

INFLUENCE OF PRINCIPAL'S TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICE OF IDEALIZED INFLUENCE ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS STUDENTS IN KAJIADO NORTH SUB-COUNTY, KAJIADO COUNTY

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Accepted: September 8, 2025

ABSTRACT

The study examined the influence of principal's transformational leadership practice of idealized on academic performance of public secondary school students in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kajiado County. Guided by the Transformational Leadership Theory developed by James McGregor Burns (1978) and expanded by Avolio et al. (2021), the study employed a concurrent explanatory mixed-methods design. A cross-sectional survey was used for the quantitative approach, while a phenomenological design was adopted for the qualitative aspect. The study targeted principals, teachers, students, and Boards of Management. Stratified random sampling, purposive sampling, and census approaches were employed to select respondents, resulting in a sample of 136 teachers, 265 students, 8 principals, and 8 BoM members. Data collection tools included questionnaires and interview guides. Validity was ensured through expert review, and reliability was confirmed with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70. Findings revealed that principals who practice idealized influence through role modelling, integrity, discipline management, and upholding high moral standards positively influenced academic performance. Students viewed principals as role models who inspired them to work harder, while teachers affirmed that principals created environments of trust, collaboration, and integrity. The study concludes that idealized influence is a crucial dimension of transformational leadership in improving school performance and recommends that principals embrace role modelling practices, while policymakers integrate transformational leadership into professional development programs.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, Idealized influence, Academic performance, Principals, Kajiado County

CITATION: Mukuna, D. S., Piliyesi, E., & Mwal'wa, S. (2025). Influence of principal's transformational leadership practice of idealized influence on academic performance of public secondary schools students in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kajiado County, Kenya. *Reviewed Journal of Education Practice*, 5 (1), 92 – 99.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Education is widely acknowledged as the cornerstone for national development, individual growth, and social mobility. In Kenya, the performance of public secondary schools in national examinations remains a major determinant of students' future opportunities. However, persistent underperformance in some counties, including Kajiado, has raised questions about the adequacy of leadership practices in schools. Globally, leadership has been recognized as one of the most critical determinants of school effectiveness (Bass & Riggio, 2023). Transformational leadership has attracted attention because of its emphasis on vision, role modelling, motivation, and innovation. Among its four components, idealized influence is particularly important as it emphasizes leaders acting as role models, earning trust, respect, and admiration from followers. In schools, principals demonstrate idealized influence when they uphold integrity, discipline, and professionalism, and when they inspire teachers and learners through personal example.

Empirical evidence suggests that transformational leadership is strongly associated with student achievement. A study by Shafira (2021) on transformational leadership and collective efficacy in Australia found that, when school leaders practice idealized influence, they inspire followers to follow the vision set for both the individuals and the organization's success. This creates opportunities for follower's professional growth and development and consequently enhances learners' performance in state examination. A study by UNESCO (2021) on restructuring leadership for schools in USA shows that, creating opportunities for teachers to grow in their ethical professional practices cannot be overlooked if today's schools are to produce tomorrow's competitive school leaders. The practice of intellectual stimulation (IS) offers a conducive environment for both leaders and teachers to deliberate on issues that enable schools to thrive. Additionally, the importance of the principal sharing ideas openly with followers, there is still a disconnect in educational setup since school principals still remain the center of communication and sometimes, communication does not reach to the intended person.

Mascall (2022) conducted a study on leaders helping teachers improve students' outcome in South Africa and found that, school principals who displays intellectual stimulation challenges teacher to rethink old ways of doing things. These enable teachers to reassess their old values and beliefs for better way of performing their teaching tasks to bring about better outcome in the school. Similarly, Ted, Khalid, and Farouk (2022) in Egypt revealed that principals who demonstrated idealized influence inspired students to achieve better results. In sub-Saharan Africa, studies in Nigeria and Tanzania also show that principals who display moral authority and professional integrity enhance student outcomes (Hallinger, 2022). Despite government reforms in Kenya, such as strengthening teacher professional development and enhancing accountability measures, many schools in Kajiado North Sub-County continue to perform below the national average in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations. This suggests that structural reforms alone may be insufficient and that leadership practices, particularly idealized influence, could provide the missing link in motivating both teachers and students towards excellence. The present study therefore sought to examine the extent to which principal's transformational leadership practice of idealized influence affect the academic performance of public secondary schools in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kajiado County.

Statement of the Problem

The Ministry of Education has made efforts to improve the quality of education by continuously improving the syllabus to meet the current need for education and by also raising the performance standards (Koech, 2022). In Kenya, the academic performance of secondary schools in KNEC exams has remained low despite the government's efforts to improve the performance of principals and teachers through professional development plans (Asuga et al., 2024). This continuity of poor academic performance among students in public secondary schools has thus become a major concern for educators, parents, and policymakers. In recent years, schools in Kenya have reported declining student outcomes, particularly in core subjects such as

Mathematics, Science, and English. One contributing factor that has gained attention is principal leadership style Vagisha (2022). According to Kaimenyi, 2024 and Kenya National Examination Council [KNEC], 2023, learning outcomes at the secondary school level are still weak, with 65 percent of KCSE candidates failing to achieve C+, which is the minimum requirement for admission to university as depicted by the 2020-2024 KCSE results. Further, according to Kajiado North Sub County (2023) report on Secondary Schools, the overall performance was below average and thus many students did not manage to qualify for university. There are also low rate of transition of learners from secondary schools to post-primary and tertiary institutions. In addition, many secondary schools in Kajiado North Sub County face hardship due to the adverse weather conditions, economic activities and poverty levels. This was also replicated nationally where only 42% of the students nationally qualified for university in 2020 and 47% in 2022 (Kenya National Examinations Council, 2023, 2024). Various studies have looked in leadership styles in secondary schools but there exist gaps. To improve understanding and provide solutions to these knowledge gaps, the current study looked into principal's transformational leadership practice of idealized influence on academic performance of students of public secondary schools in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kajiado County.

Research Question

To what extent does a principal's transformational leadership practice of idealized influence affect the academic performance of public secondary schools in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kajiado County?

LLITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

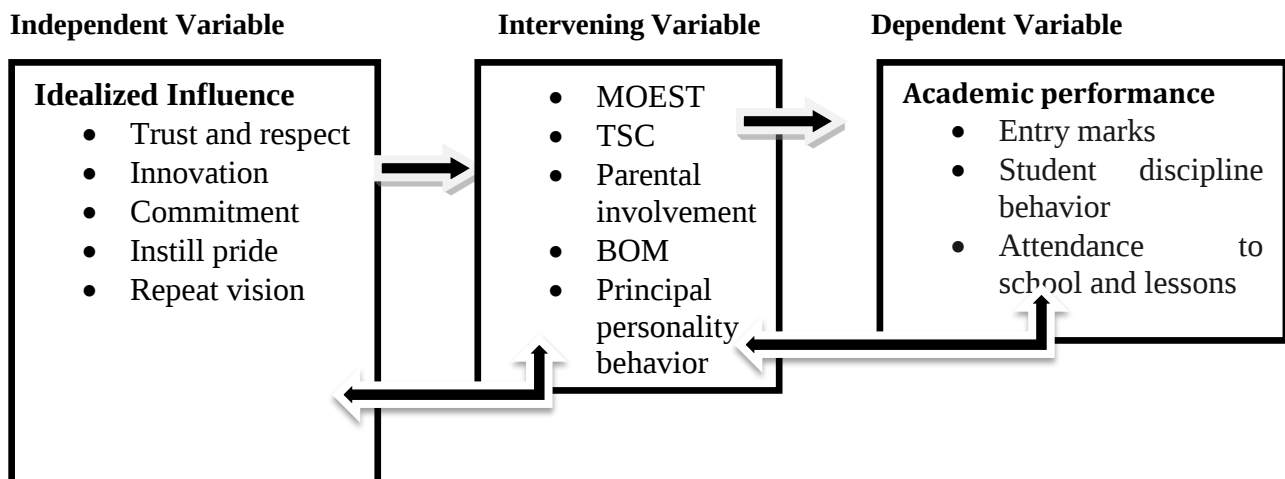
This study was anchored on transformational leadership theory, which was introduced by James Mc Gregory 1978 (Bass 2023). To him, the theory stipulates that transformational leaders are those who transform their followers into leaders themselves. Transformational leadership takes place when leaders interact with followers in ways that enhance their creativity and motivation in the organization (Bass, 2020). Hughes (2024) noted that idealize influence of transformational leadership is the best leadership and can be applied in all circumstances. Idealized influence according to Lorgwell-mckean (2021), refers to use of integrity by the principal to the followers as a way of improve performance. The principals can become more effective in schools if they adopt idealized influence behavior (Veysel, 2024). Idealized leader is perceived by the followers as one who has moral power as well as helping the followers become idealized influenced in their minds. Importantly, displays ideal behavior for the followers in the organization (Balyer, 2022).

Studies that have used the transformational leadership theory have reported its effectiveness in transforming of the low performing institutions to high performing. Anderson and Sun (2023) noted that most of the studies have used transformational leadership theory since it is strongly related to follower job satisfaction, inspiration and organisation performance and follower commitment to change. Further, Steyn (2022) indicate that the organization should see productivity gains when a transformational leader comes on board. Followers are motivated to do what is asked of them because the whole work experience is perceived as a purposeful and enjoyable adventure (David, Wong, & Choy, 2025). This theory has its share of limitations, despite being widely associated with organizational efficiency. Submission and unquestionable royalty are likely to occur in a situation where transformational theory is practiced. This is likely to make followers conduct actions they would otherwise not undertake. Consequently, if the leaders' motive or ethical standards are poor, they can manipulate their loyal constituency (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2023). This theory was preferred despites its weakness because, it strongly relates to this study which links principal's transformational leadership style and its influence on academic performance of public secondary schools in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kajiado County.

The principals are seen to affect students' academic performance through different leadership characteristics including transformational leadership. For the school to perform they need a transformational

principal who will be able to empower teachers and motivate them to focus on the school goals and objective and go beyond the personal consideration. This will enable teachers to give their very best and strive to realize the vision of the school. Principals will also encourage teachers to innovative and work as a team for the benefit of the school goals and objectives. Theory of transformative leadership style by is therefore found suitable for the study because in educational situations transformational leaders are expected to raise followers' consciousness by engaging them in the purposeful and self-generated notion of work.

Conceptual Framework



Source: Researcher (2024)

Conceptual and Empirical Literature

Idealized influence refers to leaders acting as role models who demonstrate high ethical standards, integrity, and vision. According to Bass (2021), leaders who embody idealized influence inspire trust and respect, which followers emulate in their professional practice. Leaders who use idealized influence set the standards for morality and ethics in terms of decision making in their organizations thus encouraging their team to outperform their own expectations for the sake of the whole organization. In the idealized influence leaders earn credit from the followers by considering the need for others rather than their own personal needs. Such leaders will always avoid the use of power for their own gain but for the gain of their team and the organization as a whole (Al-Mawali, 2023). In schools, this means that principals act as moral compasses who guide teachers and students by example.

Evidence on the influence of transformational leadership on teacher organisational commitment was provided by Khasawneh et al. (2022) who conducted relevant research in Jordan. They used descriptive statistics and stepwise regression analysis on data from a sample of 340 vocational teachers. They found that the link between the components of transformational leadership and organisational commitment was positive, moderate and significant. The study recommended further studies on other transformational practices. Kien (2022) conducted a study in Israel about pre-recorded lectures, live online lectures, and student academic achievement. The study used a randomized experiment to compare the impacts of live online and pre-recorded lectures on student achievement. The study concluded that the use of digital resources was helpful, especially in the conduct of online lessons during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was further discovered that pre-recorded lectures lower the ability of students' academic achievement but have no effect on higher-ability students' academic achievement. In particular, being taught via pre-recorded lectures as opposed to live online lectures through the use of digital resources decreased the likelihood of answering exam questions correctly.

Furthermore, being taught via pre-recorded lectures in the early weeks of the semester compared to the later weeks tended to be more harmful to students' academic achievement

Fababier and Raymunda (2024) sought to determine the effect of transformational leadership of school heads and the individual work performance of teachers. The study used a quantitative non-experimental design via correlational technique. The study sample included 256 teachers among public elementary schools. The researcher utilized a stratified random sampling technique and an online survey mode of data collection. Findings showed that there is a very high level of transformational leadership and individual teacher work performance. Also, results revealed that there is a significant relationship between transformational leadership and individual teacher work performance.

Dzakpasu, Amankwah, Konin, and Amanfo (2022) sought to determine the relationship between leadership styles of head teachers and teachers' job satisfaction in Kwabre East Municipal, Ghana. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The sample size was 286 teachers. A questionnaire was used to collect data. Results indicated that head teachers predominantly used a transformational leadership style, and teachers generally had a moderate level of job satisfaction. Furthermore, it was found that the transformational leadership style of head teachers correlated significantly with the teachers' job satisfaction. Transformative leaders understand that individuals have different needs, talents, interests and different levels of energies/potentials hence they strive to support each to grow by understanding that their growth boosts their morale which spills over to institutional performance. Such leaders exhibit high concern not only for institutional excellence but equally concerned with the well-being of the human resource

Muga (2022) examined principals' leadership styles and their relationship with teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Siaya, Kisumu, and Kajiado counties, Kenya. The study adopted a correlation research design. The target population comprised of all the 397 principals, 389 deputy principals, 1,190 heads of departments, and 2,208 teachers in public secondary schools in Siaya, Kisumu, and Kajiado counties who had served for at least two years in the same school. The data was collected using Teacher Job Satisfaction Survey Questionnaire. The findings established a positive and significant correlation between transformational leadership style and teachers' job satisfaction. Transformational leadership help build a common goal between leaders and the led in an organization. The leader pays attention to transforming others by helping one another, to encourage, to look after one another and to pay attention to the development of the organization as a whole. However, gaps remain in understanding how idealized influence manifests in schools facing persistent challenges such as poverty, cultural diversity, and resource constraints, which are typical of Kajiado North Sub-County. This study therefore focused exclusively on how idealized influence contributes to academic performance in this unique Kenyan context.

METHODOLOGY

A concurrent explanatory mixed-methods design was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a holistic understanding of the research question. The quantitative component employed a cross-sectional survey targeting teachers and students, while the qualitative design used phenomenology to capture lived experiences from principals and Board of Management members. The target population comprised 21 public secondary schools. From this population, 8 principals, 136 teachers, 265 students, and 8 BoM members were included. Stratified random sampling was used for teachers and students to ensure representation across school categories, while census and purposive sampling were used for principals and BoM members. Data collection tools included structured questionnaires for students and teachers, and interview guides for principals and BoM members. Validity of instruments was ensured through expert judgment from university supervisors and a pilot test conducted in two schools outside the study area. Reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients above 0.70 deemed satisfactory. Ethical considerations included obtaining research permits from NACOSTI, informed consent from participants, and ensuring anonymity and confidentiality.

FINDINGS

Table 1: Principal's Role Modelling (n=375)

Principal's Role Model	Frequency	Percentage
Upholding good morals	72	19.2
Good relationship with students and staff	114	30.4
Working hard to achieve goals	168	44.8

Source: Field Data (2025)

The findings indicate that 44.8% of students believed principals role modelled them through working hard to achieve goals, 30.4% pointed to good relationships with staff and students, and 19.2% cited upholding good morals.

Table 2: Measures to Uphold High Standards of Ethical and Moral Conduct (n=375)

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Discipline management	104	27.7
Spiritual nourishment	78	20.8
Sensitizing students on rules and regulations	83	22.1

Source: Field Data (2025)

The results reveal that 27.7% of students perceived discipline management as the main approach principals used to uphold ethical standards, 22.1% mentioned sensitization on rules and regulations, while 20.8% highlighted spiritual nourishment. Interview responses confirmed that students were oriented on rules upon entry, rules were displayed on notice boards, prefects reminded peers of regulations, and religious leaders were invited weekly to nurture moral values.

Table 3: Teachers' Opinions on Principal's Idealized Consideration (n=136)

Key: SD=Strongly disagree, D=Disagree, NS=Not Sure, A=Agree, SA= Strongly agree, M=Mean

Statements	SD	D	NS	A	SA	Mean
Caring and trust among staff members	0	0.7%	1.5%	52.9%	44.8%	4.33
High integrity of professional practices	0	0	0.9%	40.1%	59.0%	4.60
Atmosphere for collaborative learning	0	0	1.4%	59.9%	38.7%	4.39
Models problem-solving techniques	0	0	0.9%	37.3%	61.8%	4.62

Source: Field Data (2025)

Teachers strongly agreed that principals modelled problem-solving techniques (M = 4.62), demonstrated professional integrity (M = 4.60), provided collaborative learning environments (M = 4.39), and promoted caring and trust among staff (M = 4.33). The findings confirm that principals' practice of idealized influence significantly affects academic performance in Kajiado North Sub-County. Students overwhelmingly viewed principals as role models who inspire them through hard work, moral conduct, and good relationships, while teachers affirmed that principals create environments characterized by integrity, trust, collaboration, and problem-solving.

The finding that almost half of the students were inspired by principals' hard work resonates with Bass and Riggio (2023), who argue that transformational leaders inspire commitment by demonstrating diligence and dedication to goals. When principals exhibit commitment to their duties, students and teachers are more likely to emulate these qualities, which positively influences academic outcomes. The emphasis on discipline management and sensitization of students reflects the role of ethical leadership in creating conducive learning environments. Hallinger (2022) observed that schools where leaders consistently enforce rules and provide

moral guidance are more effective in promoting student learning. The incorporation of spiritual nourishment as a disciplinary strategy reflects a local adaptation of idealized influence in the Kenyan context, demonstrating that leadership practices are shaped by cultural realities.

Teachers' perspectives underscore the importance of principals modelling professional integrity and problem-solving skills. Ahmad, Khalid, and Farouk (2024) emphasized that leaders who demonstrate integrity and are responsive to follower needs foster collective efficacy. Zdaniuk and Bobocel (2025) also concluded that leaders with idealized influence build trust and innovation by embodying the behaviours they expect from others. In this study, principals' mentoring of young teachers, supervision feedback, and professional dress code reflect practical enactments of idealized influence. Overall, the findings suggest that idealized influence is not merely symbolic but has tangible academic impacts. By fostering discipline, collaboration, and role modelling, principals contribute directly to improved student outcomes. These findings are consistent with those of Shafira (2021) in Australia and Ted et al. (2022) in Egypt, as well as local research in Machakos and Makueni (Kilonzo & Kasivu, 2020; Adams & Anantatmula, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that the transformational leadership practice of idealized influence significantly enhances the academic performance of public secondary schools in Kajiado North Sub-County. Principals who model integrity, discipline, and professionalism inspire teachers and students to emulate positive behaviours, which contributes to the creation of a school culture that is conducive to effective teaching and learning. The findings demonstrate that when principals serve as role models by working hard, upholding moral standards, and maintaining good relationships, they influence both the attitudes and the behaviours of teachers and learners. Teachers reported that such leadership fosters environments of collaboration, trust, and professional integrity, while students recognized that it motivated them to focus on academic goals and discipline. The conclusion therefore reinforces the assertion of transformational leadership theory that leaders who practice idealized influence generate respect and trust from their followers, which in turn motivates improved performance. In the context of Kajiado North Sub-County, this dimension of leadership provides a strong basis for explaining variations in school performance beyond structural factors such as resources or infrastructure.

In light of these findings, the study makes several recommendations. Principals should consciously and consistently embrace idealized influence by modelling ethical behaviour, fairness, and professionalism in all aspects of school leadership. Their role as exemplars of integrity and discipline should be strengthened, as this has a direct impact on the attitudes and behaviours of both teachers and students. Teachers and students should also be encouraged to align themselves with the positive leadership practices demonstrated by principals and to emulate these behaviours in their daily work and study.

At the policy level, the Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission should incorporate transformational leadership training, with a strong emphasis on idealized influence, into ongoing professional development programs for school leaders. Boards of Management should support principals by reinforcing discipline structures, upholding ethical standards, and facilitating mentorship systems that ensure continuous professional growth among teachers.

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