

UNIVERSITY OF RWANDA



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

**FACTORS INFLUENCING HEAD TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL
SUPPORT PRACTICES FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS OF
RUBAVU**

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Masters of Education (MED) in Educational Leadership and Management of
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October, 2024

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is the result of my original work and has not been presented for any other degree at University of Rwanda or at any other Institution.

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APPROVAL

We, Ass. Prof. **Nzahabwanayo Sylvestre**, acknowledge that this work has been done under my supervision and hereby submitted upon my approval.

Supervisor: Ass. Prof. Nzahabwanayo Sylvestre

Signature : Date :

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wife, mother and sister, and all my family members whom we journeyed together for the award of this degree.

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This work would not have been accomplished without the encouragement, contribution and inspiration of other people.

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May the Almighty protect and keep you all in his palms.

ABSTRACT

The head teachers play a key role in the development of adequate teaching through professional practices that aim at supporting teachers to do this noble profession of teaching. The head teachers professional support practices have been a concern for different scholars. This study aimed at exploring the factors that shape the head teachers' professional support practices primary teachers of Rubavu district, Rwanda. The study was conducted in four randomly selected sectors in which eight schools were purposely selected, two per each of the four sectors, whose one head teacher was mentored on effective school leadership and another who did not benefit from mentorship. The study utilized the phenomenology research design under which interviews and desk review research tools were employed to gather all the information related to factors influencing the head teachers professional support to teachers. The findings were analysed using the thematic analysis technique. The study aimed to answer the following research questions: (i) What are the indicators and drivers for head teachers' professional support practices to primary teachers? (ii) What are the enabling factors that shape head teachers to support primary school teachers in Rubavu District? (iii) How do head teachers assess the impact of their own support practices on teaching and learning, and student achievement? Three themes emerged from the first research question namely (1) the school direction as the main driver of the head teachers' professional support practices to teachers, (2) the use of the school improvement plan as the specific booster of the head teachers' professional practices towards teaching and learning, and (3) the contribution of leadership styles in the increase of head teachers' professional practices. Under the second research question again three themes were found (1) the head teachers' professional practices and activities related to supporting teaching and learning, (2) the head teachers' failure to use English as a medium of communication to emphasize instruction and support to teaching and learning, (3) the school organization of teacher's continuous professional development. Finally, under the third research question two themes were identified (1) The importance of head teachers' continuous professional development in the enhancement of their professional capacity to provide support to teachers and learners; (2) Analysis and recognition of head teacher's professional support to teachers and the impact generated through various activities. The research concluded that the main drivers of the head teachers professional support practices to teachers are of a paramount importance in order to support teaching and learning effectively. It was also concluded that head teachers' awareness of the impact on their professional support is important in order to grasp where to put more emphasis. Finally, the head teachers' empowerment on their professional needs and their practices play a great support to teachers if they are turned into the routine of the head teachers to impact the primary teachers.

Key words: drivers of head teacher professional practices, school direction, School improvement plan, classroom lesson observation, constructive feedback

LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ACRONYMS

CBC:	Competence Based Curriculum
COP:	Community of Practice
CPD:	Continuous Professional Development
DOS:	Deputy head teacher in charge of Studies
ESSP:	Education Sector Strategic Plan
INSET:	In Service Training
MINEDUC:	Ministry of Education
PLC:	Peer Learning Communities
REB:	Rwanda Basic Education Board
SDP:	School Development Plan
SIP:	School Improvement Plan
SWOT:	Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threat
UR-CE:	University of Rwanda-College of Education

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

1.1. Introduction

The present research is entitled “Factors influencing head teachers’ professional support practices for primary schoolteachers of Rubavu”. The study intended to explore on the base of the previous studies and theories, which factors influencing head teachers to be able to professionally provide support to primary school teachers in order to respond to their professional needs. Phenomenology research design was used to be able to find out those factors, and they were analyzed with the use of thematic approach. In addition, this chapter presents the background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, objectives, scope, and significance of the study.

1.2. Background to the study

The head teachers play a key role in the development of adequate teaching through professional practices that aim at supporting teachers to do this noble profession of teaching. Manasia, Ianos, and Chiciooreanu (2020) stated that developing teacher professionalism, as a strategic direction, is a way to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and to improve teachers’ perceptions of professional status, job satisfaction, and self-efficacy, contributing to a sustainable education. For this noble cause, the head teachers are expected to play a big role for teachers to achieve quality education by translating curriculum into classroom practice. Manasia, Ianos, and Chiciooreanu (2020)

From the global experience, the question has been to identify and capture the factors that shape the professional practices that head teachers lean on to support their teachers (Prenger, Poortman and Handelzalts, 2020). These factors are categorized into internal i.e. the school structural relationships, exercise of transformational leadership, instructional leadership, teachers’ work engagement, teachers’ knowledge, creation practices, school culture and climate and external factors i.e, education policies, Government Funding and Resources, Community Expectations, all are paramount components that contribute to influencing practices required for the head teacher to be able to effectively support the teaching staff (Prenger, Poortman and Handelzalts, 2020) . Consequently, the head teacher has to store an amount of skills, competencies and growth to manoeuvre the mentioned factors in their profession to enable them depict where and when to intervene and provide relevant support to teachers.

In Georgia, a qualitative research has been conducted to collect evidence from primary and secondary principals related to the way teachers are professionally supported. The study found out that principals put emphasis on availing the required resources for teaching, use a variety of leadership style, also it suggested that there is a need to continue to emphasize on influencing them to become more professional and in return provide critical support to the teaching staff. In the aftermath, the findings confirmed that the more support to head teachers, the more professional support to teachers (Gümüş, 2019).

The Norway government identified a gap in the head teachers' professional support to teachers and has taken initiative of head teachers for professional growth as the potential mechanism to transform the teaching profession, revitalize experienced teachers, and lead to the school development (Hobson, 2009). In Zambia, the school managers failed to organize induction programs for newly posted teachers in their schools because these school managers themselves lacked various managerial skills and knowledge (Kamwengo, 2011)

A study conducted in Malawi concluded that performance and professional support of head-teachers was unsatisfactory to their staff primarily because the head-teachers lack knowledge and skills to perform their work. The study further revealed that majority of these head-teachers were appointed only through political patronage without induction and mentorship prior to taking their new roles (Ongek, 2016).

In Kenya, a research revealed that structures put in place to enhance school administration in Kenyan schools are either defective or simply inappropriate to produce expected education outcomes. In his study on how principals are prepared and developed in Kenya, Nandwah (2011) interrogates training programs that heads of schools are exposed to, prior to their taking up leadership positions in schools and even while in service. The findings revealed that such programs are reckoned to be deficient, often ad-hoc and cash-strapped, and suggests the need to find a better mechanism to entrench head-teachers in their leadership roles Nandwah (2011)

In Rwanda, the same question of head teachers supporting teachers has been posed, to identify factors that shape the head teachers' professional practices and support provided to teachers especially for the effective implementation of Competence Based Curriculum (CBC). In their study, Uworwabayeho and his colleagues (2020) indicated that despite major gains by the Ministry of Education in Rwanda, particularly training and recruitment of teachers and

introduction of a coordination system to ensure professional development and management of teachers, the education sector is still challenged to ensure that head teachers have the capacity to lead implementation of the new competence based curriculum in schools. Since 2014, Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB), the University of Rwanda-College of Education (UR-CE) and VVOB - Education for Development (VVOB Rwanda) have collaborated to develop formal certified – continuous professional Development (CPD) programs and developed National Head teachership Standards to enhance professional head teachership (UR-CE, VVOB & REB, 2019).

In the same line of continuous development of the quality education in schools, The Wellspring Foundation for Education launched its School Development Program (SDP) in schools of Rubavu in 2017 to enhance the challenge in school leadership about the lack of practical skills in leading teaching and learning to support the teachers. The baseline findings collected at the beginning of the SDP project from 75 primary schools of Rubavu, showed gaps in establishment of the school direction, leading teaching and learning among others.

1.3. Problem statement

One of the objectives of the Rwanda Ministry of Education as reflected in Education Sector Strategic Plan – ESSP (2017-2024) is to see improved head teachers' professional capacity in planning, management and administration of education (ESSP, 2019). According to Fullan (2014), head teacher's professional practices "refers to the set of skills, behaviors, and standards that school leaders, particularly head teachers (also known as principals in some contexts), are expected to demonstrate in their roles (Fullan, 2014).

However, despite numerous programs such as School Based Mentorship for Teacher's proficiency in English, Communities of Practices (COPs), Peer Learning Communities (PLCs), and Teachers Continuous Professional Development (CPDs) that have been put in place through Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) in the intention of helping head teachers to enhance teachers' abilities to deliver quality teaching in Rubavu, an internal evaluation conducted in 2021 by the district of Rubavu in collaboration with Wellspring Foundation for Education on the progress of quality education and school improvement, reported that only 43% of the head teachers conduct classroom observation for at least once a term and none of the surveyed head teachers has taken initiative to plan neither a continuous professional development (CPD) training session nor model lessons for teachers. The same report exhibited

that the schools of Rubavu did not have school mission and vision, nor have they the strategic plans nor school improvement plans. Consequently, the lack of the above mentioned activities has affected the teachers' implementation of CBC since the same report showed that 67% of the primary teachers were facing issues in the use of effective group work, effective lesson planning, development of relevant competences and cross cutting issues. Also, there is low students' performance that occurred in the past national examinations, as noticed in the district records that only 3% of the students have received division one in 2017, 1% in 2018, and 2% in both years 2019 and 2021. The situation described above leads to interrogate the capacity of head teachers in providing professional support to teachers. The present study seeks to explore the practical factors that influence the head teachers' professional support practices to primary teachers. The end in view is to suggest pathways through which head teachers in Rubavu may effectively support the teachers at their respective schools.

1.4. Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to explore factors that shape the head teachers' professional support practices teachers of primary schools in Rubavu District.

1.4.1. The specific objectives

Specifically, the research is intended to:

- Identify indicators and drivers for head teachers' professional support practices to primary teachers.
- Find out the enabling factors that shape head teachers' professional support practices to primary school teachers in Rubavu District
- Examine head teachers' analysis on the impact of their support practices on teaching and learning, and student achievement.

1.4.2. Research questions

Three primary research questions guided this study:

- What are the indicators and drivers for head teachers' professional support practices to primary teachers?
- What are the enabling factors that shape head teachers to support primary school teachers in Rubavu District?
- How do head teachers assess the impact of their own support practices on teaching and learning, and student achievement?

1.5. Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will shade clarity on the indicators and drivers that influence the head teachers to professionally support their teachers. Gaps in this domain were identified and addressed which is likely to contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning, and student academic achievement.

Findings from the present study will also allow the Ministry of Education through Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) to take necessary measures to address hindrances of head teachers' professional support to teachers. The end in view is to raise teaching and learning processes in Rubavu district.

Also, the findings of this study will allow the district and development partners in education to be aware of factors associated with head teachers professional support practices that play a role in the gaps beneath the students' low performance in national exam. Such a knowledge will enable the district and partners to devise robust strategies and re-direct their support towards head teachers in particular and schools in general.

Finally, the study was a fit in the school communities chiefly because it will enlighten their own blind spots which will lead to self-assessment in carrying out their responsibilities to consider factors influencing the head teachers professional support practices to teachers.

1.6. Scope and limitations of the study

The research was carried out in the Western Province of Rwanda, Rubavu District and the researcher worked with the head teachers in Rubavu district. The researcher conducted the study in four Sectors of Rubavu district whereby each sector was represented by two schools and an emphasis was placed on selecting schools whose one head teacher has been empowered on effective head teachership and the one who did not go through the empowerment process on effective head teachership and leading teaching and learning.

1.7. Summary of the chapter

This chapter provided details on the background of the problem and the problem statement. It also tackled research objectives, research questions, and generated the significance of this study to relevant institutions and stakeholders. It finally made clarity on scope and limitations of this study!

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter summarizes studies from other scholars about the topic at hand “Factors influencing head teachers’ professional support practices primary teachers”. It is organized in three sections which include the empirical and theoretical literature, and the conceptual framework undergirding this research.

2.2. Empirical literature review

Previous studies on the head teachers professional support to teachers have deepened the impact that head teachers have in influencing teachers’ professional development, and the strategies that could be taken to enrich teachers’ professionalism. (Prenger, Poortman and Handelzalts, 2020). However, little was known about the factors that influence these head teachers to determine their significant role in impacting teachers’ professional development. This research attempted to fill this gap. It also unpacked ill-known indicators and drivers that affect head teachers professional support.

2.2.1. The indicators and drivers of head teachers’ professional support practices teachers

According to Fullan, (2014) the professional practices of a head teacher are critical to fostering a supportive environment for teachers. These practices ensure that teachers can focus on effective instruction and student development.

According to Fullan, (2014) there is a number of indicators of head teachers professional practice to support teachers among others leadership and vision, professional development and growth, fostering and encouraging collaboration among teachers, building a supportive work environment, performance monitoring and feedback and many more. Starting by leadership and vision, this consists of head teacher articulating and communicating a clear, shared vision for school improvement and student achievement. With this, the head teacher as instructional leader leads the development and implementation of the school’s instructional strategies, setting high expectations for teaching and learning.

Walker, (2004) in a study entitled *Principals’ Instructional Leadership and Teacher Professional Development in Hong Kong Schools*, examined how instructional leadership practices of head teachers in Hong Kong influenced teacher professional development. Key drivers identified were the head teachers’ ability to articulate a vision for the school, provide

necessary resources, and actively participate in teacher development programs. Effective leadership was found to be crucial in enhancing teacher satisfaction and performance. However, the study noted that external factors such as government policies were not fully accounted for, and a more comprehensive analysis of how external pressures influenced professional support practices was recommended. (Walker, 2004)

In the same vein, professional development and growth through which the head teacher sets out continuous professional development which provides opportunities for teachers to engage in relevant, high-quality professional learning to enhance their skills and knowledge. In addition, mentoring, coaching and feedback to teachers, particularly new or struggling educators, helps them to improve teaching practices.

Moreover, fostering and encouraging collaboration among teachers by facilitating professional learning communities, team teaching, or peer observations consists of another indicator for head teacher's professional practice to support teacher. (Nguni, S., Slegers, P., & Denessen, E., 2006) in their study entitled: *Head Teachers' Leadership and Support for Teacher Collaboration in Tanzanian Primary Schools*, analyzed how head teachers fostered teacher collaboration and professional growth in Tanzanian primary schools. The findings concluded that key drivers included head teachers' ability to build trust and create professional learning communities. It was found that strong leadership in fostering collaboration led to increased teacher motivation and better instructional practices. However, the study highlighted as gap, the lack of resources in some schools as a limitation for head teachers to fully implement their support strategies. More research was recommended on how to support head teachers in resource-limited settings. (Nguni, S., Slegers, P., & Denessen, E., 2006)

Furthermore, supportive work environment is another indicator whereby the head teacher is accessible and approachable to maintain an open-door policy, providing teachers with easy access to guidance and support when needed. This goes together with emotional and moral support which creates a positive, supportive atmosphere where teachers feel valued, respected, and heard. Workload management: Advocates for teachers' well-being by managing workloads, reducing unnecessary administrative tasks, and providing adequate planning time. (Day, Christopher & Leithwood, Kenneth, 2007), in a study entitled *School Leadership and Its Effects on Teacher Professional Development and School Improvement* conducted in United Kingdom, examined indicators such as the availability of professional development programs,

mentoring systems, and the overall leadership style of head teachers. It found that schools where head teachers promoted collaboration and shared leadership were more effective in offering teacher support. Head teachers who focused on both emotional and instructional support tended to create environments conducive to school improvement. However, the study identified gaps in exploring how differences in school context (e.g., rural vs. urban) could affect the effectiveness of head teachers' support practices, as the study primarily examined urban schools. (Day, Christopher & Leithwood, Kenneth, 2007)

Another indicator of head teachers professional practice to support teachers consists of performance monitoring and feedback within which both regular classroom observations in a constructive manner, followed by detailed and actionable feedback, and data-driven discussions that engages teachers in data analysis to reflect on student performance and identify areas for instructional improvement together with goal setting and evaluation that helps teachers set clear, achievable goals and provides regular performance evaluations to promote professional growth. (Olatunde, 2020) in a study entitled "Head Teachers' Performance Monitoring Practices and Teachers' Job Performance in Primary Schools in Ogun State, Nigeria" analysed head teachers monitoring practices and found that head teachers who employed systematic performance monitoring practices significantly improved teachers' job performance. This included regular classroom observations and performance evaluations. They also analysed constructive feedback and noticed that the provision of constructive feedback was shown to enhance teacher motivation and professional development.

Effective feedback practices involved specific, actionable recommendations rather than general comments. They finally analysed professional Development and found that head teachers who actively engaged in providing professional development opportunities correlated with higher teacher performance and satisfaction. However, the study noted a gap in training for head teachers regarding effective performance monitoring and feedback strategies. Many head teachers lacked the necessary skills to provide constructive feedback effectively. The study also noted insufficient resources and time for head teachers to conduct regular monitoring were also highlighted, impacting their ability to support teachers adequately. In conclusion, this study emphasizes the importance of head teachers' roles in monitoring performance and providing constructive feedback. It suggests that training for head teachers could enhance their effectiveness in these areas, ultimately benefiting teacher performance and student outcomes. (Olatunde, 2020)

In addition, the School strategic improvement plan was qualified as a driver for professional support for head teachers as it helps head teachers to develop the skills and knowledge they need to improve in the quality of teaching and learning in their school. Destacamento (2012) highlighted the school strategic improvement plan as a road map that establishes the changes that the school needs to improve student achievement, and shows the how and when these changes were made. This roadmap is traced through a quite professional process. School improvement planning is also defined as the process by which members of the school conduct a thorough evaluation of their school's educational programming in the previous school years and the development of a written school plan that (1) establishes the starting point for the ongoing evaluation of efforts, and (2) unifies independently organized school improvement efforts from various areas of the total school program into a single, focused process (Destacamento, 2012).

2.2.2. Factors influencing head teachers' professional support practices teachers

The head teachers greatly impact their teachers' growth and best classroom practices in many ways. The professional head teacher strives to put in place strategies and activities that increasingly lifts up the teachers' capacities and professionalism in teaching. Macleod (2020) in *Influencing Professional Development of Educators: The Role of Head teachers*, proposed strategies that head teachers can employ to increase effective teacher professional learning in their schools. These strategies include among others the adoption of a blend of transformational and instructional approaches; and building trust and credibility. However, Macleod (2020) skipped to reveal the factors that provide principals with the confidence to carry out professional practices, to be able to enhance the teachers' challenges in their profession. The same study adopted qualitative methodology and explored the principal leadership and its role in teacher professional learning to enhance student learning. The results of this systematic review suggest that leadership is a crucial element in impacting meaningfully teacher professional learning (Macleod, 2020).

Another study (Mestry, 2017) on empowering principals to effectively lead and manage public schools in the 21st century, argued that principals tend to overlook their responsibilities of curriculum or instructional leadership, because they are not fully aware of their primary task. Either they are too busy attending to their administrative duties, resolving conflicts among role players, or maintaining student discipline. There is thus a dire need for principals to be empowered and professionally prepared for their roles as heads of schools, and to continually

enhance their skills, attributes and competencies through structured continuing professional development (CPD) programs (Mesrty, 2017).

Another study (Craft, 2000) indicates that professional development (PD), continuing professional development (CPD) and in-service training (INSET) are key to aspiring principals beyond the point of initial training. While some professionals consider CPD as training, as a means of keeping abreast, or as a way of building a career, and while professional associations hold the view that CPD is part of lifelong learning; a means of gaining career security; a means of personal development; a means of assuring the public that individual professionals are up-to-date (Friedman & Phillips, 2004). However, this study did not specify the factors that these CPD addressed for head teachers to become effective professionals who can support their teachers.

2.3. Theoretical framework

The study used Philip Hallinger and Joseph Murphy (1985) instructional leadership theory. This theory is grounded in the belief that school leaders should be directly involved in improving teaching and learning. It advocates for leaders to take an active role in the academic success of their schools by supporting teachers, fostering collaboration, and making decisions based on student learning outcomes. Furthermore, the study employed instructional Leadership framework for understanding the role of head teachers in improving teaching and learning. Their model outlines how head teachers can influence school performance by focusing on instructional aspects. It is divided into three primary dimensions:

2.3.1. Defining the School's Mission

A professional and effective head of a school is recognized on the caliber efforts invested in the development of the distinctive school image and performance in the eyes of competitive or similar institutions that offer the same services. As part of instructional leadership, setting the school direction is key factor leading to opening the door of the school progress to any instructional endeavor such as teaching and learning development whereby the school mission, vision, goals, objectives and activities align to enhance teacher skills and competence gaps, advancing students' performance and relevant classroom activities.

As time went on, studies suggested ways to establish a school direction through the school improvement plan. Cooke (2000) defines a school improvement planning as a process through which schools set goals for improvement and make decisions about how and when these goals

should be achieved (King, 2002). has already cautioned head teachers that they are expected to set clear goals, allocate resources to teaching, manage the curriculum, monitor lesson plans and evaluate teachers. Thus, head teachers' responsibilities include a deeper and broader involvement in the mechanics of teaching and learning, the use of data to make decisions, and participate in meaningful and innovative professional development (Shellard, 2003).

The school strategic improvement plan helps the schools to centralize all the plans and strategies around teaching and learning activities and puts emphasis on helping them to (1) avoid the misuse of school resources and ensure their effective allocation; (2) to make a follow up on how school activities are carried out; (3) to focus efforts on what is important in improving teaching and learning; (4) to develop a sense of ownership of school community members; (5) to hold each school community members accountable for student success; (6) to anticipate strategies before embarking on activity (REB, 2020).

In fact, the school strategic improvement plan consists of all the plans, practices and strategies that encompass all the determined goals, objectives and activities thought to be completed in a period based on mission, vision and core values. It is quite essential that head teachers find themselves able to craft a school improvement plan that is successful. Their generic practical role in this action includes, but not are not limited to : (i) establish learning goals and help teachers to align their teaching strategies to meet those goals, (ii) encourage staff to plan their daily lessons and use support material, (iii) create positive learning culture, (iv) provide personalized education, (v) ensure discipline in the school, (vi) ensure curriculum implementation, (vii) provide academic support to teacher, (viii) implement Continuous Professional Development program, (ix) ensure teaching quality, (x) personal development, (xi) academic mentoring, (xii) facilitate parent`s involvement, (xiii) provide clear instruction and direction to teachers, (xiv) regularly assess and monitor school learning activities (MINEDUC, 2007).

In addition, the school improvement plan extends for examining the gaps in school performance, suggests strategies to overcome them and jumps into action to implement the suggested strategies. The SIP plays a key role in the enhancement of the practices of the head teachers in the support that they owe to teachers as part of the strategies to improve the school performance. In this study, the researcher sought to establish the extent to which teachers get involved in the development of the SIP, their contributing role in analysis of students'

performance, capturing the root causes and designing the objectives, undergoing SWOT analysis and the whole design of the school improvement plans, and how the latter caters for the professional growth of teachers.

2.3.2. Promoting a Positive School Learning Climate

Educators are life-long learners who make an impact on the students and communities they serve. For teachers, effective professional development works as a response to emerging issues in education and provide ways to enhance teaching and learning strategies. Professional development for teachers is transformative and enables them to adopt current and updated classroom practices. Findings emphasize that absence of access to teachers' quality professional development results in a reduction of the impact they make during students' instructional time (Ravhuhali, et al, 2015).

In order to keep the momentum in fostering teachers' professional growth, head teachers must ensure that teachers have access to high-quality professional development opportunities that are aligned with the needs of the individual teachers. In fact, head teachers are key actors in helping build teacher capacity as autonomous learners and practitioners. To be able to journey in this process, head teachers are required to innovate professional ways that will help them contribute positively to the teachers needs through their direct involvement in professional development design, delivery, and content. These ways include: (1) aligning teachers' professional development with school goals and teacher needs; (2) empowering teachers as decision makers; (3) identifying needs; (4) developing on-going planning processes; (5) creating dialogues on teacher professional development; (6) supporting a variety of learning opportunities for teachers; and (7) keeping the focus on student learning. In this perspective, the Rwanda Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) has put in place a policy that regards teacher development and management in Rwanda whereby all teachers would receive systematic professional support from their head teachers, mentors and school inspectors (MINEDUC, 2007).

Moreover, when teachers are engaged in the design, delivery and content production of professional development, the outcomes are much more likely to meet teachers' needs, and have a significant influence on teacher thinking and classroom practices. Thus, school principals are not mere sponsors of teacher professional development; they collaborate with teachers in the design, delivery and planning of content for learning opportunities that align

professional needs, with school goals, and student needs. There are a number of sources that can indicate areas whereby teachers need to improve. For example, head teachers regularly supervise and evaluate teachers. These supervisory activities provide opportunities for head teachers to help teachers set professional learning and improvement goals, and to provide feedback on individual professional improvement plans. Again, the goal is not perfection; it's growth. Secondly, principals can help teachers identify their needs and then collaboratively plan learning opportunities to meet those needs. The challenge for principals is to develop a collaborative planning process that is sensitive to individual teacher needs, and that balances individual teacher choices against student and school needs. Finally, principals need to develop processes for the systematic collection and analysis of data on professional development in their schools. Again, principals can provide the expertise and resources to use data to support teachers' choices in professional development design, delivery and content.

The current study referred to and used the processes of the professional development for teachers as endeavors that are essentials to head teachers, as instructional leaders, in order professionally support teachers as they identify emerging gaps in teaching and learning.

2.3.3. Managing the Instructional Program

Assurance that instruction occurs in any school setting constitutes a top priority to ensure that the beneficiaries receive what has made them join the school. It is of no doubt that an effective and professional head teacher strives to make instruction program the best tool to achieve educational goals.

2.3.3.1. Supervising and evaluating instruction

This includes lesson observation and provision of constructive feedback. It is one of the primary factors that make the head teacher learn about the teacher's level of classroom delivery and the areas that need to be improved through a series of professional practices. According to Parkay, Hass, and Anctil, (2010), the principal is the individual best positioned within the school to evaluate the curriculum and evaluation process. Levine, (2005) reiterates that due to the frequent school reforms, principals are more accountable for student success which make the head teachership more critical and requires the head teachers especially the head teacher become more engaged in the school instructional program than any other school staff.

To do so, the head teachers are expected to sit with teachers and set clear goals, allocate all required resources, manage the curriculum, monitor lesson plans and teaching process and evaluate teachers (Wayne et al, 2008) which lead teachers to learn more and improve their own practices. This instructional practice on the head teachers professional effort, constitute a relevant and influential factor influencing the head teachers professional practice support towards teachers' growth in their daily teaching activities.

2.3.3.2. Monitoring student progress

These are activities carried out by a smart head teacher to monitor the teachers' practices and oversee the learners' performance and the challenges being faced. This is usually done through classroom visits that are carried out formally with official document to record the outcomes of the supervision, and informally.

According to Bethany Spencer (2018), a lesson observation also known as a classroom observation is the practice in which a lesson is observed to assess the quality of teaching to ensure students are receiving the most effective learning experience. Instructional supervision is more conversant, it helps teachers to be dedicated to their duties and helps the less effective and inexperienced teachers to improve in teaching (Eya & Leonard, 2012).

Lesson observations are universally regarded as an effective form of professional development and as a way to identify areas where teachers might need to improve in their teaching and classroom management skills, thus remove the students learning blockers (Bethany Spencer, 2018). Internally in the schools, lesson observations are means used to assess the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and provide insight of the ways teachers conduct lessons and interact with students. It is a form of evaluating the teachers' growth and a starting point for planning professional development content. While observing lessons, the observers identify the blockers to student learning in the classroom to reflect on them carefully during the feedback conversation with the concerned teacher.

Supervision is meant to evaluate and improve work performance to enhance quality output. School supervision, therefore, aims at ensuring that schools operations are carried out properly in order to achieve the stated goals. Ani in Eya and Chukwu (2012) grouped the purpose of school supervision into two: (1) Teacher improvement purpose (2) Non Teacher improvement purpose. Thus, the school supervision plays a key role of another factor that shapes the head

teacher professional practice support to teachers, as it encompasses an oversight of all their classroom doings and reports what is well achieved and what has to be improved.

2.3.3.1. Coordinating the curriculum

With coordination of curriculum implementation, leaders ensure that there is alignment between the school's curriculum and its goals, working to maintain consistency in the teaching content. Among other activities in coordination of curriculum implementation include provision of constructive feedback, professional dialogue and discussion May and Supovitz (2011) defined feedback as a tool to enhance the teaching-learning process, and points out that both teachers and students may benefit from relevant information which highlights strengths and achievements as well as areas for improvement.

Head teachers play a key role in supporting professional growth among teachers by serving as instructional leaders who provide targeted feedback and facilitate opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice. Thus, while observing lessons, head teachers and supervisors collect data in classrooms and provide instructional feedback. Together with teachers they reflect and identify areas for growth and what the teachers lack, and devise strategies to fill the identified gaps.

Teachers need professional development which might also start by the discussion on the teaching and learning between the head teacher and the teacher during feedback after the lesson. It is very crucial that these conversations are characterized by professional atmosphere and that they conclude with a lot of learning and professional development. Feedback for teaching and learning should be relevant, systematic, immediate, factual, helpful, confidential, respectful, tailored and encouraging if it is going to be effectively used to achieve successful teaching and learning. Furthermore, input from instructors themselves, students and peers should be sought in order to provide constructive feedback.

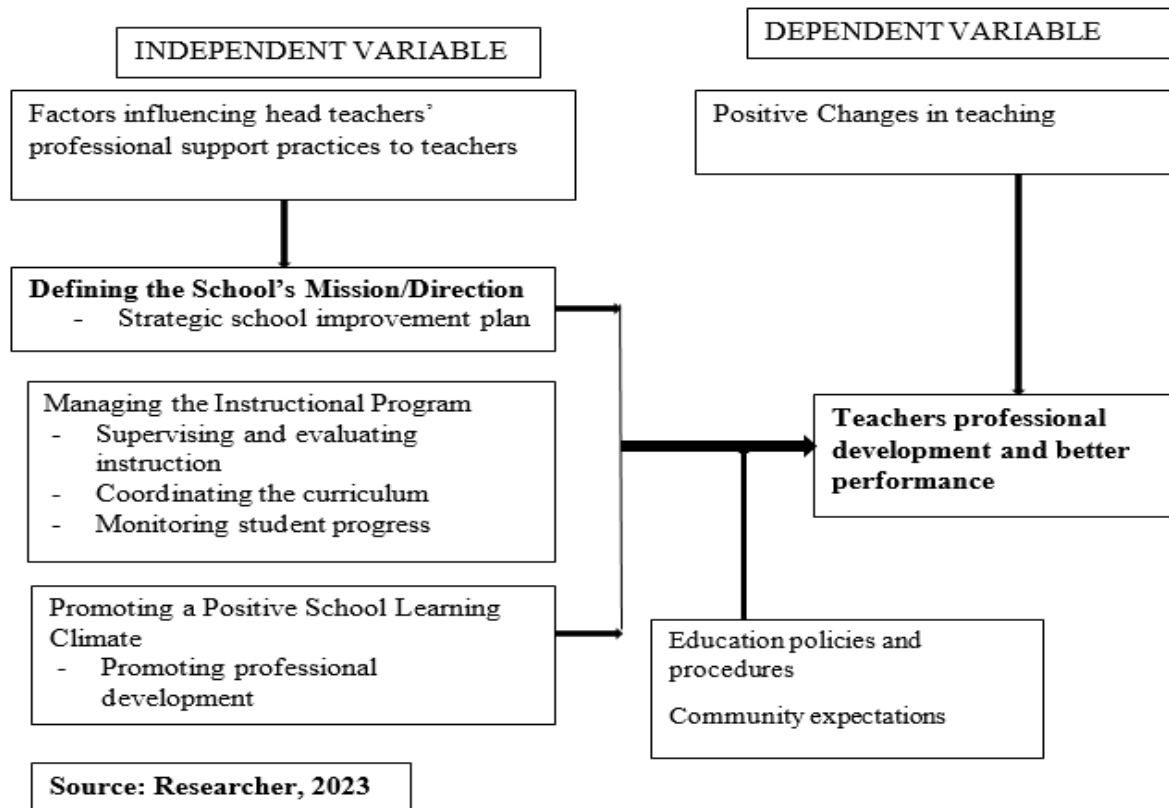
Constructive feedback, professional dialogue and discussion fed in relevance to the current work, as they constitute key factors to influencing head teachers professional support towards teachers' growth in their career as the learn, listen and exchange with head teachers.

2.4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, the dependent variable, the head teachers' practices (instructional support practices) to teachers may be the result of independent variable which refer to different factors

such as the school direction and strategic improvement plan, managing the instructional practice and promoting a positive school learning climate.

Figure 2: Conceptual framework



The present research is exploring factors that influence head teachers' professional support practices to primary school teachers. The conceptual framework was inspired by Hallinger and Murphy, (1985) instructional framework. Among the well-known factors that shape the head teachers to professionally support teachers include defining the school mission and setting the school strategic improvement plans. Also, the head teacher oversees the teaching process by conducting classroom supervision, coordinating the curriculum and monitoring the students' progress. Also the head teacher's professional practice that aim to support teachers go to promoting learning environment by establishing the professional development climate for teachers.

2.5. Summary of the chapter

This chapter highlighted the empirical and theoretical literature that served as a base for this study about factors influencing head teachers professional support practices to primary teachers. Different sources and studies have been critically explored to provide more light on these factors and how they were dealt despite gaps identified along with empirical literature.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes various research methods and techniques that used in collecting and processing data. It also represents the area of the study, population of the study, sample selection and sample size.

3.2 Research Design

The research design informing the present study is phenomenology. Phenomenological research is a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand and describe the universal essence of a phenomenon. The approach investigates the everyday experiences of human beings while suspending the researchers' preconceived assumptions about the phenomenon (Broun and Clarke, 2022).

This research was a fit in this design based on the fact that factors that are influencing head teachers' professional support practices teachers are occurring and are experiences on a daily basis by both head teachers and teachers. They are phenomenon that are happening in their daily activity experiences and they are changing day by day due to learning new experiences, methods of doing things and adopting the emerging phenomena. This design helped the researcher to collect qualitative information, testimonies and stories on the head teachers experience on the impact of their professional support practices on teaching and learning in their respective schools. Also, the study showed the head teachers' perceptions on head teachers' professional support practices with improved quality in teaching and learning.

3.2 Target Population

The table below indicates the target population and the sample design of the respondents that are targeted in the current research.

Table 2: Target Population

	Target population	Sample size
Head Teachers	40	8

Primary data collection

The criteria for inclusion of the participants in this study was limited to the head teachers and the sample was taken from 40 head teachers of the schools of four selected sectors, Gisenyi, Rugerero, Rubavu and Nyamyumba of Rubavu District, some of whom have benefited from mentoring programs for effective school leadership and professional support to primary

teachers. Sampling the participants of this study among those head teachers who benefited from mentoring and those who were not helped, the researcher sought to track the balance between professional support to teachers from the empowered head teachers in effective school leadership and that from those who were not empowered in effective school leadership.

3.3. Sampling Procedures

Sampling technique is defined as the process of choosing a smaller, more manageable number of people to take part in the research (Catherine, 2002). In this investigation, purposive sampling techniques. Purposive sampling, often called judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, is a kind of non-probability sampling in which study participants are chosen by researchers only on the basis of their subjective judgment. Purposeful sampling, as defined by Creswell (2012), is the deliberate selection of subjects and locations by a researcher in order to discover or comprehend the key phenomenon. It makes data collection possible for the researcher, which produces more accurate study findings and deeper insights. As the school in which the study was conducted, were purposively selected, the respondents of the study were also purposively selected. (Creswell, 2012)

3.3.2 Sample Size

In qualitative research, sample size is about reaching depth and richness in understanding phenomena. Unlike quantitative studies, where large samples may be necessary to generalize findings, qualitative studies prioritize contextual detail, complexity, and thick descriptions of participants' experiences or perspectives. Unlike quantitative studies where random sampling may be used, qualitative research often employs purposeful sampling. This means that participants are selected based on specific characteristics or experiences relevant to the research question. Patton (1990). This study also intended to explore the head teachers experience on the factors that shape their professional support practices teachers whereby they shared their daily and professional experiences and their perceptions about the phenomena of supporting primary teachers. While there are no strict rules for qualitative sample sizes, Creswell, (2007) recommends 5-25 participants for phenomenological studies. In this perspective, this study involved 8 head teachers from all 40 head teachers of the schools in four selected sectors. They are composed of 2 head teachers (one pure primary and one Groupe Scolaire) per each of the selected sectors, one of whom has benefited from trainings about effective school leadership to be able to collect useful data that would help to determine factors that shape the head teachers' professional support practices teachers of primary schools of Rubavu.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

To obtain enough of information for the purpose of the study, two methods of data collection were used interview and documentary review

3.4.1. Interview guide

As defined by (Creswell, 2012) an interview is a face-to-face discussion in which a participant provides information to the researcher. Asking general, open-ended questions of one or more people and documenting their responses is the main method used by researchers to gather qualitative data (Creswell, 2012)

Guided interview is also suitable for a phenomenological study as it helps to gather perceptions of the respondents on their experiences which helps to generate themes following the research questions of the study. (Creswell, 2012)

For this study, scheduled interview were conducted by the researcher interviewing the head-teachers. This instrument was used to gather information regarding factors influencing head teachers' professional support practices teachers. The questions of interview were written on prepared sheets of paper and as he asked questions, he was taking notes of the responses under each questions. The research chose this instrument so that he can easily get the opinions of the respondent, especially those, who might feel better with the interviews.

3.4.2. Documentary review

Document review consists of examining current documents in order to get information. Ary, (2010) defined a document review as document analysis. According to his argument, document analysis is a research technique used on written or visual materials with the aim of finding particular qualities of the material. Textbooks, newspapers, speeches, TV shows, commercials, musical compositions, and a wide range of other document kinds can all be included in the analysis of the contents. In the context of a school, the researcher will go over the annual reports that cover every activity that occurs there, particularly those that deal with parental involvement. (Ary, 2010)

This instrument was used to collect data for this study by analyzing regarding the head teachers professional support practices such as classroom lesson observations with the use of REB lesson observation format, mission and vision of the schools, school strategic improvement plans and reports on teachers CPDs.

3.5. Data processing and analysis methods

Qualitative research focuses on exploring and understanding complex phenomena from the perspective of those involved, making data processing and analysis more interpretative and iterative. Before analysis, data for this study needed to be prepared and organized, sorted and categorized according to their source data and cleaned to remove irrelevant information.

Coding was used to label interviews with themes and codes were assigned to each respondent in order to keep confidentiality. Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze and report patterns (themes) within the collected data. To be able to do so, the researcher familiarized himself with the data by reading and re-reading to gain a deep understanding. He then generated initial codes on key features in the data and searched for themes by grouping similar codes into overarching themes ensuring they reflect the data accurately. Finally, the themes were named and defined clearly.

3.6. Validity and reliability

3.6.1. Validity

Creswell, (2012) claims that validity is the degree to which all of the evidence points to the intended interpretation of test score for the proposed purpose. The researcher selected the knowledgeable people in the field of research, especially on the topic including his supervisors who provided feedback on the content validity of the instruments. To measure the content validity, the researcher provided 2 experts with the research instruments. The experts received a copy of the research instruments and instructions for rating the relevance and clarity of each item.

3.6.2. Reliability

According to Creswell, (2012), Reliability, is the instrument's score's consistency and stability. From that point, all questions were checked to identify conceivable mistakes and kill superfluous data. Moreover, in order to guarantee that the instruments are valid and reliable, they were administered as a pilot to two head teachers who were not among the selected ones, in order to remove potential ambiguities and wording, which might lead to undesirable answers during the investigation.

3.7. Ethical considerations

While conducting the investigation, the researcher must protect the respondents who have consented and participated in the investigation. From Creswell, (2014)'s study on the research design, the ethical issues refer to the fact that the researchers must protect their respondents who accept to disclose their personal information. They also needed to create trust with respondents and at the same time to promote integrity of research and avoid misconduct and error that could affect people and/ or institutions involved in the research.

The researcher explained to the participants that the participation in this research was voluntary and were free to stop at any point if they wished. The participants had right to not answer questions about which they would feel uncomfortable. Also, they had the right to withdraw without penalty at any time they wished so. The researcher had a responsibility to keep confidential the information gathered that no one would access it without the respondents' authorization. As they accepted, a consent form was signed.

3.8. Summary of the chapter

This chapter highlighted various research methods and techniques used in collecting and processing data. It also presented the population of the study and the sample size that took part in the study. Furthermore, it provided information about validity, reliability of the tools used for this research to be considered worth of credits. Ethical consideration was also taken care of.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 . Introduction

This chapter deals with the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of collected data about “exploring factors influencing the head teachers professional support practices to teachers of primary schools in Rubavu District, Rwanda”. In this chapter, the research objectives and research questions guided the process of data analysis with the use of thematic approach.

Thematic approach refers to techniques of analyzing qualitative data based on themes. This approach helped the researcher to explore not only the existing factors that shape the head teachers professional support to primary teachers but also to find out hidden factors that have shaped the head teachers professional support to teachers in the background of the main factors in the conceptual framework.

This investigation targeted 8 head teachers of selected schools of Rubavu district, four among them received mentorship on effective head teachership and other four did not have a chance to benefit from this empowerment. This was done in the purpose of exploring the factors that influence the head teachers from the two backgrounds to professionally support primary teachers through practical means.

Respondents were identified based on the codes given by the researcher in order to respect their privacy. Respondents coded 01, 02, 06 and 08 have benefited mentorship from Wellspring, REB and VVOB on effective head teachership while respondents coded 03, 04, 05 and 07 have barely received trainings from the above mentioned organizations.

4.2. Demographic characteristics and profile of the respondents

The total number of the respondents was 8 made of 4 head teachers who have been mentored about the head teachership professional practices and other who did not receive mentorship training.

4.2.1. Demographic Characteristics of the respondents according to their gender, age and education

The participants in this study were categorized into demographic characteristics according to the age and gender into the following table

Table 3: Characteristics of respondents according to their gender, age and education

RESPONDENTS TYPE	GENDER		AGE								EDUCATION							
	MALE		FEMALE		>30		31-40		41-50		<50		A2		A1		A0	
	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fr	%	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%
H T	5	63	3	37	0	0	2	25	4	50	2	25	2	25	0	0	6	75
TOTAL	5	63	3	37	0	0	2	25	4	50	2	25	2	25	0	0	6	75

Source: Field data collection

As indicated in the table 3, it was observed that among the respondents, the male head teachers who participated in the study count for 63% (5/8) of the total participants while the female head teachers counted 37% (3/8) of the total number of the participants.

According to the researcher, this representation of both male and female head teachers in the research matters a lot to the research in order to limit the bias of sex representation during the process of gathering information from both sexes. The presentation of the mixture of the findings from both males and females as head teachers makes the researcher to draw conclusions that are felt to be accurate from both males and females about the factors influencing professional support practices to teachers from both male and female head teachers.

The information gathered around the respondents age, indicated that the majority 50% (4/8) of the head teachers who participated in this study fall under the age between 41-50. This age range implicates the accuracy of the responses as is seen as the age whereby the participants are more reasonable and feel much comfortable to provide the information that demonstrates the reality of the phenomenon on the ground. This age range is also characterized by stability at work and the high level of maturity in terms of analysis and drawing effective conclusions on the sensitive issues (Tannenbaum, Greaves and Graham, 2016).

As far as age is concerned, the head teachers in this age range are believed to possess the maturity and professionalism to put into practices the learnt material and to describe how well they are being implemented and have enough time to analyze the impact that their support is bringing to teachers.

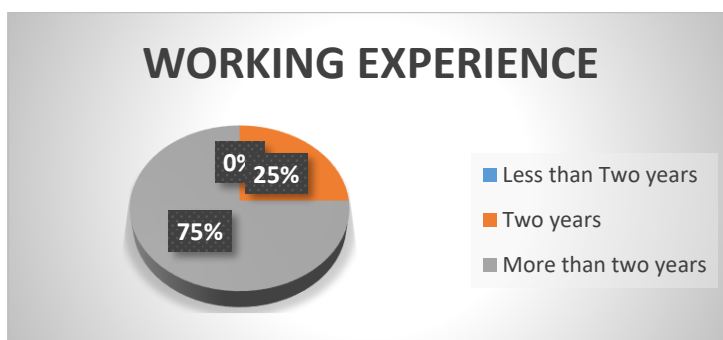
The study also looked at the respondents' education background and found out that all the respondents 100% fall under the bachelors' degree. This is the education level that is required

to fulfill the head teachers' roles as recommended by Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) through Professional Standards for Effective head teachership in Rwanda. (REB, 2020)

4.2.2. Working experience of the respondents

Working experience and the length of service in the schools of head teachers has been recorded under Figure 1 below. Recording the experience of the head teachers in education and the length of the duration they have been serving in the schools where they were found at the moment of the data collection serves as a key to the determination of the effective conclusion of the findings on the factors influencing head teachers professional support practices to teachers

Figure 3: Respondents working experience



Source: Field data collection

The findings indicate that the majority of the participants in this research, i.e., 75% (6/8) of them have been head teachers of the schools where they were found at the moment of the research, for more than two years. According to Herrity (2023), having worked in the same position for two or three years goes with the knowledge and confidence necessary to pursue leadership positions in the field. Also, it goes with the ability to train and induct the newly recruited staff. Moreover, with experience, a successful creative director possesses strong interpersonal skills and a thorough understanding of design principles to lead a team successfully (Harrity, 2023). Based on the researchers thinking, this has contributed much on the accuracy of the findings due to the fact that these head teachers have had time to do a lot of work at these schools including the tangible support practices teachers.

4.4. Presentation of research findings

Drawing on the research questions, distinct themes emerged from the collected data and provided answers to questions on factors influencing the head teachers' professional support to primary teachers.

4.4.1. Indicators and drivers for head teachers' professional support practices primary teachers.

The following themes have been identified to shade clarity on the indicators that head teachers strive to achieve and the motivating drivers for head teachers' professional support practices primary teachers.

Theme 1: The school direction (mission and vision) as the main indicator and driver of the head teachers' professional support practices to teachers

This theme was identified basically because of the high number of responses that emerged from the subjects' interventions during this research. The findings indicated that all 8 head teachers, 100% confirmed and highlighted the contribution of the school vision and mission in laying the ground for the head teacher's support to teachers through professional practices that they apply on a regular basis.

For instance, respondent coded HT002 who has more than 8 years of experience as a head teacher of primary school reported "In the beginning of my job, leading a school was done on a random basis. It was the head teacher who drew the main guidelines for the future of the school but which were not written and which could be changed according to his/her daily feelings. Now, from the time MINEDUC introduced the establishment for the school direction at each school, I am very confident on leading teaching and learning, supporting my teachers as I should because now I am guided by an official document and each activity is included in there".

In compliment, respondent coded HT006, who has 5 years of experience in leading a school added "The school direction is very key, because it is drawn by the whole school body including leaders, teachers, parents, partners and students whereby each of them has a role to play and knows the outcomes expected of them. So the implementation is easy. For me as the head teacher at the same time as the overall of the school direction, my main focus is to make sure that the activities included are implemented as they were drafted, and I have to make sure I become the role model to the rest of the school members. You understand that, as a head teacher, my first duty is to support teaching and learning, I have to do everything so that I support them to the utmost level I can." Respondent coded HT008 topped in saying "*School direction is very important for my school. This is because when it was set together, all school*

people strive for achieving all set targets. They are all aware of what they do. And if they are committed, they help one another, hence good performance of the school.”

These findings have on one side extended and complemented Chandra (2021) who, in his article about making faculty meetings more productive, proposed some tips to support head teachers to move their support to teachers more professionally by identifying and satisfying their needs and aspirations for their own professional development, depending on their experience, skills, and the context of their school.

In fact, this investigation revealed in compliment that designing the school direction and implementing it, indicates how practically the head teachers has become professional in supporting teaching and learning activities in the school. Moreover, these findings exalted the REB’s initiative to bring the school direction on board and instructing the professional standards for effective head teachership in Rwanda (REB, 2020).

However, the findings have shown a gap in terms of the use of the school direction specifically on the side of the head teachers who did not receive mentorship on effective head teachership. It was observed from the findings that the school direction statements (mission, vision and values) were not available in the offices of 2 out of 4 of these head teachers who did not receive mentorship.

For example, respondents 03 and 05, who have two and three years of experience respectively, indicated their perceptive versions on the inconveniences experienced along their headship. In this regard, respondent coded HT005 had this to say: “My school does not have the school direction. I and my colleagues here, we are really aware of the importance of their existence at school but I regret to express that we were not empowered enough to crafting our own documents. To be honest, I have been supported by the experimented head teachers who are my close friends because it is a document that has to be submitted in the office of the SEI, but I don’t have enough information on how to go about it on my own, and my team too, and how to follow it for the school life, we are still struggling”.

These head teachers have been courageous enough to reveal the inconveniences due to the lack of professional trainings on effective school direction that made them lose track of the importance of the existence and implementation of the school direction.

Theme 2: The use of the school strategic improvement plan as the specific booster of the head teachers' professional practices towards teaching and learning

On top of the typical school direction, the participants in this research highlighted the importance of the school strategic improvement plan which is solely looking for the academic improvement of the school particularly in terms of reinforcing the subjects/ lessons that often remain behind. The respondents widely highlighted that teachers play a big role in the design of the school improvement plans as they are part of the team that is in charge of the analysis of the root causes and setting the priorities for the school improvement plan. Participant coded HT001 reported in the following terms: *“Yes, they are greatly involved in the designing of the School Improvement Plan. This is because they are among those who will implement it.”* Participant coded HT006 added that teachers are involved in whole activity of the school improvement plan as well as its implementation *“They are in the process of designing the school improvement plan since they are the ones who analyze the academic results, indicate the strengths, areas for improvement and set targets that are considered as the priorities for the future of the school”*.

Through the documentation process, the findings indicated that the school direction documents exist in the offices of the head teachers, with well elaborated statements except for two head teachers among eight that participated in this research. In addition, most of the statements reflect the realities of the surrounding communities including the increase of the students' enrollment and elimination of the school dropout.

However, the head teachers were not able to indicate how and how often they reflect on these documents as reference to planning their regular school leadership tasks. This has made the researcher to question the big task that is expected of the head teachers to transform the school mind including to impact the teachers so that the school becomes the response to the community around as stipulated in the documents.

The findings also made a question on the existing literature which warns the head teachers on the factors that have to be in place to support their professional practices such as setting clear goals, allocating resources to teaching, managing the curriculum, monitoring lesson plans and evaluating teachers (King, 2002). These findings also confirm the necessity for the head teachers' responsibilities which include a deeper and broader involvement in the mechanics of

teaching and learning, the use of data to make decisions, and participate in meaningful and innovative professional development (Shellard, 2003).

Furthermore, the findings also showed the presence of the strategic school improvement plans and annual plans for 5 head teachers among eight who participated in the research and only three head teachers have been able to demonstrate the implementation plan for the last three academic years of 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023.

It was hence noted that some head teachers invest much efforts in the implementation of a number of mechanisms established to enable them provide adequate and effective direction to schools including teaching and learning through professional support practices to teachers. This is where (Chandra, 2021) indicated that some head teachers may need support in developing their leadership skills, while others may need help with curriculum development or assessment. For this cause, (Chandra, 2021) continued showing that it is important that professional support is tailored to the individual needs of each head teacher to unceasingly assess and analyze their leadership skills in improving the school academic status, as the instructional leader by identifying their strengths and opportunities for professional growth.

However, the head teachers who did not receive mentorship, claim to lack empowerment in the field of drafting adequate and effective school improvement plan that responds to the needs of schools and the communities around. This resulted in the absence of the school improvement plans in the offices of 3 out of 8 schools in addition to the absence of the implementation plan for the annual school improvement plan (5 out of 8).

In the interviews with the head teachers, respondents coded HT003 and HT005, when they were asked to show the school improvement plans, they honestly indicated that they had no time to plan for school improvement since they neither knew the process nor the importance of this document. They reported: *“We learnt that the school improvement plan is an essential document but for us, it is hard to go about it because it requires time that we don’t have. Again, there is no one at this school who can venture to write it. We even tried to learn from our colleagues in neighboring schools, but still, time is a challenge. We are trying our best, but barriers are many, time is consumed in the fulfilment of other responsibilities, we don’t know how this will happen”*.

As the findings brought the issues to light, the observations of the researcher have also found out that for the head teachers who did not benefit from empowerment about effective head teachership from different organizations especially VVOB and Wellspring Foundation for Education experience a huge gap in the design of both school direction and school improvement. Consequently, on one hand, these findings support the existing Chandra (2021) study which recommended that head teachers should take time to conduct a SWOT to identify their leadership characteristics, but on the other this activity might not take place without prior empowerment in terms of conducting SWOT and the way of using the analysis outcomes to feed in school improvement endeavor, which is the case for a number of head teachers in Rubavu who received neither training nor mentorship on the SWOT practice.

Theme 3: The contribution of leadership styles in the increase of head teachers' professional practices

The participants in this study have revealed the contribution of the adoption of servant leadership style which boosted their communication with teachers, which enabled them to build strong teams by using different gifts and talents existing in their schools.

Servant leadership has enabled the head teachers to build trust amongst the staff members and teachers, and managing the schools as organization and working closely with parent committees. Respondent coded HT008 highlighted this in the following terms: *“For the past ten years of my leadership, before Wellspring trained us on effective school leadership (servant leadership), I used to own all the responsibilities in my hands. For example, I was moving with the school stamp wherever I went believing that I am the only person to use it. In fact, I considered myself as the school owner. But thanks to Wellspring because they opened my eyes and I found out that being a school head teacher means to use the personnel and back them up. I immediately changed my style of leadership and it is working better than it used to”*.

Respondent coded HT002 come in with supplementary comments *“In my leadership before Wellspring, I never minded about involving parents in the school activities. Whenever a parent committee member came and asked me about the school, I used to ignore them and act as if they meant nothing to my school. But when I was trained about the importance of involving parents and work with the community, I understood how powerful it was to lead the school with support of parents. I am now enjoying working with parents and the wider community. I feel like I am serving them and I feel at ease as they assure some of the responsibilities that*

were loaded on my shoulders.” On the other side, some head teachers are still on their way in understanding and adapting the relevant servant head teachership.

Responding to a question regarding on how the head teachers delegate power to teachers to allow them grow in decision making, one of the head teachers replied: *“It is only me who have to attend the meetings at the district and the sector level. This is a primary school, it is not possible to send a teacher in such a meeting or in any other activities outside the school because he will leave the learners alone and their rights will be violated. So I avail myself to do such activities and I organize myself so that I first come to school, put everything in order and I leave. And when I leave, only the teacher representative knows that I am not around so that other teachers do not benefit from my absence and do whatever they want.”*

Another head teacher mentioned, *“I am the one drafting the school timetable and I know who to place in such a class and who can teach this subject. You know, when you allow teachers to provide suggestions on how the time table will look like, it might take the whole week. So for me, I draft it and present to them. Of course some are not happy with it but they are here to teach, it is their job.”*

In the lenses of the researcher, it was noticed that there was a tendency to hide the blind spots and the areas in which the head teachers need to improve their inability to initiate the school development by involving other staff members. As noticed, and on the base of field observations of the researcher, though this technique was not mentioned in the tools to be used, this lack of involvement of other school staff has been consistent in some schools, and continually led to transactional leadership or dictatorial leadership which makes the school life harder. This is founded initially to the head teachers educational and historical background and age which slowly allows the adaptation of the new initiatives and activities from the ministry of education.

But again, others have learnt and discovered well the opportunities to use the available human resources to gear up the responses and curb the holes in their professional support to teachers. Respondent coded HT006 aged of 56 and 28 years of experience as a head teacher, reported in his own statements *“sometimes, aged people like me, fail to quickly adopt the new trending systems. You know, we shifted from French to English system, we are required to provide all the documents and reposts in English, something that is not easy for aged head teachers like*

me who served during French era. But we are trying our best, sometimes using the young and energetic teachers here who know English very well."

In short, the school direction, school improvement plan and the leadership styles function as the main drivers of the head teachers' professional support practices provided to teachers. In connection with the developed themes, Macleod (2020) emphasized on the leadership styles as the main leading factor and proposed the adoption of a blend of transformational and instructional approaches; building trust and credibility. Macleod (2020) suggested the servant leadership style which transforms a head teacher into a leader who backs up and sue the available resources to produce quality work and builds the principals with the confidence to carry out professional practices to enhance the teachers' challenges in their profession by revealing the power of delegation and use of the existing talents in the school premises. Macleod (2020)

4.4.2. Enabling factors that shape head teachers' professional support practices to primary school teachers in Rubavu District

The findings of this research extended to exploring the head teachers' professional practices that have been applied in order to support teachers to do their work. Interview questions and follow up questions have been exposed to all eight head teachers and their responses have been recorded. The findings indicate that there are a number of factors that have been influencing the head teachers along the journey of their headship aligning to supporting teachers.

Theme 1: The head teachers' professional practices and activities related to supporting teaching and learning

The findings indicated through the responses to the question about the number of teachers they visit in a week, a month or a term; and the schedules as well as plans they put into action on a daily basis specifically in the provision of support to teachers. Among other practices and activities findings reveal classroom/lesson observation and the provision of the after lesson feedback. These professional support practices are unpacked in the paragraph that follow.

- **Classroom/ lesson observations**

It was noted that most of the head teachers visit teachers in the working days of the week but the frequency of these visits differ depending on the volume of the teaching staff and the internal organization in each school. For example, respondent n° 01 and 02 simultaneously

reported the following frequency: *“In a week I visit at least one teacher. In a month, not less than five teachers and in a term, all teachers are visited.”* Respondent 03 and 05 reported in a similar way: *“I visit five teachers in a week, 15 in a month and all the teachers in a term.”* Respondent 07 simply mentioned *“3 teachers a week”* Respondent 08 added *“In a week, I observe three teachers, in a month 12 teachers and in a term 36 teachers. This implies that every teacher is visited twice a term”*. Finally, respondents coded HT004 and HT006 separately responded that they visit two teachers per month.

The two last respondents extended their responses that they are not alone in this field of head teachership, their deputies also carry out these responsibilities of observing teachers. Respondent HT004 said *“Maybe you can notice that two teachers per month is a small number looking at the big teaching staff that exists in my school but don’t worry about the support I provide because I don’t work alone. I have the deputy head teacher in charge of studies whose main responsibilities are to deal with teachers and learners. While I am fulfilling other leadership responsibilities, she is there. But I don’t go far away from this noble role, that is why I have to visit at least two teachers per month. And in fact, I do my best to have visited all the teachers by the end of each academic year.”*

These responses led the researcher to question the relevance of the impact that such kind of support may bring to teachers if a number of head teachers are to leave the full responsibility in the hands of the deputy head teachers in charge of studies. It remains unclear if head teachers and Directors of Studies (DOSs) have a conversation or agreement on their respective main focus during the lesson observation to ensure that teachers have been supported as they intended and trace the progress that has been made along with the support received.

These respondents’ feedback came in to support the literature on how instructional leadership affects teacher efficacy: the majority of the participants (teachers) in a qualitative study demonstrated their belief that instructional leadership by head teachers has a positive effect on teacher effectiveness (Xiaorong & Russ, 2021).

- **After lesson feedback**

In addition to lesson observations, the findings indicate another critical factor that shaped the head teachers’ intervention to supporting teachers along their work: *“The provision of the after lesson observation feedback.”* The findings from other studies indicate that a pertinent

feedback should be constructive in the sense that it is a supportive communication tool used to encourage individual and organizational growth. Its purpose is to help identify areas of improvement in order to encourage professional development, improve performance, increase engagement, and strengthen relationships. In addition, constructive feedback looks objectively at outcomes while emphasizing what the person or organization has done well. It combines elements of constructive criticism and coaching allowing for a more balanced approach when seeking recognition or assessing progress (Kelly, 2023)

The head teachers described the process through which they provide feedback to teachers, hence indicated some discrepancies in its content. For example, respondent 08 reported “I observe them, then after I call them in a selected place to discuss about what went well (what to maintain) and what went wrong (What to improve). I start by asking the teacher to summarize a lesson from the beginning up to the end. I try to make this as a conversation. It is the teacher who himself/herself finds best practices and areas of improvement in order to avoid hurting him/her. Finally, I conclude the conversation by allowing us to establish targets for the next lesson observation based on the areas that need to be improved.”

This response seems to have hit the ideal feedback as suggested by Kelly, (2023) but lacks a kind of building relationship between the observer and observed teacher, which should be fundamental to minimize the feeling of transactional approach. Respondent 04 simply added: *“After lesson observation, we share with the observed teacher how the lesson went.”* Respondent 07 simply reported: *“during the feedback session, we start from strong areas or best practices to the areas of improvement.”* Respondent 01 highlighted: *“After discussing with the teacher how was the lesson, we take together the measures of improvement for the next time lesson”* Respondent 06 mentioned *“I First tell them what went well. Lastly, themselves they tell me what went wrong and we discuss what to do for the better”*.

The above statements from the head teachers, indicate that the feedback is the exchange between the observed teacher and the head teacher. They commonly state that the flow is first of all given to the teachers to summarize and highlight what went well in the lesson and ends with the areas for improvement.

However, the researchers’ observations via the documents presented in regards with the lesson observation and the provision of the feedback, have revealed that to a certain extent the feedback is rarely constructive and sometimes teachers were not happy and hardly agreed with

the observers' comments. It was noticed that a number of head teachers expressed the provision of the constructive feedback only by words but barely put what they talk into practices. Some of them, even in the above statements, were hardly confident to utter the process through which the constructive feedback is given.

Theme 2: The use English as a medium of communication to emphasize instruction and support to teaching and learning

Another factor connected to the provision of the feedback is the language used while discussing about the lesson. The findings indicate that only two of the eight head teachers try to use English to the extent of 60% of their time during the school activities including the support they provide to teachers.

Respondent 04 expressed this in these terms: *"In fact, both teachers and learners do not master well English which interrupts the consistent use of this language. It is often the same during the delivery of the lessons because the level of the learners has not increased enough to be sure that they can understand what they learn."* Respondent 02, who is one of the two head teachers who often use English in their daily activities informed: "English must be enforced, cultivated and make it as a culture in our daily activities. This has become my personal committed goal. In order to achieve this goal, I have to be the model. One of the strategies I use is that everyone who enters the offices and the teaching staff for anything, any reason must use English, whatever level of English is encouraged. This helps to capture the level of the use and informs where to put emphasis. This is becoming a culture, and since everyone is concerned, they make every effort to learn the necessary vocabulary they will use on a daily basis." He added "When I was appointed at this school 8 years ago, it was very rare to hear a single word of English. But until now, I can testify that English is in use for the rate of 65% in all school activities. I am proud of my support because if I had not put in efforts to make this a culture, we would have remained in the same environment of eight years ago."

However, it was found that most of the head teachers use Kinyarwanda during the feedback session. For instance, respondent 01 reported *"the after lesson feedback is done in Kinyarwanda. This is because in this language we all express our ideas freely. We exhaust our ideas when we use Kinyarwanda."* Respondent 04 added: *"the feedback and discussions after the lesson observation are done in Kinyarwanda or, sometimes, in English as teaching language. When we do it in Kinyarwanda, it helps us explore all areas of the observed lesson"*

while when we use English, we are limited in expression of the ideas. The duration is even shorted compared to the time when we use Kinyarwanda.”

Respondent 08 emphasized *“Of course in Kinyarwanda in order to facilitate more comprehension and understanding between the teacher and the Head teacher (observer).* Respondent 05 on the other hand reported *“the feedback is provided in English. Because English is the language of instruction”*. These reports about the language used during feedback have made the researcher to dig into the use of English as a medium of instruction within both the teaching and the head teachers support to teachers and learners in general.

In this regard, the researcher went deeper and found out that one the reasons that make the least use of English as medium of instructions include the head teachers and teachers background especially for those who are aged above 50 since they shifted from French to English, and have struggled for so long to make English a language used for their daily school activities. For example, respondent 06 aged of 56 and 28 years of experience as a head teacher, reported in his own statements *“sometimes, aged people like me, fail to quickly adopt the new trending systems. You, know, we shifted from French to English system, we are required to provide all the documents and reports in English, something that is not easy for aged head teachers like me who served during French era.”*

They admit that they have received many training sessions about using English but there was no stand-alone training specifically designed to improve head-teachers’ level of English as it was done for teachers. These findings come to confirm the past studies by Nzitabakuze (2012), Pearson (2014) and Uwambayinema (2013) which revealed that teachers / head teachers who took part in their respective studies generally had limited ability to use English to teach. The researcher finds this limited use of English as a fundamental challenge as the head teachers are considered as the drivers of teaching and learning where English functions as key. If they are not supported in improving English proficiency they will be ill-equipped to support the development of teachers’ professional growth in the career of teaching.

Theme 3: The school organization of teacher’s continuous professional development

The interviews and the reports on Continuous Professional Development (CPDs), clearly indicate that CPDs exists on all the schools where the research took place. The content for each CPD is well organized by the School Based Mentors (SBMs).

However, the intervention of the head teachers is a challenge as indicated through the top up questions. Respondent coded HT005, when asked on the topic of the previous CPD, he replied *“Last Wednesday, I did not attend the CPD, I was busy with the financial report which I had to submit for audit. I have the strong SBM who manages CPD even better than I could”*, he continued based on the follow up *“I rarely attend these CPDs, I can be there once a month or twice a term because I believe the SBM and DOS are there and they are capable of doing everything. At the end they draft reports and submit them here in the office. When I have time I can go through to see what they have covered.”* Respondent coded HT007 was asked in a follow up question, the role that he plays in the draft of the CPD plans, he replied in a short answer: *“Actually, CPD is the hands of the SBM. I don’t interfere much because they are trained very well. My SBM is even the sector Mentor. He is capable of organizing and delivering.”* Respondent coded HT004 on her side said *“Concerning the language used during CPD, I think it is English. But when I went there I found teachers arguing in Kinyarwanda and I questioned why they were doing so and the SBM explained that it hard for teachers to express everything in English that why they mix with Kinyarwanda. From this time, I decided to limit my other businesses during CPDS time and join them a better course of this activity. From then, things have started changing and I found myself planning for some of the CPDs and I could help the SBM.”* Respondent coded HT008 brought in a challenge concerning the teachers needs assessment. She argued that as a professional head teacher, the professional development for the school teachers is her main concern.

This is what she said *“For the plan of CPD, at the beginning of every term, I myself together with SBM gather information from teachers about what they need to grow in. For the administration, this session is very key because it helps us to plan the logistics and for the me and SBM, it helps us to be prepared beforehand in order to avoid surprises during the CPD sessions. And it helps us again to plan accordingly conserving the heaviness of the topics. However, some teachers don’t want to change though the thoughts for the CPD come from them.”* Respondent coded HT001 also in an interview replied *“Some of our teachers have a serious to change. They always think that the practices of their time, as they like to say, are the best. They hardly acquire the new methodologies, hardly learn English and hardly want to apply what they fetched in the trainings from both outside of within the school including the use of new text books.”*

Asked about how they get to know all this information about such kind of teachers, she replied “It is very simple. I used to be a primary teacher too, I do supervise the lessons and I can easily spot a teacher who is ready in a lesson. On top of that, I consistently check the students’ notebooks and I compare what I see in the notebooks with the content in the textbooks and I can see the difference.”

The researcher again asked a question about how the head teachers support the underperforming teachers and encourage the highly performing. The respondent coded HT001 replied “For underperforming teachers, I converse with them and tell them about how important is the CPDs.

This is to encourage them to actively participate in CPDs for their professional growth. For highly performing ones, I encourage them and ask them to help their fellows. Sometimes, we also provide rewards for them.” Respondent coded HT004 replies “During the CPD time, we share experiences and encourage them to try to learn from their colleagues” Respondent coded HT002 mentioned: *“Motivation, inspiration and trainings are key to supporting this category of teachers”*

Respondent coded HT007 reported: *“We support them by training them through CPDs and COPs in the areas that they do not perform well”*. Respondent coded HT008 lastly replied “For underperforming teacher, I closely talk with them about the challenges they face in their teaching in order to help them to overcome these challenges, I give them what they need to have such as materials, advice and guidance. I then do coaching and mentoring myself to ensure that they are fully equipped. Finally, I do thorough follow up to ensure they practice what we have agreed.”

In general, it was noticed that the head teachers have adopted CPD as a way of supporting underperforming teachers, despite of any other means that could be adopted such as individual mentoring and coaching which so far was adopted by one of the eight respondents.

In this line, the researcher agreed that CPD is important to improve the teachers’ professional growth as indicated in the previous studies that influencing Professional Development for Educators is unceasingly key to improved employment. Macleod (2020) and for the spotted underperforming teachers, there is a need of identifying their areas for improvement and adopt different restorative ways to build the teachers capacity such as peer mentoring and coaching,

individual training in specific areas of performance as means of assuring that individual professionals are up-to-date (Friedman & Phillips, 2004)

4.4.3. Examine head teachers' analysis and assessment of the impact of their support practices teaching and learning, and student achievement

The findings of this research extended to exploring the head teachers' assessment on their own professional practices' impact that applies in supporting teachers to do their work. Interview questions and follow up questions have been exposed to all eight head teachers and their responses have been recorded. The findings indicate that there are a number of factors that have been influencing the head teachers along the journey of their headship aligning to supporting teachers.

Theme 1: The importance of head teachers' continuous professional development in the enhancement of their professional capacity to provide support to teachers and learners

The head teachers who participated in this research have had time to receive different capacity building to empower them to provide professional support to teachers. A half of the 8 have benefited from intensive in-service training on effective professional head teachership especially on leading teaching and learning from various development partners namely VVOB and The Wellspring foundation for Education.

Respondent coded HT002 reported "I have been empowered on effective head teachership for more than two years. These trainings shaped me in organizing the school activities on a daily basis. I got opportunity to learn to be a servant leader than being served. I also learnt that my first role in a school lies in leading teaching and learning then the remaining duties. This empowerment helped change my mind, since before, I was feeling that the school exists because I am the head teacher. With this I knew that I am the head teacher because the school is established, and the school means the existence of the learners and if the learners exist, teachers exist too, then I come as their servant to coordinate all their activities."

This head teacher added that he was inspired through experience grown his practices on supporting teachers on a daily basis. He testified that he left his ego of thinking that he knew everything and has been humble to learn from his team, intimately interact with them which drew a sustainable path to support them professionally. He said "The professional development received shaped me in a way of learning from my team and understood that being the head

teacher did mean to know everything. Learning from my team has helped to clearly support them in my position of the headship of the school. I used the same learning to support my teachers to do their job well. I can confirm that the current professional practices are the result of the heavy and consistent empowerment from both Wellspring and VVOB both on the training site and especially on the support provided on the ground at school where they were observing our daily activities and mentored me on effective ways to do things”.

The respondents highlighted that mentorship enabled them to innovate new strategies to lead teaching in their schools and have been able to assess the impact that they are making in terms of supporting the teachers to do their job. Respondents coded HT002 and 008 reported:

“My support to teaching and learning has been very important. This is because performance has increased from when I started providing it. To illustrate this, I can tell you that our school was among 10 best performing schools in Rubavu District including boarding schools.” In addition, *“Teachers are hardworking to enjoy good performance of learners. There is competition in my school amongst teachers. I do appreciate this.”*

Respondents coded HT003 and 004 have reported that they assess the impact of the support they provide to teachers by analyzing the results of the] performance with *“Yes. I assess the impact of my support to teachers by analyzing results”*, *“Yes, by analyzing the performance of learners”*

Respondent HT005 added: *“My positive impact is proven by the students’ performance”*

Respondent HT004 declared *“I cannot say that I do nothing in terms of supporting my teachers, I try my best in reference to what I learnt from university, little information I learn from my colleague head teachers, the training manuals I borrowed from BLF, VVOB and Wellspring and the research that I do myself to see what I can do to fill my responsibilities but still I get stuck in some areas. Actually, I was happy that there existed PLCs on the level of the sector. Initially these PLCs contained the smart content that I needed and could learn from for enriching mu level of ability to support my teachers and my school in general.*

But this time, since BLF has reduced the intervention and follow up, PLC remained by name only and is carrying irrelevant activities compared to its initial purposes. This has discouraged me and I resolved to adapt myself to the system, but I am seriously lacking a deep professional shape to enable to confidently fit in my responsibilities of the school head teacher”.

This head teacher has evoked a number of areas where he has been experiencing shortcomings in terms of building the teachers' capacity in their profession. He said: "Among the areas that I still need to improve is my ability to use the REB lesson observation sheet. This has become a challenge especially in terms of identifying competences being developed in the lessons and how to support the teachers to develop them effectively. I am also challenged by the identification of SEN and how the teacher organizes their lessons to support these types of learners and in case of need I am lacking enough package to support teachers on the best way to handle different levels of learners in a class, sometimes in a congested classroom. Sometimes it creates headache and I opt my way to talking about general items such as filling the pedagogical documents, make a good plan of the chalkboard, sit students in pairs of girls and boys. So I skip those items that I find challenging in order to limit the way teachers may consider my skills."

The researcher found this statement as another factor that shapes the head teachers support that alienates the professionalism in this field instead of being an opportunity, due to the lack of confidence and empowerment on the side of the head teachers. It revealed that the head teachers who did not go through a deep empowerment on effective head teachership of teaching and learning have gone through critical challenges in their responsibilities hence are entitled to receive continuous support to boost their headship and confidence so that they dig into the professional support worth to teachers.

Theme 2: Analysis and recognition of head teacher's professional support to teachers and the impact generated through various activities

The researcher through interview questions wanted to know how the head teachers could spot if the support provided to teachers yielded positive fruits. This question was intentional to measure if the head teachers make a follow up on the support given or if they only go to teachers in order to demonstrate their presence in the eyes of the teachers without necessarily provide any support.

It also intended to check the head teachers' capacity to weigh the level of the support given and when and to whom they could improve what they have to provide. 65% of the respondents could somewhat show that they could observe the changes in the teachers through different areas of teaching and learning.

For example, respondent coded HT001, 004 and 005 have uttered: *“I know that the support that I have provided yielded positive fruits when there is an increase of learners’ performance”*. Respondent coded HT002, on his side has revealed that he only gets to know that his support to teachers has generated positive results when teachers adopt adequate teaching methods *“Methodology change done by teachers”*. Respondent coded HT003 has mentioned, with a very short answer, that he relies on the students results to be sure that the support provided to teachers has been impactful. *“Next students’ results”* Looking at these responses, it has been time to the researcher to bring in additional questions to make sure the interviewees have captured well the essence of these question.

One of the additional question was to know if the head teachers ever set targets with teachers with thorough follow up. The participants seemed to agree on this but only respondents coded HT006 and 008 have indicated evidences of the targets established with teachers and how they progressively followed up the processes of implementing these targets. Both of them have indicated the evidence of three consecutive regular lesson observations with the use of REB lesson observation sheet, they indicated where they have agreed with the teachers for the next lesson targets and how each of the two of three targets have been improved or revised.

Respondent coded HT008 reported: *“I rarely observe lessons and miss to set a target with a teacher. These are three consecutive lesson observations for one teacher of P4B that I conducted in February this year of 2024. I with the teacher have agreed on the management of the learners’ behavior in a classroom with establishment class rules and consistent follow up of these rules and administer positive sanctions in order to allow the implementation of self-discipline instead of using canes and sticks. This is the second lesson observation whereby we resumed from the previous and examined the development of the agreed targets. You see that here, we have appreciated the establishment of the class rules, and the way the teacher has started to follow them up with some consistency. The following targets now were to increase the consistence was assessed on this third sheet. Here she had improved well. And you see here that the three observations have been done in weeks. This helped us to thoroughly make sure this journey does not last long and one of us tends to forget what we agreed on. Again, even if we had finished with these targets, but whenever I go to class to observe the following lessons, I don’t miss to go back to the previous targets to check whether the teacher is still implementing the support I gave her.”*

The findings of this research again have been shaped in terms of exploring that empowerment/mentorship of the head teachers as one of the factors that shape the professional support that they provide to teachers as of a paramount to enrich their capacity and impact they owe to teachers. She mentioned “I owe credits to partners who supported my growth in my work. Wellspring has given a key to open the effective leadership of this school. My confidence is the result of the trainings and mentorship that I received from both the training center and the follow up they made here at school along four years of head teachership training. I benefited from them very much.”

The findings on the way head teachers perceive the impact of their professional support activities in relation to teaching and learning, and student achievement confirm the existing literature.

4.4. Summary of the chapter

The chapter dealt with findings about the research questions under the topic which is factors influencing head teachers professional support practices to primary teachers in Rubavu District. Themes were developed under each research question to reiterate the findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the findings' summary, the conclusions drawn and recommendations that the researcher suggested to different institutions for further improvement.

5.2. Summary of the findings

This research aimed at *“Exploring factors influencing head teachers professional support practices to teachers in primary schools of Rubavu, Rwanda.”* This study was built around three objectives including the (i) identification of head teachers' perceptions on drivers of the head teachers' professional practices, (ii) finding out the head teachers' activities carried out in line with professional support practices to primary school teachers in Rubavu District and (iii) examining head teachers' perceptions on the impact of their professional support practices to teaching and learning, and student achievement. The most concerned people selected to participate in this research are head teachers. There were eight head teachers, four of whom have been mentored on effective school leadership and four other who did not benefit from mentorship on effective school leadership. To conduct this research, interviews and documentation were used to collect data. The data collected were analyzed and presented qualitatively through thematic approach which were developed on the basis of the following research questions:

- What are the indicators and drivers for head teachers' professional support practices primary teachers?
- What are the enabling factors that shape head teachers to support primary school teachers in Rubavu District?
- How do head teachers assess the impact of their support practices teaching and learning, and student achievement?

Under the research question number one, three themes were developed

Theme 1: The school direction (mission and vision) as the main indicators and driver of the head teachers' professional support practices to teachers

The research has indicated that the school direction functions as the main driver of the head teachers professional support practice to teachers based on their fundamental importance to schools, particularly on teaching and learning. It was indicated during interview that the head

teachers take the school direction into account as key to establish the roadmap of the activities that help them to professionally support the teachers. It was noted in different responses, leading schools was randomly done and each head teachers formulated the leadership a way that was based on their prior experience without any kind of empowerment. However, the findings indicated that the head teachers who did not receive mentorship on effective head teachership have not gone far in the skillset of drafting and implementing the school direction as observed even in the documentation and during interviews.

Theme 2: The use of the school strategic improvement plan as the specific booster of the head teachers' professional practices towards teaching and learning

The school improvement plan was found to be the basic in driving the head teachers support to teachers, specifically in boosting and improving academic areas. The findings of this research indicated that among other supports provided to teachers included involving them in the design of the school improvement plans

However, the findings noted that the head teachers who did not receive mentorship, lack the ability of drafting effective school improvement plan, that respond to the needs of schools and the communities around, hence make the school staff out the design and implementation of this plan.

Theme 3: The contribution of leadership styles in the increase of head teachers' professional practices

This research indicated that servant leadership was adopted by the trained head teachers and helped them to adequately and professionally support the teachers of primary in Rubavu schools. It was observed this shift from other forms of leadership to servant leadership helped the head teachers to influence the teaching staff and changed them into comfortable workforce as they felt welcomed in various areas of the school direction and development such as leading and being delegated in some of the activities, for instance leading morning assemblies, attending meetings representing the head teachers. In addition, the head teachers no longer behaved as the only decision makers in the school matters, instead they involve the teachers.

On the other hand, the head teachers who did not receive the training on head teachership have been struggling on the way to share responsibilities, remained with transactional leadership and fail to provide support to teachers' growth such as power delegation, making decisions.

Under research question two, also three themes were developed

Theme 1: The head teachers' professional practices and activities related to supporting teaching and learning

The research indicated, in response to the question about the number of teachers the head teachers visit in a week, a month or a term; that the head teachers regularly visit teachers in various periods but differ in a number of teachers they visit depending on the volume of the teaching staff in each school and the internal organization in each school.

In addition to lesson observations, “*The provision of the after lesson observation feedback.*” Was found to be another critical factor that shaped the head teachers' intervention to supporting teachers along their work. It was noticed that head teachers possess a variety of means to provide feedback to teachers by sitting together, provide time for teachers to start the conversation by talking about the lesson process, what went well and what to be improved then the head teachers provides what was observed.

However, the researchers' observations via the documents presented in regards with the lesson observation and the provision of the feedback, have revealed to a certain extent that the feedback is rarely constructive and sometimes teachers were not happy and hardly agreed with the observers' comments. It was noticed that a number of head teachers expressed the provision of the constructive feedback only by words but barely put what they talk into practices.

Theme 2: The use of English as a medium of communication to emphasize instruction and support to teaching and learning

The findings in this research indicated that most of the head teachers use Kinyarwanda while talking to the teachers and during the feedback session. The findings indicated that this is the same in various schools both in classroom setting and outside. A few exceptional school whose head teachers have come up with strong measures of consistence. Many responses highlighted that Kinyarwanda makes the understanding better than English. But on the other hand, the lack of use of English in various school activities such as lesson observations, feedback and during CPDs prevents and reduces the confidence of head teachers to provide adequate support to teachers thus affects teaching and learning processes which is the origin of the poor performance of the learners. It was again noticed that English as a language of instruction has been a block to some head teachers to effectively support their teachers due to the different reasons including working background and age.

Theme 3: The school organization of teacher's continuous professional development

The findings which generated this theme revealed the teacher continuous professional development as another driver of the head teachers' professional practice support to teachers. Asked a question about how the head teachers support the underperforming teachers and encourage the highly performing. The respondents replied that they organize constructive conversation with them in person and advise for different opportunities they can use to raise their level of performance.

However, the findings indicated the head teachers have been reluctant to participating in the course of CPDs and have little information on what happen in there and what should be placed on the priority list in order to support the demanding teachers.

Under the third research question, two themes were developed

Theme 1: The importance of head teachers' continuous professional development in the increase their professional capacity to provide support to teachers and learners

The findings of this research indicated the necessity of empowering head teachers to enable them to effectively achieve their responsibilities. During interviews, it was observed that the head teachers who went through mentorship on effective head teachership have responded to interview questions confidently which confirmed their firmness in the professional support practices to teachers in spite of other blind spots. They also showed documents that witnessed the impact of the mentorship received and the support they have been providing to teachers through regular classroom lesson observations, delegation of different responsibilities, and the provided feedback to teachers.

On the other hand, the head teachers who did not receive mentorship expressed the gaps in their headship, either in the development of the major documents or the provision constructive feedback or the delegation of responsibilities. However, there was another type of mentored head teacher who showed lack in terms improvement in leadership style as results of the education background and age.

Theme 2: Analysis of the recognition of head teacher's professional support to teachers and of the impact generated through various head teachers' activities

The findings on this theme provided responses to the question that sought to explore if the head teachers make a follow up on the support given or if they only go to teachers in order to

demonstrate their presence in the eyes of the teachers without necessarily provide any support. It also intended to check the head teachers' capacity to weigh the level of the support given and when and to whom they could improve what they have to provide. The findings indicated that the head teachers barely could observe the changes in the teachers through different areas of teaching and learning. They thoughtfully believe the provided support has given positive impact without necessarily conducting thorough exploration. Sometimes the students' results serve the head teachers as the evidence of their support to teachers, but they could neither prove that they regularly check the change in teaching methodologies nor seek feedback from teachers.

5.3. CONCLUSIONS

The current research was conducted in the aim of exploring factors influencing head teachers' professional support practices teachers in primary schools of Rubavu. From the findings, research questions were analysed under thematic approach where different themes were developed to generate factors that shape the head teachers' professional support practices teachers and conclusions were drawn under each research question. The themes developed under the first research question allowed to conclude that head teachers as instructional leaders, emphasize and regularly reflect on the school direction (vision and mission), and school strategic improvement plans in order to implement the scheduled activities hence, the effective support to teachers.

The conclusions also go to the establishment of consistent continuous professional in-school sessions such as PLCs, CPDs and CoPs and the availability of the head teachers in those sessions in the aim of increasing the capacity of both head teachers and team at school to make the head teachers' support more relevant to teachers. The servant leadership practices serve as the fit for head teachers to effectively support teachers since they are involved in the whole school life under this leadership style.

The themes developed under the second research question gave room to draw conclusions that the head teachers' practical analysis and assessment of their impact on teachers provide more insight to the future endeavors. The increase of head teachers' skills in their professional practice, their consistent classroom activities such as lesson observation and provision of constructive feedback and the consistent use and encouragement to use English as a medium

of instruction, serve as pillar to building the teachers ability to perform into classroom settings and enable the head teachers to identify the areas that need more investments.

Finally, the themes developed under the third research question led to conclude that head teachers are the key to opening the doors of the schools' success. Their modeling behavior increasing their professional development, on one hand leads to the successful support to teachers and generates a more professional ground to teachers to also learn and grow, but on the other hand it might lead to a collapse school and failure of the teaching staff.

Then, the head teacher effort to evaluate and analyze how their professional practices have been taken into account among the teachers, consists of the top factors that shape their professional support to teachers as they aware of where they have to improve in their regular practices. However, there were a number of blind spots to be addressed in a professional manner to continue influencing the head teachers' support practices teachers including the use of English as medium of instructions and the implementation of CPD as a common means to developing teachers experience and capacity that needs full exploitation from the head teachers.

5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's conclusions led to the creation of the following suggestions for a number of organizations, including stakeholders such as development partners in education, practitioners (Head teachers), and policy makers (MINEDUC and its agencies).

5.4.1. Education policy makers

Recommendations go to MINEDUC and education agencies as the policy makers to establish policies that aim at enhancing the head teachers' consistent empowerment in terms of assisting their teachers professionally through regular practices and assess whether they are being implemented as required. There should be establishment of a regular empowerment platform, either physical or online that requires all the head teachers to attend mentorship and assessment should be administered in order to sharpen the head teachers' skills in effective head teachership with a focus on teaching and learning. This platform would regulate different issues including the proficiency in English, their attendance in CPDs, the regularity of lesson observations and provision of positive feedback, the inclusion of the major elements in the school direction and school improvement plan. On top of these endeavors, REB should establish the consistence in the course of PLCs and insist on their functionality at the sector

and district level with thorough follow up in order to ensure they are supporting not only the new enrolled head teachers but also reinfluencing the in-service head teachers to polish what they do on a daily basis. REB should also work closely with the development partners and establish mechanisms of following up the trainings and empowerment activities provided in order to maintain their sustainability rather than letting them perish as if they never happened.

5.4.2. Head teachers

The head teachers should ensure that the establishment of the school direction and the school improvement plan are well designed with participation of teachers and the content about the teaching and learning. The head teachers should put in their own efforts and welcome empowerment from different sources in different areas of the head teachership with insistence on the teaching and learning areas as they are the main reasons for the existence of the school.

Head teachers should emphasize on their availability in the activities that require professional support and interventions such as CPDs in the aim of lending their hands on the course of each activity and provide timely support as necessary as possible. This would help the reduction of the gaps often notice late.

The head teachers should also play a role model in the activities of teaching, implement flexibility and encouragement at the time of the provision of the feedback in order to motivate teachers to make efforts in the future endeavors. Head teachers should also attend on a regular basis the PLCs and suggest the areas in which they need empowerment so that they are supported in professional growth. Finally, head teachers need to make efforts in the use of English as a medium of instruction.

5.4.3. Development partners in education

The development partners have played a prominent role in the support of the head teachers enabling them to become more efficient in their roles of headship especially in the lead of teaching and learning. They have been providing series of mentorship and empowerment but when they leave, their activities seem to have never existed in the schools.

The research recommends and encourages them to establish sustainable systems aiming at the maintenance of their activities in the schools such follow up activities in partnership with the district, sectors and REB in order to ensure the activities rendered for the school improvement remain live in the beneficiaries. They should also establish mechanisms of assessment of the

impact of their activities in the length of a determined duration after they have left the schools so that they ensure that what they have done has generated vibrant outcomes and has impacted the schools.

5.5. Suggestions for further researches

Given the findings of this research on the inconveniencies of English as a language of instruction on the provision of the feedback between head teachers and teachers, and its use during the CPD activities, another research may be carried out on exploring the impact of the language of instruction on the classroom courses delivery and school performance. Further research may also go to exploring the effect of CPD on teacher capacity development in teaching career.

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APPENDICES

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UNIVERSITY OF RWANDA

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

EXPLORING FACTORS AFFECTING SCHOOL LEADERS' PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT PRACTICES TO ENHANCE PRIMARY SCHOOLACHIEVEMENT

By: TURATSINZE Emmanuel

Registration number: 12000007

A research proposal submitted to College of Education, the School of Education in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Master of Education (MEd) in Educational Leadership and Management of the University of Rwanda.

Supervisor: Asst. Professor Nduwayo NDUWAYO

2024

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Appendix I: Research Authorization Letter



UNIVERSITY of
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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

TURATSINZE Emmanuel
MASTERS OF EDUCATIONAL
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT
REG: 220020107
TEL: 0788648990
Email: turamusol67@gmail.com
12th March, 2024

The Mayor
Rubavu District
Western Province
Rwanda



Re: Request for Permission of Data Collection

Dear Mayor,

I am humbly addressing my utmost expressions to you in the request of the permission of collecting data for the fulfillment of my research project for the award of the post graduate degree of Masters of Educational Leadership and Management

In fact, I am writing my thesis on “Exploring factors shaping school leaders’ professional support practices to teachers in primary schools of RUBAVU District.

This research will extent to some pure primary schools and Groupe Scolaires whose head teachers have received mentorship and others have not received mentorship.

The research will inform the factors that shape the school professional support to teachers and will suggest improvement needed.

Attached is the Ethical Clearance provided by the **Research and Innovation Unit**

I am looking forward to your permission.

Yours Faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emmanuel Turatsinze'.

Emmanuel Turatsinze

Appendix II: Research Ethical Clearance

RETHC: Ethical Research Approval Form



*Directorate of Research and Innovation
(UR-DRI)*

SECTION D: Ethical Review by Chairperson of Review Committee

To be completed by chairperson of University or College RESC (whichever applies):

[Ring the identification letter of one statement]

- ✓ This research may proceed without further review
This research may not proceed; it clearly breaches ethical guidelines without providing justification, or it contravenes a decision already taken by the RESC.
This research should be referred to the full RESC.

Reasons:

Signature: NDABAGA Eugene1 Digitally signed by NDABAGA Eugene1
Date: 2024.02.10 22:46:14
+02'00' Name: _____

Chairperson University or College RES-C (whichever applies)

Date: 10 / 02 / 24
dd mm yy

To be completed after a full University or College RESC meeting (whichever applies):

[Ring the identification letter of one]

- ✓ This research may proceed
This research may proceed if the conditions below are implemented.
This research may not proceed.

Reasons (and conditions, if appropriate):

Signature: NDABAGA Eugene1 Digitally signed by NDABAGA Eugene1
Date: 2024.02.10 22:46:14
+02'00' Name: _____

Chairperson

University or College RES-C (whichever applies)

Date: 10 / 02 / 24
dd mm yy

Appendix IV: Research Questionnaire

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

Dear respondents,

Re: Request for data

I am a Master student at University of Rwanda-College of Education (UR-CE). I am carrying out research on the following topic “Exploring factors influencing school leaders professional support practices to teachers in primary schools of Rubavu, Rwanda.” I am therefore seeking your collaboration by answering to the set question items. Your answers will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will only be used for this research purpose. So, be as much as honest as you can.

Thank you!

SECTION A: Profile of respondent

1. **Gender:** Male ☐ Female ☐ Other ☐
2. **Position:** DOS ☐ HT ☐
3. **Educational qualification:**
 - A2 Level ☐
 - A1 Level ☐
 - A0 Level ☐
 - Master level ☐
3. **How long have you been a school leader in this school?**
 - a) Less than a year ☐
 - b) Two years ☐
 - c) More than two years ☐

SECTION B: Tell us about the drivers of school leaders professional practices.

- i. Probe about the following aspects:
 - a. Does the school have the school direction? If yes, describe the school direction
 - b. Does your school have annual school improvement plan for each academic year?
 - c. How are teachers involved in the design of the school improvement plan?

- d. How did you assess teachers' needs to feed in the professional development plan?
- e. Tell us about your capacity (knowledge and skills) to provide professional support to teachers at your school. Did you receive mentorship or training sessions to know more how best to support your teachers?
- f. In your opinion, how does the school direction help the school leaders to support the teachers' classroom practices?
- g. To what extent are teachers involved in the design of the school improvement plan?
- h. Does needs assessment help in designing the professional support to teachers?

SECTION C: School leaders' activities carried out in line with professional support practices to primary school teachers in Rubavu District

Tell us about how you support professionally your teachers:

Probe:

- a. How many teachers do you observe in a week? A month? A term?
- b. To what extent are you confident to do classroom observation? Provide details to your response.
- c. What is your focus when you do classroom observations?
 - Pedagogical documents including lesson plans
 - Teaching methodology
 - Teacher-student interactions
 - Activities that develop higher levels of thinking
 - Learners engagement and interpersonal skills among students
 - Sitting arrangements
 - Group and pair work activities
- d. How do you support underperforming teachers in your school? How do you maintain the highly performing teachers into their pace?
- e. Describe the process through which you provide feedback to your teachers after lesson observations
- f. In which language do you provide your feedback? Why?

SECTION D: Examine the perceptions on the school leaders' impact of their professional support practices provided to primary school teachers in Rubavu District

Can you kindly describe how you perceive the impact of your professional support activities in relation to teaching and learning, and student achievement at your school?

Probe:

- a. How would you rate your own professional support to teachers in your school?
- b. How do you know that the support you have provided has yielded fruits?
- c. How do you ensure that teachers are growing into their profession?
- d. How do you know your support to teaching is appreciated?
- e. What challenges do you face while supporting teaching and learning in your school?
- f. Can you assess the impact of your support to teaching and learning, and student achievement at your school?

DOCUMENT REVIEW FOR HEAD TEACHERS/DOS

No	Checkpoint	Yes	No	Comments
1	Availability of the school direction statements			
2	Availability of teachers needs assessment			
3	Evidence of Annual School Improvement Plan			
4	Evidence of the implementation of school improvement plan			
5	Evidence of regular lesson observations with the use of REB lesson observation format			
6	Evidence of the feedback on the lesson observation			
7	Evidence of professional development sessions held			
8	Evidence of regular teachers attendance in CPDs			