resource educational settings?

### *Subsidiary questions*

1. How do headteachers demonstrate transformational leadership practices after participating in the DELM program?
2. What challenges do headteachers face in implementing transformational leadership principles in their schools?
3. What can be done to sustain transformation leadership practices among headteachers in low resource educational settings beyond teacher professional learning interventions?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored in Transformational Leadership Theory, which underscores the essential role of leaders in inspiring and motivating followers to achieve higher levels of performance and commitment. Transformational leaders exhibit four key components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Northouse, 2019). These leaders effectively communicate a shared vision, build trust, and encourage followers to prioritize collective goals over individual interests. In educational settings, this leadership style has been shown to enhance school performance, foster inclusive practices, and promote collaboration among teachers (Ng, 2019). For example, headteachers who articulate a clear vision for academic success can inspire both staff and students to pursue excellence while facilitating collaborative lesson planning to improve student outcomes.

The integration of transformational leadership with continuous professional development and student engagement initiatives further strengthens school culture and drives improvement (Day et al., 2016). Headteachers who implemented professional development workshops that empower teachers to innovate or involve students in decision-making processes increased their engagement and commitment. Research indicates that transformational leadership is vital for navigating complex challenges and implementing organizational change within schools (Leithwood et al., 2000). For instance, during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, transformational leaders have adapted swiftly by adopting remote learning strategies while maintaining effective communication with all stakeholders.

Additionally, this study incorporated the Theory of Action Research, characterized by a cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Kemmis et al., 2019). This theory was particularly relevant in educational leadership as it emphasized the importance of reflective practice and adaptability in addressing evolving school needs (Stringer et al., 2019). Action research empowers educational leaders to engage in collaborative problem-solving with teachers and stakeholders, fostering a culture of continuous improvement. For example, headteachers might initiate action research projects aimed at improving literacy rates through data collection and reflective practice. The iterative nature of action research complements transformational leadership by promoting ongoing learning and responsiveness to the dynamic demands of school environments (Zuber-Skerritt, 2019).

By integrating Transformational Leadership Theory with the Theory of Action Research, this study presented a comprehensive framework for understanding effective teacher leadership in complex educational context like west Nile sub-region of Uganda.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Concept of Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership has emerged as a critical factor in enhancing educational effectiveness and fostering school improvement globally. Defined as the ability of teachers to influence peers, engage in collaborative practices, and contribute to decision-making processes, teacher leadership transcends traditional hierarchical models of school leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2014). Research indicates that teacher leaders often take on roles that include mentoring colleagues, participating in curriculum development, and leading professional development initiatives, thereby positively impacting school culture and student outcomes (Gordon, 2016).

In Uganda, the understanding and implementation of teacher leadership are still developing. The Ugandan government acknowledges the importance of teacher leaders in promoting quality education, particularly in response to the challenges within the educational system (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2018). However, many teachers face barriers to stepping into leadership roles, including a lack of formal training and support (Okumbe, 2019). The DELM program addresses these challenges by equipping teachers with essential leadership skills and knowledge, enabling them to become more effective leaders in their schools (Adu, 2018). Furthermore, the interplay between local educational policies and teacher leadership roles is a vital area of study, as these policies significantly influence the capacity of teachers to lead.

### Challenges and Opportunities in West Nile

The West Nile region of Uganda is characterised by a complex educational landscape, marked by both significant challenges and unique opportunities. Challenges include limited access to educational resources, high teacher turnover rates, and socio-cultural factors that hinder educational participation. Research indicates that inadequate infrastructure, scarcity of learning materials, and insufficient training for teachers impede effective teaching practices and leadership (Tijjunga, 2019). For instance, a study by Oloya (2021) found that headteachers in West Nile reported difficulties in implementing ICT tools due to a lack of access, which directly affected their ability to create inclusive learning environments.

Despite these challenges, opportunities for educational advancement exist in West Nile. The region boasts strong community ties and cultural values that can be leveraged to enhance educational practices. Community-based initiatives and the support of local NGOs have proven effective in addressing some of the educational gaps (Karamagi, 2020). Moreover, the DELM program exemplifies how targeted professional development can empower headteachers and foster leadership in challenging contexts. By focusing on locally relevant strategies, the program enhances the capacity of educators to implement effective practices despite resource constraints (Mugisha, 2022).

### The Role of Teacher Education

The relationship between teacher education and leadership development is well-documented in educational literature. Effective teacher preparation programs that integrate leadership training equip educators with pedagogical skills and prepare them for leadership roles within their schools (Berg, 2019). Research shows that such programs can foster a sense of agency among teachers, encouraging them to take on leadership responsibilities and contribute to school improvement efforts.

In the Ugandan context, however, teacher education programs often fall short of adequately preparing future teachers for leadership roles. Studies reveal that many teacher training institutions focus predominantly on content knowledge and pedagogical techniques, neglecting the essential skills needed for effective leadership (Mwebesa, 2019). This gap in training can hinder teachers from realizing their potential as leaders and may limit their ability to effect change in their schools. By incorporating leadership development into teacher education curricula, institutions can better prepare teachers to take on leadership roles and positively influence their colleagues and students.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

Teacher leadership is essential for educational success, especially in resource-constrained settings like Uganda. While existing literature offers insights into the nature and challenges of teacher leadership, particularly in regions like West Nile, significant gaps persist. Notably, there is limited empirical research on the impact of leadership development programs, such as the Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management (DELM), on teachers' professional growth. Additionally, contextual factors influencing headteachers' implementation of leadership practices remain underexplored, despite their importance in shaping educational outcomes.

Localized studies reveal both successes and ongoing challenges in teacher leadership across Uganda. In West Nile, some headteachers have effectively mobilized community resources to enhance school infrastructure and promote teacher collaboration. However, systemic issues such as low salaries and inadequate training often overshadow these achievements. Research indicates that many teachers leave their positions due to poor remuneration and lack of professional development opportunities, which undermines effective leadership (Arinaitwe et al., 2020). Furthermore, headteachers in Universal Primary Education (UPE) schools struggle with managing teacher absenteeism and limited resources, resulting in instability in school management (Kasirye et al., 2013).

Conversely, some headteachers have adopted innovative practices, such as peer mentoring programs, to improve teacher retention and morale. For instance, structured professional development sessions led by headteachers in Mukono District have reportedly enhanced teacher performance (Malunda et al., 2024). These successes suggest that programs like DELM could effectively address gaps in teacher capacity and retention if tailored to specific contextual challenges.

The literature on teacher leadership in Uganda presents conflicting findings regarding the effectiveness of leadership initiatives and the influence of contextual factors. While some studies highlight the transformative potential of leadership development programs, others point out persistent systemic barriers. For example, research in southwestern Uganda noted significant improvements in teacher qualifications following in-service training programs (Nzarirwehi & Atuhumuze, 2019), but these benefits depended on adequate planning and resource allocation—often lacking in many areas. In contrast, other studies have found that headteachers' leadership styles do not significantly correlate with improved school performance, suggesting that broader systemic issues like inadequate funding may overshadow the impact of leadership training (Vincent, 2019).

This discrepancy underscores the need for further research into how contextual variables—such as socio-economic conditions and community involvement—affect the effectiveness of leadership practices. This study aims to bridge these gaps by investigating the experiences and

perceptions of headteachers participating in the DELM program. By focusing on their challenges and strategies for promoting leadership continuity and supporting teacher development, this research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of teacher leadership in Uganda.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a mixed methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to comprehensively explore the impact of leadership styles on learners' achievement. The quantitative component involved administering structured questionnaires to head teachers. This method was chosen for its ability to gather numerical data that can be statistically analyzed to identify patterns and relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The use of mixed methods allowed for a more nuanced analysis by combining the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative data provided a broad overview of patterns and relationships, while the qualitative interviews offered context and depth, enriching the overall understanding of the research problem (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

### **Participants**

The longitudinal study involved 35 Head Teachers from whom data was collected through both semi-structured interviews and a survey questionnaire. The 35 headteachers who participated in the study were (Course Participants (CPs) of a fully sponsored Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management (DELM) program jointly offered by the Aga Khan University and Muni University in Muni University under the Foundation for Learning (F4L) project. The 35 head teachers were selected through a purposive sampling technique to ensure the research team collected relevant information on education leadership that contributes toward forging a champion teacher.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The study utilized a mixed methods approach to gather data on headteachers' professional experiences and development. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires that documented demographic details and participation in professional development activities, which were analyzed in Excel to produce frequency distributions and percentages. Additionally, qualitative insights were obtained from semi-structured interviews with headteachers, which were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically using the CSEntry App. This dual approach facilitated a comprehensive exploration of leadership experiences, challenges faced by headteachers, and their perceptions of the impact of the DELM program.

Questionnaires were distributed at Arua CPTC and St. John Bosco Lodonga CPTC, gathering responses from 14 female and 21 male head teachers across both institutions. The survey included a mix of closed-ended questions for quantifiable data and open-ended questions for detailed insights, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how different leadership styles affect learners' achievements. This mixed-method approach combined statistical analysis with personal perspectives (Bryman, 2016).

In addition to the quantitative survey, qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews. In the study on the impact of headteacher leadership styles on learners' achievement, semi-structured interviews were used as a crucial data collection method to complement the quantitative survey results. A purposive sampling technique selected head teachers from Arua CPTC and Lodonga CPTC for interviews. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' personal experiences and perceptions regarding leadership

styles, the support and resources provided, and the challenges encountered. The interviews were conducted either in person, recorded, transcribed, and analysed thematically. This qualitative data provided valuable insights that enriched the study by uncovering nuanced factors influencing student achievement and offering actionable recommendations for improving leadership practices in schools.

### **Sampling Techniques and Processes**

In this study, a mixed methods approach was utilized to explore the influence of head teacher leadership styles on learners' achievement. The sampling techniques employed were carefully designed to ensure the collection of relevant and representative data. Both purposive and stratified random sampling methods were applied to achieve this.

#### **Purposive Sampling for Head Teachers**

Purposive sampling was utilized to select 35 head teachers for a study on educational leadership, focusing on individuals likely to provide valuable insights. The head teachers were purposively chosen to ensure that we sample only those who had completed the Foundations for Learning (F4L), DELM training program. This sample included head teachers from both primary and pre-primary schools because the F4L project focused in pre-primary and primary schools.

Data analysis employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of leadership styles on learners' achievement. For the quantitative analysis, survey responses from 35 head teachers were entered into the CS Entry Application, generating Excel spreadsheets for statistical examination through frequency counts and percentages to identify trends and correlations. In the qualitative analysis, interviews with 35 head teachers were audio-recorded, transcribed, and organized in the CS Entry App which supports offline data collection on mobile devices, offering flexibility and efficiency in environments with limited or no internet connectivity allowing for thematic analysis of key insights. Furthermore CS Entry App enhances the protection of data through encryption, ensuring confidentiality and compliance with ethical standards. It also provides options to restrict access to data, maintaining integrity and privacy. Triangulation was applied to correlate qualitative findings with quantitative results, enhancing the validity of the overall analysis and providing a richer perspective on the research question.



## RESULTS

### Demographic Characteristics of the Headteachers in the DELM Program

**Table 1: Experience Range Distribution of Head Teachers, the Positions of Administrators, and Their Academic Qualifications**

Category	Subcategory	Number	Percentage (%)
Experience Range	Less than 10 years	7	20.0
	11 - 20 years	13	37.1
	21 - 30 years	14	40.0
	31+ years	1	2.9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Position / Academic Qualification	Headteachers	10	71.0
	Deputy Head Teachers	1	7.0
	Acting Head Teachers	1	7.0
	<b>Total Administrators</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Academic Qualification	Master's Degree	-	7
	Post Graduate Degree	-	7
	Bachelor's Degree	-	29
	Diploma	-	14
	Grade V	-	7

The headteachers participating in the DELM program were primarily experienced educators, with 70% having over two decades in their roles. This extensive experience provided a seasoned perspective on school management but also underscored the pressing need for succession planning, as 60% of these headteachers were nearing retirement age. Additionally, these headteachers were largely from the West Nile region, a lower-resourced area that contributed to their strong motivation to seek professional development opportunities. The unique challenges they faced within this region shaped their approach to the program and increased their enthusiasm for tools to address these specific issues.

Moreover, the cohort brought diverse backgrounds and experiences, including varying levels of familiarity with educational technology, which allowed the program to cater to a broad spectrum of needs. Approximately **50%** of these headteachers had limited prior access to structured leadership training, emphasizing the critical role of DELM in filling this gap and introducing formalized approaches to leadership that were new to many. Gender diversity among the participants further added perspectives on inclusivity, with **40%** being female headteachers, underscoring the need to create gender-sensitive learning environments. Additionally, the cohort demonstrated high community involvement, as **80%** of headteachers were actively engaged in local school management committees and often served multiple roles within their schools and communities, further shaping their commitment to the program and its objectives.

## Perception of the DELM Program's Impact on Leadership and Professional Development

**Table 2: Perception of the DELM Program's Impact on Leadership and Professional Development**

Aspect	Frequency (Number of Headteachers)	Percentage (%)
Communication Skills	26	75%
Leadership Philosophy Refinement	30	85%
Mentorship and Professional Development	23	65%

The DELM program had a profound impact on headteachers' professional skills, particularly enhancing their communication capabilities. First and foremost, one of the headteachers noted *many of us developed strategies for transparent, inclusive communication, which we found essential for fostering an open and respectful school environment*. Improved communication not only allowed them to address concerns more openly but also helped reduce misunderstandings and build trust across the school community. This skill became particularly valuable in a diverse setting like West Nile, where 75% of headteachers identified cultural and educational challenges as critical issues requiring a nuanced approach to leadership.

In addition to enhancing communication, the program's focus on gender sensitivity brought new insights to headteachers, challenging traditional norms and equipping them with practical steps for promoting gender equity. *One headteacher mentioned that they were encouraged to use gender-neutral language and facilitate mixed-gender activities, making classrooms more inclusive and encouraging equal participation among all students*. Furthermore, the DELM program helped 85% of headteachers refine their leadership philosophies by prompting them to define a clear vision for their schools, often prioritizing inclusivity, respect, and lifelong learning as core values. This clear vision guided their decision-making and interactions with students, staff, and parents, aligning their practices with a mission of continuous educational improvement.

As a result of their training, many headteachers reported becoming advocates for continuous professional development among their teachers. *Inspired by their own growth through DELM, they organized workshops and study groups, thereby fostering a learning culture that aimed to improve teaching quality and boost teacher confidence*. This dedication to mentorship translated into collaborative leadership practices, where approximately 65% of headteachers guided younger teachers, providing feedback and practical leadership experiences. This mentorship approach not only supported teacher development but also ensured that DELM's insights would be sustained within the school environment. Finally, motivated by DELM, *one headteacher stated that they implemented inclusive policies that catered to diverse student needs, including those with disabilities and from disadvantaged backgrounds*. These changes created a more equitable learning environment, fostering a positive impact on student morale and engagement throughout their schools.

## Challenges in Implementing Leadership Practices from the DELM Program

**Table 3: Challenges in Implementing Leadership Practices from the DELM Program**

Aspect	Frequency (Number of Headteachers)	Percentage (%)
Lack of ICT Resources	26	75%
Limited Professional Support	23	65%
Teacher Resistance to Change	18	50%
Balancing Leadership and Traditional Roles	19	55%
Limited Resources for Teacher Training	23	65%
Cultural Conflicts	14	40%

Despite the benefits of the DELM program, headteachers faced several challenges in implementing its leadership practices. A significant obstacle was the lack of resources, particularly in integrating ICT tools into classrooms. Approximately 70% of headteachers reported that limited access to digital learning materials hindered their ability to fully realize DELM's recommendations for a technologically equipped, inclusive classroom. This scarcity of resources affected their capacity to support gender-inclusive learning environments, which were essential to maximize the impact of their new leadership skills.

Furthermore, some teachers resisted changes promoted by DELM, such as gender-sensitive teaching and inclusive classroom practices. *One headteacher expressed that many staff members were accustomed to traditional teaching methods, and it was challenging to encourage a shift in mindset.* Without full buy-in from their teams, headteachers often struggled to implement new practices consistently, highlighting the need for a gradual approach to cultural change within schools. In addition, remote settings in West Nile meant that headteachers had limited access to ongoing professional support, with 60% of them noting that this constrained their ability to reinforce the DELM skills they had acquired. Left to rely on their initiatives, they found it challenging to sustain some of the new leadership practices.

Moreover, balancing the new leadership responsibilities with existing administrative and teaching roles became overwhelming for many headteachers. *As one headteacher stated, the additional duties often clashed with their traditional roles, emphasizing the need for extra support staff to integrate DELM's practices effectively.* Continuous training for teachers was another issue, as limited resources and materials restricted headteachers' ability to extend professional development opportunities to their staff. This limitation made it difficult to ensure school-wide implementation of inclusive methods, reinforcing the need for accessible, ongoing teacher training. Finally, in some cases, community norms and cultural expectations conflicted with DELM's principles, particularly regarding gender inclusivity. *Another headteacher mentioned that they had to carefully navigate these relationships, balancing respect for local values with the inclusive practices advocated by the program.*

## Influence of DELM Program Participation on Succession Planning and Leadership Continuity

**Table 4: Influence of DELM Program Participation on Succession Planning and Leadership Continuity**

Aspect of Influence	Percentage of Headteachers	Key Outcomes
Recognized the importance of leadership continuity	75%	Mentored younger teachers, involved them in administrative responsibilities, and prepared them for future leadership roles.
Adopted shared leadership practices	68%	Invited teachers into school management discussions and policy development, fostering ownership and accountability.
Established professional development pipelines	70%	Encouraged teacher participation in programs like DELM, creating sustainable growth pathways for future leadership.
Emphasized ethical leadership	80%	Modeled responsibility, transparency, and inclusivity, embedding enduring ethical values in school culture.

One of the most significant outcomes of the DELM program was its influence on headteachers' approach to succession planning. Approximately 75% of headteachers recognized the importance of leadership continuity and began mentoring younger teachers, involving them in administrative responsibilities and gradually preparing them for future leadership roles. *One headteacher noted that this mentorship approach not only created pathways for potential successors but also promoted a collaborative school environment, ensuring continuity in school management practices.*

In addition, headteachers implemented shared leadership practices, with 68% inviting teachers into school management discussions and policy development. *Another headteacher mentioned that by fostering a sense of ownership and accountability among staff, they created a team-oriented culture that could support a smooth leadership transition when the time came.* The DELM program's democratic approach also encouraged headteachers to adopt inclusive decision-making processes, where teachers could contribute ideas and concerns. This democratic style promoted a culture of openness and respect, making it easier for successors to continue these practices.

To further support succession, about 70% of headteachers established professional development "pipelines" by encouraging teachers to participate in programs similar to DELM. *As one headteacher stated, this strategy helped create sustainable growth pathways, ensuring teachers had the necessary skills for effective leadership, thereby preparing them for future roles.* Recognizing their eventual retirement, many headteachers also developed formalized continuity plans, which outlined core values, school initiatives, and key leadership practices. *A headteacher emphasized that these plans provided a framework for successors, helping them to maintain and build upon the practices established through DELM.*

Finally, the DELM program's emphasis on ethical leadership inspired 80% of headteachers to serve as role models, demonstrating responsibility, transparency, and inclusivity in all aspects of their roles. *Another headteacher remarked that through ethical role modeling, they instilled these values in their teachers, creating a positive, enduring school culture.* This approach

ensured that, even as leadership changed, the school's commitment to these principles would persist, setting a strong foundation for future leaders to emulate and uphold.

## **Discussion**

### **Demographic Characteristics of Headteachers in the DELM Program**

The headteachers participating in the DELM program exhibit a diverse demographic profile, predominantly characterized by extensive experience in education, particularly in lower-resourced areas like the West Nile region. Many of these headteachers have over two decades of experience, highlighting the importance of seasoned leadership in educational settings. Akinyemi and Dada (2020) emphasize that experienced educators possess a deeper understanding of their community's educational challenges, allowing them to implement tailored strategies for improvement.

Additionally, the high levels of community involvement among these headteachers demonstrate a commitment to local educational development. As Anderson and Sun (2020) note, leaders who are engaged in their communities are better equipped to address the unique challenges faced by their schools, particularly in contexts where resources are limited. The presence of both male and female headteachers further enhances the program's inclusivity, aligning with the notion that diverse leadership teams can lead to more equitable educational environments (Oplatka, 2020).

### **DELM Program Impact Leadership and Professional Development**

The DELM program significantly enhanced headteachers' professional skills, particularly in communication and gender sensitivity. Improved communication strategies fostered a more transparent and inclusive school environment, which is crucial for building trust among stakeholders (Harris & Jones, 2020). The headteachers reported that the skills gained through the program were instrumental in reducing misunderstandings and promoting collaboration.

Moreover, the program's emphasis on gender sensitivity provided headteachers with practical strategies to promote gender equity within their schools. By adopting gender-neutral language and facilitating mixed-gender activities, headteachers worked towards creating inclusive learning environments. Mahmood and Wong (2021) argue that gender-sensitive leadership is essential in challenging traditional norms and promoting equity in education.

Furthermore, the program inspired many headteachers to advocate for continuous professional development among their teachers. As Fullan (2019) points out, fostering a culture of mentorship and collaborative leadership can enhance teaching quality and boost teacher confidence. This shift towards collaborative practices indicates a broader trend in educational leadership that values shared responsibility and collective growth.

### **Challenges Headteachers Faced in Implementing Leadership Practices from the DELM Program**

Headteachers implementing the DELM program faced significant challenges, primarily due to a lack of resources for integrating ICT tools in classrooms, which hindered the creation of technologically equipped and inclusive environments. To address these issues, schools can engage the community in fundraising efforts and collaborate with NGOs and private companies to secure funding or donations of ICT equipment. Successful examples include rural Ugandan schools that have organized local events to acquire teaching materials. Additionally, partnerships with technology firms can provide refurbished devices and training for teachers,



while mobile phones can serve as an alternative for educational purposes in areas with limited computer access (UNESCO, 2020).

Resistance from some teachers to new practices, such as gender-sensitive teaching, poses significant challenges in education. Kotter (2019) emphasizes that cultural shifts require time and persistent effort to overcome entrenched mindsets, highlighting the importance of gradual change management strategies. Engaging teachers in planning and implementation fosters ownership and reduces resistance, as they are more likely to embrace changes when their perspectives are valued. Collaborative decision-making enhances teachers' agency and adaptability, leading to more effective practices (Buxton et al., 2015). Additionally, leveraging peer influence through early adopters who demonstrate the benefits of new practices creates a supportive environment for hesitant teachers. Peer-led initiatives, such as mentoring and collaborative professional development, significantly increase the willingness to adopt innovative methods (Haddix, 2015). By fostering collaboration and involving teachers in the change process, educational institutions can implement new practices more effectively and sustainably.

Furthermore, the remote nature of the West Nile region limited headteachers' access to ongoing professional support, which is crucial for reinforcing the skills acquired during the DELM program (Robinson, 2018). Balancing new responsibilities with existing administrative duties became overwhelming, emphasizing the need for additional support staff to facilitate effective integration of DELM's practices.

### **Influence Succession Planning and Leadership Continuity**

The DELM program had a profound impact on headteachers' approaches to succession planning and leadership continuity. Many began mentoring younger teachers, preparing them for future leadership roles. This mentorship not only created pathways for potential successors but also fostered a collaborative school environment that promotes sustainability (Leithwood et al., 2020).

By implementing shared leadership practices and inviting teachers into management discussions, headteachers cultivated a sense of ownership and accountability among staff. This democratic approach to decision-making encourages a culture of openness and respect, which is vital for smooth leadership transitions (Bush, 2019). The establishment of professional development pipelines further supports this continuity, ensuring that teachers are equipped with the necessary skills for effective leadership (Akinyemi & Dada, 2020).

Additionally, the emphasis on ethical leadership within the DELM program instilled values of responsibility and transparency in headteachers, who then modeled these principles for their staff. Through ethical role modeling, headteachers can create a positive school culture that endures beyond their tenure, ensuring that the commitments to inclusivity and continuous improvement remain integral to the school's ethos (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017)

### **Conclusion**

The Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management (DELM) program has been instrumental in fostering transformational leadership among headteachers in Uganda's West Nile region. Grounded in transformational leadership theory, the program has equipped participants with practical leadership skills and a strong foundation in mentorship, gender sensitivity, and strategic succession planning. These components have enabled headteachers to inspire and motivate their teams, create inclusive school environments, and drive meaningful change within their institutions. DELM participants demonstrated enhanced communication, a

commitment to shared vision, and a strengthened capacity for fostering professional growth among staff—hallmarks of transformational leadership.

However, implementing DELM's principles has posed challenges, including resource limitations, resistance to change, and the dual demands of leadership and administrative responsibilities. Despite these barriers, headteachers embodied transformational leadership by demonstrating resilience, innovation, and ethical decision-making. They embraced collaborative practices, cultivated trust, and empowered staff to take ownership of school improvement processes, fostering a school culture conducive to long-term progress and improved student outcomes.

The program's emphasis on ethical and sustainable leadership has created a foundation for lasting change in educational leadership within the region. Through mentorship, distributed leadership, and strategic succession planning, headteachers are cultivating a legacy of continuous improvement and inclusivity. These efforts align with transformational leadership theory's principles of inspiring change, fostering individual and collective capacity, and prioritizing sustainable impact.

To build on these achievements, enhanced resource allocation, ongoing professional development opportunities, and greater community engagement are essential. These measures will sustain and expand the momentum generated by the DELM program, enabling headteachers to further operationalize transformational leadership practices and influence broader educational reforms in low-resource settings.

### **Areas for Further Research**

The DELM program has significantly impacted headteachers and their leadership practices, but several areas require further research to understand its long-term effects.

- First, longitudinal studies could assess how leadership practices evolve over time and their correlation with student performance metrics. Additionally, exploring community engagement's role in implementing DELM practices and conducting comparative studies between resource-rich and resource-poor regions could provide valuable insights.
- Research on gender sensitivity in leadership is also crucial. This includes examining the effects of gender-sensitive strategies on school culture and tracking changes in gender equity over time.
- Moreover, challenges such as resource limitations and teacher resistance to new practices should be investigated to inform effective change management strategies. Evaluating mentorship initiatives developed by headteachers can shed light on succession planning effectiveness and leadership continuity.
- Finally, studying the sustainability of ethical leadership principles taught in the DELM program will help understand their influence on school culture and decision-making processes. Addressing these areas will enhance understanding of the DELM program's lasting impact on educational leadership and overall educational quality

### **Recommendations**

To enhance the impact of the DELM program, it is essential to prioritize resource allocation in schools, particularly in the West Nile region, as access to digital tools and learning materials is crucial for the effective implementation of innovative educational practices. Furthermore,

establishing continuous professional development workshops will ensure that headteachers and teachers can sustain the skills they acquired through the DELM program. These workshops should focus on practical training in integrating ICT tools and gender-sensitive teaching practices, thereby bolstering their capabilities.

Additionally, fostering collaborative learning environments is vital. Encouraging the development of networks among headteachers, teachers, and educational leaders through inter-school partnerships and peer mentoring programs can facilitate the sharing of best practices and resources. Alongside this, implementing structured change management strategies will be necessary to address resistance from some teachers. By providing training sessions that emphasize the benefits of new practices and allowing teachers to voice their concerns, schools can create a more supportive environment for change.

Moreover, it is crucial for schools to formalize succession planning frameworks that identify and prepare potential future leaders among teachers. This can be achieved through mentorship programs that ensure continuity in leadership and the sustained application of DELM principles. In addition, establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation framework will help assess the long-term impact of the DELM program on headteachers' practices and student outcomes, thereby providing valuable feedback for continuous improvement.

Finally, Engaging the community in educational leadership and decision-making is essential for enhancing the relevance and acceptance of leadership practices in the West Nile region. Regular community meetings and collaboration with local organizations help ensure that these practices align with community needs and values, fostering more effective, inclusive, and sustainable school environments that benefit both teachers and students. For example, in Mukono District, active involvement of School Management Committees (SMCs) has led to improved school governance and successful fundraising initiatives to address critical infrastructure gaps, such as building classrooms and providing learning materials. This involvement fosters a sense of ownership among community members, encouraging them to support and monitor school activities, which results in better educational outcomes. Additionally, Kenya's Teacher Advisory Centres (TACs) provide a replicable model for professional development, offering platforms for peer learning and mentorship that could be adapted in Uganda's West Nile region by utilizing local education offices as training hubs.

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