



American Journal of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies (AJELPS)

ISSN: 3069-3667 (ONLINE)

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 2 (2026)



PUBLISHED BY
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA

Visible Leadership in Steering School Well-being and Institutional Strengthening: A Review of Literature

Robert Ampomah^{1*}, Benedict Osei-Owusu²

Article Information

Received: May 12, 2026

Accepted: July 18, 2026

Published: August 29, 2026

Keywords

*Engagement, Innovation,
Institutional Strengthening,
Visible Leadership, Well-Being*

ABSTRACT

The study considered how school leaders' visibility can lead to well-being and institutional strengthening. The objective is to contribute to leadership literature on visible leadership, school well-being, and institutional strengthening and how these variables contribute to effective schools. The literature study approach was the methodology used with the purpose of reviewing and analysing relevant literature in the fields. Existing data were analyzed in the form of articles, books, and other library sources using meta-analysis, which require searching, selecting, and evaluating literature relevant to the research topic. The findings of the study indicate that school leaders' visibility is a proven strategy that strengthens content and instruction, promotes a positive learning environment, advances professional growth, and creates a favourable learning environment. Furthermore, when leadership foster participation in the design of well-being initiatives, a sense of ownership and long-lasting change becomes part of the school's culture. In conclusion, it is revealing that frequent leader visibility and fostering well-being build relationships, promote mutual trust and excellence in school.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping the vision, culture, and overall performance of an organization (Muridzi & Dhliwayo, 2025). Educational leadership involves setting clear goals, supporting teaching and learning, fostering collaboration among staff, and creating a safe and inclusive atmosphere that promotes academic excellence and personal development for all learners (Lehmeidi, 2025). School leader's role has evolved for some time now. Today, leadership duties include active engagement in curriculum planning, teacher development, and classroom support (Kilag & Sasan, 2023; Darling-Hammond, 2021).

Visible leadership in education deals with the active presence and engagement of educational leaders such as school heads, School Improvement Support Officers (SISO) and policymakers in shaping institutional culture, decision-making, and performance (Shaked, 2025). Visible leaders can engage other stakeholders and share key ideas, values, and behaviours that promote effective school. According to DeWitt (2018), a visible leader is one who consistently interacts with teachers, learners, and stakeholders, demonstrating a hands-on approach to management rather than being an arm chair leader operating from behind the scenes. Visible leaders in educational settings are increasingly recognised as critical in fostering effective teaching, and cultivating a positive school culture (Chamo, 2024).

Visible leadership is the observable presence, accessibility, and influence of leaders within an organization. It is closely linked to transformational and transparent leadership styles where leaders are engaged, communicative, and

clearly aligned with institutional goals (Bolden, 2021). In the dynamic educational landscape, visible leaders play a key role in driving change and fostering innovation. They do so by embracing new ideas, challenging the status quo, and empowering teachers, learners and other stakeholders to explore new approaches. Visible leaders create an environment where innovation thrives. However, leadership training to enhance visible leadership for prospective school heads is lacking today (Fullan, 2023). Models on visible educational leadership describes how school leaders' team up with stakeholders to positively transform the school through trust and interdependence which in turn deliver transformational change (Holcombe *et al.*, 2023). The education system is considered as a complex network of participants (government agencies, public and private providers, individuals, communities, and organizations) concerned with the provision, and regulation of essential services concerned with learning and financing (Gachie, 2020; World Bank, 2010). Other key indicators such as economic, political, good health, interpersonal relationship and an efficient managerial system works to make education succeed.

Well-being is a broad concept that covers a whole range of dimensions. Well-being refers to material comfort, good health, emotional stability that individuals enjoy in a society as a whole (Husain & Akram, 2022). The World Health Organization (2001) defined well-being as a state in which each individual is capable of making a positive contribution to their community, is able to manage the ordinary stresses of life, and realises their potential. A significant priority in the present educational landscape is the enhancement of student well-being.

¹ Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development, Mampong Campus, Ghana

² Department of Education Studies, University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development, Mampong Campus, Ghana

* Corresponding author's e-mail: rampomah1@aamusted.edu.gh

Although concepts of well-being have garnered considerable attention in the last decade, but how the concept precisely works in the educational landscape need to be explored further. School well-being includes academic achievement, physical and mental health, satisfying interpersonal relations and success (Anchunda & Anchunda, 2023). The concept of well-being used in everyday conversations formally or informally appears all over life, but explanations about exactly what well-being looks, feels or sounds like are elusive (Burke, 2020; Svane *et al.*, 2019). The task of the school in promoting learners' well-being in terms of academic, social relationship with teachers, peers and the school community go a long way to promote effective school. By performing these essential roles by leadership, the school is positioned to work well and strengthened. A typical school well-being transcends beyond the learner to include the leadership, staff (teaching and non-teaching), parents and the community as seen in Alanoglu's (2026) school well-being model.

Institutional strengthening, which shapes the learner and promotes well-being, consists of the processes, systems, and leadership mechanisms that enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, accountability, and sustainability of institutions (UNDP, 2021). Institutional strengthening relies on strong leadership practices to enhance organizational capacity and deliver services effectively. Leadership, particularly, visible, is a core driver in this transformation where the entire group works to promote growth. According to O'Reilly and Chatman (2020), visible leadership improves institutional trust and motivation, as leaders become role models who drive change and innovation. Leaders who are visible promote accountability, clarity of vision, and alignment of team's critical vision for strengthening institutional frameworks. Heifetz *et al.* (2022) argue that visible leadership reduces resistance and reinforces shared ownership of goals in institutions undergoing change, thereby enhancing institutional resilience and adaptability. Schmid (2023) postulates that an institution is a relationship pattern that is reflected by the group, which sees the relationship between organised human behaviour in a group. According to Manahung and Gamar (2022), an institution is a rule within a community, group or organization that promotes cooperation among its members to help them with the hope that everyone can work together or relate with one another for the good of all. Communities succeed when their institutions are formidable and work to promote one another. World learning envisions a world in which all society's institutions such as school, fulfil their missions strategically and possess the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances (Eddy & Amey, 2023). Based on this understanding, it can be said that an institution is a series of rules, systems, and incentive structures that guide the behaviour patterns and relationships between and among community members that are mutually binding to shape social behaviours, and are widely accepted to serve common goals. Institutional strengthening involves improving the capacity, structure,

and processes within educational organizations to enhance their effectiveness, sustainability, and responsiveness to challenges (Mozin & Nggilu, 2023).

In contemporary organizational development, the pursuit of institutional strengthening has become a central goal for achieving sustainable performance, and improved service delivery (Babalola, 2022). However, despite numerous capacity-building initiatives and reform programmes, many institutions continue to grapple with issues such as weak accountability structures, low staff morale, inefficient resource management, and poor institutional performance (Sule, 2024). Partly, these challenges emanate from the absence of visible leadership that is actively engaged, present, transparent, and responsive to the evolving needs of the institution (Adole, 2024; Agwoje & Okeleke, 2023).

Visible leadership is increasingly recognised as a critical factor of institutional change and resilience (Morris *et al.*, 2020). It influences organizational culture, facilitates strategic direction, ensures alignment of institutional goals with operational practices, and fosters a sense of ownership and accountability among staff. Yet, in many institutional settings, leadership remains distant or symbolic with minimal impact on day-to-day operations and engagement. This disconnect often leads to weakened institutional coherence, poor communication, and resistance to change further stalling development initiatives. This cannot be different from the educational setting.

While there is extensive literature on leadership and institutional development, there is a notable gap in empirical research that explores the practical manifestations and outcomes of visible leadership, school well-being and institutional strengthening in education. This study therefore searches through literature on visible leadership in education, school well-being and institutional strengthening. It is hoped that the study will unearth their alignment and possible contribution to leadership and educational thought.

Statement of the Problem

Globally educational leadership is seen as a driver of better education, school change and teacher development. Much of the evidence-based frameworks and empirical studies on visible leadership and school well-being largely were carried out in the western world. These fragmented researches in countries makes it difficult to gain a coherent understanding of what visible leadership and school well-being looks like and how they strengthen educational institutions in other settings. Again, most existing reviews on visible educational leadership are global in name but overwhelmingly feature studies from Europe, Asia, and North America. The same can be said of school well-being and how educational institutions can be strengthened. Putting together various researchers thought on these themes therefore can go a long way to strengthens best educational leadership practices.

Aim and Objectives

The central aim of this study is to review literature on visible educational leadership, school well-being and institutional strengthening from the global perspective taking a look at their methods, insight and key findings.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify publication trends in visible leadership, school well-being and institutional strengthening research across the global between 2017 and 2026.
2. Map the most active authors, countries, institutions, and journals contributing to this body of research.
3. Synthesize the key themes on visible leadership, school well-being models and institutional strengthening research methodologies used in these studies.

Research Questions

To address these objectives, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the publication trends in visible leadership in education, school well-being and institutional strengthening research between 2017 to 2026?
2. Which countries, institutions, and authors are the most prolific and influential in this area of visible leadership, school well-being and institutional strengthening?
3. What themes, methodologies and insight dominate the literature review to guide practice?

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research uses a literature study method. The purpose is to review and analyze relevant literature in the fields being studied. The methodology does not involve collecting new data. Rather, it analyzes existing data in the form of articles, books, and other library sources (Bisaria

et al., 2026). The research design is a meta-analysis, which requires searching, selecting, and evaluating literature relevant to the research topic (Chigbu *et al.*, 2023). Research can be conducted systematically, using clear criteria for selecting literature to be part of the analysis. The population and sample consist of literature that is relevant to the selected research topic, decided by using predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria to select the most relevant and high-quality literature. Therefore, the background and data sources in this qualitative research are literature collected from various sources such as scientific journals, books, research reports, and other literature sources. Researchers can utilize academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar or Books to search for literature that are relevant to the research topic. Once relevant literature is found, the researcher then proceeds to make a selection based on predetermined criteria. Data analysis technique used was reading and critically evaluating the selected literature. Researchers will identify the main findings of each literature, compare and integrate relevant research results, and compile a synthesis of these findings. Analysis can be done narratively, or through meta-analysis, taken into account the purpose of the study and the characteristics of the available literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Literature was conducted by analyzing thirty (30) studies including books, journal articles, and project reports published on Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and other databases. These sources containing the studies were published in 2017 - 2026. Table 1 gives the details of the literature review:

Table 1: Literature Study Analysis

No./ Author(s)	Article Title	Methodology	Country/ Year	Database/ Indexing	Insight
1. Jack (2023)	Visibility of School Leadership	Mixed method	USA, 2023	Digital Commons@NLU	Building trust through frequent high-quality leader visibility is one way school heads can make greater impact on the success of their school and its stakeholders.
2. Al-Smadi (2022)	Achieving Principal Instructional Leadership through Visibility	Qualitative multiple case Studies	India, 2017	Google Scholar and NAAS	Visibility of school heads is an effective strategy that instructional leaders could use to bring about learning climate and improved curriculum, instruction, and professional development, in a conducive learning environment.

8. Rose (2026)	Making Learning Visible: Leadership Actions from the Evidence	Mixed-Methods Approach	Canada, 2026	CAPSS Resource Database	Evidence gathered from this study is that, the more leaders focus their relationships, their work, and their learning on the core mandate of teaching and learning, the greater the influence on student outcomes.
7. Tucker <i>et al.</i> (2000)	The Importance of Leader Visibility in Servant-Leadership	Qualitative	USA, 2023	Literature review	A leader's visible behaviour gives power to his or her vision.
6. Mendenhall <i>et al.</i> (2025)	Making Visible Leadership Characteristics and Actions in Fostering Collective Teacher Efficacy: A Cross-Case Study	Qualitative	Switzerland, 2025	Digital Commons @ USU	Instructional leaders promote collective teacher efficacy (CTE), increased teacher confidence, and collaborate with them for a fruitful relationship in schools.
5. Waters (2017)	Visible Well-being in Schools: The Powerful Role of Instructional Leadership	Qualitative	Australia, 2017	Google Scholar and referenced via ACEL	Leadership is a vital contributor to student success; Leader visibility contributes to students' levels of well-being and their ability to graduate from school to become productive and positive people.
4. DeWit (2018)	Using the Visible Learning Research to Influence Collaborative Leadership	Mixed-Method	Switzerland, 2018	Web of Science (ESCI), Scopus, and ERIC	Collaborative practices in the classroom and school inspire many stakeholders to look at those practices and reflect to have deep impact on learning.
3. Waters (2024)	Visible Well-being: A Critical Resource for Leadership and Learning in Schools	Qualitative	Australia, 2018	Horizon	Visible well-being across schools show that the head builds staff well-being, changes teacher practice, builds student well-being and adds positively to the culture of the school.

14. Ghamrawi And Al-Thani (2023)	Well-being Leadership: Perceptions of Pre-Service School Leaders	Qualitative	Netherlands, 2023	Elsevier/Science Direct, Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed Central	Higher education plays a critical role in the development of school leaders' capability and in fostering and maintaining school-wide well-being and that, school leadership preparation programmes are falling short in adequately equipping future school leaders to ensure comprehensive well-being
13. Bingham and Bubb (2022)	Leadership for Well-being	Book chapter	United Kingdom, 2017	UCL Discovery / SAGE/ Google Scholar and library catalogues	Work-life balance for staff is critical in maintaining motivation, developing resilience and in managing workload. And well-run healthy schools pay attention to and strategically plan for well-being of members.
12. Waters <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Positive Education: Visible Well-being and Positive Functioning in Students	Conceptual review (book chapter)	United Kingdom, 2017	Google Scholar, Scopus, and OUCI	Schools are in a powerful position to promote well-being at a societal level if they infuse well-being principles into school curricula and cultures.
11. Jiang <i>et al.</i> (2025)	Conceptualizing Student Well-being in Secondary Education: A qualitative Systematic Literature Review	Qualitative	United Kingdom, 2025	Scopus, and Web of Science	Good health, autonomy, learning engagement, values, equity, and school culture are the crucial attributes of students' well-being.
10. Waters <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Positive Education: Visible Well-being and Positive Functioning in Students	Qualitative	United Kingdom, 2017	Cambridge University Press / Google Scholar and OUCI	For leaders and teachers to know how to successfully build student well-being, they need to be guided by an effective, evidence-based framework, and to develop teacher effectiveness practices; they need to collect and analyze real-time and ongoing data in order to impact on student well-being
9. Ellis (2009)	Leader Visibility: A Case Study Approach	Qualitative	USA, 2015	The Jethro Project (TJP)	Visible leaders are more confident in their competence and interpersonal relationships. They nurture subordinates, which lead to an expansion of human capacity.

20. Alanoğlu et al. (2026)	Linking School Culture to Teachers' Psychological Empowerment and Subjective Well-Being: A Multilevel Mediation Study	Quantitative	Iraq, 2026	ResearchGate	Prioritizing well-being not only enhances academic performance but also improves the quality of lives of learners. Thus, well-being in school assist learners to cultivate more intelligence and content, support teachers to have the power to develop smarter and happier students.
19. Buczak and Łukasik (2024)	Student's Well-Being in the E-School Environment: Selected Research Results	Quantitative	Poland, 2021	ERIH PLUS, Index Copernicus, and CEJSH	In pursuing well-being in an academic environment, school conditions, interpersonal relationships, self-fulfilment, and health condition are necessary.
18. Aulia and Setiyawati (2025)	School Well-Being from Primary School Principal Perspectives	Qualitative	Indonesia, 2023	Atlantis Press	School well-being constitutes a pleasant school, where individual comfort is paramount and mutual respect is accorded. This culture of mutual respect and involvement of students is all that school well-being seeks to achieve.
17. Department for Education and Cooper Gibson Research (2018)	School and College Staff Well-being: Evidence from England, the UK and Comparable Sectors	Literature review / evidence synthesis	United Kingdom, 2019	Digital Education Resource Archive (DERA)	Direct involvement of the full range of staff in the development of well-being helps encourage ownership of the initiative and thus, a sense of self-efficacy, autonomy and agency.
16. Losada- Puente et al. (2024)	Measuring School Well-being in Primary Education: A Systematic Review	Systematic Review Methodology	Spain, 2024	ResearchGate, Dialnet and the EJEJ Repository	School well-being is a topic of global interest and that educational systems globally lack a unified consensus on how to properly construct psychometric items to measure student well-being from a holistic perspective.
15. Losada-Puente et al. (2025)	Supporting Well-being of Australian School Leaders through Peer Supervision	Mixed Method	Australia, 2025	Springer / Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC	Educators should endeavour to seek opportunities for professional development and building professional support networks.

25. Atausinchi Masias <i>et al.</i> (2025)	Towards Effective Institutional Management: A Literature Review on Educational Administration Models	Integrative review	Italy, 2025	PM – Testing, Psychometrics, Methodology in Applied Psychology	Educational administration models have proven most effective in optimizing institutional management in school settings. As part of that it is necessary to put in place cross-cutting educational policy frameworks, such as institutional capacity development.
24. Vera Vélez <i>et al.</i> (2025)	Institutional Governance in Educational Units: A Systematic Review of the Literature of the Last Five Years	PRISMA method	Brazil, 2025	Scopus, SciELO, Redalyc, Dialnet, Erih Plus, Latindex, and the César Vallejo	The importance of adopting a comprehensive approach in institutional governance is not only administrative, but also, the social and economic aspect of educational institutions foster open dialogue between all actors involved to create more inclusive and participatory environments.
23. Bidemi <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Strengthening Institutional Capacity to Produce Learning at Scale: Case Studies from Jordan, Malawi, Nepal, and Uganda	Qualitative	USA, 2019	SharEd (shared.rti.org)	Early Grade Learning (EGL) programmes have always focused on ensuring schools have a teacher who is trained on instruction and in doing that schools are provided with the basic teaching and learning resources to support instruction.
22. Jimoh (2025)	Sustainable Leadership on Institutional Innovation in Higher Education	Descriptive survey	United Kingdom, 2025	Scopus	Sustainable leadership results in innovation in higher education, and that organizational learning culture facilitates the relationship between sustainable leadership and institutional innovation.
21. Nobilly and Tynan (2022)	The Evolution of Well-being in Educational Policy in Ireland: Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach	Qualitative	Ireland, 2022	DSpace at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick	The study shares three insights on well-being. These are: Culture and Environment, Curriculum, Policy and Planning. The third is Relationships and Partnerships. It is suggested that every school should strive towards a strong foundation upon which well-being practices stated can be enhanced.

30. European Commission (2019)	Strengthening Education Systems to Provide Learning for all 'Tools and Methods Series, Reference Document No 27	Qualitative	Luxembourg, 2020	EU Bookshop / Publications Office of the EU	This research summarises global education challenges: The review indicates that 258 million are out of school. With learning crisis, 6 in 10 are not achieving minimum proficiency, gender/disability gaps, conflict impact are also real.
29. Donkor (2024)	Mentorship and Institutional Development for Quality Higher Education in Ghana: A Case Study of All Nations University, Koforidua	Qualitative	Ghana, 2024	All Nations University official website anu.edu.gh	Mentorship is a novel idea which has to be structured, in both public and private universities, especially the newly established ones to enhance growth and development of mentor and mentee.
28. Poespitohadi <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Institutional Strengthening and Capacity Building: A Case Study in Indonesia	Quantitative	South Korea, 2021	Web of Science (ESCI) and SCOPUS, Brawijaya Knowledge Garden / Repository UB	The review points out that institutional strengthening influences positively and significantly capacity building of staff, particularly; communication, resources and training.
27. Korantwi- Barimah and Schultz (2017)	Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening: Ghanaian Technical Universities in Perspective	Quantitative	Bangladesh, 2017	Google Scholar, CrossRef	Building the capacity of academic staff needs to be considered as a strategic priority to improve quality teaching and research. Therefore, the need for universities to collaborate with other stakeholders to create the enabling environment to support academic staff to fully participate in capacity building programmes to equip them with the required competences.
26. Nawi (2023)	The Service Quality Level of Higher Educational Organizations: An Institutional Strengthening Based View	Quantitative	India, 2023	Google Scholar, CrossRef	The study revealed that institutional strengthening plays a significant role on service quality development.

Discussion

The study discusses how leader visibility promotes well-being and institutional strengthening. School leadership can have a bigger influence on the performance of learners, internal and external stakeholders by establishing trust through regular, and more purposeful visibility in all activities they do. Leader visibility strengthens instruction, fosters good learning climate, and work towards a successful professional development effort. This creates the needed learning environment for learners as well as staff to thrive in school. The literature review points out that consistent leader visibility improves staff morale and well-being and changes teacher work attitude which affect positively the school culture.

Improving well-being is seen as systematic rather than incidental. Recognising that motivates resilient staff to support student achievement. In order to foster well-being in school, it is necessary to change leadership preparation. Again, the distribution of resources must be guided by professional development, support systems, and thorough assessments of best practices. Schools can provide the foundation for improving well-being practices and carry out their potent role in promoting well-being at the individual and group levels.

Analysis of current models of school leadership reveals that school governance needs to take social and economic circumstances into consideration in addition to administrative pursuits. Schools should encourage clear communication to all members in order to establish inclusive, and participatory settings.

To improve capacity building, it is necessary to ensure effective communication, proper resource allocation, and training, and institutional strengthening, since these greatly influence service quality. Similarly, improving quality teaching and research output require capacity building of academic personnel. Therefore, it is desirable for educational institutions to establish supportive settings for employees to engage in capacity-building initiatives. Cross-cutting integration of digital management capabilities within educational policy ensuring infrastructure, connectivity, and ongoing training for educators and school employees. Again, inter-institutional collaboration, and active community participation must all be encouraged as policies to develop both mentors and mentees.

By building trust in a more consistent manner through high visibility in both formal and informal interactions can have a greater impact on the performance of school and stakeholders in this perspective. Visibility is a very successful instructional leadership strategy that also strengthens content and instruction, promotes a positive learning environment, advances professional growth, and creates a favourable learning environment.

Visible leadership approach in this literature review has demonstrated how consistent leader presence enhances staff and learners' well-being, changes teacher's practice, and impacting school culture. It also creates a chance for leaders and educators to have meaningful conversations

regarding classroom practices and their real impact on learning.

When stakeholders participate in the design of well-being initiatives, their sense of ownership and long-lasting change are fostered, and to ensure that future leaders acquire the needed well-being skills, and visible leadership ideals, schools must change the way they train school leaders. How schools use their resources should also be guided by research on best practices, professional development, and support systems.

For schools including higher education to expand and offer high-quality education, they must have strong leadership, and training. For instance, when higher institutions have a strong learning culture, sustainable leadership fosters innovation.

The review further indicates that building stronger educational institutions enhances the quality of services and facilitates communication, resources, and training. Therefore, teaching and research must be prioritised as a way of enhancing staff capacity building.

CONCLUSION

The research found that frequent visibility of the school leader and high-quality interactions build relationships which promote mutual trust and excellence. The literature review highlights the need for school leadership to practice frequent visibility, especially in an unscheduled, personal interactive manner to celebrate milestones. Formal observations to check in and converse with staff and being visible in the daily routines. Prioritising well-being in school works to support all and this lead to goodwill and institutional growth.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to acknowledge all researchers whose works have been referenced in this review. We also appreciate the support of the University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development, Mampong Campus, Ghana.

Research Ethics

This study is a literature review that did not involve direct human participants, data collection, or experimental procedures. All sources used in this review have been properly cited and acknowledged in accordance with academic standards.

Data Availability Statement

All data analyzed in this study are available from publicly accessible databases and sources as cited in the references section. No new primary data were collected for this study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the

authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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