



PRINCIPALS' INNOVATIVE PLANNING PRACTICES AND TEACHERS' COMPETENCE IN TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGES IN THE EAST REGION OF CAMEROON

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Abstract:

Teachers' competence remains a decisive factor in educational quality, particularly in teacher education institutions responsible for preparing future primary school teachers. This study examined the influence of principals' innovative planning practices on teachers' competence in Teacher Training Colleges in the East Region of Cameroon. It focused on three issues: the innovative planning practices used by principals, the strategies employed to implement innovation, and the ways principals addressed the challenges encountered during implementation. The study was anchored in Transformational Leadership Theory and Instructional Leadership Theory, both of which position school leadership as a key driver of teacher development, instructional improvement, and school effectiveness. A qualitative descriptive design was adopted. Data were collected from 16 informants across four Teacher Training Colleges through semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis. The data were analysed inductively, and key response patterns were summarised using descriptive tables. The findings showed that principals used adaptive, inclusive, and techno-driven planning practices, although implementation varied substantially across colleges. Techno-driven planning was strongest in the institution with better digital infrastructure, while inclusive planning remained the weakest dimension. Principals relied mainly on persuasion, dialogue, monitoring, and practical support to implement innovation. The study concludes that innovative planning can strengthen teachers' competence, but its effectiveness depends on leadership capacity, institutional support, and access to infrastructure and digital resources.

Keywords: innovative planning, school leadership, teachers' competence, instructional leadership, teacher training colleges, Cameroon

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1. Introduction

Teacher competence is central to educational quality because teachers mediate curriculum, shape learner engagement, and influence the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and values. In teacher education institutions, this issue becomes even more strategic because teacher trainers prepare the future teaching workforce. Where teachers in Teacher Training Colleges demonstrate strong pedagogical, professional, social, and technological competence, the quality of teacher preparation is likely to improve correspondingly. Conversely, where teacher competence is weak, outdated, or disconnected from current educational realities, the effects may cascade throughout the wider school system.

Globally, school leadership has increasingly been recognised as one of the strongest school-level influences on teacher practice and school improvement. Recent studies continue to show that instructional leadership is positively associated with teacher performance and teacher self-efficacy, while transformational leadership promotes teacher innovative behaviour, commitment, resilience, and creativity (Bao, 2024; Elfira, 2024; Zhang, 2025). These findings are particularly relevant in teacher education because principals in Teacher Training Colleges are expected not merely to manage routines but to create professional conditions that support pedagogical innovation, reflective practice, and continuous competence development among staff.

Planning is one of the most fundamental functions of educational administration because it gives direction to institutional action, coordinates resources, organises staff work, and frames improvement efforts. However, in today's educational environment, routine planning is no longer sufficient. Principals are increasingly expected to adopt innovative planning practices that are adaptive, inclusive, collaborative, and technology-enabled. Innovative planning involves anticipating change, responding flexibly to institutional challenges, and deliberately structuring opportunities for teacher learning, improved pedagogy, and more effective school functioning.

In Cameroon, this expectation has become more visible within current education reform frameworks. The 2023–2030 Education and Training Sector Strategy aligns education with national development priorities and places strong emphasis on educational quality, governance improvement, teacher development, inclusion, and digital transformation. UNESCO-IICBA's recent Cameroon education briefs likewise point to continuing needs in teacher development, digital solutions in teacher training institutions, and strengthened management capacities within the education system. These policy orientations suggest that principals of Teacher Training Colleges are expected to act as instructional and innovative leaders capable of supporting teachers in new and more responsive ways.

Yet, despite these policy expectations, many teacher education institutions in Cameroon still operate in contexts characterised by limited digital infrastructure, inconsistent electricity supply, inadequate access to continuing professional development, and the persistence of traditional teaching methods. In such contexts, the

quality of principal leadership becomes especially important. Principals' innovative planning practices may serve as a critical bridge between policy aspirations and school-level realities.

In the East Region of Cameroon, Teacher Training Colleges occupy a strategic place in the preparation of future primary school teachers. However, concerns remain about whether teachers in these institutions are being adequately supported to update their professional, pedagogical, and technological competencies. This raises an important question: to what extent do principals' innovative planning practices contribute to teachers' competence in these institutions?

This study, therefore, investigates principals' innovative planning practices and teachers' competence in Teacher Training Colleges in the East Region of Cameroon. Specifically, it examines the forms of innovative planning used by principals, the strategies employed to implement innovation, and the ways principals overcome the challenges they encounter in improving teachers' competence.

2. Literature Review

Innovative planning refers to deliberate leadership action that departs from routine administrative procedures in order to improve institutional effectiveness, respond to contextual change, and strengthen teaching and learning. In school settings, innovative planning may include digital integration, collaborative professional development, flexible resource use, school-community partnerships, data-informed decision-making, and strategies for improving inclusion and participation. Innovation in educational leadership is therefore not merely about technology or novelty; it is about purposeful change that improves educational processes and outcomes.

Contemporary scholarship increasingly treats innovation as a leadership issue. Research on transformational leadership, for example, shows that principals influence innovation by shaping teachers' attitudes toward change, their professional confidence, and their willingness to experiment with new practices (Bao, 2024; Kaya, 2024). When leaders encourage meaning, trust, support, and creativity, teachers are more likely to embrace new pedagogical approaches and participate in school improvement initiatives. For this study, innovative planning is conceptualised through three interrelated dimensions. The first is adaptive planning, which refers to leadership actions that respond to changing institutional needs, learner realities, and pedagogical demands. Adaptive planning may include adjusting teaching expectations, reorganising school routines, and introducing new forms of professional collaboration. The second is inclusive planning, which concerns deliberate efforts to support learner diversity, reduce barriers to participation, and promote equitable teaching practices. The third is techno-driven planning, which focuses on the integration of digital tools, online communication systems, multimedia resources, and technology-supported teaching.

These three dimensions are particularly relevant in teacher training institutions. Teacher trainers are expected to prepare future teachers who can teach diverse learners,

use learner-centred methods, and engage effectively with digital tools. Consequently, principals' planning practices in such institutions must move beyond compliance and routine administration toward more developmental and innovation-oriented leadership. Teachers' competence refers to the integrated body of knowledge, pedagogical skill, professional judgement, attitudes, and social capacities required for effective teaching. It includes mastery of content, lesson planning, instructional delivery, classroom management, learner assessment, collaboration, communication, and responsiveness to learner diversity. In contemporary education, teacher competence also includes digital literacy and the ability to use technology to support planning, teaching, assessment, and professional learning.

In teacher education institutions, competence has additional significance because teachers do not simply teach pupils; they model professional practice for future teachers. A competent teacher trainer must therefore demonstrate effective pedagogy, reflective professionalism, collegiality, and openness to innovation. Weak competence at this level is likely to be reproduced downstream in the school system.

Research consistently shows that teacher competence is shaped by institutional conditions and leadership support. Principals who create supportive work environments, promote collaborative cultures, and focus on teaching and learning tend to strengthen teacher efficacy and performance (Elfira, 2024; Zhang, 2025). This means that teacher competence should not be treated as an individual attribute alone; it is also an institutional outcome influenced by leadership, culture, access to resources, and opportunities for continuous professional growth.

Transformational Leadership Theory, originally associated with Burns and later elaborated by Bass, explains how leaders influence followers through vision, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualised support. Transformational leaders do not simply direct action; they motivate people to transcend routine expectations and commit themselves to collective improvement. In educational contexts, transformational principals promote innovation, professional growth, and school change by fostering shared purpose and encouraging staff to take ownership of improvement efforts.

Recent empirical evidence continues to affirm the relevance of transformational leadership in education. Bao (2024) found that principal transformational leadership positively influenced teacher innovative behaviour and that this relationship was mediated by teachers' sense of meaning at work. Other recent research also links transformational leadership with teacher resilience, creativity, and job satisfaction. These findings make the theory highly relevant to the present study, which seeks to understand how principals' innovative planning practices may inspire teachers to improve their competence.

Instructional Leadership Theory focuses on the principal's role in improving teaching and learning directly. It emphasises setting academic goals, supervising instruction, supporting teacher development, monitoring classroom processes, and sustaining a learning-oriented school culture. Instructional leaders are actively concerned

with the quality of teaching, the alignment of pedagogical practice with institutional goals, and the creation of conditions that support teacher improvement.

Recent research demonstrates the continuing relevance of instructional leadership. Elfira (2024) found that principal instructional leadership positively shaped teacher performance, with teacher self-efficacy playing a mediating role. Zhang (2025) also reported strong positive correlations between instructional leadership and teacher self-efficacy and identified work-environment support and teacher-student engagement promotion as important predictive dimensions. This theory is therefore relevant to the current study because it helps explain how principals' planning, supervision, and pedagogical support may influence teachers' competence in Teacher Training Colleges.

Recent empirical studies support the proposition that school leadership affects teacher competence and innovation. A 2024 *Frontiers in Education* study found that principal instructional leadership had a positive effect on teacher performance and that teacher self-efficacy mediated this relationship (Elfira, 2024). This suggests that principals influence teacher performance not only through direct supervision but also by strengthening teachers' confidence in their abilities.

Another recent study by Zhang (2025) found strong positive relationships between principal instructional leadership and teacher self-efficacy, with work-environment support and teacher-student engagement promotion identified as especially important leadership dimensions. These findings are relevant because they indicate that principals' support for work conditions and engagement can strengthen teacher competence.

On transformational leadership, Bao (2024) found that principal transformational leadership positively influenced teacher innovative behaviour and that meaning at work mediated this relationship. This suggests that when teachers see their work as meaningful and feel supported by leadership, they are more willing to innovate. Other recent work likewise links transformational leadership with teacher resilience and creativity (Kaya, 2024).

In the African and Cameroonian context, the need for stronger teacher development and better-supported teacher training institutions remains prominent. UNESCO-IICBA's recent Cameroon brief highlights digital solutions for teacher training and management, with an emphasis on strengthening teacher training institutions and supporting equitable education. Cameroon's Education and Training Sector Strategy 2023–2030 also places teacher quality, governance improvement, and digital transformation at the centre of reform. However, there remains limited published evidence focusing specifically on principals' innovative planning practices in Teacher Training Colleges in the East Region of Cameroon. This is the gap addressed by the present study.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative descriptive design. This design was appropriate because the study sought to obtain detailed accounts of principals' planning practices,

implementation strategies, and responses to institutional challenges. A qualitative approach made it possible to explore participants' experiences and perceptions in depth while remaining sensitive to the institutional and regional context in which the study was conducted.

The study was conducted in the East Region of Cameroon, the largest region in the country by land area. Four Teacher Training Colleges located in divisional headquarters were included: Government Bilingual Teacher Training College (GBTTC) Bertoua in Lom-et-Djerem; Government Teacher Training College (GTTC) Yokadouma in Boumba-et-Ngoko; Government Teacher Training College (GTTC) Batouri in Kadey; and Government Teacher Training College (GTTC) Abong-Mbang I in Haut-Nyong.

The inclusion of these institutions allowed the study to capture some variation in infrastructural conditions. GBTTC Bertoua, for example, had comparatively stronger digital support, while the other institutions were more resource-constrained. This reflects broader inequalities in educational infrastructure that remain relevant to school leadership and teacher development in Cameroon.

The study involved 16 informants drawn from the four colleges. These included four principals, ten teachers, and two heads of service. The principals and heads of service were selected purposively because of their direct involvement in institutional leadership and supervision. Teachers were included to provide insight into how principals' innovative planning was experienced at the level of everyday practice.

Three instruments were used: a semi-structured interview guide, an observation checklist, and a document analysis guide. The interview guide focused on the innovations introduced by principals, the strategies used to implement those innovations, and the challenges encountered in improving teachers' competence. Observation was used to verify whether the reported practices were visible in school routines such as staff meetings, supervision activities, classroom processes, and technology use. Document analysis covered institutional materials such as calendars of activities, meeting records, supervision sheets, notebooks, and selected teaching materials.

Trustworthiness was strengthened through triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents. The use of multiple sources allowed the researcher to compare evidence and reduce overreliance on a single perspective. The instruments were also reviewed to ensure clarity and relevance to the study objectives.

Data were analysed inductively. Interview recordings were transcribed, field notes organised, and documentary evidence reviewed. Recurrent ideas were coded and grouped into themes corresponding to the study objectives. Because the original manuscript reported key response tendencies in percentages, the rewritten article preserves these figures as descriptive summaries only. They indicate response patterns within the study sample and are not presented as inferential statistics.

Table 1: Distribution of Study Institutions and Population

Division	Teacher Training College	Student Population	Teacher Population
Lom-et-Djerem	G.B.T.T.C. Bertoua	276	34
Boumba-et-Ngoko	G.T.T.C. Yokadouma	45	10
Kadey	G.T.T.C. Batouri	88	20
Haut-Nyong	G.T.T.C. Abong-Mbang I	110	22

Source: Fieldwork, March 2026.

4. Results

The first objective examined the innovative planning practices used by principals to improve teachers' competence. Three main dimensions emerged from the data: adaptive planning, inclusive planning, and techno-driven planning.

Table 2: Innovative Planning Practices Reported by Participants

Planning Dimension	Description	Response Pattern	Interpretation
Adaptive planning	Encouraging learner-centred methods, collaborative work, and flexible responses to changing needs	40% partial agreement	Moderately present
Inclusive planning	Planning for learner diversity, special support, and equitable participation	35% partial agreement	Weakly present
Techno-driven planning	Use of tablets, phones, WhatsApp, digital resources, and multimedia support	65% agreement in better-equipped school; limited elsewhere	Most visible dimension

Adaptive planning was present but uneven. Some respondents indicated that principals encouraged group projects, active learning, and pedagogical flexibility. However, observation suggested that traditional lecturing and note-taking still dominated in several classrooms. This implies that adaptive innovation existed more as an aspiration than as a consistent pedagogical reality.

Inclusive planning was the weakest dimension. Teachers reported limited evidence that principals had developed systematic plans to help staff address learner diversity, different levels of ability, or specific learning difficulties. This suggests that inclusion remained underdeveloped as an area of school-based leadership practice.

Techno-driven planning was the strongest visible form of innovation, especially in GBTTC Bertoua. Teachers in that college reportedly used tablets and digital materials more directly in instructional work. Across all four colleges, WhatsApp groups served as active channels for announcements, deadlines, coordination, and resource sharing. These results are consistent with broader literature suggesting that leadership often drives innovation first through communication technologies and practical digital routines before deeper pedagogical transformation occurs (Bao, 2024).

Table 3: Strategies Used by Principals to Implement Innovation

Strategy	Illustrative Practice	Response Pattern
Persuasion	Encouraging teachers to attend meetings, seminars, and adopt new methods	50% average agreement
Dialogue and discussion	Using staff meetings and conversations to explain innovations	Frequently reported
Monitoring and follow-up	Checking deadlines, task completion, and participation	Reported and observed
Motivation and support	Encouragement and occasional transport support for training	60% confirmation

The second objective examined the strategies used by principals to implement innovation. Participants indicated that principals relied mainly on persuasion and dialogue rather than command. Staff meetings were central to the implementation process because they allowed principals to explain innovations, reduce resistance, and reinforce expectations. Monitoring also appeared important, particularly through reminders, follow-up, and digital communication channels.

The use of encouragement and occasional transport support for teachers to attend seminars was especially notable. This suggests that even in resource-limited settings, principals used practical means to sustain teacher development. These relational and motivational strategies align with transformational leadership and with evidence that instructional leadership works partly through support, structured communication, and professional guidance (Elfira, 2024; Zhang, 2025).

Table 4: Challenges and Coping Strategies

Challenge	Effect on Innovation	Coping Strategy
Limited digital equipment	Restricted use of technology in teaching	Encouraged phone-based research and shared digital materials
Lack of electricity in some schools	Limited multimedia teaching	Relied on low-tech alternatives and home-based tasks
Limited formal training opportunities	Slowed competence upgrading	Used staff meetings for sensitisation and encouraged seminar participation
Resistance to change	Inconsistent uptake of innovation	Used persuasion, reminders, and discussion
Financial constraints	Reduced participation in training	Occasionally provided transport support

The third objective examined the challenges principals faced and the ways they responded. These results show that principals operated within considerable constraints. Rather than abandoning innovation, they adopted context-sensitive coping strategies. One approach was to encourage home-based or phone-based research where school infrastructure was weak. Another was to turn routine staff meetings into opportunities for ongoing professional learning. This reflects adaptive leadership in practice and suggests that leadership agency remains important even under difficult institutional conditions.

5. Discussion

The study shows that principals' innovative planning practices were present in all four colleges, but not at equal levels. Techno-driven planning emerged as the strongest dimension, particularly in institutions with better infrastructure. This is consistent with recent evidence that transformational leadership helps stimulate innovation and that digital routines often become the first visible sign of school-level innovation (Bao, 2024).

The relatively weak presence of inclusive planning is significant. Although Cameroon's education strategy stresses quality and inclusion, the findings suggest that these policy objectives have not yet translated into strong school-based planning for learner diversity in the colleges studied. Cameroon's current strategy framework explicitly prioritises improved quality, equitable access, and stronger governance, but the evidence from this study suggests that inclusion remains a weak operational area in teacher training leadership. This may reflect limited training, insufficient support materials, or broader institutional constraints.

The implementation strategies used by principals were strongly relational. Rather than relying on formal authority alone, principals used persuasion, dialogue, and monitoring to sustain teacher participation. This supports the relevance of Transformational Leadership Theory, since much of the implementation process involved motivating teachers and reducing resistance to change. At the same time, the use of meetings, follow-up, and pedagogical reminders reflects the logic of Instructional Leadership Theory. Recent empirical research similarly finds that instructional leadership contributes to teacher performance and efficacy, particularly when leaders create supportive work environments (Elfira, 2024; Zhang, 2025).

The findings also show that leadership alone cannot fully compensate for structural deficits. Principals may encourage innovation, but their efforts are constrained by weak infrastructure, unequal access to digital tools, and limited funding for teacher development. This is especially important in the Cameroonian context, where teacher training institutions are expected to support digital solutions and stronger management, yet resource disparities remain significant. UNESCO-IICBA's recent Cameroon brief specifically notes support for teacher training institutions to use digital solutions for teacher training and management, suggesting that the policy direction is clear even if school-level implementation remains uneven.

Overall, the study suggests that principals in the East Region are making genuine attempts to improve teachers' competence through innovation, but these efforts require stronger institutional backing. Where principals have access to better infrastructure and are able to combine encouragement with practical support, innovation appears more visible. Where infrastructure is weak, innovation tends to remain limited, informal, or dependent on individual initiative.

6. Implications and Conclusion

The findings have practical implications for school leadership and education policy in Cameroon.

First, principals of Teacher Training Colleges need stronger preparation in innovative planning, instructional leadership, digital transformation, and inclusive pedagogy. Leadership development should extend beyond administrative routine to include strategic school improvement, teacher development, and school-based innovation.

Second, innovation cannot depend on principal effort alone. It requires institutional investment in electricity, internet access, multimedia facilities, and digital devices. Cameroon's reform agenda already places strong emphasis on education quality, governance, and digital transformation, but these priorities will require more consistent resourcing if they are to be realised at the school level.

Third, schools should formalise school-based professional development through structured mentoring, reflective meetings, peer observation, technology-support sessions, and collaborative lesson development. Such practices are particularly important in Teacher Training Colleges because teacher trainers are expected to model effective practice for student teachers.

Fourth, inclusive planning should be deliberately strengthened. The study suggests that inclusive support remains the weakest area of principal innovation. Teacher Training Colleges, therefore, need clearer institutional strategies for learner diversity, differentiated teaching, and supportive pedagogical planning.

In conclusion, this study found that principals' innovative planning practices can enhance teachers' competence in Teacher Training Colleges in the East Region of Cameroon, but the extent of impact depends on leadership capacity, available infrastructure, and institutional support. Adaptive, inclusive, and techno-driven planning were all present, though unevenly implemented. Techno-driven planning was the most visible dimension, while inclusive planning remained the least developed. Principals mainly implemented innovation through persuasion, dialogue, monitoring, and practical support. For Teacher Training Colleges to fulfil their role in preparing competent future teachers, principals must be supported not only as administrators but as innovative instructional leaders.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Amombi Delphine Amana (PhD) is a Permanent Lecturer at the University of Bertoua, Cameroon. She is an academic and researcher with expertise in educational planning, teacher education, and institutional development within the context of teacher training colleges. Her research interests focus on identifying and solving educational planning problems in Teacher Training Colleges, with particular attention to improving institutional efficiency, teacher preparation, resource management, and the quality of training programmes. Through her teaching, research, and academic engagement, she contributes to the development of effective planning strategies for strengthening teacher education in Cameroon.

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