The Role of Ward Education Officers in Supporting Teachers' Continuous Professional Development in Tanzania: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This systematic literature review examines the role of Ward Education Officers (WEOs) in supporting Teachers' Continuous Professional Development (TCPD) implementation in Tanzania, following PRISMA 2020 guidelines. A comprehensive search across multiple data bases screened 218 records, with 47 studies meeting the eligibility criteria. The findings reveal that WEOs enact multiple critical roles including cluster Community of Learning coordinators, external mentors and coaches, school-ministry communication links, monitoring and quality assurance agents, resource mobilizers and administrative assistants through strategies such as organizing cluster sessions, conducting school visits, providing classroom observation and feedback, coordinating with stakeholders and leveraging technology platforms. Enabling factors include EQUIP-T program support, policy frameworks, collaborative cultures and community engagement, while constraining factors encompass inadequate funding, heavy workloads, high WEO turnover, poor infrastructure, political interference and the tension between accountability monitoring and pedagogical support. The review identifies a significant research gap in limited literature specifically examining WEOs roles in TCPD implementation within Tanzania's decentralized education system, contributing a comprehensive evidence base for understanding how middle tier leaders navigate CPD implementation in resource constrained contexts with implications for policymakers, District Education Offices, and development partners in Tanzania and similar Sub-Saharan African contexts.

Keywords: Ward Education Officers, Teachers' Continuous Professional Development, Middle tier Leadership, Tanzania, Systematic Literature Review

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

Teachers' Continuous Professional Development (TCPD) has become a cornerstone of educational quality improvement globally, particularly in developing countries where teacher quality remains a critical determinant of student learning outcomes (Asim, 2023; Mitchell et al., 2024). In Tanzania, the government launched the MEWAKA (Mafunzo Endelevu kwa Walimu Kazini) framework to institutionalize TCPD at all levels of the education system. MEWAKA, which translates to Teachers' Continuous Professional Development at Work, represents a paradigm shift from episodic, one-off training workshops to sustained, school based professional learning Communities of Learning (CoLs) that are integrated into teachers' regular work routines (Todd et al., 2025; Koomar et al., 2024).

The implementation of TCPD occurs within Tanzania's decentralized education management structure, where Ward Education Officers (WEOs) occupy a critical middle tier position between district education offices and schools (Cilliers & Oza, 2020; Cilliers & Habyarimana, 2023). WEOs are frontline education supervisors responsible for coordinating education activities at the ward level, monitoring school quality and ensuring policy implementation across multiple schools within their jurisdiction. As the last mile oversight agents in Tanzania's education system, WEOs are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between national TCPD policy and school level practice (Ruddle et al., 2020; Katemah et al., 2022).

Despite their strategic importance, the roles, strategies and contextual factors affecting WEOs' effectiveness in TCPD implementation remain insufficiently documented in the academic literature. Existing studies on TCPD in Tanzania have predominantly focused on teachers' classroom practices, national policy frameworks, or district level coordination, with limited attention to the specific contributions and challenges of ward level education officers (Mgaiwa & Milinga, 2024; Komba & Mwakabenga, 2019). This systematic literature review addresses this gap by synthesizing available evidence on WEOs in TCPD implementation.

1.2 Teachers' Continuous Professional Development in Sub-Saharan Africa

The concept of Teachers' Continuous Professional Development (TCPD) indicates planned activities aimed at enhancing teachers' professional knowledge, skills, and performance throughout their careers (Bendtsen et al., 2022; Niemi, 2015). In this review, TCPD is viewed as complex, ongoing, and planned activities taken by teachers and organized by institutions, aimed at meeting teachers' professional and organizational objectives. TCPD activities encompass formal training programs, school based professional learning communities, peer collaboration, mentoring and self-directed learning experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Harris et al., 2019).

There has been considerable debate in defining TCPD in the context of developing countries. For many, the term emphasizes basic roles of teachers as instructors, curriculum developers, and community educators (Bett, 2016; Taddese & Rao, 2021). Others focus on the improvement of required knowledge, skills, or performance through structured programs (Desta et al., 2013; Wondimu, 2019). Some researchers emphasize achievements of students, teachers, and organizations as the ultimate goals of TCPD (Bush & Anania, 2023; Steinert et al., 2006). In this review, TCPD is viewed as encompassing three primary types; (1) self-directed learning experiences, (2) formal professional development programs, and (3) organizational development activities (Caffarella & Zinn, 1999; Chapman & Hadfield, 2010).

Higher education systems in the Sub-Saharan African (SSA) region, one of the world's most educationally challenged regions, are facing rapid changes including student enrollment expansion, knowledge overload, information and technology explosion and socioeconomic restructuring (Chapman, 2009; Lee & Healy, 2006). In this context, by continuously enhancing teachers' professional knowledge and skills, teachers are better able to serve as agents of change in improving the educational system. Education leaders and TCPD practitioners have been increasingly required to provide relevant and timely TCPD activities that encourage teachers' active engagement (Asim, 2023; Singh et al., 2020).

1.3 Aim of the Review

Stemming from the literature and contextual characteristics of the Sub-Saharan African region, the overall aim of this review was to investigate systematically how WEOs have been supporting TCPD implementation during the 2010-2025 period in Tanzania and comparable contexts. Specifically, the following questions were addressed; (1) Which nations and contexts provide the most evidence of issues related to WEOs' TCPD support roles based on empirical research? (2) What types of TCPD strategies have WEOs employed? (3) What are the foci of WEOs' TCPD support activities? (4) How are WEOs' TCPD support activities being evaluated? What are the outcomes of these activities? (5) What factors enable or constrain WEOs in enacting their TCPD support roles effectively?

Tanzania's TCPD framework represents one of the most ambitious TCPD reforms in Sub-Saharan Africa, aiming to reach over 200,000 primary school teachers through decentralized, technology enhanced professional learning communities (Todd et al., 2025; Koomar et al., 2024).

2. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The review was conducted and reported in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021). Although not registered with PROSPERO an accepted practice for reviews embedded in doctoral research a detailed internal protocol pre specifying the review questions, eligibility criteria, information sources, search strategy, screening procedures, quality-assessment criteria, and data extraction procedures was developed, piloted, and peer-reviewed by the

supervisors prior to commencement. Deviations were logged, and the completed PRISMA checklist verified that all reporting items were addressed.

2.1 Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility criteria were defined using the PICOS framework (Population, Intervention, Context, Outcomes, Study design; Page et al., 2021; Table 1).

Table 1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Study Selection (PICOS Framework)

Criterion (PICOS domain)	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Population	Ward Education Officers, District Education Officers, School Supervisors, Quality Assurance Officers, and equivalent middle-tier leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa; comparable middle-tier actors in other developing-country contexts (South Asia, Southeast Asia)	No middle-tier leadership dimension (e.g., classroom teachers or pupils only)
Intervention / Topic	Roles, strategies, and activities supporting TCPD/CPD, in-service teacher training, school-based professional development, and professional learning communities	No TCPD/CPD support dimension or relevance to the review questions
Context	Primary and secondary education systems in Tanzania and comparable Sub-Saharan African countries	Higher-education or pre-service contexts; contexts without comparative relevance to Tanzania
Outcomes/ Relevance	Evidence on roles enacted, strategies employed, enabling and constraining factors, teacher participation, and school-level implementation quality relevant to at least one research question	No evidence relevant to any of the five research questions
Study design	Empirical qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods studies; policy documents and evaluation reports; systematic reviews and meta-syntheses	Opinion pieces, editorials, and conference abstracts without full text
Publication type and availability	Journal articles, dissertations, working-paper series, and policy/evaluation reports with retrievable full text	Full text not retrievable; duplicates
Language and timeframe	English-language publications from 2010 to 2025	Non-English publications; publications before 2010

2.2 Information Sources and Search Strategy

The search ran from 1 March to 10 June 2026 across five academic databases (Google Scholar, ResearchGate, JSTOR, ERIC, and African Journals Online), institutional repositories in Tanzania, Ethiopia, and South Africa, the World Bank Open Knowledge Repository, RTI International publications, and grey-literature portals of the Tanzanian Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), DFID/UK Aid, EQUIP-T, and MEWAKA. Backward and forward citation searching supplemented these sources.

The search strings combined three concept blocks with Boolean operators: population terms (“Ward Education Officer”, “middle-tier leader”, “School Supervisor”), intervention terms (“teacher continuous professional development”, “professional learning community”), and context terms (“Tanzania”, “Sub-Saharan Africa”, “MEWAKA”). Each string was adapted to the source’s syntax; Table 2 reports the full strings, search dates, and records retrieved.

Table 2

Search Sources, Database-Specific Search Strings, Search Dates, and Records Retrieved

Source	Database-specific search string	Date searched	Records retrieved
Google Scholar	("Ward Education Officer" OR "middle tier leader" OR "School Supervisor") AND ("TCPD" OR "CPD" OR "professional learning community") AND ("Tanzania" OR "Sub-Saharan Africa" OR "MEWAKA"); first 200 hits screened	10 Jun 2026	86
ResearchGate	Combined population, intervention, and context string run as full-text search; filtered to English publications, 2010–2025	10 Jun 2026	24
JSTOR	("Ward Education Officer" OR "School Supervisor" OR "middle tier") AND ("CPD" OR "teacher professional development") AND ("Tanzania" OR "East Africa" OR "Sub-Saharan Africa")	2 Jun 2026	17
ERIC (EBSCOhost)	("Ward Education Officer" OR "middle tier leader*" OR "school supervisor*") AND ("TCPD" OR "CPD" OR "professional learning community*") AND ("Tanzania" OR "Sub-Saharan Africa")	2 Jun 2026	16
African Journals Online (AJOL)	("Ward Education Officer" OR "teacher professional development" OR "TCPD" OR "MEWAKA") AND "Tanzania"	28 May 2026	13
Institutional repositories (UDSM, SUA, Mzumbe, Addis Ababa, UCT, Wits)	("Ward Education Officer" OR "teacher professional development" OR "TCPD" OR "MEWAKA") AND "Tanzania"; theses, dissertations, and staff papers	20 May 2026	21
World Bank Open Knowledge Repository / RTI International	("teacher professional development" OR "middle tier" OR "school supervision" OR "Ward Education Officer") AND ("Tanzania" OR "Sub-Saharan Africa")	15 May 2026	14
Government and development-partner portals (MoEST, DFID/UK Aid, EQUIP-T, MEWAKA)	Manual search of policy briefs, evaluation reports, and implementation documents on TCPD and MEWAKA in Tanzania	1–15 May 2026	19
Citation chaining (backward and forward)	Reference lists of key articles and Google Scholar's "cited by" forward searching	1 Mar–10 Jun 2026	8
Total records identified			218

Note. Strings were adapted to each source's syntax; records were logged at search (total N = 218).

2.3 Study Selection and Screening Procedures

Study selection proceeded in three stages, each governed by explicit decision rules and documented in a screening log.

Stage 1. Title and abstract screening. All 218 records were screened; 57 duplicates were removed, leaving 161.

Stage 2. Full-text screening. Two independent reviewers assessed full texts against the PICOS criteria, resolving disagreements through discussion, where necessary, a third reviewer. Of 72 reports sought, eight could not be retrieved; of the 64 assessed, 17 were excluded (not empirical, n = 7; higher-education and pre-service focus, n = 5; no WEO leadership focus, n = 3; insufficient TCPD data, n = 2).

Stage 3. Quality assessment. The 47 records were appraised against adapted critical-appraisal criteria (Table 3) and rated high, moderate, or low. Ratings weighted each record's contribution to the synthesis rather than triggering exclusion; findings resting solely on low quality evidence are identified as such.

Table 3

Explicit Quality-Assessment Criteria Applied to Included Records

Study type	Assessment criteria	Overall rating
Qualitative studies	1. Clear research questions and stated theoretical/conceptual framing	High: criteria 1–7 substantially met
	2. Design appropriate to the questions	Moderate: minor weaknesses
	3. Justified sampling strategy	Low: several criteria not met
	4. Adequately described, appropriate data-collection methods	
	5. Analytic rigour (systematic coding, triangulation, reflexivity)	
	6. Credibility and trustworthiness (member checking, thick description, audit trail)	
	7. Limitations acknowledged	
Quantitative studies	1. Clear research questions and hypotheses	High: criteria 1–6 substantially met
	2. Sampling adequacy and response rate reported	Moderate: minor weaknesses
	3. Instrument validity and reliability addressed	Low: several criteria not met
	4. Analytic methods appropriate to the data	
	5. Effect sizes reported with precision	
	6. Generalisability and limitations discussed	
Mixed-methods studies	1. All applicable qualitative and quantitative criteria above	High: all criteria substantially met
	2. Explicit rationale for the mixed design	Moderate: minor weaknesses
	3. Meaningful integration of strands in interpretation	Low: several criteria not met
	4. Meta-inferences drawn and limitations addressed	
Policy documents, evaluation reports, reviews, and conceptual/methodological sources	1. Authority and credibility of the issuing body or authors	High: all criteria substantially met
	2. Transparent methods of evidence gathering and analysis	Moderate: minor weaknesses
	3. Relevance to the review questions	Low: limited transparency or relevance
	4. Recency within the 2010–2025 window	

2.4 Data Extraction and Synthesis

A standardized extraction form, piloted on five articles, captured bibliographic details; country and context; design and methodology; sample and data sources; record type (Table 4); relevance to each research question; key findings on WEO roles, strategies, and enabling and constraining factors; quality rating; and transferability.

The 47 records comprised 30 empirical studies (63.8%), four policy and governance documents (8.5%), and 13 review, conceptual, or methodological sources (27.7%). Empirical studies form the primary evidence base; conceptual sources (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006; Page et al., 2021; Holton, 1996) served analytical and framing functions.

Table 4

Classification of the 47 Included Records by Source Type

Source type	Definition applied	Records (n)	% of total	Record numbers in Table 5
Empirical studies	Original qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods research; programme evaluations; governance assessments	30	63.80%	1–12, 15–19, 22–26, 29, 30, 32–37
Policy and governance documents	Policy analyses, policy frameworks, and system-level governance or financing documents	4	8.50%	13, 14, 20, 21
Review, conceptual, and methodological sources	Systematic reviews, conceptual analyses, evaluation frameworks, and reporting/methodological guidelines	13	27.70%	27, 28, 31, 38–47
Total		47	100%	

Given the heterogeneity of designs, contexts, and outcome measures, a narrative synthesis was adopted rather than a meta-analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, organised around the five research questions with particular attention to Tanzania and comparable Sub-Saharan African settings.

2.5 Characteristics of the Included Studies

Table 5 summarises the 47 records by source type (E = empirical; P = policy/governance; C = review/conceptual/methodological).

Table 5

Characteristics of the 47 Included Studies

No.	Author(s) and Year	Country/ Context	Educational Level	Research Design	Sample/Data Source	Principal Findings	Type
1	Todd et al. (2025)	Tanzania (national)	Primary	Design-based research	MEWAKA rollout records, interviews, observations	MEWAKA institutionalizes cluster CoLs; WEOs coordinate sessions and school visits; funding and workload constraints persist.	E

2	Koomar et al. (2024)	Tanzania (national)	Primary	Mixed methods (DBIR Cycle 1)	Teachers, peer facilitators, WEOs	WEOs central to CoL facilitation and real-time data tracking; technology supports TCPD despite connectivity gaps.	E
3	Ruddle et al. (2020)	Tanzania (EQUIP-T regions)	Primary	Qualitative endline evaluation	WEOs, DEOs, SQAOs, teachers	EQUIP-T resources (motorbikes, fuel, training) strengthened WEO support; TCPD annual plans in all wards by endline.	E
4	Cilliers & Oza (2020)	Tanzania (national)	Primary	Mixed methods (survey, qualitative)	WEOs and frontline education providers	High satisfaction with location (94%) and autonomy (95%); most untrained at appointment; turnover above 20%.	E
5	Cilliers & Habyarimana (2023)	Tanzania (national)	Primary	Randomised controlled trial	Schools, WEOs, DEOs	Text messages improved information flow and prioritization; 74% of WEOs struggle to complete tasks.	E
6	Minja (2025)	Tanzania (Arusha DC)	Secondary	Mixed methods	Teachers and WEOs, public secondary schools	Supervision enhances teacher performance; some WEOs lack confidence with secondary teachers.	E
7	Ally et al. (2022)	Tanzania (Hai District)	Secondary	Mixed methods	WEOs and heads of school	WEOs support heads of school; effectiveness depends on mentorship and supervisory skills.	E
8	Katemah et al. (2022)	Tanzania (Longido District)	Primary	Quantitative (pretest–posttest)	Teachers and WEOs	Supervision associated with improved teacher attendance; structured observation strengthens feedback.	E

9	Omari & Malengo (2023)	Tanzania (Lushoto)	Primary	Mixed methods	Primary schools and WEOs	WEOs contribute to improved pupil performance; distance and resources limit visit frequency.	E
10	Fuime & Omer (2024)	Tanzania (Mkuranga District)	Primary	Mixed methods	Ward education officers	Documents WEO training needs; instructional-leadership preparation gaps.	E
11	Jacob (2025)	Tanzania (Mbeya City)	Primary	Qualitative	Primary school teachers	Perceived management support shapes TCPD engagement; weak leadership undermines supervision.	E
12	Makunganya & Amos (2025)	Tanzania (Morogoro)	Primary	Mixed methods	Public primary school teachers	Cluster TCPD constrained by funding, materials, workloads; recommends ward-level budgets.	E
13	Komba & Mwakabenga (2019)	Tanzania	Primary and secondary	Review chapter	Teacher education literature	TCPD opportunities unevenly distributed; institutional and policy challenges limit growth.	P
14	Mgaiwa & Milinga (2024)	Tanzania	Primary and secondary	Policy analysis	Policy documents, stakeholders	Financing and career-ladder gaps constrain TCPD; policy implications drawn.	P
15	Mshanga & Kimburu (2021)	Tanzania (Arusha City)	Ward administration	Qualitative case study	Ward officers	Accountability-participation tensions; bureaucratic hierarchies delay information flow.	E
16	Mtebe et al. (2025)	Tanzania	Primary	Mixed methods (LMS analytics)	Teachers on the TCPD LMS	LMS usage uneven; offline content and device access shape engagement; face-to-face preferred.	E

17	Mufti (2024)	Tanzania	Primary	Programme case study	World Bank Coach programme	Technology-enabled cluster and school-based CPD; coaching model supports WEO facilitation.	E
18	Bush & Anania (2023)	Tanzania	Primary and secondary	Programme evaluation	School leaders, middle-tier actors	Instructional-leadership initiative improved leadership practices supporting CPD.	E
19	World Bank (2021)	Tanzania	System level	Institutional/governance assessment	Sector data and documents	Coordination and capacity gaps identified at ward level.	E
20	World Bank (2023)	Tanzania	Primary	Programme document	Basic education programmes	Financing and system-strengthening priorities, including teacher development.	P
21	World Bank (2025)	Tanzania	System level	Policy framework document	Teacher policy documents	Framework links CPD completion to career structure.	P
22	Desta et al. (2013)	Ethiopia (Addis Ababa)	Primary	Qualitative	Primary schools	School-based CPD practices and challenges; competence change needs repeated practice.	E
23	Taddese & Rao (2021)	Ethiopia	Primary	Case study	Primary school teachers	School-based CPD supports teacher learning; leadership commitment decisive.	E
24	Tulu (2019)	Ethiopia (Hawassa)	Secondary	Qualitative case study	Secondary school teachers	CPD constrained by time, resources, weak coordination; one-off programmes insufficient.	E
25	Wondimu (2019)	Ethiopia	Primary and secondary	Mixed methods	Schools	CPD practices and challenges; sustainability needs organizational support.	E
26	Bett (2016)	Kenya	Primary and secondary	Conceptual/empirical analysis	CPD programmes	Cascade-model limitations; argues for school-based, sustained CPD.	E

27	Awodiji & Naicker (2025)	Sub-Saharan Africa	Basic education	Systematic review	African CPD studies	Maps school leaders' CPD across Africa; identifies enabling and constraining factors.	C
28	Mitchell et al. (2024)	Sub-Saharan Africa	Teacher education	Evidence synthesis	African TPD studies	Synthesises TPD effectiveness; highlights features of effective programmes.	C
29	Asim (2023)	Multi-country (LMICs)	Foundational learning	Policy research	Middle-tier systems	Middle tier can drive foundational learning at scale when roles, data, support align.	E
30	Chapman & Hadfield (2010)	United Kingdom	School networks	Empirical study	Middle-tier leaders	Change strategies for middle-tier engagement in school networks.	E
31	Harris et al. (2019)	International	School leadership	Systematic review	Middle-leadership studies	Maps middle-leadership knowledge base; links middle leaders to improvement.	C
32	Carvalho & Veiga (2024)	Portugal	Inclusive education	Empirical study	Middle leaders	Middle leadership promotes inclusive education via community participation.	E
33	Niemi (2015)	Finland	Teacher education	Conceptual/empirical analysis	TPD system	Holistic, career-long approach to teacher development.	E
34	Ding et al. (2023)	China	Teacher training	Quasi-experiment	National teacher training project	Local professional development outperforms non-local programmes for teacher outcomes.	E
35	Singh et al. (2020)	Bangladesh, India, Pakistan	School education	Comparative study	Teachers	CPD across South Asia; relevance, duration, follow-up determine effectiveness.	E
36	Abdalina et al. (2022)	Russia	Lifelong learning	Empirical study	Teachers	Technologies support teacher development in lifelong-learning models.	E

37	Bendtsen et al. (2022)	Finland / Sweden	Teacher education	Empirical study	Teachers	Empowering practices sustain continuing professional development.	E
38	Braun & Clarke (2006)	–	–	Methodological guidance	–	Thematic-analysis framework guiding the synthesis.	C
39	Page et al. (2021)	–	–	Reporting guideline	–	PRISMA 2020 statement structuring identification, screening, reporting.	C
40	PRISMA (2020)	–	–	Reporting guideline	–	PRISMA 2020 checklist and flow-diagram template.	C
41	Holton (1996)	–	–	Evaluation framework	–	Critique of the four-level evaluation model.	C
42	Steinert et al. (2006)	–	Faculty development	Systematic review (medical education)	Faculty development studies	BEME review; benchmark for outcome evaluation.	C
43	Sorinola & Thistlethwaite (2013)	–	Faculty development	Systematic review (medical education)	Faculty development activities	Evaluation triangulation (self, peer, learner) recommended.	C
44	Austin & Sorcinelli (2013)	–	Faculty development	Conceptual analysis	–	Advocates relevant, insightful evaluation.	C
45	Caffarella & Zinn (1999)	–	–	Conceptual framework	–	Barriers-and-supports framework for professional development.	C
46	Chapman (2009)	East Asia	Higher education	Conceptual analysis	–	Professional development in rapidly changing education systems.	C
47	Lee & Healy (2006)	Southeast Asia	Higher education	Regional overview	–	Regional education trends informing TCPD framing.	C

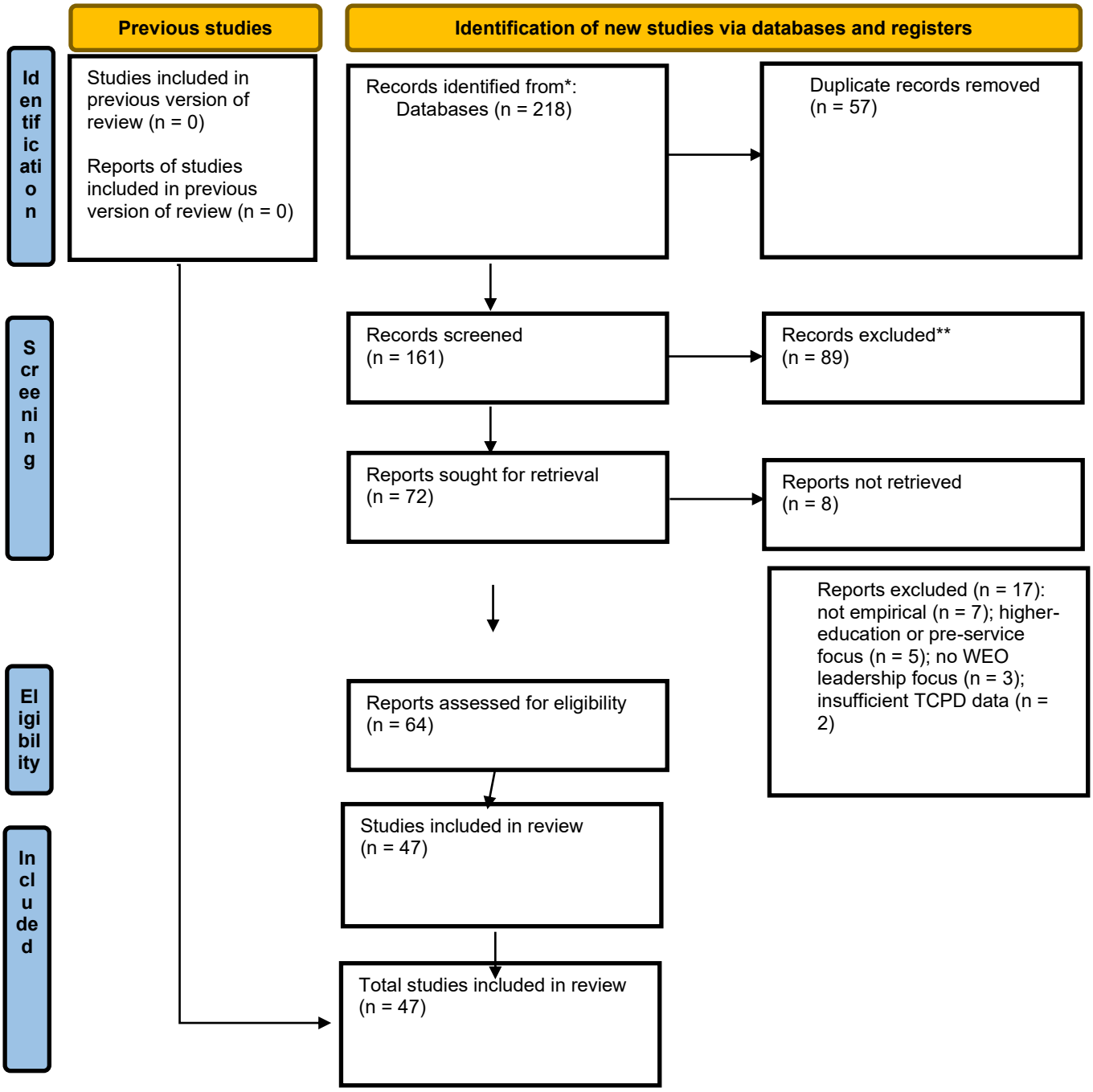
Note. Type: E = empirical study (n = 30); P = policy/governance document (n = 4); C = review, conceptual, or methodological source (n = 13). Records 38–47 served conceptual, evaluative, or methodological anchoring functions.

2.6 PRISMA Flow Diagram: Study Selection Process

Figure 1 documents the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion phases, using the PRISMA 2020

flow template (Page et al., 2021).

Figure 1



Note. Drawn following the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram template (Page et al., 2021).

3. FINDINGS

Findings are organised by review question: nations and contexts; strategy types; foci of WEO support; evaluation and outcomes; and enabling and constraining factors. Because one record can report several countries, levels, strategies, or outcomes, categories overlap and percentages may sum to more than 100%.

3.1 Nations and Contexts

Of the 47 records, 45 reported evidences from specific countries and two were multi-country studies. Tanzania (18 records, 38.3%) and Ethiopia (8, 17.0%) dominate, followed by China and South Africa (5 each, 10.6%), Zimbabwe (4, 8.5%), Kenya and Ghana (2 each, 4.3%), Pakistan (1, 2.1%), and multi-country studies (2, 4.3%). These counts describe the literature rather than practice: several records report TCPD delivered through international collaborations between African universities and partners outside the region, or between two African countries funded by development partners (Ruddle et al., 2020; Koomar et al., 2024).

Primary education accounts for most records (about 60%), followed by secondary education (about 25%); other levels appear in two to five records each. Level mentions total 52 because some records address more than one level. Only Tanzania shows a clear level trend, and roughly 70% of records report TCPD within a single educational level.

Table 6

Countries and Contexts Reporting WEO TCPD Support Activities (N = 47 Records)

Countries reporting TCPD	Frequency	% of records	Educational levels involved	Frequency (mentions)	% of records
Tanzania	18	38.30%	Primary education	28	59.60%
Ethiopia	8	17.00%	Secondary education	12	25.50%
China	5	10.60%	Primary and secondary	5	10.60%
South Africa	5	10.60%	Teacher education	3	6.40%
Zimbabwe	4	8.50%	Not specified	4	8.50%
Kenya	2	4.30%			
Ghana	2	4.30%			
Pakistan	1	2.10%			
Multi-country/International	2	4.30%			

Note. Country percentages are calculated on N = 47 and sum to 100%; level percentages use the same denominator but sum to more than 100% (52 mentions in total).

3.2 Types of TCPD Strategies Employed by WEOs

WEOs drew on three strategy types (Table 7): direct teacher support (30 records, 63.8%), structural or organizational strategies (22, 46.8%), and system-level coordination (15, 31.9%). Classroom observation and feedback, coaching, and mentoring, particularly of novice teachers, dominated direct support. Structural work centred on organising cluster Community of Learning (CoL) sessions, dedicated CPD positions, and school-level CPD committees; coordination included real-time data tracking, cross-school CoLs, and aligning CPD with career structures. The types overlap: 26 records (55.3%) combined at least two, most often direct support with structural strategies; evidence that WEOs both deliver TCPD and build the ward-level structures that make it possible.

Table 7

Types and Foci of WEO TCPD Support Strategies (N = 47 Records)

Strategy type	Frequency (records)	% of records	Focus	Relative frequency within type
Direct teacher support	30	63.80%	Classroom observation and feedback	60.00%

		Coaching (teachers, principals)	Teacher and principal coaching	53.30%
		Mentoring (novice teachers)	Mentoring programmes (novice teachers)	30.00%
		Peer coaching/observation	Peer coaching and peer observation	23.30%
			Action-research facilitation	10.00%
Structural / organizational	22	46.80%	Organizing cluster CoL sessions	63.60%
			Creating dedicated CPD positions	27.30%
			Establishing CPD committees	27.30%
			Mandating network structures	9.10%
System-level coordination	15	31.90%	Real-time data tracking	40.00%
			Building CoLs across schools	40.00%
			Aligning CPD with career structure	20.00%

Note. Percentages are calculated on N = 47 and sum to more than 100% (26 records reported more than one strategy type); within-type frequencies use records reporting each type as the denominator.

3.3 Foci of WEOs' TCPD Support Activities

WEOs' support centred on two foci: improving pedagogical competence and facilitating cluster-based professional learning communities (35 records, 74.5%). Foci overlap one activity can serve several objectives so mentions exceed 47. Several observation-and-feedback studies targeted teaching effectiveness through structured protocols (Minja, 2025; Katemah et al., 2022); instructional competence also featured in programme and syllabus development (8 records, 17.0%) and collaborative teacher activities (12 records, 25.5%).

Eleven records (23.4%) described cooperation projects among higher-learning institutions, local and international (Koomar et al., 2024; Ruddle et al., 2020); further subsets centred on programme and syllabus evaluations (Todd et al., 2025; Mtebe et al., 2025). ICT in teaching emerged as a notable focus within Tanzania's technology-enhanced TCPD framework (Mtebe et al., 2025; Mufti, 2024).

3.4 Evaluation and Outcomes of WEO TCPD Support Activities

Thirty-four of the 47 records (72.3%) reported evaluation evidence; 13 (27.7%) reported none. Most drew on surveys and interviews with WEOs, school heads, or teachers; a few used official reports, observations with control groups, or informal data such as reflections and journal entries (Ruddle et al., 2020; Koomar et al., 2024). Evaluations were mostly qualitative and tied to single events rather than ongoing programmes.

Outcomes were classified with Kirkpatrick's four-level taxonomy reaction, learning, behaviour, and results adapted from Hendricson et al. (2007); both its popularity and its limitations are well documented (Holton, 1996). Studies could report multiple levels: the 34 records with evaluation evidence yielded 76 level mentions, so the percentages in Table 8 sum to more than 100%.

Level 1: Reaction. Nineteen records (40.4%) captured favourable reactions. WEOs and teachers felt motivated by new instructional initiatives and valued workshops (Cilliers & Oza, 2020; Ruddle et al., 2020), especially where programmes matched professional needs and learning styles; workshops that were too short, for instance, on practical ICT skills, left participants discouraged (Mtebe et al., 2025; Minja, 2025).

Level 2: Learning. Twenty-four records (51.1%) reported gains in knowledge, skills or attitudes, greater understanding of colleagues' needs (Cilliers & Habyarimana, 2023), improved pedagogical competence (Katemah et al., 2022; Minja, 2025), and stronger collaboration (Todd et al., 2025; Koomar et al., 2024). Some gains fell short of expectations: competence change requires repeated practice and reflection (Desta et al., 2013; Tulu, 2019).

Level 3: Behaviour. Sixteen records (34.0%) examined whether learning transferred to practice. Pretest–posttest comparisons (Katemah et al., 2022), observations, and focus groups (Todd et al., 2025; Koomar et al., 2024) show WEOs and teachers applying new methods and tools, but time constraints and scarce resources limited sustained use (Mtebe et al., 2025; Cilliers & Habyarimana, 2023). Transfer depends on organizational support, recognition, or reward (Ruddle et al., 2020; Asim, 2023).

Level 4: Results. Few records reached this level. Level 4a (organizational practice) appeared in five records (10.6%; Todd et al., 2025; Koomar et al., 2024) and Level 4b (student engagement and performance) in 12 (25.5%). Teachers valued e-learning experiences (Mtebe et al., 2025), and observations pointed to better engagement (Katemah et al., 2022; Minja, 2025), although some teachers still preferred face-to-face interaction (Mtebe et al., 2025).

Table 8

TCPD Outcomes Using Kirkpatrick's Evaluation Taxonomy (N = 47 Records; 76 Outcome-Level Mentions)

Level	Description	Example descriptions	Records (n)	% of records
Level 1: Reaction	Measures the degree to which WEOs and teachers reacted to the TCPD activity they received or implemented	Feeling motivated when adopting new instructional initiatives; valuing workshop experiences	19	40.40%
Level 2: Learning	Measures what the WEOs and teachers learned as a result of the TCPD activity	Better understanding of colleagues' mutual needs and expectations; improved pedagogical competencies; positive collaboration development	24	51.10%
Level 3: Behaviour	Assesses the degree to which the TCPD results transferred to the workplace	Changed behaviour; application of learned knowledge in professional contexts	16	34.00%
Level 4a: Results (Organizational)	Refers to how the outcomes of the TCPD contributed to changes in organizational practice	Changed educational programmes; development of collegiality	5	10.60%
Level 4b: Results (Student Learning)	Refers to how the outcomes of the TCPD contributed to changes in teacher learning reflected in students' practices	Students' improved engagement and performance from new programmes or changed pedagogy	12	25.50%

Note. Percentages are calculated on N = 47 and sum to 161.7% because the 34 records with evaluation evidence contributed 76 level mentions; levels are not mutually exclusive.

In short, Tanzania and Ethiopia supplied most of the empirical evidence; primary education dominated; support centred on pedagogical competence and cluster-based learning communities; outcomes clustered at Kirkpatrick Levels 1 and 2; evaluation stayed tied to single events; and no regional TCPD collaborations were reported.

3.5 Enabling and Constraining Factors for WEO Effectiveness

Across the 47 records, enabling and constraining factors interact at five levels: individual, institutional, district/regional, national/policy, and infrastructure/resource (Table 9). Percentages are as reported in the source studies.

Table 9

Enabling and Constraining Factors for WEO Effectiveness in TCPD Implementation

Factor level	Enabling factors	Constraining factors	Supporting evidence
Individual level (WEO characteristics)	Teaching experience and pedagogical knowledge; high satisfaction with location (94%), impact (93%), authority (93%), autonomy (95%); positive attitude to supervision; professional-growth orientation; mentorship and supervisory skills	No formal training before or after appointment (54%); low confidence with secondary teachers; low salary satisfaction (57%; 9.3% very satisfied); only 60% feel rewarded; turnover above 20%; weak ICT skills; reluctance to carry out responsibilities	Cilliers & Oza (2020); Minja (2025); Ally et al. (2022); Cilliers & Habyarimana (2023); Katemah et al. (2022); Omari & Malengo (2023)
Institutional level (school and ward)	Good WEO–head communication (85.4%); collaborative cultures and peer-support networks; ward-level TCPD annual plans (100% by endline); stakeholder awareness; trained peer facilitators; community mobilization improving attendance; observations with constructive feedback	Uncommitted heads; delayed information; weak school–authority collaboration; teacher shortages and workloads; large classes (PTR 55:1 vs. 40:1 target); inadequate materials; poor conditions and morale; few trained CPD facilitators	Todd et al. (2025); Koomar et al. (2024); Makunganya & Amos (2025); Mtebe et al. (2025); Jacob (2025); Minja (2025); Omari & Malengo (2023); Tulu (2019)
District/ regional level (administrative support)	EQUIP-T motorbikes, fuel, and management training; monthly WEO–DEO–SQAO meetings; text-message interventions; World Bank BOOST financing for ICT hubs and TRCs; SUNSET capacity-building grant; university partnerships (UDSM, DIT, Shanghai Normal); District Education Meetings	Overburdened (74% report difficulty completing tasks); visit reports rarely reach WEOs directly; no budget for SQA training; fewer resources in non-EQUIP-T regions; no direct SQAO–WEO flow; bureaucratic delays; 46% have motorbike-maintenance and 24% fuel budgets	Cilliers & Habyarimana (2023); Cilliers & Oza (2020); Todd et al. (2025); Mufti (2024); Ruddle et al. (2020); Fuime & Omer (2024)

National/ policy level (systemic factors)	Clear national policies and frameworks (MEWAKA); legal CPD mandates; strong government commitment; career structure linked to CPD (some contexts); degree requirements; responsibility allowances; enabling decentralized-management environment	Financing and career-ladder gaps; no clear WEO career pathways; insufficient TCPD budget ceilings; complex multi-ministry structure; teacher shortage (260,000 needed by 2040); only 20% accessed TCPD in 3–5 years; political interference; top-down imposition; CPD seen as insufficiently contextualized	Todd et al. (2025); Mufti (2024); World Bank (2021, 2023, 2025); Taddese & Rao (2021); Mgaiwa & Milinga (2024); Mshanga & Kimburu (2021)
Infrastructure/ resource level (material conditions)	Mobile technology and WhatsApp coordination; practical, curriculum-relevant modules; calendar alignment; offline LMS content; government motorbikes (94% of WEOs)	No designated TRC-level TCPD budget; inadequate funds for materials and internet; 9% have computers; 42% tablets (mostly EQUIP-T); poor connectivity, roads, and long distances; transport costs; bad weather; high data costs; some WEOs lack offices	Todd et al. (2025); Mtebe et al. (2025); Minja (2025); Omari & Malengo (2023); Cilliers & Oza (2020); Cilliers & Habyarimana (2023)

4. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This section discusses the findings in relation to educational-leadership theory.

4.1 Nations Conducting WEO TCPD Support Activities

Tanzania and Ethiopia produce most of the empirical evidence on WEO TCPD support, but the authors are not necessarily from the study countries: local researchers frequently partnered with colleagues from the EU, USA, and Australia (Asim, 2023; Mitchell et al., 2024). No study reported TCPD collaboration among SSA countries, despite World Bank observations of regional cooperation (World Bank, 2021, 2023, 2025). Either TCPD has not attracted regional collaboration, or such collaboration has yet to produce published evidence; both readings point to weak regional cooperation in SSA education systems (Mitchell et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2020).

Todd et al. (2025) and Koomar et al. (2024) call for intensified collaboration across layers, from individuals to the region, through cooperation networks, transnational programmes, and joint teaching and research. Such networks would open international research and TCPD opportunities to WEOs and teachers in non-Anglophone SSA countries.

4.2 Types and Foci of WEO TCPD Support: A Middle-Tier Leadership Perspective

Direct teacher support outweighed structural and system level strategies. TCPD in these records reflects individual WEO effort more than organization wide intervention it is personal rather than organizational. The middle-leadership literature would predict this. It positions middle-tier actors as the link between policy and practice, with influence resting on relational and pedagogical expertise rather than formal authority (Harris et al., 2019; Chapman & Hadfield, 2010). Through a distributed-leadership lens (Spillane, 2006), WEOs' observation, coaching, and mentoring constitute leadership enacted jointly with heads of school and peer facilitators. Yet distributed arrangements flourish only where formal systems supply time, recognition, and structural support conditions largely absent here (Table 9), leaving WEOs to compensate individually for organizational deficits.

Where organizations and institutional support centres back TCPD only weakly (Cilliers & Oza, 2020), activities concentrate on teaching-related skills, ICT, and pedagogy. Where organizational leaders show little concern for TCPD, WEOs struggle to balance it against teaching, curriculum development, research, and

institutional leadership (Mshanga & Kimburu, 2021). From an instructional-leadership perspective (Hallinger, 2003), the most effective WEOs were those whose supervision served instructional improvement rather than bureaucratic compliance. Tanzania's cluster Communities of Learning also fit Wenger's (1998) communities of practice view; facilitation quality, not membership alone, determines whether a CoL becomes a genuine learning community or a compliance ritual.

4.3 WEO TCPD Support Evaluation

Evaluation, which should be central, is missing from many TCPD agendas; where it exists, most studies relied on self-reported surveys and interviews, making trustworthiness hard to judge and leaving objectives possibly unmet. Steinert et al. (2006) found the same pattern in North America and Europe.

Evaluations cost time and resources. Austin and Sorcinelli (2013) therefore urge evaluations relevant and insightful enough to gauge outcomes precisely. Options include combining pre–post instruments with quantitative and qualitative stakeholder feedback (Katemah et al., 2022), or triangulating self, peer, and learner evaluation (Sorinola & Thistlethwaite, 2013) well suited to credible long-term measurement. Such designs fit poorly with one time programmes and with the informal, self-directed TCPD that this review found unevaluated. Practitioners and funders should match evaluation frameworks to the TCPD format and context, and treat ward level evaluation capacity as a core component of TCPD financing.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHER RESEARCH

5.1 Recommendations for Empirical Research

Some critical dimensions of TCPD that future studies might continue to explore include scarcely examined areas of WEO support, such as the role of organizations in supporting WEOs' TCPD facilitation and the relationships among WEO TCPD support, career development and role-based performance, including teacher research and administration. Also, there is a need for research on TCPD in private education institutions, where WEOs appear to receive little professional support or TCPD opportunities. This research direction will significantly contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of TCPD's role and trends in the globalized education of the SSA region. In addition, as there was no any research on evaluation of self-directed TCPD for WEOs, focusing on such evaluation would be beneficial to our understanding of TCPD, especially in SSA countries where a great deal of TCPD is self-directed. Furthermore, the following specific research gaps warrant focused empirical investigation.

Gap 1: Direct Examination of WEOs as Primary Unit of Analysis. None of the identified studies focus exclusively on WEOs as the primary unit of analysis in TCPD implementation. Most studies examine WEOs alongside other stakeholders (district officers, school heads, peer facilitators) or treat WEOs as peripheral actors in broader TCPD evaluations. There is a pressing need for in depth, qualitative studies that center WEOs' experiences, perspectives, and practices.

Gap 2: Longitudinal Studies of WEO Effectiveness. The predominance of cross-sectional designs limits understanding of how WEO roles and effectiveness evolve over time, particularly in response to policy changes (TCPD rollout) and capacity building interventions. Longitudinal case studies tracking individual WEOs across multiple years would provide valuable insights into sustainability and professional growth.

Gap 3: WEOs in the TCPD Digital Ecosystem. While studies by Mtebe et al. (2025) and Mufti (2024) examine the TCPD Learning Management System, there is limited research on how WEOs engage with digital tools, support teachers' LMS usage, and navigate the challenges of technology-mediated professional development in rural contexts.

Gap 4: Comparative Analysis of WEO Effectiveness Across Contexts. The review identifies significant variation in WEO effectiveness across districts, regions and program contexts (EQUIP-T vs. non-EQUIP-T). Comparative studies examining why some WEOs are more effective than others, controlling for resource availability, training and institutional support, would advance theoretical understanding and practical guidance.

Gap 5: WEOs' Professional Development Needs. While the review documents that many WEOs lack training in TCPD facilitation, instructional leadership, and digital skills, there is limited research on what specific professional development WEOs themselves need and how such development should be structured. Studies examining WEOs as learners not just as supporters of teacher learning would fill an important gap.

Gap 6: Impact of WEO Support on Student Learning Outcomes. The ultimate test of TCPD effectiveness is improved student learning. However, few studies trace the causal chain from WEO support to teacher professional development to classroom practice to student outcomes. Studies that measure this impact chain would provide powerful evidence for policy advocacy and resource allocation.

5.2 Recommendations for Other Reviews

Considering what has been implemented in this review within resource limits, it is strongly suggested that future reviews extend the search beyond English language and education databases. It is also important for other reviews to cover grey literature, such as unpublished theses and NGO reports on TCPD activities. In so doing, the review would capture better insights and perspectives, particularly from low profile countries with regard to TCPD evidence. Overall, reviews on TCPD and education should be encouraged and conducted with a collaborative spirit of scholars from various countries, so as to contribute to raising the quality of evidence of SSA education's professional development.

6. CONCLUSION

This review offers the first systematic, PRISMA guided synthesis of the roles, strategies, and contextual dynamics shaping Ward Education Officers' engagement with TCPD in Tanzania's decentralized education system. Its contribution is threefold. First, classifying the 47 records into empirical studies, policy documents, and conceptual or methodological sources shows what the evidence base does and does not contain, exposing the near absence of studies centred on WEOs themselves. Second, it develops an empirically grounded typology of WEO TCPD strategies, showing that TCPD in the region remains personal rather than organizational. Third, mapping outcomes onto Kirkpatrick's taxonomy demonstrates that evaluation rarely moves beyond reaction and learning, leaving the link between WEO support and student learning untested. Longitudinal research is needed on WEOs' own development needs, their navigation of technology mediated CPD ecosystems, and the causal pathways from their support to teacher practice and student learning.

The policy implications are direct. WEO effectiveness is constrained less by willingness than by structure, funding, workload, training, information flow, and career pathways. MEWAKA's ambitions will be realized only if ward level facilitation is deliberately resourced dedicated ward level TCPD budgets, training in instructional leadership, mentoring, and digital skills, simplified WEO–DEO–SQAO information flows; reduced administrative burden so that visits prioritise pedagogy over compliance and career structures that reward CPD facilitation. Supporting, training, resourcing, and empowering WEOs is fundamental to realising the transformative potential of continuous professional development in one of Sub-Saharan Africa's largest education systems.

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