

School-Level Literacy Planning in Sri Lanka: Leadership Practices, Challenges, and Strategic Responses

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Abstract

This study explored school-level planning practices in Sri Lanka in terms of challenges confronted by principals, and effective implementation strategies. This study used a qualitative case study design. The sample was conveniently selected which comprised on 20 principals which participated in a short course on school management conducted by the Department of Educational Leadership and Management at the Open University of Sri Lanka. Research instruments included online questionnaires, discussion forums, self-reflections, focus group discussions, and analysis of one-year and five-year school plans. By using these tools, data were collected and analysis was done by applying descriptive statistics for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data. Findings showed that in collaboration with School Management Committees, principals actively develop strategic and annual plans aligned with Ministry of Education guidelines. However, certain challenges limit their efficiency including provision of less resources, modest stakeholder participation, insufficient teacher training, less time, and problems caused by policy changes and political influence. Beyond these, the findings indicated that, regardless of these challenges, principals implemented a range of mitigation strategies i.e. building the staff capacity, using evidence-based data to make decisions, working together with stakeholders, preparing more flexible planning, and allocating resources through partnerships. It concluded the significance of strong school leadership and recommended that policymakers may make the area of resource allocation stronger, support schools while planning phase, provide continuous professional development.

Keywords: *Leadership, Planning, Strategic planning, School Management Stakeholder Engagement, Continuous Capacity Building/CPD*

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Introduction

Nowadays, school leadership is seen as an important indicator to educational improvements. It covers overall educational effectiveness. It is also linked with student achievements, teachers' professional development, and increased performance of institutions. Hansen (2010) emphasized that beyond daily administrative tasks, the role of educational leader is significant to guide personnel in attainment of micro and macro levels educational goals. Across the world, leadership plays a significant role in school improvement, which leads to encouraging education systems, focusing on leadership skills development as a policy goal. In Sri Lanka, this practice is reflected in some initiatives, such as the implementation of a short course on school management by the Department of Educational Leadership and Management, Faculty of Education, The Open University of Sri Lanka in 2022. This program was mainly designed for principals to develop their managerial and leadership competencies. It supports their professional growth and increases school effectiveness as well. School-level planning was emphasized as a fundamental aspect of effective school management among the critical areas in this course.

The National Education Commission (2020) mentioned that decentralization of power provides a huge responsibility for school autonomy regarding their own development. Therefore School-level planning is a broad process that allows schools to define their visions, set priorities, and allocate resources to meet the short- and long-term future goals. Cuckle and Broadhead (2003) advocate that school-level planning is not all about administrative tasks and it is also about promoting collaboration, strategic thinking, and adaptability. In addition to that effective planning supports local schools to align their needs with the national educational goals, making equal educational opportunities available to all.

Although the school-level planning is important, in Sri Lanka, it faces multiple challenges. These include resource disparities, over emphasis on rigid curriculum patterns, and ineffective professional development prospects that often cause the useless operations of plans. Furthermore, bureaucratic autonomy and political involvement adversely affect the authenticity of the planning processes (Meyers & VanGronigen, 2019; Strunk et al., 2016). In under-resource areas, these challenges are worse where there is less infrastructural facilities and stakeholder involvement is very poor which makes planning process more difficult. Subsequently, these challenges and dynamics of school-level planning become a

prominent area of research and provoked researchers to conduct in-depth study. Many studies presented findings on non-flexible centrally design curricula which are not always aligned with the diverse needs of schools, especially those in rural or under-resource areas. This disparity and inflexibility result in some difficulties in curriculum delivery and active engagement of students. Furthermore, imbalances in provision and allocation of resource allocation, training of teachers, and infrastructure further complicate the planning process.

Taking this situation into account, the situation described so far, present paper emphasized on the current state of school-level planning in selected Sri Lankan schools, based on the participants of study (principals) who took part in the short course on school management. This study exclusively examines three areas: a) how school level planning is executed, b) what sort of challenges are faced by school leaders, and c) the effective strategies applied to employ planning. This exploration is done with the dissemination of information on role of leadership and planning to bring improvement in schools in decentralized education systems. The findings of this study will identify practical steps to enhance planning, improve stakeholder involvement, and enhance institutional capacity for sustainable development in education.

Literature Review

School-level planning is considered as a key instrument to bring improvement in educational quality to guide schools toward attainment of clear educational goals (Akpan, 2011; Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, 2020). Successful planning offers clear direction to schools. It also reduces uncertainty and helps educators to set educational priorities into practical strategies to improve teaching, learning, and overall development process. Literature has shown that planning is not just an administrative task, it is rather a strategic, collaborative process which is influenced by school's context, leadership, and involvement of stakeholders (Lunenburg, 2010; Pihillegedara & Kumari, 2022). According to Garza et al. (2014) and Pulita et al. (2021) the role of principal role is crucial to bring improvement in alignment of resources, monitoring of human/non-human resources, improving communication and increasing quality through efficient planning only. However, there are certain contextual challenges i.e. bureaucratic pressures, resource constraints, and the lack of stakeholder participation which influence planning processes (Meyers & VanGronigen, 2019; Strunk et al., 2016). That's why it is vital to identify that these dynamics are necessary to provide a critical foundation to

understand how leadership-based planning progresses in school improvement.

Conceptual Foundations and Leadership Roles

This lays emphasis to understand planning as an indispensable process to help schools grow towards attainment of goals and students' learning outcomes. Moreover, school-level planning reduces uncertainty and provides a direction to make institutional goals more actionable (Akpan, 2011; & Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, 2020). From the conceptual perspectives of planning, its managerial and strategic importance can be identified. According to Akpan (2011), planning has been recognized as a straightforward process that navigates the actions for achieving organizational goals. In the same way, the National Education Commission (2016) specified planning as the purposeful design and a mechanism for achieving school objectives. Researchers such as Goodstein (2011) and Juwariah & Kurniatun (2021) explain that for organizational success, there should be an essential systematic arrangement for planning. The role of educational planning is the collaboration of administrative tasks and the process of increasing productivity (Aljondi, 1999).

Planning is more complex within the school context than in industrial settings, where targets are clearly defined and time-bound (Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, 2020). The effectiveness of the planning is determined by the level of stakeholder involvement, allocation of resources, and the frequency of the monitoring process in the progress of the educational goals. School principals play a critical role in implementing these planning processes. Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003) mentioned a direct relationship between principal leadership, school climate, and student achievement. Lunenburg (2010) emphasized the functions of leadership, such as planning, organizing, leading, and monitoring, that are essential for school-level management. Pulita et al. (2021) outlines that principals are responsible for ensuring effective school-based management as managers, administrators, and supervisors. Some studies consistently revealed that stakeholder involvement improves planning effectiveness (Pihillegedara & Kumari, 2022; Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, 2020). Principals are required to manage instructional leadership with administrative responsibilities by building collaboration among teachers, parents, and the community. Further school-level planning strengthens commitment and the overall implementation of strategic plans.

Influencing Factors on Planning

Worldwide, Researchers are often paying attention to how leadership, stakeholder involvement, and real-world conditions influence the process of educational planning, and how it works in a real context. In Kenyan schools, principals play a major role in resource allocation and priority setting. This indicates that effective leadership contributes significantly to strategic planning and implementation (Murugi and Mugwe, 2023). Strunk et al. (2015) analyzed 206 U.S. school plans and found some challenges in school improvement efforts, observed that supports in technical assistance were not always linked to higher-quality plans. DeMatthews and Wang (2023) state how cognitive biases influence principals' decisions, and they suggested planning guardrails to improve SIP development.

Research also shows that instructional leadership and data-driven planning improve school quality. According to Fibrianti et al. (2025) there is a positive impact of instructional leadership and data-based planning on school performance in Indonesia. Parallel findings are revealed by Rwanda (Odette & Andala, 2022) and Kenya (Amukowa, 2017; Ngetich, 2019) where their studies highlighted that in successful planning implementation there is a significant role of leadership capacity and involvement of stakeholders. Several investigators focused on and explored barriers that also hinder effective planning. In a report by Amukowa (2017) and Ngetich (2019) they indicated that there are limited resources and tight budgets in Kenyan schools, and their leadership roles are sometimes not clear or conflicting, which creates problems. According to Chemwei et al. (2014) these challenges get worse due to poor communication and unsupportive work cultures. Likewise, Meyers and VanGronigen (2019) indicated that bureaucratic pressures are significantly challenging barrier to effective planning.

Limitations in the process of school-level planning are explored by several scholars. In this regard, Meyers and VanGronigen (2019) pointed out that due to bureaucratic expectations, principals are frequently involved in "satisficing" behaviour, producing "good enough". However, in short-cycle planning, there is limited monitoring which provoked the necessity for stronger training in leadership (Meyers et al., 2023). Not all research focuses on the same direction. Some other pointed put the significance of communication skills of leaders. In this regard, Kawinzi (2024) indicates that to put strategic plan into action, communication skills of leaders matter a lot. In some other contexts, resources significantly

matter a lot (Afey, 2019). Other factors, including school structure and how resources are allocated, have less influence and direct impact on outcomes.

Although literature emphasizes on importance of school leadership and planning, there are some gaps which are still not filled. Very few studies seek impact of schools over a certain time to see how student achievement is affected by planning in the long term. Additionally, there are inconsistent findings on school structures and allocation of resources which do not fully suggest the need for research and also ignore local contexts. Moreover, regarding South Asia, relevant research is limited even though schools in this region employ very different leadership systems, administrative models, and resources.

Generally, ample amount of research indicates the importance of good planning for better education, strong leadership and better involvement of stakeholders to make planning further valuable. But planning often doesn't work as well because of Limited leadership training, too much focus on rules and paperwork, Unequal or insufficient resources. Moreover, Future studies should consider school leadership training, enhance the inclusivity to involve stakeholders, and new planning approaches to improve schools. Additionally, Policymakers should invest in leadership training and provide enough resources and support to the schools in their planning practices.

Research clearly reported that school leadership plays an important role in increasing planning quality and school improvement. Studies from several countries (Kenya, Rwanda, the U.S., and parts of Asia) consistently demonstrate that principals strongly influence planning processes (Garza et al., 2014; Witziers et al., 2003). However, researchers also point out that real planning is often difficult. Planning is often hard because of bureaucratic pressure and rules, regulations, and policies that should be followed (Strunk et al., 2016; Meyers & VanGronigen, 2019). Another important finding is the identification of common challenges faced by school leaders, including limited resources, communication difficulties, internal conflicts, and insufficient leadership skills (Bickmore et al., 2021; Fibrianti et al., 2025). Therefore, these situations are leading to making new planning models that are more flexible and sensitive to local needs.

Despite the usefulness of existing research, there are several gaps that weaken the evidence. Long-term studies are rare, and most research is short-term studies that cannot show whether high-quality planning actually leads to improving in student outcomes (Huber & Conway, 2015). Certain research studies focus on self-reported data collection tools i.e.

interviews, surveys, documents etc., which usually require more effort in tool construction and reliable data collection.

Schools in every region face unique planning challenges. However, there are limited research on countries of South Asia including Sri Lanka. Large amount of research focuses on countries from East Africa and the U.S., which limits the global generalizability of findings of these studies. Additionally, some contrary findings on resources are elaborated by Kawinzi (2024) who concluded that resources don't matter a lot, but Amukowa (2017) says they matter a lot. Moreover, there is also concern about technological gaps. Particularly, there is lack of evidence-based research on how technology affects planning, monitoring, and decision-making. Finally, leadership and planning theories are operationalized by many studies in a narrow way. Thus, there's no comprehensive model to fully explain all important aspects of school planning.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework explains how quality of school-level planning, implementation of strategic plans, and overall school improvement contributes to overall improvement of school. The main idea is that effective planning comes from strong leadership practices such as instructional leadership, shared decision-making, clear communication, and regular monitoring. These practices improve the quality of planning and support to confirm that plans are carried out as intended.

Within this framework, school leadership includes instructional leadership (Fibrianti et al., 2025; Garza et al., 2014), strategic planning and management (Lunenburg, 2010), participatory governance (Murugi & Mugwe, 2023; Kawinzi, 2024), administrative and supervisory roles (Pulita et al., 2021), and the management of cognitive biases in decision-making (DeMatthews & Wang, 2023). The quality of planning is reflected in clear goals and timelines (Akpan, 2011; NEC, 2016), alignment of resources and strategies (Amukowa, 2017; Ngetich, 2019), use of evidence to guide decisions (Bickmore et al., 2021), authenticity of planning processes (Meyers & VanGronigen, 2019), and the ability to adapt plans through short-cycle planning (Aaron et al., 2024; Meyers et al., 2023).

These relationships cause some factors such as resource adequacy (Chemwei et al., 2014; Afey, 2019), organizational culture and communication patterns (Chemwei et al., 2014), stakeholder engagement (Murugi & Mugwe, 2023), bureaucratic pressures (Strunk et al., 2016), and institutional structures (Kawinzi, 2024). Implementation quality involves how closely planned activities are followed, including the use of

monitoring and feedback mechanisms and short- or long-cycle implementation approaches. Ultimately, the framework links these elements to school improvement outcomes such as student achievement (Witziers et al., 2003; Huber & Conway, 2015), school climate, organizational coherence, and instructional and teacher performance.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the nature of school-level planning implemented in selected schools.
2. To identify the key issues and challenges encountered by school leaders in school-level planning.
3. To explore the specific strategies applied by principals to ensure the smooth implementation of school-level planning.

Methodology

This research was done by using mixed-method approach. This study explored school-level planning through three guiding questions. The first one is the nature of school-level planning implemented in selected schools, and secondly, the challenges faced by school leaders in this process, and finally, the strategies principals used to ensure smooth implementation. To address these questions, a qualitative case study research design was applied, which allows for an in-depth exploration of complex phenomena within real-life contexts. Case studies are particularly appropriate for educational research because they provide a very clear understanding of processes and practices by exploring various sources of evidence. This study was case-focused on principals of selected schools where they were actively involved in doing school-level planning this enabled the researchers to have in-depth and detailed investigation of their experiences, reflections, and leadership strategies.

The focus of this study was principals from 20 schools. They participated in the short course on school management (5th batch) which was organized by the Department of Educational Leadership and Management, Faculty of Education, Open University of Sri Lanka. Participants were selected by using convenient sampling techniques due to accessibility of participants and their relevance to the study objectives.

This study collected data through several data collection procedures and tools employing online questionnaires, discussions, and strategic plans. This helped to ensure triangulation and validity. Basic information and perception of participants was collected through online questionnaires. Online discussion forums were used for building dialogue

and getting their self-reflections which allowed them to share their context-specific personal experiences. Focus group discussions were done to gather data on challenges they encounter while school-level planning and offering solutions collectively. Moreover, one-year implementation plans and five-year strategic plans from the schools were evaluated to know how planning was practically done. These multiple perspectives and aspects of school-level planning and by combining these different sources of evidence were central to the case study design.

Quantitative data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics to summarize demographic characteristics and structured responses. Whereas qualitative data from discussion forums and focus group discussions were analyzed by using systematic coding and thematic analysis to identify patterns and relationships. So, in depth understanding of the phenomenon was done through combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

The researchers followed ethical considerations. Formal approval to conduct this research was sought from the Faculty of Education, Open University of Sri Lanka. Participants were informed about the purpose of study and informed consent was secured from them. Confidentiality and privacy were kept, and participants were assured that their responses would not be leaked and used only for this research purpose. To minimize bias and improve the credibility of results data triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing strategies were used.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Table 1

Demographic Profiles

Demographics	Percentage
Male	60%
Female	40%
25–35 Years of Age	20%
36 and 56 years of age	80%
Bachelor's degree	70%
Master's degree	30%
5–10 years' Work Experience	65%
More than 10 years of experience	35%
Professional Qualifications with PGDE	45%
Professional Qualifications with M.Ed.	30%
Professional Qualifications with PGDEM	10%
Professional Qualifications with M.Sc. in Management	10%
Professional Qualifications with MTE	5%

This table indicated the demographics of participants. Among the 20 principals, male participants were 60% and female were 40%. Majority of age ranged between 36 and 56 years of age, while smaller groups were the 25 to 35 years of age. Regarding academic qualifications, there were 70% participants who held a bachelor's degree and 30% with a master's degree. Their professional experience indicated that 65% had 5 to 10 years' work experience, and 35% had more than 10 years of service. Professional qualifications had variations. The participants with a PGDE degree were 45%, those with an M.Ed were 30%, participants holding PGDEM were 10%, M.Sc. in Management were 10%, and participants holding MTE degree were only 5%. Overall, this table represents that the participants experienced school leaders in mid-to-late career stages and they were able to provide valuable insights and practical perspectives in this research regarding its objectives.

Results on Objective 1 (Nature of School-Level Planning Implemented in Selected Schools)

Theme 1: Five-year strategic plans and annual implementation plans:

The qualitative analysis reflected this theme in which respondents revealed that all principals actively participated in five-year strategic plans and annual implementation plans for their schools. They followed the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education (2020) while planning. *They indicated that "planning is a collaborative process, where principals work with the School Management Committee by ensuring that all school activities and initiatives aimed at achieving educational outcomes are systematically incorporated"*. When these basic steps are done, they submit their plans for formal approval before implementation to the respective Zonal Education Office.

Theme 2: Implementation Phases of plans and Commitment Level :

Different stages involve certain challenges while implementing plans. These occur during different stages of the planning process. Principals encounter challenges during development phase, implementation of plans and evaluation phase. Although the Ministry's guidelines have increased school-level autonomy, liability, transparency, and professional accountability, but even then, these obstacles occur at every stage. Moreover, principals indicated a strong dedication and commitment to implement strategic and goal-oriented practices to improve immediate and the long-term growth of their respective schools.

Results on Objective 2: (Main Issues and Challenges Encountered by School Leaders in School-Level Planning)

Data collected on this objective through focus group discussion and discussion forums is analyzed through a qualitative process involving three stages of thematic analysis:

- **Open coding:** this was done while reviewing participants' responses to identify repeated patterns, which were then coded to depict the main challenges.
- **Category development:** after open coding, their codes were organized into broad categories
- **Thematic coding:** then, primary themes were obtained to provide a clear understanding of the issues faced by school principals during process of school-level planning. The main themes emerged as financial and material resources challenges, engaging stakeholders and maintaining effective communication issue, Human resource management problems, Monitoring and evaluation challenges

Theme 1: Resource Limitation/Financial Challenges: The participants indicated budget and lack of finance are a big hurdle for effective planning. Most of plans cannot be actualized due to lack of financial resources. Shortages of tight budget were big barrier to effective planning. Due to less financial support, sometimes it results in incomplete projects and undermined educational initiatives. Participants indicated the need for provision of ample amount of funds or funding sources for school development process.

Theme 2: Issue of Effective Communication: Principals stated that engaging stakeholders and maintaining effective communication make it difficult to build strong partnerships with parents and community members. There is also low levels of cooperation among stakeholders which results in frequent conflicts causing ineffective planning. Particularly, Weak communication is key challenge to negotiate with relevant stakeholders and manage planning activities efficiently.

Theme 3: Human Resource Management Problems:

Human resource management problems and internal incapacities were also reported as main challenge in planning process. Principals indicated that they were facing problems i.e. *“insufficient teacher training, low staff motivation, and challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified personnel”*. They indicated that these challenges not only influence the quality of planning process but also put bad impact on school-

improvement strategies. Participants also indicated that they “*struggled to allocate sufficient time for thorough planning and reflection*”. However, they had to face additional internal challenges while doing day-to-day administrative tasks, ensuring flexibility and time management. Moreover, rigid plans frequently yielded difficulties for schools to adapt to unexpected situations i.e. changes in policy changes or emergency situations etc.

Theme 4: Monitoring and Evaluation Problems:

There were reliable data systems, due to which monitoring and evaluation became challenging. Due to this, principals could not classify on attainment/non-attainment of goals or track progress in the right direction. They indicated that they were struggling to manage decision-making and assess how well their plans were working without proper data collection or analysis. Some external factors are also involved in it. They also reported that they were having unnecessary involvement from higher authorities, political pressures, and constantly changing education policies. They also pointed out that due to insufficient contingency plans for emergencies, limited provision/use of technology, planning becomes harder.

Results on Objective 3: (Strategies Applied by Principals to Ensure Smooth Implementation of School-Level Planning)

The qualitative data under this objective was also analyzed under themes. This analysis related to the third research objective indicated the use of certain strategies by school principals for effective implementation of school-level planning.

Theme 1: Use of Capacity Building Strategies: Principals indicated that to create a proactive culture of collaboration, accountability, and continuous improvement within the school environment, they organize capacity-building activities and programs. This approach is used by them to empower the personnel. Principals emphasized that: “*successful planning and its implementation depend heavily on the competence and dedication of teachers and other staff members*”. Furthermore, to improve pedagogical skills, leadership capabilities, and awareness of planning processes they also organized school-based professional development programs. These programs were designed to give personnel sense of belongingness and attachment. They were provided with the feelings of active contributors to the school’s strategic vision rather mere implementers. By using this strategy, principals created a strong

foundation for long-term school growth which motivated staff, built their capacities and enhanced confidence.

Theme 2: Integration of Data-Driven Decision-Making Strategy:

Another significant approach was the incorporation of data-driven decision-making into the planning process. Principals used data-driven facts to track progress and adjust when necessitated. It supported them in decision making process with facts and figures. They elaborated that they introduced “*systematic mechanisms for gathering, examining, and utilizing school performance data*”. This assisted them to find out the grey areas for improvement, highlight the gaps, assess the effectiveness and plan the intervention to achieve institutional goals. Application of systematic mechanisms also proved helpful in establishing accountability, increasing transparency and providing a rational basis for resource allocation and utilization for improving the overall efficiency of school-level planning.

Theme 3: Collaboration Strategy: principals used collaboration approach. It was useful for them to work with stakeholders, teachers, community members and parents or the successful implementation of school-level planning. Working through collaboration helped them to get more human resources, construct deep relationships with the community, and assign responsibility for learner accomplishment. Principals created inclusive work environments which helped to reduce resistance, constructed agreements, and helped to ensure that school plans matched the community’s needs and vision/mission of school.

Theme 4: Flexibility and Adaptability Strategies: these two strategies were significantly used by principals. As education changes in all times, i.e. disasters, policies, change, global educational demands, change in SDGs etc., so strict plans are not always practical. Resilience in adjusting educational plans is necessary. According to the findings of this study, resilience was shown by principals while adjusting their plans, preparing backup options, and using technology etc. This helped them to manage in uncertain situations with efficiency and effectiveness.

Theme 5: Strategy to Use Available Resources and Partnerships:

Principals indicated that they tackle the financial constraints by better utilizing available resources through partnerships. They seek partnerships with local NGOs, business organizations and communities from where they can get financial support for their schools. In tight budgets, these

financial collaborations helped them to devise a plan of action and make connections with external communities.

Discussion

Different studies supported the findings of this research. In this regard, Akpan (2011) and Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka (2020) indicated the importance and need of school-level planning to improve educational quality and overall performance of school. This study indicated that principals were actively involved in making both five-year and annual plans. Goodstein (2011) and Juwariah & Kurniatun (2021) also emphasized the important role of planning to manage and guide schools efficiently.

Findings of this study indicated strategies employed by principals to improve outputs and bring efficiency involving teachers, parents, and the community. Pihillegedara and Kumari (2022) also suggested the participatory approach to foster a excellent association with stakeholders.

Nonetheless, principals also faced several issues. These included limited resources, weak involvement of stakeholders, and pressure from external policies etc. Amukowa (2017) and Ngetich (2019) also found that lack of funding and overlapping leadership tasks make the planning process difficult in Kenyan schools.

Similarly, studies have shown that, especially in Sri Lankan school leaders, often focus more on administration than on effective planning. According to Meyers and VanGronigen (2019) principals try to keep the balance between those two.

The mitigation strategies used by teachers proved helpful for them to make their schools ideal places for learning. Their professionalism and clear strategic thinking focused on personnel development, used data for decision making, involved community, organizations/stakeholders, applied flexible approach and sought additional funding resources. Fibrianti et al. (2025) indicated importance of data-based planning which helps to improve school's performance.

Findings revealed that participants applied a well-rounded and practical approach to school-level planning. These practical steps showed their commitment to managing complex leadership and making plans successful with strategic vision. Kawinzi (2024) and Afey (2019) indicated in their reports that shared decision-making is key to successful school planning. The principals' approach of adapting during uncertain or crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic also indicates their

flexibility. Meyers et al. (2023) supports this approach which needs strict monitoring systems.

Nonetheless proactive approaches are followed by principles to manage ongoing systemic challenges. However, these issues are not tackled alone without external support. For example, for unequal access to resources, limited opportunities for professional development, and frequent policy changes continue to affect school planning highlights the need for stronger institutional support. Murugi and Mugwe, (2023) and Odette and Andala (2022) indicated context-specific insights from Sri Lanka. Leadership practices are developed with some structural issues and understanding of these issues leads towards management of complex educational environments

Conclusion and Recommendations

To conclude, school-level planning is more than just administrative work. It requires strong leadership, collaborative engagement, and adaptability. It is a strategic and critical process that requires clear vision, flexibility, and inclusive leadership. School-level planning is a critical process influenced by resources constraints however, responsible leaders strengthen collaboration among stakeholders, planning can become a powerful tool for improving education, and it ensures the long-term improvement of schools.

School leaders address systemic challenges, resources constraints, financial issues, stakeholders' influence and conflict with them, inadequate provision of staff, improper monitoring systems, external pressures and human resource management issues. But with all these issues, principals indicated strong commitment and strategies to plan, implement and use creative ideas of school-level planning which keeps their schools moving ahead towards progress.

The mitigation strategies used by teachers proved helpful for them to make their schools ideal places for learning. They applied a well-rounded and practical approach to school-level planning. Their professionalism and clear strategic thinking focused on personnel development, used data for decision making, involved community, organizations/stakeholders, applied flexible approach and sought additional funding resources. These practical steps showed their commitment to managing complex leadership and making plans successful with strategic vision.

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