Participative Leadership in Ghanaian Basic and Senior High Schools: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This systematic literature review examined studies on participative leadership within Ghanaian basic and senior high schools published between 2018 and 2026. The review was motivated by growing concerns surrounding school management, teacher workload, infrastructure pressure, and institutional challenges associated with the implementation of the Free SHS policy. Following the PRISMA framework, studies were retrieved from databases including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, SpringerLink, and Emerald Insight. After screening and eligibility assessment, 22 studies were included in the final synthesis. The reviewed studies largely associated participative leadership with teacher involvement, communication, collaboration, organizational commitment, and aspects of school improvement. In several school contexts, teachers appeared more supportive of school activities where leadership practices allowed greater participation in routine decisions and instructional processes. At the same time, the findings suggest that participation within Ghanaian schools often operates within institutional conditions shaped by centralized governance, workload demands, resource limitations, and administrative pressure. The review also identified methodological patterns within the literature. Quantitative and review-based studies appeared more frequently than qualitative and mixed-method approaches, while most studies focused mainly on basic and senior high school settings. Overall, the review suggests that participative leadership remains important within Ghanaian schools, although sustaining collaborative leadership practices may become difficult where institutional support, flexibility, and resources remain limited.

Keywords: Participative leadership; Basic schools; Senior high schools; School leadership; Ghanaian education

INTRODUCTION

School leadership has changed considerably in many education systems over the years, especially in schools dealing with pressure connected to student performance, accountability, and institutional management. Leadership within schools is no longer viewed only in terms of supervision or administrative control. In many settings, school leaders are now expected to work more closely with teachers and encourage some level of shared responsibility within everyday school activities (Hallinger & Wang, 2020). Teachers are often expected to contribute not only in classrooms, but also in decisions linked to instruction, discipline, and school improvement. These expectations have become more visible in school systems facing curriculum reforms, shortages in resources, increasing workload, and concerns about educational quality.

Within Ghana, discussions about school leadership have become more noticeable in recent years, particularly after reforms such as the Free Senior High School (Free SHS) policy and other national efforts aimed at improving access to education (Ibrahim, 2026). Although Free SHS widened enrolment opportunities, the policy also increased pressure on infrastructure, staffing, instructional delivery, and school administration in

many public schools. Mohammed and Kuyini (2021) noted that overcrowded classrooms, shortages in teaching materials, and rising teacher workload continued to affect school operations in several senior high schools. In some schools, headteachers and principals manage large student populations with limited institutional support. Under conditions like these, leadership approaches built mainly around hierarchy may not always fit the realities schools deal with daily. Conversations around collaborative and teacher-inclusive leadership practices have therefore continued to attract attention within Ghanaian educational discussions.

Participative leadership is commonly linked with leadership practices that allow staff members to contribute to planning, decision-making, and institutional activities within organizations (Wang et al., 2022). Within school settings, this may include teacher involvement in instructional planning, departmental coordination, discipline management, and other school-related responsibilities. The approach does not remove the authority of school leaders completely, but it creates more room for consultation and shared responsibility. Studies in organizational and educational settings often associate participative leadership with stronger professional involvement, communication, and institutional engagement where staff members feel included in school decisions (Wang et al., 2022; Khassawneh & Elrehail, 2022). Collaborative leadership practices have also been linked with teacher trust and cooperation in some educational settings.

Even so, participation within schools is not always straightforward. Participative leadership is frequently discussed alongside distributed, democratic, instructional, and transformational leadership approaches, although these leadership perspectives are not entirely identical (Hallinger & Wang, 2020; Evadzi et al., 2026). Some Ghanaian studies connect shared leadership practices with teacher cooperation, instructional support, and aspects of school effectiveness where teachers participate more directly in school governance (Bugyei & Aidoo, 2022; Evadzi et al., 2026). Other studies draw attention to institutional conditions that make participation difficult to maintain over time. Mohammed and Kuyini (2021), for instance, reported that Free SHS implementation increased pressure on infrastructure, instructional delivery, and school management in many public schools. Fenuku and Akpaku (2024) also argued that standardized administrative procedures may reduce teacher autonomy and flexibility within some school settings. In practice, participation may sometimes appear more symbolic than fully collaborative, particularly in schools operating within centralized administrative structures.

Although interest in educational leadership within Ghana has increased, studies focusing directly on participative leadership in basic and senior high schools still appear scattered across broader leadership and policy discussions. Much of the literature discusses school leadership generally without examining participation as a distinct leadership practice. In several studies, greater attention is given to instructional leadership, distributed leadership, or school management broadly, making it difficult to understand how participative leadership functions within present-day Ghanaian school conditions. There also appears to be limited synthesis relating to methodological trends, institutional outcomes, contextual barriers, and recurring patterns emerging from studies conducted within Ghanaian pre-tertiary education.

This review examines studies on participative leadership within Ghanaian basic and senior high schools published between 2018 and 2026 using the PRISMA framework (Page et al., 2021). Evidence was gathered from databases including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ERIC, SpringerLink, and Emerald Insight. Attention is given to how participative leadership has been discussed within Ghanaian schools, the outcomes associated with it, and the institutional conditions shaping its implementation across different school contexts.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design to examine studies on participative leadership within Ghanaian basic and senior high schools published between 2018 and 2026. The review generally followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines during the identification, screening, eligibility, and selection stages of the review process (Page et al., 2021). The approach was considered appropriate because literature on participative leadership within Ghanaian schools remains scattered across broader discussions on instructional, distributed, transformational, and collaborative leadership practices. Unlike traditional narrative reviews,

systematic reviews rely on clearer and more transparent procedures for identifying, selecting, and synthesizing evidence from existing studies (Snyder, 2019). The review also adopted a qualitative thematic synthesis approach because the selected studies differed considerably in methodology, context, and focus. Rather than relying on statistical aggregation, the analysis focused more on recurring patterns, institutional experiences, contextual pressures, and leadership practices emerging across the reviewed studies.

Search Strategy

The search process was conducted between January and May 2026 using several electronic databases. No single database provided enough coverage of studies relating to educational leadership and policy issues within Ghanaian schools, therefore multiple databases were combined to improve coverage and reduce the possibility of excluding relevant studies. The databases consulted included Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), ERIC, Springer Link, Emerald Insight, Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis Online, and PubMed. Search terms focused on participative leadership, school leadership, collaboration, teacher involvement, and Ghanaian education. Keyword combinations varied slightly across databases because indexing systems and search structures were not always identical. Boolean operators such as AND and OR were applied to refine searches and reduce unrelated studies. Examples of the search strings used included, "participative leadership" AND Ghana AND schools, "distributed leadership" AND teacher participation AND Ghana. "Instructional leadership" AND teacher involvement AND senior high schools, "Free SHS" AND school leadership AND Ghana. Search filters were adjusted to include peer-reviewed journal articles, English-language publications, full-text studies, and studies published between 2018 and 2026. Reference lists from selected studies were also examined manually to identify additional relevant studies not captured during the database search process.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the quality and relevance of the literature, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied during the selection process (Miranda et al., 2024).

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2018 and 2026	Studies published before 2018
Studies conducted within Ghanaian educational institutions	Studies conducted outside Ghana
Empirical studies using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods	Opinion papers, editorials, and conference abstracts
Studies focusing on participative, collaborative, distributed, or teacher-inclusive leadership	Studies unrelated to educational leadership
Full-text articles available in English	Duplicate records retrieved from multiple databases

Screening and Selection Process

The study followed the PRISMA procedure during the search and selection stages (Page et al., 2021). The initial database search produced 1,126 records. Duplicate studies were identified and removed manually and electronically, leaving 912 studies for title and abstract screening. At the screening stage, many studies were excluded because they focused on non-Ghanaian contexts, unrelated subject areas, higher education settings, or topics outside educational leadership. Other studies were removed because they fell outside the 2018–2026 publication period or lacked sufficient empirical evidence. This stage reduced the number of studies to 176 articles for full-text assessment, although 18 full-text articles could not be retrieved despite repeated searches. The remaining studies were examined further for relevance, methodological clarity, and alignment with the objectives of the review. Some studies mentioned participative leadership only briefly without discussing school-level participation directly, while others lacked sufficient methodological or analytical detail. Following the final screening stage, 22 studies were retained for thematic synthesis and analysis.

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PRISMA Flow Description

The PRISMA flow process followed four main stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. During the identification stage, 1,126 records were retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, SpringerLink, Emerald Insight, Taylor & Francis Online, Google Scholar, and PubMed. After duplicate records were removed, 912 studies remained for title and abstract screening. At the screening stage, 736 studies were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. A total of 176 full-text articles were later assessed for eligibility. However, 18 full-text articles could not be retrieved, while several others were excluded because of weak methodological explanation, limited relevance, or insufficient discussion of participative leadership within Ghanaian schools. After the final eligibility assessment, 22 studies met the inclusion criteria and were retained for thematic synthesis.

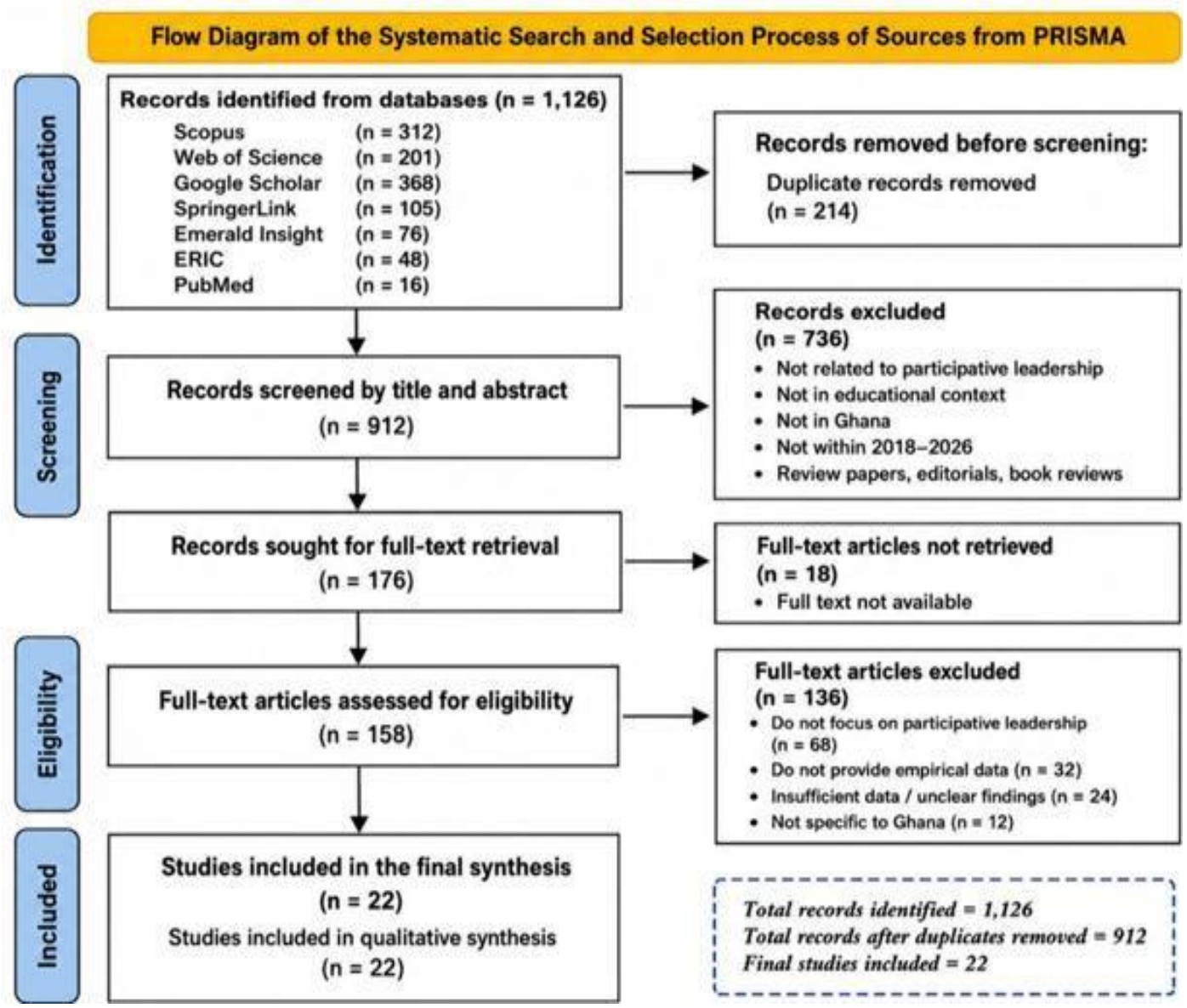


Figure 1: Flow Diagram of the Systematic review from PRISMA

Quality Appraisal of Studies

The selected studies were subjected to a basic quality appraisal before inclusion in the final synthesis. The appraisal focused on the clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of methodology, sampling procedures, data collection methods, analytical rigor, and relevance to participative leadership within Ghanaian schools. Qualitative studies were assessed mainly on methodological transparency, contextual explanation, and depth of analysis. Quantitative studies were examined in relation to research design, sampling adequacy, and clarity of statistical reporting. Mixed-method studies were evaluated based on the integration of qualitative and

quantitative findings. Studies that lacked sufficient methodological explanation, weak analytical discussion, or limited relevance to participative leadership were excluded during the eligibility stage. The appraisal process was not intended to rank studies numerically, but rather to ensure that only studies with acceptable methodological quality and direct relevance to the objectives of the review were included in the final synthesis.

Data Extraction and Analysis

Information from the 22 selected studies was organized using a structured extraction sheet. Details recorded included author(s), year of publication, research design, study location, sample characteristics, major findings, and recommendations. The extracted information was later summarized into tables to provide an overview of the characteristics of the reviewed studies. The analysis relied mainly on qualitative content analysis and thematic synthesis techniques to identify recurring patterns, institutional experiences, contextual pressures, and research gaps across the selected studies. Repeated reading and comparison of the studies helped in organizing the findings into broader thematic categories connected to participative leadership practices within Ghanaian basic and senior high schools. The final themes emerging from the review included conceptual understanding of participative leadership, participative leadership and school improvement, teacher motivation and organizational commitment, and challenges affecting participative leadership implementation. These themes formed the basis for the discussion and interpretation of findings within the review

RESULTS

This study examined participative leadership practices within Ghanaian basic and senior high schools through a systematic review of existing empirical studies. The review followed the PRISMA procedure during the identification, screening, and selection stages. An initial search across databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science (WoS) produced 1,126 records, although only 22 studies met the inclusion requirements for the final review. The selected studies showed different patterns relating to publication trends, research methods, educational settings, and leadership outcomes connected to participative leadership practices. Some studies focused on teacher involvement and school improvement, while others discussed institutional challenges affecting participation within schools. Together, the studies provide a clearer picture of how participative leadership has been discussed and examined within Ghanaian school contexts.

Publication Trends

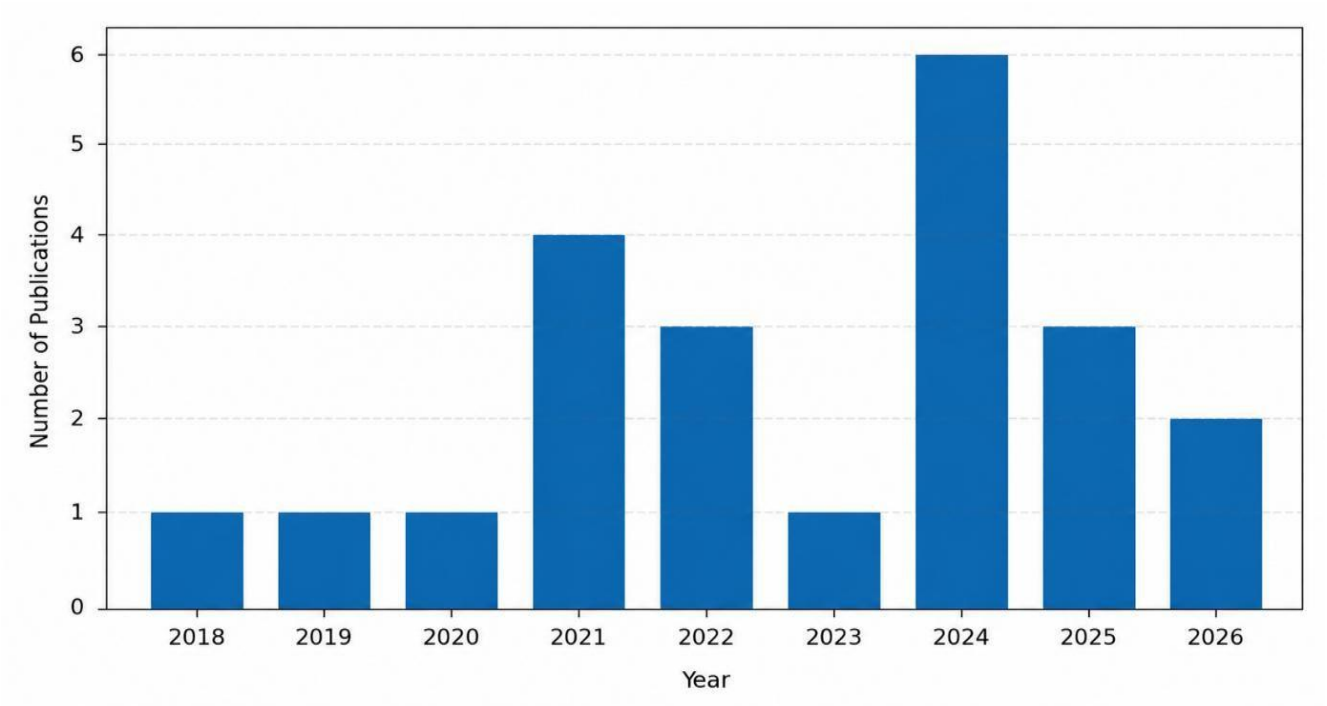


Figure 2: Distribution of Publications by Year

Studies on participative leadership in Ghanaian schools were few between 2018 and 2020, with one study recorded each year. The number rose after 2021, while 2024 had the highest number with six studies. Four studies appeared in 2021, whereas 2022 and 2025 recorded three studies each. The trend shows growing discussion around leadership and school management in Ghana, especially under pressures linked to Free SHS, workload, and infrastructure shortages. Later studies also discuss teacher participation and collaboration more directly than earlier publications.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Different research methods appeared across the 22 studies reviewed. Quantitative approaches appeared more often than the others, accounting for 7 studies. Review and policy-oriented studies also appeared frequently with 6 studies. Qualitative and mixed methods approaches were less common, with 4 studies each, while only one study adopted a quasi-experimental design. Much of the literature relied on quantitative and review-based approaches, especially in studies connected to school leadership, policy implementation, and institutional management within Ghanaian education. At the same time, the presence of qualitative and mixed methods studies points to a growing interest in understanding leadership experiences and school realities beyond numerical findings alone.

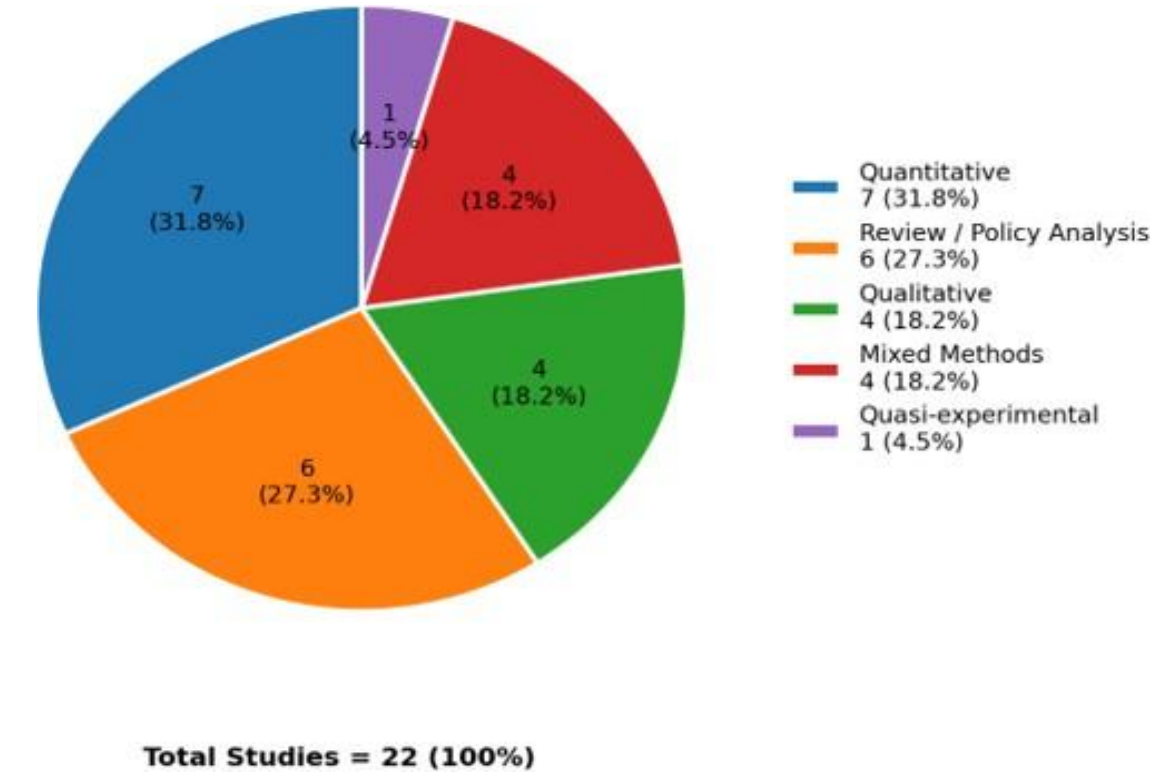


Figure 3. Distribution of Research Methodologies

Primary Educational Contexts

Most of the reviewed studies were carried out within basic and senior high school settings in Ghana. Basic or primary education appeared more frequently in the literature with 10 studies, while 8 studies focused on senior high or secondary schools. A much smaller number examined broader organizational or educational leadership contexts outside the school level. Only two studies discussed general organizational settings, whereas one study each focused on the wider education system and broader leadership issues. The pattern suggests that discussions on participative leadership in Ghana have largely centered on leadership practices within pre-tertiary schools, particularly at the basic and secondary levels where school management and instructional responsibilities remain highly visible.

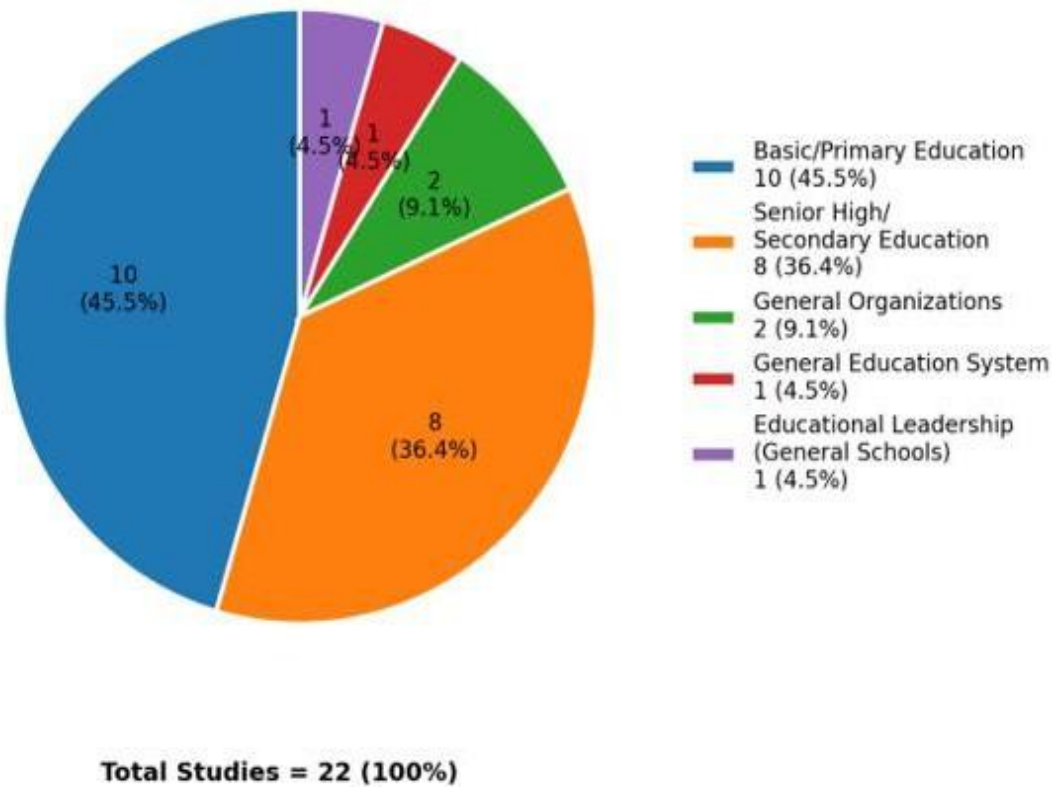


Figure 4. Distribution of Research Contexts

Table 2: Summary of reviewed studies

Author(s), Year	Focus	Context	Design	Key Finding	Recommendation / Implication
Mohammed, A. K., & Kuyini, A. B. (2021)	Exploring the implementation of the Free Senior High School policy in Ghana: Challenges and prospects	Senior High Schools in Ghana	Qualitative	The implementation of the Free SHS policy improved access to education but created challenges relating to infrastructure, teacher workload, overcrowding, and school management.	School leaders and policymakers should strengthen participatory planning, improve resource allocation, and support collaborative leadership practices within schools
Ibrahim (2026)	Social equity-informed SWOT analysis of Free SHS	Senior high schools	Policy review	Free SHS improved access but exposed inequalities in school resources and management capacity.	Participative school governance is needed to address equity and implementation gaps.
Evadzi, Osei, & Mensah (2026)	Distributed leadership and school improvement in Ghana	Basic schools	Mixed methods	Shared leadership encouraged teacher involvement and school improvement.	School heads should distribute responsibilities and build teacher leadership capacity
Dare (2024)	Ghana basic education headteacher leadership	Basic schools	Qualitative / policy analysis	Headteacher leadership practices are shaped by Ghana Education Service policy expectations.	Leadership manuals should be supported with practical training and monitoring
Ahakwa, I.	Enhancing	Basic/Prima	Quantitati	Teacher autonomy and	School leaders should

(2024)	teachers' commitment: Autonomy and learning in Ghana's basic schools	ry Schools in Ghana	ve	continuous learning opportunities significantly improved teachers' commitment and professional engagement within schools.	encourage teacher autonomy, participatory decision-making, and professional learning opportunities to improve commitment and school effectiveness.
Shamo (2023)	Implementation of Free SHS policy after five years	Senior high schools	Review / policy analysis	Free SHS produced major benefits but also challenges in infrastructure, finance, and management.	School leaders should involve teachers and stakeholders in policy implementation
Akuffo (2025)	Free SHS policy and secondary education reform	Senior high schools	Policy analysis	Free SHS reflects Ghana's effort to meet SDG 4 but faces implementation pressures	Participative leadership should support local problem-solving in SHS administration.
Osei-Owusu et al. (2018)	Instructional time and student achievement	Senior high schools	Quantitati ve	Misuse of instructional time affected student academic achievement	School leaders should involve teachers in instructional monitoring and time-use decisions
Abonyi, U. K. (2024)	Headteachers' leadership practices in Ghana: Does a formal qualification in educational leadership and management programme matter?	Basic schools in Ghana	Quantitati ve / Descriptiv e Survey	The study found that headteachers with formal qualifications in educational leadership and management demonstrated stronger school leadership practices, better communication, improved and instructional supervision.	The study recommends continuous professional development and formal leadership training for headteachers to strengthen participative leadership practices, instructional supervision, teacher involvement, and overall school effectiveness within Ghanaian basic schools.
Ansaah, Abonyi, & Salifu (2024)	Headteachers' instructional leadership practices: A comparison of public and private basic schools in two selected districts in Ghana	Basic schools in Ghana	Quantitati ve / Cross-sectional Survey	The study found that headteachers in private basic schools demonstrated stronger instructional leadership practices than those in public schools, particularly in supervising instruction and communicating school goals.	The study recommends strengthening leadership training and support systems for public basic school headteachers to improve instructional supervision, participative leadership practices, and overall school effectiveness.
Deku (2025)	Management leadership styles and job satisfaction	Senior high schools	Quantitati ve	Participative and transformational leadership were linked with staff satisfaction.	SHS leaders should reduce workload pressure and improve staff recognition.
Bugyei & Aidoo (2022)	Leadership styles and teacher motivation	Basic schools	Quantitati ve	Leadership style influenced teacher motivation in public basic schools.	Headteachers should balance authority with consultation and

					teacher support.
Dampson, D. G., Apau, S. K., & Amuah, U. (2019)	Freedom to choose within limits: Teacher autonomy from the perspectives of basic school teachers in Ghana	Public basic schools in Ghana	Mixed Methods / Explanatory Sequential Design	The study found that teachers perceived their level of professional autonomy as moderate within Ghanaian basic schools. Teacher autonomy was influenced by demographic variables such as age, teaching experience, and gender.	The study recommends that school heads and the Ghana Education Service should create supportive school environments that encourage teacher autonomy, participation in school-level decision-making, professional collaboration, and instructional flexibility.
Fenuku (2024)	Standardized teaching and teacher autonomy in Ghana	Basic / secondary schools	Mixed methods	Standardized teaching reduced teacher autonomy in some contexts	Leaders should balance standardization with teacher professional judgement
Dwomoh, D., Tetteh, J., Godi, A., et al. (2022)	The impact of the Free Senior High School education policy and double-track system on quality education outcomes: A quasi-experimental policy evaluation study in Ghana	Senior High Schools in Ghana	Quasi-experimental / Policy Evaluation Study	The study found that the Free Senior High School policy and the double-track system significantly increased access to secondary education and student enrolment across Ghana.	The study recommends stronger educational planning, improved infrastructure investment, better resource allocation, and increased support for school leadership and instructional supervision.
Wang, Hou, & Li (2022)	Participative leadership literature review	General organizations	Review	Participative leadership improves motivation, commitment, and employee voice.	Ghanaian education studies should examine participative leadership more directly.
Chen et al. (2020)	Participative leadership and creativity	General organizations	Quantitative	Participative leadership promoted creativity through psychological safety.	Schools should create safe spaces for teacher ideas and innovation.
Abonyi, U. K., & Sofo, F. (2021)	Exploring instructional leadership practices of leaders in Ghanaian basic schools	Public basic schools in Ghana	Qualitative / Interview Design	The study found limited shared instructional leadership practices among headteachers in Ghanaian basic schools.	The study recommends strengthening professional leadership preparation and encouraging more participative and collaborative leadership practices within Ghanaian basic schools.
Yahuza, A.-K.,	Telling the story: Head teachers	Basic schools in	Mixed Methods /	The study found that basic school	The study recommends strengthening leadership

Kwao, R. T., & Akosewine, F. A. (2025)	and leadership challenges in Ghana	Ghana	Cross-sectional Design	headteachers faced multiple leadership challenges, including teacher-related problems, pupil discipline issues, inadequate parental involvement, and limited institutional support.	preparation programmes, improving stakeholder collaboration, and supporting headteachers with institutional resources and participative leadership training to improve school effectiveness and educational management
Quansah, M., & Yamoah, E. E. (2024)	Qualitative insights into school improvement practices: Stakeholder perceptions in Ghanaian junior high schools	Junior High Schools in Ghana	Qualitative / Case Study	Participants emphasized that collaborative leadership and contextualized school improvement strategies contributed positively to academic performance and institutional effectiveness.	The study recommends stronger stakeholder collaboration, participative school leadership, teacher support systems, and context-specific school improvement strategies to improve academic outcomes and institutional development within Ghanaian junior high schools.
Takyi, Amponsah, Asibey, & Ayambire (2021	An overview of Ghana's educational system and its implication for educational equity	Ghanaian education system	Qualitative / Policy Review	The study found significant inequalities within Ghana's educational system relating to gender, geographical location, infrastructure, and access to educational resources	The study recommends stronger educational reforms, equitable distribution of educational resources, and inclusive leadership approaches that encourage stakeholder participation and institutional collaboration in improving educational equity within Ghana
Hallinger, P., & Wang, W. C. (2020)	Instructional leadership and school improvement	Schools / educational leadership	Review / Conceptual analysis	Effective instructional leadership contributes to teacher development, improved teaching practices, and overall school improvement outcomes.	School leaders should strengthen participative and instructional leadership practices through continuous professional development, collaboration, and teacher involvement in school improvement processes.

Based on the analysis of the 22 studies, several key themes emerged regarding the practice and impact of participative leadership in Ghana education

Conceptual Understanding of Participative Leadership

Discussions on participative leadership in schools often center on the extent to which teachers and staff contribute to everyday school decisions. In many schools, teachers take part in matters related to teaching, discipline, assessment, and other routine activities. Wang et al. (2022) describe participative leadership as a leadership approach that allows employees to contribute to organizational decision-making. The situation within schools, however, does not always reflect this idea fully. Teachers may be consulted regularly, yet important decisions often remain around headteachers and administrative structures.

Evadzi et al. (2026) linked collaborative leadership practices with closer teacher involvement and cooperation where teachers were included more actively in school leadership activities. Similar patterns appeared in studies connecting participation with teacher commitment, communication, and school functioning. The experience, however, was not the same across all schools. Hierarchy, workload pressure, and centralized administration reduced opportunities for participation in some contexts. In a few schools, collaboration looked more procedural than genuinely shared. This creates a different picture from participative leadership theory where authority is expected to move more broadly across members of the organization.

Abonyi and Sofo (2021) also observed that instructional leadership practices in some Ghanaian basic schools were shaped strongly by expectations from higher authorities. This narrowed opportunities for shared decision-making in some schools. Participative leadership in Ghanaian schools therefore seems connected not only to leadership style, but also to administrative arrangements, policy expectations, and the general culture of the school.

Participative Leadership and School Improvement

Studies reviewed in this section largely connect participative leadership with school improvement and institutional cooperation within Ghanaian schools. Research on distributed and collaborative leadership within Ghanaian basic schools suggests that teacher involvement in school-level decisions can support cooperation and improvement efforts within schools (Evadzi et al., 2026). Quansah and Yamoah (2024) also linked collaborative leadership and stakeholder participation with institutional effectiveness at the junior high school level. Across these studies, teacher participation was often associated with stronger communication, shared responsibility, and cooperation within schools. Related ideas appear in the work of Osei-Owusu et al. (2018), who examined instructional time management and student achievement in senior high schools. Although the study did not focus directly on participative leadership, it still pointed to the importance of cooperation between teachers and school leaders in monitoring instructional practices. This suggests that school improvement may depend partly on how leadership responsibilities are shared within schools rather than remaining concentrated around school heads alone. The findings were not entirely consistent across all studies. Dare (2024) discussed how headteacher leadership practices were shaped strongly by policy expectations, while Mohammed and Kuyini (2021) drew attention to management pressures associated with Free SHS, including overcrowding, infrastructure shortages, and increasing teacher workload. Under such conditions, participative leadership may support school improvement, though its influence can become limited where schools continue to face institutional and resource constraints.

Teacher Motivation and Organizational Commitment

Many of the reviewed studies connect participative leadership with teacher motivation and commitment within schools. Bugyei and Aidoo (2022) found that leadership style influenced teacher motivation in Ghanaian public basic schools, while Deku (2025) linked participative and transformational leadership practices with staff satisfaction in senior high schools. Ahakwa (2024) also reported that teacher autonomy and continuous learning opportunities strengthened professional engagement and commitment. In several of the studies, teachers appeared more motivated when school leaders involved them in decisions and allowed some level of professional input. The findings were not entirely consistent across all school contexts. Dampson et al. (2019) observed that teachers in Ghanaian basic schools experienced only moderate professional autonomy. This may explain why participation within some schools appears limited in practice even where collaboration is encouraged. Teachers may still feel restricted by hierarchy and narrow decision-making structures. Fenuku

(2024) raised a similar concern by showing that standardized teaching practices reduced teacher autonomy in some school settings. Too much administrative control may weaken teacher participation, creativity, and ownership of school activities.

Challenges Affecting Participative Leadership Implementation

The reviewed studies show that practicing participative leadership within Ghanaian basic and senior high schools is often more difficult than leadership theories suggest. Mohammed and Kuyini (2021) noted that although Free SHS improved access to education, it also increased overcrowding, teacher workload, pressure on infrastructure, and administrative difficulties in many schools. Ibrahim (2026) raised a related concern by pointing to inequalities in school resources and management capacity across some public institutions. Under such conditions, school leaders may struggle to involve teachers consistently in decision-making even where participation is encouraged. Yahuza et al (2025) also reported challenges linked to pupil discipline, weak parental involvement, teacher-related problems, and limited institutional support. Similar pressures appeared in the study by Dwomoh et al. (2022), where the double-track system created strain on instructional delivery and school management despite improving enrolment levels. In some schools, participation may remain limited to consultation meetings while important decisions continue to stay around senior administrators and external authorities. Abonyi and Sofo (2021) similarly observed that centralized governance structures continued to limit shared instructional leadership practices within some Ghanaian basic schools.

Thematic Model Emerging from the review

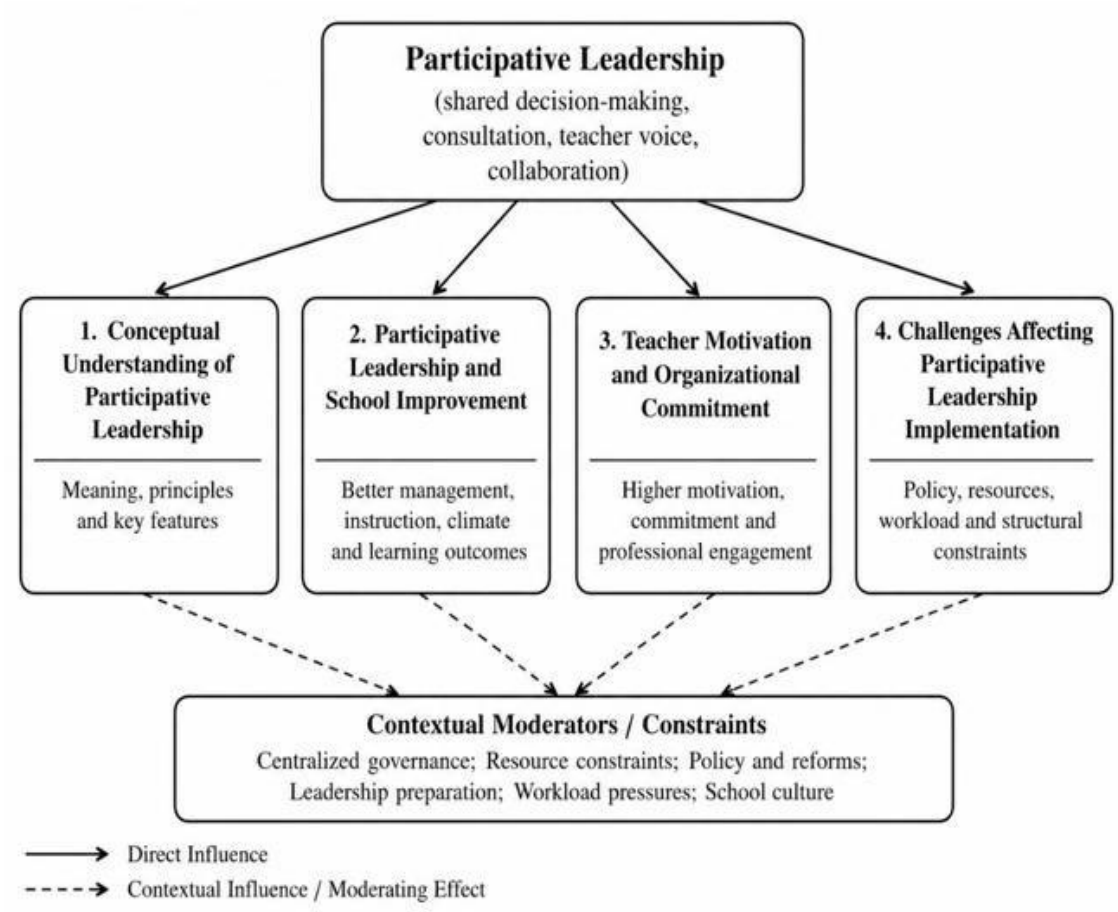


Figure 5: Thematic Model Emerging from the review

DISCUSSION

Participative leadership has gained more attention within discussions on school management in Ghana, particularly after reforms linked to Free SHS. Several studies connected teacher involvement with communication, cooperation, and school improvement efforts (Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021; Quansah &

Yamoah, 2024; Evadzi et al., 2026). Teachers in some schools also appeared more committed where they participated in decisions related to instruction and other school activities. Hallinger and Wang (2020) similarly note that schools tend to function better where leadership responsibilities are not left entirely to administrators. In many Ghanaian schools, participation seems tied closely to the daily running of the school. Leadership practices in many schools still seemed heavily controlled by centralized administrative structures. Teachers were sometimes consulted on routine matters, but important decisions mostly remained with headteachers and district authorities. In some schools, participation looked more formal than genuinely shared (Abonyi & Sofo, 2021; Dare, 2024).

Supportive leadership practices were associated with teacher morale, engagement, and job satisfaction in studies by Bugyei and Aidoo (2022), Ahakwa (2024), and Deku (2025). Dampson et al. (2019) also observed that greater teacher autonomy strengthened professional involvement. In some schools, teachers seemed more committed when they were allowed to contribute to decisions and express professional views. The experience was not identical in all settings, however. Fenuku (2024) reported that standardized teaching practices reduced teacher flexibility in some schools. Although administrative control may help maintain consistency, excessive control can weaken initiative and limit teacher participation over time.

Issues linked to overcrowding, workload, infrastructure shortages, and Free SHS implementation were also discussed in several studies (Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021; Dwomoh et al., 2022; Ibrahim, 2026). Collaborative leadership may become difficult to sustain in schools already dealing with limited resources and management pressure. Yahuza et al. (2025) further reported concerns relating to pupil discipline, weak parental involvement, and low institutional support. Under these circumstances, some school leaders may give more attention to routine administration than wider participation processes.

The reviewed studies also connected collaborative leadership with instructional supervision, school climate, communication, and staff cooperation (Osei-Owusu et al., 2018; Quansah & Yamoah, 2024). Leadership alone, however, may not fully address school-level difficulties where governance structures remain centralized and resources limited. The Ghanaian school context presents a more uneven picture than assumptions commonly found in international leadership literature. More longitudinal and mixed-method studies may help explain how participative leadership changes across different school settings over time.

Implications

This review contributes to ongoing discussions on leadership and school management in Ghanaian basic and senior high schools, particularly in relation to participation and collaboration. Several of the reviewed studies connected participative leadership with teacher motivation, communication, commitment, instructional support, and the general functioning of schools. The studies also show that leadership practices in many schools are influenced by centralized governance systems, workload pressure, resource shortages, and reforms linked to Free SHS. Participation within schools therefore does not always operate within fully decentralized structures. Teachers in some schools appeared more committed where school leaders involved them in routine decisions and school activities. Closer involvement may strengthen communication, trust, and coordination where participation goes beyond consultation alone. The experience, however, was not always straightforward. Schools dealing with overcrowding, administrative pressure, and limited institutional support may struggle to sustain collaborative leadership practices consistently. The review also raises questions about leadership preparation within Ghanaian schools. Greater attention may be needed in areas such as communication, collaboration, conflict management, and inclusive decision-making. Institutional conditions also matter. Participation may remain restricted where governance structures are highly centralized and school leaders have limited flexibility in decision-making.

Limitations And Suggestions for Future Research

This review focused mainly on studies conducted within Ghanaian basic and senior high schools, so leadership practices within other educational sectors received far less attention. Many of the reviewed studies also relied on quantitative and review-based approaches, while fewer used qualitative or mixed-method designs. Because of this, some institutional and cultural realities shaping participation within schools may not have been

explored fully. Another issue relates to the scope of several studies included in the review. Some were conducted within particular schools or districts, making broader generalization difficult across all Ghanaian educational settings. In addition, participative leadership was often discussed together with distributed, instructional, and transformational leadership, creating some overlap within the literature. The review was limited to studies published between 2018 and 2026 and retrieved from selected databases. Relevant studies outside these databases may therefore have been missed. More qualitative, mixed-method, and longitudinal research may help explain how participative leadership develops across different school environments over time. Further studies could also examine its influence on teacher retention, instructional quality, and student outcomes under changing educational reforms such as Free SHS.

CONCLUSION

This review examined studies on participative leadership within Ghanaian basic and senior high schools published between 2018 and 2026. The findings show that participative leadership continues to play an important role in school management, particularly in areas connected to teacher involvement, communication, collaboration, and institutional coordination. In many schools, participation appeared more effective where teachers were included in routine school decisions and instructional activities. The review also showed that leadership practices within Ghanaian schools are shaped strongly by institutional conditions such as centralized governance, workload pressure, limited resources, and reforms linked to Free SHS. Under such conditions, participation may sometimes remain limited despite efforts to encourage collaboration within schools. Overall, participative leadership remains relevant within Ghanaian education, especially as schools continue to deal with administrative and instructional pressures. Strengthening collaboration within schools may require supportive institutional environments, professional trust, leadership preparation, and greater flexibility in school-level decision-making. More qualitative and longitudinal research may also help explain how participative leadership develops across different Ghanaian school contexts over time.

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