

# Teachers Perception of the Influence of principals' Transformational Leadership Practice on Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools

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**Abstract:** A growing body of research has emphasized the importance of school leadership practice for quality improvement in schools. Little attention has been paid to establish the influence of principals' perception and leadership practices when the ministry and schools reorganize the leadership team with the purpose of improving students' performance. As such, this study provides additional insight into how teachers' perception of the influence of principals' transformational leadership practice on students' academic performance in public secondary schools. Descriptive survey research design was utilized to gather information from 276 teachers and 20 principals. Schools were non-proportionately stratified according to the 6 sub-counties. From the study, school principals exercised transformational leadership behaviours implying that transformational leadership practice have a direct effect on student achievement and as such generate pride among followers. Additionally, teachers are inspired by principals who engage them with the schools mission, encouraging staff to come-up with new initiatives and maintaining high performance standards.

**Keywords:** Perception, Influence, Transformation Leadership, Practice, Academic and Performance.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Principals play a vital role in setting the direction for successful schools and creating a conducive environment that fully supports teaching and learning. Furthermore, as the impact of principal leadership on student's performance became evident, policymakers placed greater pressures on the principals. Rewards and sanctions affecting principals are increasingly common. In view of the above, there is need for new leadership approaches in order to enhance school efficiency and effectiveness.

One major emphasis in the educational arena in the early 21st century has been the continuing demand for greater accountability to increase students' performance. These expectations occur against the backdrop of frequent reforms in the education sector. In this case, school leaders are expected to adopt leadership skills that enable them to implement education reforms while at the same time ensuring high student performance in national examinations. The principals, being the educational leaders are in a good position to supervise, monitor, assess, evaluate and share up to date information on educational issues and current teaching techniques with teachers in order to arouse them so as to achieve higher students' academic achievement. The quality of leadership thus makes a significant difference to student performance.

**Research Objectives:**

- i. To find out principal's transformational leadership attributes.
- ii. To establish the influence of transformational leadership practice on students' academic performance in public secondary schools.

**2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Principals are required to influence teachers to work towards the achievement of the change goal through knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviours that demonstrate excellent performance. Although it cannot be denied that transformational leadership, which is basically inspiring leadership at all levels, happens in the school system, the school principal as an instructional leader is the most influential to teacher teaching practices. Indeed, numerous studies have recognized the significant role of leadership on school improvement especially on teachers' classroom practices (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Yahya, (2015) while conducting a study whose aim was to examine the principals' leadership styles and practices, the school performance and students educational achievement reported that the principal has a vital responsibility in discharging managerial duties in the school. The overall management of schools, leadership styles and types, rests with the principal, working with and through the teachers to make best use of their capabilities in the profession and achieve the desired educational goals and students' academic achievement.

In order to meet the challenges associated with national and state expectations, principals must focus on teaching and learning by providing instructional guidance. Consequently, today's principals concentrate on building a vision for their schools, sharing leadership with teachers, and influencing schools to operate as learning communities, Bass & Riggio, (2006). A successful principal must have a clear vision that shows how all components of a school will operate at some point in the future. Principals encourage their teams to share the common vision of the school as this leads to the realization of school goals, Kouzes et al., (2013). This influences teacher motivation to meet school goals hence contribute to better student performance. Having a clear image of their schools helps principals avoid becoming consumed by the administrative requirements of their jobs.

They ensure that student progress is monitored through the continual aggregation and disaggregation of student performance data that are directly related to the school's mission and goals. An essential part of strong leadership at the front line is building great teams and creating situations where team members can share knowledge, dissect problems together and work toward common goals. Principals understand that their role is not to be an all-knowing, but to inspire and build a shared commitment and capacity for great performance. They make student success pivotal to their work and, accordingly, pay attention to and communicate about instruction, curriculum, and student mastery of learning objectives, and are visible in the school, Leithwood & Jantzi (2010).

Learning needs to occur throughout an organization and principals need to become participants in the learning process in order to shape and encourage the implementation of effective learning models in their schools. They evaluate and consider the needs of each teacher and creates a supportive environment for growth, coaching and professional training of staff. This way, teachers are empowered to achieve their best hence promoting student achievement, Stone cited by Allen *et al.*, (2016). To illustrate this, effective principals don't just arrange for professional development; rather, they participate in staff training provided to their staff. Effective principals foster the idea of working together as a valuable enterprise because they understand that this kind of collaborative learning community ultimately will build trust, collective responsibility, and a school wide focus on improved student learning (Prestine & Nelson, 2003 in Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008).

A transformational leader encourages creativity, innovation, risk-taking, and a willingness to abandon inefficient systems, and followers are stimulated to question assumptions, approach issues in novel ways, and creatively solve problems, Bass (2004, cited in Allen et al., 2016). This is in agreement with the findings by Finnigan (2010) & Blasé & Blasé (2000) that promoting professional growth affected teacher motivation. While both researchers use different terms, 'principal support for change' and 'promoting professional growth respectively', they identified the same behaviors to promote professional growth. The behaviors identified by Finnigan, Blasé, and Blasé as influencing teacher motivation were encouraging teachers to take risks, to try new strategies, and to develop programs. Much of the literature supported the fact that the leadership behaviors of principals have an effect on teacher behavior within the context of school climate.

Transformational leaders must possess certain attributes if they have to influence performance, for instance idealized attribute and inspirational motivation foster alignment around shared goals within an environment of high ethical and moral standards that supports and strengthens shared governance within an academic community. The third behavioral component is intellectual stimulation. Academic freedom, lifelong learning, and scholarship flourish within an environment that encourages intellectual stimulation. The fourth behavioral component is individualized consideration. A transformational leader evaluates and considers the distinct needs of each individual follower, creates a supportive environment that is focused on followers' achievement and growth, and uses coaching, mentoring, creation of new development opportunities, and continuous feedback to empower followers and help them achieve their potential, Stone, (2004, cited in Allen et al., 2016).

Recent studies have shown that principal's transformational leadership has a direct and indirect effect on students' academic performance. Mei & Tsai (2014), in their study on the investigation on the effect of leadership styles of science teachers on the learning motivation of elementary school students in Changhua County of Taiwan. The correlations between the above two leadership styles and the learning motivation of students are both "moderate to good relationship". They performed a regression analysis whose result significantly predicated teacher efficiency as a result of transformational leadership style. The coefficient of transformational leadership style is 0.328  $P < 0.05$ . This shows that any unit change in transformational leadership style of secondary school will result to teacher performance through teacher efficiency to change by 0.328. Also the results showed that 30.1% variation in teacher performance as a result of teacher efficiency is accounted by transformational leadership style.

Ibrahim & Al-Taneiji, (2013) reported in a study which was quantitative correlation in nature that, in order to identify principals' leadership styles in Dubai schools, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) by Avolio and Bass (1995) was used. The study found that the principal's leadership style is correlated with how teachers perceive him/her to be an effective leader. This is expected since the more a principal employs the transformational forms of leadership (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration), the more he or she is seen to be effective by teachers. In fact, the last nine items of the MLQ (those that assess principal effectiveness) bear similarity with the four forms of transformational leadership.

Alfrah, (2014) investigated the role of transformational leadership in influencing students' outcomes in public secondary schools using Kuwait as a case study. The analysis identified idealized influence (attributes) and idealized influence (behaviour) as the underlying dimensions of transformational leadership that directly and indirectly influences both student engagement and student achievement as the final outcome. Generally however, transformational leadership style has significant effect on both student achievement and student engagement.

Day, Gu, & Sammons, (2016) in their article illustrated how successful leaders combine the too often dichotomized practices of transformational and instructional leadership in different ways across different phases of their schools' development in order to progressively shape the improvement culture in improving students' outcomes. The research provides new empirical evidence of how successful principals directly and indirectly achieve and sustain improvement over time through combining both transformational and instructional leadership strategies. The findings show that schools' abilities to improve and sustain effectiveness over the long term are not primarily the result of the principals' leadership style but of their understanding and diagnosis of the school's needs and their application of clearly articulated shared values and a common vision.

Money, (2017), conducted a study on the effectiveness of transformational leadership style in secondary schools in Nigeria. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of 450 respondents (50 Principals and 400 Teachers) from 50 Secondary Schools in all the six geo-political zones of Nigeria. The stratified and simple random sampling method was used to get eight teachers from each school and the Principal of sampled schools automatically was used as a respondent. The instrument used for this study was the questionnaire titled 'Transformation Leadership in Secondary Education' (TLISE) constructed by the researchers. From the findings, it was established that both principal and teachers have good knowledge of the concept of 'Transformational Leadership'. The apparently closeness in this mean rating of the respondents portrayed that they did not actually deviate very much in their opinion of the existence and knowledge of this style of leadership.

Chemobo, Kimani, Musiega, & Willy, (2014) in their study on the effect of transformational leadership styles on teacher performance in public secondary school in Kakamega, Kenya, found out that transformational leadership style has significant positive effect on teacher efficiency. Correlation results indicated that transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on teacher efficiency with test statistic  $r = 0.761$   $p < .05$ . This implies that an improvement in transformational leadership style results to increase in teacher efficiency and any drop in transformational leadership style leads to a drop in teacher efficiency.

The findings of the study showed that principals who adopted transformational leadership significantly improved academic achievement of their secondary school students. Based on these findings, the school principals should adopt transformational leadership practices that are more employee friendly but which are results oriented. Principals should therefore link their leadership to students' performance by providing instructional guidance.

These findings agree with those of Kibiwot (2014) that teachers prefer principals who adopt democratic leadership as opposed to those that practice Laissez faire or autocratic leadership as they are more motivated when they are involved in decision making. This study confirms that teachers become committed to duty when they are involved in decision making that impact on their day to day school activities. Principals should encourage a climate that is conducive to sharing, learning, paying attention to the development of lessons, oversee teaching time, must be available all the time and adopt an open door policy. Furthermore, all of principals attempt to promote a collaborative working culture and a culture of shared responsibility and accountability contributes to a higher performance culture.

### 3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The table below presents findings on teachers' perception of the influence of principals' transformational leadership practice on students' academic performance.

**Table 1: Teachers' Perception of Transformational Leadership and School Academic Performance**

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Std Dev
i) Not able to inspire change in our school	08	7	4	56	150	1.5	1.4
Percentage (%)	3.6	3.1	1.8	24.9	66.7		
ii) Not a driving or motivating force in creating camaraderie and academic excellence	131	77	4	6	2	0.5	1.2
Percentage (%)	0.9	2.7	1.8	34.2	60.4		
iii) Acts as if each of us is the best. This motivates everyone to good performance	96	87	19	10	13	4.1	1.1
Percentage (%)	42.7	38.7	8.4	4.4	5.8		
iv) Has a positive attitude inspiring everyone to perform better	111	88	10	8	8	4.3	1.2
Percentage (%)	49.3	39.1	4.4	3.6	3.6		
v) Proud to work at my school	131	62	13	6	13	4	1.1
Percentage (%)	58.2	27.6	5.8	2.7	5.8		
vi) Provides CPD in the areas needed to better meet students' needs	111	73	18	12	11	4.1	1.2
Percentage (%)	49.3	32.4	8	5.3	4.9		
<b>Average Mean</b>						<b>3.3</b>	<b>1.2</b>

Principals have the vital responsibility of discharging administrative duties in the school by providing educational leadership and implementing performance management and coordinating curricular activities by ensuring that teachers prepare schemes of work, update lesson notes, and administer continuous assessment geared towards achieving schools academic goals. In this case, the study asked teachers if their principals were unable to inspire change in their school. 24.9% agreed while 66.7% of them strongly agreed that their principals were able to inspire change in their schools. This is consistent with the principal's view where 90% agreed that they inspired change in their schools. As the saying goes that "there are no poor soldiers under a good general," under a great principal, teachers can transform based on demand by the situation and can adapt to the pattern of leadership that is provided for by the principal.

Teachers were asked if their principal was not a driving or motivating force in creating camaraderie and academic excellence. 34.2% agreed that their principals are motivating as 60.4% of them strongly agreed by acknowledging that their principals are a motivating force. 95% of the principals supported the teachers reporting that they are a driving or motivating force in creating team work and academic excellence. This agrees with the findings of a study done by Ndiga et al (2014) that there is a strong relationship between teacher's perception of their principal and student's performance. He concluded that students achievement increase with increase in teacher perceptions of their principal. Where principals support teachers by considering teachers' personal and professional welfare and by involving them in decision making, increase in teachers' job satisfaction is realized. This promotes commitment by staff to academic excellence.

In general, the leader raises the organization to higher ground or to better achievement by motivating followers. It should be noted that this is different from pushing. Pushing can also motivate, but it is based on the avoidance of negative consequences, Mei & Tsai, (2014). From the study, 42.7% of the teachers strongly agreed and 38.7% agreed that their principals act as if each of them is the best. This motivates everyone to good performance. 95% of the principals were in concurrence that they trust the teachers to support his or her efforts towards the achievement of good performance. Researchers have shown a positive relationship between transformational leadership and motivation. Motivation has been shown to be an inspiring component of transformational leadership. (Simola, Barling ve Turner, 2010; Sosik, Godshalk, & Yammarino, 2004 cited in Ramazan & Zarife, 2014). The perception of the teachers that their principals act as if each of them is the best creates a sense of trust. This motivates and empowers teachers to achieve their best and as a result deliver excellent academic results. Actions by trusted principals are visibility and delegation of responsibilities (Louis et al, 2007).

Principals optimize performance and are able to convince teachers to strive for a higher level of achievement. High performing teachers have positive attitude and build high performing schools. However, for this to be attained, principals have the responsibility to inspire followers by demonstrating high performance expectations. When teachers were asked if their principals has a somewhat positive attitude and is ever present hence inspiring everyone to perform better, 49.3% strongly agreed as 39.1% of them agreed a point agreed by 95% of the principals. School leaders with a positive attitude and who inspire everyone to perform better builds highly motivated and committed teams. Ibrahim et al (2013) agrees that attitude towards teachers can motivate and inspire them to work towards the achievement of school goals.

When they responded to the question whether they are proud to work in their school 58.2% strongly agreed while 27.6 % agreed. This corresponds with the response by 95% of the principals agreed that teachers are proud to work in his or her school. Teachers will stay in school if they are proud, happy and believe they are contributing to the success of their students. Excellent academic performance is a product of sound and efficient leadership. From the study, school principals exercised transformational leadership behaviours as indicated by over 80% of the teachers who are proud to be work in their schools. According to findings by Marzano et al (2005), principals employing transformational leadership skills have a direct effect on student achievement and as such generate pride among followers. Additionally, teachers are inspired by principals who engage them with the schools mission, encouraging staff to come-up with new initiatives and maintaining high performance standards. Provision of a supportive environment where followers are treated with respect, collective responsibility is encouraged and aspirations of followers are taken into consideration creates a collaborative community.

Transformational leaders assume a proactive role in supporting teachers' instructional efforts by communicating directly and frequently with teachers about instruction and student needs. 90% of the principals reported that they provide continuous professional development in the areas needed to better meet students' needs a point which teachers supported as 49.3% strongly agreed and 32.4% agreed. Effective principals consistently remind teachers that academic achievement is a priority when they interact directly with them on instructional issues. Reitzug's (1989, cited in Stronge, Holly &

Catano, 2008), in the analysis of teacher and principal interactions revealed that in the school where students were achieving there were more interactions dealing with instructional matters. Moreover, these principals not only discussed academic issues, they guided, encouraged, reinforced, and promoted teachers' instructional efforts. Such principals were flexible and supportive with teachers' efforts to adapt, modify, or adjust instructional approaches to meet the needs of students. Support for the teachers' instructional efforts occurs because these instructional leaders are cognizant of what the teachers are doing.

#### 4. SUMMARY

The study sought to establish the effect of teacher's perception of the principal's transformational leadership capacities. The teachers rated their principals fairly on idealized attributes stating that their principals place great importance to the needs of others, serve as role models, instill trust and pride in working with them. When principals work towards taking care of intrinsic needs of teachers, they earn respect and this contributes positively to academic performance of the school. Teachers develop confidence that their efforts are appreciated and will therefore work towards greater achievement of school targets.

Teachers perceived that their principal's practice idealized behaviour in as far as sharing a strong sense of purpose with them that helps the team focus on attainment of school goals. Most teachers supported the fact that their principals considers ethical and moral consequences of decisions made. Teachers respect principals who involve them in decision making as this leads to the formation of high performing teams. This enables the school to achieve high academic performance as the principals encouraged everyone to share the risks involved in the decisions they make collectively.

From the study, teachers reported that their principals provide inspirational motivation as they displayed enthusiasm and optimism, involve them in developing the schools vision, communicated high performance expectations and demonstrated commitment to goals. Principals committed teachers to embrace the schools vision by clearly articulating the vision of the school. Schools where teachers were motivated to support the schools' vision expressed confidence that, as a team, they always achieved set goals and targets. This is further enhanced when the principal emphasizes and clearly communicates expectations. The principal who enhances staff motivation by being enthusiastic, optimistic, motivational and inspirational will always impact positively on the school's academic performance.

Teachers who are encouraged to come up with practical solutions to the challenges they face in their teaching roles are motivated to find workable approaches to performing tasks that impact on teaching and student learning. Principals play a major role in stimulating teachers to be innovative and creative in order to abandon practices that contribute to low performance. Considering the dynamism that is experienced in the field of education as well as emerging issues, principals are encouraged to adopt open systems whereby the ideas of teachers are considered to generate creative solutions to current challenges in school leadership. In this case, principals empower teachers to make decisions on curricular and instructional matters.

The study found out that principals have a duty to spend time to teach, coach and mentor in their schools as well as treat others as individuals rather than as members of a group. In so doing, principals support the development of individual strengths and capabilities. Individual teachers training needs should be identified for staff development to be realized. This contributes to staff motivation and further enable teachers to contribute meaningfully to school performance. Principals have the responsibility of identifying the capabilities of teachers as this provides opportunities for them to delegate duties according to their abilities. As such, teachers are encouraged to perform tasks with enthusiasm and passion. This will have a significant impact as the teachers will develop professionally as well contribute to the success of school's vision and mission hence improved learner outcomes.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

Teachers perceived their principals as demonstrating transformational leadership attributes in developing teams that are focused on goal attainment, sharing a strong sense of purpose, inspiring teams to perform to their best and motivating followers to be innovative in coming up with best practices that contribute to high achievement. The study further established that teachers perceived that the measure of the effectiveness of principal's leadership is exhibited by his/her ability to develop the capacity of others through coaching, mentorship and training so as to create high performing teams. Such teams are created by the leader by focusing the team towards achieving a common vision and collective decision making leading to a high performance.

Principals' commitment to the schools' vision motivates teachers to sacrifice their personal interests for the sake of the school. The transformational principals articulates the vision of the school clearly, demonstrates commitment to the vision and communicates goals to be achieved. Similarly, the aspirations and interests of staff should be considered. Teachers' attitudes and philosophies should be heard as active listening will show them that they are cared about leading to a higher productivity. Therefore, teachers who perceive their leader as transformational are motivated and inspired to work with enthusiasm to achieve high student academic performance.

## 6. RECOMMENDATION

The study also recommends that school principals need to value and support teachers by working with rather than through them, protect teachers against the excesses of mounting and sometimes contradictory external pressures and focus on sustaining school improvement by building teacher and school capacity. They should also appreciate teachers' perception of principals' leadership behaviour as a significant factor in school performance.

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