



International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research (IJSBAR)

ISSN 2307-4531
(Print & Online)

<http://gssrr.org/index.php?journal=JournalOfBasicAndApplied>



Influence of Head Teacher's Leadership Styles on Secondary School Student's Academic Performance: A Case Study of Meru District, Tanzania

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of headteacher's leadership style on student's academic performance at secondary level in Meru district, Tanzania. The specific objective aimed at assessing how democratic leadership style influences secondary school student's academic performance. The study used descriptive research design. The target population comprised of head teachers and teachers of secondary schools in Meru district. A total of 55 respondents comprising of 5 head teachers and 50 teachers were interviewed using interview guides and Questionnaires respectively. Primary data was collected by use of structured questionnaires and interviews while secondary data was collected by use of desk research and internet search. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study shows that most secondary schools head teachers (100%) in Meru district had adopted Democratic leadership style compared to any type of other leadership style. Again results show that head teachers who are using democratic leadership style, their students perform better than those who are using other types of leadership styles. The study recommended that the head teachers should use the most appropriate leadership style that facilitates collective responsibility and consultative decision making with all stakeholders in the schools.

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It also proposed that government should facilitate the head teacher leadership styles through empowerment and training since they have a direct relationship with the students' academic performance.

Keywords: Leadership style; democratic; academic performance.

1. Introduction

This study focuses on head teachers' leadership styles because they are the academic and administrative heads of the school, responsible for the academic and disciplinary performance of the school, and ensure that moral values are taught and upheld in the school. The head teachers must manage tasks professionally which include setting achievable objectives for education, seizing new opportunities and coping with change, maintaining a committed staff, managing effective teams, developing an effective communication system, allocating and managing resources effectively, participating effectively, staff management, managing time effectively, evaluating the school curriculum.

Globally, educating a nation remains the most vital strategy for the development of the society throughout the developing world. The effect of leadership style on academic performance has been widely debated in recent scholarly work. Only a small fraction of available studies on school leadership deal with its effects on academic performance [2]. There is also increasing recognition that schools require effective leaders and managers if they are to provide the best possible education for their learners. Schools need trained and committed teachers but they, in turn, need the leadership of highly effective principals and support from other senior and middle managers. The head teacher has always been looked up as a leader. Complex organizations such as schools need head teachers with leadership characteristics to play an active role in steering the organization towards excellence. Outstanding leadership has invariably emerged as a key characteristic of outstanding schools. There is no doubt that those seeking quality in education must ensure its presence and the development of potential leaders must be given high priority. The principals provide valuable insights into their daily practices that foster an environment which is supportive of high-student achievement.

Despite the abundance of studies on educational leadership, very few have attempted to measure the effect of school leadership on educational outcomes. Reference [4] draws attention to the fact that less than 30 of the published studies of educational leadership have investigated the link between leadership and student outcomes. The limited research on the topic does not allow promotion and adoption of leadership models and practices in education that can yield positive academic performance.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Leadership Style of the head teacher is one of the factors that influence student's academic performance in a school. Although the government policy in Tanzania attempts to ensure delivery of quality education in secondary schools, students' academic performance has remained low in many public schools compared to that of Private Ordinary Secondary Schools (POSS). General academic performance, despite the various interventions by policy makers and implementers has remained generally low. Studies have attempted to link students' academic performance with school leadership, especially the leadership styles of the head teachers.

Reference [4] draws attention to the fact that less than 30 percent of the published studies of educational leadership have investigated the link between leadership styles and student outcomes.

Despite the abundance of studies on educational leadership, very few have attempted to measure the effect of school leadership on educational outcomes. Again despite of these studies, no clear connection was made to explain the exact leadership style that can be used to reach academic excellence

The limited research on the topic does not allow promotion and adoption of leadership models and practices in education because policy makers lack the evidence that can serve as the basis for the support of specific approaches to leadership.

1.2. Objective of the Study

The major objective of the study was to analyze how democratic leadership style influences student's academic performance in Tanzania.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Behavioral Theory of Leadership

The study was guided by the behavioral theory of leadership which focuses more on patterns of leadership behavior than on the individual leader. It suggests that certain behavioral patterns may be identified as leadership styles. Applications of behavioral theory promote the value of leadership styles with an emphasis on concern for people and participative decision making, encouraging collaboration and team development by supporting individual needs and aligning individual and group objectives. Behavioral leadership theory is a response to the early criticisms of the trait approach; theorists began to research leadership as a set of behaviors. They evaluated what successful leaders did, developed taxonomy of actions, and identified broad patterns that indicated different leadership styles. Behavioral theory also incorporates B.F. Skinner's theory of behavior modification, which takes into account the effect of reward and punishment on changing behavior. An example of this theory in action is a manager or leader who motivates desired behavior by scolding employees who arrive late to meetings and showing appreciation when they are on time.

3. Review of Related Literature

This study focuses on head teachers' leadership styles because they are the academic and administrative heads of the schools, responsible for the academic and disciplinary performance of the school, and ensure that moral values are taught and upheld in the school. Leadership is central to the effective management of educational institutions. Education administration is indeed the guiding platform with in which human resources and students are able to integrate objectively in achieving better results. Studies have shown that good leadership style in any institution is evidenced by improved academic performance while inadequate leadership style leads to poor academic performance. Effectiveness of leaders can be measured by student's academic performance. Important to note is that strong administrative leadership of the head teacher is the key variable that binds

together all elements of an effective school.

Leaders who use democratic style in decision-making encourage group discussion and believe in decision-making through consensus. Democratic leaders still make the final decision, but do so only after carefully considering what other group members have said. Usually, their decision goes with the majority. In a school set up, the principal or head teacher, has to consult Board of Governors, Directors, teachers and sometimes student's leaders before any decision is made. Whereas this method is considered to be effective, the time that it takes to reach a group consensus can be crippling for a project. In order for every group member to be heard, discussion can last for a very long time. This can lead to frustration and especially where there is need for urgency. Reference [7] urges that head teachers rated as being democratic have high academic performance than autocratic head teachers.

Although democratic leadership has been described as the most effective leadership style, it has some potential downsides. In situations where roles are unclear or time is an important factor, democratic leadership can lead communication failures and uncompleted projects. In some cases group members may not have the necessary knowledge or expertise to make quality contributions to the decision making process. Democratic leadership works best where members are skilled and eager to share knowledge and ideas and when there is enough time

4. Research Methodology

The study used descriptive research design. According to reference [1] there are three main types of descriptive methods: observational methods, case-study methods and survey methods. The researcher chose case study method of descriptive research design because the study focused on a smaller sample of the population. This design was suitable for this study because only a few schools (5) were purposefully selected from the whole district under study. Descriptive case study method is also suitable for gathering in-depth information from relatively smaller sample. The target population of this study was the head teachers and teachers of secondary schools in Meru District Arusha region in Tanzania. . Purposive non-probability sampling technique was employed in selecting the respondents from a sample frame comprising of Head teachers and teachers.

The sampled schools had an average of 20 teachers each. Based on this number and ensuring a balanced and credible data, 10 teachers were drawn from each school. Each school had one Head teacher who was all drawn as respondents.

To ensure efficiency teachers were selected based on stratified purposive sampling. The sampling technique involved dividing the group into strata based on years teaching experience. The strata ensured that teachers selected had the relevant experiences that would help to provide adequate information on the objective of the study. Therefore, based on these methods, five head teachers, and 50 teachers were selected as respondents.

Primary data collection instrument for the study was the questionnaire for teachers and an interview guide for the head teachers. The reason for choosing questionnaire and interview guide as the data collection instruments was primarily due to their practicability, applicability to the research problem and the size of the population. It was also because of their cost effectiveness. The study also involved consultation of documented records to

analyze previous performance and the internet to give an overview of Meru district.

5. Study Findings

The study sought to establish the influence of leadership style on student’s academic performance and the following are some the results obtained from the teachers and head teachers who were under study. Almost all teachers (43) and all head teachers (05) were under study believe that leadership style has an influence on academic performance. Specifically, some of the responses that were put across by different respondents include; Good leadership help the students to co-ordinate their activities well both learning and co-curricular activities which eventually stimulate academic performance. It is in leadership that students gain confidence and ability to do well. Another respondent said; the more efficient the leader is and the more the appropriate the leadership style is, the better the academic performance. Also that many times students imitate their leaders in whatever they do, depending on how serious the leader is that’s how students will behave. According to one head teacher who was interviewed, democratic leadership style allows students to give out their opinions on different programmes which can improve their academic performance. There is co-operation, mutual trust and respect for one another which increases the level of performance among staff that eventually lead to improved student’s performance. Democratic leadership leads to sharing of ideas and experience in dealing and handling of students which lead to good academic performance. The study also went ahead and established whether democratic leadership style has any challenges. Those who responded to this said that democratic leadership style leads to delayed decision making due to long processes of consensus. This leads to wastage of time. Sometimes it may be difficult to reach conclusions and hence affecting development. Another respondent said that it may lead to loss of professionalism while some teachers may take advantage and fail to meet their obligations

In order to come up with a conclusion, the study also went ahead and established the national performance of different sampled schools whose head teachers believed that they were using democratic leadership style and the performance was as follows. The reason for this was to find out whether the leadership style being used by the head teacher has any positive or negative influence on students academic performance. Tables 1 and 2 below show summary of NECTA performance for the sampled schools in the previous years.

Table 1: NECTA Performance of Precious Blood Secondary School

Year	Total	Div 1	Div 2	Div 3	Div 4	Fail
2013	64	59	05	–	–	–
2012	34	08	16	09	–	–
2011	73	12	33	22	06	–

The above results show that there was progressive improvement in the NECTA performance in the last three

years with the very last year performance having all candidates passing in division one and two.

Table 1: NECTA Performance of Bishop Henry Gorgat Secondary School

Year	Total	Div 1	Div 2	Div 3	Div 4	Fail
2014	77	25	44	08	–	–
2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2012	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

It was found out that the above school started in 2011 and last year was their first year of sitting NECTA examinations. The head teacher of the above school also mentioned that she mostly uses democratic leadership style in her daily activities. From the results it is clearly seen that the academic performance of this school is good with nobody neither failing nor passing in division four.

6. Discussion of Key Findings

This discussion explains the influence of democratic leadership style on student’s academic performance. The results show that almost all head teachers (100%) at one time or the other had used democratic leadership style depending on the circumstances. Asked whether it has any influence on students academic performance, one head teacher was quick to answer, “Oh yes being democratic gives students a chance give out the opinions in the affairs that concern them. Students are able propose and share information about teachers who may not be delivering well in class, learning materials that may be lacking which eventually lead to academic excellence.

On the side of teachers, democratic leadership allows sharing of ideas experience in handling of students which lead to good academic performance”. Indeed this is portrayed in the NECTA results of those schools like school A and B who mentioned that they use more of democratic leadership style than any other type of leadership style. There is progressive improvement in their academic performance. This is in line. Reference [7] who carried out a study on the effects of leadership styles on students’ performance in K.C.S.E. in Nairobi Province, Kenya, and found out that head teachers rated as being democratic had high mean performance index than autocratic head teachers. According to reference [6] the findings contradict, it found out that there is no significant relationship between leadership styles and students’ K.C.S.E. performance. Research has a point of contradiction by noting that head teachers who are rated most democratic had the lowest mean scores in academic performance. Also although democratic leadership has been described as the most effective leadership style, it has some potential downsides. In situations where roles are unclear or time is an important factor, democratic leadership can lead communication failures and uncompleted projects. In some cases group members may not have the necessary knowledge or expertise to make quality contributions to the decision making process.

7. Conclusion

Based on the findings it was concluded that majority of secondary school head teachers in Meru district had adopted democratic leadership style. Schools which had adopted democratic leadership style had mixed results regarding students' performance in the NECTA performance; findings show that there are those who performed well while other performed poorly but to a larger extent democratic leadership leads to better academic performance.

8. Recommendations

The study recommends that the head teachers should use the most appropriate leadership style that facilitates collective responsibility and consultative decision making with all stakeholders in the schools, preferably democratic leadership style. Also the government should facilitate the head teacher leadership styles through empowerment and training since they have a direct relationship with the students' academic performance.

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