

Enhancing School Leadership Capacity Among Primary School Teachers In Phnom Penh, Cambodia: A Focus On Mentorship Involvement

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Abstract.

This study looked at how mentoring can help primary school teachers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, develop their leadership skills. The study's goal was to determine whether mentorship involvement was related to teachers' perceptions of their readiness in the areas of instructional, managerial, and strategic leadership as well as indications of leadership sustainability. The research design was correlational, quantitative, and non-experimental. An online survey created by the researcher was used to gather data from primary teachers in Phnom Penh City. The survey assessed leadership sustainability, leadership readiness, and mentorship involvement. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and multiple regression analysis performed in SPSS were used to analyse the data. The results showed that participants had high levels of work satisfaction, retention intentions, leadership readiness, mentorship engagement, and succession readiness. Although there were strong correlations observed between the leadership preparedness categories, neither leadership preparedness nor sustainability outcomes were shown to be statistically significantly correlated with mentorship involvement. Certain sustainability factors were found to be more strongly predicted by years of teaching experience than by mentorship participation alone. The results advance our knowledge of leadership development and the variables affecting school leadership sustainability, notwithstanding the lack of statistically significant correlations between mentorship involvement and leadership capacity. Future studies should look at the organization and quality of mentorship in more general educational contexts.

Keywords: School Leadership, Leadership Skills, Capacity, Mentorship Involvement and Primary School Teachers.

I. INTRODUCTION

School leadership is a key pillar in determining the overall effectiveness of an educational institution (Chhoenung et al., 2026; Kor et al., 2026; Lim et al., 2026; Mok et al., 2026). As claimed by Kafele (2015), the more effective a school leader is, the higher his or her kids will soar. The statement underscores the great influence school leaders have on student progress and overall school success. Recent research confirms that good administrators have a substantial, beneficial impact on the schools they serve, leading to critical outcomes such as student achievement, lower absenteeism, and teacher retention (Grissom et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2026). School leaders' responsibilities are vast and complex, covering management, instructional, and strategic domains. School leaders are responsible for the day-to-day running of the school, the management of staff, the allocation of resources and the maintenance of compliance with educational policies (Chhoenung et al., 2026; Lim, 2023; Lim et al., 2026). In the teaching field they maintain high academic standards, offer professional development, and utilise data-driven tactics for increased student learning. Crucially, teachers are predicted to make an endless number of decisions a day to reach school goals (Boon, 2022). The association between school leadership and student accomplishment underlines the role of instructional leadership as a prominent factor in enhancing student success (Özdemir et al., 2022). Effective school leaders also function as strategic visionaries, inspiring and motivating both educators and students and creating a culture of collaboration, creativity, and continuous development (Chhoenung et al., 2026; Okilwa et al., 2022).

At the end of the day, student achievement is a product of the effectiveness of a school teacher. Strong leaders focus on student learning, develop meaningful connections among staff to co-create a shared vision, and practise a continuous learning cycle (Chhoenung et al., 2026; Isoye & Wasonga, 2024; Lim, 2023; Lim et al., 2026). Investing in leadership development is crucial for schoolwide performance, recruitment, retention, professional growth of educators, and ultimately student achievement. Good leadership in schools is the bedrock of a successful learning environment. Great teachers build a healthy school culture, improve student performance, and guide teacher growth. They do more than manage the day-to-day. They inspire a common vision, put into place research-based initiatives and build a pipeline of future leaders to sustain the school long-term (Lim et al., 2026; Mok et al., 2026). Ideally, school leadership potential is fostered through

intentional preparation, mentoring, and experience, generating a virtuous circle of leadership excellence for students, teachers, and the greater school community.

Leadership is crucial to educational achievement. However, there is still a considerable gap in understanding how leadership talent, experience and professional development contribute to improved school results. While there is growing emphasis on mentorship as part of principal preparation and induction programs, there is still insufficient empirical understanding of how participation in mentorship affects leadership capacity and long-term leadership sustainability. Research on appropriate mentoring techniques and the impact of mentoring on new principals in Cambodia has been sparse (Lim, 2023; Mok et al., 2026). Too many school teachers begin their jobs without adequate preparation or support, resulting in unevenly effective leadership (Lim, 2023). Moreover, leadership succession planning is typically neglected, leaving schools vulnerable to instability when experienced leaders retire or move on. The absence of formal mentorship and training opportunities leads to a reactive rather than proactive strategy for leadership development, restricting the emergence of future leaders within the school system (Hastings & Sunderman, 2020; Lim, 2023; Mok et al., 2026).

The gap between the ideal and the reality of school leadership has significant consequences for student progress, teacher retention and overall school effectiveness. Poor leadership can contribute to bad school culture, lower student success, and more teacher turnover, all of which can undermine the long-term sustainability of the school (Buckman & Sloan, 2022; Lim, 2023; Mok et al., 2026). In addition, the lack of leadership succession planning creates a situation in which schools often cannot sustain their gains when experienced leaders leave, leading to cycles of instability and deterioration. Frequent principal changes may disrupt and negatively impair a school's effectiveness (Buckman & Sloan, 2022; Chhoenung et al., 2026). Failure to fill these leadership gaps risks schools continuing to fail to deliver the quality education pupils need, and perpetuating systemic difficulties within the education system.

The objective of this quantitative, non-experimental correlational study was to explore the association between mentorship experiences and leadership capacity development of primary school teachers in Phnom Penh City, Cambodia. Specifically, the study sought to determine the extent to which structured mentorship experiences contribute to teachers' preparedness for instructional, managerial and strategic leadership responsibilities, and their perceptions of sustainability indicators such as job satisfaction, retention intentions and succession readiness. The present study sought to provide empirical evidence on the role of mentorship on leadership development, professional confidence and long-term stability of schools through the collection and analysis of survey data from primary school teachers. The findings offered meaningful recommendations for districts, preparation programs, and policy makers interested in creating more successful and sustainable leadership pipelines through targeted mentoring methods.

A Synopsis of the Literature to Back Up the Research

In order to ensure long-term school sustainability and to shape students' educational experiences, school leadership is essential. According to Leithwood et al. (2020), effective leadership affects student achievement, cultivates a healthy school culture, improves teacher performance, and adds to overall institutional stability. There is still a lack of knowledge regarding how leadership ability, experience, and training influence these results, despite the well-established influence of leadership on school achievement. By investigating how school leaders' professional backgrounds and skill development contribute to efficient school management and long-term improvement, this study filled this knowledge gap. Castro (2022) emphasises that in order to strengthen principals' ability to recruit, train, and retain teachers, districts can create clear policies, put them into effect, and provide professional development opportunities. For educational stakeholders, legislators, and school administrators looking to improve leadership development initiatives and establish more sustainable learning environments, the research's conclusions offer insightful information.

Mentorship, which offers emerging leaders organised and relational chances to grow capacity through advice, feedback, and experience learning, is a key element of leadership development in this environment. In particular, this study looked at how mentoring influences long-term sustainability and leadership readiness in school leadership. This study's emphasis on leadership succession and the training of future school leaders was another important feature. There is a growing need for a pipeline of qualified leaders to sustain

continuity and spearhead school improvement initiatives as seasoned administrators retire or move into other positions. In the current school leadership environment, school districts are paying more attention to succession planning (Buckman & Sloan, 2022). Strong leadership development programs are associated with higher levels of stability and teacher retention, according to research (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003). This study provides useful suggestions for bolstering leadership training programs by examining how current school teachers develop leadership abilities in prospective administrators. One of the most significant investments made by a school board may be the training, which has a direct impact on the capacity to give kids the school leaders they deserve (Barrett, 2024). In the end, these observations help achieve the more general objective of creating a sustainable educational system in which leadership changes smoothly and school achievement is not exclusively reliant on the knowledge of a small number of people.

II. METHODS

Research Design

A quantitative research approach was chosen as it facilitates the objective assessment of variables and the statistical analysis of their interrelations. Quantitative methodologies are suitable for research aimed at uncovering patterns, validating hypotheses, and extrapolating results to broader populations (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Employing quantitative data gathered via a systematic survey tool enables the research to reduce investigator bias and create an empirical foundation for assessing the relationship between mentorship involvement and various leadership results.

Targeted Research Samples

A total of 145 teacher volunteers are effectively recruited from Phnom Penh primary schools using a useful convenience sampling technique. In particular, the survey is disseminated via a number of outlets, such as professional teacher networks, the Phnom Penh Office of Education, Youth, and Sport (PPoEYS), and social media platforms. Convenience sampling, a popular non-probability sampling method that enables effective data collection from easily accessible participants, is especially suitable in educational research contexts where large-scale random sampling is frequently logistically difficult (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fowler, 2014). Convenience sampling is particularly helpful in guaranteeing that survey responses appropriately reflect teachers' current perspectives and immediate experiences because teacher motivation and retention are dynamic and time-sensitive concerns (Podsakoff et al., 1990).

Research Instrument and Data Collection Procedures

This research employed a custom-designed online survey tool to assess teachers' views on mentorship involvement, leadership readiness in instructional, managerial, and strategic areas, as well as markers of leadership sustainability. The survey, functioning as a self-report tool, gathered teachers' impressions and self-evaluations of mentorship involvement and leadership experiences, indicating respondents' personal interpretations rather than objectively validated metrics. The survey tool was created following an examination of empirical studies about educational leadership, mentorship, and leadership development, in addition to discussions with field specialists. The tool was delivered electronically via a secure, web-based survey platform that facilitated anonymous data gathering and adhered to established standards for human subject's research. Respondents utilised either personal or district-provided computers or mobile devices to complete the survey. To maintain anonymity, no personal data was gathered.

Data were collected using a systematic survey tool aimed at obtaining demographic details and participants' mentorship experiences. The tool had closed-ended enquiries and Likert-scale items that assessed perceptions of leadership advancement, availability of professional development, and the degree and characteristics of mentorship connections. The emphasis was placed on quantitative data collecting to facilitate analysis over a wide sample and to identify possible trends and correlations. Before the commencement of data collection, ethical authorisation was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Consent was secured from all participants, with guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity offered from the beginning. The questionnaire was disseminated digitally to guarantee widespread accessibility and effectiveness in data collection. Notifications were dispatched to promote involvement, and the data gathering process was sustained for a specified duration to enhance response rates.

Cronbach's alpha was used to evaluate each scale's internal consistency dependability. With $\alpha = 0.93$, the Mentorship Participation scale showed outstanding internal consistency. Both the Managerial Preparedness scale and the Instructional Preparedness scale showed strong internal consistency, with $\alpha = 0.82$ and $\alpha = 0.89$. With $\alpha = 0.91$, the Strategic Preparedness scale showed outstanding dependability. Additionally, the leadership sustainability metrics showed a high degree of dependability. Good internal consistency was shown by the Job Satisfaction scale ($\alpha = 0.88$), Retention Intentions scale ($\alpha = 0.86$), and Succession Readiness scale ($\alpha = 0.91$). All items were kept for further analysis since item-total statistics showed that eliminating any one item did not significantly raise the reliability coefficient for any scale.

Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative statistical methods were used to analyse the survey data that was gathered. Demographic traits and general trends in the replies were compiled using descriptive statistics. The association between mentorship experiences and leadership potential was investigated using inferential statistical analysis, such as correlation and regression techniques. This method supported the study's objective of finding quantifiable connections between mentorship and the growth of school leaders by offering both a broad summary of the data and insights into particular linkages. By using organised tools and statistical methods that enable replication, control, and objective assessment of correlations among variables, quantitative analysis increases credibility (Heale & Twycross, 2015; Johnson & Christensen, 2020).

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Mentorship in Teachers' Leadership Perception

The links between mentorship participation and leadership preparedness components, such as managerial, strategic, and instructional preparedness, were investigated using Pearson's correlation analysis. Table 1 displays the correlation matrix.

Table 1: Mentorship Participation and Leadership Preparedness Pearson Correlation Matrix (n=145)

No.	Study Variables	MEIN	INPR	MAPR	STPR
1.	Mentorship Involvement (MEIN)	-			
2.	Instructional Preparedness (INPR)	-0.22	-		
3.	Managerial Preparedness (MAPR)	-0.12	0.64**	-	
4.	Strategic Preparedness (STPR)	-0.11	0.86**	0.79**	-

Note: ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

The findings showed that there was no significant correlation between MEIN and MAPR ($r = -0.12$, $p = 0.64$), INPR ($r = -0.22$, $p = 0.38$), or STPR ($r = -0.11$, $p = 0.67$) preparation. These results imply that self-reported readiness in all of these leadership characteristics within the sample was unrelated to mentorship involvement. On the other hand, there were strong positive correlations between the leadership preparedness constructs. There was a substantial correlation between instructional preparedness and strategic preparedness ($r = 0.85$, $p < .001$) and a moderate correlation with managerial preparedness ($r = 0.63$, $p = 0.003$). Additionally, there was a substantial correlation between strategic and managerial preparedness ($r = 0.78$, $p < 0.001$). These findings show that while the preparedness constructs represented different aspects of leadership readiness, they were closely related.

The results of the current research both correspond with and differ from the existing body of literature about mentorship and the development of school leadership. Prior studies have consistently highlighted the significance of mentorship in aiding both emerging and established school leaders via professional guidance, reflective practice, leadership socialisation, and real-world leadership experiences (Bastian & Drake, 2023; Virella & Cobb, 2022). A significant portion of the examined literature indicated that mentorship enhances leadership confidence, readiness, and enduring leadership viability. Conversely, the findings of the present study did not reveal statistically significant correlations between mentorship involvement and principals' perceived readiness in instructional, managerial, or strategic leadership areas, nor did mentorship serve as a significant predictor of job satisfaction, retention intentions, or succession preparedness.

Mentorship Affects Teachers' Instructional, Managerial, and Strategic Leadership Readiness

This section investigated the degree to which mentorship engagement predicted leadership readiness across instructional, managerial, and strategic domains, building on the findings of the correlational analyses. Three distinct simple linear regression models were used to address this section, with mentorship involvement designated as the predictor variable in each analysis.

Table 2: Linear Regression Predicts INPR from MEIN (n=145)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p-value
MEIN	-0.159	0.177	-0.207	-0.896	0.383

Model summary: $R^2 = 0.044$, $F(1,19) = 0.81$, $p = 0.383$

To find out if mentorship engagement significantly influenced instructional readiness, a straightforward linear regression analysis was performed. Table 2 displays the regression analysis's findings. The regression model explained around 4.3% of the variance in instructional preparation ($R^2 = 0.043$), but it was not statistically significant ($F(1, 19) = 0.81$, $p = 0.383$). Participation in mentoring did not significantly predict instructional readiness ($\beta = -0.207$, $p = 0.383$).

Table 3: Linear Regression Predicts MAPR from MEIN (n=145)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p-value
MEIN	-0.076	0.162	-0.110	-0.467	0.648

Model summary: $R^2 = 0.13$, $F(1,19) = 0.23$, $p = 0.648$

Table 3 summarises the regression analysis results. A simple linear regression analysis was undertaken to investigate if mentorship significantly predicted managerial preparation. The regression model explained only 1.2% of the variance in managerial preparation ($R^2 = 0.012$), but it was not statistically significant ($F(1, 19) = 0.23$, $p = 0.648$). Participation in mentoring did not significantly predict managerial readiness ($\beta = -0.110$, $p = 0.648$).

Table 4: Linear Regression Predicts STPR from MEIN (n=145)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p-value
MEIN	-0.073	0.171	-0.101	-0.425	0.677

Model summary: $R^2 = 0.011$, $F(1,19) = 0.19$, $p = 0.677$

The findings of the regression analysis are displayed in Table 4. A basic linear regression analysis was performed to ascertain if involvement in mentorship significantly forecasted strategic readiness. The regression model explained about 1.0% of the variance in strategic readiness ($R^2 = 0.011$), but it was not statistically significant ($F(1, 19) = 0.1$, $p = 0.677$). Strategic preparation was not significantly predicted by mentoring engagement ($\beta = -0.11$, $p = 0.677$).

The results can show traits specific to the population under study. The majority of participants indicated high levels of leadership sustainability indicators, leadership readiness, and mentorship participation. It is possible that these measurements' restricted variability made it more difficult to find statistically meaningful connections. Specifically, the high rates of overall preparedness across participants indicate that many principals thought they were ready regardless of the quantity or kind of mentorship they had received. According to Bartanen et al. (2024) and Leithwood et al. (2020), this pattern may suggest that seasoned school leaders acquire leadership skills through a variety of professional experiences that go beyond mentoring alone, such as years of administrative practice, professional learning, teamwork with colleagues, district support systems, and direct leadership responsibilities.

Mentorship Predicts Work Satisfaction, Retention, and Succession Readiness

Based on the regression analysis, this part explored how mentorship engagement predicted leadership sustainability metrics beyond administrative experience. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses using total administrative experience and mentorship participation in the first and second steps addressed this part and hypotheses.

Table 5: Presenting the Hierarchical Regression Predicts Work Satisfaction (n=145)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p-value
<i>Step 1</i>					
Total Teaching Experience	0.060	0.015	0.740	4.65	<0.001
<i>Step 2</i>					

Total Teaching Experience	0.060	0.015	0.748	4.55	<0.001
MEIN	0.058	0.112	0.085	0.55	0.615

Model summary: Step 1: $R^2 = 0.545$, $F(1,19) = 21.50$, $p = <0.001$

Step 1: $R^2 = 0.555$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.008$, $\Delta F(1,18) = 0.28$, $p = 0.615$

Table 5 displays the regression analysis's findings. After adjusting for total administrative experience, the degree to which mentorship engagement predicted work satisfaction was investigated using a hierarchical multiple regression analysis. In Step 1, cumulative teaching experience greatly predicted work satisfaction ($F(1,19) = 21.50$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.545$), accounting for 54.40% of variation. Teaching experience proved to be a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.74$, $p < 0.001$). Mentorship was added in Step 2. Mentorship did not significantly increase explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.008$, $\Delta F(1,18) = 0.28$, $p = 0.615$). Mentorship in the final model did not predict work satisfaction ($\beta = 0.08$, $p = 0.615$), but total administrative experience did ($\beta = 0.75$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 6: Presenting the Hierarchical Regression Predicts Retention Intentions (n=145)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p-value
<i>Step 1</i>					
Total Teaching Experience	0.027	0.021	0.795	1.32	0.209
<i>Step 2</i>					
Total Teaching Experience	0.026	0.021	0.288	1.25	0.234
MEIN	-0.063	0.175	-0.083	-0.36	0.728

Model summary: Step 1: $R^2 = 0.087$, $F(1,19) = 1.71$, $p = 0.209$

Step 1: $R^2 = 0.094$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.008$, $\Delta F(1,18) = 0.14$, $p = 0.728$

Table 6 displays the regression analysis's findings. The degree to which mentorship engagement predicted retention intentions after adjusting for overall teaching experience was investigated using a hierarchical multiple regression analysis. While total teaching experience accounted for 8.60% of the variance in retention intentions ($R^2 = 0.087$), it did not substantially predict retention intentions in Step 1 ($F(1,1) = 1.71$, $p = 0.209$). Step 2 involved adding mentorship participation to the approach. There was no statistically significant increase in explained variance with mentorship participation ($\Delta R^2 = 0.008$, $\Delta F(1,18) = 0.14$, $p = 0.728$). Both overall administrative experience ($\beta = 0.29$, $p = 0.233$) and mentorship participation ($\beta = -0.09$, $p = 0.728$) did not significantly predict retention intentions in the final model.

Table 7: Presenting the Hierarchical Regression Predicts Succession Preparation (n=145)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p-value
<i>Step 1</i>					
Total Teaching Experience	0.060	0.033	0.401	1.86	0.081
<i>Step 2</i>					
Total Teaching Experience	0.061	0.034	0.410	1.86	0.083
MEIN	0.137	0.280	0.109	0.50	0.634

Model summary: Step 1: $R^2 = 0.161$, $F(1,19) = 3.44$, $p = 0.081$

Step 1: $R^2 = 0.173$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.013$, $\Delta F(1,18) = 0.25$, $p = 0.634$

Table 7 displays the findings from the regression analysis. The degree to which mentorship engagement predicted succession preparation after adjusting for overall teaching experience was investigated using a hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Step 1 found that overall teaching experience accounted for 16% of the variance in succession preparedness ($R^2 = 0.161$) but did not substantially predict succession readiness ($F(1,19) = 3.44$, $p = 0.081$). Step 2 involved expanding the approach to include mentorship participation. There was no statistically significant increase in explained variance when mentorship participation was added ($\Delta R^2 = 0.013$, $\Delta F(1,18) = 0.25$, $p = 0.634$). Both overall administrative experience ($\beta = 0.42$, $p = 0.083$) and mentorship engagement ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = 0.634$) were not significant predictors of succession preparation in the final model.

After adjusting for overall teaching experience, mentorship participation did not substantially predict leadership sustainability metrics in any of the three hierarchical regression models. Total administrative experience did not significantly predict retention intentions or succession readiness, but it was a major predictor of work satisfaction. Furthermore, none of the models showed a substantial increase in explained

variation due to mentorship participation. The results also corroborated some of the existing research on the interdependence of leadership readiness domains. Leadership ability may be an integrated construct rather than a collection of discrete leadership competencies, according to strong positive correlations between instructional, managerial, and strategic preparedness (Fullan, 2014). This result is consistent with leadership theories that highlight the multifaceted character of successful school leadership and the interrelated duties principals must manage in challenging educational settings. The results also bring up significant issues with research design and measurement. The study's reliance on participants' self-reported assessments of their leadership readiness and mentorship involvement may have affected how they understood and answered survey questions. Furthermore, the single-district setting and somewhat small sample size might have constrained response variability and decreased statistical power.

The cross-sectional correlational methodology made it even more difficult to investigate the long-term effects of mentoring experiences on leadership development (Chhoenung et al., 2026; Isoye & Wasonga, 2024; Lim, 2023; Lim et al., 2026). As a result, even if the null hypotheses for each of the three research questions were kept, the results should not be seen as proof that mentoring is ineffective for developing educational leaders (Yi et al., 2026). Instead, the findings indicated that differences in perceived leadership readiness or sustainability within this sample and setting might not have been adequately explained by mentorship alone.

IV. CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to ascertain whether mentorship involvement was associated with indicators of leadership sustainability and teachers' assessments of their preparedness in the areas of instructional, managerial, and strategic leadership. While assumption testing verified the suitability of the intended parametric procedures, descriptive statistics offered a summary of participant characteristics and research factors. Although there were considerable correlations between the preparedness dimensions itself, correlational studies showed that mentorship participation was not significantly connected with instructional, managerial, or strategic preparedness. Additionally, mentorship engagement did not significantly predict leadership readiness outcomes, according to regression analyses. Although administrative experience emerged as a significant predictor of job satisfaction, hierarchical regression analyses showed that mentorship participation did not significantly add variance in predicting job satisfaction, retention intentions, or succession readiness beyond total administrative experience. The current study's conclusions have many ramifications for leadership development initiatives, school district support systems, and educational leadership practice. The results do not lessen the usefulness of mentoring in educational contexts, even if mentorship involvement was not a statistically significant predictor of leadership preparedness or sustainability markers in this sample. Rather, the findings indicated that school districts and leadership development programs would benefit from looking at how mentorship experiences are organised, carried out, and maintained over time, in addition to whether mentorship opportunities are available. The results of this study provide a number of avenues for further investigation into school leadership development and mentoring. More varied samples from various schools and geographical areas should be the focus of future research. Increasing the sample size may boost response variability and enhance the generalisability of results on leadership readiness and mentoring.

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