AN EXPLORATION OF LEADERSHIP CAPACITY BUILDING TRAININGS

FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL LEADERS IN ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

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This Thesis by <u>Melville M. E. Richardson</u> has been approved by the committee members below, who recommend it be accepted by the faculty of Unicaf University in Zambia in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Education (EdD).

Doctorate of Education (EdD)

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Abstract

AN EXPLORATION OF LEADERSHIP CAPACITY BUILDING TRAININGS FOR
SECONDARY SCHOOL LEADERS IN ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

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This study explored the lived experiences of school leaders in rural Antigua and Barbuda, focusing on the impacts of leadership capacity-building trainings on their performance, the challenges and successes they encountered, and the advancement of pedagogical approaches. Data, providing rich insights into these experiences, were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus groups with fifty-six participants. A thematic data analysis revealed four key themes: navigating resource constraints, balancing community engagement, developing essential leadership competencies, and accessing relevant professional development.

The findings highlight the need for context-specific training programmes that enhance leadership capacity and equip rural public secondary school leaders with the tools and resources to effectively inspire and influence others. This support should contribute to the holistic development of their organisations and guarantee positive student outcomes. However, the study also found that limited training and access to technological resources impede the integration of contemporary teaching approaches.

The study's limitations and implications for developing effective leadership capacity-building trainings and promoting school improvement are discussed. Recommendations for practical applications, policymakers, and future research are offered, with an emphasis on the unique needs of rural educational contexts.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented is entirely my own.

AI Acknowledgment

I acknowledge the use of Mendeley (https://www.mendeley.com/download-reference-manager/linux) for organising, citing, and referencing scholarly sources. Grammarly (https://www.grammarly.com/) and Microsoft grammar and spelling checkers for proofreading my thesis. These actions were completed on 01.05.2024. I also acknowledge the use of Quill Bot (https://quillbot.com/) as a paraphrasing tool for some quotes in Chapter 2. This action was completed on 21.02.2021.

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Dr. Jacqueline Y. Peters-Richardson, our children and my family. I particularly want to thank my siblings, Lady Kathleen L. Richardson-Walter and Dr. Joseph J. Richardson, for their unwavering support throughout my doctoral studies.

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I would also like to recognise the inclusion of the rural secondary schools' participants,
including the Ministry of Education, and the Antigua and Barbuda Union of Teachers Officials
in Antigua and Barbuda, for their participation during the data collection processes and their
involvement and commitment to this study.

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List of Abbreviations

AAA	American Anthropology Association
A&BUT	Antigua and Barbuda Union of Teachers
APA	American Psychological Association
BSA	British Sociological Association
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CPD	Continuing/Continuous Professional Development
CoP	Community of Practice
CBTs	Capacity Building Trainings
CSEC	Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate
CXC	Caribbean Examinations Council
DoE	Director of Education
ERIC	Educational Resources Information Center
ESI	Educators' Summer Institute
ETS	Educational Testing Science
FG	Focus Group
HoD	Head of Department
HRD	Human Resource Development
ISSLC	Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium
LPD	Leadership Development Programmes
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MoEO	Ministry of Education Officials
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

MoESY&GA	Ministry of Education, Sports, Youth and Gender Affairs
n	Sample size
N	Total number of individuals in the population
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
NISE	National Institute for Science Education
NPBEA	National Policy Board for Education Administration
OECS	Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States
P	Participant
PD	Professional Development
PDP	Professional Development Programmes
PI	Principal Institute
PLC	Professional Learning Community
PPP	Principal Preparation Programmes
PSC	Public Service Commission
PSEL	Professional Standards for School Leaders
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
REAF	Research Ethics and Approval Form
RO	Research Objectives
RQ	Research Question
SAP	Strategic Action Plan
TUO	Teachers' Union Officials
TA	Thematic Analysis
TLT	Transformational Leadership Theory
UNSDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

UREC   Unicaf University Research Ethics Committee

UWI   University of the West Indies

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This chapter examines the critical need for effective school leadership within the context of rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda. Specifically, it introduces the entire study and covers the following: background of the study, the purpose of the study, research objectives, research questions, limitations and delimitations of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms, organisation of the thesis, and chapter summary.

Background

The global demand for education reform has elevated leadership as a strategic imperative for governments worldwide, including, unprecedentedly, the unitary state of Antigua and Barbuda. As Bolman and Deal (2017, p. 7) noted, the "…proliferation of complex organizations" necessitates more effective leadership, improved standards, and greater accountability. These demands encompass action in enhanced leadership capacity-building training opportunities, classroom best practices, responsiveness to demographic changes, and strengthened leadership preparation programmes. The Ministry of Education in Antigua and Barbuda recognises this imperative and is responsible for the professional training of teachers, setting standards for recruitment, training, and development (Peters-Richardson, 2023). To this end, public schools are required to hold monthly professional development sessions to achieve this goal. However, leadership development has not been consistently prioritised, as argued by Schwartz and Simon (2018).

Caribbean and OECS Region Context

Building upon the global perspective, this section examines the specific context of the Caribbean and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) region. The OECS Education Reform Unit has observed that in developing countries, principals often attain their positions through promotion, sometimes without specialised education in leadership and

management. Specifically, the Reform Unit of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States

(OECS), is that:

> Such a situation becomes even more pronounced in developing countries where principals attain their position by promotion through the teaching ranks with little or no specialised education in either a transformational culturalist orientation or a rational economic foundation in leadership and management. (OECS Education Reform Unit, 2005, p. 5)

Furthermore, the challenges of geographical isolation and limited access to continuous

professional development in some areas exacerbate this lack of formal leadership training.

These elements can have a direct effect on the effectiveness of educational programmes and

leadership initiatives. Because of the historical lack of professional development opportunities

and the culture of inspectorial classroom observation, Younger and George (2012) noted that

creating communities of practice in Antigua and Barbuda can be difficult.

Antigua and Barbuda: Specific Leadership Training Efforts and Challenges

In Antigua and Barbuda, leaders are customarily recruited, selected, or appointed from

among teachers based on their seniority, required academic qualifications, years of experience,

or status. The Public Service Commission (PSC) manages the hiring process for leaders and

teachers. However, it is unclear whether the PSC's hiring practices prioritise leadership training

or experience, including participation in leadership development programmes like the

Educators' Summer Institute.

To address demands for educational reforms, the Ministry of Education, Sports, Youth

and Gender Affairs introduced the Educators' Summer Institute in 2011. This initiative

facilitates continuous professional development for current and prospective leaders, keeping

them informed of emerging trends in school leadership and educational change. The Educators'

Summer Institute (ESI) programme aligns with local, regional, and global policies and

standards, such as the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) policies, Human

Resource Development (HRD), and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

(UNSDGS). Through instruction and training it seeks to increase the capacity of human resources (Tien Dana Jose Vu and Hung 2020). The ESI was preceded by the Principal Institute (PI), which was created in partnership with the University of the West Indies and initially concentrated on educating and certifying aspiring principals and deputy principals. Subsequently, the Principal Institute evolved into the ESI, administered exclusively by the Ministry of Education.

Despite these efforts, participation in the ESI is voluntary, with no immediate consequences for non-participation. Alarmingly, only thirty-eight percent (38%) of school principals have been participating in the ESI programme (S. Mascall, Personal Communication, May 16, 2022). The preceding discussion has highlighted the existing leadership training efforts; nevertheless, a significant gap remains, which this study aims to address.

Demographic Profile of Rural Public Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda

The demographic information for Antigua and Barbudas rural public secondary school principals in 2018–2019 provides important context for understanding the leadership environment. While the age distribution points to a pool of experienced leaders the lack of principals under 40 raises questions about how to recruit younger teachers for these positions (see Table 1). There may have been a formal preparation gap and a need for focused leadership development as none of the principals surveyed had a degree in management or leadership. This is particularly crucial since meeting the particular needs of secondary schools in rural areas requires strong school leadership. Therefore more research is necessary to comprehend how this lack of formal training affects academic performance and to look into opportunities for management and leadership professional development.

The data reveals a significant gender gap among principals with a greater proportion of men in the 40–49 and 50–59 age groups. Principals average tenure varies greatly on average men have 13–5 years while women have 22–9 years (see Table 1). This may indicate that female principals typically hold their positions for longer periods of time which may aid in the schools increased stability and institutional knowledge. But it is crucial to look into the causes of these tenure discrepancies and take into account any possible ramifications for succession planning and leadership development.

The fact that none of the surveyed principals possessed a degree in leadership or management underscores a critical need for targeted professional development. In order to address the particular difficulties that rural secondary schools face effective school leadership is crucial. Principals may not have the abilities and know-how required to successfully manage school resources create a positive school climate and support student achievement if they have not received formal training in leadership and management. Giving principals the chance to pursue graduate degrees or take part in leadership development initiatives could greatly increase their efficacy and raise student and school outcomes.

Table 1

Rural public secondary school principal demographic data

Age, gender, the total number of principals in selected schools, years of experience as a rural public secondary school principal, years at current school as a principal and numbers with at least a degree in leadership/management: 2018-2019

Antigua and Barbuda	Number of principals	Male (%)	Female (%)
Selected public schools			
Gender			
Age			
≥30 years	0	0	0
30-39 years	0	0	0
40-49 years	3	0	50
50-59 years	5	33.3	16.7
60+ Years	0	0	0
Years of the principals' experience			
≤1 year			
1-5 years			
6-10 years			
11+ Years			
Average tenure of principals (years)	6.2	13.5	22.9
Years of experience as a principal in the current school			
≤1 year	1	0	12.5
2-3 years	0	0	0
4-5 years	2	0	25
6-10 Years	5	25	37.5
Numbers with at least a degree in leadership/management	8	0	0

Note. Extracted from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Draft Education Summer Institute School Teacher and Principals Data Files – some data are not shown. SOURCE: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology – Planning, Research and Training, National Principal Survey (NPS). 2018-2019

Gap in Knowledge, Practice, or Policy

Despite these efforts, no study has critically examined the alignment of current leadership training programmes with the lived challenges of rural school leaders in Antigua and Barbuda. Therefore, this study aims to address the gap where no study has critically explored the alignment of current leadership capacity-building training programmes with the lived challenges of rural school leaders in Antigua and Barbuda.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the introduction of leadership development programmes in Antigua and Barbuda, current capacity-building efforts fail to adequately prepare public secondary school leaders in rural areas for the distinct challenges they face. These challenges include limited access to technology and internet connectivity, difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers due to the rural setting. Data from the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology indicates that no principals hold a degree in leadership or management. This deficiency impacts school leaders' efficacy and productivity. The lack of adequately prepared leaders in rural schools can negatively affect student learning outcomes and overall school performance. Furthermore, generic leadership strategies often lack relevance in rural contexts, creating a gap between leaders' needs and the training provided. For example, training on managing large, urban schools may not translate well to the realities of smaller, rural schools with unique community dynamics (Thelma et al., 2024). This study seeks to assess the relevance and role of existing leadership training programmes in Antigua and Barbuda and to propose context-responsive capacity-building models tailored to the needs of rural public secondary school leaders. This study aims to bridge critical knowledge gaps and recommend more effective practices and policies that respond to the specific leadership challenges faced by rural school leaders.

Purpose of the Study

This study explores how ongoing leadership capacity-building training initiatives for secondary school leaders in rural Antigua and Barbuda are aligned with the challenges they face daily. By identifying existing gaps between training and practice, this thesis seeks to strengthen principal leadership capacity-building programmes, informing policy and ultimately enhancing the quality of educational leadership in Antigua and Barbuda as well as in other similar rural settings.

Indeed, this study acknowledges the vital role that effective leadership plays in addressing the unique challenges that rural schools encounter. As Fullan (2003) suggests, leaders should strategically allocate time, funds, and resources to staff development to effectively address these issues. This strategy promotes a learning and development culture where people are empowered to become leaders, challenged situations are supported in their efforts to overcome obstacles and measured risk-taking is encouraged. Furthermore, leaders need to be prepared by leadership development programmes to successfully apply these techniques and foster this kind of atmosphere in their schools. Consequently, leaders need to have the knowledge and abilities to build trusting relationships with their staff, according to Tonich (2021). The basis for cooperative problem-solving and school improvement is this rapport. As a result, a key component of these training courses needs to be strengthening leaders' capacity to forge close bonds with staff members and motivate cooperation in the classroom. The objective of this research is to assess the degree to which the leadership development programmes currently offered in Antigua and Barbuda comply with the fundamental components of effective leadership as emphasised by Fullan and Tonich. Ultimately, this dissertation seeks to enhance educational leadership in Antigua and Barbuda and comparable rural settings by bolstering training programmes to address these crucial areas and inform policy.

Significance of the Study

Leaders of rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda face a complex web of leadership duties, constantly adapting to new demands, and challenges and have to fill critical skill gaps that are necessary for doing their jobs efficiently. Therefore, to help these leaders steer their schools towards clear objectives and strategic orientations, it is clear that they need to strike a balance between responsibility and flexibility as this study seeks to explore these leaders' lived experiences during leadership capacity-building training. In addition, to

shed light on these leaders' tenacity and inventiveness, the research also looks at the unique difficulties and achievements they have in capacity-building programmes. By exploring the present and emerging patterns in these training programmes, the research aims to pinpoint modern approaches that impact educational leadership nationwide. Ultimately, the study is important because it critically evaluates how these kinds of training programmes impact leaders' performance in challenging, dynamic rural situations, emphasising the improvement of high-quality education delivery.

In fact, in 2021, ProQuest Central revealed that a total of 986,298 studies were linked to building leadership capacity. However, there is a noticeable gap in this vast literature (Casella, 2018; Edic, Bryant et al., 2017); to date, there have been no publications or research-based studies specifically exploring and investigating leadership trainings and its continuous impact on school improvement within the Antigua and Barbuda context. Thus, this study aims to fill this gap by examining the lasting impact of leadership on education in this field. In doing so, it builds on existing knowledge about the critical roles and responsibilities of school leaders recognised by scholars such as Nhlapo (2020); Waswas and Gasaymeh (2016); and Willis and Templeton (2018), as how it affects the quality of education and provides insightful information that may direct actions and policy decisions and examines specific practices that contribute to the development of positive school culture, and provides valuable educational strategies that might be applied to comparable situations and, by placing findings in the context of Antigua and Barbuda, perhaps enhance the educational environment.

Furthermore, in today's education environment, the tasks and duties of effective school leaders are dynamic but continuously evolving, with the accomplishments becoming more multifaceted over the last ten years. This evolution aligns with Jim Collins' concepts of five levels of leadership, from Level 1 leaders – competent individuals to Level 5 – executive leaders (Fullan, 2003). These levels reflect an increasing capacity to drive change and achieve

excellence within an organisation. Collins (2001, as cited in Fullan, 2003, p. 10) underscores that a competent leader "Catalyzes commitment to and vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision, stimulating higher performance standards." This idea is especially important when we think about how to effectively improve the leadership skills of Antigua and Barbuda's rural school leaders, who need to develop these traits in the framework of capacity-building training programmes to provide high-quality educational results.

According to Analytics et al. (2019), the process of enhancing one's leadership qualities begins with a firm understanding of the tenets of leadership. This fundamental understanding is essential for Antigua and Barbuda's rural public secondary schools, where leadership responsibilities are broad and dynamic. Schools need to concentrate on fostering these ideas inside their leadership frameworks if they want to be the birthplace of persistent innovation and internal transformation in addition to excellence. To that end, through capacity-building training, this study aims to bring leaders' leadership growth and the efficient implementation of fundamental leadership ideas together.

Analytics et al. (2019) emphasise that leaders play a critical role in creating a learning environment where all students are expected to study deeply and with high standards. Shared leadership, teamwork, and unwavering integrity are commonplace in such an atmosphere, qualities that are crucial and frequently shown. According to them, "…leadership is fundamentally a relational phenomenon" (Analytics et al., 2019, p. 90), emphasising the need for interpersonal connections for effective leadership. This viewpoint is in line with the goals of the research, which is to investigate how capacity-building training helps leaders in rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda to apply and encounter these relational leadership facets, which in turn influence their leadership style and school performance. In essence, previously, opportunities for continuing professional development of teachers were limited, so fostering a collaborative environment is necessary(Younger & George, 2012).

This study has significant implications for several reasons:

1. While a plethora of research exists on leadership capacity-building, to date, there have been no publications or research-based studies specifically exploring and investigating leadership quality and its continuous impact on school improvement in the Antigua and Barbuda context (Younger & George, 2012). By examining the real-world experiences of leaders in rural Antigua and Barbuda, this study evaluates leaders' leadership and advances knowledge about the standards of public secondary school leadership within this unique setting(Younger & George, 2012). This is particularly important, as effective leadership is essential to guiding and implementing educational changes in the region.

2. Determining where skills are lacking through the analysis of leaders' perspectives, this research may be able to pinpoint areas in which support and training are needed by highlighting important leadership skills that are now absent and necessary for efficient school administration. This study directly informs policy decisions regarding leadership capacity-building training initiatives by identifying specific areas where rural leaders need support and training. This ensures that resources are allocated effectively to address actual needs. Previously, opportunities for continuing professional development for teachers were limited, making this research particularly timely and relevant(Younger & George, 2012).

3. The findings of this research can have a significant impact on policymaking by helping to ensure that decisions on leadership capacity-building training initiatives are suited to the requirements of rural leaders. Moreover, this study provides valuable insights that can be used to refine leadership capacity-building training programmes, recruitment, and professional standards for school leaders in Antigua and Barbuda, ultimately strengthening the overall quality of educational leadership.

4. This study may contribute to more equitable education by bridging the opportunity and academic success gaps between rural and urban schools by addressing the leadership issue. This is aligned with the broader goals of education reform and ensuring that all students have access to quality education.

5. Its localised approach and wider applicability to other rural contexts represent the study's original contribution. This aligns with the need for more research investigating leaders' experiences in different national contexts.

School leaders, policymakers, stakeholders, and other organisations can benefit from this new perspective by redefining the leadership professional development frameworks, instruction, and recruitment requirements for school leadership, leadership training programmes and leadership roles. Additionally, principals, deputy principals, heads of departments, and leaders serving in other organisational roles can gain further insight into leadership decisions based on the findings of this study. Transformational leadership practices,

such as modelling the way and inspiring a shared vision, can be particularly relevant in this context.

The findings of this study should strengthen the capacity and efficacy of leadership programmes, informing policy and enhancing educational leadership training programmes in Antigua and Barbuda as well as in other similar rural settings. This is crucial, as a strong leader is essential to guiding and implementing educational change.

Institutions can utilise the findings of this study in Chapter 4 and the recommendations in Chapter 5 to select, recruit, and redesign leadership capacity-building training programmes to prepare potential leaders for leadership positions and roles. The development of secondary education leadership programmes can benefit from insights that can be tailored to meet the unique requirements and resource constraints typical of remote and rural environments.

The study could give insight into public discussions and the underlying concerns raised in the problem statement. These findings are meant to provoke thought among diverse stakeholders, administrators, policymakers, and leaders who may leverage these insights to enrich their decision-making processes and reflect introspectively on their leadership practices. By applying transformational leadership principles, school leaders can evolve into change agents who ultimately enhance the educational experience.

Furthermore, the findings should encourage prospective students who are urged to delve into and augment school leadership for long-term, sustained growth. Going a step further, the investigation also aspires to scrutinise areas that have attracted less attention. Ultimately, the goal of this research lies in aiding school principals, deputy principals, department heads, and teachers in developing their leadership skills, thereby cultivating the breed of effective leaders in today's academic sphere. This is especially important, as school leaders play a critical role in deciding the efficacy and productivity of the school.

Research Objectives

The study's research objectives are as follows:

RO1. To investigate the relationship between leadership capacity-building trainings and the effectiveness of leaders in rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda, through an exploration of their lived experiences.

RO2. To explore how leaders in rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda perceive and navigate challenges and successes within leadership capacity-building trainings.

RO3. To examine leaders' perceptions and experiences of evolving trends (contemporary practices) in leadership capacity-building training in secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

RO4. To explore how leadership capacity-building trainings impact leaders' personal performance in rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

Research Questions

The study's research questions are as follows:

RQ1. What is the perceived contributions of capacity-building trainings to leaders' effectiveness?

RQ2. How do leaders in rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda experience and navigate challenges and successes within leadership capacity-building trainings?

RQ3. How are the evolving trends (contemporary practices) in leadership capacity-building trainings perceived and experienced by leaders in rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda?

RQ4. How do leaders describe specific changes in their leadership practices as a result of capacity-building trainings?

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Limitations

This qualitative phenomenological study recognises the limitations, including potential systematic errors or biases inherent within the research design or instrument. As indicated by Jager et al. (2020), unforeseeable external obstacles outside the researcher's control may adversely affect the outcomes of the findings, both in terms of how participants provide their data and how the researcher interprets the data. Henceforth, this qualitative study encountered several limitations. Notably, a central focus of the phenomenological qualitative was on the lived experiences of public secondary school leaders in rural areas present several challenges. The major concern was that the researcher is employed by the Ministry of Education, which may have some impact on the honesty and trustworthiness of the participants' responses. In addition, the limited time available for interviews and focus group discussions, accessibility issues, methodology, how the data were collected, analysis, and coding and themes can introduce bias because the researcher plays an active role in the process.

Even with the best of intentions on the part of the researcher, the human factor in the research process cannot be completely eradicated to reduce researcher bias. The implications of this study are important given the context of this multi-site; qualitative phenomenological study conducted in four rural public secondary schools. Nonetheless, the relatively small sample size characteristic of phenomenological qualitative research, which occurred in naturalistic settings, can lead to validity concerns (Bartholomew et al., 2021). Furthermore, because of the demographics of this study's sample size from public rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda, it was not easy to generalise the findings to other populations, other studies, urban schools, or all secondary institutions in the education system. From the point of view of school size, they were likely to have varied experiences based on their role

classifications. Thus, a larger sample size might have yielded more accurate findings in this study.

The limitations of this study are inherent just like those of any qualitative research. Leaders may have presented an idealised picture of their experiences and perceptions at first because of the researcher's role as an education officer, which may have influenced participant responses. Before discussing delicate subjects with participants, efforts were made to establish rapport and trust to lessen this impact. Furthermore, while study confidentiality was upheld, the sample size of rural leaders in Antigua and Barbuda (maximum 56) limits the generalisability of the findings to other contexts, such as urban schools or other nations.

The selected sample size is in line with suggestions for qualitative research looking for in-depth understanding within a particular context, even though a larger sample size might have produced different results and wider generalisability (Kumar et al., 2020; Trotter, 2012). It is imperative to recognise, nevertheless that the experiences of Antigua and Barbuda rural school leaders might not be representative of those in other contexts.

Jimerson (2018) also noted that participant location, teacher and principal attrition rates, and researcher positionality presented difficulties for data collection. These difficulties were compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited opportunities for focus groups and follow-up interviews due to stringent protocols and the demands of online instruction. As such, the results provide a detailed contextualised interpretation of the lived experiences of the participants but they should not be extrapolated outside of the particular context of the study.

Delimitations

Delimitations are limits purposefully set by the researcher to preserve feasibility and restrict the study's scope (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). Delimitations are deliberately chosen to focus the research and make the goals achievable in contrast to limitations. The purpose of this study is to evaluate how ongoing leadership capacity-building training

initiatives for secondary school leaders in rural Antigua and Barbuda are aligned with the challenges they face daily. By identifying existing gaps between training and practice, this thesis seeks to strengthen leadership capacity-building training programmes, informing policy and ultimately enhancing the quality of educational leadership in Antigua and Barbuda as well as in other similar rural settings.

Because of their distinct backgrounds as school administrators, the participants were purposefully chosen. In Antigua and Barbuda, the study's sample consisted of 35–65-year-old rural public secondary school principals, deputy principals, department heads, and teachers. In addition, the Teachers' Union and Ministry of Education Officials. To expedite the research process observational methods were purposefully excluded from the data collection process, which was limited to digital devices recording audio interviews.

Definition of Terms

For clarity and common understanding, this study provides the following definitions of key terms:

Member checking: During open-ended interviews, the practice of a researcher restating, summarising, or paraphrasing the information received from a respondent to ensure what was heard or written down is, in fact, correct (Noori, 2021).

Rural public secondary schools: In the context of this study, rural public secondary schools refer to government-run schools in the countryside away from the city.

Trainings: In the context of this study, trainings refer to structured, organised activities aimed at improving the knowledge, skills and competence of individuals that typically include training workshops, seminars, courses, and other learning opportunities that promote professional growth.

Organisation of the Thesis

This Thesis houses five chapters. These provide a detailed account of the study. The first chapter describes the background of the study, the research problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the research objective, the research questions, limitations and delimitations, and the chapter summary of the study. The second chapter reviews literature relevant to the study's theoretical framework. The literature review included a theoretical framework, leadership theories, rural leaders' lived experiences, leadership challenges in rural settings, contemporary practices in educational leadership, the impact of leadership capacity-building trainings on performance, and a chapter summary. In addition, the researcher discussed school leadership preparation and best practices for developing leadership capacity. As part of Chapter 2, the researcher reviews and synthesises primary and secondary sources, for example, journals and books associated with the research topic. Chapter 3 explains the design of the research methodology and data collection.

Therefore, the research methodology and design presented in Chapter 3 described the population and sample of the research, sources of data, reliability and validity, trustworthiness, data collection and management procedures, goal and research questions, data analysis, ethical assurances, and a summary of the chapter.

Chapter 4 presented the data analysis, in-depth findings, an examination of the findings, and a summary of the chapter. Additionally, in Chapter 5, the study's implications and recommendations for education, leadership, policymakers, and future research are discussed. In Chapter 5, the researcher discussed how the research's findings and the literature cited as part of its theoretical framework relate to one another. These research findings could help improve leadership recruitment procedures and training programmes. In addition, the knowledge may improve leadership qualities, thus enabling students, teachers, schools, and society to achieve tremendous success and effectiveness.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the researcher saw the need for an exploration of leadership capacity-building trainings designed for secondary school leaders in Antigua. The intent is to explore the leaders' lived experiences in rural public secondary schools to evaluate the impact of these trainings on performance and to close the gap between the current leadership trainings and the real-world challenges facing rural public secondary school leaders.

Despite the leaders are committed to promoting academic excellence (Acton, 2021; Matthew, 2017; Echazarra & Radinger, 2019; Strayhorn, 2018; Yulianti et al., 2022), it is evident that leadership training programmes often overlook and may not adequately address the unique challenges these school leaders face daily (Lavalley, 2018; Preston & Barnes, 2018; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018), including limited resources and geographical isolation. Currently, the leadership training literature tends to focus on generic strategies (Tingle et al., 2019) that may not apply to the specific needs of rural education settings.

The limitations of the study are acknowledged, providing transparency about the applicability of the study. Capturing the perspectives of rural leaders and emphasising the need for relevant and effective training. Hence, this chapter underlines the intent to achieve results that will not only build leadership capacity in Antigua and Barbuda but also contribute to the evolution of leadership trainings in other contexts.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter highlights the literature reviewed on the topic under consideration. It provides a critical analysis of the literature relevant to the leadership of secondary school leaders in Antigua and Barbuda, with a particular emphasis on the unique circumstances of rural communities. The literature review brings to the fore leadership-capacity training practices from three perspectives: the global, the Caribbean and local, specifically looking at Antigua and Barbuda. It is heavily informed by the research questions and covers the following key subheadings: lived experiences of rural public secondary school leaders in leadership capacity-building training; challenges and successes leaders face in leadership capacity-building training in rural public secondary schools; evolving trends (contemporary practices) in leadership capacity-building training in rural secondary schools; and the impact of leadership capacity-building training on the performance of rural public secondary leaders.

Theoretical Framework

In this qualitative study, the theoretical framework served as a blueprint and served multiple functions (Heale and Noble, 2019). In other words, a theoretical framework is a set of theories derived from experts in the field in which you want to conduct research that you use as a guide to interpret results and analyse data (Kivunja, 2018). Additionally, the issues found the role of the research and its relevance to current theory and research (Heale and Noble, 2019). Specifically, transformational leadership theory provided the theoretical framework for this research to gain a more in-depth and broader understanding of current knowledge of the phenomena (Grant & Osanloo, 2015) applicable to leadership capacity-building trainings. Thus, the theoretical framework provided the lens that guided and supported the entire study as a whole (Grant & Osanloo, 2015).

Establishing Context and Relevance

Key concepts such as 'leadership capacity-building' and 'rural educational context' are defined to establish a clear reference for the discussion. The organisation of this review progresses logically from a general exploration of leadership theories to a focused analysis of the literature on rural educational leadership, methodically guiding the reader through the research landscape.

The scope of resources incorporates a breadth of recent publications from the past five years to reflect the most current academic discourse, while also integrating seminal works that lay the groundwork for understanding leadership development over time. The selection criteria for literature included relevance to the research question, contribution to knowledge on leadership in rural educational contexts, and the potential to inform evidence-based improvements in professional development programmes.

This chapter offers a thorough synthesis by combining different points of view from books, theses, research articles, and academic journals. It did this by pointing out both the literature's convergence and divergence as well as unexpected connections. The methodical technique employed guarantees a clear and thorough review procedure that enhances the trustworthiness of the findings. As a result, the literature review that follows aims to make a significant addition to the field of educational leadership by contextualising the study and laying the groundwork for the subsequent empirical inquiry.

The growing corpus of research on educational leadership emphasised how important leaders are in establishing an environment that supports successful teaching and learning, particularly in rural schools. These leaders are key figures in fostering professional growth and managing change within the complex and often demanding rural school environments (Andriani et al., 2018; Sun & Henderson, 2017; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Despite the

wealth of empirical data supporting this view, there remains no consensus among academics on a universal blueprint for leadership success applicable to all schools.

Considering this, the literature review chapter of the dissertation is an attempt at synthesis and extraction, intending to give the researcher a more sophisticated grasp of the intricate field of school leadership. It gives the reader an overview of the depth of the field's current knowledge while also outlining the specifics of the researcher's academic investigation (Lim et al., 2022). In addition, it highlights important ideas from the dissertation and answers important queries, which helps to map the relationships between different research projects. This part of the literature review is when conflicting theories, approaches, and findings from different academic works—theses, books, and journal articles—are cleared up. The ultimate objective is to enhance the present body of knowledge by integrating multiple strands from prior studies (Paul & Criado, 2020).

Transformational Leadership as the Theoretical Foundation

Transformational leadership involves specific practices that leaders can implement to create positive change (Table 2 details these practices).

Table 2

Leadership challenges, best practices, and the impact of training in rural educational settings

Leadership Challenges in Rural Settings	Contemporary Best Practices	Impact of Leadership Training on Performance
Resource Constraints: Limited funding, staffing shortages, and inadequate infrastructure can hinder effective leadership.	**Cultivating Collaboration:** Building strong relationships with staff, students, parents, and community members to foster a sense of shared purpose and collective responsibility.	**Improved Decision-Making:** Training enhances leaders' abilities to make sound judgments and strategic plans.
Geographic Isolation: Distance from professional networks and support systems can lead to feelings of isolation and limited access to professional development opportunities.	**Distributed Leadership:** Empowering teachers and staff to take on leadership roles and responsibilities to build capacity and foster a more inclusive decision-making process.	**Enhanced Strategic Planning:** Leaders develop skills in setting goals and aligning resources to achieve desired outcomes.
Unique Community Expectations: Rural communities often have strong traditions and values that leaders must understand and respect. Balancing local expectations with district policies and state mandates can be challenging.	**Contextualised Professional Development:** Providing leadership training tailored to the specific needs and challenges of rural schools, recognising their unique contexts and resources.	**Innovative Teaching Implementation:** Leaders are better equipped to support and promote innovative teaching practices.
Difficulty Attracting and Retaining Leaders: Rural schools often struggle to attract and retain qualified leaders due to lower salaries, limited career advancement opportunities, and challenging working conditions.	**"Growing Your Own" Leadership:** Identifying and developing promising teachers and staff from within the community to build a sustainable pipeline of future leaders.	**Increased Staff Morale:** Effective leadership contributes to a positive work environment and increased job satisfaction among staff.
Lack of Specialised Training: Leaders may lack specialised training in areas such as rural education, community engagement, or grant writing, which are essential for success in rural settings.	**Community Engagement:** Actively involving community members in school decision-making processes to build trust and support for school initiatives.	**Improved Student Outcomes:** Leadership training leads to enhanced teaching quality and a more supportive learning environment, resulting in improved student achievement.
Principal Role Complexity: Due to limited administrative support, rural principals often have to manage a wide range of responsibilities, from curriculum development to facilities management.	**Transformational Leadership:** Inspiring a shared vision, empowering others, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.	**Adaptable Learning Environment:** Leaders create a flexible and responsive learning environment that can meet the evolving needs of students and the community.

Rural schools face unique challenges that demand a nuanced approach to leadership (Davidson & Butcher, 2019). For school administrators a complex environment is created by limited resources remote location and particular community expectations. It can seem insurmountable to overcome inadequate infrastructure, staffing shortages, and limited funding.

However, it is important to recognise that many rural communities possess strong social capital and a deep sense of place, assets that can be leveraged to overcome these challenges. Geographic isolation can exacerbate feelings of disconnect and limit access to professional development. Attracting and keeping competent leaders can also be challenging due to lower pay and fewer opportunities for career advancement (Paré et al., 2017). Another level of difficulty is added by the principals roles complexity which calls for managing a variety of duties with little administrative assistance (Preston & Barnes, 2018).

A transformational leadership approach provides a powerful lens through which to address these challenges. By inspiring a shared vision, leaders can encourage resourcefulness and innovation even when funding is scarce. Prioritising relationship-building and utilising technology can mitigate the effects of geographic isolation.Transformational leaders can draw in enthusiastic individuals by emphasising the non-financial advantages of rural schools such as their impact on the community and quality of life (Paré et al., 2017). According to Preston and Barnes (2018) principals can assign tasks establish trust and promote professional development by empowering teachers and staff through distributed leadership. Social capital and a strong sense of place are two examples of the communitys strengths that must be acknowledged and valued.

Contemporary best practices in rural school leadership emphasise collaboration, distributed leadership, contextualised professional development, and community engagement (Preston & Barnes, 2018). Building strong relationships with staff, students, parents, and community members fosters a sense of shared purpose (Preston & Barnes, 2018). However if there are existing conflicts or power imbalance in the community fostering collaboration may be challenging. Transformational leaders strive to establish a more equitable atmosphere and set an example of moral conduct (Olondriz-Valverde et al., 2025). By increasing capacity and encouraging inclusive decision-making distributed leadership enables educators and staff to

assume leadership positions. This calls for a high degree of competence and trust among employees which transformational leaders cultivate via assistance and mentoring.

Leadership training demonstrably impacts performance through improved decision-making, enhanced strategic planning, innovative teaching implementation, increased staff morale, adaptable learning environments, and improved student outcomes. Training enhances leaders' abilities to make sound judgments and strategic plans. They become better equipped to support and promote innovative teaching practices. Effective leadership contributes to a positive work environment and increased job satisfaction among staff. Relatively minor investments in leadership development can yield dramatic changes in a community's capacity to identify and address problems (Allen & Lachapelle, 2012).

It is essential to provide leadership development that is adapted to the particular requirements of rural schools while taking into account their distinct resources and circumstances. By spotting and nuturing talented leaders and staff from within the community "Growing Your Own" leadership contributes to the creation of a long-lasting pool of future leaders (McConnell et al., 2021). However, it is crucial to recognise that training by itself is not a panacea. A number of factors affect how effective leadership training is such as training quality the post-training support given to leaders and the organisational culture in which leaders work. Additionally, transformational leadership principles, which focus on individual development, shared vision, and empowering others (Kouzes & Posner, 2019). Ultimately, a transformational leader in a rural setting aims to motivate and empower their team to acomplish difficult goals while cultivating a culture of ongoing development and community service.

Kivunja (2018) emphasises the importance of a theoretical framework, describing it as a crucial lens that draws on knowledge from previous studies conducted in your field. Grant and Osanloo (2015) suggest that such a framework not only helps in the interpretation of data but also provides clarity. In the context of leadership research, for example, the theoretical

underpinning of transformational leadership is critical in understanding how leaders can engage in and promote the advancement of others, to build leadership capacity across the organisation (Alqatawenh, 2018; Anderson, 2017; Pradhan & Pradhan, 2016). In Antigua and Barbuda, where educational leaders must promote creativity and student achievement despite scarce resources the transformational leadership approach provides a useful framework for comprehending how principals can motivate and enable their employees to accomplish challenging objectives.

The conceptualisation of transformational leadership models in the 1970s marked a shift in conventional leadership, aiming to explain leadership and organisational effectiveness (Odumeru & Ifeanyi, 2013). Transformational leadership offers benefits to individuals and organisations and is considered a vital leadership style for competitive advantage (Alqatawenh, 2018). Although it faces criticism regarding its definition, transformational leaders can continuously maintain organisational innovation. Beyond being a theory, transformational leadership is action-oriented.

While the inclusive model of transformational leadership encompasses a number of practices this study focuses on three essential practices identified by Kouzes and Posner: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, and Enable Others to Act (Kouzes & Posner, 2019). Transformational leaders empower followers, envision a compelling future and set an example through these practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2019). This alignment enables a thorough examination of how these practices impact school improvement and prepare future leaders especially in the area of principal succession management where teacher empowerment is essential for promoting distributed leadership in schools with limited resources (Kouzes & Posner, 2019).

In the educational system in Antigua and Barbuda, leaders are often recruited from among teachers based on seniority and qualifications, sometimes without specialised

leadership training. Transformational leadership is defined as having the ability to inspire staff and students to work toward realising a compelling vision for the school. Indeed, these trainings challenge school leaders to develop leadership characteristics that surpass conventional.

James MacGregor Burns who researched political leaders and saw leadership as a team effort is credited with developing transformational leadership theory. Transformational leaders and followers work together to improve morals and motivation according to Burns (1978, as cited in Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2018) . Specifically, in order to facilitate this development leaders, listen to people's needs and goals working together to help them reach their greatest potential and improve both individual performance and organisational goals (Bakker et al., 2022; Pradhan & Pradhan, 2016).

Bass developed the concept of transformational leadership further building on Burns model. According to his theory, these leaders enable followers to go beyond merely complying with norms by changing their attitudes values and behaviours (Bass, 1990, 1999; Bass, Avolio, & Binghamton, 1985). Idealised influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and personalised consideration are the four essential elements of transformational leadership that Bass identified (Bass, 1985). Ultimately, every component helps bring about the transformation process which in turn leads to increased success and productivity for both the organization and its members (Bass, 1985).

Furthermore, Bass argued that transformational and transactional leadership are not mutually exclusive but rather exist on a continuum (Bass, 1985). In fact, transformational leadership integrates, broadens, and elevates transactional leadership. To motivate their teams, the best leaders strategically use contingent incentives in conjunction with transformational actions. This strategy depends on clear communication that fosters followers commitment trust and greater levels of satisfaction (Abelha et al., 2018).

Terry (2021, as cited in Abdul Sahid et al., 2023, pp. 480-481), discovered a number of traits that transformational leaders:

- See themselves as agents of change,

- Are very careful risk takers,

- Have trust in members and are sensitive to their needs,

- The ability to guide and direct,

- Very dynamic, flexible and open to experience,

- Has cognitive abilities, discipline, and is able to analyze problems carefully, and

- Has a clear view/vision.

In addition to Terry's transformational leadership characteristics, Saad Alessa (2021, p. 2) suggested that transformational leaders acknowledge future needs and issues, which include the:

- Acknowledgement of future needs and issues (Saad Alessa, 2021, p. 2),

- Handling of long-term problems and opportunities (Saad Alessa, 2021, p. 2),

- Holistic examination of internal and external organizational factors (Saad Alessa, 2021, p. 2),

- Handling of organizational issues from a broad perspective (Saad Alessa, 2021, p. 2),

- Elevation of follower awareness regarding the importance and value of specific job outcomes (Saad Alessa, 2021, p. 2),

- Ability to motivate employees to substitute their personal interests for those of the organization (Saad Alessa, 2021, p. 2), and

- Ability to influence followers to change their needs to higher-order concerns (Saad Alessa, 2021, p. 2).

Transformational leaders inspire subordinates and develop their skills to foster intellectual and creative advancement (Alqatawenh, 2018). They influence and interact directly with followers to positively impact various aspects of an organisation (Kouzes & Posner, 2019). Kouzes and Posner's (2019) transformational leadership model promotes personal and professional growth through five exemplary leadership practices: modelling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, empowering others to act, and encouraging the heart, accompanied by ten leadership commitments. As such, these practices provide school leaders with guidance and practical recommendations for functioning as change agents (See Table 3).

Table 3

Five Practices and Ten Commitments of Exemplary Leadership
and Transformational Leadership Factors

The Five Practices and Ten Commitments of Exemplary Leadership		Transformational Leadership Factors
Five Practices	**Ten Commitments**	
Model the Way	1. Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared values. 2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.	***Idealised Influence*** Leaders act as role models. Followers want to emulate them. Leaders provide a vision
Inspire a Shared Vision	3. Envision the future by imagining exciting and enabling possibilities. 4. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.	***Inspirational Motivation*** Leaders communicate high expectations. Inspire others to be part of a shared vision. Enhance team spirit.
Challenge the Process	5. Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve. 6. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience.	***Intellectual Stimulation*** Leaders stimulate followers to be innovative. Support followers to challenge beliefs and values. Encourage followers to think on their own.
Enable Others to Act	7. Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships. 8. Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.	***Individualised Consideration*** Leaders listen to individual needs of followers. Assist followers to be fully actualised.
Encourage the Heart	9. Recognise contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence. 10. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.	Help followers grow through personal challenges.

Adapted from The Leadership Practices Inventory: Development Planner by
(Kouzes & Posner, 2013, p. 7-8) San Francisco, CA: The Leadership Challenge
Activity Book by (J. M. Kouzes & Posner, 2010), San Francisco, CA.

Kouzes and Posner's (2019) transformational leadership model motivates individuals to pursue a leader-inspired goal and fosters organisational success as presented in Table 3. Ultimately, leadership becomes a partnership between leaders and willing followers (Kouzes & Posner, 2019). Transformational leaders rely on teacher leaders and board members because "…challenge the status quo, provide a vision of a promising future, and motivate and inspire their followers to join in the pursuit of a better world" (O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020, p. 5). Moreover, they inspire, model, seek guidance, and enhance the intellectual development of their subordinates (Alqatawenh, 2018).

The transformational leadership style focuses on follower development and individual needs (Al Khajeh, 2018). Leaders prioritise the value system, moral and skill development, and staff motivation (Al Khajeh, 2018). Therefore, this approach bridges the gap between leaders and followers by fostering a shared understanding of motivational levels, values, and interests.

The theory of transformational leadership provides an invaluable perspective for analysing strategies that enhance school performance and develop leadership potential. According to studies, transformational leadership fosters professionalism learning a supportive environment and improved student performance Andriani et al. (2018) and Bakker et al. (2022). Enabling others, motivating a common goal and setting an example are important practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2019).

In recent decades transformational leadership has been the subject of a great deal of research (Khan et al., 2020; Mccleskey, 2014; Teetzen et al., 2022). Transformational leadership is linked to leader characteristics, organisational attributes, and follower characteristics (Sun et al., 2017). As a result, this leadership style enhances job satisfaction, promotes a healthy environment, improves results, and engages individuals in problem-solving (Jovanovic & Ciric, 2016) . It also cultivates quality, dedication, ability, participation, capacity, enthusiasm, commitment, and professionalism (Jovanovic & Ciric, 2016).

Purwanto et al. (2020) assert that transformational leadership makes organisational members more conscious of reaching common goals. However, Berkovich (2016) has criticised the theory, claiming that it is unclear and lacks analytical uniqueness and that it ignores shared leadership in favour of an excessive emphasis on the leader. Van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013, as cited in Berkovich, 2016, p. 3) highlight "…the common ground of the different transformational leadership dimensions is unclear." Despite this, transformational leaders can maintain organisational innovation (Asbari et al., 2020). Berkovich (2016) also notes that transformational leadership is a key component of leadership training programmes and a benchmark for reference.

Transformational leadership is action-oriented, emphasising the leader's impact on developing creative and intellectual abilities (Yaslioglu & Erden, 2018). These leaders directly interact with followers to bring about organisational change. Notably, this approach aligns with Kouzes and Posner's transformational leadership model (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; 2019).

Modelling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, empowering others to act, and encouraging the heart are the five practices that make up Kouzes and Posner's model, which provides a framework for both professional and personal growth (see Table 2). A principal's ability to implement change and raise academic standards is strengthened by these strategies, which are backed by ten leadership commitments (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; 2019). Therefore, the goal of this study is to demonstrate how rural school administrators can improve the educational experience by acting as change agents.

Although there are many positive connotations associated with transformational leadership, some critics contend that it can be unethical, relying more on emotion than logic and lacking the checks and balances of democratic discourse (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). According to others, political leadership may benefit more from the transformational leadership theory than managerial leadership (Andersen, 2015).

Rural Leaders' Lived Experiences

The Changing Role of Today's School Leaders

The role of the school principal has evolved significantly, adapting to reflect a broader and more complex set of responsibilities due to the multifaceted nature of leadership (Benmira & Agboola, 2021; Da'as et al., 2021; Safonov et al., 2018). The principal has historically been the cornerstone of educational quality, from discipline to managing instructional programmes (Benmira & Agboola, 2021; Cortellazzo et al., 2019; Kusumaningrum et al., 2018; A. Rahman & Subiyantoro, 2021; Safonov et al., 2018). However, over the past few decades, the scope of the principal's role has changed dramatically. Whereas previously the focus was administrative responsibilities, the modern principal is now envisioned as a change agent within the educational setting (Da'as et al., 2021). This shift has made leaders coaches, visionaries, servant leaders, instructional leaders, change agents, aspirational leaders, and team builders among other roles. The central aspects of these roles include overcoming complex challenges, leading adaptation to change, managing crises, and advocating for broader social impact (Benmira & Agboola, 2021; Iordanoglou, 2018).

Amid these phenomenal changes, school leaders find themselves under much scrutiny (Bogotch, 2015; Day & Sammons, 2016; Sebastian et al., 2018), particularly regarding accountability measures explicitly tied to student achievement and school success (Cortellazzo et al., 2019; Munir & Khalil, 2016; Sebastian et al., 2018). Such accountability has amplified the academic debate and contributed to an important body of research focused on the role of leadership in school improvement (Kusumaningrum et al., 2018; Malingkas et al., 2018; Sebastian et al., 2018; Thompson, 2017).

As leaders navigate the uncharted waters of globalisation, the developing landscape presents a tremendous amount of roadblocks (Mestry, 2017). The need for proficient, agile, and visionary leadership has been greater due to the proliferation of information and

communication technologies, multiculturalism, and changes in educational policy (Malik, 2018). These global trends call for principal who not only understand aspects of their traditional roles but who can lead schools in a rapidly changing world and ensure equitable, quality education that forms the foundation of an informed and competent society (Mestry, 2017). As the 21st century progresses further, the role of the principal will continue to evolve and become increasingly complex and integrated with contemporary challenges. For leaders to thrive in this era, ongoing professional trainings, support from policymakers, and collaborative networks to share best practices will be essential to enable effective leadership and realise the promise of education today.

The field of educational leadership is fraught with complexity and encompasses a variety of challenges that require a versatile and resilient principal. Hayes et al. (2021) enumerate several roadblocks including the need for consistent innovation in programme implementation, faculty apathy and aversion to change, loss of interest from the school's community, principal high turnover and "…feelings of professional isolation" a sentiment echoed by Miller (2015, p. 35). These challenges require leaders not only to immerse themselves in all aspects of educational dynamics but also to leverage their empowerment from within to overcome the hurdles presented by the 21st century and its successors eras (Kusumaningrum et al., 2018; Mestry, 2017).

Yet, organisational evolution does not pivot on leadership capacity alone (Hill-Berry, 2019); Hill-Berry (2019) contends that the sine qua non for competitiveness in the information epoch is the collective expertise, experiences, and discernment of the entire workforce. Simultaneously, "…before empowering the school resources, the principal should be able to empower him/herself for the school enhancement" (Kusumaningrum et al. (2018, p. 147). Tirozzi (2001, as cited in Hartwell Barfield, 2011, p. 47) insists that without such leadership, systematic advancements in teaching and learning remain elusive.

Leaders are called upon to fulfil a stunning breadth of roles, becoming "…educational visionaries; instructional and curriculum leaders; assessment experts; disciplinarians; community builders; public relations experts; budget analysts; facility managers; special program administrators; and expert overseers of legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives" (Schwartz & Simon, 2018, p. 2). The enormity of these responsibilities suggests that modern leaders should cultivate a varied skill set that enables them to meet the expansive demands of their positions.

In this vein, it is recognised that even the most experienced educational leaders often fail to critically scrutinise their leadership tendencies systemically and analytically (Esteves-Miranda et al., 2021). Thus, are reflective and evaluative approach to leadership practice is essential for leaders who strive to lead competently and responsively in an ever-changing environment. This rigorous self-evaluation and commitment to continuous learning form the backbone of effective educational leadership in the modern era.

The metamorphosis of the principal's role within educational institutions is a narrative of transition from traditional, authoritative, and managerial archetypes to becoming architects of thriving, collaborative, and lifelong learning communities. Observations by Lashway highlight a past focus on discipline, instruction, curriculum, and micro-management (Lashway, 2003), yet contemporary approaches, like those advanced by Faas et al., emphasise the importance of fostering environments where collaboration and sustained learning are the norm (Faas et al., 2018).

Building on Faas et al., ideas, Fullan defines the persona of the modern principal as not just a change agent, but also a dynamic learner leader and an adept system player (Fullan, 2014). In their role as a catalyst of change, leaders are entrusted with galvanising their communities to overcome challenges; while as learning leaders, they set the standards for personal growth and create an ecosystem in which learning is accessible and valued. According

to Fullan, being a "system player" means actively contributing to and deriving benefits from broader improvement systems, thus requiring leaders to understand and productively influence these systems (Fullan, 2014). This approach is tied to the concept of 'Systemness,' in which leaders strive to achieve coherent overall success, balancing internal capacity building with external collaboration to optimise learning opportunities.

However, as advocated by Tirozzi (2001, as cited in Hartwell Barfield, 2011), an educational climate conducive to the demands of the age of accountability cannot be achieved without enlightened and proactive leadership. This underscores the importance of placing learning (student, teacher, leader, and team learning) at the centre of educational efforts. Leaders have a responsibility not only to facilitate these learning experiences but also to participate in them and foster an atmosphere in which the pursuit of knowledge is celebrated and becomes a cornerstone of the institution's vision and mission.

The increasing complexity of school leadership in this century requires a multifaceted approach to leadership that is inclusive, and multicultural, and helps foster leadership skills across the organisational hierarchy (Malik, 2018). As Elliott and Hollingsworth (2020) assert, it will be essential for leaders to effectively navigate both the technical aspects and adaptive challenges associated with steering school improvement. Given the breadth of responsibilities that the modern principal is expected to manage, the synthesis of academic leadership, community involvement, and operational efficiency, Ndlovu (2017) stresses the pivotal nature of the principal's role. Thus, the principal is required to strike a complex balance in aligning the aspirations and efforts of teachers, students, and the broader educational community toward collective success.

In response to these evolving demands, Goldring et al. (2018) have articulated a shift in the focus of principal supervisors, who now prioritise their presence within the school environment over administrative duties. They suggested that:

> Most principal supervisors now spend the largest share of their time in schools engaging in newly developed routines and practices, such as participating in classroom walk-throughs, coaching principals, and providing ongoing feedback. Some districts also work with assistant principals or school leadership teams. They focus less on administration and building operations than in the past. They also focus less on compliance activities, such as monitoring supplies and ensuring district and state forms are completed correctly and submitted on time. Principal supervisors also consistently meet with groups of principals to provide opportunities for collaborative learning. (p. xii)

This realignment of priorities promotes a culture of continuous professional development and places less emphasis on compliance and administrative tasks and more on strengthening leadership skills and fostering a spirit of collaboration among leaders. These institutional changes reflect the need for a concerted effort to recognise the multifaceted nature of educational leadership and to prepare leaders to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing educational environment.

The school leadership paradigm is in a state of flux, especially concerning the role of the principal in public schools. The administrative archetype of a century ago has given way to a more dynamic profile that requires leaders to be self-affirming, rational, and committed to ongoing learning (Faas et al., 2018; Goldring et al., 2018; Nhlapo, 2020). However, it is crucial to recognise that the adoption of these new role definitions has not been uniform across the board; Ganon-Shilon and Schechter (2019) note that some leaders may exhibit a more passive approach, only superficially addressing policy changes and not substantially changing their practices: "…while rhetorically paying lip service to policy demands" (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019, p. 6).

The principal's behaviour can have a significant influence on a school's performance by transforming schools into robust professional learning communities that enhance the pedagogical process. Schneider and Yitzhak-Monsonego (2022) argue that the essence of the principal's role is to promote sustainability and community, thereby fostering a compelling sense of purpose toward enhancing student competence and learning. The influence of the

principal is a critical component of any school's success story, requiring a skill set that harmonises the evolving expectations of the role and embodies a deep commitment to advancing student learning and organisational outcomes. In this evolving context, leaders should be prepared to move away from traditional leadership formulas and embrace what is often called a post-heroic leadership style, one that focuses on collaborative and distributed leadership approaches rather than personal acclaim.

To be ready for what is to come, leaders should necessarily cultivate adaptability, flexibility, multilingualism, and the ability to navigate a globally mobile world (Iordanoglou, 2018). Iordanoglou (2018) further notes that the key to success lies in a solid moral compass and the ability to think strategically and conceptually. Taken together, these insights reveal the contours of evolving educational leadership. Namely, adaptability, ethical foundations, strategic insight, and the ability to foster and sustain learning communities will increasingly be emphasised.

Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions of Leadership

In educational settings like secondary schools in rural Antigua and Barbuda, leadership competency emerges as a multifaceted construct that is essential for leaders to perform effectively (Swanson et al., 2020). To accomplish organisational objectives and assist others in completing tasks, a person should integrate the knowledge, skills, abilities, judgments, and behaviours that make up their competency (American Nurses Association, 2013, as cited in Heinen et al., 2019). Mei Kin et al. (2018) posit the significance of practical application by emphasising that competency goes beyond baseline knowledge and ability. Competency is more than just a leader's attributes it also involves how well the leader performs and how to effectively apply these abilities to influence and manage the school (Prastiawan et al., 2020).

An organisation can develop and assess the particular skills, abilities, and behaviours, the performance capabilities necessary for leaders to carry out their roles in an efficient manner

by using a competency-based approach to leadership (Swanson et al., 2020). This method departs from the conventional emphasis on leadership style by offering a more concrete skill-set-oriented framework that can be assessed and improved via focused capacity-building programmes. Identifying and fostering competencies provides a tangible means of improving principal effectiveness through customised training initiatives in the context of rural school leadership. This is especially critical in settings with limited resources where the unique challenges necessitate not only theoretical knowledge but also the thoughtful application of that knowledge in real-world settings (Mei Kin et al. (2018).

A thorough framework for what is expected of school leaders to lead schools effectively is embodied in the guidelines of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), which are now called the Professional Standards for School Leaders (PSSL). To promote student learning, assist educators, and fortify their organisations, leaders should possess the core knowledge, abilities, and attitudes of effective leadership as outlined in these guidelines (Pregot, 2016; Smylie & Murphy, 2018). The Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), which was first introduced with six standards was created to help state legislators and educational leaders choose, train, appoint, and advance the careers of school administrators (Pregot, 2016; Smylie & Murphy, 2018). As school leadership practices and understanding have changed over time so too have these standards.

Ten guiding principles make up the expanded PSEL framework, which is overseen by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) and remains the standard for leadership in schools across the country (Pregot, 2016). The PSELs' integration of these standards and ideas shows a dedication to ongoing development and modification of the prerequisites for educational leadership. The PSEL gives prospective and current school leaders a road map for acquiring the competencies required for them to fulfil their administrative responsibilities and for building supportive learning environments that put

student success and overall school enhancement first (Prociw and Eberle, 2016). This is done by offering a set of updated and unambiguous standards.

To promote equitable outcomes and student learning, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium originally outlined the fundamental characteristics that school leaders should possess (Pregot, 2016). This idea was expanded upon by Prociw and Eberle (2016) who showed that capable educational leaders need to be ready to take on new opportunities and challenges in the modern educational environment as well as welcome the changes that are occurring in both education and society. By including a more comprehensive understanding of student learning (Prociw and Eberle, 2016).

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders build upon the ISLLC standards. PSEL emphasises students' physical and emotional health more because it knows that these are necessary for academic learning (Prociw and Eberle, 2016). The change from an integrated approach that supports each student's academic success and well-being to a purely focused approach to the success of every student reflects this change.

Instructions in ten domains are provided by the PSEL standards to school leaders, which include:

Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Core Values – "Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success, and well-being of each student"(NPBEA, 2015, p. 9);

Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms – "Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 10);

Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness – "Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 11);

Standard 4: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment – "Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student's academic success and well-being" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 12);

Standard 5: Community of Care and Support for Students – "Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 13);

Standard 6: Professional Capacity of School Personnel – "Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being" (NPBEA, 2015, p.14);

Standard 7: Professional Community for Teachers and Staff – "Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and wellbeing" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 15);

Standard 8: Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community – "Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 16);

Standard 9: Operations and Management – "Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 17); and

Standard 10: School Improvement – "Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 18).

With a balanced emphasis on both academic achievement and the general well-being of students, these standards are essential to training educational leaders who can meet the needs

of their school community today and adapt to changing educational environments. For principal leaders to support each learner's success and well-being, the Standards established and refined the particular knowledge, abilities, and attitudes needed (NPBEA, 2015; Prociw & Eberle, 2016). Furthermore, to meet the demands of a competitive workforce in the twenty-first century (NPBEA, 2015; Prociw & Eberle, 2016) while also making sure that educators and leaders have the tools they need to support student's academic success.

In addition, school leaders need to have the knowledge and hard and soft skills necessary to create and carry out action plans as well as the mind-set to respect, believe in, and help others, and trust others and their judgment. The capacity to effectively communicate the school's vision and purpose to teachers, parents, students, and the community in carrying out their collaborative and cross-functional roles as well as the capacity to involve families and partners in school decision-making (NPBEA, 2015; Prociw & Eberle, 2016; The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). According to Stone and Gandolfi (2018), this was a difficult act to manage. However, Thi Hoang Yen et al. (2021) were able to effectively balance this act. According to Thi Hoang Yen et al. (2021), gaining leadership skills requires constant effort, particularly because contemporary leaders should constantly reinvent themselves to adapt to a changing environment. For the school to become recognised as an active and transparent institution in the community, the leaders should better organise and oversee its resources.

Understanding School Leaders' Leadership Training Experiences in Antigua and Barbuda

Recent research consistently notes the discrepancy between the leadership training that school leaders receive and their actual experiences with the difference being especially pronounced in less advantaged areas (Ferguson et al., 2021; Sepuru & Mohlakwana, 2020). This study intends to comprehend and discuss the efficacy of training programmes aimed at

developing leadership capacity within the various socioeconomic and cultural contexts of rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

Critical analysis of leadership development programmes highlights the significance of cultural sensitivity particularly in Antigua and Barbuda where customs and community values are crucial. This research will look at how training programmes interact with and represent these regional values. It will also look into how indigenous leadership practices and philosophies can be incorporated into leaders' professional development (Cunningham et al., 2019; Khalifa et al., 2019).

The research raises concerns about how international best practices in leadership capacity-building trainings are modified to align with Antigua and Barbuda's unique educational policies and national character despite the trend worldwide toward the adoption of these practices (Greene, 2024). Adopting international leadership standards requires acknowledging and respecting local cultural norms and educational policies. This claim is reinforced by Greene's (2024) findings that "…a well-defined and rigorous recruitment and selection process (p. iii) for school leaders is necessary. This implies that the global best practices approach, which is designed to fit all situations, might not sufficiently address the unique requirements and difficulties (Peters-Richardson, 2023) faced by leaders in the education system of a small island nation in the Caribbean.

Current research acknowledges potential discrepancies between the actual responsibilities of school leaders and the anticipated results of leadership capacity-building trainings are acknowledged by the current study (Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019). To ensure that school leaders are properly prepared to carry out their roles and responsibilities within their unique community contexts, it is imperative that training be empirically studied in ways that are localised to meet their realities (Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019). Situational leadership techniques, which might be more appropriate for rural settings where school administrators

face particular difficulties and limited resources, are frequently left out of leadership capacity-building trainings. Developing effective leadership skills should involve teaching flexible context-specific strategies to leaders in these kinds of settings where they frequently have to adjust quickly to changing circumstances (Oskar Hutagaluh et al., 2020). Educational leadership involves influencing others in educational settings to achieve goals and necessitates actions of some kind (Connolly et al., 2019). There is a difference between these principles and the operationalised training that school administrators receive. Therefore, in addition to knowledge transfer, professional development for school leaders should foster reflective practice for continuous improvement. Capacity-building training programmes should incorporate opportunities for ongoing leadership capacity-building and self-evaluation (Brejc et al., 2019).

Leadership Challenges in Rural Settings

Challenges in Building Leadership Capacity in Rural Secondary Schools

Leadership in rural educational settings, in contrast to urban leaders, presents distinct challenges (Wells et al., 2021). For years, education systems around the world have grappled with the dilemma of identifying and developing the next generation of school leaders. In Antigua and Barbuda, the teaching profession, a traditional source of leadership, is showing signs of declining interest in taking on administrative roles (Government of Antigua and Barbuda, 2016). This trend occurs in a context of increasingly complex and diverse demands on the principal's role (Zepeda et al., 2017).

The emergence of new educational needs in a dynamic schooling environment is changing the demands on leaders in complex ways. Augustine-Shaw (2018, p. 1) summarises the nature of leadership in rural areas, noting that "*Rural communities present multifaceted challenges that leaders must embrace as diverse community expectations unfold.*" Effective school leadership has become a non-negotiable element for high-functioning schools and is

critical in addressing the unique demands posed by rural secondary schools. This aspect of leadership has proven to be just as important as in other system areas that transcend the educational domain and are faced with adapting to contemporary demands and various communal challenges.

The landscape of rural education leadership requires leaders to be not just instructional leaders but also community connectors capable of navigating the various problems particular to their region. Rural leaders are usually entrusted with bridging resource shortages, overcoming isolation, and forming connections that extend beyond the school gates into the larger community. As a result, their leadership abilities should be developed to successfully handle these demands.

The scenario in Antigua and Barbuda reflects a bigger worldwide issue in which the pool of individuals eager to take up school leadership is diminishing. It underscores the critical need for effective measures to attract and educate educators for increasingly demanding and complicated leadership responsibilities. The decreased enthusiasm among teachers in taking on administrative positions exacerbates the difficulty of developing the next generation of educational leaders, especially those in rural schools, where the complexity of the role is magnified by location-specific issues.

School leaders play a pivotal role in education; thus, leadership CBTs are crucial. These programmes should be customised to the requirements of rural leaders, deputy leaders, and teachers, recognising their unique obstacles and ensuring the potential success of well-supported school leaders. Leaders should be able to deliver practical, context-appropriate trainings that educate them to be change agents capable of steering their schools through the complexity of rural education.

For rural public secondary schools to thrive, leaders should be prepared via focused CBTs. These programmes should cultivate a skill set that is sensitive to the specific demands

and possibilities of rural education, ensuring that leaders can effectively traverse these situations and that their schools can deliver excellent education on par with their urban counterparts.

Leadership Dynamics in Rural School Settings and Capacity-Building Trainings

The research articulated by du Plessis (2017) highlights the complex and compounding challenges encountered by rural leaders, potentially undermining their ability to effectively execute their diverse roles. In such an environment, authoritarian leadership may prove counterproductive, and staff members may feel undervalued, marginalised, and prone to burnout. Conversely, adopting a democratic and transformational leadership style increases job satisfaction, increases dedication to the institution, and increases the number of activated and engaged staff (Inandi et al., 2020). To support this positive leadership change, capacity-building trainings go far beyond the realm of basic knowledge accumulation, fostering a reflective iterative learning process that supports the growth of not only school leaders but also the institution they lead. It is a journey of enduring development that positions educational leaders as pivotal agents of change and growth.

The need to build "Leadership capacity requires leaders to participate with relevant stakeholders skilfully, and where there is high leadership capacity, instructional leadership develops into sound leadership practices" (Naidoo, 2019, p. 1). Capacity-building trainings for secondary school leaders are based on the well-established concept that schools excel under skilled leadership.

A widely accepted principle that schools operate best when they are competently led is the foundation of capacity-building trainings (CBTs) for school leaders (Bafadal et al., 2019; Komalasari et al., 2020; Mestry, 2017). The goal of CBTS is to equip leaders not only with robust management skills but also the ability to adapt and promote change in their organisations (Bafadal et al., 2019; Komalasari et al., 2020; Poturak et al., 2020), a transformative vision of

leadership (Ruge & Mackintosh, 2020). In this framework, schools are recognised not only as learning institutions, but as communities as an integral part of educational governance (Bafadal et al., 2019; Komalasari et al., 2020). The methodology of CBTs goes beyond the mere acquisition of understanding and, emphasises reflection and continuous evolution, which together increase the capabilities of each school leader and the development of the school. This is not a one-time transaction, but an ongoing developmental adventure in which educational leaders become effective catalysts for knowledge exchange.

In Antigua and Barbuda, where educational progress rests on the shoulders of capable leaders, the philosophical underpinnings of CBTs are particularly strong. In this context, transformational leadership is defined as having the ability to inspire staff and students to work toward realising a compelling vision for the school (Wang, 2019). These trainings challenge school leaders to develop leadership characteristics that surpass conventional thinking, inspire, and improve ethical and innovative practices. The purpose is to allow leaders to emerge as change agents capable of skilfully navigating the complexities of urban and rural schools by integrating transformational leadership standards into CBTs. Consequently, CBTs contribute to the development of leaders who can motivate others and apply creative approaches that represent both local cultural awareness and global excellence in practice. They also represent advancements in academics. As a result, educators in Antigua and Barbuda transform into transformative leaders who open doors for innovative academic reforms in their institutions.

Around the world, CBT programmes are evolving (Kjellström et al., 2020). According to literature, evaluation of traditional training models, traditional workshops and seminar strategies are increasingly being supplemented or integrated (Drude et al., 2019) with real-world experiential learning (Sousa & Rocha, 2019) opportunities like internships (Grissom et al., 2019; Roupnel et al., 2019). Coaching, mentoring programmes, and action learning are also emerging as crucial CBT tools (Roupnel et al., 2019). Furthermore, individualised training

(Naidoo, 2019) that considers various operating environments in which leaders operate and employ strategies that align with adult education theory is becoming more and more popular (L. E. Martin et al., 2019).

Recognising the constraints faced by rural school leaders, a blended approach combining face-to-face seminars with online learning modules may offer equitable access to professional development by adapting academic content to the cultural and social contexts (Muhuro & Kang'ethe, 2021) of Antigua and Barbuda. These programmes would now not simply be relevant but also extraordinarily impactful, making sure that capability-building trainings are in alignment with the realities of the participants and the application of new skills and strategies without delay inside their institutions.

The educational trainings would be tailored to the cultural and social contexts of Antigua and Barbuda. The diverse delivery of CBTs, ranging from in-person seminars to digital online modalities, may be headed toward a more inclusive approach, better enabling school leaders from even rural areas to engage with and benefit from those essential professional development opportunities.

Navigating CBT Challenges and Leveraging Successes

The inconsistent application and poor quality of CBTs is a significant problem on a global scale (Grissom et al., 2019). This problem can be exacerbated by institutional resistance to change and resource limitations (Andre Martin, 2021). To ensure effectiveness, nevertheless, skills that meet the demands of an ever more complex educational environment and well-defined, strategically aligned goals are characteristics of successful programmes.

One could argue that the Caribbean region presents unique challenges for school leader training because of geographical dispersion and disparities in cultural norms (Audebert, 2020; Medford & Brown, 2022). Among them are the need to customise content (Leithwood et al., 2019) for regional contexts and the logistical challenges associated with assembling

participants. Even with these challenges, the results of effective training programmes have been observed in improved administration and academic performance at many schools as documented in academic publications like those written by Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) and Madani (2019) provide evidence.

When concentrating on a single nation, such as Antigua and Barbuda, it goes beyond continental trends to the subtler nuances of regional educational environments. The major differences between urban and rural schools are frequently brought to the attention of leaders, particularly concerning infrastructure problems and the distribution of resources. Leadership development literature focuses on generic strategies (Tingle et al., 2019) that may lack relevance in rural contexts, leading to a gap between leaders' needs and the training provided (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). When considering these findings collectively, the study "*Exploration of Leadership Development Trainings for Secondary School Leaders in Antigua and Barbuda*" assumes critical importance.

Concerns expressed regarding CBTs address critical challenges affecting the success of programmes aimed at improving the skills and knowledge of educational leaders throughout the world. As Grissom et al. (2019) have remarked, inconsistent implementation and quality of these trainings provide substantial obstacles, which can be exacerbated by internal opposition to change and resource constraints.

These issues are compounded by the Caribbean's geographical and cultural context. Because the region is varied and dispersed, school leadership training should be tailored to local conditions, which may be a difficult undertaking. Furthermore, logistical challenges in assembling participants for training might impede the execution of successful programmes. Despite these challenges, studies such as Darling-Hammond et al. (2022) and Madani (2019) have demonstrated the benefits of well-executed capacity-building training in terms of improved school leadership and academic performance. Therefore, creating efficient and

contextually appropriate capacity-building trainings requires an understanding of how these issues interact with the experiences and perceived needs of rural leaders in Antigua and Barbuda.

In Antigua and Barbuda, as in other Caribbean islands, the distinctions between rural and urban educational environments are substantial, notably in terms of infrastructure and resource distribution. The differences are frequently at the forefront of leaders' issues. Broad-based leadership development programmes may fail to meet the specialised needs of rural school leaders, resulting in a disconnect that reduces the training's effectiveness (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Recognising the gap, leadership capacity-building trainings should adopt a nuanced approach that considers the nuances of the regional educational system as well as the particular situations of rural schools. Therefore, given the need for tailored capacity-building trainings, this thesis is critical. It intends to compare the existing status of leadership development programmes to leaders' real needs and experiences, to improve the efficacy of future trainings and, eventually, the quality of education in the region.

Contemporary Practices in Educational Leadership

Leaders as Catalysts for Educational Innovation and Organisational Growth

Research suggests the need for continued implementation of progressive training programmes, overcoming teacher resistance to change, revitalising school community involvement, and addressing the high turnover rate in the leadership and navigating the complex educational landscape of the 21st century, a principal should be deeply integrated and empowered in all aspects of the schooling system (Kusumaningrum et al., 2018; Mestry, 2017; Syafitri et al., 2022).

Because organisations evolve, and so do the leaders at their helm, it is necessary to understand that developing leadership capacity is not simply a matter of raising the level of management. In the information age, gaining a competitive edge requires not only leadership

development, but also the mobilisation and utilisation of the expertise, skills, and insights of the entire staff (Kusumaningrum et al., 2018). To effectively empower the community for overall enhancement, leaders first should strengthen their capacity (Kusumaningrum et al., 2018).

Tirozzi (2001, as cited in Hartwell Barfield, 2011) assertation that the absence of leadership nullifies the prospect of systemic pedagogical enhancement and underscores the diverse roles that leaders should assume. The school leaders "…need to be educational visionaries; instructional and curriculum leaders; assessment experts; disciplinarians; community builders; public relations experts; budget analysts; facility managers; special program administrators; and expert overseers of legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives" (Schwartz & Simon, 2018, p. 2). However, Gupton (2010) notes that there are gaps in the way even the most experienced leaders reflect on their leadership systematically and analytically. Ongoing self-assessment and professional development are essential for leaders who seek to lead with efficacy and insight and set their schools on a path of innovation and growth.

Characteristics of Effective Leadership Preparation Programmes

By analysing exemplary pre-service and in-service programmes, Darling-Hammond et al.'s (2007) work helps define the characteristics of highly effective leadership training programmes. They see the following characteristics as distinctive indicators of excellence:

- A well-designed, coherent curriculum with an emphasis on the development of instructional leadership that complies with state and professional standards, particularly the ISSLC requirements; - An overall philosophy and syllabus that give[s] instructional governance and school improvement first priority.

- Interactive, learner-centered pedagogy that integrates theoretical knowledge with real-world applications.

- Faculty and instructors who exhibit subject-matter expertise, such as seasoned school administrators and university scholars.

- Reflective practices [are] fostered by techniques like problem-based learning, action research, and extensive fieldwork, augmented by the use of peer and instructor feedback.

- Cohort models and formalised mentoring relationships with experienced principals as well as a network of supportive friends and colleagues.

- Vigorous and deliberate efforts in recruiting and selection to find outstanding teachers who have the potential to be leaders.

- Well-thought-out administrative internships that give candidates the chance to take on leadership roles for extended periods of time while being mentored by seasoned leaders.

Following these recognised criteria provides a strong foundation for evaluating and developing programmes for primary preparation. A key strategy for Orr's (2023) concerns is tailoring programme material to these standards to guarantee that school leaders gain the essential abilities needed to handle today's educational obstacles. Customised, standardised programmes like this have the potential to close the research gaps about inadequacies in leadership development in rural areas.

Orr's method articulates how important it is to design principal preparation courses that are thoughtfully tailored to the particular difficulties faced by rural schools while also adhering to specified excellence standards. It may be possible to create more inclusive and successful leadership development strategies that address the unique educational challenges faced by rural school leaders by tailoring programme content to the varied needs of these regions.

Programmes should be tailored to specified criteria, which requires taking into account a nuanced understanding of the rural context, which frequently presents unique challenges like

resource constraints, rural location, and community-specific educational needs (Orr, 2023). These kinds of programmes would have to go beyond general leadership concepts and explore approaches that encourage community involvement to make use of local resources and apply creative thinking to address resource scarcity.

Additionally, uniformity within this tailored framework guarantees that all leaders receive training under a core set of competencies regardless of where they are in the world (Orr, 2023). Rural leaders can now receive the same calibre of leadership development as their urban counterparts thanks to this integration of standardisation and customisation that levels the playing field. By offering actual information on the efficacy of different leadership techniques in a rural setting, these standardised, but customised programmes may play a significant role in filling in knowledge gaps in the field. To contribute significantly to the field, they could assess, which specific elements of leadership development led to effective academic results in rural schools.

This method also recognises the dynamic character of educational leadership and promotes the ongoing development of leadership curricula to keep up with the ever-evolving demands of the educational landscape. Leadership trainings should change to reflect the increasing interconnectedness of schools with the community and technology. It should incorporate new competencies and skills to enable school leaders in all contexts including rural areas. In this manner, leadership development initiatives can be effectively utilised to promote educational equity guaranteeing that no school is left behind because of geographic location or financial limitations.

Collaborative Efforts and Contextual Adaptation in Leadership Training

Orr's (2023) research underscores the value of cooperation between postsecondary educational institutions and ministries of education or school districts emphasising the need for inclusive high-quality principal training programmes. To guarantee that school leaders are

adequately prepared to communicate and carry out the school's mission, vision and values, cooperative initiatives, and careful candidate selection are necessary for effective principal training programmes.

Thi Hoang Yen et al. (2021) support programmes for leadership development that take into account the socioeconomic cultural and policy context of school communities. This emphasises the importance of precisely customising training to local circumstances. In particular, they suggest the need for leaders to participate in ongoing education from the beginning of their careers. They also endorse strategies that encourage a culture of training and ongoing education for school leaders. According to their research school leaders should incorporate ongoing education into their leadership roles. They also support post-training techniques that expand on earlier training phases to support a lifelong learning path.

Leaders should acquire competencies beyond conventional management to effectively address the modern challenges facing school leadership. The research on the features of Education 4. 0 supports the claim that to meet contemporary challenges and new accountability requirements, leaders and other school leaders should develop competencies beyond traditional management (Himmetoglu et al., 2020).

The report asserts how important it is for educators, school administrators, and students to acquire skills related to Education 4. 0 such as digital literacy, teamwork, communication, and lifelong learning. This is consistent with the notion that leaders —or in this case school managers—need to be multifaceted and flexible enough to embrace distributed and transformational leadership approaches. As suggested by the need for transformational and distributed leadership practices, the study's findings that school managers of Education 4. 0 should possess guidance skills, technological skills, and learning skills directly support the idea that leadership in the educational sector needs to evolve to incorporate these diverse

competencies to effectively navigate the technologically rich and dynamic environment of the twenty-first century (Himmetoglu et al., 2020).

This strategy aligns with the need for rural leaders in Antigua and Barbuda to embrace adaptable and collaborative leadership styles to meet the variety of challenges they encounter (Maalouf, 2019). Expanding on this idea, leadership in academic environments is essential for promoting partnerships and collaborations in addition to administrative tasks. Strong commitments to raising the standard of instruction are necessary to increase the scope and depth of leadership training. According to Mokat (2020), providing leaders with continuous training can augment their abilities and propel their schools forward by elevating their performance and competitiveness in the academic sphere. Therefore, programmes for training and policies should be relevant to the specific context of small island developing states such as Cape Verde (Barnum & Longenecker, 2017). The development of secondary education leadership programmes in Antigua and Barbuda can benefit from insights from these countries as they can be customised to meet the unique requirements and resource constraints typical of remote and rural learning environments (Barnum & Longenecker, 2017).

It is also crucial to take Antigua and Barbuda's cultural leadership traditions into account. Leaders can be equipped to lead in a way that is consistent with the cultural context of their school through leadership development programmes that consider local customs, values, and community expectations. School administrators may create a learning environment that is both productive and culturally sensitive by supporting leadership practices that represent regional cultural competencies. This will guarantee a comprehensive approach to educational leadership.

Comprehensive Professional Development for Rural Leaders

Education has constantly evolved (Daniëls, Hondeghem, & Doch, 2019) in definition and scope, making the principal's role increasingly multifaceted and complicated (Mestry,

2017; Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018). As a result, to survive this uncertainty, "…they need leadership skills and organisational capabilities different from those that helped them succeed in the past" (Moldoveanu & Narayanda, 2019, p. 4). Regardless of how rapidly the world changes, leaders can lead successfully (Chang, Chen, & Chou, 2017). The Global Education Reform Movement (GERM), the Progressive Movement in Education, and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) have set performance goals for schools – globally and within the Caribbean sub-region of which Antigua and Barbuda is a member state. They are responsive to each child's needs and interests, respectively aligned with national goals and policies. Importantly, there is a greater need for effective leadership when the number of children entering our nation's schools has increased to improve teaching, learning, and organisational development. Mestry (2017, p. 2) agreed that "There is…a dire need for leaders to be empowered and professionally prepared for their roles as heads of schools, and to enhance their skills continually, attributes and competencies through structured continuing professional development (CPD) programmes." Accordingly, continual learning at every level of the institution is critical to satisfying the expectations of global education reform. It should be prioritised on the agenda to build leadership and organisational capacity for short-term and long-term change. Moreover, for better performance and increased proficiency, Huber and Helm (2020) recommended that professional development become part of an organisation's routine. However, Huber and Helm (2020) asserted that schools should be given financial and material resources to upgrade their technological and human resources.

Although there is a paucity of information on the characteristics of professional development in rural schools (Glover et al., 2016), literature in the field hypothesised that ongoing learning opportunities for school leaders are specifically relevant to building leaders to guarantee a culture of learning (Zepeda, 2019). Furthermore, it is directly related to enhancing student achievement and school growth and should be integrated into a larger

continuum of continuous learning (Rowland, 2017) for them to successfully fulfil their diverse leadership roles (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001). Therefore, to expedite the discourse about leadership capacity building in rural secondary schools through professional development, schools require leaders who acknowledge and accept the need for personal and professional growth and develop the leadership abilities and tenacity to build capacity in others that are interwoven into the context of the school culture inclusive of expanding pedagogical and subject content knowledge.

With this in mind, DuFour and Berkey (1995, p.1) stated, "When you talk about school improvement, you are talking about people improvement." Thus, Harris and Ramos (2013, as cited in Mackay, 2017, p. 1) claimed that "…professional development is regarded as a stock of knowledge, skills and learning for use in work and potential career progression." In addition to Harris and Ramos' definition, Fishman (2016, as cited in Elliott, 2017, p. 6) described professional development as "…'learning activities related to the profession' of teaching that occurs after initial certification." Hazri, Nordin, Reena and Abdul Rashid (2011, as cited in Razak et al. 2016, p. 85) defined professional development "…as a long-term and ongoing process that promotes growth and development of the teaching profession." Similarly, Glickman (2001, as cited in Mathis, 2004, p. 26) described it "…as the continuous education of educators for the purpose of improving the quality of education in a school." Based on the origin and assumptions shared by the various definitions, professional development is a continuing learning process that improves and increases employees' skills via access to training opportunities in the workplace. Helsing, Howell, Kegand and Lahey (2008) and Nicolaidou and Petridou (2011, as cited in Sagor, 2009, p. 7) emphasised that "Professional development should focus upon generating the new knowledge and insights required to tackle the challenges of an increasingly diverse student body."

However, Daniëls et al. (2019) argued that research findings on the efficiency of various forms of professional development for school administrators are also lacking. For example, the National Institute for Science Education (NISE) study found that variations in time spent on professional development programmes have little bearing on student learning outcomes (Loucks-Horsley et al., 1996). Similarly, according to the Educational Testing Service (ETS) annual report, the amount of time spent on career advancement has little bearing on achievement (Loucks-Horsley et al., 1996). Although successful professional learning does necessitate time, it was evident that time should be well-planned, adequately controlled, and directed with a purpose (Guskey, 2003).

While the literature on the efficacy of professional development has some disputed nuances, there is universal agreement that continued professional development is vital for increasing leaders' capabilities to enhance their skills and practice to improve teacher and student learning (Brauckmann et al., 2020; Donyai & Alexander, 2015; Gulamhussein, 2013; Ng & Szeto, 2016). According to Hilton et al. (2015), as part of a survey promote numeracy, approximately 70 teachers from 18 secondary schools in different socioeconomic locations across participated in ongoing professional development programe. Twenty leaders from 11 participated in the professional development programmes including teachers, leaders and deputies, primary school curriculum heads, and secondary school department heads. During the research, surveys, interviews, and workshop discussions were used to collect data from the participants. The results revealed that leaders' engagement in teacher professional development activities positively impacted teachers' ability to implement and draw on new skills and strategies. The findings also revealed that professional development had a positive effect on leaders themselves. In another study, Gümüş and Bellibaş (2020) conducted a cross-sectional study of 130 leaders who worked at Turkish public schools. Their research study found that

leaders' PD positively correlates with their leadership practices, although the relationship is weak, with self-efficacy as a significant mediator.

Additionally, in another study that looked at leaders' professional development, Ng and Szeto (2016, p. 1) conducted an exploratory qualitative analysis in Hong Kong on the perceptions of 32 newly hired secondary school leaders on (a) "…their role as a new principal and (b) their needs and expectations on the school leadership development programme so that contents of existing development programmes could be improved to meet their needs" through in-depth interviews. The results revealed that newly hired leaders were required to have managerial expertise, managing underperforming staff, financial management techniques, legal management skills, and curriculum and instructional leadership capacities as prerequisites. The findings also credited networking with colleagues and partnering with mentors as helpful insight and encouragement during their early years as leaders.

An effective principal professional development programme should be:

- Consistent with research regarding its inclusion as an integral part of professional life (King, 2019).

- Self-directed and planned within the context in which they operate, and staff should receive support in gaining a better understanding of the learning approaches and needs they prefer to maximise the opportunities for professional development (King, 2019).

- Recognised as complex and supported in formal and informal settings, informing the learning process (King, 2019).

- Established as an in-school professional development programme in collaboration with universities to assist novice teachers throughout their first three years of teaching (King, 2019).

- Established school mentorship programmes to improve novice teachers' well-being and quality of education (Coenders & Verhoef, 2019)

- Designed and sequenced professional development curricula to the principal's unique development needs (Daniëls et al., 2019)

- contextual and experiential (Daniëls et al., 2019)

Further, incorporating continuing professional development into professional practices provides ways to conceptualise and legitimise it (Daniëls et al., 2019). As a result, networking with fellow leaders is an excellent way to share ideas and reactivate existing knowledge and practices (Daniëls et al., 2019). However, a gradual approach to professional development is most effective. Consequently, continuous professional development for leaders should be monitored and evaluated to track progress (Thomas et al., 2018). Additionally, a plan should be created to evaluate the impact of professional learning on leadership development; seeing how it affects leadership quality is paramount (Thomas et al., 2018).

Mentoring Rural School Leaders

Just as professional development has played a crucial role in school capacity building and student learning, leadership mentorship programmes should fulfil prospective leaders' professional development requirements and support school leaders during their induction for continual growth. According to Augustine-Shaw (2016),

> Mentoring...for new rural [leaders] is a critical investment in leadership and must be a priority for school district and university programs as well as educational professionals interested in developing and supporting the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for every new leader to be successful within the educational context they serve. (p. 1)

Over the last fifty years, in an era of increased leadership accountability, the notion of mentoring has gained prominence in the scholarly literature (Merriam, 1983). Despite its recognition, with the emergence of mentoring, defining and conceptualising due to its broad interpretation across various contexts (Gümüş, 2019). For example, Dickson et al., 2014 and

Eby et al. (2007, as cited in Hackmann and Malin, 2019, p. 2) described mentoring "…as an interpersonal relationship in which a more experienced or skilled person (mentor) intentionally guides, supports, and counsels a less experienced/skilled person (mentee)." Similarly, Mullen (2021, p. 35) defined mentoring as "…a one-way, long-term teaching relationship in a one-to-one situation whereby knowledge and wisdom are imparted by the expert to the mentee." Additionally, other scholars defined mentoring as:

- "…a relationship between a less experienced individual called a mentee or protégé and a more experienced individual known as a mentor" (Wai-packard, 2001, p. 1).

- a "dyadic relationship" (Tewari & Sharma, 2014, p. 81), and

- described mentoring as "a process which develops the whole person rather than parts" (Smith, 2007, as cited in Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010, p. 43). According to the literature, most definitions included three elements: process, relationship, and context.

Merriam, 1983, p. 171) stated, "The phenomenon begs for clarification, [and] better means of assessing its importance need to be developed." Bullough and Draper (2004, as cited in Stead, 2005, p. 172) concurred that there is a "…lack of understanding." With the same tone, Mullen (2021, p. 35) suggested that "…some researchers consider[ed] its current status confusing and fragmentary rather than varied and fluid." Furthermore, Mullen (2021, pp. 35-36) purported, "The term reflects variability in the mentoring literature and new ways of thinking about the mentoring process, with traditional associations losing traction." However, there appeared to be a widespread consensus among scholarly journals, books, and peer-reviewed articles that mentoring definitions vary.

According to Spiro, Mattis and Mitgang (2007) and Magni and Maruping (2013), throughout history, leadership has been viewed as sink-or-swim. They asserted that because of having such a mind-set and receiving proper guidance, the:

> Mentoring of principals should take an important next step by embracing a larger vision—beyond a buddy system that merely helps new principals adapt to a flawed system, to one whose core goal is to help prepare a new generation of principals willing and able to challenge the status quo and lift the quality of teaching and learning in every school. (p. 5)

To address these issues, Spiro et al. (2007) proposed five leadership capacity guidelines that may be utilised to construct and strengthen a mentoring programme. These foci focused on five distinct procedures:

- "High-quality training for mentors should be a requirement and should be provided by any state or district with mentoring" (Spiro et al., 2007, p. 4).

- "States or districts that require mentoring should gather meaningful information about its efficacy: especially, how mentoring is or is not contributing to the development of *leadership behaviors and dispositions*" (Spiro et al., 2007, p. 4).

- "Mentoring should be provided for at least a year, and ideally two or more years" (Spiro et al., 2007, p. 4).

- State and local funding for principal mentoring should be sufficient to provide quality training, stipends commensurate with the importance and time requirements of the task, and a lengthy enough period of mentoring to provide new principals a meaningful professional induction. (Spiro et al., 2007, p. 4).

- "The primary goal of mentoring should be clear and unambiguous: to provide new principals with the knowledge, skills and courage to become leaders of change who put teaching and learning first in their schools" (Spiro et al., 2007, p. 4).

Mentoring programmes are known to assist people in establishing new networks and relationships, among other activities that assist individuals in setting realistic goals and overcoming obstacles (Johnson, 2011; Moir & Bloom, 2003). Furthermore, mentoring has been known to improve students' academic achievement (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). However, despite the highlighted networks, synergetic connections, and benefits of leadership mentoring, it was acknowledged that there is inconclusive data to support favourable mentoring effects on emerging leaders. Nevertheless, mentoring new leaders undoubtedly improved leadership abilities; among other things, it improved leadership capability and assisted professional development (Johnson, 2011; Moir & Bloom, 2003; Stead, 2005).

Mentoring relationships were crucial to developing future school leaders' leadership capability in the educational context (Clayton et al., 2013). Interestingly, these relationships may be "…formal, informal, short-term or long-term" (Yirci & Kocabas, 2014, p. 2). Abra et al., 2003; McCauley et al., 1998, as cited in Stead, 2005, p. 170) referenced this as "*Leadership through experience.*" Subsequently, mentorship as a leadership capacity-building tool should be dovetailed into leadership preparation programmes to provide ongoing support and direction to the interns. Per se, mentors served as role models for the mentees as they strived to become better leaders (Moir & Bloom, 2003). According to an examination of the mentoring literature, "Effective mentoring is a key component of academic and career success that contributes to overall measures of productivity. Mentoring relationships also play an important role in mental health and recruiting and retaining students…" (Hund et al., 2018, p. 1). However, its effectiveness is based on trust, confidentiality, and mutual respect (Balyer, 2017). Once the mentee developed these positive attributes, the mentoring process assisted principal candidates in developing the required leadership abilities, boosting the school's effectiveness (Yirci & Kocabas, 2014; Hattingh, Coetzee, & Schreuder, 2005).

Bush and Coleman (1995); Cranwell-Ward et al, 2004; Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002; Poe, 2002; and Tyler (1998, as cited in Hattingh et al., 2005, p. 42) highlighted the significant benefits of mentoring programmes in South Africa on the mentee and the organisation, as indicated in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4

Benefits of Mentoring Programmes - Mentee

Mentee
Improved self-confidence and self-esteem Confidential coaching
Safe learning environment to test ideas
Continued support in a changing environment
Access to different perspectives and experience
Development of transferable skills, including management, leadership, behavioural, professional
Sense of value in the organisation Opportunity to broaden networks
Help in developing a long-term career, and development goals and plans

Note. Extracted from the Implementing and Sustaining Mentoring Programmes: A Review of the Application of Best Practices in the South African Organisational Context – some data are not shown. SOURCE: the Implementing and Sustaining Mentoring Programmes: A Review of the Application of Best Practices in the South African Organisational Context (Hattingh et al., 2005, p. 42).

A principal's expertise, aptitude, and values in mentoring other leaders, interns, and administrators and providing interpersonal support benefited the school-wide educational process. Effective leadership affected the school by mentoring and empowering others while opening pathways to further education.

Table 5

Benefits of Mentoring Programmes - Organisation

Organisation
Increased motivation/retention of employees by investing in their development
Helps stabilise and reinforce the organisation's values and culture Professional standards are maintained
Improved communications – both laterally and vertically, and particularly across cultures
Productivity gains – mentees working smarter and developing two for the price of one
Knowledge capital protection in sharing and retaining valuable knowledge encapsulated in experienced managers
Enhances the practice and culture (if continuous learning)
Improved succession planning because more information is available Increased speed of change
Strengthening of business relationship

Note. Extracted from the Implementing and Sustaining Mentoring Programmes: A Review of the Application of Best Practices in the South African Organisational Context – some data are not shown. SOURCE: the Implementing and Sustaining Mentoring Programmes: A Review of the Application of Best Practices in the South African Organisational Context (Hattingh et al., 2005, p. 42).

Coaching Rural Secondary Leaders

As the complexity of school leadership grows, it has become increasingly common for teachers in a fast-paced, globalised and ever-evolving educational system to assume leadership roles without the necessary education or training. However, it is not enough to have leaders if you cannot give them the tools, knowledge, skills, and resources to achieve the organisation's strategic goals. Consequently, leadership development becomes crucial for schools' effectiveness and efficiency. Notwithstanding the numerous educational reform efforts, high-quality leadership remains one of the essential elements for enhancing student learning and organisational development in education. Since leaders need to become more skilled, knowledgeable, and experienced, they require higher training, practice, and support. While

some people may naturally possess leadership qualities, most educators require coaching as a support system to develop into effective leaders.

Coaching is not an imposed programme on school leaders or teachers. Lofthouse (2018) posits that coaching can counterbalance some of the effects of performativity while also assisting people in dealing with real obstacles, professional interests, and dilemmas encountered in complicated educational contexts. As a result, coaching can help leverage the knowledge and expertise of experienced individuals to assist aspiring and newly hired leaders and those already in the school system struggling with school leadership, based on specific needs to achieve their full potential. Consequently, to accomplish this task, Atkinson et al. (2022, p. 441) suggested that "Coaching is an educational philosophy dedicated to supporting learners' personal and professional development and growth and supporting them to reach their potential." However, its effectiveness depends on mutual trust and respect between the coach and the learner. Moreover, providing feedback to learners from someone they trust and have developed a rapport with will increase their receptivity (Atkinson et al., 2022).

In synthesising the definition of coaching from various researchers, Fusarelli and Militello (2012) postulated that coaching involves working collaboratively with individuals willing and ready to engage in work to develop their skills. Concurrently, Spence and Grant (2007) posited that coaching involves working together in a collaborative relationship between the coach and coachee to help reach goals and bring about personal development and professional growth. Similarly, Cornelius et al. (2020, p. 12) suggested that "Coaching facilitates the application of newly acquired knowledge in natural environments through prompting, active support, and directed feedback."

By gathering knowledge, developing their skills, and honing their abilities, leaders can more accurately focus on helping students reach their full potential and improve their school. Thus, researchers have established that leaders should gain more knowledge, skills, and

practice as they progress. As a result, Hagiwara et al. (2020) emphasised that people in coaching relationships reflect on their abilities, weaknesses, and experiences to gain insights and try out new concepts and ideas. Interestingly, while most leadership improvement programmes are created to meet the requirements of different people, coaching is about addressing problems specific to one individual based on the individual and organisation's needs. As a result, coaching can help leaders transform new knowledge, ideas, and skills into practice. Furthermore, working together with a partner to help improve performance related to an issue of practice is what coaching is all about (Thomas et al., 2018).

de Haan et al. (2020) critically analysed two new, large-scale, randomised controlled trials in executive coaching recently and disproved the findings of older studies. They found that:

> Contrary to previous consensus, it seems the working alliance between client and coach is not strongly related to coaching effectiveness. The strength of the working alliance only correlates with a higher effectiveness score from the beginning of the coaching relationship, but it does not significantly correlate with increasing outcomes through further coaching conversations. (p. 2)

In a study conducted by Wang et al. (2022), they performed a meta-analysis of 20 studies in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Italy, Europe, Australia, Spain, and the Netherlands, among others. It is evident from the results that psychologically informed coaching improved the achievement of goals (g51.29) and self-efficacy (g50.59), including work-related outcomes (Wang et al., 2022). In another study, Atkinson et al. (2022) concluded that when learners receive feedback and coaching from their mentors thoughtfully and intentionally, along with using evidence-based principles, they will be able to advance significantly in their development, and they will also have the tools to achieve competence throughout their training that will give them the best chance of doing so.

Consequently, Warah (1999) suggested that seven coaching components build leadership capacity and improve the organisation's overall capacity. These include:

- Mutuality and partnership - The foundation for any relationship should be mutual trust and commitment.

- Recognising opportunities for coaching - In the role of coaches, managers assess their coachees' progress and refer to problems, breakdowns, or misfits as opportunities for learning.

- Contracting - Managers are still required to elicit the agreement of their employees before coaching can begin.

- Goal setting - Collaboration and timelines are necessary to establish goals and outcomes.

- Feedback mechanism - For any learning experience to be successful, frequent, and regular feedback is essential.

- Progress monitoring or regression outcomes – Progress toward the objectives, even if minor, should be acknowledged. It is also essential to recognise and talk about any setbacks.

- Ready for possible breakdowns – Coaches or managers should be prepared for potential conflicts like coachees not wanting to cooperate or an ego clash.

Warah (1999) further stated that coaching as a management approach could be more successful in organisations favouring a horizontal leadership structure rather than a hierarchical one. When this happens, "…the beginning leaders gained greater self-awareness, self-empowerment, and insights on self-care" (Boon, 2022, p. 1). However, coach-coachee relationships can be complicated and have many layers, with both good and bad experiences (Schermuly & Graßmann, 2019). Schermuly and Graßmann (2019) reviewed nine studies that used qualitative, cross-sectional, time-lagged, or experimental research methods on the adverse effects of coaching. They found that "Throughout the diverse studies, negative effects occurred frequently, but only a few of them were severe, and most of them were low in intensity.

Concerning their antecedents, higher relationship quality between clients and coaches was related to fewer negative effects" (Schermuly & Graßmann, 2019, p. 1). Additionally, the results also showed that supervision had a positive impact. Also, there was a connection between the detrimental impacts on both clients and instructors. These results help professionalise coaching and align it with other helpful partnerships, where unfavourable outcomes have been accepted as inevitable occurrences without being taboo (Schermuly & Graßmann, 2019).

Based on research by Atkinson et al. (2022); Baker and An (2019); Boon (2022); Gray (2018); Hagiwara et al. (2020); Lofthouse (2018); and Wang et al. (2022), individuals work with a coach to achieve personal and professional outcomes customised explicitly to the learner and organisation's needs through a collaborative, reflective and goal-focused relationship in the workplace. Ennis and Otto (2015) suggested that for a successful system, it is essential to have a partnership between the coach and the organisation, and the coaching goals should always be connected to the organisation's objectives. In addition, Ennis and Otto posited that coaching activities programmes are designed to 1) increase self-awareness of the effects of her recurring habits, 2) acquire knowledge, develop competencies, alter behaviours, and get outcomes, and 3) consider the results of skill development and strategies for enhancing behaviours and skills even more. Furthermore, it inspired and supported them in developing theoretical and practical knowledge and skills that will improve their workplace performance and, more importantly, their organisation.

Internship Programmes for Aspiring Rural Leaders

According to the European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships (2018, as cited in Marinas et al., 2018)

> Internships are work-based learning opportunities, either taking place as part of formal education (with interns having a student status) or outside of formal education (also

after graduation), during which a person spends a period of time in an organisation to acquire specific competencies required by the labour market. (p. 3)

As the body of knowledge on school leadership preparation programmes has grown exponentially, a recurring theme has emerged: the need to shift the focus away from solely theoretical content knowledge from university courses and toward practical, field-based training and experiences in which interns observed the variety of activities that affected a school principal's daily operations. Fry, Bottoms, and O'Neill (2005, p. 3) postulated that there were "…far too many principal preparation programs, the internship 'vessel' is leaky, rudderless, or still in dry dock." This divergence might create gaps in potential leaders' abilities and expertise. Concordantly, Anast-may et al. (2011) argued that "Internship programs too often do not provide the types of experiences that effectively bridge the gap between theory and practice and prepare school leaders who are capable of leading and transforming schools."

Furthermore, Malcolm (1973, p. 2) coined the phrase "The adult learner: A neglected species." Therefore, the concerns that arose were why internships are fundamental and why school leaders should participate in internship programmes for professional and personal growth. Sutcher et al. (2017, p. 10) succinctly suggested that "Internships help candidates build leadership competencies and skills through a process of planning, practice, and reflection that requires them to put sophisticated theories into practice." During these encounters, interns displayed theoretical content knowledge and demonstrated the ability to apply these new skills in the real world. According to substantial research, most adults gained new knowledge and skills when they were involved in experiential learning situations that required the application of problem-solving skills in an authentic context guided by self-reflection (Anast-may et al., 2011; Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Kolb, 1984). David Kolb (1984) developed a holistic experiential learning model combining behavioural, cognitive and constructivism theories. According to Kolb (1984, p. 21), experiential learning "…combines experience, perception, cognition, and

behavior." He stated, "…knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb,1984, p. 38). Four significant phases considerably aided this process in Kolb's model: "…concrete learning, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation" (Kolb, 1984, p. 21).

Based on the work of Kolb, internship or field-based learning as part of principal preparation is an essential component of training school leaders on a local, regional, and global scale (Beycioglu & Wildy, 2016; Grissom, Mitani, & Woo, 2019) as policymakers pressed for more effective principal leadership (Crow & Whiteman, 2016). Furthermore, the confidence, relationships, and connections formed through principal internships may assist in the bridge-building process between the classroom and the real world.

For this reason, an innovative principal preparation programme should include a field-based internship (Abdelrahman et al., 2022; Sanchez et al., 2019). Similarly, Hayes and Irby (2020) stressed that internships with leaders should be embedded in principal preparation programmes and integrate theory and practice. However, to make this field-based internship programme effective in serving our schools, education system, and students, interns and novice leaders should have the opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge of the challenges that leaders face every day as well as acquire the leadership skills to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world situations expertly guided by experienced leaders (Fusarelli et al., 2019; Thessin et al., 2020).

It has been noted that in some preparation programmes, progress has been made. Therefore, Ni et al. (2019, p. 185) found that "Internship experiences and peer relationships were also important predictors of leadership learning." In another study, Karunaratne and Perera (2019) found that students rated the internship programme negatively for its ability to build creativity, work effectively in teams, improve management skills, enhance research and project skills, and enhance the desire to keep on learning. However, their findings showed that

feedback from students indicated that real-world experience provided a positive impression (Karunaratne & Perera, 2019).

Similarly, another study evaluated how programme admission requirements, university-district partnerships, and course content integration affect internship participation in principal preparation programmes. In this study, Abdelrahman et al. (2022) found that partnership policies significantly relate to the principal internship and admission requirements. Their findings also revealed that university internship and admission policies with solid district partnership policies are likely more robust than those without such policies.

Meza Rios et al. (2018) pointed out that:

> University internships provide opportunities not only for the high school students that engage in the workshops but also for the university interns who provide the workshops and who learn to recognize how classroom theories and concepts can transform into practical, relevant projects that are appropriate for the local communities in which they work. (p. 753)

Internship programmes can succeed or fail for a variety of reasons. However, internships should be an integral part of a principal's preparation programme. As a result, developing creative training programmes for school leaders should be a priority for universities' leadership preparation programmes and policymakers. Consequently, based on the findings of these studies, the internship experience can provide a prospective leader with a wealth of knowledge and ideas. However, while principal preparation is practice-focused, it has tremendous potential to improve principal leadership. Therefore, the internship programme should be structured well and embedded in the leadership preparation programmes to be successful, which includes covering all areas of the organisation during training (Karunaratne & Perera, 2019). Furthermore, if potential leaders were to be successful, they should be action-oriented and exposed to real-world work settings during field-based experiential training. Therefore, developing a high-quality internship programme as part of a principal leadership

preparation programme is critical to developing future leaders' capacity. As a result, these leaders can then cope with the increased demands and expectations of the workplace.

As was already mentioned, internship programmes provide numerous benefits for interns. For example, in a study conducted by Toprak et al. (2022), students who engaged in internships after the internship training, the students' interactions with the patients improved. These benefits might have happened because they engaged with patients directly, nurses served as mentors, and their communication skills developed throughout the internship training. The results also showed that the intern nurses who participated in these internship programmes were able to gain insightful knowledge and skills after the implementation of the internship programme. Notably, it has been demonstrated that student interns' positive relationships with their mentors were among the most fulfilling learning experiences they reported; for this reason, the relationship between the mentor and the student intern is crucial. However, Cunningham et al., 2019) cautioned that:

> Realistically, no program can prepare leaders for the myriad-specific challenges they will face; however, programs can prepare leaders to analyze the situations they face to understand *how* to approach various situations and decisions and to articulate the *why* that undergirds their actions and decision making. (p. 75)

Nonetheless, this assertion does not change the reality that extensive internship and residency programmes have long been considered essential preparatory tools (Ni et al., 2019). Moreover, as a vital resource, it will equip future leaders with knowledge and skills (Abdelrahman et al., 2022) to build leadership capacity if they are to meet the stringent requirements of modern education and better serve the diverse needs of students and teachers alike (Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020).

In-service Training: Enhancing Competency of Rural Leaders

In-service educational training involves instruction to strengthen employees' knowledge and experience to obtain the skills needed for their jobs and advance in the desired direction (Sezer et al., 2020). As a result, in-service training is increasingly being utilised in

the educational context to provide innovative ideas and strategies as part of an ongoing effort to retool school personnel and improve academic quality (Ahmadi & Keshavarzi, 2013; Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020; Imran Junejo et al., 2017). Nonetheless, despite their vital role in improving school outcomes, it is surprising to note that there is limited progress in in-service training for school leaders (Mestry, 2017). These issues are related to leaders' inadequacies in their leadership roles or simply their lack of the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes for leading and managing schools effectively and efficiently (Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020; Mestry, 2017). As a school principal, especially in the rural public secondary context, the principal's ability to motivate and enthuse students and teachers toward school goals and objectives is crucial to the effectiveness of a school. However, Mestry (2017) asserted that if the quality of education is to be significantly enhanced, it is evident that new bodies of knowledge and skills are required. Furthermore, Daresh and LaPlant (1983, p. 2) added, "…new knowledge, attitudes, and skills to bring about lasting school improvement." Hence, according to Ahmadi and Keshavarzi (2013), training was the most efficient and effective strategy for leaders and teachers to garner the necessary information and skills to enhance the organisation.

Sutcher et al. (2017) found that exemplary in-service programmes offered a well-connected set of learning opportunities informed by a coherent view of teaching and learning, grounded in theory and practice. Interestingly, many organisations have embraced in-service training as a strategic approach (see Figure 1) to offer many learning opportunities to achieve organisational goals. As a result, principals, deputies, heads of departments, and teachers now have the opportunity to participate in in-service training programmes to build their capacity. Therefore, Ibrahim (2011) argued that leaders should be adequately prepared for school leadership before an appointment and trained continuously throughout their careers to ensure that they perform their duties effectively.

Figure 1

San Diego Unified School District's in-Service Programme Structure
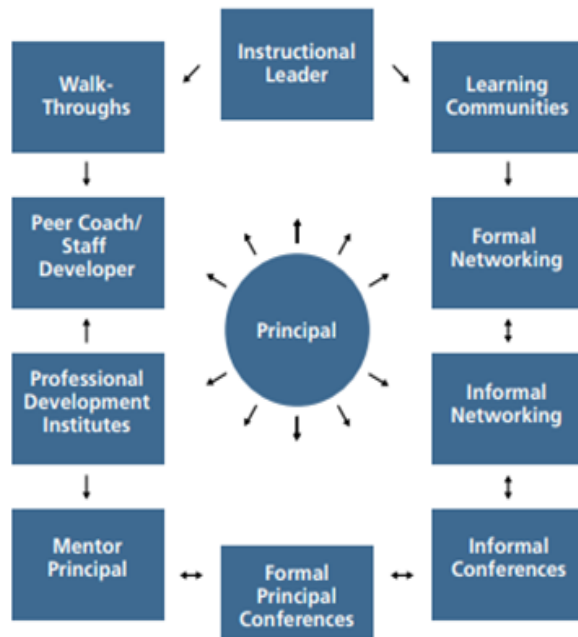
Note. Extracted from Supporting Principals' Learning: Key Features of Effective Programs
Source: Sutcher et al. (2017, p. 7)

If administrators want to meet the rigorous requirements of modern education and better address the diverse needs of teachers and students, they should actively participate in the process of learning and development continuously (Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020). However, leadership programmes that offer professional development for school leaders should address the need for leadership skills. Furthermore, leaders can acquire knowledge and adopt practices through in-service professional development (PD), improving their schools' quality of learning outcomes. Therefore, it is crucial to provide in-service training programmes and reach out to as many school leaders as possible to improve leadership practices in such contexts because many school leaders are inadequately prepared for their leadership roles (Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020).

Examining Leadership Capacity-Building Training for Rural Secondary School Leaders

In boosting school leaders' personal and professional growth and enhancing their effectiveness and performance, aspiring school leaders should have a chance to shadow an experienced principal to become suitably skilled individuals before leading their schools. Accordingly, the job of "…shadowing provided the opportunity to learn…" (Knutas, 2019, p. 662). Therefore, job shadowing aims to provide students with real-life experience. Moreover, it connects theory with practice (Chopra & Menon, 2021). As an opportunity to gain real-world experience, job shadowing also gathers real-time data from professionals to generate class discussion material (Mader et al., 2017). Furthermore, Chopra and Menon (2021) posited that:

> In today's service based economies job shadowing gets student real training on how professional tackle real time problem at work. Job shadowing helps students learn about work by taking them behind the scenes in a business, often providing their first real look at jobs in the 21st Century. (p. 4)

Additionally, Mader et al. (2017) suggested that job shadowing could be a recruiting tool for early career advancement. Besides serving as a recruiting tool for new leaders, job shadowing is also a preparation instrument for professional development and future advancement in an organisation. Interestingly, Tulowitzki (2019, p. 104) asserted that "…shadowing can also provide a sense of 'How do they do what they do?' as well as the context in which activities take place." Chopra and Menon (2021) articulated that:

> Job shadowing …helps the student to understand the dynamics of a job as also the have the platform to probe and enrich oneself by getting to be aware of the Knowledge, skills and abilities that are required for a particular job. In effect you would gain insight into effective communication, selfunderstanding, problem solving and above all, demonstrating professionalism. (p. 1)

Marlina et al. (2019, p. 3909) conducted a quasi-experiment study aimed "…*to measure the effectiveness of the application of job shadowing to midwifery graduates*..." They purposively sampled 30 participants: 15 participants in the experiment group and another 15 participants in the control group. According to the study, job shadowing was an effective way

for midwifery graduates to gain knowledge, task management skills, workplace skills, interpersonal skills, and workplace learning skills compared to the control group based on questionnaires and observation sheets. In a separate study, Mafinejad et al. (2022) conducted a pre-and post-test study of fifty first-year students participating in the shadowing programme between November and January 2020. Based on the results of the data collected, they concluded that freshmen gained a more realistic perspective about their future jobs' duties and responsibilities and ultimately were more motivated to pursue their jobs.

In shadowing an experienced principal, Chopra and Menon (2021) stated that it gives you access to or creates possibilities for networking, as well as the knowledge of current trends and job-related skills needed to enable you to make well-informed career decisions. With that being said, Clayton and LaBatt (2019) suggested that in addition to improving student achievement, principal shadowing also promoted equity and excellence. However, Rony et al. (2019) asserted that as a result of job shadowing, individuals and organisations can measure the strengths and weaknesses of their competencies, and therefore job shadowing has become an alternative stage in effective promotion systems. Based on the limitations, shadowing is frequently thought to take time (Tulowitzki, 2019). Due to the extended time required for shadowing, it is likely to pose some dilemmas, challenge communication, and sometimes appear as a threat (Knutas, 2019). Despite the minute pitfalls, research has found that observing others with more experience is a great way to learn valuable skills (Clayton and LaBatt, 2019; Chopra and Menon, 2021; Knutas, 2019; Mader et al., 2017; Mafinejad et al., 2022; Marlina et al., 2019; Rony et al., 2019; Tulowitzki, 2019). However, these interventions can tailor specific support and development opportunities to job-specific needs.

Impact of Leadership Trainings on Performance

The Evolution of the Principal's Role

The changing role of the principal has evolved significantly, from the traditional view of the principal as an authoritative figure, guardian of discipline, and central administrator of curriculum and instruction (Riani & Ain, 2022) to a lifelong advocate for fostering a collaborative learning environment (Faas et al., 2018). Faas et al. (2018) statement was expanded by Fullan and he characterises the modern principal as a catalyst for change, a leader in learning, and an active participant in the larger educational system (Fullan, 2014). Today's principal is engaged in fostering a culture of continuous learning, not only for students but across the full spectrum of the school community. The principal aligns the mission and goals of the organisation with practical ways to achieve the school's vision, thereby ensuring coherent progress toward state aspiration. Taking it a step further, Fullan emphasises the role of the principal in uniting stakeholders during difficult challenges and enabling the organisation to overcome obstacles as one (Fullan, 2014).

As learning leaders, they are expected to model the learning process themselves while creating an environment that is fertile ground for discovery and growth (Fullan, 2014). In their role as systemic leaders, they contribute to and benefit from the broader imperative of systemic improvement (Fullan, 2014). This includes adjusting accountability measures, evoking support, and expanding the capacity of all members of the school ecosystem (Fullan, 2014).

Tirozzi (2001, as cited in Hartwell Barfield, 2011) recognises that today's climate of rising expectations requires an educational philosophy centred on "learning" that encompasses the growth of students, teachers, leaders, and teams, and he describes the critical challenges for leaders as the need for "enlightened leadership" (Tirozzi, 2001, as cited in Hartwell Barfield, 2011, p. 47). This enlightened leadership is closely related to actively shaping an environment

that not only promotes learning but also allows all stakeholders to reach their full learning potential, thereby ensuring the success of schools in an era of increased accountability.

Leadership capacity-building trainings have a particularly strong impact in rural public secondary schools, where school administrators often are confronted with unique problems such as limited resources, geographic isolation, and an ever-changing educational landscape. To address these difficulties, such capacity-building trainings are meant to educate leaders with not just the requisite administrative abilities, but also strategies for efficiently navigating their unique environments. It develops leaders who are transformational and visionary leaders capable of motivating their staff and students to achieve.

These capacity-building trainings, provide "…individual capacity-building training through knowledge sharing methods, sharing organizational experiences, and organizational skills practice" (Mawardi et al., 2021, p. 44), and also enable leaders to join online and in-person professional learning communities, where they may network with other educators, share best practices, and collaborate to solve challenges. In rural places, this sense of connectivity is critical because it may minimise loneliness and develop a more holistic, collaborative leadership style. These training courses attempt to establish a cascade effect that improves student outcomes while increasing staff morale and overall performance by investing in principal leadership development.

Sustained leadership development has several long-term advantages. Participating in capacity-building training programmes often results in leaders exhibiting enhanced decision-making, strategic planning, and innovative teaching implementation skills. These abilities support the development of an adaptable learning environment that can meet the ever-changing demands of education, particularly in rural areas where success depends on this kind of adaptation. Leaders get better at leading with a forward-thinking perspective that places a high

priority on continual development in addition to overseeing the day-to-day operations of their schools.

Furthermore, the efficiency of these trainings is frequently demonstrated by increased academic achievement among students. When leaders effectively use the skills and knowledge received from such training, they are better upskilled and equipped to assist their teachers, create a conducive learning atmosphere, and construct instructional programmes that are in line with both local and national educational standards. The goal of these leadership capacity-building trainings is to have a long-term effect that raises the principal's function above administrative duties, establishing them as the driving force behind school success in rural areas.

Furthermore, the efficiency of these trainings is frequently demonstrated by increased academic achievement among students. The fundamental idea behind these programmes is that training will give staff members the chance to enhance their knowledge, skills, and abilities at work so they can comprehend what has to be done, why it needs to be done, and how to handle it (Sugiarti, 2022) at the core of these initiatives.

The Expanding Scope of School Leadership in the Modern Era

Contemporary research reveals the increasing complexity of school leadership in the 21st century, requiring leadership approaches that are inclusive, multicultural, and distributed across organisational levels (Malik, 2018). Thus, leadership development is no longer limited to leaders alone (Komalasari et al., 2020) but extends to fostering leadership traits through the community to meet growing demands and expectations. As Elliott and Hollingsworth (2020) emphasise, leaders must navigate both adaptive and technical challenges, as this dual capacity is essential to spearhead meaningful improvement. In this dynamic environment, the role of the principal transcends traditional boundaries and has become pivotal (Ndlovu, 2017). With burgeoning responsibilities and the prospect of increased complexity in the future, leaders are

expected to synergise the efforts of teachers and students toward educational success while managing their multifaceted roles and responsibilities.

Goldring et al. (2018) have observed this shift, noting that:

> Most principal supervisors now spend the largest share of their time in schools engaging in newly developed routines and practices, such as participating in classroom walk-throughs, coaching principals, and providing ongoing feedback. Some districts also work with assistant principals or school leadership teams. They focus less on administration and building operations than in the past. They also focus less on compliance activities, such as monitoring supplies and ensuring district and state forms are completed correctly and submitted on time. Principal supervisors also consistently meet with groups of principals to provide opportunities for collaborative learning. (p. xii)

As educational leadership management gets more complex, principal supervisors are shifting their duties to support leaders' instructional leadership (Hayes & Irby, 2020). By fostering leaders' capacity to improve teaching and learning in their schools, the emphasis of this shift shifts away from a purely supervisory position. Supervisors are essential collaborators in the capacity-building of administrators, taking part in walkthroughs of classrooms and offering coaching and mentorship, which eventually improves the school's overall learning environment.

Recognising the value of collaborative learning, contemporary educational leadership increasingly emphasises peer support and shared best practices (Goldring et al., 2020). When leaders work together with their colleagues, they add to a body of knowledge that serves the larger educational community in addition to improving their understanding. This team-based strategy upholds the idea that developing leaders is a shared, ongoing endeavour rather than the exclusive purview of one person. As the demands for school leadership evolve, the development and nurturing of leaders and school leadership teams have become a priority. By empowering these individuals, ministries of education should create a leadership pipeline that not only prepares future leaders but also distributes leadership duties, thus improving the school's ability to address both present and emerging educational issues. This intentional

nurturing of leadership assures a depth of capability inside the school, laying a solid basis for long-term educational achievement.

A transformational shift in educational leadership towards a more diversified, collaborative, and learning-focused approach (Khoiri, 2020) is reflected in the growth of the position of principal supervisors. Leading this terrain of change via a common commitment to instructional excellence, leaders and their teams are essential change agents that propel increases in student performance. To ensure that the effects are not isolated but rather spread across the organisational structure, this coordinated effort is in line with the objectives of leadership capacity-building trainings. This opens the door for a more comprehensive and accommodating educational experience for all parties involved.

Redefining the Principal's Role in the Modern Educational Landscape

The school leadership paradigm has undergone a major transformation, and expectations for the role of the principal in public education have changed dramatically. The principal is now envisioned not simply as a bureaucratic supervisor, but as a dynamic leader who inspires trust, fosters credible relationships, and engages in enduring learning to adapt to new educational challenges (Faas et al., 2018; Goldring et al., 2018; Nhlapo, 2020). The need to redefine the principal role is widely recognised, but implementation status varies, with some leaders either minimally complying with policy changes or "…paying lip service to policy demands" (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019, p. 6). Effective leaders can transform schools into centres of professional learning that enhance the educational process, thus improving both the quality of education and student achievement (Schneider & Yitzhak-Monsonego, 2022). Therefore, leaders should instil a compelling sense of purpose that serves as a beacon of sustainability and community spirit and directly contributes to improved student competence and learning outcomes. Success within a school is largely dependent on the principal's ability

to exemplify these qualities through his or her ability, commitment to excellence, and leadership style.

However, to succeed in an evolving educational environment, leaders should move away from the conventional leadership framework that may have promoted ascendancy in the past. Instead, it is essential to adopt a post-heroic leadership model characterised by collaborative efforts and shared vision. A variety of abilities will be essential for future leaders, including adaptability, flexibility, proficiency in diverse languages, global understanding, ethical fortitude, and the ability to think strategically and abstractly (Iordanoglou, 2018). These qualities are not only desirable but necessary to navigate the complexities of a rapidly evolving global educational environment, meet the multifaceted needs of diverse school communities, and lead schools to unified success.

Leaders should have a flexible, visionary, transformational leadership style to navigate the complexity of modern education; they should be change agents as well, not just policy enforcers. A principal's work requires them to be able to react quickly and effectively to changing legislation, social demands, and educational paradigms. As Iordanoglou (2018) suggests, an effective leader in today's complex and interconnected educational environment should have a diverse set of skills. The formation of a resilient and diverse school community necessitates many skills, including cultural and linguistic diversity, global awareness, ethical leadership, and strategic planning.

Indeed, the principal's mission goes much beyond improving test results and managing personnel. The goal is to create a fruitful atmosphere in which all members of the school community can thrive. It entails developing credible connections that promote a learning-oriented culture, enabling the resolution of systemic challenges and long-term educational success. To exemplify the paradigm change proposed by Ganon-Shilon and Schechter (2021), leaders should embrace continual professional development, and capacity-building and be

prepared to critically reflect on their work. This introspection is not just for their benefit, but it also serves as an example for the entire school community. Leaders inspire a culture of continuous development and change by setting a good example.

In this period of fast change, educational leaders cannot afford to pay lip service to changes. Such behaviour would be detrimental to their schools and students. Genuinely implementing new rules and adopting current leadership concepts takes a significant effort. Leaders are expected to be the forerunners of this new era in education, ensuring that they, as well as their school communities, not only survive but thrive in the face of shifting tides in public education.

Perceptions of Effective Leadership

People's opinions of leaders are influenced by their perceptions of their abilities and performance, which may positively or negatively affect relationships within their organisations. Because of this, a person's background, perceptions, and beliefs create his or her reality. For this reason, perception, according to the perception theory developed by Berelson and Steiner (1994, as cited in Oladepo & Olanipekun, 2016, p. 72), elucidated that "…perception is a complex process by which individuals select, organize and interpret sensory stimulation into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world."

Supporting this view, Hafidz and Pekalongan (2016, as cited in Oladepo & Olanipekun, 2016, p. 282) expressed that "Perception…plays an undeniable element in influencing…decisions" culturally, socially, psychologically, and physiologically. Therefore, not only should perception shape leaders' awareness, imagery, and consciousness of the world around them, but it should also help them to function in it to maximise communication, build a system of trust and respect, and engage to help those who share their vision, and at the same time minimised conflicts between leaders, faculty, and stakeholders.

Moreover, leadership effectiveness is influenced by others' perceptions. Therefore, leaders should recognise that perception is fundamentally influenced by active listening and feedback. For these reasons, Luthra and Dahiya (2015, p. 43) posited that "…effective and accurate communication act as an important factor to grow as an efficient and successful leader or manager." This meant that effective communication by leaders boosted success and shaped team perceptions.

In turn, a leader's views significantly impact the environment and productivity of the workplace and society. As a result, the leaders being at the helm are considered the sine qua non for the school community. Supporting this, Callaghan and Coldwell (2014 as cited in Munir & Khalil, 2016, p. 44) asserted that "Transformational & transactional leadership behaviors are very effective in developing positive perceptions among the employees, like job satisfaction and motivation." This suggested that the principal's leadership style and content are important in creating a positive organisational culture that promotes followers' well-being.

Although Khan and Waheed (2019, p. 138) described the leader's role as "..indispensable…and…multidimensional," rural secondary school leaders have constantly been under tremendous pressure to provide successful outcomes in Antigua and Barbuda and numerous developed and emerging countries alike. Consequently, schools' academic achievement has emerged as the most critical criterion for evaluating leaders' performance (Munir & Khalil, 2016). Moreover, the need for successful leadership in rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda has grown as they face the rising complexity of meeting and satisfying constituents. As a consequence, Smith, Francis, and Harper (2015) argued vehemently that:

> Educational leadership has hitherto played a subdued role within the domain of education improvement in the Caribbean. It now needs to assume a more explicit and interventionist role in that domain in order to transform educational delivery, produce better educated and skilled individuals, and place Caribbean citizens at the heart of international competitiveness. (p. 76)

In addition, Thi Hoang Yen et al. (2021) suggested that to develop a leader effectively, the candidate should begin at the stage of a teacher and continue until the stage of a principal is reached. Regrettably, Smith, Francis, and Harper (2015) asserted that not all school leaders had been trained in or thoroughly understood the subject, and leaders cannot adapt until they are educated. Smith, Francis, and Harper (2015) further insisted that:

> There is an increasing need for the improved delivery of education to ensure that nations have effective human capacity, educated and trained citizens to source new international economic opportunities. To achieve this objective, the development of transformational leadership of all education institutions is critical – schools through to higher education and their personnel must be players in developing each individual into an effective and economic-contributing citizen. (p. 78)

Özer et. al. (2017) conducted a *Study on Toxic Leadership Perceptions of Healthcare Workers* in a cross-sectional study. The research included 292 staff from various state hospitals in Ankara, Turkey, including physicians, nurses, and health care personnel. The study aimed to assess healthcare employees' toxic leadership views and show whether workers' assessments of toxic leadership subdivisions differed based on human and demographic characteristics (Özer et al., 2017). They discovered that participants' views of toxic leadership differed objectively in four dimensions, including age and overall career experience, selfishness, and negative state dimensions, depending on their occupation (Özer et al., 2017). Aubrey (2012, as cited in Özer et al., 2017, p. 13) affirmed, "Toxic leadership is a bad leadership type that risks the values and the norms of the organisation and develops inappropriate behaviours."

In another study, Bhandarker and Rai (2019, p. 65) conducted a quantitative methodology study "…to elucidate the distressing impact of toxic leadership on the mental state of the subordinates and examine the unique coping mechanisms used by them to deal with such leaders." Evidence was obtained from 570 workers employed by private and public organisations in India. The findings showed that assertive, avoidance and adaptive coping are all negatively linked to self-worth loss. Withdrawal was linked to both assertive and denial

coping. Also, anxiety was related to avoidance and constructive coping strategies (Özer et al., 2017). Childress (2009, as cited in Munir & Khalil, 2016, p. 43) stated that "The success of a leader in achieving the goals of an organization greatly depends upon the manners in which this relationship is established and developed." Additionally, a leader's ability to lead effectively is applicable in most contexts (Hitt et al., 2018).

Among the new expectations and global demands, a survey methodology analysis was performed on 130 randomly chosen assistant principals in elementary, middle, and high schools to determine their principalship readiness perceptions (Chan, Webb, and Bowen, 2003). When it came to assistant principals' views of principal duties, they posited that school principals played five prominent roles, including "…curriculum development (frequency [f] = 80), instructional support (f = 79), teacher observation/evaluation (f = 79), maintaining a safe climate (f = 73), and meeting with parents (f = 63)" (Chan, Webb, and Bowen, 2003, p. 6). To achieve the status quo, Balyer and Alci (2015, p. 134) suggested that leaders "…should have deep knowledge, skills about professional learning communities and initiation to realize it." On the other hand, Day and Sammons (2016) insisted that leaders should:

> Shift away from the conventional, hierarchical patterns of bureaucratic control toward what has been referred to as a network pattern of control, that is, a pattern of control in which line employees are actively involved in [making] organisational decision[s] [and] staff cooperation and collegiality supplant the hierarchy as a means of coordinating workflows and resolving technical difficulties. (p. 18)

Tailoring Basic Education and CBTs to Address Challenges in Antigua and Barbuda

With an emphasis on developments in Antigua and Barbuda, the literature underscores the necessity of modifying basic education to meet the unique difficulties encountered in this setting (Consortium, 2013), such as the remoteness of rural schools and the constraints on ongoing professional development. The importance of hearing local leaders' opinions and involving them in the development and application of CBT is emphasised in this context (Samuel, 2020), which is part of a larger conversation about the study of educational leadership.

Research on capacity-building training (CBT) argues for a philosophical turn away from a one-size-fits-all approach to educational training and emphasises the significance of contextually appropriate practices (Brauckmann et al., 2020; Peters-Richardson, 2023). The Antigua and Barbuda exploration is important because it may help us comprehend how to best adapt CBTs to local needs, cultural norms, and long-term educational goals (Peters-Richardson, 2023). Therefore, this study adds to the conversation about how to develop school leaders who are not only leaders but also change agents and visionaries who can influence education both locally and globally.

Tailoring basic education and capacity-building trainings in Antigua and Barbuda requires an understanding of the unique issues that educational leaders confront on the island nation. Key characteristics identified in the research include geographical isolation and restricted access to continuous professional development, both of which can have a direct influence on the efficacy of educational programmes and leadership. These capacity-building initiatives may be implemented in everyday practice, in any transition service programme that strives to expose students to excellent community-based work-based learning experiences (Crane et al., 2021), incorporating the notion of incorporating flexible, practical skills that take into account the demands, and circumstances of the local area into the teaching process. There is a consensus that incorporating local leaders in the development and implementation of CBT improves alignment with Antigua and Barbuda's specific educational setting. Such participatory techniques guarantee that the views of persons in the local setting are heard and that their perspectives influence the training delivered.

To further meet the various needs of schools across the island, research indicates that a more adaptable, context-sensitive approach to educational training (Theobald, 2021) is required. This entails recognising how cultural expectations, customs, and norms affect schooling. For Capacity-building trainings to be more effective, the educational system has to

be sensitive to these subtleties. According to published research, in the context of Antigua and Barbuda's larger educational objectives, this kind of approach helps leaders grow as leaders in education and as agents of long-lasting change in their local communities (Acton, 2021).

When school administrators possess the necessary abilities and expertise to effectively handle local difficulties, research assessing the efficacy of these customised CBT programmes shows promise for improving student results and bringing about progressive changes in teaching practices. To better fit the Antiguan and Barbudan environment, these findings demand that training materials and delivery strategies be reevaluated. Programme customisation frequently entails using locally accessible resources, adjusting for infrastructure constraints, and incorporating technology to overcome gaps between rural schools.

Furthermore, the research emphasises the need for leadership models that are not just focused on administrative efficiency, but also include transformational approaches that can adapt to rapidly changing educational contexts (Bakker et al., 2022). Leadership development training in Antigua and Barbuda should thus aim to equip leaders as inventive and proactive individuals capable of encouraging educational success within the school system. Such development may include strategies for forming alliances and partnerships to promote educational programmes, thus broadening the impact of effective leadership practices beyond specific schools.

According to the exploration, capacity-building training has to do more than just impart information if it is to have a significant effect in Antigua and Barbuda. School administrators should be encouraged to cultivate a culture of critical reflection, lifelong learning, and flexibility. In their educational communities, leaders of schools should be seen as visionaries as well as administrators, according to this paradigm shift. The distinct cultural, social, and infrastructural issues that Antigua and Barbuda's schools confront can be effectively addressed by leaders by emphasising context-specific training (Bergmark, 2023). Moreover, this strategy

fosters a culture of development and quality in education that is adapted to the requirements of the country by pushing leaders to innovate and take a creative approach to problem-solving. The ultimate objectives of this kind of specialised capacity-building training are to raise the standard of education generally, encourage fair access to educational opportunities, and assist in the growth of a future generation that is prepared to advance the country.

Conceptualising Sustainable Leadership Capacity in Education

To preserve and sustain individual and whole-school improvements that have favourably affected students' learning, leadership capacity building has become increasingly vital (ten Have & Gordijn, 2020) for long-term survival and sustainability (Filho et al., 2020) as schools have developed and become more competitive knowledge-based society that is complicated and rapidly changing (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003). Regarding the essence of the term, sustainability has emerged as a crucial concept in developing and sustaining school leadership capacity over time. However, Hargreaves and Fink (2003) advised that sustainability did not imply whether everything could survive forever, but rather how something may be produced without jeopardising the growth and well-being of others, both now and in the future. Thus, Jamieson (1998, p. 184) stated that "Sustainability is about human survivability and the avoidance of ecological disaster." Seven years later, (Fullan, 2005) posited that sustainability had become a rallying notion, one that included the continual development of solutions necessary for whole-system capacity growth. Similarly, individuals and schools, according to Davies (2007), should be able to adapt and improve to handle new problems, complexities, and successes in new and challenging situations. Allen (2018, p. 1) stated that "Sustainability involves sustaining the continuity of human societies within a biophysical habitat (the world." In expounding on Allen's definition, Birney and Reed (2009, p. 3) suggested that:

> Sustainability is about the relationship between people, their purpose and their place. It is about engaging, learning to create positive, empowering future for our children and their children. Sustainability as both goal and practice activity is by its nature life-giving

for communities, educators and the children and young people in their care; it brings life to learning and learning to life.

Galpin and Whittington (2012) asserted that sustainability today is the new millennium's strategic imperative, gaining traction in the same way that the late-twentieth-century excellence, quality, and reengineering initiatives did. Borowy (2013, p. 2) described it as "…the comparatively simpler idea, which can be explained in purely descriptive terms as the capacity of any given system to exist and reproduce on a long-term basis."

In the educational literature, the specific conceptualisation of the term sustainability has metamorphosed in several ways, making it a straightforward concept. For example, in building longer-term sustainability, earlier suggested by Borowy (2014) and Filho et al. (2020) to sustain schools' effectiveness, Davies (2007, p. 3) suggested:

- "Measuring outcomes and not just outputs" (Davies, 2007, p. 3),

- "Balancing short- and long-term objectives" (Davies, 2007, p. 3),

- "Thinking in terms of processes, not plans – the way that leaders involve their colleagues is more important than the documents that they write" (Davies, 2007, p. 3),

- "Having a passion for continued improvement and development" (Davies, 2007, p. 3),

- "Developing personal humility and professional will as a means of building long-term leadership capacity" (Davies, 2007, p. 3),

- "Practising strategic timing and strategic abandonment" (Davies, 2007, p. 3),

- "Building capacity and creating involvement" (Davies, 2007, p. 3),

- "Developing strategic measures of success" (Davies, 2007, p. 3), and

- "Building in sustainability (Davies, 2007, p. 3).

In addition, Fullan (2005) highlighted eight sustainability components in the education context. These components, as suggested, consisted of the following:

- Public service with a moral purpose (Fullan, 2005, p. 61).

- Commitment to changing context at all levels (Fullan, 2005, p. 61).

- Lateral capacity building through networks (Fullan, 2005, p. 61).

- Intelligent accountability and vertical relationship (Fullan, 2005, p. 61).

- Deep learning (Fullan, 2005, p. 61).

- Dual commitment to short-term and long-term results (Fullan, 2005, p. 61)

- Cyclical energising (Fullan, 2005, p. 61), and

- The long lever of leadership (Fullan, 2005, p. 61)

These factors have a short-term and long-term impact on individual and organisational success and change.

Conversely, according to Faber, Jorna, and Engelen (2005, p. 1), sustainability is a complicated and perplexing concept; therefore, a consensus is lacking, and there is no clear path (Faber et al., 2005). Furthermore, Ives et al. (2017, as cited in Ives et al., 2018, p. 1389) claimed that "The literature is fragmented" across academic borders, lacking consistency in how core ideas are perceived and implemented (Ives et al., 2018).

Contrary to these pitfalls, Hargreaves and Fink (2004, p. 3) affirmed that "*Sustainable leadership has an activist engagement with the forces that affect it and builds an educational environment of organizational diversity that promotes cross-fertilization of good ideas and successful practices in communities of shared learning and development*." Furthermore, they contended that "…leadership sustainability, and leadership succession" (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004, p. 3) were essential elements determining the long-term trajectory for individual and organisational transformation and continuity (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). However, Hargreaves and Fink (2004) proposed that to improve institutional leadership capacity, the leader:

- Creates and preserves sustaining learning,

- Secures success over time,

- Sustains the leadership of others,

- Addresses issues of social justice,

- Develops rather than depletes human and material resources,

- Develops environmental diversity and capacity, and

- Undertakes activist engagement with the environment. (p. 3-9)

Hence, the path to attaining leadership and organisational sustainability began with inspiring and empowering followers on the values and principles of working in a rapidly changing and healthy workplace while ensuring that the essential success factors persisted even when leaders changed (Pascal, 2009). Moreover, the individuals' ability was critical to organisational success in such a climate. Equally important, building and preserving a shared culture through time is required for long-term sustainability (Caswell, 2013).

Gaps in Literature Reviewed

However, further quantitative, mixed-method or longitudinal research is required to explore the alignment of existing leadership capacity-building trainings available for secondary school leaders in rural Antigua and Barbuda and the daily challenges they face in comparable contexts. The methodology employed in the study is described in full in Chapter Three.

Chapter Summary

A global village has become a reality due to globalisation, technological advancements, and the knowledge explosion in the 21st century (Malik, 2018). Consequently, these have placed tremendous demands on the organisation's culture, structure, and staff, forcing school leaders to rethink their role, capacity to lead, and how they make decisions and respond to challenges to improve rural public secondary schools. Therefore, to cope with these unprecedented changes and challenges, people and organisations are empowered to develop

and utilise their skills, initiatives, and capacities for individual and organisational growth and development. Furthermore, building capacity should be a priority to make a "…meaningful contribution to societal well-being" (Hope & Cynthia, 2022, p. 15). The goal of capacity building is sustaining individual and organisational growth and development. Hence, it entails bringing all stakeholders together to move the organisation from one level of operation to another.

The literature review focused on the that underpinned this study, general leadership theories and research-based efficacy of various leadership styles, leadership in a historical context, the impact of government educational policies on school-based decision-making, leadership capacity building, the challenges in building leadership capacity in rural secondary schools, and school leadership programmes. This literature reviews also focused on evaluating the alignment of existing leadership trainings available for secondary school leaders in rural Antigua and Barbuda and the daily challenges they face. The study seeks to evaluate the impact of leadership capacity-building trainings, identify potential gaps in current trainings, and suggest evidence-based practices to enhance the capacity and effectiveness of leaders' trainings in comparable contexts. As a result, it utilised Kouzes and Posner's (2019) five principles of exemplary transformational leadership theories as the theoretical framework for this study. The leaders were required to model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart to enable others to act collaboratively. Research suggested that student achievement was higher when leaders established a collaborative vision and a support system for the faculty to move toward a new direction (Lacerenza et al., 2017). The literature review showed a wealth of scholarly research on principal leadership. Nevertheless, it also pointed out the gaps between getting them ready for the job and their difficulties due to their circumstances.

As the workplace moved from rigid hierarchical systems to collaborative systems, leaders needed new skills to build robust organisations to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Iordanoglou, 2018) and beyond. These emerging leaders should realise the importance of continual growth in their leadership capacity. Research has shown that systems that focused on a shared vision, empowered subordinates, and stakeholders, supported leadership capacity building, and created conditions that facilitated successful teaching and learning were better positioned to increase teaching and learning (Andriani et al., 2018; Bhagavathula et al., 2021; Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020; Sun & Henderson, 2017). Unfortunately, the principal cannot do this responsibility solely on his or her own.

According to this literature review, leadership has shifted from authority and dominance to collaboration, partnership, and transformation, necessitating various methods and practices to develop and sustain leadership capacity for the next generation to facilitate effective learning and school improvement. Lavdim et al. (2016, p. 104) posited, "Leadership does not mean being just a leader and everything else will be done itself. The leader should be an agent of change, the one who cooperates with the others to achieve the required goal." Consequently, building leadership capacity provided a means for school leaders to deal with the changing accountability landscape in education. As a result, they may employ the constructs described in the literature to assist teachers and other leaders in honing their leadership skills. Furthermore, the review of the literature defined leadership as a process (Cortellazzo et al., 2019; Prastiawan et al., 2020; Singh & Ryhal, 2021) for building leadership capacity and the critical role the principal performed as a leader in responding to change and empowering teachers to enhance teaching and learning. More significantly, Mei Kin et al. (2018) articulated that managing and implementing change effectively calls for a multifaceted set of skills.

As leaders' work becomes increasingly more difficult (Bolman & Deal, 2017), schools should identify strategies to support leadership development and make schools more appealing

to those interested in pursuing a career in school leadership. Although leadership preparation programmes have been criticised for inadequately training individuals for school leadership (Grissom et al., 2019; Young, Groth, and Korach, 2017), research has provided promising practices for building leadership capacity. According to Orr and Orphanos (2011, p. 19):

> Investments in preparation program and internship quality will positively contribute to the leadership knowledge of graduates and their leadership practices and school improvement progress. These results yield significant implications for policy makers, universities, and other providers of leadership preparation.

However, aspiring educational leaders need effective leadership training programmes (Voss et al., 2021; Winn et al., 2016) to step into school leadership.

Effective principal leadership provided additional opportunities for teacher collaboration, learning opportunities, and reflection time. Additionally, effective leadership is a critical component of educational reform. To actively engage in leadership capacity building of leaders to face the challenges of the 21st century and get them ready to take the helm as leaders, it is not about recruiting, training, and placing them. However, the Ministry of Education needs to ensure that they are building the leadership capacity of rural secondary school leaders by providing mentorship, coaching, job-shadowing, ongoing professional development opportunities, and internship programmes and ensuring that leaders have the necessary resources to get the job done. Interestingly, there was a fundamental awareness across the literature that these strategies and programmes do not operate in a vacuum; examining exemplary programmes regionally and globally can teach us how to structure current programmes to prepare school leaders effectively. However, new research is critical if we are to gain a better understanding of effective PD in the field (Gore & Rosser, 2022).

A fundamental component of leadership is striving to improve students' education quality (Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Grissom et al., 2021; Ni et al., 2019). Consequently, the entire staff needed combined efforts to improve educational quality and student learning outcomes to

build a competent and competitive working environment (Sentočnik et al., 2018). In this context, leaders of rural public secondary schools are forced to work as change agents in this unique environment and look for innovative leadership strategies and practices to boost students' academic achievement. Leadership in rural public schools is crucial to developing and modernising rural education. This chapter has addressed a vacuum in the literature on school leaders' preparedness and school effectiveness.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

In the era of international connectedness, multiculturalism, and diversity, the principal was the central figure (Brauckmann et al., 2020) who facilitated or impeded meaningful change (Mubashir et al., 2020). Indeed, in this regard, the principal was generally recognised as the critical transformation agent for the organisation's growth (Acton, 2021). However, the growing burden of promoting positive change raised various leadership demands and challenges. Therefore, these impediments built a platform to evaluate the alignment of existing leadership trainings available for secondary school leaders in rural Antigua and Barbuda and the daily challenges they faced. The study sought to evaluate the impact of leadership capacity-building trainings, identify potential gaps in current capacity-building trainings and suggest evidence-based practices to enhance the capacity and effectiveness of leaders' trainings in comparable contexts. Thus, creating meaningful change can be challenging (Stouten et al., 2018); this qualitative phenomenological research aimed to understand and describe the lived experiences of rural public secondary school leaders in Antigua and Barbuda. Moreover, it explored their perceptions about the leadership qualities that school leaders needed to be effective leaders.

This chapter of the dissertation provided the methodological techniques used to describe how the researcher gathered the data "…to provide an answer to the phenomenon under study" (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 14) in Chapter 1. Primarily, it reminded the reader of the research topic, and the goal of the research was to explore the lived experiences of rural public secondary school leaders in Antigua and Barbuda. Subsequently, the sample and population of the research were described. For instance, an unstructured interview protocol and focus group discussion approaches were utilised in this study to uncover the point of view and examine the informants' insights and beliefs. Furthermore, the chapter explained the materials and sources of data to be used, data management and collecting processes, and how the data

were processed and analysed, providing details that verified the approach's ethical assurances while revealing potential methodological shortcomings. Finally, the researcher summarised the chapter.

Research Approach and Design

In terms of research approach and design, in this dissertation, the research study was conducted according to a qualitative approach; hence, the researcher took a descriptive phenomenology philosophical stance (Lindberg et al., 2019) that underpinned the study as it focused primarily on the experiences and perceptions of school leaders' lived experiences of the world they lived. According to Qutoshi (2018):

> *Phenomenology as a philosophy and a method of inquiry is not limited to an approach to knowing, it is rather an intellectual engagement in interpretations and meaning making that is used to understand the lived world of human beings at a conscious level.* (p. 215)

Therefore, to understand lived experiences, the concept of the lifeworld becomes crucial (Lindberg et al., 2019).

According to Lindberg et al. (2019), this qualitative research study was carried out from a descriptive phenomenological viewpoint, which supported the exploration of the nuanced experiences that made up the lived world of school leaders. In other words, Qutoshi (2018) described phenomenology as an intellectual effort that went beyond simple technique and was crucial for understanding human lived reality on a conscious level. It was characterised by the interpretation and creation of meaning (Qutoshi, 2018). The lived world was therefore crucial to this study because it reflected the fundamental context in which the experiences of the school leaders were comprehended and evaluated.

With this in mind, this qualitative study was carried out in the participants' natural environments, which promoted familiarity and comfort and enabled the collection of real data. By using these settings, the researcher was able to acquire first-hand information through

reflection and developed a comprehensive understanding of the social realities that people perceived in their situations (Qutoshi, 2018). A variety of school officials, including teachers, department heads, deputy principals (Maharaj-ramjattan, 2021), and principals, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Education and the Teachers' Union, made up the carefully chosen group of participants, each of whom offered unique insights into the phenomena. Participants were purposively chosen for the study from four of the six public secondary schools located in the island's rural areas as recommended by the Ministry of Education. Three Teachers' Union Officials (n=3), three Ministry of Education Officials (n=3), and one hundred and sixty-three (N=163) school personnel made up the total number of participants (N = 169). These participants were selected based on their ability to provide rich insights into the research questions.

To begin, possible informants were issued a total of one hundred and sixty-nine invitations together with participant information sheets and consent forms. Out of those invited, one hundred and sixty-three (n=163) people sent back consent forms indicating that they were willing to share their real-life experiences for the study. Notably, the study instruments were delivered in person and by email to accommodate all participants, even those with restricted internet connections.

As such, the data collection method for this qualitative phenomenological study was crucial. Therefore, the study included in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with school leaders, from four rural public secondary schools, and officials from the Teachers' Union, and the Ministry of Education in Antigua and Barbuda. To ensure consistency, an unstructured format was used for the 24 interviews with three Education Officers, three Teachers' Union Officials, four principals, six deputy principals, and eight department heads to ensure consistency among informants across the data set and throughout the process. The

study's primary data sources were the twenty-four (*n*=24) interview transcripts and four groups of eight focus group participants (*n*=32).

The method of gathering data was the unstructured interview protocol, which consisted of open-ended questions and optional probes to elicit in-depth responses (see Appendices K-M). Specifically, six of the twenty-four interviews were conducted face-to-face in the schools' offices and private rooms in the first quarter of 2022, with the study participants being principals, deputy principals, department heads, and teachers.

Given the country's epidemiological condition, the rapidly increasing COVID-19 cases, and COVID-19 protocols and guidelines established, all focus group discussions were conducted via the Zoom platform at the convenience of the informants and the participants' request. From May 5, 2022, to June 16, 2022, ten interviews were carried out with two deputy principals and eight department heads who were not part of the initial sample population. These interviews were conducted to determine data saturation. Additionally, on November 7-30, 2023, six interviews were conducted. Specifically, these interviews involved three Ministry of Education Officials and three Union of Teachers Officials, intending to gather further insight and enrich the data. Data saturation was based on the degree to which data in new datasets repeated those in prior datasets (Saunders et al., 2018).

Data saturation was crucial in qualitative research (Lowe et al., 2018). Saturation was the point in the interviews where the researcher ceased identifying new concepts related to the research questions (Lowe et al., 2018). Data saturation occurred when no new emerging themes, concepts, or findings were evident during the data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Lowe et al., 2018), and there was enough information to replicate the study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). However, Bowen, 2008, Kerr, Nixon, and Wild (2010, as cited in Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1408) articulated, "Failure to reach data saturation has an impact on the quality of the research conducted and hampers content validity."

In addition, Saunders et al. (2018) suggested that data saturation interviews should not exceed 10 for phenomenological studies. However, once the data saturation point has been reached, no new analytical information emerges, and the study has produced the most accurate and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Therefore, it was fundamental to qualitative research to sample only until data saturation has been reached (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Despite this, little guidance was available on determining saturation (Hennink et al., 2019). Furthermore, Size et al. (2021) articulated that qualitative researchers should rely on not only the saturation of data for a particular method but also their research goals, sampling method, and research participants' characteristics to judge the data adequacy of that method.

To facilitate participation, participants were frequently reminded through emails, telephone calls, and WhatsApp cross-platform messaging. Subsequently, participants were interviewed based on their availability. To ensure informed consent, as part of each interview and focus group session, the researcher walked through the Participants Information Sheet (see Appendix D) and the Informed Consent Forms (see Appendices E-J) with each participant in a brief introduction. Following this, each participant was issued an electronic folder containing a code for identification in transcribing the audio recordings. In the code, the first letter was P for a participant, followed by numbers in chronological order; for example, P1, P2, P3, et cetera. The interview transcriptions were protected in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home. Moreover, audio recordings, documents, and transcripts from interviews and focus group discussions were kept on the researcher's personal computer in an encrypted folder protected by a password. All the data and materials for the research, both electronic and physical, will be destroyed after a period not exceeding five years. Similarly, electronic records on the hard drive will be deleted, and physical transcriptions will be shredded.

Each interview lasted approximately 25 and 35 minutes. Nevertheless, according to Oltmann (2016), Hawkins (2018), and Octaberlina and Muslimin (2020), with the advancement of technology, there are now options for data collection, such as telephone, videoconference, Moodle, Google Classroom, email, and text message. However, the interviewer obtained permission in each case to record the interview and focus group discussion. Furthermore, the interviewer promised to keep the participant's anonymity and confidentiality, protect the participant from harm, and allow him or her to withdraw without consequences. Notably, Pezaro et al. (2016, p. 4) postulated that "Confidentiality in the context of an online intervention would mean that users would be expected to keep the identities of individual names, organisations and places confidential."

Thirty-two (*n*=32) teachers were divided into four focus groups: FG1, FG2, FG3, and FG4. To protect participants' privacy, the interviews took place at a time and place that was mutually agreed upon. Furthermore, a series of open-ended questions was posed to the participants. All interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, stored in a safe place, and made available to the participants for verification, enhancing credibility and trustworthiness.

Audio recordings of the interviews, focus group discussions, and verbatim transcriptions were transcribed and analysed using the iterative thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process involved multiple phases. Initially, using transcriptions of the participants' narratives, the researcher manually analysed the raw data, looked for recurring themes, and then reviewed and organised the codes into themes that served as the basis for the discussion section of this chapter.

Timeline

During data collection, the researcher needed to be flexible to accommodate unforeseeable circumstances while keeping the timeline on schedule. Consequently, multiple

factors influenced the timeline for this study, including the Research Ethics Application Form (as seen in Appendix A) for approval by the Unicaf University Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix B) for data collection. These factors included:

    i.   Approval of the Research Ethics Application Form (REAF) by the Unicaf University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) - December 9, 2021

    ii.   Approval to conduct the research in the four rural public secondary schools by the Gatekeeper - December 15, 2021

    iii.   Dissemination of data collection documents: participant information sheet, consent forms, and participants' demographic questionnaire – January 4 – 6, 2022

    iv.   Data collection - January 4, 2022 – February 2, 2022

    v.   Finalisation of data collection (data saturation) and importation of primary data for analysis – May 5, 2022 - June 16, 2022.

    vi.   Collection and analysis of additional data – November 7-30, 2023.

In addition, neither the interview schedule nor the interview or focus group discussion processes went smoothly due to the critical role that the leaders played. Therefore, interview and focus group schedules occasionally had to be rescheduled, or the researcher had to travel to another location due to the participant's illness and school closures due to COVID-19 cases. Again, this was critical to the research and the researcher as the primary data collector.

The propulsive force driving or impetus behind this study was to detail the activities school leaders may have exercised to develop leadership capacity, thereby bolstering school performance. Considering the exploratory nature of this research study, a qualitative methodological approach was deemed most appropriate since there was no indication of what the research would uncover based on the purpose of the research. This qualitative paradigm, being inductive, is designed to describe, explain, and understand the phenomena based on

beliefs, feelings, or points of view towards a particular part of it (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). This understanding emerged as the study advanced during data collection.

As a result of the phenomenon, the researcher embraced a descriptive phenomenological stance, aimed to describe the essence of the human experience phenomenon as expressed by the participants (Neubauer et al., 2019). Their perceptions and lived experiences within their lived world were invaluable to the progression of the research study. Subsequently, the researcher would, at that point, administer in-depth interactive face-to-face unstructured interviews (Ibourk, 2021) with a population of 56 participants, as seen in Tables 5 and 8 in Chapter 3, to accumulate primary evidence for which there was insufficient information available on the phenomena through interviews and focus groups. In other words, "…unstructured interviews were used as narrative methods that allowed for getting insight into each of the …stories" (Ibourk, 2021, p. 1245).

Gentles et al. (2015) indicated that sampling is a set of relevant data sources from which information was gathered to address the research purpose and questions. Essentially, sampling involves selecting a group of individuals from a larger population (Rahman et al., 2022) in which the research population plays an important role (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020). Mweshi and Sakyi (2020) expounded that:

> Sampling is the process by which a researcher carefully selects, through probabilistic and nonprobabilistic methods, a number of individual items from a larger population of interest for closer study. Sampling strategies should, whenever possible, identify inclusion and exclusion criteria to set boundaries on what item is selected and what is not selected from a given population of study. (pp. 180-181)

However, to do a research study correctly, a sampling technique should be selected (Thomas, 2022). Therefore, the researcher employed purposive sampling based on the people-oriented and in-depth nature of the study.

Purposive sampling helped the researcher to select participants intentionally based on an in-depth abundance of data and experience (Jamali, 2018) of the phenomenon or "…based

on a predetermined criterion related to the research…and solely on their availability" (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020, pp. 190-191). Upon providing informed consent, prospective subjects became participants of paramount importance in the research study. Their rights and well-being were safeguarded throughout the research process, guided by fundamental ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, as outlined in the Belmont Report (Ferdowsian et al., 2020) and other relevant ethical guidelines.

Specifically, to preserve the identity, rights, and integrity of the subjects, data, and the study, each participant was informed of the research goals to convey, unreservedly and transparently, his/her eagerness to participate or withdraw without any penalty from the study. Consent forms outlining the reason, extent of the study and rights were distributed to the individual participants through email gathered from the Ministry of Education with the assistance of school leaders. According to the standard view, the recipient of consent is under a responsibility to disclose certain information (Millum & Bromwich, 2021).

Underlying the framework for thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), this study used a phenomenological approach to data collection and analysis. This methodology was consistent with the goal of the study, which investigated and comprehended participants' first-hand accounts of the phenomenon being studied. Focus group, interviews, and demographic questionnaires were used to gather data, which produced rich and nuanced insights into participants' attitudes and interactions around the study topic. Because they understood the importance of first-hand knowledge, the teachers, department heads, deputy principals, and principals added their special insight into the phenomenon to the analysis.

In an in-depth qualitative interview, open-ended questions were asked. Furthermore, if the researcher wanted more in-depth evidence, this data collection tool assisted the researcher in exploring and asking follow-up questions. Can you, for instance, describe another example of an experience? The researcher collected additional data through an audiotape in response to

this question. The participants were audiotaped and transcribed for approximately an hour, with an open door for a subsequent interview. To ensure privacy, the data, audiotape, and transcripts were held in a safe facility to ensure the integrity of the interviewees was protected; nevertheless, the data will be destroyed when the process is through. Before the commencement and execution of the data-gathering process, authorisation was sought from the gatekeeper, the Director of Education (DoE). The Director's consent permitted the researcher to investigate the schools and each school principal, deputy principal, and department head, who were the head figures of the institutions and who gave the information to create trust and buy-in to the investigation.

At the end of a study, the researcher engaged participants in debriefing sessions. According to McMahon and Winch (2018), debriefings involve an in-depth, goal-oriented discussion of collected data following its collection. Additionally, it has been argued that debriefing is crucial for research involving deception, but there was at least some evidence to suggest that just retracting material may not be enough to return subjects to their pre-experimental state (Greenspan & Loftus, 2022). However, if debriefing did not entirely mitigate the possible adverse effects of deceit, this presented potential ethical concerns (Greenspan & Loftus, 2022).

Research Paradigm

In the educational environment, individuals possess an inherent drive to explore and comprehend phenomena, enabling them to make informed judgments amidst evolving educational paradigms such as behaviourism, connectivism, cognitivism, constructivism, and humanism. Research serves as a tool for investigating the unknown, playing a crucial role in expanding our understanding (Begić & Galić, 2021). It involves acquiring information, developing understanding, gathering data, and interpreting it to construct a comprehensive view of the world (Song, 2021). Furthermore, research is a systematic inquiry aimed at

discovering, unveiling, interpreting, and revising established truths (Alhadeff-Jones, 2013). Therefore, a foundational understanding of ontology and epistemology is essential to enhance the rigour and depth of any research endeavour. Research philosophy, in general, helps researchers address questions about how data about a phenomenon should be collected, analysed, and used. Understanding different research paradigms is crucial for coherent and grounded research designs (Pretorius, 2024).

Qualitative research explores the complexities of human experiences, seeking an in-depth understanding through diverse perspectives. In particular, it prioritises meaning-making over quantification, focusing on the dynamics of social relations (Queirós et al., 2017). Consequently, a key feature of qualitative research is its flexible design. Methods and data analysis can evolve as understanding deepens, allowing researchers to adapt to new insights. Although distinct from quantitative approaches, mixed-methods research increasingly integrates both for a more comprehensive view of social phenomena (Dawadi et al., 2021).

Qualitative research emphasises in-depth comprehension over broad generalisability. To this end, data collection relies on flexible techniques like observation, interviews, and focus groups (Nassaji, 2015), generating rich, contextually grounded data. Indeed, in qualitative studies, researchers develop an understanding of a phenomenon through observation, allowing themes and patterns to emerge organically from the data. Analysis continues until data saturation is reached. Furthermore, subjectivity is embraced through adaptable, interpretive reporting styles, using narratives, participant quotes, and in-depth explanations to communicate findings. Ultimately, the goal is to accurately portray social reality, acknowledging the researcher's influence (Flemming & Noyes, 2021).

Qualitative research provides a nuanced, contextualised understanding (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). As a result, findings often lead to new questions and insights to guide future research. Completeness, data analysis accuracy, and the strength of the researcher's narrative

determine validity, rather than statistical measures. Despite these differences, qualitative and quantitative research methodologies are fundamentally similar. Queirós et al (2017) pointed out that the researcher is involved in every step of the research process, from formulating the research question through data collection, analysis, and reporting. Therefore, both approaches aim to fill knowledge gaps and produce new knowledge.

Researchers create a methodical plan for gathering and evaluating data, which, in qualitative research, involves conducting in-depth interviews or observations and carefully selecting participants. Qualitative research embraces the unknown and lets themes and patterns surface from the data itself as opposed to trying to verify pre-existing theories (Nassaji, 2015). Furthermore, qualitative research is grounded in interpretivist epistemological beliefs (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Aspers & Corte, 2019). Consequently, qualitative research is a better methodological choice to understand the thoughts and perspectives of others. A phenomenological qualitative approach explores the richness and complexity of the participants' perspectives (Shorey & Ng, 2022). To achieve this, focus groups and one-on-one in-depth interviews are incorporated. Ultimately, a purposive non-probability sampling strategy is appropriate for phenomenological studies seeking detailed data from participants who have experienced particular things (Friday & Leah, 2024).

Ontology

Ontology, the study of being and reality (Abou-Assali, 2014), plays a crucial role in research. An ontological belief, in reality, depends on our understanding of its structure and nature (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Khatri, 2020). Various forms of study were based on differing views about what constituted truth. Our opinion or sense of truth influences what we think or know about reality (Ryan, 2018). Consequently, researchers should recognise their ontological stance when doing research. Ontology may be divided into realism and relativism (see Figure 2). The realists presumed that only one truth exists (Rossi, 2019). Truth does not change. From

an ontological perspective, the deductivist argued that one external reality existed and was uncovered by hypothesis and experimentation (Ryan, 2018). Conversely, a relativist ontology suggests that reality is subjective and can vary based on individual perspectives (Pretorius, 2024).

Relativism asserts the existence of multiple realities that are shaped by context, standing in opposition to realism, which maintains that there is only one objective reality (Baghramian & Carter, 2015). Relativists contend that truth is constructed and flexible as opposed to the absolute truth put forth by realists. What was deemed 'real' or 'true' was always entwined with the particular context in which it was understood (Merlo & Pravato, 2021). For instance, understanding was influenced by context, as seen by the fact that ideas such as justice and fairness can be understood quite differently in different cultures and contexts (Österman, 2021). This contextual dependence on reality suggests that knowledge is situated and mainly applicable to similar contexts rather than being universally generalisable. Thus, ontological viewpoints—that is, the positions regarding the essence of reality—have a big impact on how research methods are carried out and how meaning is interpreted (Nasution, 2018).

Researchers create a methodical plan for gathering and evaluating data, which, in qualitative research, involves conducting in-depth interviews or observations and carefully selecting participants. Qualitative research embraces the unknown and lets themes and patterns surface from the data itself as opposed to trying to verify pre-existing theories (Nassaji, 2015). Furthermore, qualitative research is grounded in interpretivist epistemological beliefs (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Aspers & Corte, 2019). Consequently, qualitative research is a better methodological choice to understand the thoughts and perspectives of others. A phenomenological qualitative approach explores the richness and complexity of the participants' perspectives (Shorey & Ng, 2022). To achieve this, focus groups and one-on-one in-depth interviews are incorporated. Ultimately, a purposive non-probability sampling

strategy is appropriate for phenomenological studies seeking detailed data from participants who have experienced particular things (Friday & Leah, 2024).

Figure 2

Ontological and Epistemological Comparison
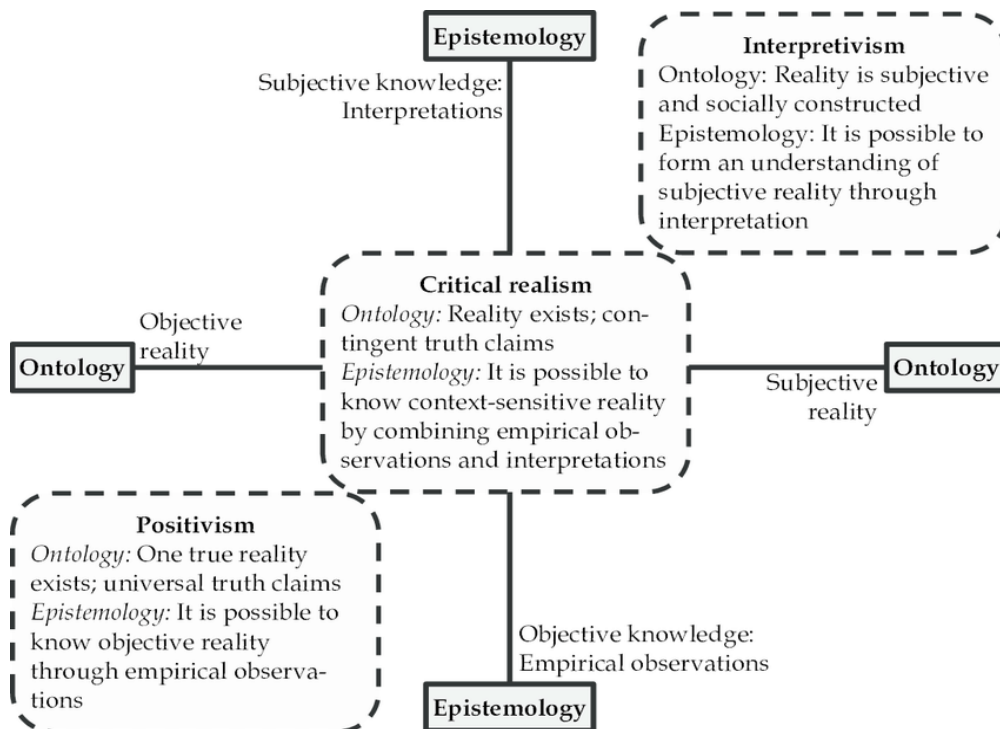
Note. Extracted from The Use of Digital Analytics for Measuring and Optimizing Digital Marketing Performance SOURCE: (Järvinen, 2016, p. 64)

Epistemology

Epistemology the study of knowledge, is the study of how researchers connect with their research to learn new things (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Khatri, 2020). Our ontological stances or our convictions regarding the nature of reality had a big impact on how we understood knowledge. A researcher who adhered to the idea of a single objective reality, for example, might be more interested in quantitative approaches that aimed to measure and quantify phenomena. Conversely, a researcher who accepts the existence of multiple subjective realities may favour qualitative methods to comprehend a range of viewpoints and lived experiences.

The former strategy was typified by positivism according to Al-Saadi (2014). In the search for truth, positivists placed a strong emphasis on objectivity and evidence, arguing that

the world is unaffected by the researcher (Al-Saadi, 2014). This viewpoint was consistent with the conviction that there was a steady, observable world that was amenable to impartial study. Figure 2, if applicable, visually represents the differences between the epistemological frameworks of positivism and interpretivism. Alternative frameworks such as interpretivism contest this idea, arguing that knowledge is context-dependent and co-constructed (Al-Ababneh, 2020).

In contrast to positivism, interpretivism emphasises subjective understanding and the social construction of reality. Interpretivists believe that, in addition to direct observation, there exist other methods of gaining knowledge about the world around us, which involve our perceptions and interpretations of it (Al-Saadi, 2014). When interpreting information from their senses, people relied on their perceptions. Similarly, people created their meanings of social realities and the interpretive research paradigm saw reality and meaning-making as socially constructed (Tubey et al., 2015). Interpretivists value qualitative research techniques like focus groups, interviews, and ethnography because they enable in-depth examination of both the social contexts that shaped meaning and the subjective experience and interpretation that these techniques imply. According to Al-Ababneh (2020), the selection of research instruments and the overall study design were greatly influenced by ontology and epistemology, which were important philosophical perspectives.

Axiology

Axiology, the study of values, is an integral component of research philosophy that acknowledges the researcher's values inevitably shape the research process (Pretorius, 2024). This viewpoint in contrast to a strictly objective one accepts the notion that values should be understood and taken into consideration rather than being eradicated (Pretorius, 2024; Tanlaka & Aryal, 2025). This method makes reflexivity a crucial tool encouraging researchers to critically assess their own preconceptions biases and past knowledge and how they may affect

the research (Bias, 2017). This entails being open and honest about ones values so that readers can appraise the possible influence of those values on the results and comprehend the perspective that the research was conducted through (Pretorius, 2024). Our axiology as researchers is directly impacted by our ontological and epistemological positions. In contrast to positivists who may still aim for value-free research interpretivists and constructivists are more likely to embrace the role of values in research emphasizing reflexivity and transparency. Yet, choosing to be objective is a value in and of itself. Therefore we can perform more thorough moral and reliable research if we specifically take our values into account (Pretorius, 2024). Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between axiology ontology, and epistemology. It shows how our views on reality and knowledge influence our values and in turn how we conduct research.

The development of research questions and the choice of research design which are at the heart of the research process are both impacted by axiology. The selection of subjects thought significant or deserving of study is influenced by the values of the researchers (Brown, 2020). For example, an environmental sustainability-minded researcher might for instance decide to look into how industrial operations affect nearby ecosystems. Furthermore, the researchers values and priorities are reflected in the research design choice whether it be a qualitative study examining the lived experiences of impacted communities or a quantitative study aiming to measure and compare environmental impacts. This emphasises how the values of the research endeavor are inseparable.

Axiology encourages researchers to acknowledge and manage the inherent conflict between subjectivity and objectivity in research (Austin & Sutton, 2014). According to Pretorius (2024), objectivity is a common goal but complete value-neutrality is usually unachievable and possibly undesirable. Reflexivity is a strategy that researchers can use to understand and manage their own biases and assumptions (Austin & Sutton, 2014). When

researchers are forthright and honest about their values and how they may influence their interpretations the validity and dependability of their findings are enhanced (Pretorius, 2024). At every step of the research process this means critically analyzing oneself and carefully considering opposing points of view (Greenbank, 2003).

Aaxiology has significant ethical implications for research. Researchers have a responsibility to consider the potential impact individuals, communities, and society(Biedenbach & Jacobsson, 2016). This entails keeping in mind concerns like power dynamics, social justice, and the possibility of injury or unforeseen consequences. (Biedenbach & Jacobsson, 2016). By explicitly considering their ethical commitments and values researchers can conduct more significant and responsible research that fosters positive social change (Biedenbach & Jacobsson, 2016). This makes it necessary to critically examine and have ongoing conversations about how values affect research priorities and methods.

Methodology

Methodology serves as the specific framework for how research is conducted, outlining the systematic process of inquiry (Al-Ababneh, 2020). It includes the methods approaches and strategies used to gather and examine data with the goal of offering a thorough and well-organised method for responding to research questions (Berryman, 2019). Assuring that the studys design data collection and analysis are all logically connected the methodology is not just a collection of tools but rather a well-thought-out plan that complements the research philosophy (Al-Ababneh, 2020). In the end, the trustworthiness of the research findings are decided by the methodology.

The three main categories of methodologies—qualitative quantitative and mixed-methods—offer different perspectives on the subject of the study. In order to find patterns and correlations between variables quantitative approaches usually concentrate on numerical data and statistical analysis. Often this method aims to create objective metrics and extrapolate

results to broader populations. On the other hand qualitative approaches use in-depth interviews textual analysis and observations to explore the subtleties of the human condition. Finding the meaning and interpretation of phenomena from the viewpoint of those involved is the aim. In order to offer a more thorough comprehension of intricate phenomena mixed-methods research integrates both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

Axiology, the study of values, significantly influences methodological choices (Saunders et al., 2015). Researchers' values inevitably shape the research process, from the formulation of research questions to the interpretation of findings (Pretorius, 2024). For instance, a researcher with a strong commitment to social justice may choose a qualitative methodology to explore the lived experiences of marginalised communities. This choice reflects a value-driven decision to prioritise understanding and amplifying the voices of those who are often unheard. Similarly, a researcher concerned with objectivity and generalisability may opt for a quantitative methodology to minimise bias and establish statistically significant results.

Regardless of the chosen methodology, rigour and ethical considerations are paramount. Researchers must adhere to established standards of data collection, analysis, and reporting to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of their findings. Furthermore, ethical considerations, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants, must be carefully addressed throughout the research process. By explicitly acknowledging the influence of axiology and upholding ethical principles, researchers can conduct more responsible and impactful research that contributes to the advancement of knowledge and benefits society.

Population and Sample of the Research Study

Population

Elfil and Negida (2017) defined a research population as an identifiable group of people with similar characteristics, which Friday and Leah (2024, p. 90) expounded, suggesting that

instead of interacting with an entire population, "…a selected number of relevant participants can be identified and used to represent the entire population, which we can then call a sample." Despite this, Stratton (2021) noted that it was often impractical to collect data from the whole population due to accessibility issues. Similarly, Majid (2018) emphasised that recruitment was rarely feasible or appropriate for the entire population of interest. Therefore, selecting the most appropriate subset of the population was crucial. When selecting research settings and populations for your study, Fain (2017) and Shorten and Moorley (2014) recommended identifying well-defined groups of individuals whose attributes were most likely to contribute the most relevant, detailed and rich data to strengthen the study. Considering these sampling principles, the informants in this dissertation were the school leaders, Ministry of Education Officials, and the Antigua and Barbuda Union of Teachers Officials (see Table 5). Due to this, the researcher chose leaders and teachers from four rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda as well as the Ministry of Education Officials and the Antigua and Barbuda Union of Teachers Officials as the target demographic to be included in this qualitative phenomenological research study.

Consequently, based on the nature of this research study, the researcher has purposively chosen the target population. Generally, the researcher presupposed specific characteristics of the sample (e.g. male to female ratio = 1/4) and deemed it appropriate to represent the broader population (Elfil & Negida, 2017). The population for this research study comprised current secondary school principals, deputy principals, department heads, and teachers from four rural public secondary schools, Ministry of Education Officials, and the Antigua and Barbuda Union of Teachers Officials in Antigua and Barbuda (see Table 5). These individuals had the needed experiences and abilities to provide essential data to gather diverse viewpoints based on the study's purpose (Etikan, 2016; Majid, 2018).

However, whether an individual was eligible to participate in this research study depended on eligibility criteria. Among the eligibility criteria were inclusion criteria, which described the target population's characteristics (Majid, 2018). Thus, according to the aims and procedures of your study, the inclusion criteria determined how someone could participate (Hornberger & Rangu, 2020). Hence, participation in the study was contingent upon meeting all criteria. In addition, this study also has exclusion criteria.

In contrast, exclusion criteria should list characteristics of an individual that, if met, render them ineligible for participation (Hornberger & Rangu, 2020). Specifically, the exclusion criteria for this research on the lived experiences of rural public secondary school principals, deputy principals, department heads, and teachers excluded those under 35 or over 65. It was infrequent for a principal or school leader to reach leadership before age 35 and continue after retiring at age 65. In addition, cognitively impaired individuals were excluded.

There was a total of one hundred and sixty-three (N=163) secondary school leaders and teachers in these four rural public secondary educational institutions, including four principals (n=4), six deputy principals (n=6), and eight (n=20) department heads, and approximately one hundred and thirty-three (n=133) teachers (see Table 6). Additionally, three Teachers' Union Officials (n=3) and three Ministry of Education Officials (n=3) were included in the population (see Table 6). However, because of this qualitative research's phenomenological nature and the population's considerable size and demographics, the researcher did not investigate every individual in the population since it would have been too costly and time-consuming (Sharma, 2017) for the project. Therefore, an expected response rate of 32-48 represents about ninety (90%) percent response rate. According to Wu et al. (2022), a response rate of 60% is considered marginal and 80% and above is considered exceptional. This study demonstrated a high response rate of 87.5 percent. According to Stedman et al. (2018, p. 1), "High response rates are one crucial element of this capacity to make such generalizations." Furthermore, it

would be more practical to interview a subset of the population, and a sample is acceptable so that the researcher may draw inferences for the entire population later.

Table 6

Population Size

Groups	Target Population (*N*=169)	Accessible Population (*n*=56)
Principals	4	4
Deputy Principals	6	6
Department Heads	20	8
Teachers	133	32
Ministry of Education Officials	3	3
Teachers' Union Officials	3	3

Note: *N* is the number of people in each group and subgroup of the population

Sample Size

Bin Ahmad and Halim (2017, p. 20) emphasised that "Sample size is an important feature of any empirical study [that needs] to be representative of a given population to make inferences about the population based on the sample characteristics." However, Andrade (2020) contended that an excessively large sample size is unethical and unnecessary, just as a small sample size is also unscientific. Furthermore, Hennink et al. (2019, p. 1) highlighted the challenges in "Selecting an appropriate sample size for qualitative research remains challenging. Since the goal is to select a sample that will yield rich data to understand the phenomenon studied, sample sizes may vary significantly depending on the characteristics of each study."

However, Malterud et al. (2015) advocated that including target group members with new experiences can enhance the credibility of the information. Shorten and Moorley (2014) issue a warning that insufficient or poor sample sizes can lead to the use of harmful practices, and their utility and credibility can be questioned (Shaheen et al., 2019). Ensuring a sufficient sample size is imperative to derive significant findings from studies. Kang (2021, p. 1) cautioned that "If the sample size is too small, even if a large...effect is observed, the possibility

that it could be caused by random variations cannot be excluded." This emphasised the danger of assuming findings were the result of chance when the sample was not large enough, which could compromise the reliability of study findings. Furthermore, achieving an appropriate balance was necessary to get the right sample size, which should not be either too small for data saturation or too large for data extraction (Malterud et al., 2015).

Researchers have proposed several methodological approaches to determine the optimal sample size for qualitative studies including ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and case studies (Stough & Lee, 2021). Observation, in-depth interviews, and focus groups were methodologies that differed in the impact on research quality, which further influenced the dissertation's overall quality based on the research's objectives and how the collected data were used (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Gentles et al., 2015; Legan & Vandeven, 2017). Particularly in phenomenological studies, the ranges include approximately 6-20 (Ellis, 2016), 8-15 (Hill et al., 2005), and 5-25 (Creswell, 2007) participants to achieve data saturation.

Additionally, to achieve saturation, it was recommended that fewer than ten interviews be conducted and three to four focus group discussions be held (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). They have noted that five or more may be adequate regardless of the size of the population being examined. However, it was crucial to determine when enough data from research to develop an accurate and robust understanding of the phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2018). Alternatively, to manage the complexity of the analysis process, Bekele and Ago (2022) posited that research that utilised individual interviews was conducted 20 to 60 interviews. As a result, in keeping with many other phenomenological qualitative studies of this type, the researcher aimed to gather around fifty-six participants (n=56) from the target group. This sample size aligned with the study's aims and design, ethical considerations, participant retention, and the participants' relevant experience and eligibility (Squire et al., 2024).

Lakens (2022) posited that in sampling, the goal is not always to select a representative sample but rather a sample with a sufficient number of diverse subjects to reach saturation effectively. Furthermore, the author stated that an appropriate sample size justification in qualitative research relied on four guiding principles, which included: 1) identifying the populations, including any subpopulations; 2) estimating how many codes each population contains; 3) the probability that a code will appear in an information source, and 4) the sampling strategy (Lakens, 2022).

However, phenomenological research was most effective when sample sizes were between four and ten interviews (Bartholomew et al., 2021), and four focus groups provided sufficient evidence for identifying a large number of new issues - code saturation (M. M. Hennink et al., 2019). Although researchers have developed guidelines for conducting specific variants of phenomenology, they do not explain what constitutes an adequate sample (Bartholomew et al., 2021). It is worth noting that while some guidelines suggest specific sample sizes for phenomenological research, the concept of saturation, whether code saturation or meaning saturation, is often used to determine adequacy (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Sampling

As Mweshi and Sakyi (2020, pp. 180-181) have described, "…sampling is the process by which a researcher carefully selects through probabilistic and nonprobabilistic methods several individual items from a larger population of interest for closer study." Moser and Korstjens (2018) pointed out that the methodological approach should guide the selection of sampling strategies. Therefore, researchers often select a subset of the overall population to allow for extrapolation of the results and conclusions to the entire population. Furthermore, sampling strategies can be classified into two distinct dichotomies: probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Sarstedt et al., 2018; Shaheen et al., 2019), as described in Table 6.

To choose participants, this study used a multi-stage mixed-methods sampling technique (Ramanujan et al., 2022). Specifically, to find information-rich cases that matched the objectives of the study, the first stage relied on a purposive sampling method to select a smaller group of school leaders from a subset of the schools for in-depth interviews to explore their experiences with the programme. This focused strategy is especially pertinent to qualitative research, where the goal is in-depth understanding as opposed to statistical generalisation. Following this, stratified random sampling was used in the purposively chosen sample in the following step to select a larger sample of teachers from different schools to guarantee representation across important subgroups and improve the findings' generalisability within the intended population.

In this dissertation, the researcher has decisively, thoughtfully, and purposefully selected purposive sampling methods from the umbrella of the non-probability sampling methods, including convenience, quota, and snowball. Shaheen et al. (2019) noted that, unlike quantitative research, qualitative research did not have well-defined sampling procedures. However, they articulated that qualitative research involved selecting participants that attuned to the purpose of the study, a process that relied heavily on the researcher's judgement. Campbell et al. (2020) confirmed that targeted selection resulted in more trustworthy data and more robust results. Therefore, it was also imperative that the sample selection rationale aligned with the overarching research objectives from an ontological, epistemological, and axiological viewpoint (Campbell et al., 2020).

Table 7

Probability Sampling and Non-Probability Sampling

probability sampling	non-probability sampling
The samples are randomly selected.	Samples are selected based on the researcher's subjective judgment.
Everyone in the population has an equal chance of getting selected.	Not everyone has an equal chance to participate.
Researchers use this technique when they want to keep a tab on sampling bias.	Sampling bias is not a concern for the researcher.
Useful in an environment having a diverse population.	Useful in an environment that shares similar traits.
Used when the researcher wants to create accurate samples.	This method does not help in representing the population accurately.
Finding the correct audience is not simple.	Finding an audience is very simple.

Note. Extracted and paraphrased from the Pros and cons of different sampling techniques by Sharma (2017).

As such, purposive sampling "…should not be used to make external statistical generalisations to a large population from which the sample was selected or to a different population" (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2017, p. 136) but focused on those willing to share their knowledge and experiences in response to the research questions (Etikan & Bala, 2017). Consequently, because of these properties, it was best suited to small-scale, in-depth research (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Shaheen et al., 2019). When the researcher selected a sample with unique experiences and specialised expertise, he used purposive sampling (see Table 8).

Table 8

Types of Probability Sampling and Non-Probability

Probability Sampling	Non-probability Sampling
Simple random: sampling is a sampling strategy in which each member of the population has an equal probability of being chosen to participate in the sample.	**Convenience:** sampling is a non-probability sampling approach in which participants are chosen by the researcher based on their availability and convenience.
Stratified random: sampling is a sampling approach in which the population is divided into smaller groups (strata), and a sample is drawn at random from each stratum.	**Purposive:** sampling is a non-probability sampling approach in which participants are chosen for research because they have traits that make them good sources of information.
Random cluster: sampling is a method for selecting participants at random from a list too vast for simple random sampling. Instead, the researcher chooses areas at random and then chooses from inside those borders at random.	**Snowball:** sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which the researcher locates volunteers by contacting other participants.
Systematic: sampling is a sampling technique for which the researcher selects every *n*th member of the population to the sample. The starting point is chosen at random.	**Quota:** sampling is a non-probability sampling approach in which the researcher contacts individuals who meet specific characteristics until the quota for each profile is satisfied.

Note. Extracted and paraphrased from Research methods for inexperienced researchers by Leacock, Warrican, & Rose (2009)

However, while purposive sampling ensured that the results were generalisable, it can also be problematic because the sample population was so small (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Shaheen et al., 2019). Indeed, another issue with purposive sampling was the possibility of biases (Sharma, 2017). Interestingly, qualitative research frequently places a higher priority on objectives other than those of quantitative research, like rich description and in-depth understanding, as opposed to concentrating only on reducing bias and maximising generalisability. Even though generalisability was not always the main goal, the researcher's positionality and sample decisions had a big impact on the study's conclusions. One way to influence the direction of research was to rely on a particular representative or enter a community with preconceived notions. Therefore, purposive sampling was one clear and persuasive sampling technique that should be used for this reason. As Isaac (2023, p. 4)

emphasises, "An effective purposive sample must have clear criteria and rationale for inclusion" Ultimately, it was also critical to recognise that the researcher's judgment and experience matter a great deal when it came to determining the sample selection even in purposive sampling (Sarstedt et al., 2018).

Sampling Procedure

The sampling approach involved selecting a subset of the overall population to extrapolate the results and conclusions to the entire population. According to Gentles et al. (2015), a sampling procedure is defined as the process of selecting appropriate data sources from which to obtain results. In order to guide the selection process, two significant dichotomies of sampling techniques exist: probability sampling (quantitative) and non-probability (qualitative) sampling techniques (Pace, 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2018; Sharma, 2017).

Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2017), Pace (2021), and Sharma (2017) asserted that quantitative probability sampling may use random, stratified, systematic, or cluster sampling in probability sampling. Thus, because sampling meant extending selected members to a larger population, the probability process eliminates selection bias. Nevertheless, understanding the sampling protocol's limits on interpretation was vital since all these components significantly affected estimates and inferences (Etikan, 2016).

In contrast, the non-probability sampling method was unlike probability sampling because it did not indicate that every population element was included in the sample (Gelling, 2015; Sarstedt et al., 2018). Furthermore, this method collected samples without using random sampling from the population at large (Gelling, 2015; Pace, 2021). Instead, researchers selected their subjects based on their subjectivity. Nonetheless, subjectivity is commonly understood to represent people's ideas, experiences, and feelings (Bumbuc, 2016). Therefore, sample estimates can never be extrapolated to the entire population using sampling approaches with

small sample sizes, such as convenience, purposive, snowball, and quota sampling (Sharma, 2017).

Researchers used convenience sampling to select the most convenient respondents, irrespective of their characteristics until they reached the required sample size (Martínez-mesa et al., 2016). However, due to its less scientific and more controversial nature (Pettus-Davis et al., 2011), this approach lacked the credibility necessary to collect meaningful data, considering the intent and resources available for this type of qualitative study.

Moreover, the subset was selected through a non-probability research process, which carefully recruits informants who have experienced the phenomenon studied to adequately address the research questions (Etikan & Bala, 2017). Probabilistic quantitative sampling included random sampling, but qualitative non-probability sampling was primarily intended to perform purposive sampling - that was, to select a sample that met specific criteria relevant to the research question (Etikan & Bala, 2017).

Purposive sampling was another qualitative non-probability strategy (Etikan & Bala, 2017). In contrast to quantitative probability sampling approaches, the purpose of purposive sampling was not to select participants by random selection, as with other forms of quantitative probability sampling, such as random, stratified, and others (Etikan & Bala, 2017). Instead, the goal was to choose typical people from your area of interest based on your judgment (Etikan & Bala, 2017). Consequently, purposive sampling was employed in this research due to the in-depth nature, research questions, data collection method, and small population size. A purposive sampling design illustrated the researcher's goal to choose individuals intentionally using his judgment and the population's vast amount of information-rich experience with the phenomenon (Sarstedt et al., 2018; Whitehead & Lopez, 2016). According to Whitehead and Lopez (2016), when purposive sampling was used, the sample units were selected because they had specific qualities that allowed a deep exploration of the core themes and problems the

researcher desired to research. Therefore, researchers can enhance the robustness of their research studies by embracing both worlds so long as they accept parity (Pace, 2021).

A good sample size was crucial to producing trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability results. However, if the sampling technique and data collection methods were inappropriate, the interpretation would be unreliable, unverifiable, and non-transferable (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2017), potentially minimising bias (Sharma, 2017). As for non-probability sampling, one of the main goals was to rely on the findings of the sample members to help make generalisations about the entire population. Nevertheless, one can only make generalisations based on the actual population described in the sampling frame (Acharya et al., 2013). Although purposive selection entailed purposeful decisions, this should not imply prejudice about the chosen choices.

To ensure representation from all four rural public secondary schools, eight teachers were selected for the focus groups using a stratified random sampling technique. The first step in this method was to identify each teacher in each school and create a sampling frame for them. Eight teachers were randomly selected from each school's sampling frame and thirty-two teachers took part in the focus groups. Equal representation for all schools in the study ensures that comparisons and analyses between schools are possible while also maintaining a manageable sample size for qualitative data collection.

To reduce selection bias, the random selection procedure was meticulously carried out within each school (Pace, 2021). Every teacher in a school was given a special identification number. Eight distinct identifiers were then chosen by blind drawing from a container these eight identifiers matched the eight teachers selected from that school. Each of the four schools underwent an independent repetition of this procedure, guaranteeing that each teacher in each school had an equal chance of being chosen for the focus groups. This meticulous methodology

fortified the validity of the qualitative findings and improved the samples' representativeness within each school.

It was necessary to document this sampling procedure for transparency and reproducibility. The selection of identifiers, the variety of identifiers provided to teachers and the specific blind draw from a container that was used were all meticulously documented. This comprehensive documentation allowed for analysis of the sampling process and ensured that the participant selection was unbiased and random. However, even though the goal of this stratified random sampling technique was to form representative groups from each school, it was critical to recognise the possibility of sampling error and how it may affect the applicability of the findings to the larger population of secondary school teachers in rural areas.

To select two department heads at random, the researcher first created a sampling frame for each of the four rural public secondary schools. Listing all 20 department heads from each school in this frame allowed for a unique identification of each individual. Once the sampling frames were established, the researcher employed a blind drawing from a container method. Specifically, each head of department has a number from 1 to 20. Use the blind drawing from a container method to select two unique numbers between 1 and 20 for each school. The heads of departments corresponding to the selected numbers constituted the sample. This method ensured each head of department within each school had an equal chance of selection.

Participants Recruitment

Four Antigua and Barbuda rural public secondary schools granted the researcher access to participants for this study. However, to ensure ethical engagement, the recognised that the participants might not share the same level of interest in the research topic (Far, 2018). Therefore, the researcher highlighted how their participation could contribute to higher education or improve the student experience, aiming to foster their engagement (Far, 2018).

The participants were drawn from various school leadership and leadership academic disciplines, including Modern Languages, Industrial Technology, Business Education, Information Technology, Agriculture Science, Mathematics, English Language, Music and Performing Arts, Physical Education and Sports, Social Sciences, Natural Science, and Home Economics. Participants also included Ministry of Education Officials and Teachers Union Officials. This diverse group formed the management teams of their respective institutions. The researcher navigated the formal ethics approval process before contacting these individuals. This involved completing the Research Ethics Application Form (see Appendix A) and obtaining clearance from the Unicaf University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), as presented in Appendix B.

Additionally, the researcher had to acquire legal authorisation to conduct the study by obtaining a Gatekeeper's letter to seek permission from the Director of Education. As Ramrathan et al. (2017) point out, it is unlawful to commence research at a site without prior authorisation. Once the Director of Education approved the research within the government-run educational institutions, as shown in Appendix C, the researcher sought the school leaders' contact details, excluding the Visual Arts Heads of Departments and those who were cognitively challenged.

After obtaining the required authorisation to interact with school leaders and teachers and initiating the study, the researcher then proceeded to the third step of participant recruiting. The primary recruitment strategy for enlisting school leaders involved sending customised emails to each potential participant on January 4, 2022. Specifically, these emails contained the Participant Information Sheet (seen in Appendix D) and provided detailed information about the study's purpose, details about informed consent, as well as the researcher's contact information.

Moreover, included in the invitations were an online link connecting to a participant information sheet, informed consent documentation, and a concise demographic questionnaire. Participants were required to express their informed consent for participation by selecting an agreement checkbox on a Google Forms survey before they could proceed with the survey itself. Should they choose not to consent, they are not allowed to move on to the next stage of the process.

However, some participants encountered challenges accessing the Google Form. Consequently, the decision was made to create and distribute hard typewritten copies of the necessary materials: Participant Information Sheet, Consent Forms, and Demographic Questionnaires. These were given to the principals of the rural public secondary schools, who then passed them on to their deputy principals, department heads, and teachers. The hard copies were generally collected the next day, and their contents were transferred into the online Google Forms system.

As outlined in the Informed Consent Forms in Appendix E, Appendix F, Appendix G, Appendix H, and Appendix J, participation in this study was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential in this study. Furthermore, the Informed Consent Forms stated that participants could withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. Finally, once they acknowledged that they had satisfied the study's participation requirements or criteria for eligibility, they clicked the consent submitted button or signed and returned the hard copy to the researcher.

In this qualitative phenomenological study, participant selection searched out respondents who lived the experience of the research question, spoke honestly about that experience, and provided a wealth of information about the experience (Whitehead & Lopez, 2016). The phenomenological approach, in essence, examines a phenomenon's human experience via the world of the individual who perceived it (Neubauer et al., 2019). Consequently, the researcher utilised a purposive sampling criterion as previously indicated.

In addition, several eligibility and inclusion criteria were employed for participation in this research. These included:

- Participants who lived in Antigua and Barbuda,

- Participants who were between the ages of 35 and 65 years, and

- Participants were current rural public secondary school principals, deputy principals, heads of departments, Teachers' Union Officials, and Ministry of Education Officials.

Despite the exclusion criterion for participation in the study that included Visual Arts department heads and teachers with cognitive impairment, an email was sent to 169 prospective participants informing them of their participation. Despite this, 56 people (see Table 9) who matched the study's criteria agreed to share their experiences of rural public secondary schools and were eventually chosen as study participants.

However, only the eligible participants from each site or institution were allowed to participate in the study's focus groups. Subsequently, to the dissemination of recruitment emails and consent forms to four principals, six deputy principals, eight department heads, 40 teachers, three Ministry of Education Officials, and three Teachers' Union Officials, the recruitment procedure yielded four interested principals, six interested deputy principals, eight department heads, 32 teachers, three Ministry of Education Officials, and three Teachers' Union Officials. However, one department head declined, one was too young, and six did not respond to the recruitment process. In total, while twenty (20) department heads were invited to participate, eight were interviewed, and thirty-two (32) teachers were divided into four groups of eight participants each.

Table 9

Participants Recruitment

Groups	Participants	Population	Sample Size	Data Collection Tools	Sampling Method
A1	Principals	4	4	Unstructured Interview	Purposive Sampling
B1	Deputy Principals	6	6	Unstructured Interview	Purposive Sampling
C1	Department Heads	20	8	Unstructured Interview	Random Sampling
D1	Teachers	133	(8x4)=32	Focus Group	Random Sampling
E1	Ministry of Education Officials	3	3	Unstructured Interview	Purposive Sampling
F1	Teachers' Union Officials	3	3	Unstructured Interview	Purposive Sampling

Note. Participants recruitment is based on probability and non-probability sampling methods

Site Selection

As stated throughout this research, the main purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the participants' lived experiences and perceptions from the perspective of the individuals being studied (Whitehead & Lopez, 2016). Consequently, this resulted in the research being conducted in their naturalistic settings, which was critically important for this dissertation.

In conducting the study, factors such as "…the nature, context, environment, and logistics of the study setting" (Majid, 2018, p. 3) could affect how it was conducted. To mitigate this, Majid (2018) stated that before submitting a study for ethics review and collecting data, investigators should assess the study setting, events, and gatherings. Accordingly, this study was conducted across four rural public secondary school sites as recommended and selected by the Ministry of Education. In this multisite study, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted at four different geographical locations and school sites based on the location of each participant. This technique of data collecting, which was not confined to a single site, presented a significant opportunity to record common experiences in an educational environment that had hitherto been overlooked in the literature review.

Regarding participant selection, purposive sampling was used by the researcher to select four out of six rural public secondary school leaders using predetermined criteria that support the study goals. Choosing people on purpose who are most likely to provide the richest and most pertinent data for your study is known as purposeful sampling. To comprehend the backgrounds, experiences, and educational context of each of the six rural school leaders, the researcher gathered data on them all. To determine which schools most closely matched the experiences the researcher was interested in learning more about, this data was compared to the selection criteria. Ultimately, four of the six principals were selected as recommended by the Ministry of Education because they were the most likely to offer cases with lots of information for in-depth analysis.

Instrumentation of Research Tools

When considering the instrumentation of research tools, whether a researcher chooses a quantitative or qualitative method, data collection is a critical component, ensuring that reliable and robust information is collected to make informed decisions about the study. Primary and secondary data were the two dichotomous forms of data collected for research and analytics (Sudhir Voleti, 2019). Specifically, demographic data was gathered to gain an insight into the participants' backgrounds and, in turn, how such background experiences correlate to the wider experiences under investigation with the help of probing interviews. However, this study's primary data collection methods were unstructured, open-ended interviews and focus group discussions (Cypress, 2017; Rueda et al., 2020). Therefore, this project collected data from interviews and focus groups, guided by the research questions and methodology, and specifically designed to describe a phenomenon from those who experienced it.

Interviews

In qualitative interviews, researchers can gain insights into the experiences and perceptions of different phenomena of interest based on their unique perspectives, allowing

insight into how those phenomena are experienced and perceived by interviewees (McGrath et al., 2019). To facilitate effective data capture, McGrath et al. (2019) offered twelve tips for administering qualitative interviews as essential tools for capturing data, including:

- Identifying when qualitative research interviews are appropriate,

- Preparing yourself as an interviewer.

- Construct an interview guide and test your questions.

- Consider [the] cultural and power dimensions of [an] interview situation.

- Build rapport with your respondents.

- Remember you are a co-creator of the data.

- Talk less and listen more.

- Allow yourself to adjust the interview guide.

- Be prepared to handle unanticipated emotions.

- Transcribe the interviews at a good time.

- Check the data, and

- Initiate analysis early. (pp. 1002-1005)

Given the nature of this qualitative study, the researcher utilised interviews as a data collection tool. According to Rolland et al. (2019), an individual interview can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured. They posited that a structured interview is a series of predetermined questions and responses presented in person, like questionnaires. A semi-structured interview utilised a guide, identified questions were asked, and relevant topics were addressed (Wan, 2021). In contrast, adherence to a schedule during an unstructured interview is unnecessary since questions were not predesigned (Wan, 2021). Furthermore, an unstructured interview relied on the participant's responses to the research study topic without receiving much instruction from the researcher (Rolland et al., 2019).

Data were gathered primarily through face-to-face on-site interviews and Zoom video conferencing web-based interviews administered to principals, deputy principals, department heads, teachers, Ministry of Education Officials (MoEO), and Antigua and Barbuda Union of Teachers (A&BUT) Officials. Real-time audio and video streaming were available on the platform (Lobe et al., 2020). Four principals, six deputies, eight department heads, and 32 teachers from four rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda, three Ministry Officials, and three Teachers' Union Officials were interviewed for this study, as shown in Table 8. Prior to the interviews, information was emailed or delivered to each informant. The researcher briefly explained the research's purpose to the informants before the interview began. Furthermore, participants signed a consent form before the interviews took place. Each interview had an approximate 25 to 35-minute time limit.

These interviews were in-depth (Alshenqeeti, 2014; Rutakumwa et al., 2020), informal, and unstructured (Queirós et al., 2017) in nature, which led them to spontaneity and flexibility and involved direct one-to-one engagement with the individual participant and the interviewer only (see Appendix L, Appendix M, and Appendix N). According to Zhang and Wildermuth (2009, p. 1), unstructured interviews were created "…to elicit people's social realities." Specifically, these interviews allowed for exploration of participant experiences (Roberts, 2020).

The increased coronavirus (COVID-19 disease) cases and the Ministry of Health's restrictive protocols and social distancing disrupted the researcher's ability to administer face-to-face interviews. However, some interviews were conducted face-to-face and others virtual via the Zoom web-based platform to collect qualitative interview data at four rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda. Six participants were interviewed face-to-face, and eighteen via the Zoom web-based platform. In such interviews, an opening question might be: Can you describe your experiences as a rural school principal/leader as part of your reflection on your

role as a leader? Tell me about your experiences and personal qualities that qualify you for this position. Could you describe the formal leadership certification programme or training you obtained to be considered for this position?

As a result, the researcher had a more significant opportunity to ask the participants open-ended questions to allow the discussions to flow and pose probing questions to better understand the participants' specific experiences, attitudes, or (Roberts, 2020). The interviewer's ability played an essential and integral role in the research instrument (Whitehead & Lopez, 2016). The method of collecting depended on the findings' credibility and could be considered time-intensive and cannot be generalised (Queirós et al., 2017).

Although interviews provided an excellent means of collecting rich and detailed data, it was time-consuming in terms of the timeframe to collect the data and transcribe, organise, analyse, and report the information (Queirós et al., 2017). However, "Unstructured Interviews is the method that found the least number of functional requirements, the method with the least number of questions asked and the method with the lowest quality" (Rueda et al., 2020, p. 2). Despite this potential drawback, transformational leadership can provide substantial benefits to individuals and organisations.

Focus Groups

In addition to the interviews, data collection included four focus groups. These took place at four different rural public secondary school sites across Antigua and Barbuda., each site provided a distinct geographical context. The focus groups were relatively small, with eight participants engaged in discussions simultaneously. Focus groups are valuable for gathering rich information and engaging stakeholders (Hamilton & Finley, 2020). During these sessions, the researcher acted as the moderator, guiding the discussion and all voices were heard. Furthermore, all the focus group participants were teachers with teaching and leadership roles and responsibilities within their respective schools. It also consisted of homogeneous

individuals who were allowed to reflect on and discuss questions posed by the moderator, thus providing rich qualitative data. A skilled moderator can help create an environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts (Sim & Waterfield, 2019).

Before starting the focus group discussions, the participants were informed of all study information and provided with consent forms. However, Sim and Waterfield (2019) cautioned that a focus group methodology posed unique ethical challenges that do not fully match those posed by one-to-one interviews, which focused on three key aspects: "…consent; confidentiality and anonymity; risk of harm" (Sim & Waterfield, 2019, p. 3004). Moreover, they articulated that:

- Unlike in one-on-one interviews, revocation of consent is less straightforward,

- Research participants' ability to communicate outside of the group poses a potential risk to confidentiality and anonymity, and

- Sensitive topics may be discussed in focus groups, and the public nature of the discussions can exacerbate harm.

However, in their view, researchers should provide information in sufficient detail and with sufficient clarity to guide the discussion on matters considered to be inappropriate and to turn the conversation in a different direction if necessary. Addressing these challenges proactively helps to ensure the ethical conduct of focus groups. Researchers must be mindful of power dynamics and ensure a safe environment for every participant.

During the focus groups, 32 informants participated. As soon as the first eight eligible informants who met the study's criteria from each institution responded to the Google Form, the researcher closed the response button so that others would be unable to respond. Each focus group included eight participants and one moderator. Due to the restrictive protocols of the COVID-19 virus, the focus group discussions were administered virtually on the Zoom web-based platform (Amaral et al., 2022). As a result, the focus groups remained distraction-free

throughout the focus groups' interactive conversation, except for an individual who joined the discussion while driving. There were 50 minutes allotted; however, focus group discussions took approximately 40-45 minutes.

Focus groups are an excellent method for gathering information from qualitative sources (Hamilton & Finley, 2020). Participants may not always express their opinions honestly (Alshenqeeti, 2014), especially when it comes to delicate subjects, even though they have the benefit of obtaining rich and interactive insights from various viewpoints. To counteract this, the moderator was vital in directing and supervising the discussions, making sure that they stayed on topic and useful. The moderator needs to be aware of potential biases and ensure an inclusive environment (Gordon, 2020).

Study Procedures and Ethical Assurances

The Researcher's Role

The researcher was merely an instrument used to collect data in this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003); therefore, the researcher was mindful of the preconceptions that may arise from using a phenomenological method. For example, Smith and Noble (2014) stated that:

> Bias exists in all study designs, and although researchers should attempt to minimise bias, outlining potential sources of bias enables greater critical evaluation of the research findings and conclusions. Researchers bring to each study their experiences, ideas, prejudices and personal philosophies, which if accounted for in advance of the study, enhance the transparency of possible research bias. Clearly articulating the rationale for and choosing an appropriate research design to meet the study aims can reduce common pitfalls in relation to bias. (p. 4)

Furthermore, Smith and Noble (2014) further stated that:

> Ethics committee[s] have an important role in considering whether the research design and methodological approaches are biased, and suitable to address the problem being explored. Feedback from peers, funding bodies and ethics committees is an essential part of designing research studies, and often provides valuable practical guidance in developing robust research. (p. 4)

However, Fusch et al. (2018) articulated that qualitative researchers carry their bias into the research; instead, share it, and strive to mitigate it to ensure that the other participant is being interpreted accurately.

Constantly, the researcher complied strictly with all the research guidelines outlined by the Unicaf Research Ethics Committee (UREC) in recruiting participants, eligibility criteria, preparing and administering the instruments/tools, the non-disclosure agreement, as well as the data collection and processing, conscious of possible risks and preconceptions that may arise from the use of the phenomenological method. Moreover, the researcher also adhered to research standards and ethics in analysing and reporting the research results. In addition to these standards or codes of ethics, the researcher was honest, transparent, accountable, impartial and respectful of the subjects (Surmiak, 2018). Indeed, the researcher's primary objective in qualitative research was to understand participants' feelings and thoughts. To achieve this effectively, the researcher asked probing questions, listened to the responses, and thought carefully before asking further questions to get to the significant part. Data collection methods might vary, but researchers should protect their participants and data as a primary responsibility. Thus, to protect respondents' identities, codenames and numbers were assigned.

Moreover, the researcher was careful not to impose his opinions or beliefs on the informants during the interviews and focus group discussions. Instead, the researcher set aside his preconceived notions about the research topic and opened his mind to understanding and listening to the participants. Consequently, the researcher's objective was to provide a rich understanding of the phenomena of rural public secondary school leaders' experiences from their viewpoints.

Generally, research is carried out to contribute knowledge to academic study, policy, and practice and substantially to the well-being of those who engage in it (Khan, 2014). In light of this, the author suggested that since research generates knowledge and substantially

contributes to participants' well-being, "Researchers are guided by the bioethical principles of justice, beneficence, non-maleficence, respect for human rights and respect for autonomy through the entire research process" (Haahr, Norlyk, & Hall, 2014, p. 6). Therefore, to protect the rights and dignity and ensure a safe experience and continuous well-being for participants, the researcher adhered strictly to the Unicaf University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) code of ethics and provided additional information regarding the study and their participation through ethical consideration, informed consent, deception, confidentiality, protection of participants, and debriefing.

Ethical Considerations

While designing and implementing this study, the researcher prioritised significant ethical considerations as to how he should protect the privacy and anonymity of informants and the nature of his relationship with them. Therefore, this phenomenological qualitative research was intimate, sensitive, and personal, so it was especially important to emphasise ethical behaviour (Quinney et al., 2016). According to Sim and Waterfield (2019, p. 3003), participants are granted the following three essential rights:

- Consent (informed): Although exercising the right to withdraw may not be as simple as it would be in an individual interview, participants must fully understand the nature of the research, including any potential risks and give their informed consent.

- Privacy and Anonymity: Maintaining the privacy of shared information is crucial but it can be difficult in group settings with little post-interaction control. Protecting participant identities from disclosure and maintaining anonymity are equally crucial.

- Protection from Harm: It is the ethical responsibility of researchers to reduce any potential harm especially when dealing with delicate subjects.

This necessitates striking a careful balance between promoting candid conversation and shielding participants from discomfort while still honouring their opinions and life experiences.

The researcher aimed to establish a courteous and secure atmosphere where participants could freely and honestly share their experiences by abiding by these ethical guidelines.

Phenomenological qualitative research prioritised its adherence to ethical principles, as they safeguard the subjects' privacy and ensure their confidentiality in an extensive, sensitive manner (Khan, 2014). The importance of adhering to and acknowledging ethical guidelines established by the Unicaf University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), the American Anthropological Association (AAA), the British Sociological Association (BSA) or other agencies cannot be overstated. Without ethical guidelines, sampling procedures, data collection, and public dissemination, findings can pose ethical dilemmas. Furthermore, research participants were intended to be protected from harm and to have their privacy, anonymity, and dignity respected (Khan, 2014). Therefore, codenames and numbers were used in the research context to protect the research informants and institutions.

Several ethical principles were established and clearly defined in the research literature that researchers followed to avoid damaging the research subjects or the study's integrity. Specifically, the principles of ethical conduct were divided into guidelines to ensure that the researcher conducts research to the highest ideals possible rather than hindering it. During the research, the researcher was exposed to many ethical dilemmas that may arise at all stages of the study (Kousholt & Uhl, 2021). In other words, the literature argued that these ethical principles guaranteed that research participants were protected, respected, and treated with dignity (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022)

In qualitative research, participant protection and research integrity are of utmost importance (Laryeafio & Ogbewe, 2023). The security of the data (interviews and focus group documents) was given top priority by the study's researcher who took precautions to guard against physical damage or destruction. This is consistent with Khan's (2014) emphasis on minimising harm: according to Khan (2014), researchers should never cause participants

unnecessary or irreversible harm, secure prior voluntary consent when possible and never needlessly humiliate, degrade or release harmful information about specific individuals that was collected for research purposes.

Informed Consent

Qualitative research methodology relied on informed consent as an essential ethical principle to protect elements and institutions' identities (Tulyakul et al., 2020). Specifically, informed consent was a crucial ethical requirement, and each participant should be informed about their rights, benefits and risks, confidentiality, and the research objectives to voluntarily affirm their participation in the study (Tulyakul et al., 2020).

The right of "free will" of participants should be respected in addition to voluntary affirmations of consent "…surrounding this phenomenon, which consisted of eliminating dual role conflict and coercion, guarding confidentiality" (Tulyakul et al., 2020, p. 86). Therefore, it was necessary to give the subject adequate time to consider participating (Manti & Licari, 2018). In essence, as a process, informed consent involves disclosing information, understanding it, and obtaining permission (Reevaluation et al., 2018). It meant that the informed consent process informed participants, they comprehended the study and its implications, and they could consent (Biros, 2018). Informants should be allowed to participate in or withdraw from studies on their terms without repercussions (Ramrathan et al., 2017). To avoid any discomfort, it was crucial to provide sufficient information to potential participants.

In contrast, parents, legal guardians or other caregivers should provide informed consent before researchers can work with children under the age of 18 (Morrow, 2016). Furthermore, in addition to honouring adult authority, researchers ought to give children's self-determination top priority by giving them the freedom to inquire about and determine whether or not to participate further. Researchers, especially those working with vulnerable populations who have mental health difficulties or are in institutions, should be mindful of the need to

secure and protect their data (Kellett et al., 2014). These populations may, in some cases, find it particularly hard to issue well-informed consent, so additional safeguards should be put into place to ensure their respect for autonomy as well as welfare. Misrepresenting or withholding relevant information from any participant group could seriously compromise the integrity of a study. This lack of transparency is not only unethical concerning these members, who have perhaps more than most dropped the senseless belief, but also is incompatible with the fundamental ethical research principles of objectivity, efficiency, honesty, and accuracy.

Deception

The practice of deception is widely accepted as unethical (Hayden, 2012). Indeed, informed consent is undermined by misleading information, which can lead to citizens being misled (Massoumi et al., 2020). As a result, the ethical principle of deception was also essential (Calhoun, Pian-Smith, Truog, Gaba, & Meyer, 2015). In the case of ethical fraud, children, teenagers, or adults could be misled if the researcher's intent is not clearly explained (Morrow, 2016). Since deception "…can result in a sense of mistrust and betrayal" (Calhoun et al., 2015, p. 164), as the researcher, it was his responsibility to follow all ethical guidelines regarding trustworthiness and integrity.

To avoid providing research participants with false information or misleading them, several eminent research ethics bodies have established thorough ethical guidelines, including the British Sociological Association (BSA), the American Psychological Association (APA), the American Anthropological Association (AAA), and the Research Ethics Committee of Unicaf University (UREC). This emphasis on openness is crucial because any betrayal of integrity can have a major negative effect on the reliability of research findings, thereby compromising their dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

Giving participants enough information about the goal of a study while maintaining the validity of the results is a difficult balancing act that researchers frequently encounter.

Ineffective or badly done deception is especially harmful, as Olson and Raz, (2021) argued, since it can quickly raise participant suspicions and compromise the validity of the study itself. Therefore, researchers have an unwavering ethical obligation to ensure that all information shared with participants is accurate and truthful, even in cases where certain details may need to be omitted to maintain the methodological rigour of a study. Any choices about withholding information should be well thought out, ethically supported and approved by the appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB). In addition, a thorough debriefing procedure at the end of the study is necessary to fully explain the objectives of the research to participants and address any possible issues resulting from information omissions.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality was an ethical principle that also needed to be observed. Specifically, confidentiality is referred to most frequently to protect the participants' data and information in research paradigms, such as qualitative research, where the sample size is small and the data collection method is personal interviewing (Clark-Kazak, 2021). Therefore, research data should be confidential, except for participants' consent (Ramrathan et al., 2017; Surmiak, 2018). However, researchers should be aware of the risks involved and how much confidentiality they can guarantee in this context. In practice, the digital recordings, the transcribed materials, and demographic information were kept separate from the consent forms and participant details to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

Protection of Participants

The safety and well-being of potential participants were paramount, and their protection should be a constant priority throughout the research (Xu et al., 2020). Therefore, the informants' names were not included; however, alphabetic and/or numerical symbols were used to protect each participant. Moreover, even though it is not always possible to anticipate some of the risks that may occur, researchers should ensure that participants are protected from

danger and harm, such as coercion, deception, mental, physical, and emotional exploitation, and emotional embarrassment (Surmiak, 2018). Researchers should also prevent the research from becoming contaminated. Nevertheless, the debriefing process can assist in addressing these risks at the end of the study (Greenspan & Loftus, 2022).

Debriefing

After completing the study, the researcher should engage participants in a debriefing session (Greenspan & Loftus, 2022). During the research process, human subjects should have the chance to pose pertinent questions and receive an honest reply after describing their involvement's purpose, results, and importance (Weinbaum, 2016). In this phase, researchers provided participants with appropriate and accurate information about the study, discussed and disclosed the research's results to the participants, and explained the possible risks (Surmiak, 2018). It has been shown that debriefing interviews provide credibility to a study and highly effectively boost reflexivity (Weinbaum, 2016). However, researchers do not need to disclose all study details before its beginning, as doing so could compromise its validity and outcome.

As a way to hold researchers accountable for their actions, UREC, the APA, AAA, BSA, and other ethics committees, associations, or organisations have established ethical principles for research. First, respect and dignity should be shown to potential participants. Additionally, they should be able to opt in voluntarily and without penalty at any time and be informed of the risks involved (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). In essence, before starting qualitative research, the researcher should adhere to several ethical standards, including informed consent, debriefing, protection of participants, deception, and confidentiality. Since participants are regarded as the foundation of the research, these guidelines ensure that their rights, well-being, and privacy are respected and protected from harm and danger (Surmiak, 2018).

Data Collection and Analysis

In this chapter, interviews and focus group interactive discussions were the primary methods of collecting data to converse with the participants (Arjama & Kangasniemi, 2024). Following appropriate procedures, a primary dataset was collected specifically for the type of study at hand. These data collection tools were designed to understand and describe the lived experiences of rural public secondary school leaders in Antigua and Barbuda and explore their perceptions about the leadership capacity-building trainings that school leaders need to be effective leaders. For this reason, Azad et al. (2021) argued that interviews were appropriate tools for exploring and effectively gathering in-depth insight into social phenomena [from participants' perspectives] to collect qualitative data that cannot be obtained quantitatively. In this regard, the school leaders were the authorities on the phenomenon.

A qualitative interview can be structured, unstructured, or semi-structured (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Unstructured interviews were used in this study to fully and thoroughly understand each participant's lived experiences in their natural setting. Notably, this approach is in alignment with the growing understanding that interviews are a crucial tool for gathering qualitative data in a variety of research paradigms (Martin et al., 2014) as elaborated upon in Table 9. Through the voluntary and open expression of ideas and emotions during interviews, participants provide researchers with the opportunity to gather detailed information, examine language and present complex points of view (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

Table 10

In-Depth Interviews and Focus

	In-depth Interviews	Focus groups
Nature of data	For generating in-depth personal accounts	For generating data which is shaped by group interaction - refined and reflected
	To understand the personal context	To display a social context — exploring how people talk about an issue
	For exploring issues in-depth and in detail	For creative thinking and solutions
		To display and discuss differences within the group

Note: Extracted from Design issues by Lewis (2003, p. 60) - some data are not shown

Unlike individual interviews, focus groups entail interacting with a group of people to obtain information about a particular subject. Focus groups are becoming a very useful tool for qualitative interviewing and evaluation (see Table 10), as Krueger and Casey (2014, as cited in Morgan et al., 2016, p. 109) point out, they have become much more common "over the past 25 years." By interacting with others, this method encourages participants to reevaluate and possibly strengthen their unique perspectives. Focus groups are naturally dynamic, producing a wealth of rich and varied data. They offer a safe space where people can feel more at ease disclosing private information and life experiences, especially when they are with like-minded people. However, it is crucial to recognise that divergent opinions may surface in this context (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). For this study, a total of four focus group sessions were conducted. Informants were divided into four groups of eight participants based on the sites, physical facilities, COVID-19 protocol restrictions, and the similarity of their roles and experiences.

Consequently, before the research data collection procedure could have been conducted, the researcher completed and submitted the Research Ethics and Approval Form (REAF) for approval to Zambia's Unicaf University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) on October 21, 2021 (see Appendix A). Subsequently, before obtaining approval from UREC on

December 9, 2021, a few changes were made to the research tools and population size. This was followed by the approval of the Director of Education in Antigua and Barbuda's Ministry of Education (see Appendix C) on December 15, 2021.

Per the ethical principles, a letter was written to the Director of Education (DoE) seeking permission to collect data from the schools. As a result, having obtained approval to proceed with the study, the data collection has begun; however, schools were on Christmas vacation, which delayed the process. Nevertheless, the Director's consent authorised the researcher to conduct the study at four rural public secondary schools and informed the school leaders who were the institutions' leaders and who would be willing to provide the data to build trust and buy-in to the research.

Once all the permissions were received, the Ministry of Education provided all school leaders' contact information - email addresses and phone numbers. Subsequently, potential participants were emailed a cover letter outlining the study's purpose, an invitation to participate in the research, the Informed Consent Form, and a demographic questionnaire. In such a case, the participants were advised that withdrawal was wholly voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without suffering consequences. Furthermore, the survey participants were informed that their responses would remain confidential and that their names or other identifying information would not be included (Potthoff et al., 2023). All electronic data collected and stored, whether in a Microsoft Word document, Excel spreadsheet, digital audio device, or email, were stored on a password-protected laptop computer, coded, and reported accurately, and the data were appropriately analysed.

Data Collection

After respondents read the information and signatures were received and cleared to begin the research, they were directed to complete a demographic survey (see Appendix K) via an online Google Form link in the email. Demographic data were collected regarding gender,

age range, years in education, years dedicated to school administration, job title, number of years in current position, highest academic qualification, and formal and informal leadership participation in development programmes. Upon receiving the hard copies, they were uploaded to the Google Form, and the data were exported from the Google Form to an Excel spreadsheet.

In-depth unstructured interviews and targeted group discussions were used in this study (see Appendices E–J). The interviewer and the interview questions functioned as the main instruments. For researchers looking to go deeply into a particular phenomenon, unstructured interviews are especially useful. Indeed, their adaptability permits open-ended inquiries (Popping, 2015), which may yield surprising revelations and a deeper comprehension of the subject. Since there are no preset roles, steps or questions, this method of conducting interviews is the least structured and allows for maximum flexibility and adaptability (Rueda et al., 2020).

From January 4, 2022, through February 2, 2022, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with eight participants (n=8) and four focus group sessions - four groups of eight informants (n=32). The interview process and focus group sessions took place for three weeks, mainly depending on the availability and schedule of the participants. In the end, the invitation was delivered via email and in person and collected within a day after delivery, followed by several emails and telephone calls to reduce non-responsive rates. Except for the delay in data collection, the researcher encountered no significant challenges once the process began. In fact, although some respondents were tense, on the contrary, it was apparent that most participants were relaxed, open, and eager to share their experiences and perceptions. Open-ended questions also allowed informants to share their knowledge and experiences. The researcher interviewed each participant for approximately 25-35 minutes and focused group for approximately 35-45 minutes face-to-face and using the Zoom web-based platform.

More, a note was posted on some leaders' doors stating, "*Do not disturb interview in progress*", and school secretaries were advised to manage all calls and messages. Participants

consented to the recordings being made using a digital recorder and the Zoom audio recording system to understand and ensure that the data were of high quality. On January 7, 2022, the first two interviews and focus group discussions (data collection) were conducted on the same site. After the two interviews, the third interview occurred on Zoom on January 10, 2022, between 7:00 p.m. and 7:40 p.m. On February 2, 2022, all focus group conversations and interviews were completed. Ultimately, as a result of the Zoom web-based platform, travel distance was reduced; however, this medium increased the number of interviews and focus group discussions per day.

In one of the face-to-face interviews, the students repeatedly knocked on the door, and the telephone constantly rang, interrupting the interview periodically. Consequently, it sometimes disrupted the principal's thought process, and it was necessary to stop the recording several times. Despite this, it was still possible for the researcher to collect data from the interviewees despite these obstacles. The exact wording and order of interview questions remained flexible to facilitate the interactive experience with each interviewee, and in cases where a participant's response needed clarification, the researcher repeated the question and asked probing questions. However, Hill et al.(2005) asserted that interviewers should ask no more than 8-10 scripted questions within one hour of the interview to ensure consistency among respondents and ample opportunities for probing. Every participant was allowed to schedule or reschedule an interview at the most convenient time.

Because this phenomenological study sought to describe participants' descriptions of human experience phenomena within the world (Finlay, 2014; Neubauer et al., 2019; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015), a digital recorder and recording system on the researcher's computer captured all of the interviews and focus group sessions, as opposed than trying to transcribe verbatim, allowing the researcher to play the recordings repeatedly for transcription. To further assist with this process, the Otter AI voice transcription tool assisted the researcher in

converting audio recordings into text scripts. After the transcription of the interviews and focus group discussions, the recordings were played back, and the transcriptions were corrected.

The researcher removed interjectory or filler words, sounds, and phrases, such as "umm," "ah," "What I am trying to say", "you know", "err", or "ahh" and added punctuation such as commas, semicolons, and full stops that did not change the context or content of the participants' description. For member-checking, participants heard the recordings, read the transcripts, and submitted comments where necessary (Ramrathan et al., 2017). The use of member checking in qualitative research was a standard method for maintaining the study's validity (Candela, 2019; Stahl & King, 2020). However, in contrast, limited evidence exists regarding its processes and outcomes (Brear, 2019). Three participants commented on and made minor modifications to their transcripts. The remainder provided affirmative approval for the transcript as initially transcribed. Recorded interviews and focus group conversations were transcribed verbatim and reviewed manually based on Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis step-by-step guide.

After collecting the interviewees' and focus group data, the researcher transcribed the transcripts verbatim. Following this, to conduct a thorough, in-depth data analysis, this study utilised the thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to guide the data analysis procedure. Thematic analysis identified and analysed raw data gathered through surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other qualitative research methods to uncover hidden themes or patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Thematic analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research. It is considered accessible and theoretically flexible for analysing data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In their research "Thematic Analysis", Braun and Clarke, (2006) identified six iterative processes or steps to effectively identify, analyse, and report qualitative data by conducting the thematic analysis (see Table 11 for a summary of these steps). The six identifiable steps were

"…familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 87-93). However, as Braun and Clarke (2012) noted, these steps need not be addressed linearly, as the researcher may switch between stages as deemed necessary.

Table 11

Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with the data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Note. Extracted from "Using thematic analysis in psychology" by (Braun & Clarke., 2006, p. 87).

The researcher followed an inductive approach to analyse the raw data in-depth and generated themes to answer the research questions. Specifically, as Bingham (2020, pp. 2-3) postulated, some critical elements of an inductive approach include "Make meaning from the data; Develop themes and findings; Identify representative data to support findings; and Explain findings using theory and literature."

In alignment with the purpose of the study, the researcher used the thematic analysis method to identify, analyse, and report themes or patterns discussed by rural leaders from

secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda based on their experiences. However, data analysis was a continuous process that involved unearthing deeper, deeper layers of meaning in the data.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) as defined by Clarke and Braun (2015, p. 1), "…is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning ('themes') across a data set." In essence, it systematically identified patterns or themes within qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2015). Therefore, during the first phase of the data analysis procedure, the researcher needed to be familiarised with the raw data. Specifically, it was crucial that the researcher fully immerse himself in the data to be familiar with its depth and breadth (Clarke & Braun, 2012). First, data familiarisation was done by reading and re-reading the participants' interviews and focus group interactive discussion transcriptions twice, taking notes, and highlighting areas to understand the materials better (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Next, the researcher repeatedly combed through the raw data line by line.

Despite this, it was recommended that researchers familiarise themselves with the data and confirm the accuracy of the transcripts by checking them against the original recordings. Braun and Clarke (2012) emphasised the relevance of familiarising yourself with the data. Following this, the interview scripts and corresponding pages were numbered to facilitate quick reference.

The next step in the research process, according to Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 61) is referred to as "…generating initial codes." At this stage, the manual stage signalled the start of the data analysis process. Finding potentially important information required a thorough reading and familiarisation with every interview and focus group discussion transcript. To code the data relevant and recurring words phrases, sentences, quotations or statements made by interviewees and focus group participants that were significantly pertinent and applicable to the research questions had to be underlined and categorised into small meaningful chunks.

Following the coding of all the data, those that shared the same code were compiled and listed in the following column with that code. The researcher looked through the data utilising these codes to identify the key themes and recurring meanings.

The third phase was "searching for themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 63). During phase three, the researcher collected codes to identify potential themes and all information relevant to each possible theme (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Then, it "…involves sorting the different codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89). Theme development was the primary focus of this phase because themes were the analysis's first and most essential element (Clarke & Braun, 2015). As such, it was possible to identify the essential data areas and connect them with the research questions.

Moreover, a theme was created by combining multiple codes. After sorting and analysing the codes, the researcher identified the themes and sub-themes and accessed the coded data extracts that corresponded to them. Furthermore, to indicate potential patterns, highlighters, and coloured pens were used to indicate potential patterns since the raw data were coded manually.

Searching for themes in advance of the fourth phase was helpful, where potential themes were reviewed. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 91) referred to this phase as "…the refinement of those themes." The codes were read in the first level to determine whether a coherent pattern emerged for each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and some previous themes were revised or discarded. After reading the entire data set, the second level of analysis consisted of the researcher verifying whether the themes were consistent with the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasised that coding data and generating themes may continue indefinitely if it fits the data well; however, they cautioned that this should be acknowledged and stopped. In other words, the process would be concluded after the researcher has read the

entire data set concerning the coded data and exhausted the themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), once this phase has been completed, researchers should have a pretty good understanding of the various themes, how they were related to each other, and their overall impact on the data.

Under the direction of (Braun and Clarke, 2006), the themes were refined to their ultimate form. Specifically, this included figuring out what part of the data each theme captured, as well as defining and honing the essence of each theme and determining how pertinent it was to the study's research questions. During this process, the researcher wrestled with important questions such as: What message did each theme convey? How, if at all, did subthemes relate to the central theme? Was there an overarching theme that connected all the others? The researcher ensured a rigorous and insightful analysis by defining each theme, identifying its essence and figuring out how it related to the data and research questions.

The process of thematic analysis resulted in data analysis and the creation of a narrative report. Indeed, as Braun and Clarke (2006) indicated, this narrative attempted to give a coherent, logical, and distinct account of the essence of the data and its significance to the research questions, going beyond simple description. Ultimately, this perceptive and thorough depiction of the results was made by weaving together the narratives within and between the themes.

Chapter Summary

School leaders play various roles and responsibilities in today's environment, and their quality has evolved in recent years. Consequently, to ensure success in today's globally competitive environment, school leaders should adopt a new mind-set and a more diverse skill set to cope with the changes. During this dissertation, a qualitative method was used to examine the experience of a group of participants. Initially, a qualitative phenomenological methodology was conducted to understand and explain the lived experiences of rural school

leaders in Antigua and Barbuda and explore the perceptions of leaders' leadership qualities to be effective school leaders. Furthermore, the qualitative research provided more profound insight into the topic and clarified the contributing factors that allowed for an "…in-depth understanding of phenomena embedded within research participants' views and perspectives" (Qutoshi, 2018, p. 220) as they lived it.

Therefore, in this chapter, a detailed description of the research methodology has been provided. The chapter also employed the thematic approach of Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyse the data, which allowed for rich, in-depth conversations with the participants. Besides providing them with an open-ended, guided study, it also described the method of selecting the population through purposive sampling and how the data were collected and analysed. Finally, it described and defended the procedures utilised to determine the credibility, transferability, and credibility, authenticity, sensitivity, and integrity of the data, discussed the potential ethical issues surrounding this research, the researcher's role in the study, what steps were taken to protect human subjects and their data and data collection and analysis and chapter summary. Chapter Four demonstrated that the methodology described in Chapter Three was applied to the data collected from the participants.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

To explore the alignment between contemporary leadership capacity-building trainings and the day-to-day difficulties experienced by secondary school leaders in rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda, this study employed a qualitative phenomenological methodology. The goal was to pinpoint gaps and suggest particular improvements to raise the efficiency and applicability of these initiatives. As such, the research strategy and technique were covered in length in Chapter 3, which set the stage for an extensive data analysis. The results of interviews with department heads, deputy principals, and principals of four rural public secondary schools and focus group discussions with teachers, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Antigua and Barbuda Union of Teachers (A&BUT), were then presented in Chapter Four. The information was arranged thematically per the study's research questions, offering a logical and perceptive analysis of the dynamics of leadership in different kinds of learning environments.

The study used a phenomenological approach to provide a thorough analysis and comprehension of the lived experiences of rural public secondary school leaders. Specifically, by critically capturing and communicating the individuals' inner experiences, this method attempted to provide a better understanding of their environment as expressed in their own words (Neubauer et al., 2019; Qutoshi, 2018). The detailed accounts these leaders gave were supposed to illuminate their reality as well as give guidance on strategies to improve their efficacy as leaders.

Chapter 4 is structured into four separate components, which are specified in the methodology presented in Chapter 3, and it gives readers a thorough knowledge of the experiences of the study participants. The trustworthiness of the data, research problem, research questions, and research objectives were briefly reviewed in the introductory portion

of Chapter 4. Descriptive findings were given in the second section, together with information on the participants' demographics and the specifics of the data collection procedure. Following this, the third section explained the data analysis methods that were employed. In conclusion, the main findings from in-depth interviews and focus groups were provided at the end of the chapter, along with the identification of main themes, all organised within a framework for thematic analysis (TA). This section served as an introduction to Chapter 5 and a summary as well as a place of departure for further investigation and discussion.

Trustworthiness of Data

This section examined trustworthiness. In an era where qualitative research is increasingly valued, it is critical to conduct it rigorously and methodically to yield meaningful and valuable outcomes (Nassaji, 2020). Therefore, as a matter of ensuring trustworthiness, Shufutinsky (2020, p. 55) argued that:

> Although self-transparency provides the researcher and the audience the opportunity to understand the researcher's position and to evaluate potential effects on the research methods or outcomes, the use of self for exclusion of self from the data may contribute to transparency and trustworthiness.

It is crucial to address how qualitative researchers made sure their results were credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable (Kakar et al., 2023). Thus according to Korstjens and Moser (2018, p. 120), the terms "…credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability"(Korstjens and Moser 2018 p. 120),which made it easier to explain how trustworthiness goals are met in qualitative research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Due to its subjectivity and other limitations qualitative research is much more accurate and reliable when methods are applied to ensure reliability (Ahmed, 2024).

Credibility

As per Korstjens and Moser (2018), credibility depends on the accuracy of the information gathered from participants and how the data are interpreted. In other words, it is

about whether the findings reflect the realities of the phenomenon (Nassaji, 2020). Furthermore, an effective strategy depends on the data; peer debriefing was recommended for adding external scrutiny to the research process, increasing credibility (Nowell *et al.,* 2017). Similarly, "…examining referential adequacy …to check preliminary findings and interpretations against the raw data" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, as cited in Nowell *et al.,* 2017, p. 3). Ultimately, it reflected the researcher's belief that the findings were accurate.

Another helpful strategy was member checking (Nassaji, 2020). Consequently, the researcher provided the participants with a copy of the interview transcripts to verify accuracy for increased validity. As a result, the researcher utilised the member-checking process and data saturation to ensure credibility. Each participant was allowed to review or modify their transcript (Stahl & King, 2020). Following the member-checking process and minor changes were made, they accepted the transcripts. Moreover, although the researcher accepted that saturation had been achieved with the initial eight interviewees, the researcher felt he needed to include ten additional participants not included in the initial sample to strengthen the transferability of the study (Farris & Babbage, 2018). A third strategy was triangulation, which entails using several methods and sources of data collection, thereby increasing the accuracy and credibility of the findings (Nassaji, 2020) and identifying recurring patterns (Stahl & King, 2020).

To conclude, the researcher concluded that the process had reached saturation after interviewing 18 informants and 32 focus group participants due to the high degree of similarity and commonality between the data sets. Nevertheless, the researcher purposefully recruited two additional deputy principals and eight department heads from the same four rural government secondary schools. Indeed, according to research, expanding the sample variability would ultimately enhance the credibility and transferability of the findings.

Transferability

When conducting qualitative research, transferability means the researcher can effectively transfer or apply the study findings to new contexts or settings with other participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Nassaji, 2020). For example, other contexts could refer to similar experiences or phenomena, circumstances, cultures, and populations. Therefore, the research activities and assumptions should be richly and comprehensively described (Nassaji, 2020). In other words, for transferability to be effective, Korstjens and Moser (2018, p. 121) recommended that "The researcher facilitates the transferability judgment by a potential user through thick description." As a result, the researcher can show readers that the study outcomes were applicable in other settings.

Indeed, in qualitative research, patterns and descriptions can be adapted to different contexts. Thus, a thick description should depict circumstances richly enough for others to understand (Stahl & King, 2020). Furthermore, the research provided insights into the meanings and contexts of the informants' experiences. Consequently, researchers would be able to determine whether the results of this qualitative study were applicable or transferable to the context of their study.

Dependability

Chowdhury (2015) suggested that dependability referred to the study's replicability and the ability to come up with the same results if the findings are consistent. However, according to Nassaji (2020, 428), the concept of "*Dependability* is an alternative notion to reliability in quantitative research." In other words, the findings should be presented to allow others to draw similar conclusions (Nassaji, 2020). Furthermore, Korstjens and Moser (2018) suggested that a study's dependability is assessed by how participants evaluate the findings, interpretations, and recommendations to support the findings from participant data. Similarly, if an individual

wants to replicate the study, he or she would be able to obtain comparable results from the research findings.

A critical dependability attribute was the consistency and reliability of the researcher's research results and how well the research procedures were documented (Stahl & King, 2020). Therefore, to verify this qualitative research study, the researcher ensured that the study was conceptualised, data were collected, interpreted, and reported results. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 3, the researcher provided clearly outlined methodological procedures and audit trails that enabled other researchers to replicate the research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to how well "…others confirm the researcher's interpretations and conclusions" (Nassaji, 2020, p. 428). Credibility, transferability, and dependability were required to establish confirmation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Therefore, it is "…recommended [that] researchers include markers such as the reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study so that others can understand how and why decisions were made" (Koch, 1994, as cited in Nowell *et al.*, 2017, p. 3). Thus, researchers engaged in qualitative research can demonstrate the accuracy of the results by providing information on analysing the data at every step undertaken to offer a rationale for selecting the data analysis method (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

However, to enhance the accuracy of the interview protocols that resonated with the participants' experiences, the researcher had two Education Officers who did not fit into the study's criteria to determine the validity of the instruments. Since the researcher was the central data collector, a pilot study conducted with seven participants provided insights into the phenomenon studied and gave the researcher experience in interviewing and further developing interpersonal skills– the ability to communicate and interact with the informants. As a result, a few errors in the interview protocols and interviewing skills were rectified and not replicated

in the study. *A*dditionally, digital audio recordings of the interviews and focus group interactive conversations were taken to ensure the use of the audio recording devices properly. Much attention was paid to verbal and non-verbal communication, body gestures, and how questions were asked were closely examined.

A pilot study for an interview is a valuable component of qualitative research since it underscores the importance of improvisation in the study (Ramrathan et al., 2017). Furthermore, Malmqvist et al. (2019) suggested that researchers conduct at least three pilot interviews or focus groups with people from the target population to help refine the wording and order of their interview questions, ascertain the issues being examined, and test the research methodology. However, it also allowed the researcher to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the main study (Hazzi & Maaldaon, 2015) and to practise using the protocol in a real-life interview situation to gain experience and evaluate the effectiveness of data collection and analysis methods before they were finalised (Hazzi & Maaldaon, 2015). In addition, the pilot study provided feedback on logistics concerns regarding the structure of the questions and their clarity, which helped the researcher identify necessary changes for improvement or modification (Popping, 2015) before conducting the actual interviews and focus group discussions, taking into account any issues that arose during the pilot phases to ensure that interview questions yielded credible results (Doody & Doody, 2015). However, in the data analysis, the study's results did not consider data from the pilot study. Consequently, the data from pilot groups were discarded once they had been collected.

Research Bias and Confirmability

In this study, the researcher himself was the instrument for data collection. Therefore, researcher bias and capability are a matter of concern and "…is viewed as both a problem to be managed and a threat to the credibility of a study" (Roulston and Shelton, 2015, p. 332), and it can severely undermine the trustworthiness of data if left unchecked (Roulston & Shelton,

2015). To address this, informants were asked to confirm that the verbatim transcriptions of interviews matched the actual data collected from participant interviews and focus groups, thus ensuring the validity of the data collected. Moreover, all participants read the interview and focus group transcripts and agreed with the transcriptions. Research validity is reinforced when the researcher's bias is clarified and acknowledged. Thus, to determine whether the study's findings and conclusions are credible, Noble and Smith (2015) argued that researchers should judge the soundness of the research as a function of the methodology used and the integrity of the conclusions drawn; hence, bracketing or setting aside his assumptions, preconceived ideas, and biases about the research topic based on the informants' experiences and beliefs.

The concept of confirmability refers to the extent to which the interpretation of the research results was not fabricated by the researcher but derived from the data. Therefore, throughout the research process, records of the research procedure and data were retained in the form of recordings and transcriptions. In this way, it allowed for research transparency and verification by other researchers. However, the researcher tried to reduce his biases to increase confirmability. Furthermore, to strengthen confirmability, the qualitative researcher practised reflexivity at every level of the qualitative research process. The researcher should be aware of their preconceptions and beliefs, accept his connections to the research questions and participants, and consider how these things affect the research (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). Adherence to these standards is key to trusting qualitative data on principal leadership capacity.

Participants' Demographics

The initial stage of data analysis involved carrying out a descriptive analysis of the sample population, which included four rural public secondary schools that participated in the research study and Officials from the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Antigua and Barbuda Union of Teachers (A&BUT). To achieve this, a demographic survey was distributed to all participants. The participants' demographic data were used to contextualise the analysis.

Specifically, each participant's background and experiences were explored and described by obtaining this information. During this phenomenological qualitative dissertation, any identifying information about informants or organisations participating in this study was withheld to ensure anonymity and confidentiality (Ngozwana, 2018; Pezaro et al., 2016; Sim & Waterfield, 2019; Surmiak, 2018).

The participants in this research study numbered 56 (*n*=56), and an identifier was assigned to each participant in place of their name—for example, P1 through P18, TUO1-3, MoEO1-3, and FG1 through FG4. Four principals, six deputy principals, eight department heads, 32 teachers, three Teachers' Union Officials (TUO), and three Ministry of Education Officials (MoEO) were accepted, as all the participants met the criteria except for two participants who either declined or did not meet the age criteria. Notably, the participants comprised 45 females and 11 males with various backgrounds and diverse educational attainments.

For the purpose of participant selection, purposive sampling was employed to identify participants based on the researcher's judgement about which one would be most informative (L. Wei, 2023) and stratified random sampling technique was used to select the teachers for the focus groups. This research dissertation utilised open-ended, unstructured interviews with participants and focus group discussions. In total, twenty-four informants participated in the unstructured interviews, and 32 participated in the focus group discussions. All the informants who expressed an interest and participated in the study met the criteria.

Demographic Questionnaires

The demographic questionnaires, available in Google Forms and hard copy formats, were utilised to capture crucial demographic data from participants. Specifically, these descriptive data were collected from rural public secondary school leaders, Teachers' Union Officials, and Ministry of Education Officials. The data included critical demographic

characteristics of the study participants related to gender and age ranges. However, the questionnaires did not include the exact ages, number of years in education, number of years dedicated to school administration, job title, number of years in current position, academic achievement, and formal and informal leadership development programmes, as presented in Table 12.

Table 12

Participants' Demographics Characteristics Data of the Study Participants: Gender, Age Range, Number of Years in Education and Number of Years Dedicated to Education

	Category	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	11	20
	Female	45	80
	Total	56	100
Age ranges	35-44	36	64
	45-54	17	30
	55-64	3	6
Number of years in education	1-5	0	0
	6-9	4	7
	10-14	18	32
	15-19	11	20
	20+	23	41
Years dedicated to school administration	1-5	16	29
	6-10	26	46
	11-15	7	13
	16-20	4	7
	21+	3	5

Participant Demographics: Gender, Age, and Experience

According to the data in Table 12, the gender distribution of the participants was 20% males and 80% females across all age groups. In terms of age, the participants ranged from 35 to 64 years, with the majority falling into the 35 to 44 bracket (64%), followed by the 45 to 54-year age bracket (30%). A smaller proportion, specifically three respondents (6%), were in the 55 and older age group. Concerning experience levels, the participants varied, ranging from one to over twenty-one years. Three participants had more than 21 years of experience in school administration, while four (7%) had between 16 and 20 years of experience. Sixteen

participants (29%) had one to five years of experience, and seven (13%) had between 11 and 15 years of experience. In contrast, most participants had been in school administration for six to ten years (46%). Two principals had been in school administration for over seven years, and six deputy principals had been in school administration for 1 to 5 years. In addition, a wide range of years as a school leader existed among heads of departments.

Relating these findings to the broader context, and in line with the national demographic statistics, the demographic data showed that principals and deputy principals had an average of seven (7) years of leadership experience (Table 1). Their leadership skills will thus probably be impacted by this degree of experience when they move into their new positions as department heads, deputy principals and principals. Four different settings and locales employed four individuals as principals. At least two remote public secondary schools employed five of the participants as deputy principals. Every participant worked in a public secondary school located in a rural area of Antigua and Barbuda. Consequently, four distinct rural geographic regions were included in the sample.

Table 13

Participants' demographics data: job title and number of years in current position

Groups	Category	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Job title			
	Ministry of Education Officials	3	5.4
	Teachers' Union Officials	3	5.4
	Principals	4	7.1
	Deputy Principals	6	10.7
	Heads of Department	8	14.3
	Teachers	32	57.1
Number of years in current position			
	1-5	22	39
	6-10	25	45
	11-14	2	3
	15-19	6	11
	20+	1	2

Note: *N* is the number of people in each group and subgroup of the population

Participants' Roles and Tenure

The demographic data, as shown in Table 13, included four principals, six deputy principals, eight department heads, 32 teachers, three Ministry of Education Officials, and three Antigua and Barbuda Union of Teachers Officials. Regarding the duration in their current roles, the data disclosed that the majority of participants had occupied their present leadership roles for around half a decade. Specifically, 22 individuals (39%) and 25 participants (39%) had one to five years and six to ten years of experience, respectively. As the table revealed, a combination of both leadership instabilities at these institutions and frequent turnover may account for the relatively moderate term that many leaders have held their roles. Overall, Table 13 further demonstrated that 47 respondents (84%) had been in their current role for one to ten years, representing the majority.

Building on the previous points, the distribution of participants across different roles (principals, deputy principals, department heads, teachers, Ministry officials, and union officials) provides a more nuanced picture. Given the sizeable number of teachers in the data it is likely that the study included viewpoints from people at different phases of their careers in addition to those in official leadership roles. This is important since teachers goals and experiences can provide information about the leadership pipeline for the future (Hirsh & Bergmo-Prvulovic, 2019). They may have especially enlightening opinions on leadership turnover and stability. The inclusion of Ministry of Education officials and union officials (three each) adds another layer of complexity. With their more comprehensive understanding of the educational landscape these stakeholders can offer context on systemic issues policy changes and collective bargaining agreements that may affect leadership mobility and tenure. Their opinions could help clarify the elements that support or undermine institutional leadership stability.

Considering the moderate tenure (one to ten years for most), it is worth exploring whether this is sufficient for leaders to implement meaningful change and establish a strong school culture. According to research a consistent dedication to establishing rapport encouraging teamwork and promoting educational advancement is necessary for effective school leadership. Longer tenures may result in resistance to new ideas or stagnation while shorter tenures may limit a leaders capacity to have a lasting impact. It is noteworthy that the average tenure of rural public secondary school principals in Antigua and Barbuda has been documented at 6 to 2 years. Research indicates that a consistent dedication to establishing connections encouraging teamwork and promoting educational enhancement is necessary for successful school leadership. While a longer tenure may result in stagnation or opposition to new ideas a shorter tenure may limit a leaders capacity to have a lasting impact. Its crucial to remember that the average tenure of rural public secondary school principals in Antigua and Barbuda is 6 to 2 years.

The data's implications for succession planning should be considered. The combination of potential leadership instability and moderate tenure underscores the importance of identifying and developing future leaders (Renihan, 2012). Schools and districts need to invest in leadership development programmes, mentorship opportunities, and succession planning strategies to ensure a smooth transition when leaders move on. Particular attention should be paid to the skills and qualifications required of teachers for them to be appointed to school leadership positions. By actively training teachers for leadership positions schools can lessen the negative consequences of employee turnover and encourage a continuous improvement culture. Given that a sizable percentage of participants in the data had held their positions for one to ten years with a notable concentration of one to five years this indicates that the leadership landscape is comparatively dynamic. There are a number of reasons for this besides turnover and instability. The amount of time seen might be representative of typical trends in

career progression within the education sector. Department heads and deputy principals are common starting points for aspiring leaders who want to gain experience before moving on to principal positions or other leadership roles. As they hone their skills and search for new opportunities many leaders may use the one to five year period as a developmental stage.

Succession planning techniques and leadership development programmes might be required to address these problems. By putting people in various roles for a predetermined amount of time to increase their experience, schools or districts can design programmes that identify and prepare future leaders. This structured mobility may have led to a distribution of the time spent in current roles. In assessing the impact of educational policies, it is critical to consider the effects of external factors like shifting priorities in education funding fluctuations and policy changes. These outside factors frequently offer leaders fresh chances or difficulties that could lead them to look for a different role or company. For a thorough examination of leadership tenure and stability in the educational system it is essential to comprehend these larger contextual influences. Perhaps in order to inspire a common vision and bring about change new leaders are being taught transformational leadership techniques.

Figure 3

Participants' Demographics Data: Highest Academic Qualification

Demographic data: Academic qualification

Qualification	Value
Postgraduate degree	1
PhD/EdD	0
Master's degree	12
Bachelor's degree	29
Associate degree	14
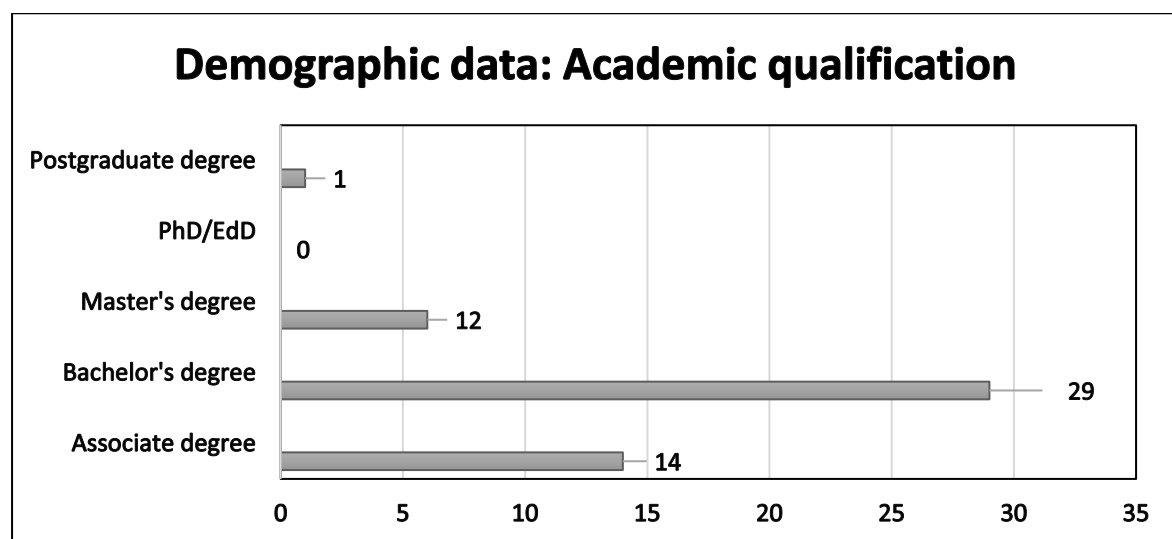
Participants' Educational History and Qualifications

Figure 3 presents the educational history of the participants, revealing that 29 (52%) of them had earned a bachelor's degree. Furthermore, fourteen individuals (25%) of them had obtained only an associate degree in teacher education. In a smaller number, just 12 (21%) and 1 (2%) of the participants held master's and post-graduate degrees in education, respectively (see Figure 3). This distribution may reflect the fact that many educational leadership positions only require a bachelor's degree, and hiring educational leaders does not always necessitate a master's degree. Consequently, the majority of participants are eligible for principal or deputy principal roles based on their undergraduate degrees.

However, it is important to note that significantly more than 25% of participants do not hold official credentials, although they have over 80 percent of their years of experience in the organisation's management hierarchical structure. Based on the requirements for principalship or deputy principalship, this suggested a gap - some of these people might not meet the minimal requirements to lead the school in that capacity. This situation raises concerns because the quality and experience of school administrators' existing responsibilities may suffer if they are unwilling to engage in the professional growth and training that leaders require due to financial limitations.

Figure 4

Participants' Demographics Data: Formal and Informal Leadership Development Programmes

Demographic data: Leadership development programmes

Programme	Value
Leadership In-service Training Programme	7
Leadership Internship Programme	1
Leadership Mentorship Programme	5
Leadership Prefessional Development	41
Educators' Summer Institute	32
University Leadership Develoment Programmes	7
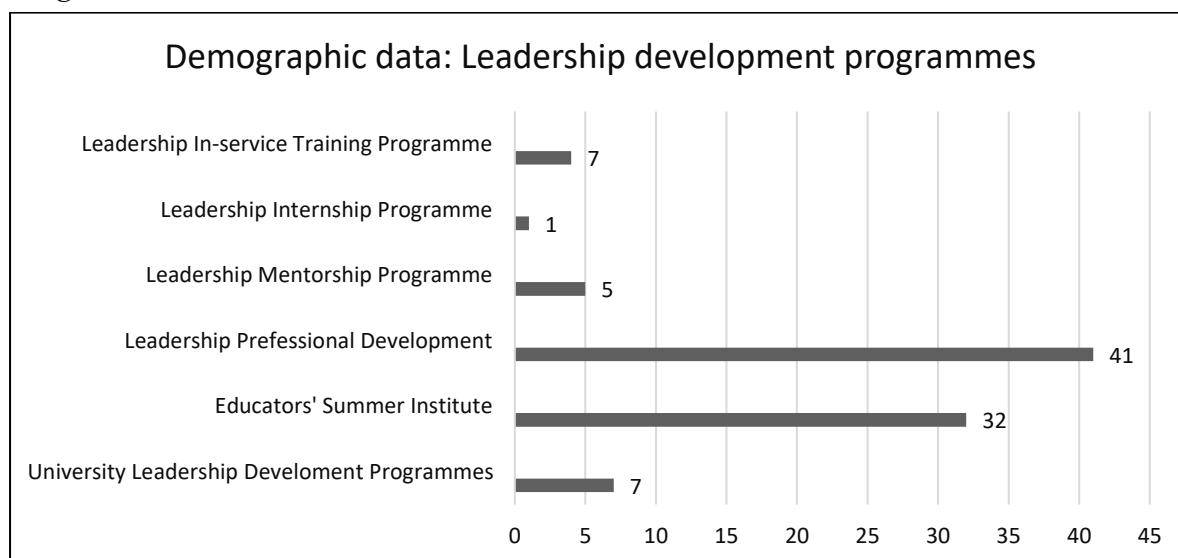
Support and Training for School Leaders

Figure 4 illustrates the types of support and training school leaders received, revealing that professional development and Educators' Summer Institutes were the most popular (41 and 32, respectively). This suggests that school administrators actively pursued and needed more opportunities for professional development in addition to Educators' Summer Institutes. Conversely, the data indicate that fewer leaders attended university leadership development programmes (7), mentorship programmes (5), in-service leadership training programmes (4), and leadership internship programmes (1).

This data indicates a recognised need for continuing education opportunities for school leaders with a notable emphasis on professional development and summer institutes. However concerns concerning the accessibility and perceived value of these options are raised by the decreased participation in internships mentorships in-service leadership training and university leadership programs. One possible interpretation is that professional development and summer institutes offer more immediate, practical skills and knowledge directly applicable to the daily challenges faced by school leaders. The format and timing of these programmes may also be

more convenient for busy administrators compared to longer-term commitments like university programs or internships. It is also possible that the funding and resources are more readily available for professional development and summer institutes, making them more accessible options.

The lower participation in mentorship and internship programs could also indicate a lack of structured opportunities or awareness about their benefits (Musyoka & Gentry, 2020). Mentorship programs, in particular, can provide valuable personalised guidance and support, while internships offer hands-on experience in leadership roles (Campoli & Darling-Hammond, 2022). The limited engagement in these programs may represent a missed opportunity to develop leadership skills through practical application and personalised feedback. Further research is needed to understand the barriers preventing school leaders from participating in these potentially valuable development experiences.

Data Analysis Procedures

To address this study's research questions, the relevance ascribed to the individuals' lived experiences was examined. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and extract meaningful insights from the data. Specifically, the study utilised Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis, as illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Six Phases in Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with the data	Phase 2: Generating initial codes	Phase 3: Searching for themes	Phase 4: Reviewing themes	Phase 5: Defining and naming themes	Phase 6: Producing the report
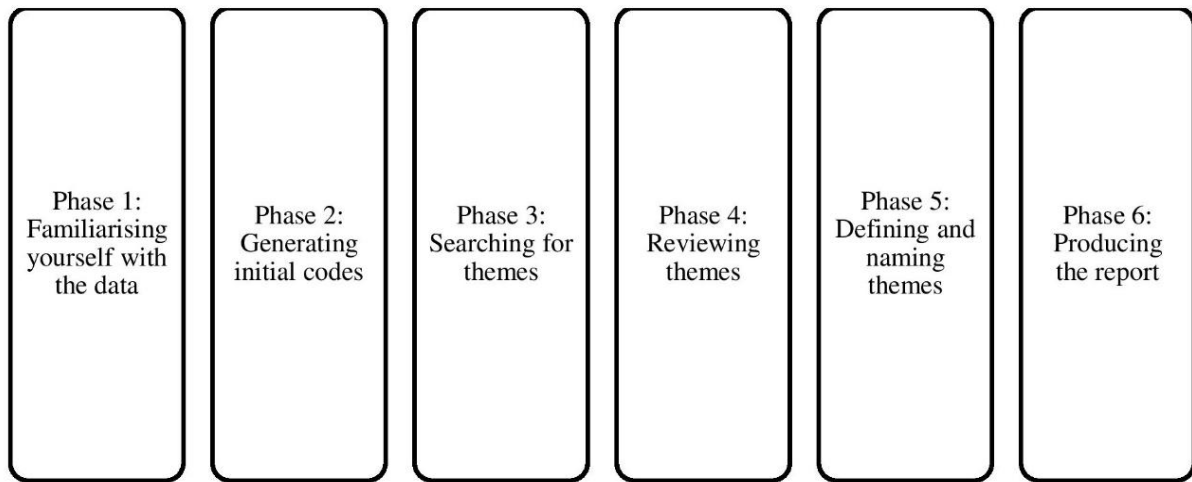
This study addressed its research questions by exploring the relevance ascribed to the individuals' lived experiences. Thematic analysis, as represented in Figure 5, was employed to systematically analyse and interpret textual data, aligning with its effectiveness in "…analysing experiences, perceptions and understandings" (Herzog, Handke, & Hitters, 2019, p. 2). Following the recommendation, the researcher used a thematic analysis to identify themes and patterns within the data and construct a narrative.

A vital step of the thematic analysis process was to become familiar with the data. The researcher listened to and reviewed all audio recordings several times to ensure the accuracy of transcriptions. In compliance with the standard thematic analysis practice, this was accompanied by going through the data narratives line by line and highlighting and underlining certain lines that were important or interesting to the overall analysis and relevant to the research questions (see Appendix O).

Initial coding was performed manually using Microsoft Word Highlighter and Colour Tools. These preliminary codes were extracted from the text by identifying the most frequently and saliently used words and phrases associated with the research questions or objectives, as

revealed in the interviews and focus group discussions. Braun and Clarke (2019) explained that:

> Codes tend to…capture a single idea associated with a segment of data and consist of pithy labels identifying what is of interest in the data (in relation to the research question). Codes can be conceptualised as the building-blocks that combine to create themes – so multiple codes typically are combined to create themes, during the process of TA. (p. 2)

This exercise consistently compared data across data sets and explored connections across various narratives.

Consequently, the next step of the thematic analysis procedures involved a review of the codes to begin developing themes. This resulted in examining the codes to begin the creation of themes. During this phase, patterns were distinguished based on the preliminary codes. As a result, the preliminary codes were arranged into a table, typically in rows and columns in Microsoft Word, to facilitate categorisation. The codes were categorised and grouped into columns, thus allowing the researcher to contrast and compare within the same category and against others. Each column was further divided into smaller categories for more specific analysis.

The initial procedure consisted of collating codes and supporting data. Subsequently, each category was assigned a theme. To ensure consistency, the transcriptions for the interviews and focus group discussions and the audio recordings were revisited and compared. As a result of this process, some of the themes were either discarded or combined to prevent repetition and then the codes were grouped into themes. Furthermore, the procedure consisted of naming and defining each theme to determine whether these themes helped understand the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2021), the themes should form an overarching "story" about the data presented to tell the story best. Specifically, "A theme captures a common, recurring pattern across a dataset, clustered around a central organising concept. A theme tends

to describe the different facets of that singular idea, demonstrating the theme's patterning in the dataset" (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 2).

Results

The results of this qualitative phenomenological study may help leaders better understand the experiences of people in leadership roles, which might increase the body of knowledge currently based on the literature on rural public secondary school leaders. Specifically, the themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews with informants (n = 24) and four focus group members (n = 32) were presented by the researcher in the research results section; furthermore, the themes matched the goals and research questions of the study. Drawing upon Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method, the findings of this qualitative phenomenological study were presented to describe the experiences of participants regarding their leadership experiences in leadership capacity-building in rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

This study utilised in-depth, unstructured, open-ended interviews and focus group discussions to collect raw data from public rural secondary school leaders, Ministry of Education Officials, and Antigua and Barbuda Union of Teachers Officials in Antigua and Barbuda to address the four research questions of this study. To this end, 10 questions, as seen in Appendices L-N, guided the interviews and focus group discussions. The interviews and focus group discussions were analysed across data sets, and six themes emerged; subsequently, these were further consolidated into four main themes: (1) Navigating Resource Constraints and Multifaceted Roles, (2) Balancing Community Engagement with Educational Leadership, (3) Leadership Competencies and Innovation in School Administration (4) Professional Development and Its Influence on Leadership Effectiveness (see Figure 6). In this chapter, the researcher discussed each of these themes. To illustrate, excerpts were presented verbatim in

quotes from the participants' interviews and focus group discussions to demonstrate how the themes supported the findings.

Figure 6

Themes

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                          ┌─────────────┐
                          │   Themes    │
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        ┌────────────────┬───────┴────────┬────────────────┐
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Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4
Navigating Resource Constraints and Multifaceted Roles	Balancing Community Engagement with Educational Leadership	Leadership Competencies and Innovation in School Administration	Professional Development and its Influence on Leadership Effectiveness
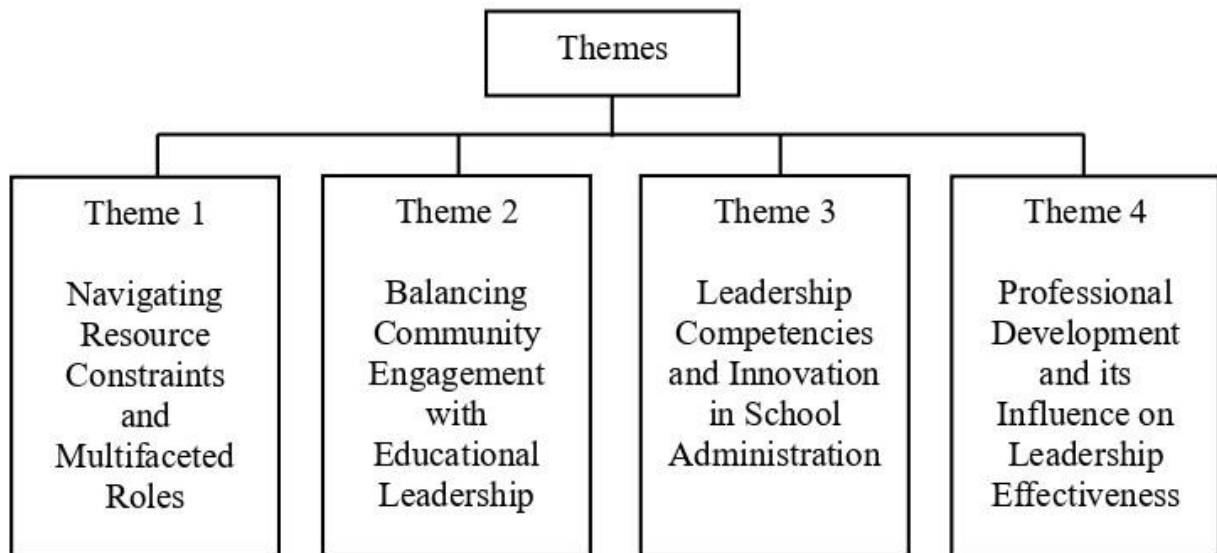
Theme 1: Navigating Resource Constraints and Multifaceted Roles

Every educational setting has a complex and multifaceted role for leaders but in rural schools these challenges are made worse by the lack of resources. In Antigua and Barbudas rural public secondary schools where leaders must constantly exhibit creativity and adaptability the first theme Navigating Resource Constraints and Multifaceted Roles aims to examine the characteristics of the leadership environment. These challenges are in fact made worse by the constraints of limited resources.

In rural settings, school leaders frequently encounter the harsh truth of dealing with fewer financial resources, diminished technology access, and a shortage of educational materials in contrast to urban school leaders. Consequently, these resource constraints necessitate leaders to take on various roles, not only as instructional leaders but also as resource managers, fundraisers, community liaisons, and sometimes even as teachers. The responsibility

of fulfilling a wide range of duties with limited resources characterises the daily experiences of these educators.

Therefore, this study explores how rural leaders successfully navigate the difficult terrain of a few resources while still making an effort to provide a high-quality education. It looks at the creative strategies and leadership philosophies they use to get the most out of the resources they have. Moreover, it also takes into account the role of rural leaders as change agents, who should imaginatively make the most of their positions to create learning environments that are robust, capable of adjusting, and prospering in the face of hardship.

Through an examination of their experiences and methods for overcoming resource limitations, this study seeks to emphasise the vital importance of the many responsibilities played by rural school leaders. Ultimately, it highlights not only the positive relationship that exists between resourcefulness and effective leadership in preserving the continuity and quality of teaching and learning in rural schools but also the resilience and adaptability needed to navigate the resource-constrained landscapes of rural education.

Navigating Leadership Roles During Unprecedented Times.

Leaders in these remote areas face challenges that are characteristic of their geographical location, as FG106 notes, and this often results in the marginalisation of rural institutions. Consequently, this geographical isolation underscores the need for training programmes that equip school leaders with strategies that can advocate for the subsidisation of resources and help overcome their constraints. Moreover, FG105 and FG106 stress the need for effective leadership in these contexts, particularly in support of firm decision-making, professional conduct and the collective determination among staff to excel, despite the challenges faced.

The leaders reiterated that the challenges have intensified as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, P1 states the challenges of undertaking core leadership functions, such

as organising and supervising face-to-face instruction alongside remote teaching and performing teacher evaluations in a time of crisis. This experience highlights the need for capacity-building training programmes for school leaders that will prepare them with the necessary skills to manage crises, efficiently work during a virtual learning scenario, and give consistent support to the staff whenever there are disturbances. Similarly, P1 emphasises the difficulties experienced when transitioning into leadership roles, especially after a well-loved leader or when there are contentious issues, thus reiterating the call for the preparation of aspiring leaders to change the focus from the functional aspects of leadership to the dynamics of organisational change and leading in difficult situations. Leaders entering new roles require a clear plan to excel during the transition (Potts, 2016).

The next challenge that most of the rural school leaders face is the scarce availability of resources. TUO2 points to the unavailability of physical facilities and a stable internet connection and makes a case for training that encourages inventiveness and flexibility. In this regard, TUO1 also mentions this need and explains that such schools are usually faced with difficulties in terms of funding. Therefore, it is implied that training programmes meant for school leaders should also be tailored to help the leaders understand resource management strategies and develop more creative ways of accessing resources.

The challenges faced by the leaders are also noticeable in the personal accounts provided by them. P8 went from experiencing anxiety through extremely traumatising stress to adjusting, which is indicative of the true weight of leadership in adverse environments. Thus, this suggests the need for leadership preparation that focuses on enhancing professional skills and cultivating emotional intelligence as well as resilience in leaders so that they perform their professional and personal roles successfully.

Moreover, rural school leaders experience additional barriers – both internal and external. P10 and P12 discuss the internal opposition due to the older and younger generations

present among the staff, while also recognising the external elements of socio-economic challenges that influence the students themselves and the entire operations and image of the school. Furthermore, P9 highlights that there are many shortages of staffing, thus reiterating the importance of capacity building of the leaders of schools in the area of recruiting and retaining schools in such conditions. Principal leadership strategies are vital in addressing teacher recruitment and retention in rural schools (Durnen, 2021).

The narratives provided by the leaders touch on multidimensional issues that are not limited to everyday management responsibilities. P4 rationale of their position in the greater educational hierarchy juxtaposed with TUO3's remark about students attending class without essential tools indicates the need for a leadership training programme that enables a more embracing systemic view. Indeed, such training should assist leaders in articulating the requirements of their facilities within a wider policy and structural framework.

The experiences of secondary school leaders in rural Antigua and Barbuda illustrate that the role of a leader goes well beyond managerial efficiency. To that end, to steer the ship effectively in these extraordinary situations, they need an additional arsenal of abilities including but not limited to emotional control, adaptability, out-of-the-box thinking, and an insight into the environment in which the school operates. This research recommends that specific training on building capacity for leadership is necessary to provide these leaders with the tools and capabilities that will address their challenges and ultimately the success of their schools and students.

These leaders maintain that their personal experiences help to portray the difficulties that they encounter and the adjustments that had to be incorporated into their work for long periods of crisis. Therefore, it is thus a space that embodies operational crisis management, work-empathetic leadership, and problem-solving. Cumulatively, these undertakings present a clear and detailed picture of the difficulties that connote leadership in rural public secondary

schools as a result of both personal and professional development and learning that takes place all the time.

It highlights the need for leadership capability enhancement interventions specifically targeted at rural leaders to help them deal with these challenges. In particular, training in areas like crisis management, compassionate leadership, or even conflict resolution will equip them with effective tools to manage their schools and their personnel during the most difficult situations. Rural communities presented multifaceted challenges that leaders must embrace.

In rural areas, public secondary school leaders have a multitude of duties and are highly regarded in the community. These leaders are not just managers of the institution; rather, they perform a multitude of functions simultaneously and adapt to the demands of their environment. For instance, this is also seen in the contributions of FG105 and FG106, who cite examples of the deployment of leadership skills in these circumstances on a rather diversified scale. FG105 focuses on the relationship between the dual task of department management and the other elements of the school management structure, stating that it is "Helping to manage my department effectively and to support the management team with issues governing the school." Moreover, it is also captured in the statements of FG105 regarding the importance of non-functional management aspects such as "Good communication skills, the ability to resolve problems that arise in your department/school, listening, [being] aware and [being] patient giving fair judgement in dealing with matters."

Defining the necessary competencies for undertaking a role under conditions of change evolution, such as through innovation and flexibility, FG106 states: "I would say, innovative, creative, plan and deliver, strategic thinking, adaptive to changes and good communication skills." In contrast, FG100 notes these challenges of firstly being contextualised in the way of understanding how schools work in the respective areas and managing to set targets for oneself as well as for the students one is helping through their

educational journeys, "The skills of learning how schools function, knowing your role and keeping directing positive energy, skills, knowledge and setting positive goals to achieve the final goals and getting the students shaped for their roles or their career pathways." In line with these observations, MoEO2 speaks to the importance of enhancing relationship management skills so that they go beyond the school and community members to also include parents and other stakeholders: "The leadership skill, which I believe would be relationship-building skills to foster the relationship that is necessary not only among the teachers but with the community, stakeholders, parents." To this end, such strategies are important to the rural leaders who do not run away from the community but look to remain engaged and more approachable as highlighted by P5, "In the rural community, I find the children…are a bit more reserved than in the city, you will have to pull things out of them."

This breadth of functions and the necessity for adjustment point out the significance of leadership capacity-building programmes, which can be adapted to the environment of rural schools. Specifically, it is in the context of such rural leadership that the leaders underscored the need for the leaders to possess skills that go beyond mere communication, to include problem-solving, relationship management, and mediating complex situations within the community. Therefore, it is essential to provide specialised training programmes to rural leaders so that they can handle all these different aspects and develop a positive and conducive atmosphere for education for all the students. Rural school leaders encounter challenges in the many roles they must play in smaller schools and districts (Zuckerman, 2020). These leaders are not just managers, but also community connectors.

Role Expansion and the Wearing of 'Many Hats.'

Under these circumstances, it is not always the case that the individual will follow an easy path towards leadership. A participant objects to the lack of adequacy of readiness of the newly appointed leaders and advocates for independent learning and self-experience: "There

is no preparation for these leadership roles … after being appointed to act, you are on your own" (TUO2). Indeed, based on this endorsement, especially in the rural setting, the situation is, most of the newly appointed leaders find themselves in, is that, there is no orientation offered, which helps them come to terms with the responsibilities placed on them and therefore they have to learn to perform their duties on the job. MoEO1 ensures the use of leaders who possess the potential to cause the movement of the schools from stagnation to their desired performance level, reiterates the need for capacity building focusing on the skills and leadership levels of the workers: "Principals have highlighted the importance of Professional Development that [is] geared towards improving their leadership skills and also that of the staff."

Furthermore, a school leader's professional background and skills may be of great importance regarding the quality of education in their schools. In other words, MoEO1 explains that a leader's potential and the way he or she leads can foster education or allow it to become stagnant and boring at best: "A principal's experience and leadership skill will either enhance the teaching-learning within the four walls or embrace mediocrity." This thesis, as TUO1 advocates, pertains more clearly to a situation where there is a difference in the ability of group members to lead. "The cohort of [leaders] do possess different competencies and in this case different strengths and weaknesses. Nevertheless...several challenges seem to be experienced across many of our schools, particularly in schools where leaders have been in position for seven years and above."

As shown in the case of P5, stakeholder engagement and local community reliance are reiterated while commenting on the structure of rural schools where relationships are often enhanced due to the small nature of the society: "In the rural community...it is easier to interact and notice the students and the teachers so we have a rather close-knit school community." However, TUO3 points out the issues of building trust and simply working as a team,

cooperating or collaborating that leaders working in rural areas regularly encounter: "Trustworthiness, teamwork, co-operation, and collaboration, as well as networking are some of the issues that I believe [leaders] of rural schools coped with daily".

Importantly, the progression to a leadership role is frequently prompted by affirmation from within the education sector. P7 recounts a personal experience of being identified as having leadership traits at an early stage, which gave her a precursor insight into what such a role would involve: "I was approached initially in 2009 by a principal, who told me he kind an observed great leadership quality in myself...I, therefore, was able to gain some insight into leadership."

Consequently, these observations bring to the fore the shortcomings and complications associated with rural school leadership, which once again raises the need for the holistic development of leadership skills. Unpreparedness, differences in the levels of leadership skills, and unique characteristics of rural schools point out that the provision of specialised training and support to cover such gaps for school leaders is critical. Therefore, to promote the advancement of others, building leadership capacity is needed.

The Multifaceted Reality of Rural School Leadership.

These experiences illustrate that the day-to-day life of a rural public secondary school leader is full of contradictions and complexities. They are expected to assume, and even succeed in, several different roles from departmental heads and school administrators to agents of change in their rural communities. The stories of the participants demonstrate that apart from being innovative, strategic and flexible, excellent communicative abilities are also necessary. Moreover, it is also worth mentioning that these interactions emphasise the almost total absence of prior assistance for the recently recruited leaders. Therefore, there is only one way to understand this: there is a need for better specified and organised pre-oriented retraining of these heads to help them with the performance of their duties and prevent them from

descending into mediocrity (MoE1). There are, however, difficulties adequate to the nature of the tasks. Since the rural population is typically small and rather fragmented, establishing external relations with various stakeholders creates challenges that demand enormous devotion from the leaders. Similar situations emphasise the additional needs of rural educational leadership, which go beyond the simply described factors of support, appreciation, and development concerning leaders in such positions.

There are, however, difficulties adequate to the nature of the tasks. Since the rural population is typically small and rather fragmented, establishing external relations with various stakeholders creates challenges that demand enormous devotion from the leaders. Similar situations emphasise the additional needs of rural educational leadership, which go beyond the simply described factors of support, appreciation, and development concerning leaders in such positions. Indeed, commitment, adaptability, and resilience emerged as consistent themes upon interviewing leaders of rural public secondary schools about their duties and experiences. As demonstrated by P6, his pride in his staff's readiness to go "…above and beyond…" and teach many courses demonstrates an admirable culture of devotion and adaptability. The openness with which P4 shared his developing passion for working with students embodies the personal growth that typically goes hand in hand with becoming an educator. P2 concisely expresses concerns about collegial relations and the operational culture within schools, pointing to "…the staff room…" as a hub of major issues. FG400 explores the complexity of leadership roles, covering everything from lesson planning to supervising less experienced teachers and handling a wide range of administrative tasks. Similarly, FG401 talks about her particular difficulty in ensuring that teachers plan lessons consistently, but she also highlights the general benefits of customising lessons for the rural setting.

FG402 brings up contractual concerns and different work approaches, which speak to more general systemic issues that may affect the efficacy of educational leadership. FG100

enriches this narrative by delineating the diverse responsibilities carried out by a department head, ranging from communication and evaluation of classes to formulating recommendations and managing administrative affairs. Building on this, P13 highlights how dynamics and challenges increase with the growing number of roles, in this case, administration in a school, educational issues resolution, and teacher evaluations, among others. On the other hand, P1 is a staunch advocate for neutrality and equal opportunities in every institution of education and balanced budgeting within schools. Such results of the findings reveal the complex and challenging aspects of leadership in schools in rural settings, courtesy of the commitment, flexibility, and determination that are characteristic in sensing and performing such functions. Motivation for such continues to be the access to support services, the provision of professional development programmes, and the need for change as opposed to the status quo regarding challenges that rural school leaders face in their quest to provide every learner with a fair chance in education.

The insights from the testimonies of these leaders who work in rural public secondary schools go further than mere anecdotal evidence. The narratives illustrate the scope of their work, their zeal in shedding light on their commitment, the relations among the personnel involved, and the operational challenges faced. Illustrating the importance of improving school systems, the leaders' experiences show the willingness to push for quality education despite logistical and human resource challenges. Ultimately, as a group, they present the need for leadership that recognises and honours the contentious nature of the roles, while still fighting for equity and justice in the support received from the education authorities and policymakers.

The ideas expressed by the school leaders and education leaders raise compelling issues on the characteristics of effective leadership in schools situated in rural areas. P2's remarks demonstrate the importance of having a progressive and active approach to learning in leadership, understanding that certain core skills are often taken for granted, and

acknowledging that becoming a leader who is also an educator does not happen overnight. Specifically, P2's account places great focus on the challenges of taking on the leadership job with no previous experience in interim leadership. This quick turnaround serves to bring to the fore the urgent need for specific skills and flexibility as core to effective training on the job. However, challenging these encounters may be, they also serve to reinforce the role of learning by doing in acquiring effective leadership skills. As identified earlier, numerous teaching experiences of P2 through different educational levels are one of the advantages she brings to her leadership position. Because of their vast experiences, P2 finds it easier to understand the educational system, which is an added advantage for them as a mentor and a leader.

In addition, P10 and P16 offer insights into the numerous aspects of education in rural areas beyond institutionalised learning. P10 notes the role of family and surrounding communities, specifically evaluating the effect of parental involvement and the detrimental effects of the parents' attitudes towards schooling. P16, however, does cover leadership skills development through self-learning, involvement in their respective unions, and acquisition of leadership experience, stressing the multiplicity of avenues for leadership skills development.

Leadership approaches differ, and in TUO2, the author explains that school leadership is not simple, as there are other aspects that managers and leaders have to deal with apart from management and order. Yet, in MOEO1, attention is given to the level of decision-making and, in particular, the role of school leaders in presenting contextual and informative leadership. These are also addressed in FG104 and FG102, where some aspects of leadership are analysed concerning the need to integrate prior skills, learn from others, and practice carrying out plans. It is noteworthy that all the respondents maintained that constructive leadership in a rural learning setting involves a fine interplay of institutional learning and a wide variety of informal practices, adaptability and situational responsiveness, as well as a commitment to continuing education. Additionally, they should not be ignored as they have a

great bearing on education, parental support, community development, and economic factors, among other external factors.

Theme 2: Balancing Community Engagement with Educational Leadership

      Overcoming Barriers to Parent and Community Involvement.

Managing the fine line between community involvement and instructional leadership presents unique challenges for public secondary school leaders in rural locations. Sustaining this equilibrium necessitates being proactive in removing obstacles to community and family involvement, both of which are critical to students' academic progress and general growth.

P11 sheds light on the mentality of the rural communities' culture, which may prevent participation: "I think because most of them are from that area. I remember when I went there; it was like the same thing. It's like, okay, for them, it's okay. Any excuses are valid excuses in their minds." This opinion emphasises the difficulties principals encounter when societal standards tolerate a lack of interest in the teaching process.

In contrast, the achievements in community participation are discussed by FG107, especially in terms of conceptualising education conformity with national standards: "Successes include getting teachers to become more aware of the requirements of the CSEC (Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate) syllabus and how they impact this regardless of the level they teach." Since it influences teaching practices and results relevant to the children in the community, this understanding is an essential first step in incorporating the community.

Highlighting the impact of parental involvement, or the lack thereof, FG101 notes, "Parental involvement in their child's life goes a long way to ensure academic success. From my experience, parents in rural areas seldom attend PTA meetings or inquire about their child's progress..." This lack of parental involvement presents a substantial challenge for leaders aiming to forge strong school-community partnerships. FG100 suggests a proactive approach to engagement: "A field report on the parents to gain their awareness of the roles of the school."

By actively reaching out and educating parents about the school's role, leaders can initiate more substantial community participation in educational activities. FG203 points out the leadership attributes necessary for overcoming these community engagement barriers: "And a leader needs patience when dealing with these issues as well as the ability to bridge the gap between the community and the school." Patience and bridging skills are vital for leaders as they navigate the complex dynamics between the school and its surrounding community.

Ultimately, FG106 concludes by discussing the critical leadership attributes required to accelerate change: "Leadership qualities that contribute mainly to the growth and change of the school include teachers and students having respect for each other and communication between all stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and students." This succinct statement captures the overarching goal of removing obstacles to successful community participation by fostering an atmosphere that is communicative, inclusive, and respectful of the opinions of all parties involved in the educational process. Mutual respect and open channels of communication between educators, parents, and students lay the groundwork for cooperative collaborations. The ability of the school to prosper despite the difficulties present in rural educational settings is greatly aided by this dynamic. Rural school leaders can improve learning results and aid in the development of the larger community by establishing partnerships and encouraging a culture of engagement.

Success Stories of Community-School Partnerships.

The study focuses on leaders' experiences with community-school collaborations as a means of examining the obstacles and achievements they encounter in managing rural public secondary schools. The success stories that the participants recounted show how educational approaches have changed, especially concerning the use of electronic technology in the classroom to improve instruction. FG107 highlighted a significant step towards modernising educational procedures: encouraging teachers to embrace electronic technology as a teaching

tool. P11 further elaborated on this, noting the advantages of providing students with laptops. This helped students overcome the issue of an occasionally subpar IT lab and enabled them to submit assignments electronically and communicate effectively with students who were frequently absent.

Despite initial recommendations needing more detail, FG402 expressed satisfaction with the changeover process, indicating that the overall results were favourable. The collaboration and skills of her teachers were major factors in the transition's success. Similarly, FG101 emphasised the importance of acting professionally, treating others with respect, and effective team communication to encourage cooperation and positive reactions from co-workers.

P11 further emphasised the shared desire for student accomplishment, illustrating how the community and school shared the common goals of seeing students reach their full potential. This draws attention to a key component of community-school collaborations: a concerted effort to advance academic success, which can be seen as both the impetus and the gratifying result of these cooperative efforts. Overall, the leaders' perspectives suggest that, despite certain difficulties, technology is being successfully integrated into instruction, particularly in rural areas. According to P11, providing laptops helps students overcome infrastructure limitations and maintains academic continuity, especially for those who struggle with regular attendance. This adjustment represents a more flexible and accessible educational system and addresses resource shortages.

The experiences of FG402 demonstrate potential benefits of adapting to new technology in education, highlighting that the success of this process depends partly on effective teacher collaboration. Meanwhile, FG101 underscores the importance of leadership traits such as respect and effective communication in gaining team support and improving the general operation of educational programmes in the school. Furthermore, P11's emphasis on

student success and achievement highlights a shared vision that is supported by both community members and school staff. The shared vision significantly aids in the development of effective community-school collaborations. The testimonies provided by participants attest to the success of these relationships, demonstrating that the resilience and adaptability of rural educational communities can prevail in the face of adversities.

Socioeconomic Factors Influencing School Leadership in Rural Areas.

This discussion focuses on the distinct socioeconomic elements that affect school leadership in secondary public schools located in rural areas. As FG103 rightly points out, leaders working in these contexts experience certain duties and difficulties, and their ability to navigate these challenges successfully is a true measure of their leadership. Echoing this, FG105 emphasises the critical need for consistency in leadership roles, as high turnover rates among principals and deputies can destabilise school management. Expanding on this, FG105 provides further details on the complex nature of the leadership position in rural schools, highlighting the continuous need for diligence in observing and assessing the performance of both educators and students. It also recognises the need to address various challenges and adequately prepare students for important tests such as the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC). This underscores the diverse responsibilities rural school leaders have to manage, necessitating effective and supportive networks, as well as efficient management strategies.

Demonstrating the accountability that leaders have to their communities, FG104 highlights the duty of school leaders to update stakeholders and higher authorities on the actions, problems, and solutions. Navigating the intricacies of school environments, including interactions with internal and external stakeholders, requires leadership skills such as effective communication and conflict resolution, a point further stressed by FG105.

FG203 highlights the varying levels of parental involvement in the educational system and challenges in engaging parents who do not recognise the importance of school. Given the

potential impact of this apathy on students' academic performance, leaders should implement policies that encourage parental engagement. Simultaneously, FG204 suggests leaders need to dedicate themselves to supporting and monitoring neglected students and mentoring them toward becoming productive members of society.

FG301 reflects on the experience of teaching in a rural school as a "cultural shock," where teacher morale is identified as a critical factor in student education. This suggests that leadership must focus not only on students but also on maintaining a positive and motivating atmosphere for teachers. FG303's personal experiences emphasise the importance of being aware of individuals' underlying struggles, reminding us that passion and awareness are essential traits for effective school leadership. Collectively, these insights paint a picture of the multifaceted role rural school leaders play, one that requires a balance of authority, empathy, and resourcefulness to address socioeconomic factors that influence their capacity to lead effectively. In rural schools, leaders are entrusted with bridging resource shortages, overcoming isolation, and forming connections that extend beyond the school gates into the larger community.

Leadership Capacity-Building Trainings.

Given the numerous obstacles rural school leaders face, improving school leadership is crucial. Capacity-building trainings should equip leaders with the right tools and strategies to navigate the specific socio-economic context of rural schools. This includes understanding the dynamics of poverty, scarcity of resources, and geographic isolation affecting students and the school as an organisation. Training could incorporate case studies, simulations, and community engagement opportunities to build this contextual understanding.

Recognising that student achievement is linked to parent involvement, these trainings should also explore ways leaders can promote parental involvement and community

participation in school-related activities. This includes enabling leaders to effectively interact with parents, address their concerns, and ensure that schools are welcoming to the families.

Furthermore, programmes also aim to enhance teacher retention by building teacher morale. Considering the difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified teachers in rural areas, it is vital to create a positive school environment by focusing on providing mentorship and professional growth, as well as promoting teacher wellness. An effective capacity-building training intervention in school leadership and governance is needed to enhance the capacity of principals (Lumadi, 2014).

In light of potential high turnover among school leaders, training should promote sustainable leadership practices Fusarelli et al., 2018). This can be achieved through mentoring, succession planning, and providing experience-building opportunities for future leaders. "Grow your own" models of leadership can be utilised in rural schools, but their effectiveness needs to be examined (McConnell et al., 2021)The department should form partnerships with higher institutions of learning and experts in different fields to improve the quality of workshops and training offered to school principals (Lumadi, 2014).

Theme 3: Leadership Competencies and Innovation in School Administration

      Nurturing Staff Relationships and Coping with Challenges.

Research into evolving trends in rural secondary school has identified key competencies needed for leadership and innovation in school administration. On important aspect, highlighted by focus groups and interviews, is nurturing staff relationships and effectively coping with challenges.

One of the biggest issues facing school leaders today is embracing modern technologies (FG106). Some participants noted tech-savvy students sometimes disregarded conventional approaches (FG106; FG103). Others observed the ineffectiveness of online learning when

students lacked the necessary technological skills, which resulted in inefficient teaching. Leaders must therefore act swiftly to prepare students and staff for the shift in technology.

Effective leadership traits such as respectability, assertiveness, decision-making, problem-solving, and supportability as also important (P17). These traits help one gain the respect of one's peers, foster a supportive atmosphere (P17), which is particularly important in rural schools where competing economic alternative opportunities, such as fishing, can impact schooling (P11).

Despite occasionally feeling overloaded, strong staff relationships and mutual support can greatly benefit leaders (FG300). Professional development opportunities, such as the Commonwealth of Learning's online tutoring programme and retraining in Google Classroom administration, are also advantageous. Workshops can also shape leadership responsibilities and provide the necessary skills, with stakeholders like the Ministry of Education offering methodical approaches to improve leadership qualities (FG105; FG106). Moreover, principals benefit from networking and coaching opportunities (Wells et al., 2021)

Balancing in-person instruction with remote learning adds another layer of complexity (FG400) that today's rural school administrators should manage. Therefore, rural secondary school leaders need a dynamic skill set to manage various teaching methods, build staff connections, deal with economic pressures affecting student attendance, and integrate technology effectively into the classroom. These perspectives are invaluable for gaining an understanding of the leadership qualities required to foster innovation in school administration while overcoming the difficulties inherent in rural environments (Viloria, et al., 2021).

Rewards and Challenges in Leadership.

This section explores the benefits and difficulties of leadership, particularly within the context of evolving trends in rural secondary schools. Education leaders in these settings can

navigate a complicated mix of challenges and successes, requiring a diverse skill set to effectively manage administrative and pedagogical responsibilities.

One vital reward is the ability to enhance teachers' knowledge. For example, raising teachers' awareness of the CSEC syllabus requirements ensures learning objectives align with standardised benchmarks (FG104). Effective communication and teamwork amongst people with different personalities are a prerequisite for success, highlighting the need for strong interpersonal skills to create a cohesive and effective team (FG104).

However, leaders must also proactively address challenges specific to rural educational settings (P11). This includes fostering creativity and innovation to achieve departmental and daily goals (P11). Balancing theoretical knowledge with real-world application can be difficult, especially when limited resources hinder experiential learning (Cray & Millen, 2010). Initiatives and inventiveness can be affected by leadership approaches. To promote an environment supportive of innovation, leadership should strike a balance between structure and empowerment. A top-down approach, while ensuring conformity, may intentionally inhibit creativity (P11).

Despite these difficulties, pedagogical leadership and strategic communication have enabled secondary school administrators in rural areas to successfully raise academic standards (FG301). Success also depends on a leader's ability to foster trust and relationships, encourage collaboration, and build leadership capacity within schools. The dynamics and complex character of leadership require advanced managerial skills, as well as continuous efforts to promote active learning in less-than-ideal conditions (Hardwick-Franco, 2018).

Effective Communication and Conflict Management.

The need for efficient communication and conflict resolution is highlighted in the context of rural secondary schools in light of evolving trends. Indeed, these elements are essential for navigating the affected school environment of the continuing epidemic. For

example, FG101 demonstrate a forward-thinking approach to leadership by foreseeing the necessity for cooperative problem-solving to solve learning gaps made worse by the epidemic. Specifically, to guarantee that education continues to have an impact despite previously unprecedented problems, this proactive mentality is centred on innovation and team participation.

P11 raises a salient point regarding the importance of directive communication; otherwise, students may lack initiative, as evidenced by their tendency to "mill alone in the corridor." This statement underscores the need for clear and precise instructions in managing student behaviour and ensuring adherence to schedules.

However, FG302 presents a more comprehensive perspective on leadership, stressing the need for effective leaders to possess several critical abilities, including skilful conflict resolution, active listening, clear communication, and strategic planning. In fact, these abilities are crucial for the day-to-day operations of a school as well as for the innovative projects that help students in the long run.

Furthermore, maintaining the visionary theme, FG302 discusses their attempts to adopt cutting-edge teaching pedagogical strategies and departmental improvement, which include interacting with colleagues who have leadership positions. This suggests that, in order to improve one's comprehension of duties and responsibilities, successful communication draws on a larger network of information and support that goes beyond one's local environment (Preston & Barnes, 2018).

In conclusion, the information presented by FG101, P11, and FG302 provides leaders a clear picture of a dynamic learning environment where they should employ a blend of creative problem-solving, pragmatic communication techniques, and visionary thinking. Therefore, effective communication skills are critical for handling current problems but also for preparing for future curriculum demands. Ultimately, a healthy and productive educational environment

is also dependent on the skilful and diplomatic handling of disagreements. The aforementioned competencies form the basis for leadership positions in the dynamic context of secondary education in rural areas, emphasising the critical equilibrium between proactive planning and adaptable communication in efficient school management (Larasati & Raharja, 2020).

Building Communication and Authentic Leadership.

Here, the need to cultivate genuine leadership and develop communication skills is emphasised in light of changing trends in Antigua and Barbuda's rural public secondary schools. Specifically, it highlights how essential these components are to helping rural school leaders grow professionally and strengthen their capacity to deal with changing dynamics in the educational setting. Moreover, leadership development should be consistently prioritised.

FG303 succinctly highlights the critical components that constitute good leadership, effectively summarising this sub-theme. Notably, among the essential elements, she suggests "Understanding the importance of building good communication, passion, drive, and authenticity." In particular, all other facets of leadership are based on effective communication, which makes it easier to give clear instructions, improves comprehension, and allows leaders, educators, students, and the community to have open discussions.

In addition to competency, according to FG303, a leader needs more than just competency; they also need to be intrinsically driven and have the inner will to conquer obstacles. Indeed, for efforts to be sustained in the rural and sometimes underfunded environments of rural schools, these internal attributes are essential.

Furthermore, the idea of authenticity in leadership acknowledges the need for sincere communication and open governance. Authentic leaders are aware of their motivations and ideals and make an effort to match them with their decisions and professional activities. A more cohesive and motivated learning environment is produced by this alignment, which fosters respect and trust between faculty and students.

Therefore, in rural public secondary schools, where resources may be scarce and remoteness may hinder cooperation, it is especially important to integrate communication skills, enthusiasm, drive, and sincerity in leadership (Preston & Barnes, 2018). These attributes enable leaders to encourage academic success, motivate their followers, and improve the school despite the challenges that come with their particular situation. In conclusion, through the elaboration of these communication and authentic leadership concepts, rural schools may ensure the resilience and durability of education in these areas while also adjusting to changing educational patterns (Zuckerman, 2020).

Theme 4: Professional Development and Its Leadership Effectiveness

Evaluating the Reach and Effectiveness of Training Programmes.

The influence of training on leadership effectiveness is the focus, which examines the efficacy and reach of rural public school leaders' training initiatives. Moreover, parental participation and support are a crucial yet sometimes overlooked component of educational leadership that P11 highlights. Specifically, P11 noted that "I don't think that they are not supporting, I don't think they know how to support," indicating a potential gap in parent empowerment that could be addressed through leadership professional development programmes. In addition, collaborative efforts and contextual adoption in leadership training can also improve school leaders' ability to communicate and carry out the school's mission.

Turning to direct professional improvement, FG101 recounts participating in "…a 6-week course on leadership" during their degree, suggesting a blend of theoretical and possibly practical elements aimed at enhancing leadership skills. A diverse approach to improving leadership abilities is demonstrated by the range of credentials possessed by FG100, which includes advanced studies in psychology, training in technical vocational education, and a diploma in education. The variety of credentials implies that a wide range of educational backgrounds contributes to effective leadership. In fact, the success rate of participants

increases significantly after training (Arslan & Uzaslan, 2017), as leadership development programmes can be quite productive (Aldulaimi, 2018).

FG107's graduate studies have exposed their leadership practice's strengths and limitations, as they embark on a road of developing self-awareness and skill building: "Initially, I had no formal training towards the leadership role...These modules have all helped to show me what I've been doing right and wrong and what changes I can make or adapt to suit my situation." This highlights the importance of exploring leadership programmes to identify areas for improvement. Planning well, having a people-centred approach, and having the ability to motivate others are all highlighted as leadership qualities (FG300). The human management abilities they have gained from their schooling are also valued, indicating that formal training may help develop the soft skills required for leadership. Therefore, promoting self-reflective thinking is a central need in leadership development (Nesbit, 2012). Also, leadership development programmes should develop leaders' interpersonal, intrapersonal and conceptual skills (Nesbit, 2012).

Challenges in Recognising Training Efforts and Adapting to Instability.

FG301 highlights a limitation in acknowledging training efforts though since her summer institute program did not result in a tangible certificate. This could have an impact on the perceived legitimacy and motivation for pursuing such developmental endeavors. Consequently when training initiatives are not officially acknowledged concerns arise about the incentives and motivation for leaders to engage in professional development. This requires considering how professional development accomplishments are acknowledged and evaluated.

Furthermore, as FG300 points out, the pandemic's instability makes it difficult to exercise leadership because it prevents consistent strategies from being implemented and time to mentor teachers from being developed. Consequently, this exposes a potential area for leadership training to concentrate on crisis management and adaptability. In fact leadership

programs clearly need to place more emphasis on resilience and adaptability in order to meet the ever-changing demands of educational systems particularly during a pandemic like the one that FG300 has experienced. Training programs now place a high priority on the capacity to lead and manage during times of unexpected and fast change. The focus of adaptive competencies is on the abilities and conduct needed to react to the ever-changing nature of a crisis (Hertelendy et al., 2021).

The Importance of Interpersonal Skills and Community Involvement.

To foster transparency and cooperation, P11 reaffirms the value of social abilities in leadership. Indeed, this underscores the need for having the ability to work with people, even when your viewpoints diverge. Therefore, to increase leadership efficacy, efforts aimed at providing leadership training should incorporate components that enhance interpersonal skills. P11's focus on transparency and cooperation highlights the need for training courses fostering the soft skills necessary for collaborative leadership. In addition to strategic and operational skills, leaders need to be able to create inclusive work environments and manage various teams and perspectives effectively.

The Role of Formal Education, Experience, and Continuous Development.

The participants' examinations of the training programmes indicate a crucial connection between formal education, real-world experiences, and the growth of interpersonal skills to enhance leadership effectiveness. The personal narratives from FG101 and FG100 demonstrate how a combination of specialised leadership courses and academic credentials yields a broad range of leadership competencies. All of these different educational experiences add to a leader's repertoire and preparation to handle the challenging responsibilities of educational leaders. There is also an increasing need to recognise and address the particular difficulties faced by educational leaders. As P11 indicates, part of this is giving parents and

other stakeholders the authority to assist the educational process. This is an area where leadership development programmes should also try to develop community involvement skills.

Yet, the feedback from FG107 and FG300 points towards a gap in continuous professional development and its practical application, stressing the importance of such programmes not only covering theoretical knowledge but also providing real-world applicability. These reflections advocate for ongoing training that helps leaders critically evaluate their styles and adapt to changes within the educational landscape.

After these talks, it is evident that for leadership development programmes to be successful, they should focus on the overall growth of educators, giving them the emotional intelligence, practical skills, and knowledge that they need to meet the challenges that the education sector faces today and in the future.

Transfer of Training to Practical Leadership Scenarios.

Educational leaders offer invaluable context for examining the relationship between professional development and effective leadership, specifically on the transfer of training to real-world leadership situations. For example, after years of teaching and working with several leaders, FG400 explains how her approach has been directly influenced by the cumulative wisdom she has received from mentors. She credits her leadership talents to their guidance: "Years of teaching and working with different principals...the good advice. The ideas that we would have shared with me make me able to do what I do." This testimonial serves as an example of how learnt leadership principles may be applied in training settings to day-to-day school administration.

Moreover, the transforming significance of professional development—specifically the pursuit of academic goals and mentorship—is further highlighted in FG406. "Guidance from my then Education Officer...I then went on to do my master's in leadership, which also increased my knowledge in being a good leader" (FG406). He talks of his experience, capturing

a narrative of sequential progress. This implies that building leadership acumen starts with well-designed courses and perceptive mentoring.

Professional development endeavours that provide clear guidelines and expectations, as reported by FG406, present practical resources for leaders: "…there was a video of more to be sent that outlined by various persons more teachers and ministry officials of the task and requisites that we as teachers need to follow." Thus, such materials act as a bridge, transferring abstract training into tangible leadership practices.

In addition, FG400 advocates for ongoing education and suggests more innovative learning programmes, including "...having professional development sessions where we can come together with ideas." This advice highlights a weakness in the way things are done now and shows how collaborative learning may affect the effectiveness of a leader. Similarly, FG406 shares how professional development has catalysed self-reflection and team enhancement: "It has caused me to do a lot of introspection [...] how I can do better. Also causing members of my departments to function even better to be more productive." This personal and team-based growth demonstrates the real-world implications of effective training.

In conclusion, P11 summarises the fundamentals of applied democratic leadership. "Not saying that you have to go with what people are saying, but at least allow persons to feel as if they're part of the decision-making process to be more democratic," is how important it is to take a practical step towards inclusion in decision-making. This communicates the idea that enhanced school governance and team involvement may be achieved via professional development that not only increases knowledge but also cultivates leadership characteristics.

Long-Term Effects of Capacity-Building on School Improvement Initiatives.

The testimonies provided by educational leaders about their experiences with leadership and professional development provide insights into the issue of professional development and its influence on leadership effectiveness, especially concerning the long-term

consequences of programmes aimed at school reform. P11 discusses the advantages of managing a committed team:

> Well, generally, it's been, it's been a good experience. I mean, I'm working with a team of persons who are quite capable of carrying out their duties. And not only capable but willing to go above and beyond what is required of them.

This reinforces the idea that team members' abilities and desire to go above and beyond are crucial components of effective leadership.

In addition, FG202 provides a realistic perspective on the responsibilities of departmental leadership: "As a teacher, it is not an easy task to constantly monitor teachers and all the affairs of the department and the school as a whole. This comes with a lot of responsibilities." Acknowledging the complex and demanding nature of their role, FG202 highlights the critical need for robust leadership capacity to manage extensive duties effectively.

FG301 underscores the need for adaptability in leadership tactics: "A leader needs to possess a blended leadership style marked by consultative leadership and decisive leadership styles." The integration of these styles is indicative of the evolving demands on leaders to mediate between participative and assertive leadership approaches for school advancement.

Furthermore, adding to the conversation on support within the school's leadership structure, FG204 illustrates her contributory role: "And since I took up the position, I am able to give support to my principal, deputy principal, colleagues, students and parents." FG204's role exemplifies the collaborative, multifaceted aspect of leadership and its importance in fostering a coherent school community.

FG302 focuses on the essence of teamwork and delegation: "Teamwork and delegating of work are two qualities that aim in school growth...I am an individual who listens deeply and respects other people's opinions." Here, the ability to distribute tasks while valuing different viewpoints is connected with fostering a growth-oriented school environment.

In FG303, it is discussed how leadership practice combines personal growth, professional development, and real-world context. She explains her strategy as follows: "For me, professional development, personal experiences, and reality have assisted in my leadership role. The aim is to remain receptive to others' ideas and to learn from their approaches." The testimony of FG303 emphasises the need for ongoing training and effective communication as the cornerstones of successful leadership and school reform.

Emphasising the need for effective collaborative practices and continuous professional development, FG400 notes the value of teamwork, even in smaller departments: "Good teamwork, even though there's only one teacher in my department...we collaborate together. So that would be a strength." Collaboration is not just about numbers but the quality of interactions that contribute to a productive educational environment. FG400 also comments on the dual challenges of meeting administrative deadlines and working with inexperienced teachers:

> Meeting deadlines for lesson plans and such...I really try and work with the teacher because the guidance because as I said, the very next in experience, and they are always very open and grateful for the help. So, it's still a challenge, but it illustrates that is very open because you have some teachers who are not very open and they put up resistance. But the teacher has been very open and very grateful for the assistance that has been given.

This remark emphasises how important it is to have an open mind and to be grateful to create an atmosphere that encourages growth and advancement. It stresses the necessity of raising any problems that may occur in the field of education.

The efficacy of leadership and the course of initiatives for school reform are significantly influenced by professional development. Capacity-building strategies have long-term consequences on school dynamics as leaders negotiate the challenging terrain of educational administration.

FG301 discusses how attitudes towards teaching are evolving, as well as the continuous battle with a lack of available human resources, stated:

> Currently, the trend in human resources is where most individuals see teaching as a job instead of as a career or profession. Also, the lack of human resources continues to be a challenge for the department. Getting over these hurdles would be my greatest achievement.

On the other hand, the phrase captures a major obstacle in the field of educational leadership - elevating teaching to a respected career option and dealing with personnel shortages.

FG404 reflects on the mentorship aspect of professional development:

> I've had to always have a recording [of] the progress of a new person to go over things with a new person, a new teacher is usually a new teacher who has just joined the system. So, it has been fairly positive to give guidance and so forth.

To maintain high standards of instruction and guide newcomers, experienced teachers should mentor incoming, inexperienced teachers.

FG407 discusses both the successes and the hurdles of implementing programmes: "A few of the programmes that I have put on organised with my department that were a success ... having teachers cooperate or collaborate to get that done, you know, is no easy task." Success, here, is attributed to collaborative efforts despite the inherent challenges, such as teacher shortages and differing pedagogical approaches among staff that FG407 further elaborates on:

> Challenges. Now, sometimes we have teacher shortage ... a lot of strain on us to carry that extra [students] and still do other duties, and differences in opinions or difference in ways in which persons would have their classes ... getting the classroom management ... can be a bit of a challenge.

These insights underscore the multifaceted nature of school leadership and the nuanced difficulties in uniting a team toward common educational outcomes.

FG407 continues to stress the operational aspects of leadership in overseeing academic planning and time management:

> Ensuring that [the] lesson plan is done and dealing with or whenever you want to have contact time...monitoring... keeping up with doing the class work face to face even

when you know, the other activities, which may take up contact time that you plan to do, you know, cover content.

The balance between administrative duties and facilitating effective learning experiences is highlighted as a critical component of school improvement.

Emphasising Teamwork and Delegation.

Because it emphasises delegation and cooperation, professional development for heads of departments, in particular, has a significant impact on improving the efficacy of leadership in education. These vital abilities are developed through supportive settings and well-designed curricula that encourage collaborative learning and leadership practice. Heads of departments need to process a unique balance of managerial leadership competencies to be effective.

The Ministry of Education plays a pivotal role in facilitating this growth through regular engagement and structured workshops, as reported by FG105: "Teacher HOD Management and Leadership Workshop." The value of these workshops is reinforced by FG102's mention of the term "Heads of Department meetings," which are strategically designed for HODs to convene and gain insights from one another: "Heads of Department meetings each term - These meetings are conducted by the Ministry of Education" (FG102).

The "Ministry of Education HOD meetings have been excellent for sharing experiences and for giving guidance in the expectations of the role," says FG101, contributing to the conversation about the benefits of Ministry-led HOD meetings. Department heads should connect themselves with the expectations placed on them and their teams through the sharing of experiences and practices. FG101 provides more examples of how professional development is implemented in the workplace by explaining the participatory and useful methods departmental meetings use: "The programmes implemented in department meetings involve role-playing, conducting meetings, and [motivating] students and teachers to achieve the goals of the department. Getting the tasks directed by the administration completed." Moreover,

research has long accorded heads of subject departments a key middle leadership role in secondary schools (Jarvis, 2008).

FG301 provides a constructive critique about the duration of leadership programmes: "There has been a significant improvement to my perspective as it pertains to my leadership role...the programme itself was too short to get that adequate information." Although the feedback from FG301 acknowledges the progress that has been made, it suggests that more thorough training might increase the long-term effects of effective leadership. The aforementioned finding highlights the need for comprehensive and continuous professional development initiatives aimed at enhancing and expanding the fundamental leadership competencies required to facilitate school reform initiatives.

Despite the introduction of leadership development programmes in Antigua and Barbuda, current capacity-building efforts fail to adequately prepare public secondary school leaders in rural areas for the distinct challenges they face. These challenges include limited access to technology and internet connectivity, difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers due to the rural setting. Data from the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology indicates that no principals hold a degree in leadership or management. This deficiency impacts school leaders' efficacy and productivity. The lack of adequately prepared leaders in rural schools can negatively affect student learning outcomes and overall school performance. Furthermore, generic leadership strategies often lack relevance in rural contexts, creating a gap between leaders' needs and the training provided. For example, training on managing large, urban schools may not translate well to the realities of smaller, rural schools with unique community dynamics (Thelma et al., 2024). This study seeks to assess the relevance and role of existing leadership training programmes in Antigua and Barbuda and to propose context-responsive capacity-building models tailored to the needs of rural public secondary school leaders. This study aims to bridge critical knowledge gaps and recommend more effective

practices and policies that respond to the specific leadership challenges faced by rural school leaders.

In this phenomenological qualitative study, a total of fifty (n=50) school leaders from four rural public secondary schools, along with three (n=3) Education Officers, and three (n=3) Teachers' Union Officials in Antigua and Barbuda provided descriptive accounts of their experiences. Chapter 3 of this dissertation is dedicated to dealing with data collection methods employed to address the primary research questions. The research questions are crucial in guiding the direction of this study, are as follows:

RQ1. What is the perceived contributions of capacity-building trainings to leaders' effectiveness?

RQ2. How do leaders in rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda experience and navigate challenges and successes within leadership capacity-building trainings?

RQ3. How are the evolving trends (contemporary practices) in leadership capacity-building trainings perceived and experienced by leaders in rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda?

RQ4. How do rural secondary school leaders describe specific changes in their leadership ptactices as a result of capacity-building trainings?

In academic study, research objectives serve to specify the goals of the research—what it hopes to learn, look at, comprehend, or accomplish. By directing the approach and specifying how data will be gathered, examined, and evaluated, they provide the study with a clear direction. Good research objectives should be quantifiable, feasible, and specified. They should also provide explicit standards by which the research's performance may be evaluated (McNabb, 2017). They guarantee that the study continues on course and advances understanding in the field by producing insightful results about the research questions or

verifying the hypotheses put forward (Sudheesh et al., 2016). When it is not possible to develop hypotheses, as in exploratory or descriptive research, aims might be expressed as questions that guide the research. The research objectives were:

RO1. To investigate the relationship between leadership capacity-building trainings and the effectiveness of leaders in rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda, through an exploration of their lived experiences.

RO2. To explore how leaders in rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda perceive and navigate challenges and successes within leadership capacity-building trainings.

RO3. To examine leaders' perceptions and experiences of evolving trends (contemporary practices) in leadership capacity-building training in secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

RO4. To explore how leadership capacity-building trainings impact leaders' personal performance in rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

Evaluation of Findings

As part of this qualitative phenomenological study, school principals, deputy principals, department heads, and teachers in rural public secondary schools including Teachers' Union Officials, and Ministry of Education Officials in Antigua and Barbuda were interviewed to explore how effectively the current leadership capacity-building training initiatives for secondary school leaders in rural Antigua and Barbuda are aligned with the challenges they face daily, identify existing gaps, if any, and suggest empirical evidence. Such capacity-building is crucial, as one of the key areas for improvement in any education system is the leadership required to drive its performance (Hutton, 2014).

In this section, the evaluation of the findings aims to answer the study's research questions regarding the data discussed in this chapter. All four research questions are addressed

as part of the evaluation of the findings. Consequently, the findings of this study are based on the evaluation of the findings from the unstructured interviews of 24 participants (n=24) and the four focus groups of eight participants (n=32) per group. Given the population size, the researcher has no intention of generalising the findings to all rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda or other contexts. Instead, the researcher provides information to existing and potential leaders and employers on building leadership capacity.

A total of four themes were identified that covered the lived experiences of individuals in the rural context who performed leadership and administrative roles. These central themes were: 1) Navigating Resource Constraints and Multifaceted Roles, 2) Leadership Skills and Community Engagement in Rural Schools, 3) Leadership Competencies and Innovation in School Administration, 4) Professional Development and Its Leadership Effectiveness. In addition, the researcher presented the existing literature in Chapter 2, which included research on leadership theories, leadership in a historical context, the impact of governmental policies on school-based decision-making, leadership capacity building, challenges in building leadership capacity in rural schools, and school leadership preparation.

Despite this, the existing literature has not explicitly addressed leadership in Antigua and Barbuda's rural public secondary schools. This statement suggests that, while there is extant research on educational leadership, there is a dearth of special focus or substantial study on leadership in Antigua and Barbuda's rural public secondary schools. This lack of explicit emphasis implies that there may be specific obstacles and conditions to this environment that have not been adequately investigated or addressed in earlier studies.

In this regard, by focusing on rural public secondary school leaders in Antigua and Barbuda, the current study contributes to the field of knowledge by exploring the views, opinions, and lived experiences of rural public secondary school leaders in Antigua and Barbuda. Since there is little research in this field, a deeper look at how principals, deputy

principals, department heads, teachers, the Ministry of Education Officials, and the Teachers' Union Officials perceive leadership qualities that make for effective leaders is necessary. Interestingly, to understand this study's findings, it is crucial to compare previous literature with the findings of this study.

Theme 1: Navigating Resource Constraints and Multifaceted Roles

The findings highlight the wide range of obstacles and dynamic responsibilities that rural public secondary school administrators encounter, especially when confronted with exceptional difficulties like the COVID-19 epidemic. The information obtained from focus groups and interviews delves into the difficulties of operating rural schools, which contend with the notion of scarce resources, geographical locations, and increased demand for high-quality leadership, such as sound financial management, model professional behaviour, and skilful crisis management.

Compounding the intricacy of managing schools in rural locations, the physical separation of rural schools from urban areas adds to the complexity of administering schools in these areas, which may also lead to feelings of marginalisation. According to Alam and Halder (2018, p. 552), "*Marginalization is a multidimensional process that denies opportunities and outcomes to those 'living on the margins', while enhancing the opportunities and outcomes for those who are 'at the centre.*" Rural school leaders should balance the demands of maintaining high professional standards with the need to make quick decisions despite emergencies like the pandemic, which has permanently changed the face of education. As FG105 and FG106 have shown, this difficult situation is made even more difficult by the direct effects of the pandemic (P1), which include making teacher assessments more difficult, taking on leadership roles in an uncertain time, and bridging the gap between virtual and traditional classroom environments.

The reference to TUO2 is noteworthy since it emphasises how severely lacking reliable internet access and physical resources are in rural public secondary schools. This highlights even more how important it is for school leaders in these areas to be innovative. TUO1 delves further into the difficult process of fundraising in these kinds of settings, where budgetary restraints are paramount and leaders' ability to manage them is critical.

The personal account of P8 captures the emotional pressure and consequent adjustments that leaders should make when faced with such situations. This illustrates how leadership may be personal amidst adversity, showing how frustration and tension give way to adaptability and emotional fortitude in the end. The findings aptly capture the dual nature of leadership difficulties in rural schools, with a focus on both the professional skills and inner strength required to lead schools through difficult times.

Exacerbating the multitude of challenges faced by leaders of rural public secondary schools, additional insights from P10, P12, and P9 divulge layers of internal resistance related to age differences among staff and socioeconomic problems that affect the student body, as well as changing the operational dynamics of the school. Growing older may be a cause of resistance to change that can hinder the adoption of new plans of action. Furthermore, the socioeconomic barriers cover the practical issues that students face right away, as well as the way the community views and uses the school in general, illustrating how external forces can impact school operations.

The commentary offered by P9 sheds light on the profound staffing shortages, bringing to light another serious issue that impacts rural leaders and adds to the complexity of their multifarious responsibilities. There are major obstacles due to the scarcity, which will probably have an impact on class numbers, the range of disciplines provided, and the general standard of education. New strategic initiatives may be hampered by staff members' resistance to

change, especially if they have more experience. Hence, García-Cabrera et al. (2011, as cited in Lomba-Portela et al., 2022, p. 2) suggest that:

> Resistance to change represents a critical psychological state of employees that affects the success of change initiatives undertaken by the organization, having the ability to seriously undermine these initiatives and lead to the failure of change projects driven by management.

Furthermore, based on the context and changes to be implemented, Lomba-Portela et al. (2022) asserted that it would be crucial to consider the type of resistance to change that will be encountered to lessen its impacts. Indeed, the challenges of rural leadership often include dealing with diverse expectations and even political factions within the community (Davidson & Butcher, 2019).

On the other hand, socioeconomic barriers can affect students' immediate practical needs as well as how the school is perceived and used in the community at large, which can have an impact on the school's wider social role. Compounded by TUO3 observation of students attending lessons without sufficient resources accentuates how important it is for rural leaders to take the initiative and use their ingenuity to make sure that students have access to the required learning resources they need.

Together, these accounts underscore the breadth and depth of what it means to lead a rural public secondary school, transcending mere administrative duties. As such, demanding traits such as emotional intelligence, flexibility, and creative problem-solving become clear, as these leaders navigate not just the everyday tasks but also extended crises.

In reflection of these experiences, it is evident that crises affect people on two levels: they affect leaders on an emotional and psychological level in addition to causing immediate operational problems. These leaders outline a job that includes leading with empathy and compassion in addition to handling the current situation and managing it. The accounts present a comprehensive and nuanced picture of the environment in which rural school administrators

work, highlighting noteworthy professional and personal growth in the face of enduring difficulties and the necessity of lifelong learning. The unifying theme among these experiences bears witness to the demanding and always-changing nature of leadership in such complex and frequently unheard-of situations.

A recurring thread in all of these narratives is the tenacity and ongoing adaptability required of leadership in situations this complex and frequently disregarded. This subject demonstrates the constant and changing nature of managing schools in settings that need a wide range of abilities and a strong moral foundation, yet frequently have few resources (Zuckerman, 2020).

The varied participants' perspectives demonstrate how intricate and varied the responsibilities of rural public secondary school leaders are. As previously said, these leaders do many more roles than just administrators; they also serve as department heads, level heads, communicators, mediators in conflicts, change managers, role models, and community builders (Davidson & Butcher, 2019). Each of these roles calls for a different skill set that is specific to the needs of the workplace.

Building on this complexity of roles, multidimensional leadership qualities are illustrated by FG105 and FG106. According to FG105's perspective, rural leaders frequently have to handle dual responsibilities that include both general school leadership and efficient department administrative issues. Crucial competencies for these leaders include the capacity for effective communication, conflict resolution, and peer relationship management. This broad range of expertise stresses not only administrative prowess but also interpersonal and strategic skills.

FG106 findings further reinforce the need for these varied abilities by emphasising the need for innovative and flexible rural public secondary school administrators who can both plan strategically and respond to changing conditions. In line with the emphasis on creativity

and effective communication (FG105), this supports the idea that rural administrators should think creatively and effectively express their vision to staff, students, and the community at large.

The perspectives of MoEO2 and P5 become pertinent when one takes into account the socio-emotional competencies that rural leaders should possess. Establishing and preserving connections with parents and other community members, as well as stakeholders, requires the relationship-building skills that MoEO2 emphasises. P5's observations on the restrained demeanour of rural children and the close-knit character of school communities in rural areas provide additional evidence of the significance of these abilities. These revelations highlight the close relationship between the dynamics and general well-being of the community and the responsibilities played by leaders.

TUO3's viewpoint brings a sobering reality to bear, connecting it to the fundamental needs of the position. Newly appointed rural leaders often lack sufficient preparation for the intricacies of their leadership roles. This illustrates how important experience-based learning and self-sufficiency are, especially when formal education is lacking. TUO3 perspective supports the idea that rural leaders need to be proactive and resourceful, highlighting the significance of adaptability and self-direction.

To elevate schools from mediocrity to excellence, MoEO1 underscores the vital need for professional development. This statement emphasises how staff members, especially those in leadership positions like principals, need to continuously improve their leadership skills to adapt to the particular obstacles faced by rural educational settings and achieve significant personal growth. This underscores how important it is to keep learning new things throughout life and adapting to new situations to lead effectively in these unique settings (Wells et al., 2021).

Building on the idea of lifelong learning, these stories highlight the critical role leaders play in determining the calibre of education provided at their institutions. This is particularly true in rural settings where they encounter particular difficulties and possibilities. The relationship between a principal's experience and knowledge and the ensuing student learning results is examined in MoEO1 and TUO1. MoEO1 highlights the critical role that leadership plays in either promoting or obstructing the advancement of education by highlighting how these qualities may either be a catalyst for greatness or a trap of mediocrity. Notably, TUO1 notes that there is a range of competence levels among school administrators; less seasoned leaders have comparable difficulties, indicating that experience and leadership aptitude are frequently linked.

P5 and TUO3 illustrate how important the community is to rural leadership. According to P5, leaders need to be proactive in involving staff and kids because of the close-knit community inside the school and the reserved attitude of rural youngsters. This demonstrates the significance of fostering close interpersonal relationships in rural educational settings. Returning to the significance of these connections, TUO3 asserts the involvement of the principal in building community cooperation, trust, and collaboration. these ideals are fundamental yet sometimes difficult to achieve in every educational setting,

Continuing with P7's accounts, it becomes clear how leadership evolves naturally within the academic environment. This highlights the value of recognising and nurturing future leaders amongst their peers, laying the foundation for transferring important knowledge and real-world experiences that shape a leader's approach and perceptions of their responsibilities (Wells et al., 2021).

It becomes evident that a rural public secondary school administrator has a diverse range of responsibilities and has to be well-versed in many areas, including strategic planning, clear communication, original thought, and constant situational adaptation. The anecdotes

brought together here point to a gap in formalised support for newly appointed leaders. This gap suggests a pressing need for more robust professional development programmes that adequately prepare school leaders for the diverse aspects of their roles and prevent them from falling into inertia (Viloria et al., 2021). Such programmes could focus on networking and coaching, which rural principals find particularly beneficial (Wells et al., 2021).

Leaders play a variety of functions in rural settings that extend beyond simple administrative duties (Zuckerman, 2020). Within small, tight-knit communities, they should establish meaningful relationships. This emphasises the unique nature of rural educational leadership and the importance of community engagement. It also highlights the importance of leaders having excellent interpersonal skills to properly involve many stakeholders.

The narratives that P6 and P4 provided elaborate on these special dynamics and highlight the flexibility and resiliency that rural educators should possess. P6 expresses satisfaction with the staff's readiness to take on different tasks, demonstrating their dedication to the school's success and individual development. P4 underscores the significance of fostering a spirit of innovation and emotional involvement to demonstrate the kind of innovative spirit and emotional investment that is required in rural educational settings. According to these accounts, leadership in these situations entails more than just carrying out administrative tasks; it also entails promoting a positive community, developing the potential of both teachers and students and guiding schools towards community improvement through individualised and flexible leadership strategies.

P2 further underscores the significant role of the staff room shapes school dynamics, articulating the importance of collegial connections and a positive operational culture in impacting the school's overall atmosphere and functioning. Building on this, P2 suggests that effective leadership entails not only promoting academic achievements but also overseeing teacher interpersonal relationships.

Furthermore, FG400 and FG401 elaborate on the multifaceted roles inherent in a leadership position, specifically the amalgamation of administrative and instructional responsibilities. These responsibilities range from general administrative duties, such as lesson preparation and providing hands-on mentorship to less experienced teachers. In particular, FG401 points to the challenge of maintaining consistency in lesson preparation while recognising the need to better adapt instruction to the rural setting, to improve student learning outcomes.

Expanding on the principal's responsibilities, FG402 discusses how leaders navigate structural issues impacting the effectiveness of education delivery. In addition, FG100 outlines a department head's responsibilities, which include correspondence, student grading, and decision-making, among other administrative tasks.

Moreover, P13 points out that one of the most difficult things about being a crucial challenge for rural school principals is juggling a multitude of duties. The complexity and demanding nature of educational leadership in such contexts is underscored by the need to balance multitasking, administrative work, dealing with specific to education educational challenges, and teacher assessment. (Zuckerman, 2020) also notes the challenges rural school leaders face due to fewer staff, requiring them to handle managerial and maintenance tasks in addition to instructional leadership.

To further the concept of justice in educational institutions, P1 advocates for success and fairness in the allocation of resources within these institutions. This perspective exemplifies a leadership vision that extends beyond the boundaries of individual schools and strives for a just and equitable educational system as a whole.

These findings from P13 and P1, alongside insights from Zuckerman (2020), contribute to the broader discussion regarding successful leadership in the rural context. They collectively advocate for a diversified and flexible leadership style capable of adapting to changing

operational and resource constraints while upholding high educational standards. These leaders share narratives that underscore the significance of practical experience, adaptability, and a deep comprehension of the educational process to develop effective mentoring and leadership capabilities, particularly for those who are transitioning into leadership roles without having prior incremental leadership experience.

P10 and P16 offer valuable insights into the external factors affecting schooling in rural areas beyond the traditional classroom settings. Specifically, P10 emphasises the vital roles of family and community involvement, noting that parental involvement and community perceptions of education can have a significant influence on the educational environment. This highlights the connection between academic success, broader societal views, and the support network provided by students' socio-familial ties.

Moreover, P16 suggests that leadership skills development is a complicated and multidimensional process. Effective leadership abilities can stem from a variety of experiences, including administrative roles, self-directed study, informal training sessions, or being involved in union activities. This indicates that a wide range of experiences, not just formal professional development programmes, can cultivate invaluable leadership skills.

TUO2 illustrates the intricacy of educational settings, asserting that leaders have a deeper understanding of the complex relationships within the school community, going beyond mere rule enforcement. Building on this, MoEO1 stresses the importance of decision-making in leadership, advocating for a sophisticated and nuanced situational leadership style. Together, these insights emphasise that adept decision-making is integral to leadership capacity building.

FG104 and FG102 expound on the various roles of leaders, suggesting a need to balance leveraging current skills with gaining knowledge from peers and real-world experiences to refine approaches. Here, the focus is on the continuous learning and adaptation processes necessary for leaders to remain relevant and effective.

These resources collectively suggest consensus regarding the complex balancing act needed for leadership in rural educational settings, The integration of formal education within non-formal learning experiences supports the capacity to adjust and retain situational awareness, together with a strong commitment to ongoing professional and personal development.

Furthermore, external elements such as community involvement, family support, and the socioeconomic status of the schools constitute the educational fabric. Given their significant influence on leadership efficacy and pedagogical strategies in rural schools, these factors are crucial and should be carefully considered. In essence, these narratives illustrate that school management requires not only instructional design but also a comprehensive understanding of the complex environment (Cray & Millen, 2010).

FG400 addresses the problem of academic pressure in resource-limited settings, describing the reality of burnout among teachers striving to maintain high levels of instruction standards despite these difficulties. This narrative demonstrates the need for resilience and the importance of support networks in reducing attrition.

P1's remarks highlight the staffing issues frequently encountered by rural schools. The migration of qualified teachers to urban schools creates a persistent struggle for rural schools in maintaining staff morale and respect. Nevertheless, P1's initiatives to implement career days exemplifies a resourcefulness adaptation to the situational needs, aiming to improve student's educational experiences despite the challenges of the rural environment.

FG404's establishment of a strong bond with peers underscores the importance of strong interpersonal connections within a department, offering refuge from the professional isolation. Similarly, P2 emphasises the need for empathy and motivation in leadership, viewing these qualities as vital for building and fostering a supportive learning environment. P2

suggests that leaders frequently draw upon their own experiences and studies of leadership theories to inform their leadership style with reflective practice.

According to P13, the role of a principal is multifaceted, requiring a balance between managing adults, influencing public opinion, and uniting the community behind the school's mission. This demands a passionate desire to inspire and empower all stakeholder.

FG102's experience highlights that leadership abilities, especially in time and people management, are evolutionary. This progression indicates an increase of leadership skills and a successful adaptation to the complex demands of educational leadership.

To P13, becoming principal means taking on a challenging position that includes managing adults and navigating public opinion in addition to trying to bring the community together around the school's mission. To encourage and inspire all parties concerned, this calls for a motivating drive.

P6 provides a compelling account of the long-lasting and profound impact leaders can have on their students. Re recounting the story of a former student who became a doctor, P6 illustrates the profound and long-lasting influence of committed and dedicated teachers who encourage students to achieve their fullest potential. Collectively, these testimonials provide a comprehensive picture of rural educational leadership, one that is marked by resilience, flexibility, and a strong commitment to individual and community development.

FG201 concisely describes the kind of adaptable leadership that thrive in a rural school setting. According to FG201, leaders in rural schools need a combination of perseverance, empathy, creative thinking, and an open mindset to overcome the numerous obstacles they face. In rural schools, where teachers often experience isolation, rural school leadership is portrayed as a pursuit of dedication and innovation.

FG400's testimony underscores the need for resilience in managing the relenting demands of educational obligations, especially when burnout is present. Maintaining academic

excellence while facing emotional difficulties requires this resilience. Conversely, FG404 articulates the value of healthy interpersonal interactions in the classroom, as they can enhance peer mentorship and support and alleviate feelings of professional isolation.

FG102 reflects on the evolution of leadership skill sets, emphasising the need for effective time and people management, particularly in rural settings where adaptability is crucial. This testimony highlights the potential for personal development in leadership positions over time.

P13 addresses the multifaceted role of leadership, equating the need to build community trust with influencing public opinion and inspiring individuals to support the school's goals. This perspective aligns with the idea that rural leaders should be community connectors, capable of navigating various challenges.

P1 considers the personnel shortages that rural schools often face due to the exodus of highly qualified educators to more urban areas. This problem underscores the importance of leaders fostering a culture of appreciation and support among their existing staff. P1's initiatives to improve student experiences, such as career days, demonstrate strategic innovation aimed at broadening the opportunities available to rural students.

P2's insights reveal that effective leadership involves more than just standard managerial duties; it also encompasses empathy, a strong sense of responsibility, and a genuine care for the well-being of both staff and students. P2 further emphasises the value of human flexibility, the ability to navigate the emotional dynamics of the school environment while considering perspectives shaped by personal history, such as the influence of early religious experiences on one's leadership style.

FG201 portrays a successful rural school leader as someone with dynamic flexibility. This leader requires strong character traits such as empathy, creativity, firmness, and an open mind to effectively handle the unique challenges of their roles. These leaders are skilled in

creating a school climate that fosters staff stability, growth, and community participation, in addition to upholding high standards despite limited resources and potential isolation. Hardwick-Franco (2018) suggests, the role of the rural school principal differs from that of metropolitan counterparts across a range of areas.

The various testimonials further highlight the multiple facets of leadership, exhibiting a range of talents and approaches that enhance the viability and effectiveness of rural education. Leaders successfully manage the stress of their demanding positions while simultaneously nurturing meaningful relationships, as evidenced by FG400. FG102's analysis of the development of leadership skills illustrates how these abilities evolve to better meet the demands of the educational environment.

P1 and P2 demonstrate how combining strategic initiatives with a caring leadership approach can achieve positive outcomes for students and staff, exemplifying leaders with an inventive spirit and a strong community dedication. Such leaders become integral community members, motivating students to achieve higher academic standards and overcome rural constraints. Their resilience and vision serve as examples for future generations.

Leaders of public secondary schools in rural areas play a vital role in mitigating any negative perceptions of their schools. They navigate the complexities of cultivating positive community ties and strengthening the school's reputation amidst the constraints of rural education.

MoEO2 highlights that rural schools' close-knit ties with their communities offer leaders a unique perspective on student backgrounds, which can be pivotal in overturning any adverse views by leveraging these robust community connections. This integration enables leaders to directly address misperceptions and significantly influence the development of future leaders through a commitment to excellence. As Lamkin (2006) notes, rural superintendents

often find themselves as the sole administrator and the only target of public criticism, bearing responsibility for both successes and failures in the school district and community.

TUO2 emphasises that proficient leadership extends beyond enforcing rules and regulations to include financial management, noting that poor financial management practices can undermine academic goals and damage the school's reputation. P18 underscores the visionary aspect of leadership, highlighting the need for leaders to inspire their staff with a strategic vision aligned with school objectives. Such a forward-thinking perspective plays a critical role in re-shaping public perception and guiding progress toward shared achievement. P1 and P2 provide detailed accounts of their individual experiences engaging parents in rural schools, illustrating the ongoing conflict between the appeal of urban educational opportunities and a parent's decision to enroll their child in a rural school. P2 proactively counters negative attitudes by advocating for research-based teaching and prioritising academic success to the community's perception.

Collectively, these narratives demonstrate the dedication of rural school administrators to changing public perception. By promoting academic achievement, cultivating community partnerships, and fostering confidence in data-driven successes, these administrators work tirelessly to improve the school's reputation and prestige in the face of external criticism and competition. This requires leaders to be not just community connectors capable of navigating the various problems particular to their region.

Theme 2: Balancing Community Engagement with Educational Leadership

Rural public secondary school leaders face the challenge of balancing active community engagement with their instructional leadership responsibilities. Successfully balancing these demands requires focused efforts to remove barriers that hinder family and community involvement, which is crucial for students' overall growth and academic success.

Given the importance of family and community, administrators should find innovative methods to integrate community resources and support in the classroom (Zuckerman, 2020).

P11 describes a deeply ingrained mindset in rural communities that may prevent participation in the educational process, making it difficult for leaders to change societal norms that seem to support a detached approach to education. FG107 notes progress in aligning teacher awareness with national standards, stating, "Successes include getting teachers to become more aware of the requirements of the CSEC syllabus and how they impact this regardless of the level they teach." This alignment ensures that educational methods and outcomes are relevant to and understood by local families, which is a critical step in garnering the community's support.

Research indicates that leaders who effectively navigate varying levels of parental engagement (FG203, FG101, FG202) often prioritise relationship-building, open communication, and tailored outreach to meet the needs of diverse families. FG101 emphasises the importance of parental involvement, noting its absence in rural communities: "Parental involvement in their child's life goes a long way to ensure academic success…From my experience, parents in rural areas seldom attend PTA meetings or inquire about their child's progress." This presents a significant challenge in seeking to strengthen school-community bonds. Effective leaders recognise this challenge and proactively work to eliminate barriers to participation (FG203, FG101, FG202), striving to make all families feel comfortable and included, regardless of their current level of involvement. Leadership training programmes should focus on fostering relationships, demonstrating equity, and offering parent support tailored to the community's specific needs. Rural leaders are usually entrusted with bridging resource shortages, overcoming isolation, and forming connections that extend beyond the schools' walls into the larger community.

To increase community engagement, a direct approach is advised, such as conducting "A field report on the parents to gain their awareness of the roles of the school" (FG100). Proactive outreach to educate parents on the school's objectives can significantly increase community participation in the school's activities. Effective leaders need "…patience when dealing with these issues as well as the ability to bridge the gap between the community and the school" (FG203). They should facilitate connections between the community and the school.

Qualities of successful leaders in bringing about change include "…teachers and students having respect for each other and communication between all stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and students" (FG106). It is important to remove obstacles to community engagement by creating an environment that is inclusive, respectful, and communicative. Mutual respect and open communication among teachers, and students are foundational. Rural leaders act as crucial community bridge-builders. Leadership training that equips leaders to navigate diverse perspectives and cultural barriers in fostering inclusive community engagement, addressing principles highlighted by (P11).

Rural school leaders should aim to improve learning outcomes and promote community development by removing barriers and fostering collaboration. The work to improve academic achievement and position their schools as active community hubs by cultivating strong relationships and creating inclusive discussions and decision-making (Harmon & Schafft, 2009). Their goal is to foster a view of education as an active component of the rural community, relying on cooperation and involvement (Bagenda et al., 2021). A key aspect of their educational initiatives is that they align with the community's unique needs and preferences (Cray & Millen, 2010).

They also seek to foster shared accountability and ownership among stakeholders, turning cultural obstacles into opportunities for advancement. An appreciation of cultural

sensitivity and the need to alter ingrained beliefs that may impede students' engagement is crucial. Equipping leaders with the virtues of patience and the aptitude for bridging divides is essential in developing a more cohesive and supportive relationship between the school and the community, as stated by FG203. Indeed, overcoming these engagement barriers is a testament to the resilience and dedication of these leaders. Furthermore, encouraging mutual respect and good communication among teachers, students, and parents is the heart of these initiatives, as encapsulated in the findings from FG106. With this strategy, education may be modelled after a community, where all members contribute to improving both the educational process and the community.

To this end, rural school leaders hope to promote a culture that values group involvement, lowers obstacles to successful cooperation, enhances educational results, and contributes to the development of a robust and more connected rural environment. They champion the value of education as the means to both personal achievement and the general development of communities via persistent lobbying and astute leadership. Moreover, FG107 recognised important advancements in modernising education by encouraging teachers to utilise technology more frequently and productively. For example, P11 discussion highlights the many advantages of providing students with laptops, which facilitates online work submission and helps overcome restrictions on IT infrastructure. In addition, keeping in touch with children who struggle with consistent attendance also helps them continue to advance academically.

However, FG402 admits that the initial suggestions for integrating technology may have been more thorough, or a favourable shift is evident, highlighting the role that teacher cooperation and expertise play in promoting effective technology adoption. Likewise, FG101 discusses the fundamental principles of professionalism and communication, acknowledging

that these attributes are critical to building strong bonds among teachers and guaranteeing the smooth running of learning initiatives.

In addition, the successful integration of advanced technological resources in rural school systems also depends on the efficiency of the existing and distributive leadership (FG107, P11). The findings of this study revealed that leaders often experience resistance to technology integration among teachers (FG402, FG101). Therefore, leadership training programmes provide them with effective strategies to overcome this challenge, underscoring a crucial area for improvement within capacity-building training programmes. Nevertheless, the successful leaders in this research affirm that the goals of integrating technology into education can be realised by cultivating an atmosphere of collaboration, giving follow-up assistance and addressing the issues of teachers. Hence, such leadership development programmes should lay more emphasis on those aspects that will help in fostering acceptance, engaging the teachers and creating productive cooperation that will facilitate the integration of technology in rural schools.

P11, FG402, and FG101's experiences and viewpoints converge to create a narrative of advancement. In particular, they provide insights into an educational setting where technology enhances collaboration and professional collegiality in addition to bolstering infrastructure. Recognising a common aim between the community and the school, P11 highlights student achievement as a motivating cornerstone and beneficial outcome of such synergistic collaborations. These narratives reflect not just the effective integration of technology into rural education but also the changing nature of the educational environment, which is becoming more accessible and adaptable. Specifically, the ideas expressed by FG402 support the noting that adopting a tech-enhanced education paradigm can be beneficial if faculty support is given priority. Simultaneously, the testimonies of FG101 emphasise the significance of possessing leadership attributes in fostering a collaborative and encouraging team environment.

P11's focus on working together to promote student accomplishment highlights the shared vision between the community and the school. Indeed, this focus helps to strengthen the collaboration between these two organisations. To this end, testimonials from leaders provide concrete proof of the commitment and adaptability of rural education systems in overcoming challenges. All of these endorsements demonstrate how important leaders are in helping their schools use technology and build these partnerships, thereby validating their role in creating a robust and forward-thinking educational environment.

Despite the lack of agreement on the role that parents play in their children's academic success, some studies suggest a significant influence. For example, Berkowitz et al. (2021) and Freund et al. (2018) suggested that students' social and intellectual outcomes are significantly influenced by parental involvement. Expanding on this, another scholar articulated that parenting is a multifaceted construct (Silinskas & Kikas, 2019), which can support students' achievement and interest in learning (Erdener & Knoeppel, 2018). It also allows parents to be involved in their children's decision-making, learning processes and outcomes. Moreover, participants felt that parents, the community, and the Ministry of Education could also be valuable sources of information for the schools, in addition to providing educational resources for their children, homework assistance, and attending and participating in parental attitudes toward education. In contrast, Pelemo (2022, p. 65), in a dissertation titled: *Parental Involvement - investigating the roles, barriers, and strategies of effective parent-teacher relationships in middle school math,* found that "All parent participants shared that the school had not created opportunities for parents to volunteer in the school."

According to the interview and focus group data, the participants' experiences and perceptions are crucial and contribute to the level of continued parental participation needed to raise or enhance students' achievements. In addition, participants discussed the relevance of the school in establishing ties with the community and connecting with parents who shared

their thoughts and experiences. As indicated by the focus groups and interview data, parents'

and the community's active participation is essential to students' academic achievement and

the institution's development. Furthermore, FG203 articulated:

> Even though I have similar experiences as my colleagues, I enjoy every moment of my work organising departmental training, working with my colleagues and students with one exception, and dealing with parents who do not care about their children's interests or the school.

Participant 16 stated that "…parental involvement needs to be improved. Although student

interest in learning has decreased, there is still hope that they can be helped if we all continue

to work collectively to do our best." Indeed, schools are a critical influence on family

involvement (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012).

Although it has been shown that parental involvement in education has a significant

impact on children's academic outcomes (Lara & Saracostti, 2019), the findings were that

parents in rural areas seldom attended PTA meetings or inquired about their child's progress

until the child repeats or sent home for some infraction (FG101). Rural schools have their

uniqueness; as with urban schools, however, those interviewed felt that students in rural schools

were more interested in working than concentrating on their schoolwork, a behaviour that their

parents often endorse. Furthermore, many times, parents would enter teachers' classes and take

their children out of the classroom without permission. This practice seemed to be widespread.

Occasionally, the principal intervened, but the experience was not pleasant (FG202).

Consequently, participant FG202 stated, "A leader must build relationships, demonstrate

fairness and be supportive to be effective." After all, school leaders are integral to school

success. Research indicates that:

> Family and community partnerships involve extending learning to the home and community contexts. Embedding families within a whole school approach reinforces the complementary roles of families and educators and extends opportunities for learning across the two contexts in which children spend most of their time. Community partners provide links with external support and mental health services in the

community, thereby ensuring there is access to services for students needing additional social and emotional support. (Goldberg et al., 2019, p. 757)

Hence, community members' perspectives should be obtained to comprehend these partnerships and examine the elements that support or hinder them. In addition, these community members have valuable expertise and information to help shape the community's future development. Despite multiple issues, the findings indicated that a few leaders persevered in juggling their professional and personal lives and tackled the challenge of cultivating ties with the community. In terms of the participant's demographic characteristics data, this statement may be linked to limited leadership years of experience in their role as school principals, deputy principals, teachers, and department heads (see Tables 12 and 13), as well as a lack of informal and formal training (see Figure 4).

Challenges and Impact of Leadership Turnover in Rural Schools

Leaders in rural public secondary schools face unique and complex socioeconomic factors, requiring them to balance increasing demands (FG103). As FG105 noted, this includes providing high-quality education amidst resource limitations and maintaining stability despite high turnover. Grissom and Bartanen (2019) found that ineffective leaders are more likely to turnover, while Azis et al. (2019) suggest that organisations need to identify the primary reasons for turnover to prevent it, highlighting the importance of organisational support and work satisfaction in reducing turnover. Sorensen and Ladd (2020, p. 1) asserted:

> *High teacher turnover imposes numerous burdens on the schools and districts from which teachers depart. Some of these burdens are explicit and take the form of recruiting, hiring, and training costs. Others are more hidden and take the form of changes to the composition and quality of the teaching staff.*

Principal turnover, which is more prevalent in schools with a more significant percentage of low-income, low-achieving, and minority students, negatively impacts students' achievement, teacher retention and the overall school environment (Grissom et al., 2021).

Leadership Responsibilities and Community Engagement

To mitigate these problems, schools require robust management and purposeful network creation. FG105 emphasised the need for leaders to vigilantly assess the efficacy of their staff members and the academic success of their students to guarantee that students are prepared for important exams. Effective leadership in rural schools also necessitates proficiency in communication and problem-solving abilities. FG104 sheds light on the value of responsibility in school administration, especially concerning the commitment to educating and involving stakeholders in the community to educating and involving stakeholders in the community and higher authorities about the school's goals, problems, and solutions.

Parental Involvement

Another essential component is parental involvement in the educational process, which is covered by FG203. School leaders need to address parents' lack of interest in the educational system, given its possible influence on students' academic performance and engagement and devise a plan to encourage increased parental participation (F. Wei & Ni, 2020). FG301 emphasises the importance of supporting teacher morale, a crucial factor in maintaining a positive learning environment. Additionally, FG303 highlights the significance of compassion and awareness in leadership, enabling them to understand the personal challenges faced by students and community members.

Rural school administrators have a vital role in overcoming the socioeconomic obstacles that characterise their educational landscape. To effectively guide their school, they need to be strategic, resourceful, authoritative, and empathic, maintaining a balance to navigate social dynamics and foster academic achievement.

Theme 3: Leadership Competencies and Innovation in School Administration

This theme, 'Leadership Competencies and Innovation in School Administration,' highlights the diverse initiatives required for effective school leadership and innovation in rural

secondary schools. It underscores the significance of developing a robust staff relationship and adjusting to various educational challenges. One significant challenge is adapting to students' digital preferences, as highlighted by FG106. Students are often more familiar with modern technology than with traditional teaching methods. At the same time, FG103 points out the difficulties of distance learning, especially when students lack technological proficiency or access, leading to inadequate instruction. Consequently, leaders must take the initiative in preparing both staff and students for evolving educational delivery methods and technological advancements.

Essential leadership qualities include respectability, assertiveness, decision-making, problem-solving, and supportiveness, according to P17. These traits are foundational for garnering respect and fostering a supportive learning environment, particularly in rural areas where alternatives paths like fishing, as cited by P11, may draw students away from education. Furthermore, principals in rural schools can be agents of change through collaboration with members of the school community (Preston & Barnes, 2018).

FG300 recognises the importance of an effective network for leadership resilience. FG300 highlights the value of professional development opportunities, such as online tutoring offered by the Commonwealth of Learning and training sessions for digital technologies like Google Classroom. FG105 and FG106 further emphasise the positive impact of educational training on leadership roles. Workshops led by institutions like the Ministry of Education and Education Officers offer valuable strategies for refining leadership skills, equipping participants with the knowledge and skills needed for efficient management.

Adding to the complexity of school administration in rural settings, FG400's comments reveal the challenge of balancing in-person instruction with remote learning. Ultimately, school leaders in rural public secondary schools require flexible leadership skills to manage diverse teaching approaches, cultivate positive staff relationships, address the impact of socioeconomic

factors on education, and integrate technology into the curriculum. These leaders' insights provide valuable knowledge on the leadership skills necessary to foster innovation in school administration and effectively address the unique challenges of rural settings. Success hinges on their ability to manage personnel and provide effective instruction. Leaders should possess core knowledge, abilities, and attitudes to promote student learning

Enhancing Teaching and Fostering Innovation in Rural Schools

FG104 highlights the importance of improving teachers' understanding of the curriculum to align pedagogical teaching strategies with standardised assessments. It also stresses the need for leaders to possess excellent interpersonal skills to facilitate effective communication and collaboration among staff. P11 notes the relevance of personal leadership and stresses that creativity and innovativeness are essential for leaders to overcome daily obstacles and departmental challenges. This is particularly relevant in remote learning settings, where proactive leadership is crucial. FG301 echoes the mix of challenges and enthusiasm in educational leadership, highlighting the need for effective classroom management strategies. Leaders must also bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in a real-world context, as highlighted by FG301. This requires innovation and flexible approaches. To foster innovation, rural school leadership should balance structure and flexibility, ensuring conformity without stifling creativity. A strict top-down approach may inadvertently limit creative energies. Rural principals can be agents of change through collaboration with members of the school community (Preston & Barnes, 2018).

Effective communication and strategic pedagogical leadership are key drivers in elevating academic standards in schools. Leaders in the settings face the ongoing challenge of promoting active learning in less-than-ideal situations while fostering innovation, maintaining structural integrity, and managing limited resources (Viloria et al., 2021). They should be able

to deliver practical, context-appropriate trainings that make them change agents capable of steering their schools through the complexity of rural education.

Navigating Challenges in Rural Education through Communication and Proactive Leadership

In the evolving landscape of rural secondary education, the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the critical need for effective communication and conflict resolution. To address the learning gaps exacerbated by the pandemic, FG101 champions a proactive leadership strategy focused on anticipating problems and fostering collaborative solutions. Complementing this, P11 emphasises the necessity of directed communication, observing that without it, students might exhibit impulsive behaviours, such as aimless wandering in school hallways, thus highlighting the importance of clear guidance in student conduct and maintaining structured schedules.

Furthermore, FG302 advocates for a comprehensive approach to leadership competencies, proposing a toolkit encompassing not only effective communication and conflict resolution but also active listening and strategic planning. These skills are essential for both the daily management of schools and the implementation of ambitious, creative learning initiatives. Keeping with the vision of advancement, FG302 also discusses endeavours to embrace advanced pedagogical methods and departmental enhancement through engagement with a broader network of educational leaders. This underscores that a deeper understanding of one's responsibilities relies on robust communication networks extending beyond local confines (Zuckerman, 2020).

Consequently, based on the testimonies of FG101, P11, and FG302, an engaging educational environment requires leaders to employ a variety of tools, including innovative problem-solving techniques, practical communication strategies, and proactive vigilance. Effective communication is the bedrock for addressing current challenges and anticipating

future learning needs (Lynn et al., 2023). Maintaining a positive and stimulating learning environment also hinges on adept and diplomatic dispute resolution. In the dynamic setting of rural secondary education, these fundamental competencies lay the groundwork for effective leadership, showcasing the delicate balance professional school leaders must strike between proactive planning and adaptable communication (Hayes et al., 2021). Leadership development should be a priority to build the leadership capacity of rural secondary school leaders by providing mentorship, coaching, job-shadowing, ongoing professional development opportunities, and internship programmes.

Against the backdrop of evolving educational trends, the need to cultivate authentic and transformational leadership, alongside improved communication skills, is paramount in the rural public secondary schools of Antigua and Barbuda. These elements are essential for rural school leaders to advance their careers and adapt to changes within the educational system. Echoing this sentiment, FG303 elucidates the components of effective leadership, including the development of robust communication channels and a leader's passion, drive, and commitment to genuine interactions. This, in turn, facilitates open dialogues among leaders, teachers, students, and the community, fostering stronger mutual understanding.

Iterating on the essence of leadership, FG303 suggests that capability alone is insufficient; leaders must also possess intrinsic motivation and the resolve to overcome challenges. These inherent traits are vital for sustaining growth in the demanding and often resource-constrained settings of rural schools (Zuckerman, 2020). Effective leaders boost success and shape team perceptions. Moreover, authenticity in leadership, characterised by open communication and transparent governance, necessitates that leaders consistently align their personal beliefs with their professional responsibilities, ensuring their actions reflect their stated values and goals. This alignment reinforces respect and trust, strengthening the

educational community and fostering a more motivated and coherent learning environment. Transformational leaders inspire and encourage positive changes (Alzoraiki et al., 2024).

In rural public secondary schools, where obstacles such as limited resources and geographical isolation can impede cooperative efforts, leaders who possess strong communication skills, enthusiasm, initiative, and moral courage are particularly valuable (Kelker, 1998). These essential characteristics enable leaders to inspire their teams and drive academic achievement, ensuring continued learning even amidst inherent challenges. By nurturing communication and authentic leadership skills, rural schools can not only endure but also adapt to changing contexts. By cultivating these attributes, leaders in rural schools can ensure the persistence of strong and innovative pedagogical practices, thereby maintaining the quality and dynamism of learning, even in the most isolated settings (Hayes et al., 2021).

Theme 4: Professional Development and Its Leadership Effectiveness

This theme underscores the critical role of capacity-building training for educators in rural public secondary schools, emphasising that leadership effectiveness is contingent upon such initiatives. P11 highlights the often-overlooked role of parental involvement in educational leadership, noting that leadership capacity-building programs are necessary to bridge the knowledge gap between parents and how to support their children's education. By doing so, parents can become more engaged and empowered participants in the educational process.

FG101's participation in a "6-week course on leadership" demonstrates how effective leadership skills development necessitates blending academic knowledge with real-world application. FG100's varied educational background, including educational theory, technical vocational evaluation, and psychology, highlights the advantages of a broad knowledge base for efficient leadership. Their multidisciplinary experience contributes to their multifaceted leadership talents. Formal education can significantly improve self-awareness and leadership

abilities, as noted by FG107, who discusses the transformative effect of graduate courses on their leadership approach. This self-reflection exemplifies how academic research can help refine one's leadership style to better align with their specific context.

FG300 asserts that careful preparation, a people-centred approach, and the ability to motivate others are pillars of exceptional leadership. Recognising the significance of their educational experiences in shaping people management abilities suggests the beneficial impact of formal training on developing the interpersonal skills required for successful leadership. To expedite leadership capacity building in rural secondary schools, leaders should accept the need for professional growth. Collectively, these insights emphasise the need for a systematic approach to leadership development, recognising that formal education can enhance a wide variety of skills, from social awareness to technical ability. Participants' personal experiences highlight the complex nature of leadership training for those in rural public secondary schools, underscoring the wide variety of skills required of them (Hardwick-Franco, 2018; Preston & Barnes, 2018). To effectively prepare leaders, training programmes must extend beyond formal skill acquisition to include the recognition and validation of training efforts, as this is crucial for encouraging continued professional development (FG301).

A key aspect of leadership development involves cultivating crisis management and adaptive leadership skills, especially considering unpredictable events (FG300). Training should address how to manage disruptions to mentoring and school administration, enabling school leaders to navigate the constantly evolving issues they face. Furthermore, social competencies are critical for fostering open communication and collaboration, highlighting the need for interpersonal skills in leadership training programmes. Comprehensive leadership development programmes should also include community stakeholders, such as parents, in addition to educators, to ensure a holistic approach (Zuckerman, 2020).

Blending formal education with practical application is essential, combining theoretical knowledge with hands-on guidance in real educational settings (FG101; FG100; FG300; FG107). Given the geographical isolation and limited access to specialised services in rural communities, leadership development must address the unique challenges of the rural context (Murphy, 2022). This includes providing ongoing support from content educational experts to bridge the gap and ensure rural leaders receive the necessary resources and mentorship (McConnell et al., 2021) (McConnell et al., 2021). By focusing on these key areas, leadership development programmes can better equip rural school leaders to drive positive change and improve educational outcomes.

In essence, effective leadership development requires a blend of formal education, practical experience, continuous learning, and strong interpersonal skills, all tailored to the specific challenges and opportunities of the rural school context (Hardwick-Franco, 2018). It calls for leaders who acknowledge and accept the need for personal and professional growth and develop the leadership abilities and tenacity to build capacity in others that are interwoven into the context of the school culture. Networking and learning from other leaders is also beneficial (Wells et al., 2021).

Unrecognised professional growth for leaders, as experienced by FG301, raises concerns about motivation and highlights the need for adequate acknowledgement and valuation of professional opportunities. Tumultuous circumstances, such as those brought about by pandemics, necessitate resilience and flexibility training in leadership curricula, empowering leaders to navigate rapid transitions effectively. These points underscore the need for training that integrates operational skills, strategic expertise, emotional intelligence, teamwork, and flexibility to overcome educational obstacles (Zolkoski et al, 2021).

Leadership training programmes can enhance problem-solving and change-initiation skills, with research suggesting these programs have been significantly more successful than

initially anticipated (Bowers, 2017; Clifford et al., 2016; Cosner, 2019; Lacerenza et al., 2017). Educational leaders' accounts demonstrate a concrete relationship between professional development and effective leadership. Similarly, FG400's reflection emphasises the influence of mentoring and shared experiences on school management, highlighting the importance of incorporating advice from experienced leaders (Wells et al., 2021).

FG406's educational journey exemplifies how a strong leadership foundation starts with structured academic programs and mentorship, enhanced by advanced degrees. Professional development resources, such as videos detailing duties and expectations, translate theoretical knowledge into practical strategies. Furthermore, FG400 advocates for more active professional development workshops, indicating a need for collaborative learning forums. These experiences demonstrate that professional development is a flexible vehicle for crafting knowledgeable, reflective, and equitable leaders who represent the students they serve, manage teams and navigate education's complexities. Initiative among team members enhances leadership efficacy, as P11's positive team leader experiences and a motivated group suggest. The success of the leadership structure depends on this commitment, yet FG202's admission of the difficulties associated with being Head of Department highlights the demanding nature of the role and the need for strong leadership capacity.

Democratic leadership is essential for representing diverse views in decision-making, with P11 emphasising the importance of collaborative decision-making across the school community and knowledge extension concerning professional development. A hybrid leadership style is also essential, requiring flexibility in decision-making and consultation. Similarly, all levels play important roles in effective practice, with FG204's complex role underscoring the need for leaders to provide positive support. Collaboration is highly effective, prioritising teamwork as a central factor for advancement, as highlighted by FG302. This demonstrates how leaders can appreciate diverse views to create a pleasant learning

environment. School reform resides in ongoing education and adaptability, as when others' ideas are incorporated into leadership practice, as illustrated by FG303.

Evolving attitudes in the teaching profession and the persistent challenge of inadequate human resources highlight the critical need for focused professional development and strategic reform initiatives (FG301). These widespread concerns suggest that overcoming systemic obstacles requires investing in these areas to improve the overall educational landscape (Orr, 2023). This includes addressing the perception of teaching as "just a job" versus a respected profession, directly addressing trends in human resources. The persistent shortage of qualified personnel is a major obstacle. Overcoming this challenge involves fostering a view of teaching as a fulfilling career and a long-term commitment (Espinoza et al., 2018).

To cultivate a supportive environment, it is important to recognise the vital role of mentorship in professional development, ensuring high-quality instruction and the successful integration of new teachers (McConnell, Bruster, & Thompson, 2021; Wells et al., 2021). Mentorship offers valuable opportunities for mentors and mentees to grow, develop, and share expertise, ultimately cultivating a skilled teaching staff and shaping future educators (FG404). Effective capacity-building interventions, such as professional development programs and collaborative initiatives, can yield long-term benefits for educational systems, enhancing school outcomes and the effectiveness of school reform projects (Andreoli et al., 2020).

These accounts underscore the importance of effective leadership that fulfils administrative and mentoring responsibilities, fostering a professional culture that values teaching as a career (McConnell et al., 2021). This involves creating an environment that values collaboration, adaptation, and professional growth in educational leadership (Preston & Barnes, 2018). To that end, department heads should participate in professional development that emphasises cooperation and delegation, and implement programmes that promote collaborative learning and leadership practices (Preston & Barnes, 2018). By embracing

collaborative efforts to address common challenges, such as teacher shortages and differing pedagogical views, educational institutions can achieve positive outcomes (FG407).

The testimonies also illuminate challenges related to human resource shortages while underscoring the critical roles of operational responsibilities inherent in leadership positions (Cray & Millen, 2010). Furthermore, it's crucial to recognise the practical aspects of educational leadership, such as revising lesson plans and managing time effectively (FG407), highlighting the need for leaders to balance administrative duties with instructional leadership (Hardwick-Franco, 2018). By addressing these multifaceted challenges and promoting a collaborative, supportive, and growth-oriented environment, educational leadership can navigate obstacles and improve student outcomes.

The Ministry of Education supports this growth through organised workshops, such as the "Teacher HOD Management and Leadership Workshop", which enhances managerial and leadership abilities. "Heads of Department meetings" also provide a strategic platform for sharing knowledge and creating a collaborative learning environment (Murphy, 2022). Interactive techniques like role-playing further support professional growth by engaging participants in administrative responsibilities. Cooperation is invaluable, and delegation and teamwork can positively impact school progress. Inclusive leadership and group initiatives contribute to a positive learning environment (McConnell et al., 2021).

FG301 suggests that longer, more thorough training programs could enhance the long-term benefits of good leadership techniques. Continuous leadership development, combining theory and practice, is essential for leaders (Thi Hoang Yen et al., 2021). Investing time and resources in regular training opportunities allows leaders to learn from each other and enhance their skills(Viloria et al., 2021).

Chapter Summary

The initial paragraph effectively summarises Chapter Four, outlining the study's purpose, research problem, questions, methodology, and data presentation. Given that this dissertation employs a qualitative phenomenological approach, its primary aim, as Qutoshi (2018) notes, is to accurately represent participants' lived experiences without distorting their perspectives. Therefore, the subsequent four research questions guided data collection:

. **RQ1.** What is the perceived contributions of capacity-building trainings to leaders' effectiveness?

RQ2. How do leaders in rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda experience and navigate challenges and successes within leadership capacity-building trainings?

RQ3. How are the evolving trends (contemporary practices) in leadership capacity-building trainings perceived and experienced by leaders in rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda?

RQ4. How do rural secondary school leaders describe how leadership capacity-building trainings informed and contributed to their perceived performance in rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda?

Data collection methodology for this qualitative phenomenological research study relied on in-depth, unstructured, open-ended interviews and focus group discussions to capture the lived experiences of 56 participants (rural public secondary school administrators, Ministry Officials and Teachers' Union Officials) in Antigua and Barbuda. Demographic data provided context and depth to the findings. Raw data were analysed using the Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis methodology. To eliminate preconceived biases, bracketing was employed as recommended by Dörfler & Stierand (2020). As a result, four themes emerged: 1) navigating resource constraints and multifaceted roles, 2) balancing community engagement with

educational leadership, 3) leadership competencies and innovation in school administration, and 4) professional development and its influence on leadership effectiveness. These themes were based on the input of principals, deputy principals, teachers, department heads, Teachers' Union Officials, and Ministry of Education Officials who participated in this study. Hence, direct verbatim quotes from the interviews and focus group transcripts were used to highlight and personalise the data. However, a few quotations have been edited to improve grammatical clarity and to protect the identities of participants and institutions; codenames and numbers were used.

Understanding the breadth and significance of leadership in schools requires an awareness of some important themes, which are revealed by the research on educational leadership in a variety of circumstances. These themes include everything from the real-world difficulties posed by limited resources to the necessity of vibrant community involvement and the uptake of cutting-edge teaching tools, especially in rural areas. Additionally, the evidence emphasises how important professional growth is to improving the efficacy of leadership. These themes offer a comprehensive picture of the circumstances that school administrators encounter and point out the areas in which assistance and intervention may greatly enhance learning results. A narrative summarising the complicated environment educational leaders operate in and emphasising the strategies that might help them succeed in their responsibilities for the benefit of their organisations is provided by the synthesis of these studies.

This study, conducted in four rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda, found a strong correlation between educational leaders' leadership attributes and their ability to successfully navigate a variety of challenging situations. These findings align with the larger body of research on educational leadership and speak to themes seen in earlier studies. These include how creative leaders overcome obstacles and take on multiple responsibilities, how

vitally professional development plays a role in improving the effectiveness of leaders, and how leaders skillfully strike a balance between community involvement and leadership.

This qualitative phenomenological study reveals the adaptability and resourcefulness of rural secondary schools within Antigua and Barbuda's resource-constrained environment. The lack of resources has forced them to be extraordinarily adaptable and creative in how they handle their administrative and instructional responsibilities. As FG105 stated, the challenges include "…having to be alert at all times monitoring and evaluating teachers and students alike, keeping abreast of numerous issues, managing the affairs of the department giving support to the school's management team, and at the same time, preparing students for CXC."

Despite these challenges, collaborative resource allocation and community partnership formation are key strategies used by school administrators in settings with limited resources. The study explores how school administrators leverage these partnerships to improve students' access to resources and strengthen community relationships. As TUO2 noted, [leader'] "attitude, skills, and attitudes of [leaders] are directly linked to the success of the institutions they manage. For example, despite their challenges, some rural schools can thrive because they are managed by leaders who are efficient, committed and have the capacity to get the job done." By analysing the impact on these three critical areas, this study provides insightful information about effective leadership strategies for schools facing similar challenges.

This research underscores the importance of effective school leadership, particularly community engagement, for educational success in Antigua and Barbuda. TUO1 noted that "[leaders] must become quite adept at relationship-building to endear themselves to the community, build trust and encourage cooperation," which reduces absenteeism and vandalism. Active community involvement, including parents, local businesses, and organizations, is crucial for creating a supportive environment. The study examines strategies to involve community organisations, agencies, and parents in educational initiatives,

highlighting the potential for sustainable outcomes through collaboration (Younger & George, 2012).

MoEO2 emphasised the importance of "…relationship-building skills to foster the relationship that is necessary not only among the teachers but with the community stakeholders, parents, etc." The study investigates the link between engagement strategies, community perceptions, resource availability, and parental participation. A focus on supportive relationships improves the school climate, as evidenced by FG106's assertion that "Leadership qualities that contribute mainly to the growth and change of the school include teachers and students having respect for each other and communication between all shareholders such as parents, teachers and students." While complex, cultivating positive relationships is crucial.

Despite barriers such as limited internet access and a lack of professional development, innovative school leaders in Antigua and Barbuda's secondary schools are exploring ways to leverage technology to improve learning outcomes. However, a lack of training and restricted access to technical resources make it exceedingly difficult to integrate 21st-century pedagogical strategies and skills in rural public secondary schools. As FG103 suggested:

> For the past three years, I have been acting as a HOD. Although unpaid, I carry out my duties to the best of my ability. This position comes at a very difficult time, a time when face-to-face instruction is replaced with online learning. This new norm comes with many challenges as students in these areas (countryside) engaged in this subject area have issues with devices and internet access. Other students who are fortunate enough to access online learning are unable to use the technology effectively, thus making lessons unproductive. My subject area is based on theory and practical skills; we teach a concept to demonstrate an example. After which, we ask the student to produce an item based on that concept. This poses a challenge, for it is very difficult to accomplish such an objective with the lack of face-to-face learning.

Despite significant obstacles, some creative leaders have discovered innovative methods to use technology to improve student learning in the classroom. These methods include seeking external collaborations for professional development and peer learning.

The findings underscore the critical need for ongoing capacity-building trainings to equip school leaders with the tools and knowledge to navigate the dynamic and ever-changing education landscape and successfully drive effective school improvement efforts. Leadership capacity-building trainings is vital for educational leaders to ensure that their skills are constantly improved and that they are up-to-date on the 21st century best practices. As Thi Hoang Yen et al. (2021, p. 30) noted, "Leadership development for leaders thus needs to be carried out continuously, combining theory and practice. This requires the active participation of both training institutions, state management agencies and especially the leaders themselves." While professional development is essential for educational leaders, this study investigates how programme components translate into practical leadership strategies, examining the relationship between formal (university) leadership capacity-building programmes, mentorship or coaching programmes, and school improvement initiatives.

Research indicates gaps and complexities in rural education leadership. Effectively addressing these particular issues of rural settings requires leadership abilities beyond theoretical knowledge. A comprehensive grasp of barriers associated with running rural public secondary schools is necessary. Therefore, it is important to support professional development initiatives, facilitate strategic innovative planning, and expand resources tailored to the needs of rural schools. Focused assistance can build better leadership capacities, improving educational experience for children in these areas.

The disparity between a principal's academic qualifications and practical leadership skills highlights an issue in rural education management. A lack of practical training before assuming roles could negatively impact effectiveness, indicating a need for an educational reform that aligns leadership training with actual on-ground requirements. There are concerns regarding the conventional pathway to school leadership, including whether teachers possess the skills, qualifications, and suitability factors required for leadership positions. Leadership in

rural settings requires strong collaboration and community engagement skills, which should be integrated with leadership training modules (Preston & Barnes, 2018).

In order to meet the particular needs of secondary schools in rural areas, effective school leadership has become an essential component of high-functioning schools. Leaders of secondary schools in rural areas emphasise these abilities as being essential for efficient administration. It is typically the responsibility of rural leaders to overcome isolation fill resource gaps and build relationships that go beyond the boundaries of the school and into the wider community. A school's success depends significantly on the principal's leadership style, their relationship with teachers, and their influence on the school's culture. These factors contribute significantly to the school's overall efficiency, reinforcing the importance of cultivating effective leadership practices from the outset. Studies have documented that successful leadership is a catalyst for improved student achievement and well-being (Preston & Barnes, 2018).

There is an urgent need for transformation in principal selection, preparation, and professional development, accommodating the changing demands in the educational landscape. As Naidoo (2019, p.1) suggested, "…principals can develop exemplary leadership practices when subjected to sound training and professional development programmes." Such programmes can enhance school leaders' performance by providing them with the necessary information and abilities, leading to better learning outcomes.

The absence of formal preparation for the principal role signals an institutional gap, particularly impacting rural school leadership. Addressing this gap requires comprehensive training programmes that enhance leadership consistency and quality. It is important to bridge academic knowledge, practical skills, community engagement and formal training for leaders, especially in rural settings (Hardwick-Franco, 2018).

Chapter 5 analyses the results in the context of Chapter 4's data analysis, discussing the findings within the context of the literature review, implications, and recommendations for future action.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This chapter summarises the findings of an exploration of the transformational framework of leadership in rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda. It connects the theoretical framework of effective leadership to practical techniques for improving school efficiency in a changing educational world.

Previous chapters have highlighted the challenges and debates surrounding educational leadership and its influence on school performance (Government of Antigua & Barbuda, 2014; Grissom et al., 2019; Thompson, 2017). A key issue is the contradiction between school leaders' preparedness and the evolving needs of modern educational environments. Empirical studies suggest that current leadership programmes may not adequately prepare leaders for today's dynamic educational environment (Cosner, 2019; Grissom et al., 2019; Tingle et al., 2019). Further research is also needed to fully comprehend how organisational planning affects real-world results in educational environments (Cosner, 2019; Grissom et al., 2019; Tingle et al., 2019).

Using Kouzes and Posner's transformational leadership paradigm, this research explored leadership capacity-building trainings for secondary school leaders in Antigua and Barbuda. Based on this, the researcher proposes practical recommendations to help leaders improve their skills and build a robust academic environment. The findings highlight the potential of structured leadership capacity-building interventions as crucial for long-term growth in education.

This chapter summarises the implications of the study's findings and offers recommendations for policymakers, education leaders, and other stakeholders. It provides an

overview of the study's contribution to the field of educational leadership and suggests directions for future research.

Building upon the knowledge that support transformational leadership and investing in educational staff are essential to scholastic achievement (Kim & Beehr, 2020), this chapter analyses the complex result of the qualitative phenomenological study. The focus is on the experiences of rural public secondary school leaders in Antigua and Barbuda, and how educational trainings can better equip them to design robust educational system.

To navigate this exploration, the researcher crafted four pertinent research questions, which operated as a guide throughout the study's journey:

RQ1. What is the perceived contributions of capacity-building trainings to leaders' effectiveness?

RQ2. How do leaders in rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda experience and navigate challenges and successes within leadership capacity-building trainings?

RQ3. How are the evolving trends (contemporary practices) in leadership capacity-building trainings perceived and experienced by leaders in rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda?

RQ4. How do leaders describe specific changes in their leadership practices as a result of capacity-building trainings?

The findings of these research questions are explored in detail in the following sections, along with their implications for educational policy and practice and recommendations that might greatly increase leadership capacity-building trainings. The journey of this research, its contributions to knowledge, and potential directions for further exploration into the development of educational excellence are all summarised in the conclusion.

This qualitative design study uses a purposively selected sample (Sarstedt et al., 2018) of 50 leaders from four rural public secondary schools, which include four principals, six deputy principals, eight department heads, and 32 teachers in Antigua and Barbuda who are between the ages of 35 and 65 and also meet the research criteria. Additionally, three Teachers' Union Officials and three Ministry of Education Officials also participated in the interviews. Therefore, the researcher conducts unstructured interviews and focus groups to develop rich and detailed descriptions of the phenomenon (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). This leads the researcher to use open-ended questions, allowing each participant to express their opinions and feelings in their own words (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). Ten questions with probing questions are used to guide the interviews and focus group discussion processes.

Audio recordings and transcriptions of the interviewees and focus groups are conducted for approximately an hour. Moreover, the data, audiotapes, and transcripts are kept in a secure area to ensure the integrity of the interviewees and focus groups. Under Zambia's Unicaf University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) review ethical requirements, the researcher takes extreme care to protect the identities of every participant, and any identifiable information is kept in secured locations. All participants were contacted by email during the study to invite them to participate. Each participant signs a consent form. In the consent form, participants are informed why they are selected, the potential risks, and how confidentiality is protected. Therefore, the researcher assigns a letter code followed by a number to each participant and focus group; for example, P1, FG1, TUO, and MoEO.

Thematic analysis is used to analyse the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interview participants reviewed their transcripts to ensure that their responses were accurately recorded during transcription as a part of the member-checking process. From participants' narratives across data sets, four significant themes emerge 1) Navigating resource constraints and multifaceted roles, 2) Balancing community engagement with educational

leadership, 3) Leadership competencies and innovation in school administration, and 4) professional development and its influence on leadership effectiveness.

Implications

The findings of this thesis offer significant implications for research, school practices, and policy development in educational leadership. This includes ongoing research to improve leadership capacity-building programmes, encouraging collaborative leadership, and the crucial role of government support in professional development (Orr, 2023). Policy implications should guarantee thorough leadership training, and practice-based recommendations should foster supportive environments for new leaders. It is critical to build leadership skills to maintain and improve student growth and instructional effectiveness. Administrators in rural public secondary schools should develop and implement practical plans that foster leadership qualities in all students (ten Have & Gordijn, 2020).

Bringing teachers, department heads, deputy principals, and school principals together can facilitate the exchange of ideas and best practices (Dexter & Richardson, 2020). By working together, they can greatly improve their leadership skills and establish a learning environment that encourages every student to reach their greatest potential. Knowledge sharing and networking are essential to an organisation's long-term success (Admiraal et al., 2021). Incorporating interventions into a school's organisation and culture can produce lasting effects (Admiraal et al., 2021) by directing institutions towards ongoing professional learning and collaboration.

Adapting leadership development strategies to different educational environments is crucial, considering the changing requirements and involving all stakeholders. While developing capacity is a long process, flexible steps can help create a responsive learning environment for school leaders, teachers, students, and the community. Also, leadership

development should be a priority, but it has not been consistently prioritised. Integrating required leadership development courses into university degrees is one possible solution.

Theoretical Implications

Leaders of secondary schools in rural areas need transformational leadership because it provides crucial framework for addressing their particular difficulties. Leaders who advance a shared vision are able to successfully manage limited resources and win over the community. It is critical to understand that not all rural circumstances may lend themselves to general leadership approaches. Leadership development programs need to be tailored to the unique cultural customs of each community. According to social capital theory leaders in rural educational environments must establish strong community ties in order to overcome resource scarcity and foster cooperative relationships. To ensure ethical leadership rural communities need leaders who prioritise diversity and human rights (Rude et al., 2005).

Building upon a foundation of transformational and ethical leadership, distributed leadership can empower teachers and staff, building capacity within the school. Instructional leaders in rural schools must be able to handle issues unique to their area in order to lead effectively. Leaders of rural schools frequently overcome isolation fill resource gaps and build relationships with people outside of the school and community. It is crucial to differentiate between the difficulties associated with "ruralness" and "smallness" (Lamkin, 2006). In order to address the evolving needs of students leaders also need to be culturally sensitive (Hesbol et al., 2020) and innovative in their approach to problem-solving utilizing community collaborations to tackle resource limitations.

Leadership development programmes must be culturally sensitive that take into account the nuances of local learning environments. Rural settings may not benefit as much from generic leadership techniques underscoring the significance of contextually relevant behaviors and an awareness of regional contextual and cultural issues (James, 2008). The views of local

leaders are crucial when creating and executing training aimed at increasing capacity. By fostering communities of practice where overcoming mistrust and fostering communication and trust are essential it is possible to create long-lasting environments for teachers professional development.

The transformational leadership model provides a framework for developing leadership skills enabling leaders to influence change inside their organizations. The model encourages leaders to influence their followers to prioritise higher-order concerns by focusing on personal and professional growth through practices such as setting an example inspiring a shared vision and empowering others (J. Kouzes & Posner, 2019). A positive environment is also created learning professionalism is encouraged and student achievement is raised by transformational leadership. Community-based leadership techniques can improve this framework even more (Rakhman et al., 2021). Participants who go on to become school leaders frequently gain a strong sense of agency that empowers them to start changes in their organizations and communities. Cultural sensitivity is crucial especially in communities where traditions and values are highly valued according to critical evaluation of leadership development programs. Qualitative research can be used to explore these nuanced aspects of reality.

Culturally responsive leadership models that are adapted to the unique cultural contexts of rural communities should be the subject of future theoretical investigation. This entails going beyond general theories of leadership and comprehending the ways in which local customs values and knowledge systems can be incorporated into leadership techniques. For instance, elders have a lot of power and influence in some rural communities a leader who is sensitive to cultural differences would ask for their advice and take their viewpoints into account when making decisions. This strategy recognises that leadership is a concept that needs to be tailored to the distinct cultural environment of each rural community and cannot be applied universally.

Additionally ethical leadership that upholds diversity and human rights ought to be taken into account (Rude et al., 2005).

Applying complexity theory can provide a valuable lens for understanding the interconnectedness of factors affecting rural schools (Myende & Maifala, 2020). Rural schools are not isolated entities but rather complex systems with multiple interacting elements, including students, teachers, families, community organisations, and external policies. Complexity theory acknowledges that these elements are constantly influencing each other, and that small changes in one area can have cascading effects throughout the system. Leaders need to adopt flexible and adaptive approaches, recognising that there are no simple solutions to complex problems.

Theoretical frameworks should incorporate social justice perspectives to address inequities in resource allocation, teacher quality, and student outcomes in rural schools (Myende & Maifala, 2020). Comparing rural schools to their urban counterparts the former frequently experience systemic disadvantages such as lower funding trouble recruiting and retaining skilled teachers and greater student poverty. These disparities are contested by a social justice framework which urges leaders to support laws and procedures that advance equity and justice for all students irrespective of where they attend school or their financial status.

Practical Implications

Strategic planning and cooperative communication should be highly valued by effective educational leaders. To stabilise their communities leaders must improve their professional development and strategically manage their resources. To do this useful strategies like cooperative procedures coaching workshops and classroom visits can be used. Collaboration and networking via professional learning communities and mentorships connect rural school leaders with their counterparts, mitigating isolation and promoting resource sharing.

Leadership capacity-building programmes should offer hands-on experiences, focusing on real challenges in rural schools, and incorporate longer-term internships to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Training in resource management and stakeholder engagement is also crucial for addressing issues like vandalism and absenteeism. Fair resource allocation is essential, and leaders must manage resources creatively to reduce disparities, acknowledging the frequent preference for urban schools.

Priority should be given to interconnected strategies in order to effectively support and develop educational leaders. Leadership programmes should place a strong emphasis on networking and teamwork establishing mentorship opportunities and professional learning communities. To close the gap between theory and practice practical training centered on real-world problems is crucial including longer-term internships. To establish trust effectively coordinate and interact with a diverse range of community members leaders should possess the abilities of resource management stakeholder engagement and community engagement. Leaders must stay up to date on new trends through ongoing professional development and programs should tackle logistical issues to guarantee program execution. Effective leadership development necessitates the cultivation of critical reflection experiential learning and the growth of relationships and trust. For change to be effective leaders must also gain a deeper comprehension of the current culture. In the face of ongoing change adaptive leadership can support leaders and their school community in thriving. To address the evolving needs of students culturally sensitive leadership is also essential (Hesbol et al., 2020).

With ongoing professional development to stay abreast of new developments systematic and progressive leadership training is crucial to fostering effective leadership especially in rural schools. To help them grow formal mentorship programs should match up new leaders with seasoned mentors. Considering how important the community is to rural schools community engagement tactics are essential (Zuckerman, 2020). Professional

development should be customised to educators' needs, recognising that generic strategies may not suit rural contexts, and should offer ongoing support for teacher growth, addressing previous limitations. Leaders should prioritise instructional leadership and encourage innovative technology use to support student learning, while solutions should consider the resource limitations of rural schools. Place-based learning, drawing from rural contexts, should be embedded in training programmes, and resource sharing and networking between rural and urban schools should be encouraged. A blended approach, combining formal learning with practical application and mentoring, is vital. Professional development should also be responsive to the specific demands of rural schools, such as technology use and community involvement, and well-structured mentoring programmes can further assist new rural school leaders.

Continuous and customised professional development that addresses the changing demands of educational management is crucial for all school leaders in order to improve leadership effectiveness especially in rural schools. Experience and practice should be given top priority in career advancement programs so that leaders can put what they have learned into practice using techniques like action research virtual reality and peer coaching. Its critical to use leadership shadowing and professional learning communities to foster an attitude of constant learning that supports an improvement-oriented school culture. Communities of practice are sustainable venues for teacher professional development that can help seasoned educators improve their abilities. Regional isolation is one of the particular problems that educational leaders face and it should be addressed in basic education and capacity-building training. Training programmes must acknowledge the influence of cultural norms and be flexible and context-sensitive. A thorough hiring procedure that includes ongoing training opportunities is essential because leaders who receive training that develops their skills are better able to lead school reform and apply contemporary practices. Training quality can be

raised through collaborations between education departments and postsecondary educational institutions. The Principal Support Program acknowledges the value of learning plans networking mentoring and professional development for principal development (Wells et al., 2021). These programs are crucial because leadership development remains a low priority.

Effective leadership strategies are needed in education systems to address issues like vandalism and absenteeism. Programmes enhancing leadership capacity are essential. Policies should allocate resources to mitigate disparities between urban and rural schools. Policymakers should prioritise funding for rural-focused capacity-building programmes addressing geographic isolation and resource limitations. Implementing policies that incentivise rural school leaders with housing, financial benefits, and continuing education is crucial for attracting and retaining quality leaders. Training should equip rural leaders to manage budgets in resource-constrained environments and address challenges like vandalism (TUO1).

It is crucial to remember that the responsibilities of principals in rural and urban areas are different (Hardwick-Franco, 2018). Learning must be given top priority by the principals leadership. Through cooperation effective rural principals can be change agents by cultivating relationships with community members parents employees and students (Preston & Barnes, 2018). It is necessary to approach rural schools as systems. For new leaders to be supported mentoring between districts and universities is essential (McConnell et al., 2021).

Targeted leadership development programmes are needed to equip leaders with essential skills. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology aims to improve leadership quality and accountability (Ministry of Education, 2012). Principals may lack specialised education in transformational or economic leadership. Policy should address resource disparities in rural schools. Departments should partner with higher education institutions to enhance training for principals. School leadership training should be tailored to local conditions. The capacity of small rural districts to create, fund, and implement leadership

programmes depends on available resources and partnerships with institutions of higher education and other supporting entities (McConnell et al., 2021). A "grow your own" approach can be effective in this context (McConnell et al., 2021). It is also important to cultivate a democratic and transformational leadership style.

Developing close ties with local organisations parents and community members should be a top priority for rural leaders. This calls for candid communication cooperative decision-making and attentive listening. In rural areas school administrators should try to participate in local organizations go to community events and ask the community for opinions on significant school decisions. Rural school administrators can foster a sense of shared ownership and accountability for the schools success by establishing trusting relationships.

Implement distributed leadership models to empower students faculty and staff to assume leadership positions in the school (Andreoli et al., 2020). Creating teacher leadership teams allowing students to participate in school governance or enabling staff members to spearhead professional development initiatives are some examples of how to do this. Distributed leadership helps to increase the capacity of the entire school community and promotes a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for school improvement.

Provide rural school leaders with the skills and resources necessary to collect, analyse, and use data to drive instruction and school improvement efforts. This includes systems investment in data management that provides training on data analysis and promotes a data-driven culture within the school. Rural school leaders can make more-informed decisions and ensure that their work aligns with the needs of their students by using data to identify the areas where help is needed most and track progress as time goes on.

Policy Implications

To improve policy implications, leadership training should be enforced before individuals become school leaders. This aligns with transformational leadership theory, which

emphasises the importance of equipping leaders with the skills to inspire and empower their teams. Policies should also financially support the professional growth of school leaders, recognising that continuous development is crucial for maintaining effective leadership. Budgetary restrictions or a lack of access to high-quality training programs in rural areas however may make implementation difficult. Given that rural schools frequently face different challenges than their urban counterparts policies should guarantee equitable resource distribution while attending to their particular needs (J. Johnson & Howley, 2015). Leadership development is often not prioritised. Required leadership development courses could be integrated into university degrees to address unique challenges in rural schools. Rural schools face compounding challenges, so leadership programs should address their specific needs. As rural communities diversify, it is critical for leaders to be culturally responsive (Hesbol et al., 2020).

Longitudinal studies should evaluate the long-term impacts of leadership development programs on rural school performance in order to draw conclusions. This is significant because the effects of leadership on student outcomes may not be immediately apparent. Scholars ought to explore methods for alleviating the challenges encountered by school administrators in rural areas and analyse how social capital can lessen the consequences of resource constraints (Cray & Millen, 2010). To learn more about leaders experiences in various national contexts more research is required.

Before becoming a school leader people should be required to complete leadership training in order to improve the policy implications. This is consistent with the theory of transformational leadership which highlights the significance of giving leaders the tools they need to motivate and empower their teams. Recognizing that ongoing development is essential to sustaining effective leadership policies should also provide financial support for school leaders professional development. But in remote locations lack of access to high-quality

training programs or financial limitations may make implementation difficult. All students should have equal access to technology and resources thanks to policies. Additionally policies should provide incentives to draw educators to leadership roles in rural areas. Since rural schools frequently face different challenges than their urban counterparts policies should address their specific needs and ensure equitable distribution of resources (Johnson & Howley, 2015). Leadership development is frequently overlooked to address the particular difficulties faced by rural schools mandatory leadership development courses could be incorporated into university degrees. Because of the additional difficulties that rural schools face leadership programs ought to cater to their unique requirements. Leaders must be sensitive to cultural differences as rural communities become more diverse (Hesbol et al., 2020). To keep educators and leaders up to date on new trends leadership training is essential.

In order to determine the research implications longitudinal studies ought to evaluate the long-term impacts of leadership development initiatives on rural school performance. This is crucial because it may take some time for the effects of leadership on student outcomes to become apparent. Researchers ought to look into ways to lessen the challenges faced by school administrators in rural areas and consider how social capital can lessen the effects of resource constraints (Cray & Millen, 2010). To better understand leaders experiences in various national contexts more research is required.

Federal policies should avoid one-size-fits-all strategies and instead take into account the distinctions between rural and urban schools (Johnson & Howley, 2015). According to Hardwick-Franco (2018) this is consistent with the ideas of context-specific leadership which acknowledges that different environments require different approaches to effective leadership. Universities and districts must mentor new leaders in order to promote a cooperative approach to leadership development (McConnell et al., 2021). The calibre of mentors and the assistance offered by the participating institutions however determine how successful mentoring

programs are. To improve educational achievement in rural areas funding high-quality leadership development programs is essential (McConnell et al., 2021). The absence of official educational leadership training should be addressed by policies that offer thorough hiring procedures and ongoing training opportunities. By addressing the unique challenges that schools face context-specific training can assist leaders in promoting an innovative culture. Recruitment efforts should be centered on management skills and policies should systematically address leadership development and preparation with well-defined requirements. By providing funds and offering incentives for involvement in professional learning communities policymakers should assist school administrators in their ongoing professional development. Policies must acknowledge and respond to the particular difficulties faced by school administrators in rural areas. Rural leaders require context-specific and ongoing professional development according to a number of sources (McConnell et al., 2021; Owen et al., 2020). In rural areas mentoring between districts and universities and "Grow your Own" initiatives can help new leaders (McConnell et al., 2021).

Researchers also found that virtual learning environments can improve equity of access to education (Turwelis et al., 2022). However, the digital divide in rural areas may limit the effectiveness of technology-based solutions (Sundeen & Sundeen, 2013). Policies should also implement incentives to attract teachers to rural leadership positions. Future research should focus on the long-term impacts of leadership development programmes (Owen et al., 2020). Also, keep in mind that there may be resistance to change from staff or community members who are accustomed to traditional ways of doing things.

Implement policies that incentivise experienced and effective leaders to serve in rural schools (McConnell et al., 2021). This could include a range of financial and non-financial incentives, such as salary bonuses, housing assistance, student loan forgiveness programs, or opportunities for professional growth and leadership development. The goal is to make rural

school leadership a more attractive and sustainable career path, ensuring that rural schools have access to the best possible leaders.

Assign specific funding sources to leadership development initiatives aimed at school administrators in rural areas (Hardwick-Franco, 2018). The special opportunities and difficulties of rural education such as managing small schools interacting with a diverse student body and forming solid community ties should be addressed by these programs. Rural school leaders should also receive funding for continuing mentorship and support which will enable them to stay up to date on best practices and deal with new issues as they arise.

To support rural communities efforts to develop competent school leaders McConnell et al. (2021) recommend that school districts in rural areas form partnerships with universities. These collaborations can provide rural schools with technical support and ongoing mentoring professional development and support to address the particular challenges of rural education (McConnell et al., 2021). Through providing specialised training these partnerships can create a pool of competent rural school leaders and give them the tools they need to succeed (McConnell et al., 2021). Given that they are frequently regarded as subject-matter experts which is a significant burden rural principals require assistance (Wells et al., 2021).

Recommendations

Recommendations for Applications

This research has led to important actionable recommendations for action, such as strengthening cooperation with the community by developing and implementing clear communication plans and collaborative processes that include that the community has a role in the development of actions and is responsible for outcomes, incorporating a variety of learning experiences (mentorship opportunities, in-person workshops, leadership shadowing), create online platforms and communities of practice for educators in similar contexts, and developing

and designing a community engagement toolkit for rural leaders to address cultural barriers and resource constraints.

Therefore, from a practical application perspective, there is a need to develop a school leaders' professional development plan that collaborates with individual school leaders to collaborate with school leaders to develop and design tailored professional development plans aligned with their individual needs, goals, and context. They also need to establish networks or communities of practice that connect and support school leaders. Additionally, it is important to provide continuous coaching and mentoring to school leaders with special emphasis on those new in the position or those under serious challenges. This may entail mentoring of leaders by more seasoned leaders, hiring outside coaches for the leaders, or even creating a coaching system in the education system.

The multidimensional character of educational leadership needs a variety of specialised techniques to maximise performance and solve inherent obstacles. Recognising the critical role of professional development in managing effective schools, the guidelines presented here hope to provide a complete roadmap for policymakers, school administrators, and researchers alike. These proposals emphasise the importance of expanding support networks, urge the adoption of collaborative approaches, and underline the necessity for extensive research to improve policy and practice. They foresee a framework that would not only enhance the perception of the teaching profession but would also enable school administrators to nurture an environment of continual learning and growth, therefore improving educational quality.

According to the study's findings, leaders frequently have sufficient educational backgrounds when they take on their positions, but lack real-world leadership experience. This creates special obstacles that are needed for practical leadership skills, know-how, abilities, and approaches for efficient management. According to Fullan (2020), some deskilling occurs when people move jobs or take on new leadership roles. He states that the new context is likely

unfamiliar to them since they do not possess skills specific to their position (Fullan, 2020). Therefore, this requires them to become contextual learners (Naziah et al., 2020).

As a result, this study sheds insight into the stress experienced by certain rural public secondary school administrators. Several barriers were discovered via interviews and focus groups, although they were not covered in detail. Of the participants in the interviews, 55% indicated major increases in workload, pushbacks, and leadership turnover. The Ministry of Education officials, the four focus groups, and the Teachers' Union officials all emphasised that followers' opposition was made worse by their reluctance to adapt. Inadequate training, a lack of respect and communication, and a lack of parental and community participation were among the other issues mentioned. Leaders are considered critical to school reform and creating inclusive, high-performing schools (DeMatthews et al., 2022). The expectations of many stakeholders substantially shifted the role of school leaders, necessitating professional development for leaders remain updated with the latest developments in their fields to effectively perform the complex duties (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018).

The findings of this study may be helpful for rural public secondary school principals, deputy principals, teachers, and department heads in Antigua and Barbuda, and effective teaching and learning should be ensured, choices should be made at the school, and a school-wide culture and atmosphere should be upheld (Merritt, 2021). School administrators ought to get the information, abilities, and mind-set needed to work effectively, thus, school administrators had to take prompt action to optimise the advantages for the school, assisting, motivating, and enhancing the professional growth of school leaders (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018).
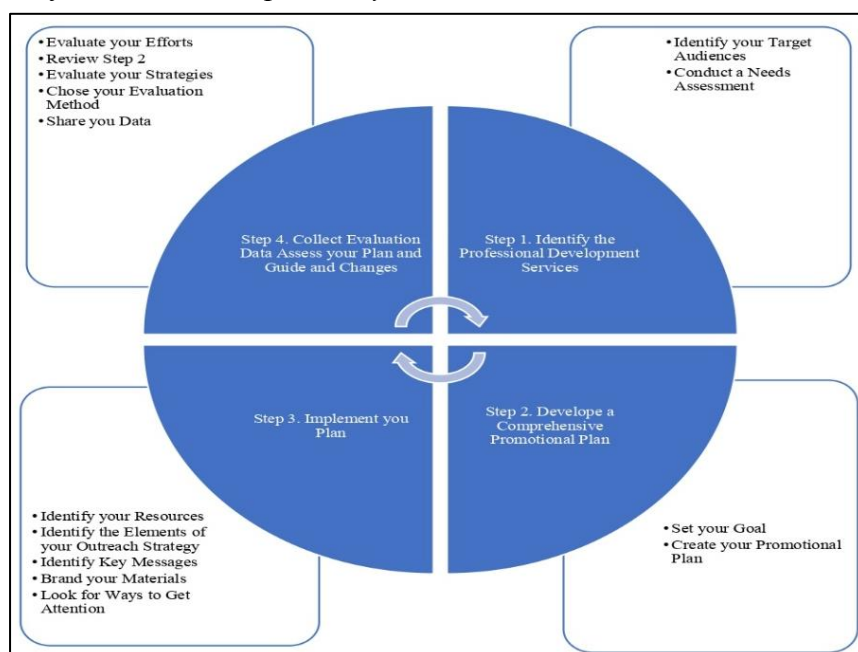
Currently, professional development sessions are not tailored to their specific needs (P1-P18; FGC1-FGC4). Ongoing support for professional development needs to be re-envisioned as the cornerstone of educational change rather than a collection of isolated

activities (P1-P18; FGC1-FGC4). Enhancing the design of professional development programmes may be a vital strategy (Hubers, Endedijk & Van Veen, 2020) to enable principals, deputy principals, department heads, and teachers to enhance the leadership capacity of their teachers and colleagues (Murphy, 2022), thus building new capacity at the school level or community (Wells et al., 2021). The CDC suggests that the primary objective of professional development is to teach skills and strategies that can improve outcomes when implemented and recommends four guiding principles with sub-components to implement professional development best practices (see Figure 7).

To enhance principal and teacher learning and expertise, a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective. As illustrated in Figure 7, the professional development cycle involves identifying appropriate services, developing a comprehensive promotion plan, implementing it, collecting data, assessing, and evaluating. Rural public secondary school leaders should develop an educational framework aligned with the Ministry of Education's national strategic imperatives.

Figure 7

Professional Development Cycle

Note. Guide to Promoting Professional Development
SOURCE: Extracted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention CDC (2017, pp. 5-30)

This framework should begin by ensuring alignment between the Ministry of Education, the Union of Teachers, and the school's educational goals. Next, a needs assessment should determine leaders' and teachers' learning needs. Each organisational level should then identify specific, evidence-based content and activities, ensuring the availability of resources to support professional development. Measures for each professional development goal and supporting activity should be identified, and a plan to communicate evaluation results created. The plan should be implemented and its effectiveness periodically evaluated, with results and recommendations shared with all school members (Hardwick-Franco, 2018). As professional development planners progress, they can revisit previous steps to ensure all outcomes and goals are addressed. By implementing a continuing professional development plan, leaders can maintain a high standard in the school organisation(Wells et al., 2021), ultimately benefiting all stakeholders (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018).

Professional Learning Communities.

The quality of education is improved through collaborative learning and teacher involvement in professional learning (Bouchamma et al., 2019). Collaboration among teachers and leaders in professional learning communities can improve the efficacy of professional development initiatives. Therefore, the primary goal of school leaders is to establish professional learning communities that may increase teachers' professionalism and well-being while positively impacting student learning outcomes (Antinluoma et al., 2018). This is because when teachers are more self-assured and actively participate in their learning, they tend to design more interesting and productive learning events for their students.

Even though leaders and teachers are unique, groups facilitate their professional development. There is mounting evidence that school leaders' learning is most effective, persistent, and ongoing when it results from active involvement in teams who work together to develop and confront difficulties that they would be unable to solve alone (Bouchamma et al.,

2019). This is because social dynamics in groups promote greater comprehension, responsibility, respect, and even motivation, throughout a longer period. These groups serve as professional learning communities through collaborative effort, critical reflection, and problem-solving. They meet regularly to enhance their professional and students' learning development (Prenger et al., 2019).

In building organisational knowledge, skills, and dispositions, school leaders should engage in professional learning communities that develop leadership networks within and across schools. There is increasing evidence that schools that are successful in restructuring themselves are also connected to external sources of support. This implies that the synergistic advantages of organisational cooperation within the framework of PLCs and outside support resources are very important in transforming the schools.

School leaders could experience success in an environment where the school culture is supportive, collaborative, and collegial, shares ideas, provides positive feedback and invests in leaders' and followers' professional development. Additionally, to foster this growth, such as an environment also provides time for professional development and learning community involvement, collaboration, and reflection, promotes trust and respect for individuals' opinions and ideas and inspires followers to take risks. The collaborative professional development of teachers has been at the core of education for many years, which explains the emerging Communities of Practice. They provide a framework for maximising teacher enrichment through the sharing of disciplines, pedagogies, competencies, and mind-sets. This encourages teachers to positively modify their behaviour and performance in the classrooms, which promotes more innovation and effectiveness in teaching and learning.

The works of both Hörberg et al. (2019) and Hutchins and Boyle (2017) highlight the importance of common practices as defining attributes of a community of practice. Hutchins and Boyle discussed the existence of the practices within a profession and how this nurtures

the identity and knowledge of the community. For instance, similar to Hutchins and Boyle's work, Hörberg et al. explain the concepts of shared repertoire, joint enterprise, and mutual engagement while attempting to give the readers an understanding of a Community of Practice. These components also point out that shared practices in the form of a shared repertoire, a joint enterprise, and mutual engagement are important for learning and developing within a community.

Interestingly, Chrisentary and Barett (2015, pp. 25 - 26) offer a different perspective claiming that communities of practice are not a "…social network…" but rather "…functions by the talent, trust and collaboration in the group to allow the group to adjust to change, using the knowledge strategies of [the] domain, community, and practice." This viewpoint stresses the dynamic and adaptable character of Communities of Practice (CoP), underscoring the significance of trust, cooperation, and information exchange in their capacity to manage change.

The primary aim of communities of practice was to internalise knowledge (Zboralski et al., 2006) and transfer knowledge, learn from others, and assist them in acquiring the necessary aptitude, intelligence, and abilities that the organisation values. Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave (1991, as cited in Place, 2016) proposed that learning is a collective phenomenon in a cultural and historical context rather than a personal one. Moreover, Amineh and Asl (2015, p. 12) articulated that "… [learners'] conceptions of knowledge are derived from a meaning-making search in which learners construct individual interpretations of their experiences." Piaget proposed that a person builds his or her knowledge independently, while Vygotsky proposed that one learnt only by engaging in different modes of social interaction (Lourenço, 2012). Consequently, "…knowledge is built or constructed actively" (Bozkurt, 2017, p. 210).

This new learning paradigm has shifted from individuality to collectivity, whereby members bond with each other and share values, information, and best practices. These

members become a community of practice. For this reason, in the Vygotskian sociocultural theory of learning, Vygotsky philosophised that knowledge is co-constructed and that people learn from one another, thereby adding to the theory's social component (Marginson et al., 2017; Silalahi, 2019). Thus, "…learning is portrayed as a social formation of a person rather than as only the acquisition of knowledge" (Pyrko, Dörfler, & Eden, 2017, p. 391). Learning, according to Vygotsky (1978;1986, as cited in Silalahi, 2019), did not occur through self-discovery when the learner was capable, but rather through the assistance of those who were more experienced than the learner, who eventually helped the learner grow to his or her full potential development within the learner's potential development. To account for the evolution of psychological phenomena from social interaction, Vygotsky suggested two mechanisms (Lantolf, 2012). The first was referenced as imitation, followed by the Zone of Proximal Development (Lantolf, 2012). Lantolf (2012, p. 59) suggested that "…through imitation, learners build up repertoires of resources for future performances, but these need not be precise replicas of the original model." The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is a crucial component of Vygotsky's theory. In ZPD, the more capable colleagues led learners through tasks they could not complete independently (Lantolf, 2012). However, the learners internalise knowledge by allowing them to work individually on other mediation (Lantolf, 2012).

As a result, Wenger (2000) established three crucial propositions that characterised the integrity of communities of practice. He stated that:

- "Members are bound together by their collectively developed understanding of what their community is about, and they hold each other accountable to this sense of *joint enterprise*" (Wenger, 2000, p. 229).

- Members build their community through mutual engagement. They interact with one another; establish norms and relationships of *mutuality* that reflect these

interactions. To be competent is to be able to engage with the community and be trusted as a partner in these interactions (Wenger, 2000, p. 229).

- "Communities of practice have produced a *shared repertoire* of communal resources-language, routines, sensibilities, artifacts, tools, stories, styles; to be competent is to have access to this repertoire and be able to use it appropriately" (Wenger, 2000, p. 229).

Additionally, Chrisentary and Barett (2015) concurred that virtual communications and social networking technologies have opened up new possibilities for communities of practice to go beyond conventional workgroups and bridge the geographical divide. As a result, to balance and sustain CoP, trust, momentum, and respect for members' necessary time are critical (Johnson, Moorcroft, Tucker, Calvert, & Turner, 2017).

In-service training.

In-service training is increasingly necessary for long-term survival and sustainability in leadership (ten Have & Gordijn, 2020). An effective leadership in-service training programme can build leadership capacity at the school level (Owen et al., 2020). Such a programme can renew leaders' and teachers' knowledge, abilities, and experiences, enhancing job performance and school sustainability (Imran Junejo et al., 2017). These in-service training sessions can be held inside or outside of schools, based on the needs of the participants and institutions (Balbay et al., 2018). Figure 1 may show a structure for a school principal's in-service programme, according to the literature review (Balbay et al., 2018).

To address the unique opportunities and challenges faced by rural schools in-service training should actively emphasise contextualisation and practical application in addition to theoretical knowledge. For example training could concentrate on tailoring literacy improvement techniques to the needs of students from non-English speaking households or those with limited resources rather than addressing these techniques in general (Moser et al.,

2018). Learning can be successfully transferred into practice through practical exercises case studies based on actual rural school situations and peer coaching (Cheng, 2021). Innovation and creativity should be emphasised in this kind of training so that teachers can produce useful teaching tools even with limited resources (Elias et al., 2014).

School-level leadership can be developed through an efficient in-service program (Owen et al., 2020). Long-term benefits of sustainable leadership development include improved decision-making strategic planning and creative teaching and implementation abilities. School administrators in rural areas may experience feelings of loneliness. Therefore chances to learn alongside and through others should be a part of professional development (Wells et al., 2021). Peer observation action research projects and professional learning communities are examples of collaborative activities that can empower teachers to assume leadership roles in their classrooms and schools and create a sense of shared responsibility for school improvement. These communities foster a more collaborative all-encompassing leadership style and lessen loneliness.

In-service training must be in line with the schools overarching objectives and priorities in order to have a long-lasting effect. In order to create training programs that directly address the needs for professional development leaders should collaborate with educators to pinpoint the precise areas in which these needs exist. Additionally in-service training ought to be a continuous procedure that incorporates opportunities for ongoing learning mentoring and follow-up support rather than a one-time occurrence. Teachers who receive this continuous support can hone their abilities overcome obstacles and maintain their dedication to raising student achievement.

Recommendations for Policy

This study underscores the need for a multi-pronged approach to strengthen leadership in rural secondary schools. The creation and application of a thorough leadership framework

that covers multiple important areas should be a top priority for policymakers. To ensure that programmes are suited to their individual needs and in line with the Ministry of Education's vision, this framework should give priority to long-term capacity-building initiatives, especially for department heads, new leaders, and deputies. In addition, cultivating a culture of cooperation and advancement in the workplace is essential. In addition to putting strategic plans into place to advance the teaching profession and draw in fresh talent, this can be accomplished by encouraging regular collaboration among school leaders through Ministry-sponsored seminars, workshops, and peer learning opportunities. Another essential component is fostering stronger ties between the community and the school, which motivates the latter to create and carry out action plans that actively involve community partners and parents in meeting the needs of their students. To guarantee leadership programmes applicability efficacy and flexibility in light of the changing nature of education a strong framework for ongoing assessment is necessary.

Based on the findings, the researcher recommends that school leaders expedite the implementation of a strategic action plan (SAP) to improve and strengthen the bond between the school and the community by bringing together community partners, families, and other stakeholders to address children's needs. In addition, studies have shown that school effectiveness is strongly correlated with parental involvement (Anastasiou & Papagianni, 2020; Berryhill et al., 2020; Dettmers et al., 2019; Erdener & Knoeppel, 2018; O'Toole et al., 2019; Waluyandi et al., 2020; Yulianti et al., 2022).

This study makes several recommendations for policymakers. Hence, based on the study's findings, this dissertation offers policymakers practical strategies for enhancing leaders' capacities in rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda. As articulated by Moldoveanu and Narayandas (2019, p. 4), "Companies of all sorts realise that to survive in

today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment, they need leadership skills and organisational capabilities different from those that helped them succeed in the past."

Moldoveanu and Narayandas (2019) further articulated that policymakers should look at how a principal's leadership style may be encouraged to have a beneficial effect on the skills of teachers and the culture of the school and develop leaders to fulfil the organisation's demands instead of selecting and hiring leaders to fill open positions in the future. School leaders' job descriptions are often generic in nature and do not reflect the organisational vision and strategic objectives. Acknowledging this problem, it is imperative to implement a leadership development programme to prepare, train, and refine leadership knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Therefore, policymakers should craft job descriptions based on the skills needed to achieve the vision and mission of the Ministry of Education. Each position should be hinged on an appropriate set of skills based on distinct levels of responsibility. However, a leadership assessment or appraisal tool should be implemented to assess leaders' proficiency and to determine their placement on the skills level needed to grow and complete the tasks.

It is critical for the Ministry of Education to continuously evaluate and assess the quality and efficacy of leadership programmes following the completion of the desired training. In most training programmes, summative evaluations occur at the end; however, the effectiveness of the programme relies significantly on continuous formative assessment and timely feedback. This guarantees that necessary modifications may be implemented quickly, promoting continuous enhancement and flexibility in response to evolving educational environments. By doing this, the Ministry can make sure that the leaders are capable of handling future difficulties in addition to satisfying existing requirements.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study points towards several directions, which future researchers can take including conducting further studies to identify those components of leadership development programmes that lead to the most favourable outcomes for the students, assessing how technology embedded in the curriculum influences levels of engagement, academic achievement, and acquisition of 21st-century skills, undertaking longitudinal institution-wide research to understand the long-term effects of collaborations on communities and the schools, and conducting a comparative analysis of the lived realities and challenges of heads of schools in rural and urban settings to understand specific needs and design appropriate responses.

The resolution of leadership problems in rural secondary schools necessitates a multimodal strategy. Given that the findings of this qualitative phenomenological study provide meaningful insights into the challenges posed by leaders, it requires further investigation to completely understand and solve them by bridging the skill gaps found in this research, helping to enhance management and leadership in rural schools.

To address these challenges, future studies should look at the components and efficacy of ongoing professional development programmes, especially in rural schools. These programmes could provide leaders with the necessary management and leadership skills that this study discovered to be missing "…continuous training and support…is lacking" (TUO3). Professional development opportunities may be made more successful by scrutinising how they are created and delivered (Yang, 2020). This might imply a stronger emphasis on characteristics such as emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, and community participation, which have been highlighted as critical for effective leadership in rural schools by this study (TUO2; TUO3).

More precisely, the function and performance of professional development programmes merit closer examination. Interestingly, a greater understanding of emotional

intelligence, interpersonal skills, and community engagement could create pathways for further investigation. Therefore, further research is of utmost importance for improving the quality of education in rural secondary schools. The impact of these tailored PPPs on schools' outcomes should be an area for further study. These areas of research could make a substantial contribution to enhancing rural school leadership, boosting educational achievement and "…keeping…knowledge and skills up-to-date" (Mlambo et al., 2021).

As Lara and Saracostti (2019) suggest, school-family relationships should be constructed according to educational contexts, generating various actions. As a result, an action plan with an active task force should be established. Therefore, for schools, parents, and the community to work harmoniously, teachers, parents, school leaders, and policymakers should collaborate. In the end, academic achievement is the goal. Sheridan, Smith, and Kim (2019) carry out *A Meta-Analysis of Family-School Interventions and Children's Social-Emotional Functioning: Moderators and Components of Efficacy.* According to their study, a significant correlation was found between family-school intervention and positive outcomes, which included interpersonal, relational processes (communicating, collaborating, and maintaining parent-teacher relationships) and tangible, structural elements (involvement at home, behavioural supports).

Therefore, there is a greater need for research to evaluate the impact of experiential leadership development programmes. That is, review the literature and existing studies to ascertain the impact of professional development, which leans towards practice on leader self-efficacy, leadership practices, and school outcomes. In addition, investigates the importance of lifelong learning in rural school leadership. For example, carry out a thorough examination of the effects of continuous leadership capacity-building trainings for rural school leaders in navigating the challenges of their context. Furthermore, engage in case studies or other

qualitative research that identify best practices aimed at enhancing the professional development of rural school leaders.

Post-Study-Related Actions

After conducting this study, the researcher plans to present the results to teachers, department heads, rural public secondary principals, deputy principals, and above all, policymakers. The study can be used to build best practices for leadership based on its findings, recommendations, conclusions and suggestions. These best practices are meant to support departmental heads, deputy principals, and rural public secondary school principals. They are also meant to shape policy, which could assist in developing and maintaining leadership capacity-building trainings over time. Furthermore, by increasing the study's effect, the researcher is dedicated to working both independently and together with other universities. This entails writing papers for educational journals and carrying out additional studies in the areas of change management and educational leadership.

Aiming to develop programmes that are both theoretically sound and practically relevant, and the dissemination of these best practices is guided by the research findings. The findings may guide the creation of capacity-building training programmes that take into account the complex requirements of leadership in a variety of learning environments. These best practices aim to improve the resilience and adaptability of administrators making them better equipped to manage their schools in Antigua and Barbuda's dynamic educational environment. They do this by addressing the real-world challenges that leaders and other educational leaders in the region face.

Additionally, the study intends to create an ongoing conversation between leadership experts, legislators, and educators. The ultimate goal is to spark long-term advancements in this area by encouraging thought and conversation about the condition of educational leadership training as it stands right now. Through active engagement with stakeholders

through workshops, seminars, and symposia, the researcher seeks to improve leadership practices and strategies while cultivating a cooperative environment where knowledge sharing could improve educational outcomes for rural schools. The purpose of this continuous involvement is to guarantee that the process of developing leadership skills stays dynamic and ever-changing enabling it to meet upcoming obstacles and maintain academic excellence.

Conclusion

The impact of a principal's relationship with teachers on the school's culture is emphasised in the research. Better communication, teamwork, and a positive atmosphere that supports a school's success may be fostered by an effective and supportive partnership. The ability of the principal to inspire and encourage educators, students, and the community to create a supportive learning environment is one way that the principal's leadership style directly affects the success of the school.

According to this study, the capacity of leaders to lead practically has a key impact on the functioning of secondary schools in rural regions. The disparities in these competencies among leaders necessitate an exploration and probable adjustment of current systems for the professional development, selection, and training of leaders. There appears to be a need to modify the preparation and selection methods given the differences in the leaders' educational backgrounds and practical experience. This highlights the necessity of more stringent screening and preparation procedures for prospective leaders.

Before taking on the post, there is an obvious requirement for targeted leadership development. This type of specialised training may assist leaders in preparing for any challenges they may encounter in the real world when they begin their positions. Leaders should stay current on educational advances to satisfy the needs of an ever-changing student body. As a result, the findings emphasise the need to invest resources in holistic leadership

development. School administration may be made more successful by offering tools to help administrators hone their practical leadership skills.

Rural public secondary school leaders' work can be complicated, which sometimes causes dissatisfaction and makes it difficult for them to properly negotiate their obligations. Nevertheless, the majority of leaders at rural public secondary schools stated that they are prepared to go above and beyond in the middle of the mayhem. Because of this, exercising leadership during times of transition requires a variety of abilities, know-how, and character traits to balance administrative and instructional duties. This research study aims to evaluate how effectively the current leadership training initiatives for secondary school leaders in rural Antigua and Barbuda are aligned with the challenges they face daily, identify existing gaps, if any, and suggest empirical evidence. Therefore, based on the nature of this study, the researcher utilises a qualitative phenomenological research method instead of a quantitative research method.

This qualitative phenomenological study includes principals, deputy principals, department heads, teachers from a rural public secondary school, the Teachers' Union Officials, and the Ministry of Education Officials to identify leadership issues. Consequently, the researcher visited four Antigua and Barbuda rural public secondary schools. A total of eight department heads, four principals, six deputy principals, three Teachers' Union Officials and three Ministry of Education Officials were interviewed and 32 teachers formed the focus groups for the study. These diverse groups provided rich and detailed real-life experiences though the positions, qualifications, and age range of these leaders may differ at different levels of education. Participants are novices and experienced school leaders, Teachers' Union Officials, and Ministry of Education Officials who were purposively selected from the sample in the first half of 2022 and the latter quarter of 2023.

To do this, the four research questions guiding this study are: What is the perceived contributions of capacity-building trainings to leaders' effectiveness? How do leaders in rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda experience and navigate challenges and successes within leadership capacity-building trainings? How are the current evolving trends (contemporary practices) in leadership capacity-building trainings perceived and experienced by leaders in rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda? How do leaders describe specific changes in their leadership practices as a result of capacity-building trainings?

Kouzes and Posner's (2010; 2012; 2919) exemplary transformational leadership model informs this study. According to the research findings, this theoretical framework may help develop leadership capacity for long-term sustainability. Consequently, the leadership model developed by Kouzes and Posner includes five practices and ten commitments that leaders exhibit when performing at their highest level. Hence, this theoretical framework gives practical advice on how to lead and what actions to take to succeed as school leaders. Furthermore, the theoretical framework for building future leaders is endorsed by participants' characterisations of the processes undertaken to face adversity and prepare leaders to develop conceptual and contextual guidance on how teachers and leaders lead while providing practical suggestions for coping with 21st-century global demands.

Therefore, to gain a deeper and more thorough understanding of the phenomenon, which includes the elements of effective school leadership and how these contribute to fostering a productive educational environment in rural settings, the exemplary transformational leadership theoretical framework is appropriate for this study. This framework can also shed light on the methods and approaches that school administrators in these situations might use to overcome obstacles, bring about improvements, and motivate their staff to meet common learning objectives.

This qualitative design utilises open-ended interview protocols and focus group discussions to collect qualitative data. To identify themes among the 56 participants, the researcher uses Braun and Clarke's thematic approach. Based on the thematic analysis of the data, four themes emerged: 1) navigating resource constraints and multifaceted roles, 2) balancing community engagement with educational leadership, 3) leadership competencies and innovation in school administration, and 4) professional development and its influence on leadership effectiveness. These themes emphasise how important it is to include the community, lead as a principal effectively, and provide thorough training and development for school administrators to improve the quality of education in rural areas. Underscoring the urgent necessity of implementing methodical modifications in the processes of preparing, training, and selecting leaders for rural schools, they guarantee enhanced learning results and effective administration.

The study's findings again show how important a principal's leadership is to a school's ability to be managed successfully, especially when it comes to rural public secondary education. It becomes evident that a principal's leadership effectiveness is not limited by their educational background or the schools from which they graduated. Rather, it emphasises the real-world leadership experience that has been gathered over time. Even if academic credentials are prioritised in the recruitment process, persistent trends of inadequate leadership are noted. The school may suffer as a result of a lack of leadership abilities. Certain attributes, such as a good sense of community and a collaborative spirit, are necessary for leading a public secondary school in a rural area. This highlights certain difficulties that come with being a rural school leader that may not be addressed by academic credentials alone.

According to the findings, the interaction between a principal and teachers has a critical impact on rural public secondary school culture, as the findings show. Improved communication, teamwork, and a good environment are all critical for the school's success and

may all be fostered by a supportive and productive partnership. Since the principal's leadership style comprises motivating and influencing teachers, students, and the community to create a learning environment, it follows that the success of the school is intimately linked to this leadership style.

Revision of the procedures for choosing and preparing leaders is indicated by the discrepancy between the academic credentials and practical training of leaders. It follows from this that choosing and preparing future leaders would require a more comprehensive strategy. Leaders are strongly encouraged to pursue capacity-building trainings to stay up to date with educational breakthroughs and adapt to the changing demands of their student body. As a result, the results emphasise how crucial it is to allocate funds for thorough leadership development to give leaders the theoretical understanding and practical abilities they need to manage their schools successfully. Encouraging supportive connections with staff and the whole school community, navigating the particular obstacles of rural education, and promoting great educational results are all made possible by this investment in leaders.

A clear prerequisite for assuming the position is attending certain leadership capacity-building trainings. Leaders might be better prepared for the obstacles they may encounter in the real world after taking on their roles with the help of this specialised training. This study shows that a principal's ability to lead effectively in the real world is a critical factor in how well rural secondary schools function. The disparities in competencies amongst leaders indicate that the existing procedures for school leader selection, professional development, and preparation need to be examined and maybe overhauled.

The researcher's goal in conducting this phenomenological dissertation is to contribute to the body of knowledge on "An Exploration of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Leaders in Antigua and Barbuda." Therefore, the results of this study are important for stakeholders, policymakers, people, and researchers doing more research in this

field of educational leadership and administration. Furthermore, the study provides recommendations ranging from proposals for further research to practical implementations. It is recommended that leaders, parents, and policymakers take into account these suggestions since their execution is expected to have a favourable effect on children, parents, leaders, policies, and the community at large.

The literature reinforces the notion that school leaders should engage in continuous capacity-building trainings to develop their leadership capacity. With such leadership training, upcoming, school leaders can be better equipped to manage the evolving demands they face in the future. Therefore, principal preparation programmes (PPPs) are indispensable in equipping new leaders with the necessary skills for successful school leadership (Grissom et al., 2019).

This study corroborates the research of many scholars that leadership is essential (Grissom et al., 2021; Guzmán et al., 2020; Tingle et al., 2019) since they are one of the critical features of students' learning and school improvement. Consequently, "…leadership has received more attention as an essential ingredient in efforts to improve schools and student learning" (Grissom et al., 2021, p. ix). In addition, "This change is expected to generate or enhance strategic leadership actions, thus allowing for the design of more and better contextually-bound solutions for the respective schools" (Brauckmann et al., 2020, p. 4).

Leadership Experiences

Leaders' experiences in Antigua and Barbuda's rural public secondary schools are governed mainly by their implicit concept of leadership. As a result, they find it challenging to adjust to the responsibilities and expectations of the leadership role they are required to fulfil when assigned those tasks (Tingle et al., 2019). The findings demonstrate that most of the school leaders in this study have challenging and overwhelming experiences in rural public secondary schools. Nevertheless, leaders in Antigua and Barbuda's rural public secondary schools are overjoyed to get the opportunity to head their schools. This positivity is expressed

as an excellent learning experience (P16); incredible (FG4); rewarding (FG1); a love for children (P1, P2, P3, P5), empathy for people (P2), an enjoyable moment (FG2), and have encountered many rewards (FG3).

However, while most participants consider their leadership experiences as elating, all the participants in the study regard their experience as frustrating in providing effective leadership to rural public schools. The school leaders identify parental involvement, teacher resistance to change, marginalised schools, geographical isolation, and high leadership turnover rates, especially among principals and deputy principals as hindrances to negotiating their roles are among the prime issues they encounter daily.

From their perspective, it is also perceived that their leadership responsibilities impact their personal and professional development to lead effectively. In addition to these barriers, the study details the excessive responsibilities of the principal's duties. As a result, they assert that working as school leaders impacts their responsibilities resulting in burnout. They also confirm that their school responsibilities affect their personal and professional development growth and, at the same time, cannot build relationships beyond the school; despite this, the leaders remain devoted to the school primarily because they are dedicated to the student's learning.

Students' achievements depend on positive relationships between schools, parents, and community members (Rita Panaoura, 2020; Waluyandi et al., 2020). Students may likely succeed in life significantly if they see these relationships as being embedded in the school culture. However, one finding from the study is that while all the participants involved are concerned about the decline in parental involvement, students' withdrawal, and unfavourable public perceptions, they feel frustrated about strengthening the partnerships among the stakeholders due to the daily difficulties. One member of FG2 posits that "A leader needs to

bridge the gap between the community and the school." However, a department head argues that:

> Suppose we cannot remove the misconception placed on the school, build relationships with the community, or reaffirm our commitment to parents, community and policymakers working together and possibly changing how the leader articulates the school's vision. In that case, I believe the school will continue to face challenges. (P13)

The interviews and focus group findings indicate that rural public secondary school leaders do not have the time to engage with parental concerns effectively. Although this issue is discussed at length and interviews and focus groups share similar thoughts, all believe that alliances with parents and the community are necessary "…so that students go there, become the best version of themselves" (P3).

It takes time and effort to form alliances and engage in productive partnerships; nonetheless, only by working together can the child's needs be addressed. As a result, parents, schools, and community members should work together to make meaningful decisions to help every student reach their full potential. Therefore, schools should collaborate with families and communities through open communication channels to give the best education possible (O'Toole et al., 2019). In addition, O'Toole et al. (2019) suggest that the structural and contextual supports provided to parents can considerably impact the quality of their connection with schools.

A plethora of research studies accentuate that effective leadership is a catalyst for enhancing academic results (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019; Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020; Naziah et al., 2020; Swanson et al., 2020; Szempruch & Smyła, 2020). However, while leaders can lead successful schools, Naidoo (2019) emphasises that leaders who lack assertiveness are more likely to succumb to pressure.

Leadership Qualities

According to NPBEA (2015), Prociw and Eberle (2016), and The Council of Chief State School Officers (2008) in the literature reviewed in this study:

> School principals must have the knowledge and hard and soft skills necessary to develop and implement action plans, as well as the disposition to believe in, respect, and contribute to trusting people and their decisions, as well as the ability to include families and partners in school decision-making, and finally, the ability to effectively articulate the school's vision and purpose to teachers, parents, students, and the community (Dissertation, p.66)

This study examines the necessary competencies that Antigua and Barbuda rural public secondary school leaders consider important qualities in public school leadership to improve and sustain school effectiveness. This study's findings show that collaboration and teamwork, inspiring and empowering others, and empathy are beneficial leadership qualities of the principal. In addition, these leadership qualities positively affect organisational culture, promote effectiveness, and improve student academic achievement.

They also emphasise that their influence on the development and sustenance of positive school culture is strongly dependent on the involvement and empowerment of their followers in all areas of school development and inspiring their subordinates to buy-in into the school's vision and, at the same time provide the subordinates with the necessary support in carrying out their duties effectively. In inspiring a culture of empowerment, school leaders articulate that active collaboration, teamwork, and empathy are essential qualities of school success. For example, a deputy principal states, "Communication is vital in leading a school effectively" (P7) and "being willing and open to listening to staff, not just teaching staff" (P14). However, as a leader, "…you should not micromanage everything", asserts a department head (P9).

Leadership Capacity-Building Trainings

Every rural public secondary school leader in Antigua and Barbuda relies primarily on on-the-job experiences, intuition, trial and error, peers, and mentorship support from present

and previous leaders; in most cases, they have to paddle their canoes to carry out their daily obligations. In contrast, while one participant believes that experiential experience is satisfactory, most school leaders express that on-the-job experience is insufficient to equip them for leading a school, especially given the complex problems they frequently face. Participant 1 asserts that "…school leadership is a sore point. It is not a situation where you are given formal training." In addition, Participant 12 articulates, "I think some specialised level of training should be done. There are some things one learns by experience; however, formal training prevents some catastrophic mistakes from happening."

Schools are dynamic and constantly changing; therefore, quality professional development programmes for school leaders are essential to their development and the success of their schools. Moreover, participants claim that these professional development programmes (PDP) are not personalised to their specific requirements, and they should be continuous, contextual, and experiential to maximise school leaders' potential to promote school transformation and improve students' learning outcomes. Thus, Participant 14 says:

> These workshops facilitated by the Ministry would have impacted me as a leader in some respects, but a more robust leadership training programme would have benefited us to be able to cope with the numerous challenges we face on the school's daily basis to lead effectively.

Although principal preparation programmes are highlighted as a possible enhancer of leadership, the literature shows that these programmes have not kept up with leaders' rising demands and challenging tasks (Cosner, 2019). Furthermore, many effective forms of professional development (PD) for school administrators are lacking (Daniëls et al., 2019). However, "If the preparation of school leaders is to be a transformative experience, it should be grounded in a set of contemplative, rigorous, interactive experiences that enhance personal growth and development" (Fusarelli et al., 2019, p. 12). Despite the nuances, there is universal acknowledgement that ongoing professional development is vital for enhancing leaders' ability

to improve their skills and practice and can foster effective organisational leadership and learning (Jensen, 2022; Moldoveanu & Narayanda, 2019; Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018). It also gives leaders a contextual perspective and experiential learning by taking small steps to close the leadership gap while building school leadership capacity and fostering relationships within and beyond the parameters of the school settings in the school community.

However, a tailored approach is required instead of a one-size-fits-all approach. Therefore, organisations should offer effective leadership development programmes (LDP) that address the needs of both the organisation and the learner if they are devoted to recognising the needs of their leaders and the constructs required to develop them. This study offers a framework for leaders and organisations to create and evaluate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to construct a thriving and dynamic leadership programme. Nevertheless, it recognises that assessment and feedback are the cornerstones of long-term success in leadership development and sustainability.

Additionally, the leadership capacity-building trainings framework offers school leaders and aspiring leaders a strategy and chance to develop their leadership skills by working with and learning from others within and across schools. As a result, it encourages collaborative learning and networking among co-workers in a specific work setting (Prenger et al., 2019). Collegiality significantly impacts student learning outcomes, which opens the potential for individual and collective capacity for school leadership (Brodie, 2021). It is specifically designed for capacity-building trainings that emphasises the growth and development of leadership skills. With such a plan, they are more likely to remain in the field and perhaps even in their current school as they gain confidence and a deeper understanding of leadership in that particular educational environment.

After a comprehensive review of the literature and the data analysis, the data support the findings of this phenomenological qualitative research study that school leaders who

participate in ongoing professional leadership capacity-building trainings should gain a deeper understanding of how leadership preparation equips them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become future school leaders. As a result, the literature suggests that continuous professional development (CPD), leadership mentoring programmes, leadership internship programmes, and in-service leadership programmes can help potential candidates build leadership competencies and skills through planning, practicum, and reflection (Sutcher et al., 2017). This is because school leaders, whether principals, deputy principals, department heads, administrators, or prospective leaders, are preparing for an educational system that is constantly evolving. The literature also suggests that the effectiveness and sustainability of these programmes should be aligned with the leadership development programme's curriculum and state requirements (Tingle et al., 2019). As a result, research like this provides Antiguan and Barbudan leaders with the impetus to hone their leadership skills, learn new tools and advance professionally. However, the principal training programmes' curriculum has to be grounded in the reality of school leadership, incorporating relationship-building, resource management, and community participation (Bush et al., 2019).

Leadership development is a complex and sometimes conundrum phenomenon. These leaders expressed a variety of experiences during interviews and focus groups that were unique to their contexts; however, they provided lessons that researchers, policymakers, and school leaders could use to strengthen their leadership capabilities. Although there is a plethora of best practices for leadership development that may be used to improve leadership abilities, it is the presumption that the Ministry of Education should invest in the preparation and capacity building trainings of its school leaders through its Educators' Summer Institute and continuous leadership development programmes in schools to cope with the complexities of navigating their leadership roles. Iteratively, all participants suggest that these programmes should be contextual, practice-oriented, and meet the specific needs of the leaders (Brauckmann et al.,

2020). Leadership development is a journey of learning and retooling that helps leaders constantly improve through time rather than a one-time, one-size-fits-all investment (Brauckmann et al., 2020).

In light of these unexpected findings, it is critical to identify the challenges of rural public secondary schools. These challenges can be related to leaders' uncertain duties, being undervalued, a lack of student and parental involvement, teacher resistance and pushback to change, marginalised schools, negative public perceptions, geographical isolation, high leadership turnover rates, and professional development. An understanding of these challenges would enable the Ministry of Education to offer support to build the capacity of these rural public secondary school leaders, their sustainability, and the growth of the institutions.

Further research into these barriers is also needed. For example, the literature of this study suggests that people do not enjoy being bossed around and are criticised more often than rewarded. This frequently results in feelings of fear, resentment, and frustration (Chukwusa, 2019), which can potentially paralyse an organisation by creating a minimal environment within them (Luqman et al., 2019). Consequently, Lambert (2006) states that learning and leadership have a reciprocal relationship. That is, they coexist together. However, to achieve long-term viability, survivability, and sustainability, leadership should be spread across the school, be ingrained in its tradition, and focus on team development including employees, members of the school council, and governing bodies (Stoll, 2009).

As evident in this study, rural public secondary school leaders articulate that they are in desperate need of dynamic and transformational leaders to establish a vision, inspire individuals, be good listeners, foster a positive learning environment, encourage collaboration, teamwork, empathy for others, and support professional development (P1-P18; FG1-FG4).

Similar comments made by teachers, department heads, principals, and deputy principals were collected and used to establish codes and themes. As a result, this study offers

insights into school leaders' perspectives on the leadership abilities necessary to be successful leaders. These insights are congruent with previous research in the field of education. In addition, the qualitative phenomenological data findings corroborated the findings of previous research studies presented in the literature review. Noteworthy, based on the problem statement and the purpose of the study, the literature review and the research findings as demonstrated, there is a need for more thorough research and solutions to fill these leadership gaps, according to this study.

The results, taken together, demonstrate how important it is to provide context-specific, comprehensive leadership development. The techniques of outstanding leadership proposed by Kouzes and Posner are not only supported empirically but also aligned with such an approach. Kouzes and Posner's transformational leadership paradigm aligns with the values of practical application when combined with a solid theoretical base. In addition, the meta-analytic review carried out by Lacerenza et al. (2017), highlights this all-encompassing approach to leadership training by pinpointing the ideal circumstances for such projects. Collectively, these viewpoints might increase the applicability and efficacy of the transformational leadership paradigm, especially in the context of educational leadership.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Unicaf University Research Ethics Application Form (REAF)

REAF_DSPA - Version 1.0

UNICAF UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM
DOCTORAL STUDIES PROVISIONAL APPROVAL

The Provisional Approval - Research Ethics Application Form (REAF) should be completed by Doctoral level candidates enrolled on Dissertation stage 1.

This form is a **provisional approval** which means that the UREC committee has accepted the initial description of the project but this is conditional as changes may have to be implemented following Dissertation Stage 2 and piloting in Dissertation Stage 3.

This is a conditional offer and acceptance of the project needs to be verified and confirmed upon completion of the Research Ethics Application Form in Dissertation Stage 3.

Important Notes:

• An electronic version of the completed form should be uploaded by the student to the relevant submission link in the VLE. Student's supervisor will then review the form and provide feedback commentary. Once supervisor's initial approval is given then the supervisor will forward this to doctoral.studies-aa@unicaf.org, for provisional approval by the Unicaf University Research Ethics Committee (UREC).

• Please type your answers and **do not** submit paper copy scans. Only *PDF* format documents should be submitted to the committee.

• If you need to supply any supplementary material, not specifically requested by the application form, please do so in a separate file. Any additional document(s) should be clearly labelled and uploaded in the relevant VLE link.

• If you have any queries about the form, please address them to your dissertation or project supervisor.

UNICAF UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM DOCTORAL STUDIES	UREC USE ONLY: Application No: Date Received:

Student's Name: Melville M. E. Richardson

Student's E-mail Address: melrich2000@gmail.com

Student's ID #: R1804D5022300

Supervisor's Name: Dr. Lupiya Daniel Mpolomoka

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Program of Study: UUZ: EdD Doctoral of Education

Research Project Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principal in Antigua and Barbuda

1. **Please state the timelines involved in the proposed research project:**

Estimated Start Date: 27-Jul-2020   Estimated End Date: 31-Dec-2022

2. **External Research Funding (if applicable):**

   2.a. **Do you have any external funding for your research?**

   ☐ YES   ☑ NO

   If YES, please answer questions **2b** and **2c**.

   2.b. List any external (third party) sources of funding you plan to utilise for your project. You need to include full details on the source of funds (e.g. state, private or individual sponsor), any prior / existing or future relationships between the funding body / sponsor and any of the principal investigator(s) or co-investigator(s) or student researcher(s), status and timeline of the application and any conditions attached.

   2.c. If there are any perceived ethical issues or potential conflicts of interest arising from applying or and receiving external funding for the proposed research then these need to be fully disclosed below and also further elaborated on, in the relevant sections on ethical considerations later on in this form.

3. The research project

3.a. Project Summary:

In this section fully describe the purpose and underlying rationale for the proposed research project. Ensure that you pose the research questions to be examined, state the hypotheses, and discuss the expected results of your research and their potential.

It is important in your description to use plain language so it can be understood by all members of the UREC, especially those who are not necessarily experts in the particular discipline. To that effect ensure that you fully explain / define any technical terms or discipline-specific terminology (use the space provided in the box).

This study evaluates how effectively the current leadership capacity-building training initiatives for secondary school principals in rural Antigua and Barbuda are aligned with the challenges they face daily, identifies existing gaps, if any, and suggests empirical evidence. The ultimate goal is to strengthen the capacity and efficacy of principal leadership programmes, informing policy and enhancing educational leadership training programmes in Antigua and Barbuda as well as in other similar rural settings.

In supporting this purpose, Fullan (2003) vigorously argues that principals should invest their energy and resources, such as time, money, and human capital, into the development of individuals within the institution, to take the chance that they will learn, and establish opportunities and conditions for people to take risks, confront and cope with challenges, and to be empowered and supported in this endeavour. Correspondingly, principals must have the "…expertise for implementing strategies based on a conditional relationship between the leader and his or her followers" (Tonich, 2021, p.54).

The purpose of this study is to help understand how educational trainings can better equip principals with the knowledge and skills to design robust educational system and their staff and students.

3.b. Significance of the Proposed Research Study and Potential Benefits:

Outline the potential significance and/or benefits of the research (use the space provided in the box).

Principals of rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda face a complex web of leadership duties, constantly adapting to new demands, and challenges and have to fill critical skill gaps that are necessary for doing their jobs efficiently. To help these principals steer their schools towards clear objectives and strategic orientations, it is clear that they need to strike a balance between responsibility and flexibility as this study seeks to explore these principals' lived experiences during leadership capacity-building training. To shed light on these leaders' tenacity and inventiveness, the research will also look at the unique difficulties and achievements they have in capacity-building programmes. By evaluating the present and emerging patterns in these training programmes, the research aims to pinpoint modern approaches that impact educational leadership nationwide. Ultimately, the study is important because it critically evaluates how these kinds of training programmes impact principals' performance in challenging, dynamic rural situations, emphasising the improvement of high-quality education delivery.

4. **Project execution:**

4.a. **The following study is an:**

☑ experimental study (primary research)

☐ desktop study (secondary research)

☐ desktop study using existing databases involving information of human/animal subjects

☐ Other

If you have chosen 'Other' please Explain:

Melville M. E. Richardson   R1804D502230   3

4.b. Methods. The following study will involve the use of:

Method	Materials / Tools

Qualitative:

- ☑ Face to Face Interviews
- ☐ Phone Interviews
- ☑ Face to Face Focus Groups
- ☐ Online Focus Groups
- ☐ Other *

Quantitative:

- ☐ Face to Face Questionnaires
- ☐ Online Questionnaires
- ☐ Experiments
- ☐ Tests
- ☐ Other *

*If you have chosen 'Other' please Explain:

5. **Participants:**

5 a. Does the Project involve the recruitment and participation of additional persons other than the researcher(s) themselves?

☑ YES   **If YES, please complete all following sections.**

☐ NO   **If NO, please directly proceed to Question 7.**

5 b. Relevant Details of the Participants of the Proposed Research

State the number of participants you plan to recruit, and explain in the box below how the total number was calculated.

Number of participants | 56 |

Based on the nature of this research, in-depth unstructured face-to-face interviews will be conducted with 56 participants: 3 Ministry of Education Officials, 3 Teachers' Union Officials, 3 principals, 6 deputy principals, 8 HoDs, and focus groups - 32 homogeneous focus groups of 8 heads of departments from each of the 4 rural public secondary schools from a population of 48 HOD based on the people-oriented.

Describe important characteristics such as: demographics (e.g. age, gender, location, affiliation, level of fitness, intellectual ability etc). It is also important that you specify any inclusion and exclusion criteria that will be applied (e.g. eligibility criteria for participants).

Age range   From | 35 | To | 65 |

Gender   ☑ Female
           ☑ Male

Eligibility Criteria:

- Inclusion criteria

Participants reside in Antigua and Barbuda:
rural public secondary school principals, heads of departments, deputy principals, Ministry of Education and Antigua and Barbuda Union of Teachers

- Exclusion criteria

Visual Arts head of departments (HOD).
Participants above the age of 65 years.

Disabilities

Disabled participants are disqualified from participating in the study because there are no disabled participants in the education system.

Other relevant information (use the space provided in the box):

Excluded from this study are Visual Arts Head of Departments leaders because the researcher is responsible for the oversight of this discipline and teachers.

5 c.   Participation & Research setting:

Clearly describe which group of participants is completing/participating in the material(s)/   tool(s) described in 5b above (use the space provided in the box).

> Group A1 - Principals in school Group A1 will be engaged in unstructured face-to-face interviews to understand and explore their opinions, behaviours, opinions, and experiences on the phenomena. Likewise, Group B1 - Deputy Principal in school A1 will be engaged in unstructured face-to-face interview to understand and explore their opinions, behaviours, opinions, and experiences on the phenomena. Group C1 Heads of Departments will be engaged in unstructured face-to-face focus groups discussions giving them an opportunity to freely and openly express their opinions, feelings and experiences on the designated topic.

5 d.   Recruitment Process for Human Research Participants:

Clearly describe how the potential participants will be identified, approached and recruited (use the space provided in the box).

> Group A1-The Participant Information Sheet will be emailed to three rural public secondary school principals inviting them to participate in a research followed by the Informed Consent Form once they would have consented to be a part of the study. Likewise, in Group B1-the Participant Information Sheet will be emailed to the six deputy principals of the three secondary schools followed by the Informed Consent Form once they would have agreed to participate in the study; however, only the first person from the school with two deputies will be selected. Group C1-The Participant Information Sheet will be emailed to the 40 heads of departments from the three secondary schools, except the Visual Arts' heads of departments. The Informed Consent Form from the first six people from each school who responded will participate in the research.

5 e.   Research Participants Informed Consent.

Select below which categories of participants will participate in the study. Complete the relevant Informed Consent form and submit it along with the REAF form.

Yes	No	Categories of participants	Form to be completed
✔	☐	Typically Developing population(s) above the maturity age *	Informed Consent Form
☐	☐	Typically Developing population(s) under the maturity age *	Guardian Informed Consent Form

* Maturity age is defined by national regulations in laws of the country in which the research is being conducted.

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5 f. **Relationship between the principal investigator and participants.**

Is there any relationship between the principal investigator (student), co-investigators(s), (supervisor) and participant(s)? For example, if you are conducting research in a school environment on students in your classroom (e.g. instructor-student).

☐ YES ☑ NO

If YES, specify (use the space provided in the box).

6. **Potential Risks of the Proposed Research Study.**

6 a. i. **Are there any potential risks, psychological harm and/or ethical issues associated with the proposed research study, other than risks pertaining to everyday life events (such as the risk of an accident when travelling to a remote location for data collection)?**

☐ YES ☑ NO

If YES, specify below and answer the question 6 a.ii.

6 a.ii **Provide information on what measures will be taken in order to exclude or minimise risks described in 6.a.i.**

6 b. Choose the appropriate option

		Yes	No
i.	Will you obtain written informed consent form from all participants?	✔	☐
ii.	Does the research involve as participants, people whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question?	☐	✔
iii.	Does this research involve participants who are children under maturity age? **If you answered YES to question iii, complete all following questions.** **If you answered NO to question iii, do not answer Questions iv, v, vi and** **proceed to Questions vii, viii, ix and x.**	☐	✔
iv.	Will the research tools be implemented in a professional educational setting in the presence of other adults (i.e. classroom in the presence of a teacher)?	☐	✔
v.	Will informed consent be obtained from the legal guardians (i.e. parents) of children?	☐	✔
vi.	Will verbal assent be obtained from children?	☐	✔
vii.	Will all data be treated as confidential? If NO, explain why confidentiality of the collected data is not appropriate for this proposed research project, providing details of how all participants will be informed of the fact that any data which they will provide will not be confidential.	✔	☐
viii.	Will all participants /data collected be anonymous? If NO, explain why and describe the procedures to be used to ensure the anonymity of participants and/or confidentiality of the collected data both during the conduct of the research and in the subsequent release of its findings.	✔	☐

			Yes	No
ix.	Have you ensured that personal data and research data collected from participants will be securely stored for five years?		✔	☐
x.	Does this research involve the deception of participants? If YES, describe the nature and extent of the deception involved. Explain how and when the deception will be revealed, and who will administer this debrief to the participants:		☐	✔

6 c. i. Are there any other ethical issues associated with the proposed research study that are not already adequately covered in the preceding sections?

☐ Yes   ✔ No

If YES, specify (maximum 150 words).

6.c.ii Provide information on what measures will be taken in order to exclude or minimise ethical issues described in 6.c.i.

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6 d. Indicate the Risk Rating.

☐ High   ✔ Low

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7. Further Approvals

Are there any other approvals required (in addition to ethics clearance from UREC) in order to carry out the proposed research study?

☐ YES   ☑ NO

If YES, specify (maximum 100 words).

8. Application Checklist

Mark √ if the study involves any of the following:

☐ Children and young people under 18 years of age, vulnerable population such as children with special educational needs (SEN), racial or ethnic minorities, socioeconomically disadvantaged, pregnant women, elderly, malnourished people, and ill people.

☐ Research that foresees risks and disadvantages that would affect any participant of the study such as anxiety, stress, pain or physical discomfort, harm risk (which is more than is expected from everyday life) or any other act that participants might believe is detrimental to their wellbeing and / or has the potential to / will infringe on their human rights / fundamental rights.

☐ Risk to the well-being and personal safety of the researcher.

☐ Administration of any substance (food / drink / chemicals / pharmaceuticals / supplements / chemical agent or vaccines or other substances (including vitamins or food substances) to human participants.

☐ Results that may have an adverse impact on the natural or built environment.

9. Further documents

Check that the following documents are attached to your application:

		ATTACHED	NOT APPLICABLE
1	Recruitment advertisement (if any)	☐	☑
2	Informed Consent Form / Guardian Informed Consent Form	☑	☐
3	Research Tool(s)	☑	☐
4	Gatekeeper Letter	☑	☐
5	Any other approvals required in order to carry out the proposed research study, e.g., institutional permission (e.g. school principal or company director) or approval from a local ethics or professional regulatory body.	☐	☑

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Appendix B: Unicaf University Research Ethics Committee Approval

UREC's Decision

Student's Name: Melville M E Richardson

Student's ID #: R1804D5022300

Supervisor's Name: Dr. Lupiya Daniel Mpolomoka

Program of Study: UUZ: EdD Doctoral of Education

Offer ID /Group ID: O19745G19496

Dissertation Stage: 1

Research Project Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda.

Comments:

Decision: A. Approved without revision or comments

Date: 08-Oct-2020

Appendix C: Director of Education Letter of Approval

Government of Antigua & Barbuda

Ministry of Education, Sports & Creative Industries
Government Complex, Queen Elizabeth Highway
St. John's, Antigua
Tel: 462-0192/462-0193/462-0198/462-0199
Overseas: 268-462-4959/1051
Fax: 268-462-4970

Mr. Melville Richardson   December 15, 2021
Green Bay Hill
St. John's
Antigua

Dear Mr. Richardson,

Receipt is acknowledged of your letter dated 7th October, 2021 seeking permission to recruit school leaders and to subsequently conduct a research in four (4) rural public secondary schools on "Leadership Capacity Building for Sustainability Development in Rural Public Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda" as part of your studies at the Unicaf University, Zambia.

It is noted that the purpose of the phenomenological qualitative research is to understand and describe the lived experiences of public rural school principals in Antigua and Barbuda, as well as to explore their perceptions of the leadership qualities that school principals must possess in order to be effective leaders.
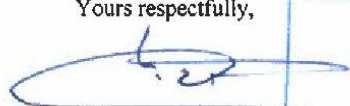
It is further noted that the study is among school principals, deputy principals and department heads involved in school leadership.

The Ministry of Education, Sports and Creative Industries is pleased to grant permission for you to conduct your research among four (4) rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

Per your request, the school officials will be notified that you will make contact with them to solicit their participation in the aforementioned research. Also, access to the relevant email addresses will be provided.

We wish you all the very best with your studies.

Yours respectfully,

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

DEC 15 2021

Clare Browne Esq.
Director of Education   SPORTS & CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet

Participation Information Sheet

Proposed Research
By
Melville M. E. Richardson

Research Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda.

Description:

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research is to evaluate how effectively the current leadership capacity building trainings for secondary school principals in rural Antigua and Barbuda are aligned with the challenges they face daily, identify existing gaps, if any, and suggest empirical evidence. The goal is to inform policy and refine educational principals' capacity-building trainings within the context of Antigua and Barbuda and other similar settings. The study's objective is to help school principals improve leadership competencies to become effective leaders. The research hopes that the body of literature and data collected may cast some light on the ongoing debates. The findings will also inspire policy-makers, administrators, school leaders, and school principals affected by the problem as they reflect on their leadership and for future researchers to demonstrate a keen interest in capacity building trainings for secondary schools principals. Your involvement in this project will contribute to a pool of information and impact the way leadership ability is built and maintained in rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

School leaders in rural public secondary schools will be contacted via email and asked to voluntarily participate in this research by answering an online demographic questionnaire, participating in face-to-face interviews, and participating in focus group sessions. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not to participate has no bearing on your current or future relationships with the researcher. If you decide to join, you can leave at any time without penalty. If you choose not to participate in the study, I will not use any of the information gathered about you. During this time, the participant will be free to ask the researcher any questions or seek clarification in order to make an informed judgement.

These sessions will be recorded. Therefore, this study's records will be kept confidential, and written and audio research records will be stored in a lockable file cabinet at home. Audio recordings will be saved on a secure external hard drive and transferred to my password-protected laptop. The data will be accessible only to my dissertation supervisor and me. Throughout this study, pseudonyms will be used to preserve the anonymity of participants and their schools. Outside of the dissertation committee, no confidential material will be shared. However, once the participant withdraws, data will be destroyed.

Thank you in advance for your desire to contribute to expanding the information base connected to An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda.
.

For further information, participants can contact the researcher by phone/WhatsApp (1-268-783-7448) or by email (melrich2000@gmail.com).

Appendix E: Group A1 Consent Form

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Informed Consent Form

Part 1: Debriefing of Participants

Student's Name: Melville M. E. Richardson

Student's E-mail Address: melrich2000@gmail.com

Student ID #:   R1804D5022300

Supervisor's Name: Dr. Lupiya Daniel Mpolomoka

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Program of Study: UUZ: EdD Doctoral of Education

Research Project Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda

Date: 10-Oct-2021

Provide a short description (purpose, aim and significance) of the research project, and explain why and how you have chosen this person to participate in this research (maximum 150 words).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research is to Evaluate how effectively the current leadership capacity building trainings for secondary school principals in rural Antigua and Barbuda are aligned with the challenges they face daily, identify existing gaps, if any, and suggest empirical evidence. The goal is to inform policy and refine educational principals' capacity-building trainings within the context of Antigua and Barbuda and other similar settings. The study's objective is to help school principals improve leadership competencies to become effective leaders.   The research hopes that the body of literature and data collected may cast some light on the ongoing debates.   The findings will also inspire policy-makers, administrators, school leaders, and school principals affected by the problem as they reflect on their leadership and for future researchers to demonstrate a keen interest in capacity building trainings for secondary schools principals.   Your involvement in this project will contribute to a pool of information and impact the way leadership ability is built and maintained in rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

The above named Student is committed in ensuring participant's voluntarily participation in the research project and guaranteeing there are no potential risks and/or harms to the participants.

Participants have the right to withdraw at any stage (prior or post the completion) of the research without any consequences and without providing any explanation. In these cases, data collected will be deleted.

All data and information collected will be coded and will not be accessible to anyone outside this research. Data described and included in dissemination activities will only refer to coded information ensuring beyond the bounds of possibility participant identification.

I, | Melville M. E. Richardson |, **ensure that all information stated above is true and that all conditions have been met.**

Student's Signature: *MRichardson*

1

Informed Consent Form

Part 2: Certificate of Consent

This section is mandatory and should be signed by the participant(s)

Student's Name: Melville M. E. Richardson

Student's E-mail Address: melrich2000@gmail.com

Student ID #:   R1804D5022300

Supervisor's Name: Dr. Lupiya Daniel Mpolomoka

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Program of Study: UUZ: EdD Doctoral of Education

Research Project Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda.

I have read the foregoing information about this study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss about it. I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions and I have received enough information about this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without negative consequences. I consent to the use of multimedia (e.g. audio recordings, video recordings) for the purposes of my participation in this study. I understand that my data will remain anonymous and confidential, unless stated otherwise. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Participant's Print name:

Participant's Signature:

Date:

If the Participant is illiterate:

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had an opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the aforementioned individual has given consent freely.

Witness's Print name:

Witness's Signature:

Date:

Appendix F: Group B1 Consent Form

UNICAF UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form

Part 1: Debriefing of Participants

Student's Name: Melville M. E. Richardson

Student's E-mail Address: melrich2000@gmail.com

Student ID #:   R1804D5022300

Supervisor's Name: Dr. Lupiya Daniel Mpolomoka

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Program of Study: UUZ: EdD Doctoral of Education

Research Project Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda

Date: 10-Oct-2021

Provide a short description (purpose, aim and significance) of the research project, and explain why and how you have chosen this person to participate in this research (maximum 150 words).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research is to Evaluate how effectively the current leadership capacity building trainings for secondary school principals in rural Antigua and Barbuda are aligned with the challenges they face daily, identify existing gaps, if any, and suggest empirical evidence. The goal is to inform policy and refine educational principals' capacity-building trainings within the context of Antigua and Barbuda and other similar settings. The study's objective is to help school principals improve leadership competencies to become effective leaders.   The research hopes that the body of literature and data collected may cast some light on the ongoing debates.   The findings will also inspire policy-makers, administrators, school leaders, and school principals affected by the problem as they reflect on their leadership and for future researchers to demonstrate a keen interest in capacity building trainings for secondary schools principals.   Your involvement in this project will contribute to a pool of information and impact the way leadership ability is built and maintained in rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

The above named Student is committed in ensuring participant's voluntarily participation in the research project and guaranteeing there are no potential risks and/or harms to the participants.

Participants have the right to withdraw at any stage (prior or post the completion) of the research without any consequences and without providing any explanation. In these cases, data collected will be deleted.

All data and information collected will be coded and will not be accessible to anyone outside this research. Data described and included in dissemination activities will only refer to coded information ensuring beyond the bounds of possibility participant identification.

I,   Melville M. E. Richardson   , **ensure that all information stated above is true and that all conditions have been met.**

Student's Signature: *MRichardson*

1

Informed Consent Form

Part 2: Certificate of Consent

This section is mandatory and should to be signed by the participant(s)

Student's Name: Melville M. E. Richardson

Student's E-mail Address: melrich2000@gmail.com

Student ID #:   R1804D5022300

Supervisor's Name: Dr. Lupiya Daniel Mpolomoka

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Program of Study: UUZ: EdD Doctoral of Education

Research Project Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda

I have read the foregoing information about this study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss about it. I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions and I have received enough information about this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without negative consequences. I consent to the use of multimedia (e.g. audio recordings, video recordings) for the purposes of my participation in this study. I understand that my data will remain anonymous and confidential, unless stated otherwise. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Participant's Print name:

Participant's Signature:

Date:

If the Participant is illiterate:

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had an opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the aforementioned individual has given consent freely.

Witness's Print name:

Witness's Signature:

Date:

Appendix G: Group C1 Consent Form

UNICAF UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form

Part 1: Debriefing of Participants

Student's Name: Melville M. E. Richardson

Student's E-mail Address: melrich2000@gmail.com

Student ID #:   R1804D5022300

Supervisor's Name: Dr. Lupiya Daniel Mpolomoka

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Program of Study: UUZ: EdD Doctoral of Education

Research Project Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda

Date: 10-Oct-2021

Provide a short description (purpose, aim and significance) of the research project, and explain why and how you have chosen this person to participate in this research (maximum 150 words).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research is to Evaluate how effectively the current leadership capacity building trainings for secondary school principals in rural Antigua and Barbuda are aligned with the challenges they face daily, identify existing gaps, if any, and suggest empirical evidence. The goal is to inform policy and refine educational principals' capacity-building trainings within the context of Antigua and Barbuda and other similar settings. The study's objective is to help school principals improve leadership competencies to become effective leaders. The research hopes that the body of literature and data collected may cast some light on the ongoing debates. The findings will also inspire policy-makers, administrators, school leaders, and school principals affected by the problem as they reflect on their leadership and for future researchers to demonstrate a keen interest in capacity building trainings for secondary schools principals. Your involvement in this project will contribute to a pool of information and impact the way leadership ability is built and maintained in rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

The above named Student is committed in ensuring participant's voluntarily participation in the research project and guaranteeing there are no potential risks and/or harms to the participants.

Participants have the right to withdraw at any stage (prior or post the completion) of the research without any consequences and without providing any explanation. In these cases, data collected will be deleted.

All data and information collected will be coded and will not be accessible to anyone outside this research. Data described and included in dissemination activities will only refer to coded information ensuring beyond the bounds of possibility participant identification.

I, [Melville M. E. Richardson   ] **, ensure that all information stated above is true and that all conditions have been met.**

Student's Signature: *MRichardson*

Informed Consent Form

Part 2: Certificate of Consent

This section is mandatory and should to be signed by the participant(s)

Student's Name: Melville M. E. Richardson

Student's E-mail Address: melrich2000@gmail.com

Student ID #:   R1804D5022300

Supervisor's Name: Dr. Lupiya Daniel Mpolomoka

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Program of Study: UUZ: EdD Doctoral of Education

Research Project Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda

I have read the foregoing information about this study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss about it. I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions and I have received enough information about this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without negative consequences. I consent to the use of multimedia (e.g. audio recordings, video recordings) for the purposes of my participation in this study. I understand that my data will remain anonymous and confidential, unless stated otherwise. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Participant's Print name:

Participant's Signature:

Date:

If the Participant is illiterate:

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had an opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the aforementioned individual has given consent freely.

Witness's Print name:

Witness's Signature:

Date:

Appendix H: Group D1 Consent Form

UNICAF UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form
Part 1: Debriefing of Participants

Student's Name: Melville M. E. Richardson

Student's E-mail Address: melrich2000@gmail.com

Student ID #: R1804D5022300

Supervisor's Name: Dr. Lupiya Daniel Mpolomoka

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Program of Study: UUZ: EdD Doctoral of Education

Research Project Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda

Date: 10-Oct-2021

Provide a short description (purpose, aim and significance) of the research project, and explain why and how you have chosen this person to participate in this research (maximum 150 words).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research is to Evaluate how effectively the current leadership capacity building trainings for secondary school principals in rural Antigua and Barbuda are aligned with the challenges they face daily, identify existing gaps, if any, and suggest empirical evidence. The goal is to inform policy and refine educational principals' capacity-building trainings within the context of Antigua and Barbuda and other similar settings. The study's objective is to help school principals improve leadership competencies to become effective leaders. The research hopes that the body of literature and data collected may cast some light on the ongoing debates. The findings will also inspire policy-makers, administrators, school leaders, and school principals affected by the problem as they reflect on their leadership and for future researchers to demonstrate a keen interest in capacity building trainings for secondary schools principals. Your involvement in this project will contribute to a pool of information and impact the way leadership ability is built and maintained in rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

The above named Student is committed in ensuring participant's voluntarily participation in the research project and guaranteeing there are no potential risks and/or harms to the participants.

Participants have the right to withdraw at any stage (prior or post the completion) of the research without any consequences and without providing any explanation. In these cases, data collected will be deleted.

All data and information collected will be coded and will not be accessible to anyone outside this research. Data described and included in dissemination activities will only refer to coded information ensuring beyond the bounds of possibility participant identification.

I, _____Melville M. E. Richardson_____, **ensure that all information stated above is true and that all conditions have been met.**

Student's Signature: *MRichardson*

1

Informed Consent Form

Part 2: Certificate of Consent

This section is mandatory and should to be signed by the participant(s)

Student's Name: Melville M. E. Richardson

Student's E-mail Address: melrich2000@gmail.com

Student ID #:   R1804D5022300

Supervisor's Name: Dr. Lupiya Daniel Mpolomoka

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Program of Study: UUZ: EdD Doctoral of Education

Research Project Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda

I have read the foregoing information about this study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss about it. I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions and I have received enough information about this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without negative consequences. I consent to the use of multimedia (e.g. audio recordings, video recordings) for the purposes of my participation in this study. I understand that my data will remain anonymous and confidential, unless stated otherwise. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Participant's Print name:

Participant's Signature:

Date:

If the Participant is illiterate:

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had an opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the aforementioned individual has given consent freely.

Witness's Print name:

Witness's Signature:

Date:

Appendix I: Group E1 Consent Form

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| **Informed Consent Form** |
| **Part 1: Debriefing of Participants** |

Student's Name: Melville M. E. Richardson

Student's E-mail Address: melrich2000@gmail.com

Student ID #:   R1804D5022300

Supervisor's Name: Dr. Lupiya Daniel Mpolomoka

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Program of Study: UUZ: EdD Doctoral of Education

Research Project Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda

Date: 10-Oct-2021

Provide a short description (purpose, aim and significance) of the research project, and explain why and how you have chosen this person to participate in this research (maximum 150 words).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research is to Evaluate how effectively the current leadership capacity building trainings for secondary school principals in rural Antigua and Barbuda are aligned with the challenges they face daily, identify existing gaps, if any, and suggest empirical evidence. The goal is to inform policy and refine educational principals' capacity-building trainings within the context of Antigua and Barbuda and other similar settings. The study's objective is to help school principals improve leadership competencies to become effective leaders. The research hopes that the body of literature and data collected may cast some light on the ongoing debates. The findings will also inspire policy-makers, administrators, school leaders, and school principals affected by the problem as they reflect on their leadership and for future researchers to demonstrate a keen interest in capacity building trainings for secondary schools principals. Your involvement in this project will contribute to a pool of information and impact the way leadership ability is built and maintained in rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

The above named Student is committed in ensuring participant's voluntarily participation in the research project and guaranteeing there are no potential risks and/or harms to the participants.

Participants have the right to withdraw at any stage (prior or post the completion) of the research without any consequences and without providing any explanation. In these cases, data collected will be deleted.

All data and information collected will be coded and will not be accessible to anyone outside this research. Data described and included in dissemination activities will only refer to coded information ensuring beyond the bounds of possibility participant identification.

I, [Melville M. E. Richardson   ], **ensure that all information stated above is true and that all conditions have been met.**

Student's Signature: *MRichardson*

1

Informed Consent Form

Part 2: Certificate of Consent

This section is mandatory and should to be signed by the participant(s)

Student's Name: Melville M. E. Richardson

Student's E-mail Address: melrich2000@gmail.com

Student ID #:   R1804D5022300

Supervisor's Name: Dr. Lupiya Daniel Mpolomoka

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Program of Study: UUZ: EdD Doctoral of Education

Research Project Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda

I have read the foregoing information about this study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss about it. I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions and I have received enough information about this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without negative consequences. I consent to the use of multimedia (e.g. audio recordings, video recordings) for the purposes of my participation in this study. I understand that my data will remain anonymous and confidential, unless stated otherwise. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Participant's Print name:

Participant's Signature:

Date:

If the Participant is illiterate:

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had an opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the aforementioned individual has given consent freely.

Witness's Print name:

Witness's Signature:

Date:

Appendix J: Group F1 Consent Form

UNICAF
UNIVERSITY

| **Informed Consent Form** |
| **Part 1: Debriefing of Participants** |

Student's Name: Melville M. E. Richardson

Student's E-mail Address: melrich2000@gmail.com

Student ID #:   R1804D5022300

Supervisor's Name: Dr. Lupiya Daniel Mpolomoka

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Program of Study: UUZ: EdD Doctoral of Education

Research Project Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda

Date: 10-Oct-2021

Provide a short description (purpose, aim and significance) of the research project, and explain why and how you have chosen this person to participate in this research (maximum 150 words).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research is to Evaluate how effectively the current leadership capacity building trainings for secondary school principals in rural Antigua and Barbuda are aligned with the challenges they face daily, identify existing gaps, if any, and suggest empirical evidence. The goal is to inform policy and refine educational principals' capacity-building trainings within the context of Antigua and Barbuda and other similar settings. The study's objective is to help school principals improve leadership competencies to become effective leaders. The research hopes that the body of literature and data collected may cast some light on the ongoing debates. The findings will also inspire policy-makers, administrators, school leaders, and school principals affected by the problem as they reflect on their leadership and for future researchers to demonstrate a keen interest in capacity building trainings for secondary schools principals. Your involvement in this project will contribute to a pool of information and impact the way leadership ability is built and maintained in rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

The above named Student is committed in ensuring participant's voluntarily participation in the research project and guaranteeing there are no potential risks and/or harms to the participants.

Participants have the right to withdraw at any stage (prior or post the completion) of the research without any consequences and without providing any explanation. In these cases, data collected will be deleted.

All data and information collected will be coded and will not be accessible to anyone outside this research. Data described and included in dissemination activities will only refer to coded information ensuring beyond the bounds of possibility participant identification.

I, | Melville M. E. Richardson | , **ensure that all information stated above is true and that all conditions have been met.**

Student's Signature: *MRichardson*

1

Informed Consent Form

Part 2: Certificate of Consent

This section is mandatory and should to be signed by the participant(s)

Student's Name: Melville M. E. Richardson

Student's E-mail Address: melrich2000@gmail.com

Student ID #:   R1804D5022300

Supervisor's Name: Dr. Lupiya Daniel Mpolomoka

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Program of Study: UUZ: EdD Doctoral of Education

Research Project Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda

I have read the foregoing information about this study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss about it. I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions and I have received enough information about this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without negative consequences. I consent to the use of multimedia (e.g. audio recordings, video recordings) for the purposes of my participation in this study. I understand that my data will remain anonymous and confidential, unless stated otherwise. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Participant's Print name:

Participant's Signature:

Date:

If the Participant is illiterate:

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had an opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the aforementioned individual has given consent freely.

Witness's Print name:

Witness's Signature:

Date:

Appendix K: School Leaders Demographics Questionnaire

Unicaf University Zambia
Doctorate of Education (EdD)

School Leaders Demographics Questionnaire

Research Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda.

You are invited to participate in this demographic questionnaire; because of your current principal status, you were selected as a possible participant; you were chosen as a prospective participant because of your current principal status.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research is to evaluate how effectively the current leadership capacity building trainings for secondary school principals in rural Antigua and Barbuda are aligned with the challenges they face daily, identify existing gaps, if any, and suggest empirical evidence. The goal is to inform policy and refine educational principals' capacity-building trainings within the context of Antigua and Barbuda and other similar settings. The study's objective is to help school principals improve leadership competencies to become effective leaders. The research hopes that the body of literature and data collected may cast some light on the ongoing debates. The findings will also inspire policy-makers, administrators, school leaders, and school principals affected by the problem as they reflect on their leadership and for future researchers to demonstrate a keen interest in capacity building trainings for secondary schools principals. Your involvement in this project will contribute to a pool of information and impact the way leadership ability is built and maintained in rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

Background Information

Procedures

Currently, the researcher is pursuing a doctorate in education (EdD) from Unicaf University, Zambia. If you agree to participate in this study, I will require you to fill out the demographic questionnaire. The questionnaire containing ten (10) questions should take no more than five (5) minutes to complete. Your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. By participating in this survey, you acknowledge that you understand that your responses will be kept private and anonymous. While your answers to all questions are required, you are free to skip any that make you uncomfortable. All data and information collected will be coded and will not be accessible to anyone outside this research. Data described and included in dissemination activities will only refer to coded information ensuring beyond the bounds of possibility participant identification.

This study's participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will have no impact on your present or future relationships with the researcher. If you decide to join, you may withdraw at any moment without consequence. If you opt to withdraw from the research, I will not utilise any of the information gathered about you.

Confidentiality:

This study's records will be kept confidential and written and audio research records will be stored in a lockable file cabinet at home. Audio recordings will be saved on a secure external hard drive and transferred to my password-protected laptop. The data will be accessible only to my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Lupiya Daniel Mpolomoka, and me. Throughout this study, pseudonyms will be used to preserve the anonymity of participants and their schools. Outside of the dissertation committee, no confidential material will be shared.

Thank you in advance for your desire to contribute to expanding the information base connected to An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda.

For further information, participants can contact the researcher by phone/WhatsApp (1-268-783-7448) or by email (melrich2000@gmail.com).

Please complete all questions and make sure you follow the instructions for each question.

1. What is your gender? [ ] Female   [ ] Male

2. What is your age?   [   ]

3. The number of years in education.   [   ]

4. The number of years dedicated to school administration.   [   ]

5. What is your job title?

    a. Principal   [   ]
    b. Deputy Principal/Assistant Principal [   ]
    c. Head of Department   [   ]

6. The number of years in current position.   [   ]

7. What is your highest academic degree? Select one option only.

    a. Associate degree   [ ].
    b. Bachelor's degree   [ ].
    c. Master's degree   [ ].
    d. PhD/EdD   [ ].
    e. Other (Please specify) _____

8. Participation in formal and informal leadership development programmes – select those that apply:

    a. University Leadership Development Programmes [   ].
    b. Educators' Summer Institutes [   ].
    c. Leadership Professional Development [   ].
    d. Leadership Mentoring Programme [   ].
    e. Leadership Internship Programme
    f. Leadership In-Service Training Programme
    g. Other:_____

Appendix L: Interview Protocols

Unicaf University Zambia
Doctorate of Education (EdD)

School Leader Interview Protocol

Research Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda.

You are invited to participate in this interview; because of your current principal status, you were selected as a possible participant; you were chosen as a prospective participant because of your current principal status.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research is to Evaluate how effectively the current leadership capacity building trainings for secondary school principals in rural Antigua and Barbuda are aligned with the challenges they face daily, identify existing gaps, if any, and suggest empirical evidence. The goal is to inform policy and refine educational principals' capacity-building trainings within the context of Antigua and Barbuda and other similar settings. The study's objective is to help school principals improve leadership competencies to become effective leaders. The research hopes that the body of literature and data collected may cast some light on the ongoing debates. The findings will also inspire policy-makers, administrators, school leaders, and school principals affected by the problem as they reflect on their leadership and for future researchers to demonstrate a keen interest in capacity building trainings for secondary schools principals. Your involvement in this project will contribute to a pool of information and impact the way leadership ability is built and maintained in rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

Background Information

Procedures

Currently, the researcher is pursuing a doctorate in education (EdD) from Unicaf University, Zambia. If you agree to participate in this study, I will require you to do the following: offer your opinions through audio-recorded, 60-minute face-to-face interviews, as well as evaluate transcripts for accuracy. An interview will be set at a time and location convenient for you. I propose that we do so in a quiet place, such as your workplace office. Following my data analysis, I will decide on more interviews.

This study's participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will have no impact on your present or future relationships with the researcher. If you decide to join, you may withdraw at any moment without consequence. If you opt to withdraw from the research, I will not utilise any of the information gathered about you.

Confidentiality:

This study's records will be kept confidential and written and audio research records will be stored in a lockable file cabinet at home. Audio recordings will be saved on a secure external hard drive and transferred to my password-protected laptop. The data will be accessible only to my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Lupiya Daniel Mpolomoka, and me. Throughout this study, pseudonyms will be used to preserve the anonymity of participants and their schools. Outside of the dissertation committee, no confidential material will be shared.

Thank you in advance for your desire to contribute to expanding the information base connected to An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda..

For further information, participants can contact the researcher by phone/WhatsApp (1-268-78448) or by email (melrich2000@gmail.com).

Unstructured Interview Questions

1. As you reflect on your role, can you describe your lived experiences as a rural school leader?

2. What are your perceptions or thoughts on the leadership abilities necessary to lead a school effectively?

3. Can you describe what leadership qualities you believe contribute most to the school's continual growth and/or change?

4. Tell me about your experiences and personal qualities that make you qualified for this position.

5. What has leadership knowledge, abilities, and skills assist you in your leadership role?

6. Explain what kind of support your leadership preparation programme provided for your role.

7. Could you describe your formal leadership certification programme or training that you obtained to be considered for this position?

8. How has your leadership perspective been impacted since you completed your leadership preparation programme?

9. What do they think your successes have been, and what challenges do you currently face or believe will be challenged in the next five years?

10. Would you like to share any other information regarding your experience as a rural school principal?

Appendix M: Teachers' Union Officials Interview Protocol

Unicaf University Zambia
Doctorate of Education (EdD)

Research Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda.

You are invited to participate in this demographic questionnaire; because of your current principal status, you were selected as a possible participant; you were chosen as a prospective participant because of your current principal status.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research is to evaluate how effectively the current leadership capacity building trainings for secondary school principals in rural Antigua and Barbuda are aligned with the challenges they face daily, identify existing gaps, if any, and suggest empirical evidence. The goal is to inform policy and refine educational principals' capacity-building trainings within the context of Antigua and Barbuda and other similar settings. The study's objective is to help school principals improve leadership competencies to become effective leaders. The research hopes that the body of literature and data collected may cast some light on the ongoing debates. The findings will also inspire policy-makers, administrators, school leaders, and school principals affected by the problem as they reflect on their leadership and for future researchers to demonstrate a keen interest in capacity building trainings for secondary schools principals. Your involvement in this project will contribute to a pool of information and impact the way leadership ability is built and maintained in rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

Background Information

Procedures

Currently, the researcher is pursuing a doctorate in education (EdD) from Unicaf University, Zambia. If you agree to participate in this study, I will require you to fill out the demographic questionnaire. The questionnaire containing eight (8) questions should take no more than five (5) minutes to complete. Your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. By participating in this survey, you acknowledge that you understand that your responses will be kept private and anonymous. While your answers to all questions are required, you are free to skip any that make you uncomfortable. All data and information collected will be coded and will not be accessible to anyone outside this research. Data described and included in dissemination activities will only refer to coded information ensuring beyond the bounds of possibility participant identification.

This study's participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will have no impact on your present or future relationships with the researcher. If you decide to join, you may withdraw at any moment without consequence. If you opt to withdraw from the research, I will not utilise any of the information gathered about you.

Confidentiality:

This study's records will be kept confidential and written and audio research records will be stored in a lockable file cabinet at home. Audio recordings will be saved on a secure external hard drive and transferred to my password-protected laptop. The data will be accessible only to my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Lupiya Daniel Mpolomoka, and me. Throughout this study, pseudonyms will be used to preserve the anonymity of participants and their schools. Outside of the dissertation committee, no confidential material will be shared.

Thank you in advance for your desire to contribute to expanding the information base connected to Leadership Capacity Building for Sustainable Development in Antigua and Barbuda's Rural Public Secondary School Principal.

For further information, participants can contact the researcher by phone/WhatsApp (1-268-783-7448) or by email (melrich2000@gmail.com).

Please complete all questions and make sure you follow the instructions for each question.

<div align="center">

Teachers' Union Officials
Demographic Questionnaire

</div>

Please complete all questions and make sure you follow the instructions for each question:

1. What is your gender? [ ] Female [ ] Male
2. What is your
3. The number of years in Education [ ]
4. The number of years in education [ ]
5. What is your job title?
   a. President [ ]
   b. 1st Vice President [ ]
   c. 2nd Vice President [ ]
   d. General Secretary [ ]
6. The number of years served in the above position [ ]
7. What is your highest academic degree? Select one option only.
   a. Associate degree [ ]
   b. Bachelor degree [ ]
   c. Master degree [ ]
   d. Post-graduate degree [ ]

    e. PhD/EdD [ ]
    f. Other (Please specify)_____

Unstructured Open-ended Questions

1. Can you describe some notable experiences of rural public secondary school principals in Antigua and Barbuda that you have observed in your role as an Education Official?

2. What are some leadership skills that you believe are essential for principals to be effective, based on your interactions and observations?

3. In your perspective, how have the principals' experiences and their leadership skills impacted the efficiency of rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda?

4. Based on your interactions with school principals, could you describe how they have expressed their understanding of leadership development and share any insights into their perspectives on the success or effectiveness of these initiatives?

5. In your role as an Education Officer, can you share any observations or experiences related to how principals were prepared for their leadership roles and the context in which this preparation took place?

6. Could you share the nature of rural public secondary school principals' experiences in Antigua and Barbuda based on your supervisory role?

7. From your point of view, what are the most critical leadership skills that these principals need to possess to be effective leaders?

8. How do these principals' experiences, skills, and attitudes influence school efficiency, in your opinion?

9. Can you discuss how school principals in your charge interpret or understand the concept of leadership development?

10. Can you reveal the type of preparation these principals undergo before assuming their roles and the context surrounding it?

11. When it comes to challenges, what do school principals commonly share with you during your supervisory visits?

12. How, in your view, can the existing leadership development programmes be improved to better prepare rural school principals?

Appendix N: Ministry of Education Officials Interview Protocol

Unicaf University Zambia
Doctorate of Education (EdD)

Research Title: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building Trainings for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda.

You are invited to participate in this demographic questionnaire; because of your current principal status, you were selected as a possible participant; you were chosen as a prospective participant because of your current principal status.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research is to evaluate how effectively the current leadership capacity building trainings for secondary school principals in rural Antigua and Barbuda are aligned with the challenges they face daily, identify existing gaps, if any, and suggest empirical evidence. The goal is to inform policy and refine educational principals' capacity-building trainings within the context of Antigua and Barbuda and other similar settings. The study's objective is to help school principals improve leadership competencies to become effective leaders. The research hopes that the body of literature and data collected may cast some light on the ongoing debates. The findings will also inspire policy-makers, administrators, school leaders, and school principals affected by the problem as they reflect on their leadership and for future researchers to demonstrate a keen interest in capacity building trainings for secondary schools principals. Your involvement in this project will contribute to a pool of information and impact the way leadership ability is built and maintained in rural secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

Background Information

Procedures

Currently, the researcher is pursuing a doctorate in education (EdD) from Unicaf University, Zambia. If you agree to participate in this study, I will require you to fill out the demographic questionnaire. The questionnaire containing eight (8) questions should take no more than five (5) minutes to complete. Your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. By participating in this survey, you acknowledge that you understand that your responses will be kept private and anonymous. While your answers to all questions are required, you are free to skip any that make you uncomfortable. All data and information collected will be coded and will not be accessible to anyone outside this research. Data described and included in dissemination activities will only refer to coded information ensuring beyond the bounds of possibility participant identification.

This study's participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will have no impact on your present or future relationships with the researcher. If you decide to join, you may withdraw at any moment without consequence. If you opt to withdraw from the research, I will not utilise any of the information gathered about you.

Confidentiality:

This study's records will be kept confidential and written and audio research records will be stored in a lockable file cabinet at home. Audio recordings will be saved on a secure external hard drive and transferred to my password-protected laptop. The data will be accessible only to my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Charles B. W. Prince, and me. Throughout this study, pseudonyms will be used to preserve the anonymity of participants and their schools. Outside of the dissertation committee, no confidential material will be shared.

Thank you in advance for your desire to contribute to expanding the information base connected to Leadership Capacity Building for Sustainable Development in Antigua and Barbuda's Rural Public Secondary School Principal.

For further information, participants can contact the researcher by phone/WhatsApp (1-268-783-7448) or by email (melrich2000@gmail.com).

Please complete all questions and make sure you follow the instructions for each question.

Ministry of Education Officials
Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete all questions and make sure you follow the instructions for each question:

1. What is your gender? [ ] Female [ ] Male
2. What is your
3. The number of years in Education [ ]
4. The number of years in education [ ]
5. What is your job title?
    a. Deputy Director of Education [ ]
    b. Education Officer, Administration [ ]
    c. Education Officer, Curriculum [ ]
    d. Assistant Director of Planning, Statistics and Services [ ]
6. The number of years served in the above position [ ]
7. What is your highest academic degree? Select one option only.
    a. Associate degree [ ]
    b. Bachelor degree [ ]
    c. Master degree [ ]
    d. Post-graduate degree [ ]

       e.   PhD/EdD [ ]

       f.   Other (Please specify)_____

Unstructured Open-ended Questions

1. Can you describe some notable experiences of rural public secondary school principals in Antigua and Barbuda that you have observed in your role as an Education Official?

2. What are some leadership skills that you believe are essential for principals to be effective, based on your interactions and observations?

3. In your perspective, how have the principals' experiences and their leadership skills impacted the efficiency of rural public secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda?

4. Based on your interactions with school principals, could you describe how they have expressed their understanding of leadership development and share any insights into their perspectives on the success or effectiveness of these initiatives?

5. In your role as an Education Officer, can you share any observations or experiences related to how principals were prepared for their leadership roles and the context in which this preparation took place?

6. Could you share the nature of rural public secondary school principals' experiences in Antigua and Barbuda based on your supervisory role?

7. From your point of view, what are the most critical leadership skills that these principals need to possess to be effective leaders?

8. How do these principals' experiences, skills, and attitudes influence school efficiency, in your opinion?

9. Can you discuss how school principals in your charge interpret or understand the concept of leadership development?

10. Can you reveal the type of preparation these principals undergo before assuming their roles and the context surrounding it?

11. When it comes to challenges, what do school principals commonly share with you during your supervisory visits?

12. How, in your view, can the existing leadership development programmes be improved to better prepare rural school principals?

Appendix O: An example of coding analysis of an interview

Research Project: An Evaluation of Leadership Capacity Building for Secondary School Principals in Antigua and Barbuda

Interview Date: June 9, 2022

Time: 48:34 minutes

Interviewer: Melville M. E. Richardson

Open (line by line) Coding	Data
RQ 1: What are the lived experiences of rural school principals, and what are their perceptions about the leadership skills that principals require to be effective leaders?	
Rewarding challenges Public perceptions Transition trouble Parental concern Required leadership skills	**Interviewer:** As you reflect on your leadership role, can you describe your lived experiences as a rural school principal? **P13:** The experience has been very challenging but at the same time rewarding. Especially managing adults and dealing with the public perception of the school. You see, during the transition from a Junior Secondary to a secondary school, the community and the public did not have confidence in the school. They thought that the school would fail. They believe that the Ministry of Education was dumping only the underperforming teachers at the school. As a result, many parents pulled their children out of school and during the year, other students left. As it relates to my perception of the leadership skills required to be effective, I believe that a principal should have the skills to inspire others and at the same time has patience, listen well, communicate well, and build a team that supports the vision and mission of the school and gain the confidence of the parents and the general public.
Positive relationships Interpersonal skills Fairness and consistency Leadership focus	**Interviewer**: What are your perceptions or perspectives on the leadership abilities necessary to effectively lead a school? **P13:** I think for any school leader, especially in the rural schools, we need to be able to build positive relationships with teachers, students, parents, and the wider community. Leaders need to have good interpersonal skills in selling themselves. However, to effectively carry out our duties, we need to be fair and consistent with them throughout our leadership practices. Too often, as leaders, we find ourselves bothered because we neglect our purpose as leaders.
Assessment Duties Instructional Oversight	**Interviewer**: Would you like to share any other information regarding your experience as a principal leading a rural school? **P13:** As the head of the department, we are expected to assess teachers, address instructional matters relating to the department and deal with school administration matters at the same time. This has posed many challenges in finding a balance in performing multiple roles with the day, especially when I have a class to teach, and I am called to deal with administration

Administrative Role Task Balancing Organizational Skills	issues. Therefore, as I reflect, I believe that as a leader, one must be organised and prepared to deal with these challenges when they come up.

RQ2: How do these experiences, skills, and attitudes contribute to developing those qualities in improving school efficiency?

Early Leadership Experience Non-Competitive Appointment Teamwork Respect Visionary Thinking	**Interviewer**: Tell me about your experiences and personal qualities that make you qualified for this position. **P13:** Okay. Growing up, I was very active in youth church ministries. I led several youth organisations. So, I think that those would have given me the exposure and experience that made me qualified. When I became the head of the department about 11 years ago, I didn't have to apply for the position, and the principal told me to take up the task. Therefore, I would have executed some of what I did as a youth leader in my practice to engage the teachers in teamwork. I believe in teamwork. I strongly believe that when a department comes together to plan and execute that plan the department and the school would function more effectively. Additionally, I have respect for co-workers and authority, and I have a vision for my department.
Delegation Team Bonding Motivational Challenge	**Interviewer**: Can you describe the leadership qualities you believe contributed mainly to the school's continual growth and/or change? **P13:** One thing that I can specifically talk about is delegation leadership. My principal delegated all the responsibilities to the teachers. However, apart from delegating responsibilities, I believe that the bonding of a team working together for the organisation's best interest was the main factor that contributed to the institution's growth. The fact that people thought that the school would be a failure and removed their children, because of this, the leadership, teachers, and some parents worked together to prove that the school could compete with all the other secondary school on the island.
Accountability Patience Navigating Resistance Listening and Fair Judgement Motivation	**Interviewer:** What leadership knowledge, abilities, and skills assist you in your leadership role? **P13:** A leader's responsibilities and roles require a number of skills. Since a department head is accountable to the principal and deputy principal for what happens in the department, as head of department I must have a lot of patience when dealing with teachers, students, and parents in carrying out the mandates of the and school and the government. Especially, when there is some resistance coming from teachers and parents as new policies were enacted by the principal without their knowledge or sent to them too late. Also, I love listen to the concerns of everyone and make a fair judgement and at the same time being able to motivate them to work towards the goal of the school. Also, being able to deal with conflicts before they escalate into unmanageable issues.

Conflict Management	
RQ3: How do school principals characterise their understanding of leadership development and what did principals experience concerning leadership preparation, and in what context?	
Lack of Formal Training No Leadership Requirements Required Qualities Principal's Selection Uncertainty about Changes	**Interviewer**: Could you describe your formal leadership certification programme or training that you obtained to be considered for this position? **P13:** I did not attend any institution or training sessions to receive formal training or leadership certification. From my recollection, there are no requirements when I became a head of department. What happened then, a teacher must teacher the subject, holds a teacher education certification and exhibit some form of maturity or seniority and selected by the school principal who submitted my name to the Ministry of Education. I also believe that there might be some changes, but I am not too clear as to what they are.
Absence of Formal Training Ministry Support Insufficient Practicality Timing and Relevance of Training Specificity of Training	**Interviewer**: Explain the kinds of support or programmes that have prepared you for your current leadership role? **P13:** As I said before I did not receive any formal training to prepare me for my role as head of department. However, the Ministry of Education has provided some support over the years such a Summer Institute and professional development. However, these programmes are talk shops. I am a hands-on learner and I find these supports are not practical. The school also provides professional development but must times it happens at the end of the day when most teachers are tired and burnt out and ready to go home. And very often the topics don't address the interest of the teachers. I believe that the professional development should be specific, directed. That is, address the needs of the teachers, for example for leaders only rather than generic. This will help me as a leader to develop the necessary skills to cope with the challenges of the twenty first.
Lack of Formal Training Gains from Informal Training Improvement in Staff Engagement	**Interviewer:** How has your leadership perspective been impacted since you completed your leadership preparation programme? **P13:** I can't speak to any formal leadership preparation programme, but the little informal training that I have received from professional development, it has made me rethink some of my ways of doing things and as it were 'place the horse before the cart.' Since then, with the little knowledge, I gave gained, I have seen an improvement in the interest of teachers to carry out their responsibilities and the quality of students' work improve. However, there is a lot of work to be done to improve my leadership knowledge and ability.

Improvement in Student Performance Need for More Training	
Building Positive Relationships Engaging Collective Efforts Overcoming Negative Stereotype School Performance Parent Expectations Student Absenteeism Parental Acceptance School Reputation Need for Community Engagement Vision Articulation	**Interviewer**: What do they think your successes have been, and what challenges do you currently face or believe will be challenged in the next five years? **P13:** As a HOD, I would say that my major success is building positive relationship with teachers, students and parents and getting them to work together for their interest of the students. However, getting rid of the stigma of be classified as a school for underperformers (teachers and students) continues to plague the school even though it has outperformed most of the well-established schools on the island. Another challenge is the poor expectations of parents for their child's success. Many students, especially the males continue to miss school during the tourist season and mango seasons to make a bock here and there and the parents feel quite comfortable with it. If we are not able to remove the misconception placed on the school, building relationship with the community or reaffirm our commitment to parents, community and policymakers working together for the common good of the institution and possible a change in how the vision of school is articulated by leadership, I believe that the school will continue to face these challenges going forward.