

The extent to which principals' use of transformational leadership style influences students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Kenya

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which principals' use of transformational leadership style influences students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Mwala sub-county, Machakos County. This study used descriptive survey research design. It targeted 72 schools, 72 principals and 505 teachers in Mwala Sub-county. The study employed stratified random sampling technique to select 36 principals and simple random sampling technique to include 216 teachers. The instruments were validated through piloting and by research experts to ascertain content validity while reliability was achieved through piloting using test-retest method. Data was coded and entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0 for analysis. Descriptive statistics which included frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were employed to analyse data. Inferential statistics which basically involved running correlation analysis at 0.05 level of significance were employed to test the nature and strength of relationships between variables. The study employed tables to present the analysed results. The results revealed that there was weak positive but statistically significant correlation between transformational leadership style and students' academic performance ($R=.374, p=.038$). The study recommends to: Kenya Institute of Educational Management (KEMI) and the Teachers' Service Commission (TSC) to regularly in-service teachers on leadership styles; principals to enhance practices associated with transformational leadership practices since they improve academic performance.

Keywords: Leadership style, Transformational Leadership Style, Academic Performance

Introduction

Leadership is one of the concepts that are studied a lot and there is still no clear agreement on its definition. On this note, Ucar, Eren and Erzen (2012) claim that several definitions of leadership were made according to the ability, personality, efficiency in relationships, cognitive and emotional approaches of a leader and the focus on an individual or a group or according to a person's directing the other persons, organizational structure, ability to establish or facilitate relationships in a group or organization.

Leadership is the most effective when leaders choose more effective styles. Oluremi (2013) describes leadership style as the manner and approach of providing direction, implementing plans and motivating people. There are several leadership styles which exert varying influence on students' academic achievement such as transformational, instructional, transactional, democratic, laissez faire and autocratic among others. While some leadership styles when adopted make the leader effective; others make the leader weak and ineffective and thus lead to poor results. From a theoretical standpoint, House (1971) in his Path-Goal theory cited in Cote (2017) advanced that a particular leadership style should be used to complement what is missing from the work situation in order to enhance follower motivation, satisfaction and performance. This theory asserts that leaders' behavior is motivational when it eliminates factors that hinder goal accomplishment; provides guidance and support to the employees, and grants meaningful rewards in return for success. In agreement with this proposition, Quin, Deris, Bischoff and Johnson (2015) allude that effective school principals make positive changes which result in increased student achievement.

There is evidence which suggests that an effective school principal can be made through professional development program (Greatbatch & Tate, 2019). For instance, In Singapore, only those who successfully

complete a six-month, full-time Leaders in Education Programme (LEP) offered by National Institute of Education (NIP) can be appointed as principals (Retna, 2015). In addition, there are in – service training for serving principals. A study done by Deng and Gopinathan (2016) in Singapore reported that school leadership was instructional with school leaders being able to provide teachers with guidance and support in curriculum and instruction. As a result, the country emerged the best globally in 2015 Programme for International Students' Assessment (PISA) examination. When people receive some training, they employ effective leadership styles (Njagi & Mwanja, 2017) and high emotional intelligence (Mwanja, Khama & Nyamboga, 2022). However, instructional leadership style is not of any interest to this study but the evidence provided demonstrates that principals can be trained to employ more effective styles.

The KEMI Diploma Module 2, *Transforming Education Management*, highlights five leadership styles which include democratic; autocratic; laissez faire, transactional styles and transformational styles (KEMI, 2014b). The KEMI learners' guide emphasize that the course participants should be able to practice transformational educational leadership. However, a cursory examination of the module reveals that the course material is shallow and inadequate to equip trainees with adequate content on effective leadership styles. To further this argument, a study done by Oyugi and Gogo (2019) in Awendo Sub-county, Kenya showed that autocratic, democratic and laissez faire styles are commonly practiced leading to poor academic performance. Use of weak leadership styles when the KEMI Diploma emphasizes on the practice of transformational leadership style could suggest that the training could be inadequate. The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which principals' use of transformational leadership style influences students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Mwala sub-county, Machakos County.

Theoretical Framework

This study was based on Path-Goal Theory developed by Robert House, revised in 1974 by House and Mitchell, and revised again in 1996 by House (as cited in Cote, 2017). House believed that a leader's behaviour is contingent to employee motivation and employee performance. Path-Goal theory states that a good leader provides clear direction, sets high goals, gets involved in goal achievement and supports his employees. In the initial version of Path-Goal Theory, House (1971) explained that the leaders' behavior is motivational when it eliminates factors that hinder goal accomplishment; provides guidance and support to the employees, and grants meaningful rewards in return for success. House and Mitchell (1974) expanded the initial theory to include four well defined leader's behaviors: directive leadership; supportive leadership; participative leadership; and achievement-oriented leadership.

This theory proposes that a particular leadership behavior should be used to complement or to fill what is missing from the work situation in order to enhance follower motivation, satisfaction and performance. In school, the effect of principal leadership on academic performance is indirect and therefore the principal need to adopt a leadership behavior that will motivate teachers. In order to determine required leadership behaviors, a leader needs to analyze two factors. The first is attributes to the work environment. These include the task, the formal authority system and the primary work group.

The second is attributes of each individual subordinate. These include ability, experience, personal goals, needs and locus of control. Subordinates with an external locus feel little control over their lives. The theory provides various leadership behaviors which principals can employ on different individuals (teachers) in various task characteristics. Therefore this theory formed the basis of this study because it identifies transformational leadership style and provides situations (environment and tasks) that the school principal can apply to improve academic performance.

Transformational Leadership Style and its Influence on Students' Academic Performance

According to Allen et al (2015), in idealized influence, the leader's behaviour becomes a role model for the subjects that instills pride and trust among followers. Ucar, Eren and Erzengin (2012) emphasize that such leaders are faithful, inspire confidence, do not collapse in case of difficult situations, protect their most important values or show they protect, is aware of the goal that should be succeeded, show loyalty to the purpose and make decisions by considering ethical and moral aspects.

The inspirational leader is able to motivate followers by providing meaning to the followers' work and challenging them in their work (Bass et al., 2003 cited in Mendez-Keegan, 2019). Allen et al (2015) elaborate that such a leader shares the school's vision and goals and thus make the followers to envision a successful future and inspired to fulfill goals. In support of these views, Ucar, Eren and Erzen (2012) allude that such leaders are more optimistic for future and they present a continuously developing vision and high standard models and they make enthusiastic speeches, encourage their subordinates and tell them why the thing that must be done should be done. It can be seen that a transformational leader practicing inspirational motivational motivation emphasize team spirit, enthusiasm, passion and optimism.

Anderson (2017) claims that transformational leaders are unselfish and place others' needs ahead of their own by communicating the school's vision, establishing norms, developing an individual's strengths by changing attitudes, and encouraging risk taking from staff. According to Miskel and Wayne (2008), transformational leader is proactive, raises the awareness levels of followers on inspirational collective interests and help followers achieve unusually high performance outcomes. A transformational leader is flexible, open-minded, sensitive to other people's need, encourage participation sharing, decision-making and highly tolerant to diversity. Kouzes and Posner (2002) maintain that transformational leadership influence students' academic performance if properly implemented in schools since it directly impact on teachers and subordinate staff.

Through employing descriptive survey design and using questionnaires and document analysis checklists, Demozie (2018) investigated principals' leadership styles and students' academic performance in government primary schools in Enjibara town of Ethiopia. Out of the 7 schools located in the town, 4 were randomly selected. The study included 91 teachers who were selected through stratified random sampling technique. The study results showed that there was positive but weak relationship between transformational leadership and students' academic achievement. It is evident that this study sampled a smaller sample and it was conducted in primary school setting while the current study was conducted in secondary school setting.

Although studies reviewed so far establish a positive relationship between transformational leadership and academic performance, a descriptive study done in public secondary schools in Makueni County by Musyoki, Okoth, Kalai and Okumbe (2021) on the influence of principals' intellectual stimulation on students' performance reported a negative correlation between intellectual stimulation and academic performance. The sample comprised of 111 principals, 729 teachers and 12 Ministry of Education officials drawn from 388 secondary schools and used questionnaires and interview guide to collect data. This study contradicts most of the studies reviewed in this section which finds that transformational leadership is a good predictor of academic performance. The present study was conducted so as to clarify this inconsistency in literature

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed descriptive survey research design. Descriptive research survey design involves collecting data in order to answer questions on current status of subjects of the study. This design allows the researcher to use descriptive and inferential statistics in data analysis. Thus, the choice of a research design is informed by a number of considerations key among them being data analysis techniques.

Participants

According to the Mwala Sub-county Education Office (2020), there are 72 public secondary schools with a population of 72 school heads and 505 teachers. The study targeted all (72) school heads and all (486) teachers in the sub-county making a total target population of 577 respondents. Stratified random sampling technique was used to stratify the schools into their respective zones

Out of the 72 schools, the study intended to include a sample of 36 (50.0%) schools which according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) were appropriate. The 72 public secondary schools were stratified into 5 zones which include: Mwala (14); Masii (15); Muthetheni (16); Yathui (12); and Mbiuni (15). After stratification, the study employed simple random sampling technique 50% of schools in each zone. The procedure involved writing names of all the schools on pieces of paper and folding them. The folded pieces of papers were put in a cup and

shuffled. Then, half of the folded pieces of paper were drawn from the cup that when unfolded gave the actual names of the schools which were visited. All the principals of the participating schools were purposively included in the study.

To determine teachers' sample, Yamene (1967) formula was employed as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where *n* is the sample size, *N* is the population size and *e* is the sample error at 95% confidence level

$$n = \frac{486}{1 + 505(0.05)^2}$$

n = 216 teachers.

Therefore, a total of 216 teachers were included in the study. Using equal allocation of the number of sample schools 216/36, the study included 6 teachers per school. At the school level, simple random sampling technique was employed to select the actual 6 teachers who were included in each school. All the names of teachers in the school excluding the principal were written on pieces of papers that were then folded and put in a cup and shuffled. Then, 6 pieces of the folded papers were drawn and unfolded to give the actual names of teachers who were to participate in the study.

In total, the study included 36 principals and 216 teachers making a total sample 252 respondents. Table 3.1 gives information on sample size.

Table 3.1: Sample Size Table

Zone	Schools	Sample (50.0%)	Teachers	Sample Size
Mwala	14	7	42	49
Masii	15	7	42	49
Muthetheni	16	8	48	56
Yathui	12	6	36	42
Mbiuni	15	8	48	56
Total sample	72	36	216	252

Measures

Questionnaires were the main instruments of collecting data used in this study. Two sets of questionnaires, a questionnaire for school heads and another one for teachers were used to collect quantitative data. Statements were adapted from Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 6S variant which is a self-rating tool for the principals. The instruments had a 5-point Likert scale representing the frequency of each behavior, examples are 0 = not at all, 1 = once in a while, 2 = sometimes, 3 = fairly often, 4 = frequently, if not always. The MLQ has 12 items which measure the four aspects of transformational leadership in four factors: Idealized influence (items 1, 8, and 15), Factor 1; Inspirational motivation (items 2, 9, and 16), Factor 2; Intellectual stimulation (items 3, 10, and 17), Factor 3; and Individual consideration (items 4, 11, and 18), Factor 4.

Data Analysis

This study was purely quantitative and thus collected quantitative data. The Quantitative data was coded and captured through Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) computer program (version 23.0) for analysis. Data analysis involved two stages, that is, descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics included frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. Data for demographic information of respondents were coded appropriately and entered into the SPSS. This data was analysed mainly through frequencies, percentages and standard deviations. For instance, data relating to gender was coded as follows; 1 = male, 2 = female. Means of schools were entered into the SPSS version 23.0 and analysed through means and standard deviations. Further, academic performance data was transformed to create a new variable, A , which was used for correlation analysis.

Ethical Considerations

To address legal ethical concerns, a research license was applied from National Commission of Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) website. The researcher was authorized to conduct research by NACOSTI vide license number NACOSTI/P/21/10456. Cognizant of the fact that teachers' right to privacy, dignity and confidentiality overrode their need to participate in the study, the researcher undertook the following measures: respondents' consent was first sought and they were made aware that their participation or non-participation was not going to affect them in any way; as a general practice in surveys, respondents were asked not to indicate their name or the name of their school to ensure they participated anonymously; questionnaires were filled in the staffroom, departmental offices or in the open fields where teachers felt comfortable; filled up questionnaires were collected promptly from respondents and mixed with other questionnaires from other schools in the presence of participants; and that no questionnaire was collected by members of the administration or any other teacher. To protect self and the study participants from contracting Covid-19, the researcher observed all the Ministry of Health Protocols and reminded participants to observe the same during their interactions.

Research Results

This study sought to establish the sub-variables of transformational leadership with more weight on academic performance.

Table 1: Sub-variables of Transformational Leadership with More Weight

Variable	R	P-Value
Individualized Influence	.408	.023
Inspirational Motivation	.472	.007
Inspirational Stimulation	.387	.031
Individual Consideration	.354	0.042

Table 1 shows that inspirational motivation ($R=.472$) bore more weight on academic performance followed by individualized influence ($R=.408$), inspirational stimulation ($R=.387$) and individual consideration ($R=.354$) in that order. The net effect of this analysis suggests that inspirational motivation and individualized influence constructs of transformational leadership are the strongest predictors of academic performance.

Hypotheses Testing

A null hypothesis was formulated as follows: H_{01} : There is no statistically significant relationship between transformational leadership style and students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Mwala sub-county. To ascertain the veracity of this claim, a correlation analysis was run at 0.05 level of confidence the relationship between transformational leadership style and students' academic performance. A normality tests was done which showed that one of the variable was non-parametric ($p < 0.05$). As a consequence, a Spearman's rank-order correlation which is non-parametric was run at 0.05 level of significance. The results are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Correlation between Transformational Leadership and Academic Performance.

			Transformational Leadership	Academic Performance
Spearman's rho	Transformational Leadership	Coefficient	1.000	.374*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.038
		N	31	31
	Academic Performance	Coefficient	.374*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.038	.
		N	31	31

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Results reported in table 2 indicate that there was weak positive correlation between transformational leadership style and students' academic performance, which was statistically significant ($r = .374, p = .038$).

With a *P value* of $0.038 < 0.05$, the null hypothesis which stated that “ H_{01} : there is no statistically significant relationship between principals' use of transformational leadership style and students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Mwala sub-county was rejected.

Discussion

The objective of the study sought to establish the extent to which principals' use of transformational leadership style influence students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Mwala sub-county. Descriptive results established that idealized influence practices such as making teachers to feel comfortable to be around them, making teachers to have complete faith in them, and making teachers to be proud to be associated with them were high. These findings are in line with Path Goal theory adopted in this study, the principal should make the teaching job more rewarding, challenging and interesting in order to achieve effective teaching and learning. It was revealed that majority of the principals were highly practicing inspirational motivation behaviors such as: expressing themselves with few simple words on what the school community could and should do; providing appealing images about what the school community could do; and helping teachers to find meaning in their work. The findings are supported by Path-Goal theory which states that a good leader should provide a clear direction, set high goals, get involved in goal achievement and support his/her employees.

The descriptive results also established that practices associated with inspirational stimulation were moderately practiced such as: enabling teachers to think about old problems in new ways; providing teachers with new ways of looking at puzzling things; and getting teachers to rethink ideas that they had never questioned before. The findings have theoretical support. For instance, Path-Goal theory postulates that a leaders' behavior is motivational when it eliminates factors that hinder goal accomplishment and provides guidance and support to the employees. The study further established that practices associated with individual consideration were moderate such as helping teachers to develop themselves; letting teachers to know how they think they are doing; and giving personal attention to teachers who seemed rejected. Path-Goal theory asserts that leaders should provide their followers with direct, clear and regular feedback on their performance in particular and the organizational performance in general.

Inferential results revealed that there was weak positive but statistically significant correlation between transformational leadership and students' academic performance. Transformational leadership was studied as a multi-construct consisting of four sub-variables. This study established that not all of the sub-variables exerted similar weight on academic performance. In this sense, inspirational motivational ($R = .472$) bore the most weight followed by individualized influence ($R = .408$), then inspirational stimulation ($R = .387$) and finally, individualized consideration ($R = .354$).

The study findings agree with a study done in New York by Mendez-Keegan (2019) on transformational leadership practices and student achievement which established a positive significant relationship between transformational leadership and students' achievement. The findings disagree with a study done in Philippines by Buenvenida and Ramos (2019) on transformational leadership practices of school heads and performance of city schools. The study established that although transformational leadership practices were being practiced, they did not significantly influence students' academic performance.

The current study established that there was weak positive but statistically significant relationship between intellectual stimulation and students' academic performance. This finding support a study done in Nigeria by Ogbonnaya, Izuagba and Chukwudebelu (2020) which investigated the impact of transformational leadership style on students' academic achievement and revealed that there was a positive relationship between intellectual stimulation and pupils' academic achievement. Although the two studies established that there was a statistical relationship between the two variables; the relationship ranged from weak to strong. It was noted that the Ogbonnaya, Izuagba and Chukwudebelu (2020) study employed Leithwood Transformational Leadership Instrument while the current study employed Multi-Linear Questionnaire to collect data on transformational leadership.

The findings of the study agree with a study done by Demozie (2018) in Ethiopia which investigated principals' leadership styles and students' academic performance and showed that there was positive but weak relationship between transformational leadership and students' academic achievement. In Kenya, the study findings support an earlier study done by Maru (2013) in Kinangop Sub-county which showed that transformational leadership was weakly correlated with students' academic performance ($R = .34$).

Overall, the current study established that there was weak correlation between transformational leadership and students' academic performance. Further, the current study found out that the four sub-variables of transformational leadership were weakly correlated with academic performance. These findings wholly agree with a study done by Muia (2018) who investigated the influence of principals' transformational leadership practices on academic performance in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education in Mbooni West Sub County, Kenya. The findings revealed that transformational leadership had positive correlation with academic performance. On the four sub-constructs of transformational leadership, the findings established that: there was weak positive but statistically significant relationship among the four sub-constructs of transformational leadership and academic performance: idealized influence ($R=.178$); inspirational motivation ($R=.194$); intellectual stimulation ($R=.198$); and individual consideration ($R=.168$).

The study findings agree with a larger study done by Kilonzo, Kasivu and Mulwa (2020) in Machakos County which investigated the relationship between principals' involvement in developing teachers and students' academic performance. Their study showed that there was positive and significant relationship between principals' transformational practice of developing their teachers and students' academic performance ($R=.671$). It can be seen that the relationship between the variables was strong while that established by the current study was weak. The difference can be accounted by the fact that the Kilonzo, Kasivu and Mulwa (2020) study employed a larger sample and Leithwood Transformational Leadership Instrument while the current study included a smaller sample and used Multi-Linear Leadership Questionnaire Short Form 6S variant.

The study findings support a study done by Kitur, Choge and Tanui (2020) in Bomet County on the relationship between principals' transformational leadership style and secondary school students' academic performance which reported a strong positive significant relationship between transformational leadership and students' academic performance. It can be noted from the study findings that studies that employ Leithwood Transformational Leadership Instrument report a stronger correlation while those that employ the MLQ instrument report a weaker correlation like the current study. The finding that transformational leadership is positively correlated with academic performance is inconsistent with a study done in Makueni County by Musyoki, Okoth, Kalai and Okumbe (2021) on the influence of principals' intellectual stimulation on students' performance which reported a negative correlation between intellectual stimulation and academic performance.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the Ministry of Education through Kenya Institute of Educational Management (KEMI) should improve the KEMI diploma training content and more particularly on transformational leadership. The study also recommends to the Ministry of Education and TSC to conduct frequent in-service training programs where the training workshops should be used to apprentice teachers with new approaches to transformational leadership such as Leithwood Transformational Leadership Model which provides more school specific transformational leadership practices. Owing to the fact that transformational leadership was found to be a good predictor of academic performance, the study recommends principals to enhance/continue practicing this style since it improves academic performance.

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