

The Extent to which Principals' Use of Transactional Leadership Style Influences Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Kenya

Peter Ndunda Mwove¹, Jonathan Muema Mwania^{2,*} & Gideon Mutuku Kasivu¹

¹Department of Educational Administration and Planning, South Eastern Kenya University, Kenya

²Department of Educational Psychology, South Eastern Kenya University, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of transactional leadership style on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Mwala Sub-county, Kenya. This study used a descriptive survey research design. Target population of the study was all the 72 schools, all the 72 principals, and all the 471 teachers in Mwala Sub-county public secondary schools. Out of the population of 72 schools, 36 were chosen through stratified random sampling technique. All the 36 principals of the sampled schools were purposively included in the study. Yamene (1967) formula was used to give a sample of 216 teachers. Proportional allocation method was used to identify a weighted teachers' sample for each school. Simple random sampling technique was employed to select the participating teachers in each school. The instruments were validated through piloting and by research experts to ascertain content validity while reliability was achieved through piloting using the test-retest reliability technique. Data were 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 utilized to analyze data. Inferential statistics which involved running correlation analysis at a 0.05 level of significance were employed to test the nature and strength of relationships between variables. The study used tables to present the analyzed results. The results established that there was a weak positive but statistically significant correlation between transactional leadership style and students' academic performance ($R=.428$, $p=.016$). Based on the findings, the study recommends to the 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 transactional leadership practices since it improves academic performance.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a powerful strategy identified by governments worldwide to eradicate poverty, spur economic growth, and develop human capital (United Nations Educational Scientific & Cultural Organization, (UNESCO, 2016). In essence, a student who goes to school is expected to acquire quality education often measured through academic performance. On the other hand, research has shown that school leadership is an overriding factor influencing students' academic performance (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). According to Sun and Leithwood (2017), principals' leadership directly influences school conditions that enhance teachers' output such as school culture and climate. Increased teachers' output is reflected in improved students' academic performance. Hence, school leadership has an indirect influence on students' academic performance. Moreover, Handford and Leithwood (2013) assert that effective leadership inspires and guides

teachers to enhance student's learning outcomes. According to Mwove, Mwanja and Kasivu (2023) school's academic performance is partly dependent on the quality of school leadership.

Transactional leadership involves an exchange between a leader and a follower, often a relationship to benefit both parties. According to Rasheed, Amin and Amin (2021), staff are included in democratic decision-making but excluded from authoritarian decision-making. Quin, Deris, Bischoff, and Johnson (2015) allude that a successful school principal makes positive changes that result in increased student achievement by adopting effective leadership styles. Principals practising transactional leadership communicate specific targets which they expect to be achieved by employees, monitor for any deviance from what is expected, and reward those who meet desired expectations (Anshu & Uradhyay, 2017). It is commonly viewed as an exchange relationship. This leadership style includes contingent reward and active-management-by-exception dimensions. According to Damanic (2014), contingent reward is based on active and positive transactions between leaders and employees. Conversely, management by exception involves the leader monitoring employees' performance and taking corrective action when problems arise (Lin & Chuang, 2014). The principal can establish a productive exchange relationship with staff to achieve agreed academic goals. This study sought to establish whether transactional leadership had any influence on academic performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bush (2008) views transactional leadership as an exchange process. Principals practicing transactional leadership communicate specific targets which they expect to be achieved by their subordinates, monitor for any deviance from what is expected, and reward those who meet their desired expectations (Anshu & Uradhyay, 2017). A transactional leader is more concerned about attaining set goals than the welfare of the staff (Dartey-Baah, 2015). This leadership style may include contingent reward and active-management-by-exception dimensions. Bush (2008) emphasizes that this type of leadership is necessary because the principal requires the support of the staff to be effective in school management.

According to Damanic (2014), the contingent reward is based on active and positive transactions between leaders. This, according to Mendez-Keegan (2019), may include emphasizing tasks to be accomplished for one to be rewarded while offering supervision. Dartey-Baah (2015) asserts that rewarding success may contribute to extrinsic motivation. Conversely, management by exception involves the leader monitoring employee performance and taking corrective action only when deviations from what is expected are noted (Lin & Chuang, 2014). Such undesirable deviations that may warrant a leader's attention and action can include mistakes and errors (Sayadi, 2016). This study investigated transactional leadership as a multi-construct consisting of two sub-variables, that is, contingent reward and management by exception active.

Several scholars have studied how transactional leadership is related to academic performance. For instance, Shortridge (2015) implemented a study to assess the influence of leadership styles on academic achievement in Maryland State, US. The study findings established that transactional leadership was weakly but positively associated with academic achievement. The results thus suggest that transformational leadership was effective in enhancing students' academic performance. This study utilized an ex post facto research design and employed a non-probability sampling technique to include a smaller sample of 43 principals. However, the current study adopted a descriptive survey research design and probability sampling techniques to include random samples of 36 principals and 216 teachers. The reviewed study was conducted in the US while the present study was done in Kenya.

Lin and Chuang (2014) carried out a study to probe the effects of leadership styles on learning motivation in Taiwan. Their survey involved 165 teachers and 2,800 students who were selected through a simple random sampling technique. Their survey established that transaction leadership style was positively associated with learning motivation. The results could suggest that an increase in this type of leadership could increase

learning motivation and hence, the academic performance of learners. Thus, transactional leadership was effective in fostering the academic performance of students. This study was however conducted in a foreign context while the present study was done in Kenya.

Rasheed, Amin and Amin (2021) utilized a descriptive survey research design to investigate how principals' leadership styles influenced students' academic performance in secondary schools in Pakistan. The study used a stratified random sampling technique to identify 32 principals who responded to a questionnaire. The results of this study established that transactional leadership style had a negative relationship with students' academic performance. Thus, the results imply that the transactional leadership style was not effective in improving students' academic performance. This study was done in Pakistan while the present study was implemented in a Kenyan context where contextual factors may be different. Again, the reviewed study only sampled 32 principals while the current study included 36 principals and went ahead to include 216 teachers.

Regionally, similar investigations have been undertaken. In this regard, Saidu (2021) employed a descriptive survey research design to conduct a study in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria to investigate the impact of principals' leadership styles on teaching and learning in secondary schools. The researcher used a simple random sampling technique to include a sample of 16 principals, 206 teachers and 32 MOE officials. The study utilized questionnaires to elicit information from respondents. Results of the study showed that the transactional leadership style had a positive impact on teaching learning and hence, students' academic performance. Consequently, the results indicated that the transactional leadership style was effective in facilitating improved students' academic performance. This study was done in Nigeria and included a smaller sample of 16 schools while the present study was carried out in Kenya and it involved 36 schools. However, the reviewed study involved three classes of respondents while the current study involved principals and teachers only.

In Uganda, Akullo and Kamanyire (2023) employed a cross-sectional descriptive survey research design to investigate the influence of head teacher leadership styles on teacher performance in primary schools in the Kaabong District. The study included all 36 schools in the district. The study sample was 308 respondents including 36 school heads, 36 deputy head teachers, 36 Boards of Management (BOMs), 36 student leaders and 164 teachers. A census technique was used to include the school heads, deputy head teachers, BOMs and student leaders. On the other hand, a simple random sampling technique was employed to select the teachers. Data were collected mainly through administering questionnaires and conducting interviews. The study results indicated that transactional leadership had a weak positive relationship with teachers' performance which was not statistically significant. The results thus imply that transactional leadership was not very effective in enhancing teachers' output which could be reflected in improved student outcomes. This study employed a cross-sectional descriptive research design and was done in Uganda while the present study adopted a descriptive research survey design and was implemented in Kenya.

Locally, a study done in Samburu Central Sub-county by Njukunye and Waithaka (2020) to investigate how strategic leadership impacts academic performance established that transactional leadership had a positive relationship with academic performance. It can be inferred from the results that the practice of transactional leadership style was effective in fostering good academic results for students. The study employed a descriptive survey research design and used questionnaires and interview guides to collect data. A stratified random sampling technique was used to include 5 schools where 5 school heads were purposively sampled and 50 teachers were selected using a simple random sampling technique. Compared to the current study, which included 36 schools and 216 teachers, the sample of 5 schools was small as well as that of 50 teachers. This study was done in Samburu County while the present study was conducted in Machakos County.

The study findings are furthered by another study done by Sika and Anyango (2020) in Migori County which adopted a correlational research design to probe how transactional leadership impacted learning

motivation and academic achievement. The study used questionnaires to collect data. The survey results established a weak positive association between transactional leadership and academic performance. Thus, the results suggested that transactional leadership was effective in improving students' academic performance. This study employed a stratified random sampling technique to select 127 school heads, 350 teachers, and 400 students. Contrary to the current study which adopted a descriptive survey research design, the reviewed study employed a correlational research design. This study was done in Migori County while the present study was implemented in Machakos County.

The results are somehow conflicted by a study done in Nandi Central Sub-county of Nandi County by Chebonye, Okutu and Kiprop (2021) that investigated the influence of head teachers' transactional leadership style on teacher service delivery. On one hand, the results of this study established that contingent reward had a negative influence on teacher service delivery. On the other hand, results showed that passive management had a positive influence on teacher service delivery. The results indicate that school heads could be effective in enhancing their schools' academic performance by practicing more passive management behaviours and less contingent reward practices. The study employed a descriptive survey research design, used a stratified random sampling technique to select 58 school heads and a simple random sampling technique to include 174 teachers. Questionnaires were utilized to gather data from the teacher respondents while interview guides were used to administer interviews with the principal respondents. This study was done in Nandi County while the present study was implemented in Machakos County. It included a larger sample of 58 schools while the present study involved 36 schools. Furthermore, this study was done in a primary school setting and used questionnaires and interview guides to gather data while the current study was implemented in secondary schools and utilized questionnaires only.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used Descriptive research survey design. This design was preferred because the study intended to collect primary data to describe the transactional leadership style employed by the principals in the study area. This design was expected to enable the study to make conclusions on whether transactional leadership style practiced could be responsible for low academic performance experienced in Mwala sub-county public secondary schools or not.

When this data was collected, there were 72 schools, 72 principals, and 486 teachers. Therefore, the study targeted all the (72) schools, all the (72) principals, and all the (471) teachers in the Sub-county. In total, there were 543 respondents. A 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 Oso and Onen (2009) were appropriate. The 72 public secondary schools were stratified into their 5 educational zones in Mwala Sub-county. These zones include: Mwala (14); Masii (15); Muthetheni (16); Yathui (12); and Mbiuni (15). After stratification, the study employed a simple random sampling technique to select 50% of schools in each zone. All 36 heads of the selected schools were included in the study. To determine the teachers' sample, Yamene's (1967) formula was employed as follows:

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

Where n is the required sample, N is the entire population, and e is the sample error at 95% confidence level.

$$n = \frac{471}{1 + 471(0.05)^2}$$

= 216 teachers.

$$\text{Sample per school (s)} = \frac{216}{471}$$

Further, proportional allocation method was used to sample 45.85% of teachers in each school as shown below:

X 100

= 45.85%

At the school level, simple random sampling technique was employed to select the 45.85% participating teachers. In total, the study included 36 principals and 216 teachers making a total sample 252 respondents. Table 3.1 gives the information.

Table 1: Sample Size Table

Description	Population(N)	Sample Size (n)
Principals	72	36
Teachers	471	216
Total	543	252

Questionnaires were the main instruments of collecting data used in this study. This study was purely quantitative and thus collected quantitative data. Data were coded and entered into Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) computer program (version 23.0) for analysis.

RESULTS

The objective of the study sought to determine the extent to which principals' use of transactional leadership style influences students' academic performance in public secondary schools in the Mwala Sub-county. Descriptive statistics which involved computation of means aided factor analysis. Principal participants were presented with 6 statements to rate their transactional leadership practices using a 5-point Likert scale. Statements 1, 2 and 3 captured data on the sub-variable of contingent reward whereas statements 4, 5 and 6 were attributed to management-by-exception sub-variable. Table 2 presents the analyzed data.

Table 2: Principals' Views on their Use of Transactional Leadership

Description of Leadership Behaviors	Mean	Scoring	Rating
I tell teachers what to do if they want to be rewarded for their work	3.09	3	
I provide recognition/rewards when teachers reach their goals	3.32	3	
I call attention to what teachers can get for what they accomplish	2.64	3	
		9	High
I am satisfied when teachers meet agreed-upon standards	3.67	4	
As long as things are working, I do not try to change anything	1.93	2	
I tell teachers the standards they have to know to carry out their work	3.03	3	
		9	High

Score Range: High = 9-12, Moderate = 5-8, Low = 0-4

A factor of 9 suggests the practices were rated as high.

Teachers’ Assessment of their Principals’ Transactional Leadership Practices

The principal’s questionnaire was triangulated to teacher respondents. Table 3 presents the analyzed data.

Table 3: Teachers’ Views on Principals’ Use of Transactional Leadership

Description of Leadership Behaviors	Mean	Scoring	Rating
The principal tells teachers what to do if they want to be rewarded for their work	3.01	3	
The principal provides recognition/rewards when others reach their goals	3.21	3	
The principal sets targets to what teachers can get for what they accomplish	2.73	3	
		9	High
The principal is satisfied when teachers meet agreed-upon standards	3.48	3	
The principal does not try to change anything as long as things are working	2.67	3	
The principal tells teachers the standards they have to know to carry out their work	3.33	3	
		9	High

Score Range: High = 9-12, Moderate = 5-8, Low = 0-4

These views seem to corroborate principals’ views as captured in Table 3 where they reported that they fairly often (M=2.64, score 3) called to attention what teachers could get for what they accomplished. There was consensus between teachers (factor 9) and principals (see Table 3, factor 9) that the practice of contingent reward among principals in Mwala sub-county public secondary schools was high.

On the second parameter of management-by-exception, teachers indicated that their principals were fairly often (M=3.48, score 3) satisfied when they met agreed-upon standards. The views validate principals’ claims reported in Table 3 where they equally affirmed that they were often (M=3.67, score 4) satisfied when teachers met agreed-upon standards. Teachers revealed that their principals fairly often (M=2.67, score 3) did not change anything as long as things were working. However, principals were particularly reserved in Table3 where they indicated that they sometimes (M=1.93, score 2) did not change anything as long as things were working.

Teachers indicated that their principals fairly often (M=2.67, score 3) told them the standards they had to know to carry out their work. The findings approve principals’ claims reported in Table 3 where they revealed that they fairly often (M=3.03, score 3) told teachers the standards they had to know to carry out their work. Overall, both teachers (factor 9) and principals (factor 9) as reported in Table 3 agreed that management-by-exception practices were high in the Sub-county.

The Correlation between Contingent Reward Practices and Academic Performance

Through correlational analysis, the study sought to establish the nature of the relationship between contingent reward and students’ academic performance. Statements 1, 2, and 3 collected data on contingent reward sub-variable of transactional leadership. Using Spearman’s order correlation, contingent reward and academic performance were correlated. Correlation Table 4 gives the results.

Table 4: Correlation between Contingent Reward and Academic Performance.

			Contingent Reward	Academic Performance
Spearman's rho	Contingent Reward	Coefficient	1.000	.509*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.003
		N	31	31
	Academic Performance	Coefficient	.509*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.
		N	31	31

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

Results as depicted in Table 4 shows that there was a positive moderate relationship between contingent reward and students' academic performance which was statistically significant ($R=.509$; $p=.003$). Coefficients below 0.5/-0.5 are considered weak while coefficients between 0.5/-0.5 and 0.7/-0.7 are said to be moderate.

The Correlation between Management-by-Exception Practices and Academic Performance

Similarly, the relationship between the management-by-exception sub-variable of transactional leadership and students' academic performance was equally explored. Statements relating to management-by-exception practices were 4, 5 and 6. These statements were used to create a new sub-construct that was correlated with academic performance variable using spearman's rank order correlation at a 0.05 level of significance. Correlation Table 5 gives the results.

Table 5: Correlation between Management-by-Exception and Academic Performance.

			Academic Performance	Management-by-Exception
Spearman's rho	Academic Performance	Coefficient	1.000	.287*
		Sig.	.	.000
		N	31	31
	Management-by-Exception	Coefficient	.287*	1.000
		Sig.	.000	.
		N	31	31

Results, as reflected in Table 5, show that there was a positive weak and statistically significant relationship between contingent reward and students' academic performance ($R=.287$; $p=.000$). Coefficients below 0.5/-0.5 are considered weak while coefficients between 0.5/-0.5 and 0.7/-0.7 are said to be moderate.

How Elements of Transactional Leadership Impact on Academic Performance

This study was concerned with identifying the most effective leadership styles that impact students' academic performance. It was specifically interested in identifying specific sub-construct of particular style that had more weight on the dependent variable. In this regard, transactional leadership was studied as a multi-construct variable consisting of two sub-variables – contingent reward and management-by-exception. Table 6 presents the results of the comparison.

Table 6: Sub-variables of Transactional Leadership with More Weight

Variable	R	P-Value
Contingent Reward	.509	.003
Management-by-Exception	.287	.000

Table 6 indicates that the contingent reward sub-variable of transactional leadership style (R=.509) had more weight on academic performance than the management-by-exception (R=.287) sub-variable. Coefficients below 0.5/-0.5 are considered weak while coefficients between 0.5/-0.5 and 0.7/-0.7 are said to be moderate.

The objective of the study sought to determine the extent to which principals’ use of transactional leadership style influences students’ academic performance in public secondary schools in the Mwala Sub-county. Data were captured through SPSS version 23.0 and coded. A null hypothesis was formulated as follows: **H₀**: There is no statistically significant relationship between principals’ use of transactional leadership style and students’ academic performance in public secondary schools in the Mwala Sub-county.

A Spearman’s rank-order correlation was run between transformed transactional leadership variable and academic performance variable at a 0.05 level of significance. Spearman’s rank-order correlation was preferred to Pearson Correlation because one variable remained non-parametric and thus necessitated the use of non-parametric data analysis techniques such as Spearman’s rank-order correlation as opposed to Pearson correlation for parametric data. The results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Correlation between Transactional Leadership Style and Academic Performance.				
		Academic Performance		Transactional Leadership Style
Spearman’s rho	Academic Performance	Coefficient	1.000	.428*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.016
		N	31	31
	Transactional Leadership	Coefficient	.428*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.016	.
		N	31	31

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

Results reported in Table 7 indicate that there was a weak positive correlation between transactional leadership style and students’ academic performance, which was statistically significant (R = .428, p = .016). Correlation coefficient ranges are -1, 0, and +1 where coefficients equal or close to -1 imply a strong negative correlation, 0 implies there is no correlation while coefficients equal to +1 or close to +1 indicate a strong positive correlation. Coefficients below 0.5/-0.5 are considered weak while coefficients between 0.5/-0.5 and 0.7/-0.7 are said to be moderate.

With a P-value of 0.016, which was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis which stated that “H₀: there is no statistically significant relationship between principals’ use of transactional leadership style and students’ academic performance in public secondary schools in Mwala sub-county” was rejected. The results thus suggest that principals’ use of transactional leadership style is statistically related with students’ academic performance in public secondary schools in Mwala Sub-county. The implication is that principals could positively enhance the academic performance of their schools by increasing transactional leadership practices.

DISCUSSION

The results implied that an increase in transactional leadership style would potentially increase students' academic performance. Based on the results, the study confirmed that the transactional leadership style was effective in enhancing students' academic performance. Globally, the findings are supported by Shortridge's (2015) study done in Maryland State which established that transactional leadership had a positive and weak relationship with academic achievement suggesting that an increase in the practice of this style would equally increase academic achievement. Hence, the study established that transactional leadership was effective in fostering good academic performance. The study findings are consistent with Lin and Chuang's (2014) study done in Taiwan which indicated that transactional leadership style was positively associated with learning motivation. Thus, the study found that the transactional leadership style was effective in improving academic performance.

However, the findings of the present study are inconsistent with Rasheed, Amin and Amin's (2021) study done in Pakistan which showed that transactional leadership style had a negative relationship with students' academic performance. These findings implied that an increase in the practice of this leadership style would decrease the academic performance of students. Thus, the study revealed that the transactional leadership style was ineffective in facilitating enhanced school performance. However, Rasheed, Amin and Amin's (2021) study was done in Pakistan, a predominantly Muslim country where a huge population grows up in a strict Sharia law environment. On the contrary, the current study was done in Kenya where a huge population is Christian. Muslims grow up in a strict autocratic environment dictated by Sharia laws. Transactional leadership could be ineffective in this country because it has elements of *laissez-faire* such as management-by-exception and passive management. Given a free hand to do their things, these teachers who are often used to autocratic practices seem to relax and lose focus on accomplishing tasks.

Regionally, the findings are supported by Saidu's (2021) study done in Nigeria which showed that transactional leadership style had a positive impact on teaching and learning. Teaching and learning being a predictor of academic performance, the results implied that the transactional leadership style was effective in fostering good academic results. However, the study findings are inconsistent with Akullo and Kamanyire's (2023) study done in Uganda which showed that transactional leadership style had a weak relationship with teachers' performance which was not statistically significant. Hence, the results implied that transactional leadership style could not predict students' academic performance and thus, it was not that effective in facilitating good academic performance. The difference in results can be explained by the fact that Akullo and Kamanyire's (2023) study utilized a cross-sectional research design and was done at a primary school setting in Uganda while the current study adopted a descriptive research design and was done in a secondary school level in Kenya. The inconsistencies in research design and the two studies being done in two different geographical contexts could be the reason why there was variability in results.

Locally, the results are consistent with Njukuny and Waithaka's (2020) study done in Samburu County which established that transactional leadership had a positive relationship with academic performance. Based on the results, transactional leadership was effective in enhancing students' academic outcomes. Moreover, the study is supported by Sika and Anayngo's (2020) study done in Migori County which established that there was a weak positive association between transactional leadership and academic performance and hence, confirmed that the style was effective in facilitating good academic results.

CONCLUSIONS

This study adduced sufficient evidence which demonstrated that principals in Mwala Sub-county public secondary schools highly practiced transactional behaviours in all the two dimensions of contingent reward and management-by-exception. It was shown that contingent reward and management-by-exception were all

statistically and positively correlated with academic performance. The study reported a weak positive correlation between transactional leadership style and students' academic performance which was statistically significant. The results implied that an increase in transactional leadership practices could increase the academic performance of students. Based on the results, the study concludes that transactional leadership was effective in enhancing students' academic performance. Therefore, this leadership style is promising to improve students' outcomes in poorly performing schools. Hence, principals in such schools can adopt this style. Despite the study finding that all dimensions of this leadership style were highly practiced, results indicated that each sub-construct exerted a varying influence on students' academic performance. In this regard, it was noted that the contingent reward dimension enhanced academic performance more than the management-by-exception dimension.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI) and TSC to in-service principals on the best transactional leadership practices, particularly, management-by-exception and contingent reward. Principals need to create productive exchange relationships with teachers where they can communicate specific academic targets that teachers must achieve for them to be rewarded while monitoring those whose performance could be worsening. Principals also need to be transactional leaders who practice management by exception and thus ensure they monitor actively teachers' performance on various tasks. The fact that the management-by-exception dimension is less effective could suggest that teachers may require close supervision. The study further recommends to principals enhance the practice of transactional leadership style since it enhances students' academic performance.

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