

Headteachers' Leadership Styles as a Critical Factor Towards Learner's Academic Performance in Public Primary Schools in Kenya

Ann Mbula Mutua^{1*}, Selpher Cheloti², Leonard Kamau³

^{1,2}Department of Educational Administration and Planning, South Eastern Kenya University, P.O. Box 170-90200 Kitui, Kenya

³Department of Educational Communication and Technology, South Eastern Kenya University, P.O. Box 170-90200 Kitui, Kenya

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

Headteachers are charged with the key leadership roles within the school setting necessitating the adoption of effective leadership styles. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the influence of Headteachers' leadership styles on learners' academic performance in Makueni County, Kenya. This article is an extract from a study carried out in Makueni County, Kenya. The study used a descriptive research design where the target population consisted of 714 public primary schools in Makueni County while the sample size consisted of 509, particularly, 74 Headteachers, 428 teachers, and 7 quality assurance officers. The study used questionnaires for Headteachers and teachers and interviews for Quality Assurance and Standards Officers as the primary data collection tools. The study that Headteachers who led by example, maintained a strong rapport with teachers, encouraged collaboration, and demonstrated commitment to academic performance positively influenced learners' academic performance. Thus, the study recommended the need for policies that will entrench professional development on desirable leadership style qualities for Headteachers. The study further recommended that the Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission should consider establishing a mentorship programme where experienced headteachers will share practical knowledge on desirable leadership styles with newly hired headteachers to ensure better learners' performance.

Keywords: Leadership, learners, performance, laissez-faire, autocratic, democratic style, transformational

INTRODUCTION

Headteachers play a crucial role towards determining the success of a school (Deakins, *et al.*, 2005). Nevertheless, the roles of Headteachers in the learning environment have continued to change over the years. Mackey (2016) argued that Headteachers are expected to shift from being school managers who oversee the day-to-day activities of a school to becoming instructional leaders as they are apt to have a positive influence on the learners' outcomes. Through leadership, Headteachers can motivate both the learners and teachers. The Headteachers play a critical role in guiding the learners' conduct, respect for each other, and responsible management of their own time in public primary schools in Kenya. Effective leadership by the Headteachers helps the learners adhere to the school rules and regulations and improve their academic performance. According to Malonza, (2020), productive leadership potentially improves learning efficiency by getting the most out of the learners under its leadership.

According to Aydin, Sarier and Uysal (2013), Headteachers are placed at the helm of providing instructional-based leadership and heading schools, thus, they are necessitated to exercise quality leadership traits. Headteachers are required to exhibit desirable leadership capabilities or behaviours as these have a

positive impact on how learners perform. According to Kanori, Obae and Chelote, (2014), the Headteachers adopt different leadership styles and this is what influences the behaviour and performance of the learners.

The main leadership styles adopted by Headteachers in public primary schools in Kenya include transformative, democratic, authoritative, participative/consultative leadership styles. Each of these leadership styles employs different approaches and this determines its effectiveness in improving learner performance. Authoritative leadership places judgment at the forefront and controls all decision-making processes among the learners. On the other hand, democratic leadership facilitates an environment where ideas freely flow and this is achieved through collaboration and consensus-building between the instructors and the learners. Participative leadership mainly applies the motivation and abilities of independent learners to manage tasks with minimal supervision. Lastly, transformative leadership focuses on the leader's ability to develop the skills of the learners and instil discipline to help them undertake their studies with accuracy and efficiency.

An effective leadership style is defined by various features that aim at improving and growing individual learners to meet the expected educational outcomes. According to Ann (2018), the key leadership traits necessary for the successful improvement of learners must have features that facilitate effective communication, trustworthiness, decisiveness, positive and inspiring attitudes, and encourage independent thinking. Effective communication helps in connecting the learners and the teachers, which facilitates transparency among the learners (Gillespie, 2005). Trustworthiness is also a crucial feature that helps the learners believe in the integrity and authentic character of their instructors. This helps the learners adopt good values and ethics that help them improve their academic performance. The leadership should also be decisive, as this forms the basis for exercising good judgment and appreciating informed input from differing opinions. Good leadership should also facilitate independent thinking, which means the leaders must apply common sense when offering solutions to issues. Effective leadership should also be inspirational, as this helps encourage the subjects to embrace the goals of the teams. This means that the Headteacher's leadership is a defining imperative for the best performance of the learners in public primary schools in Kenya.

An effective leadership style works towards improving learners' outcomes by ensuring that all the subjects under the leadership are working towards achieving common goals while at the same time striving to achieve their personal best. Headteachers in public primary schools provide leadership to both the teachers and the learners by providing guidance and direction as well as delegating tasks that help individual learners realize their strengths and apply them to improve their performance (Mungai, Kibaara, & Kamau, 2018). Therefore, this study was driven by the need to study how leadership styles adopted by the Headteachers in Kenya's public primary schools contribute to the academic performance of the learners.

Based on data provided by the Makueni Education Office (2021), an analysis of academic performance among students in public primary schools in Makueni County reveals a consistent decline from 2017 to 2021. This trend is illustrated in Table 1, which displays the mean scores achieved by schools during this period, specifically 258.59 in 2017, 252.63 in 2018, 252.32 in 2019, 254.07 in 2020, and 251.98 in 2021. This worrying trend of poor performance among learners has become a key concern to educational stakeholders in the county, especially, teachers and parents underscoring the importance of investigating the influence of Headteachers' use of different leadership styles on learners' outcomes; hence this study. This research, therefore, sought to establish the indispensable role of leadership style in the academic performance of learners.

Table 1: Mean scores attained in the national examination from 2017-2021

Year	Mean Scores
2017	258.59
2018	252.63
2019	252.32

2020	254.07
2021	251.98

Source: Makueni Education Office (2022).

The study aimed at examining the influence of Headteachers' leadership styles on learners' academic performance in Makueni County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A study carried out by Sebastian & Allensworth (2012) on the influence of principal leadership on classroom instruction and students' learning process highlighted the importance of using effective leadership styles. The study examined the impact of leadership in Chicago's public high schools on how the learners performed. Using the multi-level structural equation modelling approach, the study found that significant differences were evident between schools where principals exercised leadership compared to those that did not. Sebastian & Allensworth (2012) argued that leadership could be adopted to promote the establishment of a conducive learning environment and college-oriented climate positively impacting learners' performances.

Another study conducted by Boampong et al. (2016) in the Ashanti region, Ghana, on the effect of integrating leadership styles among school heads indicated that these skills were important. Junior High Schools (J.H.S) in the Effiduase – Sekyere East district of the Ashanti region were sampled for the study because they exhibited poor performances in the public examinations at the Basic Education Certificate Examination level (BECE) within the district. The study adopted the triangulation approach to collect both qualitative and quantitative data to investigate the relationship between learners' academic performance and the application of leadership styles among headteachers (Boampong et al., 2016). From 271 respondents, the study underlined that stakeholders like parents, teachers, students, policymakers and society as a whole are anxious to see learners excel in their academic work. Even without the necessary framework and resources, stakeholders expect the school heads to propel the schools to excellence; these responsibilities also ensure that the Headteachers are held accountable when learners perform below expectations. The study concluded that headteachers needed to be equipped with the necessary leadership styles to attain the desired academic performance in schools.

In South Africa, Bush's (2013) study on the importance of instructional leadership in the learning process across South African schools underlined that this managerial skill could not be overlooked. The study found that there was a need towards increasing attention to headteachers' leadership as a way to improve the academic excellence of each learner. Bush (2013) further stated that the significance of instructional leadership was captured in the Managing Teaching and Learning framework as a foundational pillar in South Africa. Very few literature have examined the influence of leadership styles on learners' achievement, thus, this study sought to fill this gap by identifying key leadership styles that can be used by headteachers to improve learners' academic performance.

In another study carried out by Kitavi (2014) on the influence of leadership styles among school heads on the learners' performance in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education in Matinyani sub-county, Kitui underpinned leadership as a core tenet towards students' excellence. The study investigated the effect of three key leadership styles, that is, laissez-faire, democratic, and autocratic on how learners performed in the KCPE. Kitavi (2014) used a sample size of 6 public primary schools in the division with 6 Headteachers, 6 deputy Headteachers and 24 teachers. The design adapted for this study was a descriptive survey. The study administered questionnaires to Headteachers, deputy Headteachers and teachers. From the findings, the study concluded that the democratic leadership style was the most applied in the selected primary schools

towards boosting the learners’ academic performance.

Similarly, Oyugi’s (2018) study on the influence of leadership styles on learners’ performance in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education in the Awendo sub-county underlined the impact of integrating effective leadership within schools. The study used a sample size of 30 Headteachers, 340 educators, and 1400 form four learners and adopted an ex-post facto research approach. Based on the findings, Oyugi (2018) noted that Headteachers needed to integrate the most appropriate leadership style to enhance learners’ outcomes. The study concluded that the democratic leadership style was expected to positively impact learners’ academic performance compared to autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles. According to these studies, the integration of Headteachers’ leadership styles occurs to be a key factor in the attainment of high learners’ academic performance underscoring the significance of conducting this study.

Theoretical Framework

The systems theory, the primary theoretical framework, upon which this study was based was founded by Von Bertalanffy (1968). The systems theory gives hints on understanding the complex interrelationships and dynamics in educational systems. The theory is a holistic approach that stresses the interconnectedness of a variety of components within a system and how they influence each other. In this study, the Headteachers’ leadership styles such as democratic, participative, transformative, and authoritative are likely to influence the learners’ academic performances.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey design was used in this study to examine the influence of Headteachers’ leadership styles on the learners’ academic performance. The study targeted a population of 714 public primary schools located in Makueni County totalling 714 Headteachers, 5906 teachers, and 8 Quality Assurance and Standards Officers. To arrive at the sample’s size, Yamane’s (1967) formula was employed to arrive at 509 respondents, comprising 74 Headteachers, 428 teachers, and 7 quality assurance officers. The primary data collection tools were questionnaires and interviews. Lastly, the quantitative data was analysed using percentages, mean scores, and the Chi-Square test, while qualitative data was analysed from themes.

FINDINGS

The study sought to determine the influence of Headteachers’ leadership styles on learners’ academic performance in public primary schools in Makueni County, Kenya.

Learners’ Academic Performance

The study assessed the learners’ academic performance which was the dependent variable by asking teachers to rate overall learners’ academic performance in the surveyed school. The results are represented in Figure 1.

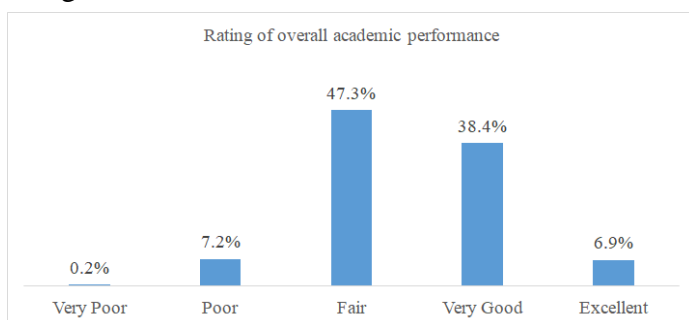


Figure 1: Rating of overall academic performance

Source: Field Data (2023)

The results in Figure 1 present that 47.3% rated overall academic performance as fair; 38.4% rated it as very good; 7.2% rated it as poor; 6.9% rated it as excellent and 0.2% rated it as very poor. A mean score of 3.45 and 0.738 as the standard deviation was posted regarding overall academic performance. From the interviews, some of the sub-county quality assurance officers indicated that the performance has been improving in the schools under their jurisdiction, while others noted that there was a notable downward trend.

Influence of Headteachers’ leadership styles on learners’ academic performance

The third specific objective of the study was to establish the influence of the Headteacher’s leadership styles on learners’ academic performance in public primary schools in Makueni County, Kenya.

Nature of Headteachers’ leadership styles

The study began by asking the teachers to describe the leadership styles of the Headteachers in the surveyed schools. Figure 2 shows the results.

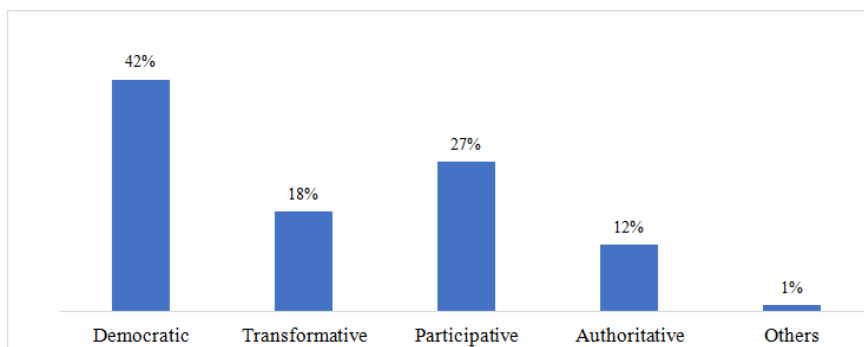


Figure 2: Teachers’ responses on Headteachers’ leadership styles

Source: Field data (2023)

The results show that 42% of the teachers rated the Headteachers as democratic leaders; 27% saw them as participative leaders; 18% saw them as transformative; 6% described the Headteachers as authoritative and 1% indicated they were team leaders.

The study also posed the question to the headteachers for them to describe the type of leadership style they ascribe to. The results are shown in Figure 3.

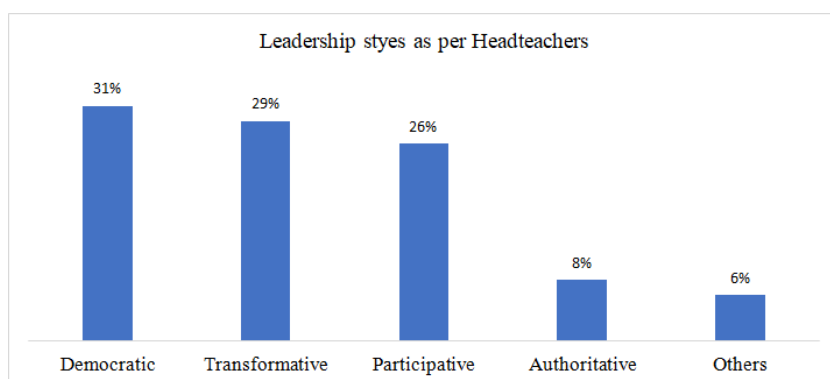


Figure 3: Headteachers’ responses on the leadership styles that ascribes to them

Source: Field Data (2023)

Figure 3 shows that 31% of the Headteachers viewed themselves as democratic leaders; 29% saw themselves as participative leaders; 26% saw themselves as transformative; 6% described themselves as authoritative and 1% indicated they were servant leaders.

The study then used a five-point Likert scale where 1 means strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree to seek the views of the teachers on the Headteachers' leadership characteristics in the schools. Table 2 shows the results.

Table 2: Teachers' responses on Headteachers' leadership style characteristics

Leadership style characteristics	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
The Headteacher leads by example	2%	4%	12%	42%	40%	4.14	0.928
The Headteacher communicates clearly on performance issues	2%	2%	7%	50%	39%	4.24	0.790
The Headteacher consults with the teachers before making decisions	4%	6%	17%	44%	29%	3.86	1.051
The Headteacher is friendly and accessible to teachers	2%	2%	11%	45%	40%	4.19	0.859
The Headteacher maintains a strong rapport with teachers	2%	3%	13%	44%	38%	4.13	0.885
The Headteacher delegates key roles and responsibilities to other teachers	1%	1%	6%	46%	46%	4.34	0.739
The Headteacher as the school head encourages collaboration among teachers	2%	1%	8%	44%	45%	4.31	0.798
The Headteacher as the school head insists on excellence in academic performance, and commitment	1%	1%	8%	38%	52%	4.41	0.724
The Headteacher is very committed to academic performance issues	2%	1%	10%	38%	49%	4.30	0.869
The Headteacher can mobilise teaching resources	2%	3%	12%	49%	34%	4.11	0.864
The Headteacher is allowed to be innovative in teaching	1%	2%	11%	50%	36%	4.16	0.807
The Headteacher explains clearly his decisions	2%	3%	13%	51%	31%	4.05	0.862
The Headteacher is very firm in the implementation of decisions	2%	2%	13%	45%	38%	4.14	0.876
The Headteacher reprimands teachers who perform poorly	10%	10%	25%	35%	20%	3.45	1.208
The Headteacher is a disciplinarian	3%	3%	13%	47%	34%	4.04	0.945

Source: Field data (2023)

The results in Table 2 show that 42% of teachers felt the Headteachers led by example to a great extent, and 40% of teachers felt headteachers led by example to a very great extent. On the other hand, 4% felt Headteachers led by example to a little extent, 2% reported Headteachers led by example to a very little extent and 12% expressed uncertainty on the issue. This characteristic had a mean of 4.14. The data shows that regarding whether Headteachers communicate clearly on performance issues, 50% of teachers indicated that Headteachers communicate clearly to a great extent, and 39% of teachers felt Headteachers

communicate clearly to a very great extent. On the other hand, 2% felt Headteachers communicated clearly to a little extent, and 2% of reported Headteachers communicated clearly to a very little extent while 7% expressed uncertainty on the issue. A mean score of 4.24 was recorded. On whether the Headteachers consult with the teachers before making decisions, 44% of teachers indicated the Headteachers consult to a great extent, and 39% of teachers felt Headteachers consult to a very great extent. On the other hand, 6% felt Headteachers consult to a little extent, 4% reported Headteachers consult to a very little extent and 17% expressed uncertainty on the issue. This leadership characteristic posted a mean score of 3.86. The results show that 45% of teachers agreed that the Headteachers are friendly and accessible to teachers, while 40% of teachers strongly agreed with this statement. Conversely, 2% of teachers disagreed, and another 2% strongly disagreed. Additionally, 11% of teachers were uncertain about this aspect. A mean of 4.19 was recorded on this activity. The results indicate that 44% of teachers agreed that the Headteachers maintain a strong rapport with teachers, while 38% of teachers strongly agreed with this statement. On the other hand, 2% disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed. Meanwhile, 13% of teachers were uncertain about this issue. A mean score of 4.13 was posted on this item.

The results also show that 46% of teachers agreed that the Headteachers delegate key roles and responsibilities to other teachers, while 6% strongly agreed with this practice. Conversely, 1% disagreed, and 1% strongly disagreed. Additionally, 6% of teachers were uncertain about this leadership activity. A mean of 4.34 was recorded on this activity. In relation to whether the headteachers, as the schools' heads, encourage collaboration among teachers, the majority of teachers (44%) agreed with this practice, while 8% were uncertain. Additionally, 44% of teachers strongly agreed that the Headteachers encourage collaboration, indicating a positive perception of their leadership style. Only 1% disagreed, and 1% strongly disagreed with this leadership characteristic. This leadership characteristic posted a mean score of 4.31.

The findings reveal that the majority of teachers 52% strongly agreed and 38% agreed that the headteachers, as the schools' heads, insist on excellence in academic performance and commitment. On the other hand, 8% of teachers disagreed, and 1% strongly disagreed with this aspect. A mean of 4.41 was recorded on this activity. The results indicate that 38% of teachers agreed and 49% strongly agreed that the headteacher is very committed to academic performance issues. Conversely, 8% of teachers disagreed, and 2% strongly disagreed with this characteristic. A mean of 4.30 was posted on this item. The findings reveal that 49% of teachers agreed and 34% strongly agreed that the Headteachers are able to mobilize teaching resources. On the other hand, 3% of teachers disagreed, and 12% were uncertain about the Headteachers' ability to mobilize teaching resources. A mean score of 4.11 was recorded for this activity. The results indicate that 50% of teachers agreed and 36% strongly agreed that the headteachers allow teachers to be innovative in teaching. Conversely, 2% of teachers disagreed, and 11% were uncertain about the Headteachers' stance on allowing innovation in teaching. This item posted a mean of 4.16.

The findings further show that 51% of teachers agreed and 31% strongly agreed that the Headteachers explain their decisions clearly. On the contrary, 2% of teachers disagreed with this aspect, and 13% were uncertain about the clarity of the Headteachers' decision explanations. This item recorded a mean of 4.05. The results indicate that 45% of teachers agreed and 38% strongly agreed that the headteachers are very firm in the implementation of decisions. Conversely, 2% of teachers disagreed with this aspect, and 13% were uncertain about the firmness of the Headteachers in decision implementation. A mean of 4.14 was posted on this item. The findings reveal that 35% of teachers agreed and 20% strongly agreed that the headteachers reprimand teachers who perform poorly. On the other hand, 10% of teachers disagreed with this practice, and another 10% strongly disagreed, while 25% of teachers expressed uncertainty on whether the Headteachers reprimand poorly performing teachers. A mean score of 3.45 was recorded on this activity. The results show that 47% of teachers agreed and 34% strongly agreed that the headteachers are disciplinarians. On the other hand, 3% of teachers disagreed, and another 3% strongly disagreed with this characteristic of the Headteachers while 13% of teachers were uncertain about whether the Headteachers

were disciplinarians. This leadership characteristic posted a mean score of 4.04.

The study then used a five-point Likert scale where 1 represented not at all, 2 represented very little extent, 3 represented little extent, 4 represented great extent, and 5 represented very great extent to assess the extent to which Headteachers felt the leadership characteristics applied to them in their school’s leadership.

Table 3: Headteachers Responses on the extent to which leadership characteristics apply to them

Leadership style characteristics	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
I lead by example	0%	1%	3%	43%	53%	4.47	0.624
I communicate clearly on performance issues	0%	0%	5%	46%	49%	4.43	0.599
I consult with the teachers before making decisions	0%	1%	8%	53%	38%	4.27	0.668
I am friendly and accessible to teachers	0%	0%	6%	49%	45%	4.4	0.595
I maintain a strong rapport with teachers	0%	0%	3%	40%	57%	4.54	0.554
I delegate roles and responsibilities to other teachers	0%	0%	5%	39%	56%	4.5	0.603
I encourage collaboration among teachers	0%	0%	7%	39%	54%	4.47	0.624
I insist on excellence in academic performance	0%	0%	5%	42%	53%	4.47	0.602
I am committed to academic performance issues	0%	0%	5%	33%	62%	4.57	0.599
I am able to mobilise teaching resources	0%	0%	14%	45%	42%	4.28	0.693
I allow teachers to be innovative in teaching	0%	0%	8%	50%	42%	4.34	0.625
I explain clearly my decisions	0%	0%	7%	43%	50%	4.43	0.621
I am very firm in the implementation of decisions	0%	0%	6%	47%	47%	4.42	0.597
I reprimand teachers who perform poorly	5%	14%	18%	36%	27%	3.66	1.174
I am a disciplinarian	4%	4%	9%	49%	34%	4.04	0.985

Source: Field data (2023)

The results in Table 3 show that 53% of Headteachers reported leading by example to a very great extent, while 43% stated that they do so to a great extent. On the other hand, 3% of Headteachers indicated leading by example to a little extent, and 1% of Headteachers reported leading by example to a very little extent. A mean of 4.47 was posted on this item. The results indicate that 49% of Headteachers communicate clearly on performance issues to a very great extent. Additionally, 46% of Headteachers reported doing so to a great extent. In contrast, 5% of Headteachers indicated communicating on performance issues to a little extent. A mean score of 4.43 was recorded on this activity. The results reveal that 53% of Headteachers consult with teachers before making decisions to a very great extent. Moreover, 43% of Headteachers reported doing so to a great extent. Conversely, 8% of Headteachers indicated consulting with teachers to a little extent, and 1% reported doing so to a very little extent. This leadership characteristic posted a mean score of 4.27. The findings demonstrate that 49% of Headteachers reported being friendly and accessible to teachers to a great extent, while 45% stated that they were very friendly and accessible. On the other hand, 6% of Headteachers indicated being friendly and accessible to a little extent. A mean of 4.40 was recorded on this activity. The results indicate that 57% of Headteachers reported maintaining a strong rapport with teachers to a very great extent, while 40% stated that they maintained a very strong rapport to a great extent. On the other hand, 3% of Headteachers indicated maintaining a strong rapport to a little extent. This item had a mean score of 4.54.

The findings reveal that 56% of Headteachers reported delegating key roles and responsibilities to other teachers to a great extent, while 39% stated that they delegated to a very great extent. On the other hand, 5%

of Headteachers indicated delegating to a little extent. A mean of 4.50 was posted on this item. According to the findings, 54% of Headteachers reported encouraging collaboration among teachers to a great extent, while 39% stated that they encouraged it to a very great extent. On the other hand, 7% of Headteachers indicated encouraging collaboration to a little extent, and 0% reported encouraging it to a very little extent. This leadership characteristic posted a mean score of 4.47. The results reveal that 53% of headteachers insisted on excellence in academic performance and commitment to a great extent, while 42% stated that they insisted on it to a very great extent. On the other hand, 5% of headteachers indicated insisting on excellence and commitment to a little extent. A mean of 4.47 was posted on this item. The findings indicate that 62% of headteachers reported being very committed to academic performance issues, while 33% expressed commitment to a great extent. In contrast, 5% of Headteachers indicated a little extent of commitment. This item had a mean of 4.57. The results reveal that 45% of Headteachers reported being able to mobilize teaching resources to a great extent, while 42% stated that they could do so to a very great extent. On the other hand, 14% of Headteachers indicated mobilizing teaching resources to a little extent. A mean score of 4.28 was recorded on this activity. According to the findings, 50% of Headteachers reported allowing teachers to be innovative in teaching to a great extent, while 42% stated that they allowed it to a very great extent. On the other hand, 8% of Headteachers indicated allowing teachers to be innovative in teaching to a little extent. Top of Form

A mean of 4.34 was posted on this item. The results indicate that 50% of Headteachers reported explaining their decisions to a great extent, while 43% stated that they explained them to a very great extent. On the other hand, 7% of Headteachers indicated explaining their decisions to a little extent. This item recorded a mean of 4.43. The findings reveal that 47% of headteachers reported being very firm in the implementation of decisions, while another 47% indicated being firm to a great extent. On the other hand, 6% of Headteachers mentioned being firm to a little extent. A mean of 4.42 was recorded on this activity. The Headteachers reprimand teachers who perform poorly. A mean score of 3.66 was posted on this item. According to the data, 49% of Headteachers reported being disciplinarians to a great extent, while 34% indicated being disciplinarians to a very great extent. On the other hand, 4% of Headteachers mentioned being disciplinarians to a little extent. This leadership characteristic posted a mean score of 4.04.

The study then sought the overall rating by the teachers. The results are shown in Figure 4

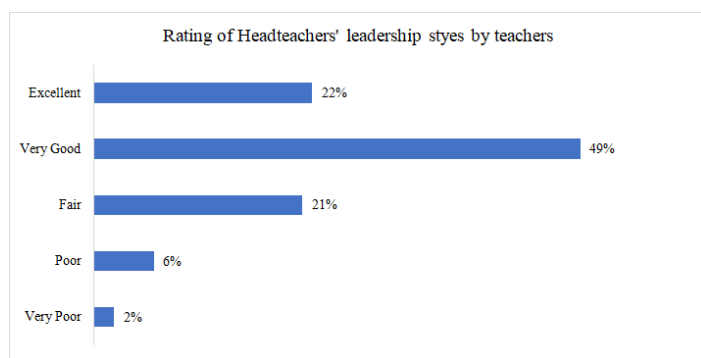


Figure 4: Rating of overall leadership styles by teachers

Source: Field Data (2023)

The results show that 49% rated overall Headteachers’ leadership styles in the surveyed schools as very good; 22% rated them as excellent; 21% rated them as fair; 6% rated them as poor; and 2% rated them as very poor. A mean score of 3.8 and a standard deviation of 0.875 were posted regarding overall leadership style characteristics.

During the interviews, the QASOs were asked to indicate the leadership qualities that were considered

during the hiring of Headteachers, and it emerged that collaborative leadership was essential in the running of schools to ensure teamwork among the school community’s stakeholders. Issues of integrity and being performance-oriented also emerged as defining features of Headteachers’ leadership styles. THE QASOs were also asked to indicate the desirable qualities for primary school Headteachers. QASO1 emphasized the need for the Headteachers to be visionary and possess communication skills, as this was a key consideration even in the Headteachers hiring process by the TSC. QASO7 noted the need for Headteachers to be inspirational leaders.

Hypothesis testing for the Influence of leadership styles on academic performance

The chi-square test was used to test the third hypothesis, which stated: There was no statistically significant influence of Headteachers’ leadership styles on learners’ academic performance in public primary schools in Makueni County, Kenya. To conduct the Chi-square test, the overall rating for learners’ academic performance and the overall Headteachers’ leadership style ratings from the teachers’ data were used. The Chi-square test results are shown in Table 4.17.

Table 4: Chi-Square for leadership styles and learners’ academic performance

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	80.069a	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	67.545	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	24.254	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	407		

a. 11 cells (44.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .02.

The results in Table 4 show a Chi-Square critical value of 80.0965, and the p-value was less than 0.05 which indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between headteacher’s leadership styles and learners’ academic performance. The null hypothesis was thus rejected, and the alternative hypothesis that there was a statistically significant influence of Headteachers’ leadership styles on learners’ academic performance in public primary schools in Makueni County, Kenya, was thus accepted.

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

For this study, the specific objective was to establish the influence of the headteachers’ leadership styles on learners’ academic performance in public primary schools in Makueni County, Kenya. The results in Figures 2 and 3 show that democratic, transformative, and participative leadership were the dominant styles of leadership practised by the headteachers in the surveyed primary schools in Makueni County. Results in Table 2 indicate that teachers on the nature of leadership styles rated highly the issues of headteachers, as the schools’ heads, insisting on excellence in academic performance and commitment (mean score of 4.41) and headteachers delegation of key roles and responsibilities to other teachers (mean score of 4.34). The teachers rated lowly the issues of headteachers reprimanding poorly performing teachers (mean score of 3.45) and also the issue of headteachers consulting with the teachers before making decisions (mean score of 3.86).

On their end, results represented in Table 3 represent that Headteachers who maintained a strong rapport with teachers and commitment to academic performance issues were the highly rated leadership characteristics, as shown by mean scores of 4.54 and 4.5, respectively. Leading by example, encouraging collaborations and insistence on academic excellence were all rated at 4.47. However, the headteachers deemed reprimanding poorly performing teachers as a bit undesirable leadership characteristic as it had the

lowest mean score of 3.66. These findings suggest that the headteachers in the surveyed primary schools in Makueni County demonstrated positive leadership attributes, particularly in terms of their commitment to academic performance, maintaining strong relationships with teachers, and promoting collaboration. However, there is room for improvement in areas such as consultation with teachers before making decisions and the approach to handling poorly performing teachers.

With regard to the overall rating of leadership styles characteristics, the results in Figure 4 shows that 49% rated overall Headteachers' leadership styles in the surveyed schools as very good; 22% rated them as excellent; 21% rated them as fair; 6% rated them as poor; and 2% rated them as very poor. A mean score of and a standard deviation of 0.875 were posted regarding overall leadership style characteristics. The results in Table 4 show a Chi-Square critical value of 80.0965, and the p-value was less than 0.05 which indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between headteacher's leadership styles and learners' academic performance. The null hypothesis was thus rejected, and the alternative hypothesis that there was a statistically significant influence of headteachers' leadership styles on learners' academic performance in public primary schools in Makueni County, Kenya, was thus accepted. These results imply that the leadership style exhibited by headteachers in public primary schools in Makueni County plays a crucial role in shaping pupils' academic outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found that Headteachers' leadership styles influenced the academic performance of learners in public primary schools located in Makueni County, Kenya. The results showed that Headteachers who prioritize academic excellence and delegate responsibilities to teachers are highly rated by the respondents. The study concluded that Headteachers who led by example maintained a strong rapport with teachers, encouraged collaboration, and demonstrated commitment to academic performance positively influenced learners' academic performance. However, Headteachers who do not consult with teachers before making decisions and who reprimand poorly performing teachers are likely to lead to poor learning outcomes.

Thus, the study recommended the need for policies that will entrench professional development on desirable leadership style qualities for Headteachers. The study further recommended that the Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission should consider establishing a mentorship programme where experienced headteachers will share practical knowledge on desirable leadership styles with newly hired headteachers to ensure better learners' performance.

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