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Decolonizing School Leadership in Ghana: Rethinking the Full Range Leadership Model through Indigenous African Leadership Philosophies in Public Senior High Schools

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Abstract

This study decolonizes understandings of school leadership in Ghana by examining the relevance of the Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM) in public Senior High Schools (SHS) and proposing an integrated model grounded in Indigenous African Leadership Philosophies (IALPs), particularly Ubuntu. The study used a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. The study surveyed 500 participants (350 teachers and 150 school leaders) from 50 SHS across five regions and measured FRLM styles (MLQ-5X), indigenous leadership practices (using a new 15-item scale, $\alpha = .88$), and three school outcomes. The study then conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 school leaders. Transformational leadership predicted teacher motivation ($\beta = .45$) and school climate ($\beta = .52$), with the FRLM explaining 38% and 45% of the variance, respectively; laissez-faire leadership was negatively related to both ($\beta = -.21$ and $-.27$). Indigenous leadership practices predicted teacher motivation ($\beta = .58$, $R^2 = .34$) and school climate ($\beta = .65$, $R^2 = .42$). Effects on WASSCE pass rates were small (FRLM $R^2 = .09$; indigenous practices $R^2 = .07$). Hierarchical regression showed that indigenous practices explained additional variance in school climate beyond the FRLM and school controls ($\Delta R^2 = .11$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .39$; final $R^2 = .57$). Interviews revealed that leaders practiced communal, consensus-based leadership while facing constraints from bureaucratic Ghana Education Service demands. This study provides rare empirical evidence from Ghana that challenges the universal applicability of Western leadership models and proposes an integrated Ubuntu-Full Range Leadership framework for culturally grounded leadership preparation and practice in African schools.

Keywords

Decolonization, Full Range Leadership Model, Ubuntu, Indigenous African Leadership philosophies, Ghana

1. Introduction

The global landscape of educational leadership and management has long been dominated by theories and models originating from Western, particularly North American and European, contexts. Frameworks such as the Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM) have been disseminated globally, often presented as a universal standard for effective leadership (Kirkbride, 2006). However, this uncritical exportation of leadership paradigms into diverse cultural settings has prompted a growing and urgent call to decolonise leadership knowledge (Matshoba-Ramuedzisi & Fourie, 2026). In this context, decolonisation involves a critical interrogation of the epistemic dominance of Eurocentric perspectives and a deliberate re-centering of indigenous knowledge systems and philosophies that have been historically marginalised or erased (Sanerivi et al., 2026).

In Africa, this call resonates with particular force. The continent possesses a profound wealth of indigenous philosophies that offer deep insights into leadership, governance, and community, yet these are frequently absent from formal leadership training and academic discourse (Ashu et al., 2023). This has created a significant paradox: while indigenous philosophies like Ubuntu culturally mandate leaders to prioritise collective well-being and communal harmony, leadership performance across many sectors on the continent often falls short, with leaders perceived as advancing personal or sectional interests rather than broader societal ones (Asamoah & Yeboah-Assiamah, 2019). This disconnect is partly attributable to the continued reliance on administrative and leadership structures inherited from colonial rule, which are often centralised, authoritarian, and in direct conflict with indigenous values of consensus and relationality (Asadu & Aguinam, 2020).

The Ghanaian public Senior High School (SHS) system provides a critical context for exploring this complex issue. School heads are pivotal figures, responsible for shaping school culture, sustaining teacher morale, and ultimately influencing student achievement. They operate within a highly centralised bureaucracy established by the Ghana Education Service (GES), which prescribes their roles and responsibilities in a top-down fashion. However, these leaders also function within local communities that are rich with cultural norms and expectations about what constitutes good leadership—expectations that may not align with official mandates. This study investigates this crucial intersection, seeking to understand the utility and limitations of the FRLM while simultaneously exploring the untapped potential of Indigenous African Leadership Philosophies (IALPs) to inform a more effective and culturally resonant leadership praxis in Ghana.

Our theoretical framework is twofold. First, we critically examine the FRLM,

which conceptualises leadership along a continuum from passive and ineffective laissez-faire styles, through transactional exchanges (contingent reward, management-by-exception), to the most active and effective transformational behaviours (idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration) (Serrat, 2021). Second, we draw on the rich tapestry of IALPs, focusing primarily on the philosophy of Ubuntu. Ubuntu, often translated as "I am because we are" is a worldview that emphasises community, compassion, interdependence, and mutual responsibility (Raphael, 2026). As a leadership theory, Ubuntu posits that a good leader is one who creates, sustains, and enriches communal relationships, enabling others to do the same (Metz, 2018). This relational focus contrasts sharply with the more individualistic and heroic undertones of some Western leadership models. We also acknowledge the diversity of African thought by referencing other philosophies, such as the democratic and republican principles of the Oromo Gada system (Aliye, 2020; Demmeksa, 2026) and the concept of servant leadership rooted in Igbo philosophy (Osiri, 2020).

This study is guided by the following research questions: To what extent do the components of the FRLM predict school effectiveness outcomes: teacher motivation, school climate, and student academic performance in Ghanaian public SHS? How do Ghanaian SHS leaders perceive and enact leadership practices aligned with IALPs such as Ubuntu? How can the FRLM be integrated with IALPs to create a more culturally resonant and effective leadership model for Ghanaian schools? By addressing these questions, this paper aims to move beyond critique and contribute a constructive, empirically grounded model for decolonised school leadership. We argue that effective leadership in the Ghanaian context and likely in many other African settings—is not a matter of choosing between Western and indigenous models, but of skilfully weaving them together into a hybrid framework that is both globally informed and locally rooted.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Imperative to Decolonise Educational Leadership

The movement to decolonise academia represents a fundamental challenge to the historical and ongoing dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems, which have long been presented as universal truths while systematically marginalising or invalidating other ways of knowing (Magnusson, 2023). In the field of educational leadership, this has resulted in a body of literature that largely reflects Western cultural assumptions, individualistic values, and hierarchical organisational structures (Matshoba-Ramuedzisi & Fourie, 2026). Scholars argue that applying these models in non-Western contexts without critical adaptation can perpetuate a form of coloniality, leading to policies and practices that are disconnected from local realities, values, and needs (Uzoigwe, 2025).

The decolonisation project in education is multifaceted and transformative. It involves diversifying curricula to include non-Western perspectives and histories (Cohen, 2021), transforming pedagogical practices to be more inclusive and cul-

turally responsive, and fundamentally rethinking the purpose and structure of educational institutions, including their leadership (Ashu, 2026). Universities and teacher education programs are critical sites for this work, as they are responsible for preparing the next generation of educators and leaders who will either reproduce or challenge existing colonial structures (Medical Education Partnership Initiative Principal Investigators, 2014). The ultimate goal is not a simplistic rejection of all Western knowledge, but rather the fostering of an "epistemic equity" where multiple knowledge systems can coexist, interact, and mutually inform one another (Patwardhan et al., 2023). This approach promises to lead to more just, relevant, and ultimately more effective educational systems for all students (Mallikarjuna, 2025).

2.2. The Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM)

The FRLM, developed by Bernard Bass and Bruce Avolio, stands as one of the most influential and extensively researched leadership theories of the past four decades (Kirkbride, 2006). It proposes that all leaders exhibit a range of behaviors that can be plotted along a continuum from ineffective to highly effective (Nikezic et al., 2013). At the least effective end of this spectrum is Laissez-Faire (LF) leadership, which is characterized by a general absence of leadership, avoidance of decision-making, and abdication of responsibility (Ntalakos et al., 2026). More active, though not always optimal, is Transactional Leadership, which is based on a series of exchanges or bargains between leaders and followers. This style includes two main components: Contingent Reward (CR), where leaders clarify expectations and provide rewards in exchange for followers meeting those expectations, and Management-by-Exception (MBE), which can be active (monitoring for deviations and taking corrective action) or passive (intervening only after problems have become serious) (Clarinval, 2026). The model's most effective component is Transformational Leadership, which elevates and inspires followers to set aside their immediate self-interests for a greater collective purpose (Barbuto et al., 2008). It comprises four key behaviors, often referred to as the "Four I's": Idealized Influence (II): Leaders act as strong role models, embodying high ethical standards and earning the trust, admiration, and respect of their followers (Toor & Ofori, 2009). Inspirational Motivation (IM): Leaders articulate a compelling and optimistic vision of the future, motivating followers to commit to shared goals (Ryan & Tipu, 2013). Intellectual Stimulation (IS): Leaders encourage creativity, innovation, and critical thinking by questioning assumptions and reframing problems (Oprea et al., 2020). Individualized Consideration (IC): Leaders act as coaches or mentors, paying special attention to each follower's individual needs for achievement and growth (Romaşcanu et al., 2017). Although the FRLM has been extensively validated in numerous Western organizational contexts (Elaine, 2025), its universal applicability has been increasingly questioned (Thu & Mazumdar, 2025). Critics argue that it may promote a "heroic" top-down, and individualistic view of leadership that does not fit well with more collectivist or consensus-oriented cul-

tures (Tsipa et al., 2025). Its primary focus on the leader-follower dyad may also overlook the broader community, kinship networks, and relational webs that are central to social and organizational life in many non-Western societies (Gebremariam & Endawoke, 2018). Furthermore, some studies have found negative correlations between psychopathic traits and positive leadership styles within the FRLM, suggesting the model's components are sensitive to personality factors that may manifest differently across cultures (Mathieu et al., 2015; Westerlaken & Woods, 2012).

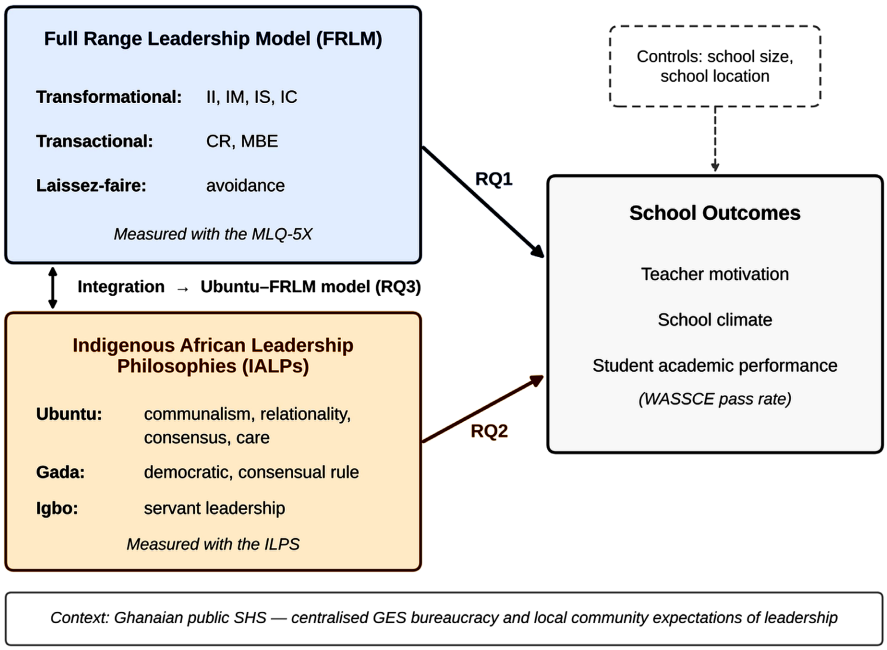
2.3. Indigenous African Leadership Philosophies (IALPs)

Africa is home to a rich diversity of indigenous philosophies that offer profound and often contrasting conceptualizations of leadership (Ashu et al., 2023). A review of the literature on African leadership reveals a growing, though still uneven and fragmented, engagement with these indigenous paradigms (Matshoba-Ramuedzisi & Fourie, 2026). Central among these is the philosophy of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is a pan-African philosophy grounded in the principles of interconnectedness, human dignity, and the primacy of the community (Sibanda & Grobler, 2023). It holds that a person's humanity is not an intrinsic quality but is affirmed and realized through their relationships with others. In the context of leadership, Ubuntu translates into a communal, participatory, and deeply humanistic model (Asamoah & Yeboah-Assiamah, 2019). An Ubuntu-inspired leader is not an authority figure who commands from a distance but a facilitator who builds consensus, fosters a sense of collective identity, and promotes shared responsibility (Metz, 2018). This philosophy is not merely an abstract ideal but has practical applications across various sectors, demonstrating its versatility (Uzoigwe, 2025).

Other IALPs further enrich this perspective. The Gada system of the Oromo people in Ethiopia, for instance, offers a sophisticated model of democratic, decentralised governance with principles of fixed terms of office, separation of powers, and consensus-based decision-making that resonate strongly with modern principles of good governance (Aliye, 2020). Similarly, Igbo management philosophy from Nigeria emphasises sacrifice and servant leadership, positing that a leader's primary role is to serve the community's needs and well-being (Osiri, 2020). In Sudan, indigenous governance systems such as the Nazir, Omda, and Sheikh structures demonstrate leadership rooted in communal ethics, reciprocity, and collective responsibility (Busby & El-Tayeb, 2026). Together, these diverse philosophies point toward a common thread of relational, ethical, and community-embedded leadership.

Synthesising these IALPs with a globally recognized model like the FRLM offers a promising path forward for developing culturally resonant leadership frameworks. For example, the "Individualised Consideration" of transformational leadership could be deepened and reframed through the Ubuntu lens of holistic care for individuals as integral members of the community, not just as employees. "Inspirational Motivation" could shift from a leader-centric vision

to a shared purpose that the community develops and owns collectively. This integration is key to developing a leadership framework that is both effective in its outcomes and authentic in its cultural expression. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework that guides this study, illustrating how the FRLM and IALPs are positioned as predictors of school outcomes and how their integration can yield a new, hybrid model.



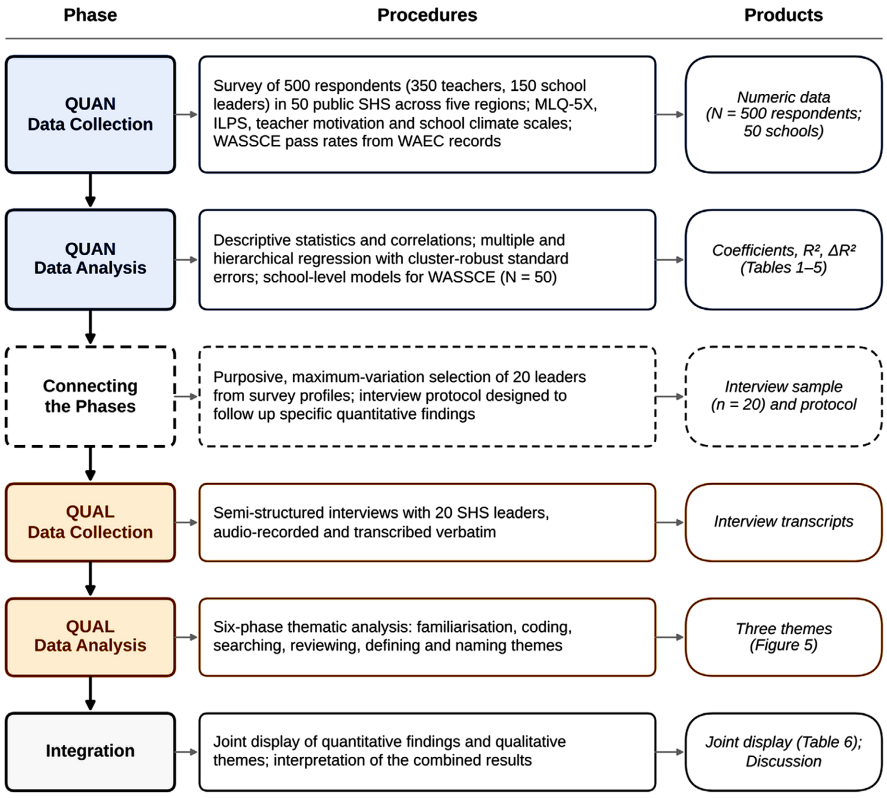
Note: The FRLM (RQ1) and Indigenous African Leadership Philosophies (RQ2) are positioned as predictors of school outcomes, and their integration yields the proposed Ubuntu-Full Range Leadership model (RQ3). II = idealized influence; IM = inspirational motivation; IS = intellectual stimulation; IC = individualized consideration; CR = contingent reward; MBE = management-by-exception; ILPS = Indigenous Leadership Practices Scale.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. This two-phase approach was chosen because it allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complex phenomenon of school leadership in the Ghanaian context. The initial quantitative phase was designed to establish statistical relationships between leadership styles and school outcomes through a large-scale survey. The subsequent qualitative phase then used semi-structured interviews to explain, elaborate on, and enrich those quantitative findings, providing depth and context that numbers alone cannot capture. This design allows for both generalization from the quantitative data and in-depth exploration from the qualitative data. Figure 2 summarizes the procedures and products of each phase of the research.



Note: Procedures and products of the two-phase design. Results from the quantitative phase informed the purposive selection of interviewees, and the two strands were integrated during interpretation.

Figure 2. Sequential explanatory mixed-methods design.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

The study was conducted in public Senior High Schools (SHS) across Ghana.

Quantitative Phase: A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select schools and participants. First, five of Ghana's sixteen regions (Greater Accra, Ashanti, Northern, Volta, and Western) were purposively chosen to ensure geographical, cultural, and socio-economic diversity, representing the southern coastal, middle forest, and northern savannah zones of the country. Second, within each region, we stratified all public SHS by school type (single-sex vs. mixed) and location (urban vs. rural). We then randomly selected 10 schools from each stratum in each region, for a total of 50 schools. Third, within each participating school, all members of the senior leadership team (Headmaster/Headmistress and Assistant Heads) were invited to participate, and teachers were selected using simple random sampling from the school's staff list. The final sample of 500 participants comprised 350 teachers and 150 members of school leadership teams, averaging seven teachers and three leaders per school. This sample size was determined a priori to provide sufficient statistical power (>.80) for multiple regression analysis with up to six predictors. Questionnaires were distributed to 400 teachers and 165 school leaders. A total of 350 teachers (87.5%) and 150 leaders (90.9%) returned usable questionnaires, resulting in a high overall response rate.

Qualitative Phase: From the initial pool of 150 school leaders who completed the survey, we purposively selected 20 for semi-structured interviews. The selection criteria were designed to achieve maximum variation. We selected leaders from different regions, school types (single-sex and mixed), and, crucially, those whose survey responses indicated strong adherence to transformational leadership, strong adherence to indigenous leadership practices, or a clear mix of both styles. This allowed us to explore the nuances of how these different leadership approaches are enacted in practice.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

The survey questionnaire consisted of four sections, and the qualitative phase utilized a semi-structured interview protocol. **Demographics.** This section collected data on each participant's role (teacher, head, assistant head), years of experience, gender, and their school's size and location (urban/rural). School size and location were used as control variables in the hierarchical regression analysis (Table 5). **Leadership styles (FRLM).** Leadership styles were measured using the well-validated Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X short form), adapted for the school context. The instrument measures transformational leadership with 20 items (e.g., "Talks optimistically about the future"), transactional leadership with 8 items (e.g., "Makes clear what one can expect to receive when performance goals are achieved"), and laissez-faire leadership with 4 items (e.g., "Avoids making decisions"). All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 0 = *not at all* to 4 = *frequently, if not always*. Scale scores were calculated as the mean of the relevant items, with higher scores indicating more frequent use of a particular style. Teachers rated their headteacher's leadership, while school leaders rated their own leadership.

Indigenous Leadership Practices Scale (ILPS). As no existing scale was suitable, the ILPS was developed specifically for this study based on a comprehensive review of the literature on Ubuntu and other IALPs (Asamoah & Yeboah-Assiamah, 2019; Metz, 2018). Its 15 items describe culturally specific leadership practices such as "Fostering a family-like atmosphere among staff," "Making important decisions through broad consultation with stakeholders," and "Showing deep concern for the personal well-being of staff and their families." Items were rated on a 5-point scale from 1 = *never* to 5 = *always*, and the scale score is the mean of the 15 items. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency in this sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$). However, internal consistency alone does not establish that the ILPS measures a construct distinct from transformational leadership, so its incremental contribution is interpreted with this limitation in mind. School outcomes. Three outcome measures were used. Teacher motivation was measured with a 10-item scale adapted from previous research, and school climate was measured with a 12-item School Climate Index. Both scales were completed by teachers on a 5-point Likert scale, and scores represent the mean of the items.

Student academic performance (WASSCE). As a proxy for student academic

performance, we used each school's percentage of candidates who passed the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) in the two most recent examination years (2021 and 2022). These official records were obtained from the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) Ghana office. A candidate was counted as passing if they achieved a grade of A1-C6 in all four core subjects (English, Mathematics, Integrated Science, Social Studies) and at least three elective subjects. The two annual pass rates were averaged to create a more stable measure of school performance. As this is a school-level measure, it was analysed with the 50 schools as the units of analysis. Semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol was designed to explore leaders' leadership philosophies, their approaches to decision-making, how they build relationships with staff and the community, and the challenges they face in their roles. Probes were used to specifically examine how cultural values and community expectations shape their leadership practices and how they navigate the demands of the GES.

3.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis: The survey data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. We first calculated descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations for all variables. We then used multiple and hierarchical regression to test the predictive power of the FRLM and ILPS on the three school outcomes. Three specific features of the data shaped these analyses. **Combining teacher and leader ratings.** Because teachers and school leaders rated leadership from different perspectives, we conducted independent samples t-tests to compare their mean ratings on all leadership scales. No statistically significant differences were found, justifying the decision to pool their responses for the main analyses. **Clustering within schools.** Since respondents were nested within 50 schools, their responses are not independent. To account for this, the regression models for teacher motivation and school climate (Table 1, Table 2, Table 4 and Table 5) were estimated with standard errors adjusted for clustering by school, using the cluster-robust standard errors method in Stata. The intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) were .16 for teacher motivation and .21 for school climate, indicating that a meaningful portion of the variance in these outcomes was at the school level.

School-level analysis of WASSCE performance. Because WASSCE pass rates are a school-level measure, the analyses of student performance (Table 3 and the student-performance row of Table 4) used the 50 schools as the units of analysis. Each school's leadership scores were calculated by averaging the ratings of all respondents (teachers and leaders) within that school. Before aggregation, we assessed within-school agreement using the rwg(j) statistic, which showed acceptable levels of agreement. The school's pass rate was then regressed on these aggregated school-mean leadership scores (N = 50). With only 50 schools, these models have limited statistical power to detect small effects, so their results are interpreted with caution. **Qualitative Analysis:** The 20 interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using the six-phase process of thematic analysis.

This systematic process involved familiarization with the data by reading and re-reading transcripts, generating initial codes, searching for broader themes across the dataset, reviewing and refining these themes, and finally defining and naming the final themes that captured the essence of the leaders' narratives.

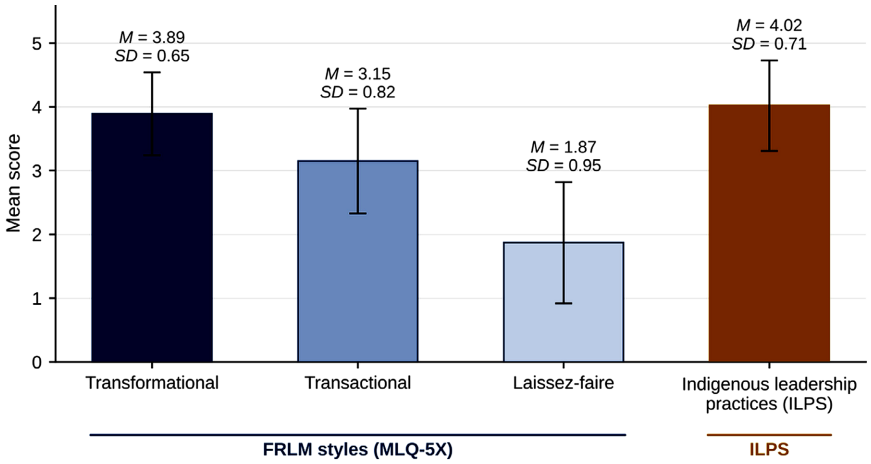
3.5. Ethical Considerations

The study received ethical approval from the University of Cape Coast Institutional Review Board (UCCIRB/CES/2022/045). The study obtained permission to collect data in schools from the Ghana Education Service national headquarters, followed by regional and district directorates and the heads of the selected schools. In addition to institutional approval, each participant was fully informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits. Written informed consent was obtained from every participant, and they were assured that their responses would remain confidential and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms are used for all participants and schools in all reports and publications.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative Findings

Descriptive statistics indicated that, on average, school leaders were perceived to engage in transformational leadership (M = 3.89, SD = .65) and indigenous leadership practices (M = 4.02, SD = .71) more frequently than transactional leadership (M = 3.15, SD = .82). Laissez-faire leadership was the least frequently observed style (M = 1.87, SD = .95). Pearson correlations revealed that both transformational and indigenous leadership were strongly and positively correlated with teacher motivation and school climate, while laissez-faire leadership was negatively correlated with these outcomes. Figure 3 displays the mean scores for each leadership style.



Note: Bars show mean scores across all respondents (N = 500); error bars show ±1 SD. FRLM styles were measured with the MLQ-5X and Indigenous leadership practices with the ILPS.

Figure 3. Mean scores for leadership styles and indigenous leadership practices.

Regression Analyses

We conducted a series of regression analyses to address the research questions. The results are presented in Tables 1-5.

Table 1. Multiple regression of FRLM components on teacher motivation.

Variable	*B*	*SE*	β	*p*
(Constant)	1.54	.21		<.001
Transformational	.48	.06	.45	<.001
Transactional	.11	.05	.12	.031
Laissez-Faire	−.19	.04	−.21	<.001

Note: $R^2 = .38$, $F(3, 496) = 101.7$, $p < .001$.

As shown in Table 1, the FRLM components collectively explained 38% of the variance in teacher motivation. Transformational leadership was the strongest positive predictor (β = .45, $p < .001$), followed by a significant negative relationship with laissez-faire leadership (β = −.21, $p < .001$). Transactional leadership had a weak but statistically significant positive effect.

Table 2. Multiple regression of FRLM components on school climate.

Variable	*B*	*SE*	β	*p*
(Constant)	1.22	.25		<.001
Transformational	.61	.07	.52	<.001
Transactional	.08	.05	.09	.112
Laissez-Faire	−.28	.05	−.27	<.001

Note: $R^2 = .45$, $F(3, 496) = 135.2$, $p < .001$.

For school climate (Table 2), the FRLM explained 45% of the variance. Transformational leadership was again the most powerful predictor (β = .52, $p < .001$). Laissez-faire leadership had a strong negative impact (β = −.27, $p < .001$), while transformational leadership was not a significant predictor.

Table 3. Multiple regression of FRLM components on student performance (WASSCE pass rate).

Variable	*B*	*SE*	β	*p*
(Constant)	35.6	8.12		<.001
Transformational	5.81	2.55	.28	.027
Transactional	1.98	2.11	.11	.352
Laissez-Faire	−4.03	1.89	−.24	.038

Note: $R^2 = .09$, $F(3, 46) = 1.52$, $p = .223$. Analysis at the school level (N = 50).

The FRLM components explained a much smaller and non-significant portion of the variance in student academic performance ($R^2 = .09$, $p = .223$), as shown in Table 3. At the school level of analysis, only transformational leadership (positively) and laissez-faire leadership (negatively) approached significance, but their effects were modest and the overall model was not statistically significant.

Table 4. Multiple regression of indigenous leadership practices (ILPS) on school outcomes.

Outcome	*B*	*SE*	β	R^2	*p*
Teacher Motivation	.67	.04	.58	.34	<.001
School Climate	.81	.05	.65	.42	<.001
Student Performance (WASSCE)	4.99	2.21	.26	.07	.029

Note: Each row reports a separate regression of the outcome on the ILPS. Because each model has a single predictor, β equals the correlation r and $R^2 = \beta^2$. Teacher motivation and school climate: N = 500 respondents; student performance: N = 50 schools.

Table 4 demonstrates that indigenous leadership practices were a strong predictor of both teacher motivation (β = .58, $R^2 = .34$) and school climate (β = .65, $R^2 = .42$), explaining substantial variance in both outcomes. Its effect on student performance was statistically significant but smaller (β = .26, $R^2 = .07$).

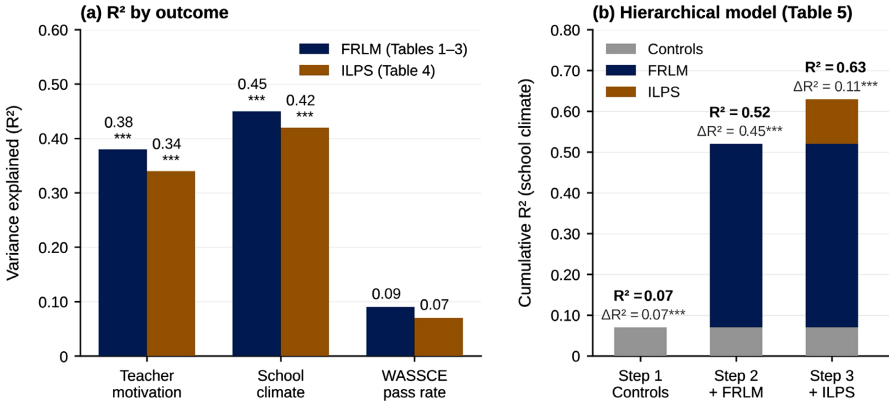
Table 5. Hierarchical regression of FRLM and ILPS on school climate.

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	β	β	β
Step 1: Controls			
School Size	.15**	.11	.06
Urban Location	.18**	.14**	.09
Step 2: FRLM			
Transformational		.48**	.25**
Transactional		.07	.02
Laissez-Faire		−.24**	−.11
Step 3: ILPS			
Indigenous Leadership			.39**
Model Summary			
R^2	.07	.52	.63
ΔR^2	.07**	.45**	.11**

Note: Final model $R^2 = .57$, $F(6, 493) = 109.1$, $p < .001$. **$p < .001$.

The hierarchical regression model (Table 5), using school climate as the out-

come, provides the most compelling evidence for an integrated model. After controlling for school demographics in Step 1 (R^2 = .07) and adding the FRLM components in Step 2 (ΔR^2 = .45), adding the ILPS in Step 3 significantly increased explained variance by a further 11% (ΔR^2 = .11, $p < .001$). In the final model, the ILPS emerged as a strong and significant predictor (β = .39) even when controlling for the FRLM. This indicates that the ILPS captures a unique dimension of leadership behavior that contributes to a positive school climate beyond what the standard FRLM scales measure. Figure 4 summarises the variance explained by each framework.



Note: (a) R^2 for the FRLM models (Tables 1-3) and the ILPS models (Table 4) for each outcome. (b) Cumulative R^2 for school climate across the three steps of the hierarchical model (Table 5). ***$p < .001$.

Figure 4. Variance in school outcomes explained by the FRLM and indigenous leadership practices.

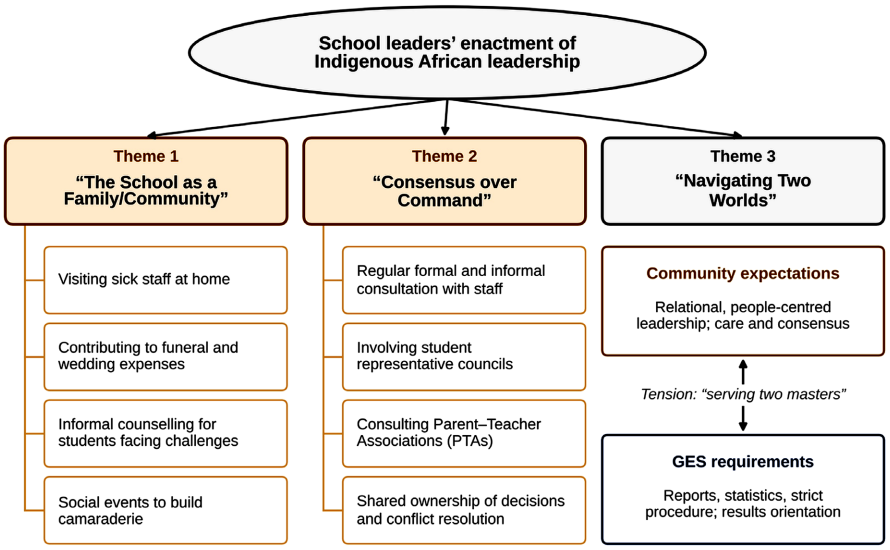
4.2. Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of the interviews with 20 school leaders revealed three overarching themes that illuminate how indigenous philosophies shape their leadership practice and the challenges they face. Figure 5 maps these themes and their associated practices.

***Theme* 1: "*The School as a Family/Community*"**

A striking consistency across interviews was the use of family and community metaphors to describe their schools and their leadership role within them. Leaders saw their responsibilities as extending beyond administrative duties to include fostering belonging, mutual care, and collective identity. This perspective aligns directly with the core tenets of Ubuntu. One headmaster from the Volta Region stated: This is not just a school; it is a community, a large family. If a teacher has a problem at home, it is my problem too. If we don't care for each other as people, how can we expect to work together for the students? Rules matter, but relationships are what make the school work. This humanistic perspective manifested in concrete practices such as visiting sick staff members at home, contributing to funeral or wedding expenses, providing informal counselling to students facing

personal challenges, and organising social events to build camaraderie and strengthen interpersonal bonds.



Note: Themes were developed through thematic analysis of interviews with 20 SHS leaders. Practices listed under Themes 1 and 2 are those reported by participants; Theme 3 captures the tension between community expectations and Ghana Education Service (GES) requirements.

Figure 5. Thematic map of school leaders' enactment of indigenous leadership.

Theme 2: "*Consensus over Command*"

While acknowledging their ultimate authority and responsibility as heads of their institutions, the interviewed leaders strongly preferred participatory, consensus-based decision-making. They described holding regular formal and informal consultations with staff, student representative councils, and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs). This practice reflects a deep-seated cultural value for consensus-building and ensuring that all voices are heard. A headmistress in the Ashanti Region explained:

I can just issue a directive, but it won't be effective. People will comply on the surface, but their hearts won't be in it. It is better to take the time to discuss, to listen to all views, even the dissenting ones. When we finally agree on a path, everyone owns it. It becomes "our" decision, not "my" decision. This is how our elders lead in the village, and it works.

This approach was seen as especially crucial for implementing new policies, resolving conflicts, and fostering shared ownership of the school's direction and success.

Theme 3: "*Navigating Two Worlds*"

A dominant and often emotionally charged theme was the tension leaders felt between their culturally ingrained, relational leadership styles and the formal, bureaucratic requirements of the Ghana Education Service. They frequently described feeling pulled between the relational demands of their school community

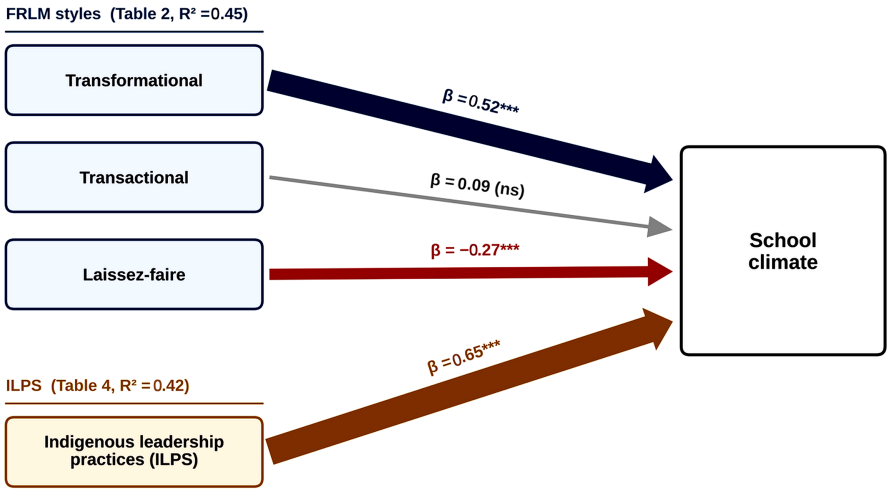
and the system's transactional, results-oriented, and often rigid demands. One experienced head from the Northern Region lamented:

The GES wants reports, numbers, statistics. They want you to follow the procedure exactly. But leadership is about people, not just paper. Sometimes the 'right' thing to do for a student or a teacher is not what the rulebook says. You have to find a balance, but it is a constant struggle. You are serving two masters: the system and your community.

This theme powerfully highlights the practical, everyday challenges of decolonising leadership from the ground up, where leaders must constantly navigate the legacy of colonial administrative structures that prioritize procedure over people (Asadu & Aguinam, 2020).

4.3. Path Diagram of Leadership Styles and School Climate

Figure 6 visually integrates the standardised coefficients from the regression analyses on school climate (Table 2 and Table 4) to illustrate the relative predictive strength of each leadership style. Arrow width is proportional to the magnitude of the beta coefficient, providing an intuitive comparison.



Note: Standardized coefficients (β) for school climate. Arrow width is proportional to |β|. FRLM coefficients are from the multiple regression in Table 2 (R^2 = .45); the ILPS coefficient is from Table 4 (R^2 = .42). ***p < .001; ns = not significant (p = .112).

Figure 6. Path diagram of leadership styles and school climate.

4.4. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Following the sequential explanatory design, the two phases of the study were deliberately connected. The survey results guided the purposive selection of interviewees, and the interview questions were designed to follow up on specific quantitative findings. This integration allows for a richer interpretation of the results. Table 6 provides a joint display that maps the qualitative themes onto the key quantitative findings.

The qualitative themes of "School as a Family" and "Consensus over Com-

mand" directly confirm and explain *why* both transformational and indigenous leadership are so strongly linked to a positive school climate. These practices build trust, foster belonging, and create a supportive environment. The themes also help to expand on the hierarchical regression finding. The unique variance explained by the ILPS likely reflects the deeply relational, culturally specific practices described by leaders, such as attending family events or using proverbs in meetings, that the more generic items of the MLQ-5X do not fully capture. The "Navigating Two Worlds" theme helps explain why transactional leadership was not a significant predictor of climate; leaders often viewed these bureaucratic, exchange-based actions as impositions from the GES, separate from the "real" work of leading people. Two quantitative findings were not explained by the interviews. First, no theme directly addressed laissez-faire leadership, likely because interviewees were selected for their active leadership profiles. Second, the interviews did not shed light on the weak link between leadership and WASSCE results, a complex issue likely influenced by many factors beyond leadership, such as student intake quality and school resources, which were not the focus of the interviews.

Table 6. Joint display of quantitative findings and qualitative themes.

Quantitative Finding	Qualitative Theme(s)	Relationship
Transformational leadership strongly predicts school climate ($\beta = .52$).	1) School as Family/Community	Confirmation
Indigenous leadership (ILPS) strongly predicts school climate ($\beta = .65$).	1) School as Family/Community	Confirmation
ILPS explains variance in climate beyond FRLM ($\Delta R^2 = .11$).	1) School as Family/Community; 2) Consensus over Command	Expansion
Transactional leadership does not predict school climate ($\beta = .09$, ns).	3) Navigating Two Worlds	Expansion
Laissez-faire leadership negatively predicts climate ($\beta = -.27$).	(None)	Not Explained
Leadership effects on WASSCE pass rates are weak.	(None)	Not Explained

Note: Confirmation = the qualitative findings agree with the quantitative result and help explain it; expansion = they add an aspect the quantitative result does not show; not explained = the interviews did not address the result. Coefficients are from Tables 1-5.

5. Discussion

This study set out to decolonise the understanding of school leadership in Ghana by critically evaluating the dominant FRLM alongside indigenous leadership philosophies. The findings provide compelling empirical evidence that while Western leadership theories have some relevance, they are insufficient on their own to capture the full essence of effective leadership in this cultural context.

5.1. Interpretation of Findings

In response to our first research question regarding the FRLM, the quantitative

results confirm that its transformational component, in particular, significantly predicts positive school outcomes such as teacher motivation and school climate. This is not surprising, as leadership behaviours like providing a vision, inspiring others, and supporting individuals are valued across many cultures (Lee et al., 2019). However, the model's overall explanatory power was moderate, and its link to student academic performance was notably weak and not statistically significant. This finding aligns with broader meta-analytic evidence suggesting that generic transformational leadership has smaller, more indirect effects on student outcomes than leadership styles focused more directly on instruction and learning. This suggests that the FRLM, on its own, provides an incomplete and potentially misleading picture of what drives school-wide success in Ghana.

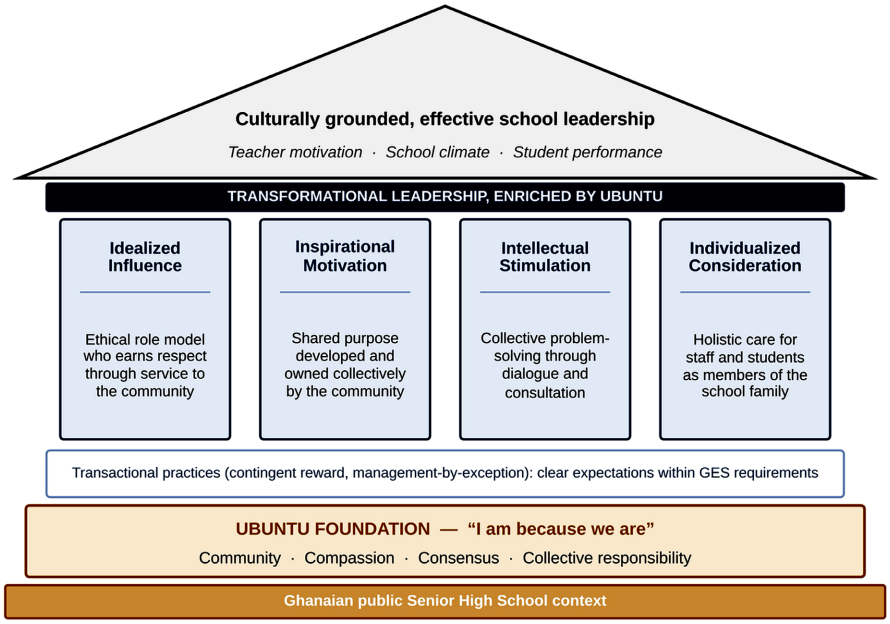
The answer to our second research question, concerning the enactment of IALPs, is vividly illuminated by both the quantitative and qualitative data. The high mean score on the ILPS and its strong predictive power for teacher motivation and school climate indicate that indigenous, Ubuntu-based leadership is not merely a theoretical ideal but a practiced and impactful reality in Ghanaian schools. The qualitative themes of the "school as a family" and "consensus over command" bring these statistics to life, illustrating how leaders enact these principles daily. They prioritise relationships, collective well-being, and participatory governance, aligning perfectly with the African theory of a good leader as a creator and sustainer of communal bonds (Metz, 2018). The "navigating two worlds" theme powerfully captures the ongoing struggle against colonial administrative legacies, forcing leaders to balance these culturally resonant practices with bureaucratic mandates that often feel alienating and counterproductive (Asadu & Aguinam, 2020).

Regarding our third research question on integration, the hierarchical regression analysis (**Table 5**) provides strong empirical support for an integrated leadership model. The finding that the ILPS explained significant additional variance in school climate after accounting for the FRLM is crucial. It suggests that the culturally specific, relational practices measured by the ILPS are not redundant with the FRLM scales and represent a distinct and important dimension of leadership. This dimension appears to be a relational, communal, and humanistic one that the FRLM, with its focus on leader-follower dyads, underemphasises. While we acknowledge that the ILPS's distinctiveness from transformational leadership requires further validation, the qualitative data strongly support the interpretation that it captures a unique cultural dimension. This finding supports the broader scholarly call to reclaim and integrate African leadership knowledge into mainstream discourse, not as an exotic alternative but as a vital contributor to a more globally inclusive science of leadership (Matshoba-Ramuedzisi & Fourie, 2026).

5.2. Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study challenges the assumed universality of the FRLM and makes a tangible contribution to the decolonisation of leadership theory. The pro-

posed Integrated Ubuntu-Full Range Leadership Model (Figure 7) offers a concrete example of how this can be achieved. Rather than simply rejecting the FRLM, it re-grounds the model in a different philosophical tradition. By infusing the "Four I's" of transformational leadership with the values of Ubuntu community, compassion, consensus, and collective responsibility, the model becomes more culturally authentic and, as our data suggest, potentially more powerful in the Ghanaian context.



Note: Ubuntu principles form the foundation that enriches and contextualises the four transformational behaviours in the Ghanaian school setting. Laissez-faire leadership is excluded from the integrated model. Practically, the implications of this research are significant and actionable for several stakeholders: There is an urgent need to reform leadership preparation, professional development, and evaluation systems. Current training programs should be revised to go beyond Western models and include substantive modules on Ghanaian and African cultural philosophies of leadership. Furthermore, evaluation criteria for school heads should be expanded to recognise and reward the crucial work of relational and community-building, not just administrative compliance and examination results. This research validates the intuitive, culturally grounded practices that many successful leaders already use. It provides them with a framework and a language to articulate and advocate for their approach, potentially helping them navigate the "two worlds" with greater confidence and legitimacy. International organisations supporting education in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa need to adopt a more culturally sensitive and collaborative approach. Instead of importing pre-packaged leadership training programmes based on Western models, they should work with local experts and practitioners to co-develop context-specific models that are grounded in local strengths, values, and philosophies.

Figure 7. An integrated ubuntu-full range leadership model.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, its cross-sectional design means we cannot infer causality; we can only report statistical

associations between leadership styles and outcomes. Second, although schools were sampled randomly within strata, the sample was drawn from only five of Ghana's sixteen regions, and participation was voluntary, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to all public SHS in Ghana. Third, our reliance on self-report surveys for leadership, motivation, and climate introduces the risk of common method variance. Fourth, the ILPS, while showing good internal consistency, is a new instrument. Further validation is needed, including confirmatory factor analysis and tests of its discriminant validity from transformational leadership, before its incremental contribution can be definitively attributed to a uniquely indigenous leadership dimension. Fifth, with only 50 schools, the school-level analyses of WASSCE performance had limited statistical power. Finally, the study is limited to Ghana, and its findings may not generalize across the continent's vast cultural diversity.

Future research should address these limitations. Longitudinal designs are needed to track the impact of integrated leadership models on school culture and student outcomes over time. Comparative studies across different African nations would be invaluable for understanding the nuances of indigenous leadership philosophies in various contexts (Gurney, 2023). It would also be beneficial to conduct a content analysis of curricula in university-level educational administration programs to assess how they address (or ignore) indigenous leadership concepts, as these programs are crucial for shaping the next generation of school leaders (Ashu, 2026). Finally, future qualitative work should include leaders with more passive or avoidant profiles to capture the full range of leadership experiences and should explicitly examine how leadership practices interact with other crucial factors, such as student intake characteristics and school resources, to shape academic results.

6. Conclusion

Decolonizing school leadership is an urgent and necessary project, not just for Africa but for a global community seeking more equitable and effective educational systems. This study demonstrates that, in the context of Ghanaian public Senior High Schools, the uncritical application of Western leadership models like the FRLM is inadequate. While these models offer useful tools and concepts, they fail to capture the deep cultural emphasis on community, relationality, and collective well-being that is central to effective leadership in this setting. Indigenous African philosophies, particularly Ubuntu, are not relics of the past but are vibrant, living principles that actively and positively shape the practice of successful school leaders today. Our findings advocate for a paradigm shift—away from the uncritical importation of foreign models and toward the thoughtful creation of hybrid, integrated frameworks. The proposed Ubuntu-Full Range Leadership Model is one such attempt to "re-center" indigenous knowledge while engaging constructively with global leadership discourse. By embracing this approach, the Ghanaian education system can cultivate a generation of school leaders who are not

only managerially competent but also wise, compassionate, and deeply connected to the communities they serve. This path leads toward a truly effective, authentic, and epistemically just educational system, one that reimagines leadership for a new era.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, H.I. and F.Y.; methodology, H.I.; software, H.I.; validation, H.I. and F.Y.; formal analysis, H.I.; investigation, H.I.; resources, H.I.; data curation, H.I.; writing, original draft preparation, H.I.; writing, review and editing, H.I. and F.Y.; visualization, H.I.; supervision, F.Y.; project administration, F.Y. Both authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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