

# Impact of Principals' Transformational Leadership Style on Secondary School Students' Academic Performance in Lari Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

This study assessed the impact of principal's transformational leadership on academic performance in secondary schools in Lari Sub-county in Kiambu County, Kenya. The study also investigated the impact of teachers confounding variables such as educational level, age, gender, school type, and duration of stay at the same school where the principal served. The population of the school was 42 public secondary schools. Using a stratified sampling, 17 principals were used in the study. In addition, 57 teachers from the schools whose principals participated in the study were used. Characteristics of transformational leadership were measured using Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire where the principals rated themselves while the teachers rated their principals in relation to their perceived characteristics in the scale. Relationship among the variables was tested using SPSS. Linear regression analysis approach was employed in analyzing whether the principal's transformational leadership depicted any significant effect on academic achievement. Results revealed that the principals' inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, idealized influence and individual consideration had a positive impact on the academic performance of students. Among the recommendations was that the findings have significant implications on policy on the selection and training of principals.

**Keywords:** principals' transformation leadership style, secondary school students' academic performance

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## INTRODUCTION

Leadership is perhaps the most discussed field in today's world. This is because an effective leader has the ability to inspire an organization to generate better quality outcomes. On the other hand, an ineffective leader negatively influences the outcomes of an organization. Therefore, an effective leader is imperative for an effective school. Talebloo and his colleagues (2018) define effective school according to the academic results and achievement. On the other hand, research pertaining to the effective school is one of the major educational reform initiatives being conducted in various countries to

determine the influential factors concerning effective schools (Botha, 2010). Over the past years, the emergence of new conceptual models has invaded the field of educational leadership and as determined by various empirical studies, instructional and transformational leadership are two of the foremost models (Hallinger, 2003). In contrast with various earlier leadership models which included contingency theory, trait theories, and situational leadership, the aforementioned two models focus unequivocally on the degree in which educational leadership affects the educational outcomes. According to Hallinger (2003), transformational leadership is the imperative and extremely popular image of ideal practice in schools. It is fundamental element of effective or unsuccessful program and has been researched by various researchers and has emerged the most frequently researched field for the last two decades (Lee, 2014). Leaders who utilize transformational leadership style motivate their followers through scopes of leadership, which can be ideal effects of coherent stimulation and inspirational motivation (Abbasi, 2017).

School systems have transformed to function like business organizations where the school leadership is a crucial factor for outstanding performance and student achievement. A question arises over whether the principals possess appropriate management skills, leadership styles, and approaches imperative for the effective operational performance of secondary schools. Transformational leadership portrays great significance to students' performance. A study conducted by Ross (2004) utilized scores on provincial, state or national tests in language and math, and reported substantial positive impacts of transformational leadership on math and language accomplishments. Several studies have been conducted to establish the affiliation between transformational leadership and followers' creativity and performances (Yew, 2015). According to Yew (2015), transformational leadership is positively affiliated with followers' creativity where there is causal relationship between the two. For instance, leaders who practice transformational leadership are likely to attract more creative followers. Additionally, Liang and Chi (2013) assert that there is also a positive relationship between transformational leadership and task performance.

Principals' leadership in secondary schools is essential to effective learning and performance as it determines whether goals are met or not. For instance, Ndiritu (2012) conducted a study in secondary schools in Nairobi County which revealed that principals' transformational leadership has a positive impact on academic performance. In Lari sub-county in Kiambu County, only nine percent of Form Four candidates

qualified to join the university in 2016 compared to the 11% of the students nationally. In 2017, only five percent of the students from the sub-county joined university against 10% of the national average. This raises the question as to whether the performance of the schools was contingent upon the leadership, and if so, whether transformative leadership style would have applied. A transformational leader depicts various transformational leadership behaviors which they employ in their daily interactions with their subordinates. These behaviors include intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The release of the 2016 KCSE results in 2017 where Lari sub-county revealed that only nine percent of Form Four candidates qualified to join university in 2016 and five percent in 2017 had the local and national educational administrators express concern regarding the performance of the schools in the examinations. This was also replicated nationally where only 11% of the students nationally qualified for university in 2016 and 10% in 2017 (Kenya National Examinations Council, 2016, 2017). The dismal performance brought to fore the need to overhaul the education management. One of the measures proposed by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), which employs teachers and principals, was to delocalize or transfer the principals of underperforming schools to schools away from their local community. This proposal apparently has some weakness since many schools that were performing well had principals from the local community. The question then was whether the poor performance of schools is a result of principals' leadership style or because of their serving in stations that are close to their homes. Furthermore, Ndiritu (2012) study recommended that findings from the Nairobi County study on transformative leadership should be replicated in counties with diverse dynamics in order to determine the generalizability of the finding.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to determine the impact of transformational leadership on academic performance of secondary students in Lari Sub-County.

## **Hypotheses of the Study**

The following null hypotheses were tested in the study:

- a) H01. There is no substantial affiliation between principal's inspirational motivation influence and academic performance of secondary schools in Lari Sub-County, Kenya.
- b) H02. There is no significant association between principal's intellectual stimulation influence and academic performance of secondary schools in Lari Sub-County, Kenya.
- c) H03. There is no significant relationship between principal's individualized consideration influence and academic performance of secondary schools in Lari Sub-County, Kenya.
- d) H04. There is no substantial affiliation between principal's idealized influence and academic performance of secondary schools in Lari Sub-County, Kenya.

## **Justification of the study**

Motivation and commitment to productive teaching, class attendance, and overall discipline at school depend on the leadership of the head teacher. Low performing schools are assumed to have principals who do not demonstrate transformational leadership style and results in fewer students joining universities. A study pertaining to the contribution of the principal's leadership style to students' academic performance in Lari sub-county is of great importance. Such a study has not been done in Lari sub-county. Also, results of the study would be expected to shed light to the prevailing situation in the sub-county and recommendations for improvement made.

## **Significance of the Study**

The results of the study will greatly contribute to the prevailing knowledge on the existing leadership styles to the managers and administrators of secondary schools. It is also anticipated that the principals will find attending conferences and seminars an integral part of their leadership development. Additionally, these findings will be useful to the principals appointing bodies such as the Teachers Service Commission which employs both primary and secondary schools' teachers, and to the Public Service Commission which is responsible for hiring principals for vocational and technical

institutions. The findings may also be useful to administrators of colleges and universities.

### **Scope and Delimitations of the Study**

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire has seven leadership factors. The first four are Individualized Consideration, Intellectual Stimulation, Inspirational Motivation, and Idealized Influence. The fifth factor measures contingent reward while the sixth measures management-by-exception, and seventh measures laissez-faire of 21 attributes on the questionnaire. All seven factors were included in the study. Principals and their teachers participated in the study too.

### **Limitation of the Study**

The study's results were established from semi-urban schools and findings can be generalized to other schools that share geographical, infrastructural, social economic and climatic conditions.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Burns (1978) developed the theory of transformational leadership style. The theory underscores the belief that a leader is supposed to guide staff with prevailing capabilities, goals, values, and other resources throughout the development stages. The theory differentiates itself from other leadership theories because it inquires about the most fundamental question of why an individual should be a leader and offers an intellectual guideline and focuses on an organization's innovation while ensuring support and empowerment to teachers as decision-making partners (Conley and Goldman, 1994; Leithwood, 1994). Transformational leadership depicts a direct influence on the organizational climate whereby organizational climate is invigorated through transformational leadership thereby establishing an environment favoring motivation of employees (De Jong & Bruch, 2013). As a result, the organization is able to achieve its goals in addition to increased performance. Additionally, Giroux and McLarney (2014), asserts that motivated employees working in a supportive climate tend to produce more effectual customer services, strengthening the performance of an organization. As noted by Rawung, Wuryaningrat, and Elvinita (2015), inspirational motivation entails a role in developing satisfaction and trust when it comes to the employees. In addition, these

authors claim that inspirational motivation is the foundation for knowledge sharing; an imperative constituent in promoting the effectiveness of an organization. Leaders portraying inspirational motivation are associated with building trust, acting with integrity, encouraging others, encouraging innovative thinking, and coaching and developing people. These leaders, therefore, challenge their followers with well-regarded standards, communicate optimism on matters pertaining to future objectives, and provide meaning for the task at hand. Furthermore, Ishaq (2008) noted that intellectually stimulating leader provides encouragement that makes followers solve problems innovatively. They also nurture individuals to compare their personal values and beliefs with those of an organization and create a tolerant environment. According to Smothers and his colleagues (2016), intellectual stimulation empowers followers via communication as well as through encouragement in order to discover problems and solutions. Also, Anjali and Anand (2015) found that intellectual stimulation is capable of developing employees' commitment towards the organization. Consequently, this portrays positive impacts for the organization in achieving its goals through employees' hard work and dedication (Anjali and Anand, 2015).

The theory of transformative leadership style was therefore found suitable for the study because in educational situations transformational leaders are expected to raise teachers' consciousness by engaging them in the purposeful and self-generated notion of work. The energy which emanates from individual and group discussion is used to drive the group's vision and purpose. With this kind of leadership, teachers are more likely to become committed to their work, thereby positively impacting the students' academic performance. This is in contrast to situations where the principal is autocratic and micromanages the teachers who in turn live in fear of criticism and afraid of initiating activities that would improve academic performance.

## **RESEARCH APPROACH**

### **Research Design**

Descriptive survey research was employed in this study to explore the perceptions of principals and teachers. The survey method was suitable for this type of study because it provided a quantitative description of perceptions of the sample

population on a Likert scale.

### **Sampling Procedures and Data Collection**

The study's population comprised of 42 public secondary schools principals in Lari Sub-county from whom a sample of 17 principals and 57 teachers was used using stratified sampling. The schools constituted 40% of all schools, with the three categories of school (county, sub-county, extra county) registering a 30% of the sampled size. Purposeful sampling was utilized to choose 17 secondary school principals from the 42 sub-county schools. In addition, 57 out of 91 teachers whose principals thoroughly filled the questionnaires were included in the study. Results showing schools performance in KCSE between 2015 and 2017 were extracted from the Kenya National Examinations Council data to compare the principals standing in the MLQ scores and the school's performance.

### **Research Instruments**

The study also utilized the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) for transformational leadership which was developed and updated by Bass and Avolio in 1997 to incorporate more items that portray leadership actions which are directly observed. Two questionnaires were used, one for the principals and the other for teachers. The principals' instrument allowed them to do a self-perception analysis while the teachers analyzed their principal's perceived standing relative to the transformational leadership components.

### **Validity and Reliability of the Instrument**

#### **Reliability**

Armstrong (2008) stated that from the MLQ generated data the instrument measures what it was intended to measure because it has a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86 for the original MLQ. This level is considered high and since the acceptable statistic testing level is supposed to be more than 0.70 (Hair et al., 2011). Pahi1, Umrani, Hamid, and Ahmed (2015) state that the overall inter-item reliability of the MLQ ranges between 0.631 and 0.968 which mean the items have internal consistency.

## **Validity**

Form 5X by Bass and Avolio (1997) is considered the best and successful MLQ version in sufficiently comprehending transformational leadership constructs. Consequently, this generates confidence to researchers who wish to use the MLQ to measure transformational leadership. Tepper and Percy (1994) argued that MLQ's structural validity is the most instantaneous concern regarding MLQ. In addition, Pahil, et al. (2015) conducted an empirical validation of the instrument in the Pakistani health sector and concluded that "all the constructs [of MLQ] have met the criterion [of convergent and discriminant] validity and suggest that these tools are appropriate in measuring leadership styles in the health sector in Pakistan" (p.33). In relation to using the instrument in developing countries, Pahil et al. (2015) concluded that results of the confirmatory factor analysis, reliability, and validity tests engender the use of the instrument as a substitute for transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles and that "latent constructs [of the MLQ] has sufficient level of discriminant validity"(p.34).

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

Purposeful sampling was used to select 17 secondary school principals from the 42 sub-county schools. In addition, 57 out of 91 teachers whose principals thoroughly filled the questionnaires were included in the study. Results showing schools performance in KCSE between 2015 and 2017 were extracted from the Kenya National Examinations Council data to compare the principals standing in the MLQ scores and the schools performance.

Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to extract descriptive statistics while inferential statistics was used in testing hypotheses. Pearson correlation coefficient was utilized for analysis of each hypothesis to test the relationship between the schools' academic performance and transformational leadership.

## **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

### **Demographic Characteristics**

Data analysis on demographic characteristics revealed that 88% of the schools were sub county schools, 6% were county, while another 6% were extra county schools.

On gender, 76.5% of the principals were males, while 23.5% of them were females. Majority of the principals (47.1%) were 46 to 50 years old, 41.2% were 51 to 55 years old, 5.9% were 56 to 60 years old and another 5.9% were 41 to 45 years old. Additionally, 76.5% of the principals had Bachelor's degrees, while 23.5% of them had master's degrees. Lastly, 29.4% of the principals had been in their present school for between 0 and eight years compared to 11.8% who had been in the school for more than 10 years.

### **Assessment of Leadership Style**

Analysis of the results showed that 64.7% of the principals considered themselves transformational, while 35.3% of them did not. In contrast, teachers considered 54.4% of the principals transformational while 45.6% of them thought they were not. This means that over 54% of the teachers and principals viewed the top leadership in the school as transformative.

### **Principal's Inspirational Motivation and Academic Performance**

The first hypothesis sought to determine the degree to which principal's inspirational motivation affects academic performance. A linear regression analysis was utilized. Model summary results revealed that a principal's inspirational motivation had a correlation of 39.3% with academic performance. Additionally, the r-square value indicated that a principal's inspirational motivation explained 15.5% of the total variation in academic performance.

An analysis of variance test was carried out with academic performance as the dependent variable and principal's inspirational motivation as the independent variable. From the results, the regression model was significant in explaining the relationship between the variables,  $F = 10.411$ ,  $p = 0.043 < 0.05$ .

Inspirational motivation was found to be academic performance's significant predictor as revealed by the model coefficient results,  $t = 3.988$ ,  $p = 0.043 < 0.05$ . In addition, a unit increase in inspirational motivation increased academic performance by 5.8%. The regression equation is as given below:

$$\text{Academic performance} = 1.219 + 0.058 (\text{Inspirational motivation})$$

**Table 1: Hypothesis 1 Model Summary**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	11.390	1	11.390	10.411	.043 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	16.415	15	1.094		
	Total	17.959	16			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Factor 2 - Inspirational Motivation

b. Dependent Variable: Average MSS

### Principal's Intellectual Stimulation and Academic Performance

The second hypothesis sought to establish the degree to which principal's intellectual stimulation impacts academic performance. A linear regression analysis was used to determine whether a principal's intellectual stimulation have significant effects on academic performance. The model summary results revealed that a principal's intellectual stimulation has a correlation of 54.6% with academic performance. Additionally, the r-square value indicated that a principal's intellectual stimulation explained 29.8% of the total variation in academic performance.

An analysis of variance test was conducted with academic performance as the dependent variable and principal's intellectual stimulation as the independent variable. From the results, the regression model was significant in explaining the relationship between the variables,  $F = 13.723$ ,  $p = 0.028 < 0.05$ . Intellectual stimulation was found to be an academic performance's significant predictor as shown by the model coefficient results,  $t = 4.929$ ,  $p = 0.028 < 0.05$ . In addition, a unit increase in intellectual stimulation increases academic performance by 11.5%. The regression equation is as given below:

Academic performance = 0.870 + 0.115 (Intellectual stimulation)

**Table 2: Hypothesis 2 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	13.160	1	13.160	13.723	.028 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	14.388	15	.959		
	Total	17.959	16			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Factor 3 - Intellectual Stimulation

b. Dependent Variable: Average MSS

### Principal's Individualized Consideration and Academic Performance

The third hypothesis sought to determine the extent to which principal's individualized consideration impacts academic performance. A linear regression analysis approach was used to ascertain whether a principal's individualized consideration has a significant influence on academic performance. The model summary results revealed that a principal's individualized consideration has a correlation of 45.6% with academic performance. Additionally, the r-square value indicated that a principal's individualized consideration explained 20.7% of the total variation in academic performance.

An analysis of variance test was carried out with academic performance as the dependent variable and principal's individualized consideration as the independent variable. From the results, the regression model was significant in explaining the relationship between the variables,  $F = 11.171$ ,  $p = 0.041 < 0.05$ .

The model coefficient results revealed that individualized consideration is a significant predictor of academic performance,  $t = 4.173$ ,  $p = 0.041 < 0.05$ . In addition, a unit increase in individualized consideration increases academic performance by 5.1%. The regression equation is as given below:

Academic performance = 1.022 + 0.051 (Individualized consideration)

**Table 3: Hypothesis 3 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	11.685	1	11.685	11.171	.041 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	15.689	15	1.046		
	Total	17.959	16			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Factor 4- Individual Consideration

b. Dependent Variable: Average MSS

### Principal's Idealized Influence and Academic Performance

The fourth hypothesis sought to determine the degree to which principal's idealized influence affects academic performance. A linear regression analysis approach was employed to ascertain if a principal's idealized influence has a significant influence on academic performance. The regression model summary results revealed that a principal's idealized influence has a correlation of 31.7% with academic performance. Additionally, the r-square value indicated that a principal's idealized influence explained 10.0% of the total variation in academic performance.

An analysis of variance test was carried out with academic performance as the dependent variable and principal's idealized influence as the independent variable. From the results, the regression model was significant in explaining the relationship between the variables,  $F = 12.073$ ,  $p = 0.049 < 0.05$ . Further analysis was conducted while considering the model coefficient results. From the results, idealized influence is a significant predictor of academic performance,  $t = 3.271$ ,  $p = 0.049 < 0.05$ . In addition, a unit increase in idealized influence increases academic performance by 6.1%. The regression equation is as given below:

Academic performance = 2.603 + 0.061 (Idealized influence)

**Table 4: Hypothesis 4 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	14.379	1	14.379	12.073	.049 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	17.871	15	1.191		
	Total	17.959	16			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Factor 1 - Idealized Influence

b. Dependent Variable: Average MSS

## DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Discussion

The study sought to determine the impact of principals' transformational leadership style on the academic performance of secondary school students in Lari Sub-county, Kiambu County, Kenya. Overall, the study contained four hypotheses where the first hypothesis aimed at finding out the degree to which principal's inspirational motivation impacts the academic achievement of secondary schools. According to the results, inspirational motivation had a considerable impact on the students' academic achievement where increase in principals' inspirational motivation led to increase in academic performance of students. The second hypothesis aimed at determining the extent to which the principal's intellectual stimulation impacts the academic performance of secondary schools. The study's results revealed that intellectual stimulation had a noteworthy impact on academic performance of students. The third hypothesis, on the other hand, targeted to find out the extent to which principal's individualized consideration affects the academic performance of secondary schools. Results proved that individualized consideration had a considerable impact on students' academic performance where increase in principals' individualized consideration resulted in

increase in students' academic performance. The fourth hypothesis targeted to ascertain the degree to which the principal's idealized influence affect the academic achievement of secondary schools. According to the results, the idealized influence had a substantial impact on the students' academic performance where increase in principals' idealized influence led to an increase in the academic performance of students.

## **Conclusion**

From the findings in the section above, the research study concludes that most of the schools in Lari Sub County are sub county schools, most of the principals are male aged between forty six and fifty years. Additionally, most of the principals in Lari Sub County have a Bachelor's degree and most of them have stayed in their respective schools for between zero to eight years. In addition, the findings revealed that the principals' inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized have positive impacts on the academic performance of students.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made from the study findings and conclusions:

1. Principals should be encouraged to undergo transformational leadership training and practice transformational leadership styles. The Teachers Service Commission, which employs the principals, should identify institutions to offer the training or short-term courses that the principals should attend.
2. The Teachers Service Commission should put in place proper policies to address the gap in performance based on gender of principals, school types, and duration of stay at a school.
3. Replication studies by different researchers or the Ministry of Education should be conducted in more sub-counties and counties in order to obtain regional and national data.
4. Universities should develop training curriculum for principals on transformational leadership.
5. The Teachers Service Commission should use transformative leadership tests when promoting principals.

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