

**INFLUENCE OF ADMINISTRATOR'S DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP STYLES ON
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN
NAROK SOUTH SUB-COUNTY, NAROK COUNTY, KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

The research aimed to examine the influence of administrator's democratic leadership styles on the academic performance of public secondary school students in Narok South Sub- County, Narok County, Kenya. The research was guided by the following research question: To what extent does democratic leadership influence the academic performance of public secondary school students? The study was anchored by Path Path-Goal Theory. A concurrent explanatory mixed methods design was used. In quantitative design, a cross-sectional survey was used, and in qualitative design, phenomenological research was adopted. The study targeted 696 students, 100 teachers, 40 schools, and 40 administrators. A stratified sampling method was used to sample the 8 schools. Yamane's (1967) formula was used to select 80 teachers and 254 students. Purposive sampling was used to select 8 principals. Data for students and teachers were collected using questionnaires, and an in-depth interview guide was used for school administrators. Content validity and reliability of the tools were determined before data collection. Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 and above was considered satisfactory and reliable. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS Version 25, employing descriptive data like frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviation, and were presented in tables. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically and findings reported in narrative form. Pearson Correlation was used to test the hypothesis. The study recommends that administrators adopt democratic and transformational leadership styles as compared to instructional leadership. The study suggested a comparative analysis be conducted for different sub-counties or counties within Kenya to examine whether variations in administrators' leadership styles produce similar or different effects on academic performance and thus broaden the external validity beyond Narok South Sub-County.

Keywords: Democratic leadership styles, Academic performance, Administrators

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BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The concept of administrator leadership styles refers to the usual manner that school leaders or principals lead, drive, and manage teachers and students (Northouse, 2022). Leadership, according to UNICEF (2025), is prioritizing the needs of the community, stakeholders, and team members, with a focus on empathy and ethical stewardship. Therefore, leadership is a process where an individual can stimulate other people to achieve a common goal willingly without fear of the consequences of non-compliance. Portter (2022) noted that the democratic leadership style is distinctive in the ever-changing field of educational leadership because shared decision-making, collaborative processes, and an unwavering commitment to diversity mark it. Democratic leaders proactively engage teachers, staff, and students in decision-making. This particular approach places importance on including collective input, fostering collaboration, and establishing agreement. Within the context of high school settings, democratic leadership aims to establish an all-encompassing atmosphere that takes into account a wide range of perspectives in order to shape educational policies and practices. Democratic leadership instills a sense of assurance among staff and teachers, empowering them to fulfill their responsibilities effectively. Moreover, it recognizes and incentivizes innovative instructors and fosters positive change. Additionally, it creates avenues for growth and development for staff and teachers who may encounter setbacks, enabling them to enhance their professional capabilities.

According to UNESCO (2016), the majority of the administrators in developed countries use democratic leadership styles because they are professionally trained and are also held accountable for deteriorating school performance. Mutinda and Wambua (2022) conducted a study in Kenya that examined the effects of leadership styles on the general performance of the school, teachers' job satisfaction, and student discipline. The findings indicated that schools with good leaders had an improvement in academic performance, teachers' motivation, and discipline. Leadership styles provide a culture of positive learning that facilitates the students' academic and general development. School leaders who provide a conducive learning environment enable students to achieve better in terms of academic performance. In another study, Ngunyi and Ndurumo (2024) investigated the impact of democratic and transformational leadership styles on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Lari Sub-County. The research revealed a significant positive correlation between principals who effectively communicated a compelling vision and inspired their staff, and the improved academic outcomes of their students. This underscores the pivotal role that school leaders play in fostering an environment conducive to academic excellence.

In recent years, there have been noticeable trends and difficulties in the academic performance of Narok County's public secondary schools. One of the main measures of academic success in the area is the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education exam. Academic difficulties affect a substantial percentage of Narok County's schools. According to reports, almost 80% of the county's schools perform poorly academically and participate in few national-level activities outside of music (Kenyatta University, 2023). This figure emphasizes the necessity of focused actions to improve countywide educational outcomes. According to a study conducted in Narok South Sub-County, poor academic performance is a result of ineffective school administration (Kenyatta University, 2023). Therefore, suitable leadership could close the gap by significantly enhancing academic achievement. Thus, the need to study the current study that investigated the influence of administrator's democratic leadership style on the academic performance of students in public secondary schools across Narok South Sub-County, Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

Leadership styles by the school administrators are significant in shaping academic performance, and this has become a concern among education stakeholders (Northouse, 2022). In many public secondary schools, administrators play a crucial role in fostering student engagement, ensuring adequate learning resources, and motivating teachers. However, in some schools, ineffective leadership styles have led to

declining academic performance, lack of student involvement, and low teacher morale. According to UNESCO (2021), schools with quality leadership in sub-Saharan Africa have 20–30% enhanced student participation. World Bank (2023) statistics indicate that poor leadership is responsible for low teacher morale in over 35% of government schools.

In Kenya, the Teachers Service Commission (2021) put in place schools that had active administrators, having achieved teacher satisfaction of over 70%, while poorly managed schools achieved less than 40%, and learner engagement decreased by over 30% in schools where administrators did not interact with learners (Ministry of Education, 2022). According to the Ministry of Education (2020), the nation's secondary school dropout rate stands at approximately 15%, and is higher in rural and marginalized communities, up to 25%, where school administration and administrative support are typically lowest. In addition, the UNICEF report (2021) showed that students in poorly governed schools are more than twice as likely to be dropouts compared to students who attend schools with supportive, effective leadership. This outcry has prompted the need for current research.

Studies have highlighted that schools with effective democratic leadership structures tend to perform better academically due to improved teacher motivation, student engagement, and the availability of necessary teaching and learning resources in Narok South Sub-County. However, in many public secondary schools within the county, democratic leadership inefficiencies have contributed to persistent under-performance when taking national tests like the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). To bridge these gaps, this study sought to explore the influence of administrator's democratic leadership style on the academic performance of students in public secondary schools across Narok South Sub-County, Narok County Kenya.

Research Question

To what extent does democratic leadership influence the academic performance of public secondary school students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the Transformational leadership theory which offers a stimulating framework by which to examine educational leadership. Although originally put forward by Downton and later modified by Burns, more recent scholarship has transferred the application and specified the theory within the context of education. Transformational leadership emphasizes the mutual process by which leaders and followers energize and develop each other toward shared goals. Ng (2024) thinks that in modern schools, this style of leadership guarantees a culture of teamwork where school leaders guide students and teachers towards academic success academically. For the assessment and measurement of transformational leadership behavior, the Multi-Factor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) has been consistently constructed to reflect contemporary leadership contexts (Ghasabeh, Soosay, & Reaiche, 2021).

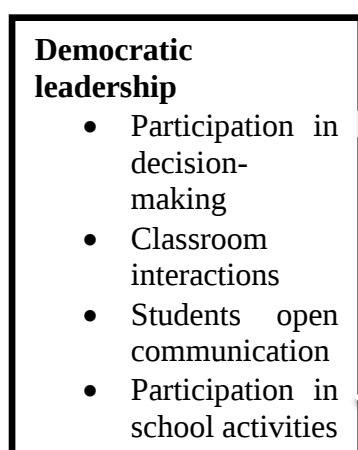
The theory is underpinned by four primary components, often referred to as the "4 I's" of transformational leadership. Idealized influence, the first dimension, refers to the leader's ability to act as a moral exemplar and to gain followers' trust and respect by consistently demonstrating ethical behavior and commitment to institutional goals (Afshari & Gibson, 2023). The second, inspirational motivation, is to articulate a definitive and compelling vision that awakens hope, interest, and a sense of direction in the learning community (Wang, Tsai, & Tsai, 2021). Third, intellectual stimulation provokes innovation and critical thinking among students and employees by forcing existing assumptions and encouraging problem-solving in both the administrative and classroom environments (Hao, He, & Long, 2021). Finally, individualized consideration embodies the emotional intelligence of a leader to the team members' personal development needs, expressed through mentoring, coaching, and emotional support that encourages individual growth (Nguni & Hermelink, 2023). The dimensions work jointly to reconfigure the school community as an

active, responsive, and compassionate organization.

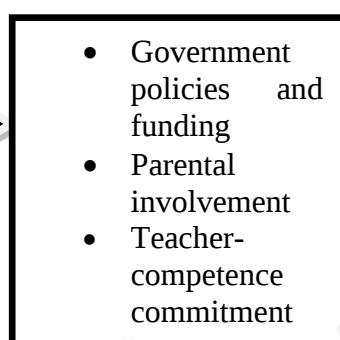
Transformational leadership competencies in education are well-documented. Wang et al. (2021) observe that this kind of leadership significantly boosts job satisfaction and employee motivation, the hallmark of attaining a positive school climate. Transformational school leaders are also seen as visionaries who not only set high standards but also facilitate pedagogical creativity and collaborative learning methods (Afshari & Gibson, 2023). Ng (2022) emphasizes that the adaptability of this model makes it especially suited for schools going through fast-paced technological and curriculum changes. By creating trust, loyalty, and commitment, transformational leaders build strong working relationships among school administrators, teachers, and students, which form the cornerstone of academic success and organizational stability (Nguni & Hermelink, 2019). Despite its benefits, the theory has not been free from criticisms. Alatawi (2021) states that the theoretical boundaries of transformational leadership are not well established yet, which makes it difficult to distinguish from other leadership constructs, such as charismatic or servant leadership. Indistinctness in theory can lead to inconsistencies in the application and study of the model. Also, Ghasabeh et al. (2025) warn that the emphasis of the theory on charisma could lead to an overdependence on a single leader and, therefore, to the erosion of the development of collective or distributed leadership mechanisms in schools. Hao et al. (2021) further contribute that transformational leadership's abstract and subjective qualities complicate its being empirically captured and its effects measured. Kroll and Vogel (2022) discuss the risks of charisma's abuse, with that excessively charismatic leaders may utilize their power for political or personal reasons rather than for the institution's well-being. To address these shortcomings, there must be the incorporation of complementary theories as well as the triangulation of data sources in leadership research. Emphasizing collective practices and shared leadership roles can minimize the threats of over-leader centrality. Despite its critics, Transformational Leadership Theory is one of the most applicable leadership models to education and other arenas. Understanding how school leaders may inspire, motivate, and engage students to improve academic performance is extremely appropriate. Researchers warn against its excessive focus on charisma, however, and suggest combining it with additional leadership philosophies for a more balanced approach. The thesis presents the administrators' leadership styles being used by public secondary school administrators in Narok South Sub-County, Kenya. Contextual data also grounds the findings on real practices. The theory limitations, therefore do not invalidate the applicability and precision of the study.

Conceptual Framework

Independent Variable



Intervening Variable



Dependent Variable

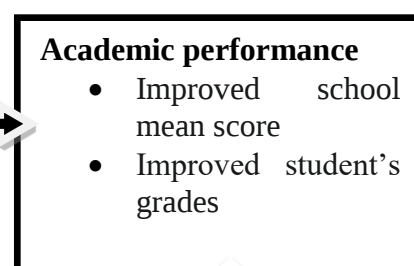


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher (2024)

Empirical Literature Review

Schnitzler, Holzberger, and Seidel's (2021) examined the interactions between behavioural, cognitive, and emotional components of student engagement in particular learners as well as the relationships between these engagement patterns and academic accomplishment and self-concept in Germany. The researchers used a person-centered approach to find unique engagement among learners' profiles and investigate how these profiles relate to academic results. The results highlight the significance of encouraging comprehensive student engagement to improve educational outcomes by indicating a significant correlation between levels of engagement and improved academic self-concept and accomplishment. In Canada, Chitpin (2020) conducted a research on how principals might help close the achievement gap in Ontario by involving students in decision-making. A qualitative case study technique was used. The participants included five respondents from the Ontario School District. Data was gathered using semi-structured and open-ended interviews. Results showed that teacher-centered instruction is better than student-centered instruction. These participants created evaluation policies to meet the demands of governments and educational institutions rather than to meet the needs of specific students.

In Cross Waterway State, Nigeria, Arop et al. (2020) studied the academic achievement of scientific students in secondary schools and school management practices. Data was collected from 893 educators and 1252 students. Data collection tools included questionnaires and students' tests. Key management strategies, including student participation, teacher motivation, school supervision, record keeping, student discipline, and good communication, were discovered to be highly correlated with students' academic achievement. Maganga (2023) analyzed influence on secondary school students' academic performance in Tanzania. Thirty-three participants, comprising parents, teachers, and children were sampled. Data was collected using focus group guides, interview guides, and document analysis. Two of the major obstacles to academic achievement were few resources and language barriers. Irungu et al. (2021) investigated the impact of managers' learner engagement strategies on secondary school students' academic performance in Kirinyaga and Murang'a counties. The sample was 205 principals and 367 teachers. Data was collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. The findings showed that school administrators encouraged collaboration in the schools. Stakeholders participated in networks and connections that promoted cooperation and improved academic achievement. Lemein, Koech, and Sang (2023) examined effect of the managerial skills of head teachers on the academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Narok South Sub-County. Descriptive survey research design was used. The sample was 33 principals, 33 deputy principals, and 66 department heads. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and interview schedules. The findings indicated that there was a statistically significant correlation between the principals' engagement practices such as motivating students to engage, setting academic expectations, and monitoring progress and improved academic performance.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed method utilizing cross-sectional survey and phenomenological research designs. The target was 40 public secondary schools of Narok South Sub-County, Narok County. The target population was 40 principals, 100 teachers, and 696 students. Purposive sampling was used to sample eight principals, simple random sampling to sample 80 teachers, and stratified random sampling to sample 254 students. The research instruments were questionnaires and interview guides. Reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient while dependability of the questionnaire was ensured through consultation and through analysis by the University research experts. The study analyzed data both quantitatively and qualitatively.

FINDINGS

Table 1: Students Perceptions on Democratic leadership and its influence on Students Academic Performance (n=250)

Statement	SD(%)	D(%)	N(%)	A(%)	SA(%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
The principal regularly engages with students to understand our needs.	26 (10.4%)	54 (21.6%)	39 (15.6%)	80 (32.0%)	51 (20.4%)	3.30	1.30
I feel free to share academic concerns with the school administration.	38 (15.2%)	33 (13.2%)	18 (7.2%)	92 (36.8%)	69 (27.6%)	3.48	1.44
Student views are respected and considered in school decision-making.	35 (14.0%)	33 (13.2%)	24 (9.6%)	67 (26.8%)	91 (36.4%)	3.58	1.47
The principal encourages student participation in academic-related programs.	21 (8.4%)	51 (20.4%)	7 (2.8%)	121 (48.4%)	50 (20.0%)	3.52	1.24
When I am involved in school activities, my academic performance improves.	27 (10.8%)	31 (12.4%)	32 (12.8%)	101 (40.4%)	59 (23.6%)	3.54	1.31
Average						3.48	1.35

Source: Field Data (2025)

Results revealed a moderate favorable attitude towards the involvement of administrators in academic affairs, though there were mixed responses. The students agreed that; the principal regularly engages with students to understand their needs (M=3.30, Std. Dev= 1.30), they felt comfortable discussing academic problems with the school administration (M=3.48, Std. Dev= 1.44), their opinions were taken into account when making decisions (M=3.52, Std. Dev= 1.24), administrators encourage their participation in academic programs (M=3.54, Std. Dev= 1.31), and engaging in school activities improved students' academic performance (M=3.54, Std. Dev= 1.31). In general, the composite mean for all five items was 3.48 with a standard deviation of 1.35, indicating moderate student perceptions with high variability.

Table 2: Teachers Perceptions on Democratic leadership and its influence on Students Academic Performance (N=80)

Statement	SD(%)	D(%)	N(%)	A(%)	SA(%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
The school leadership promotes teamwork and cooperation among staff.	2 (2.5%)	5 (6.3%)	4 (5.0%)	30 (37.5%)	39 (48.8%)	4.23	0.95
Teachers are given opportunities to collaborate in school decisions.	3 (3.8%)	4 (5.0%)	5 (6.3%)	28 (35.0%)	40 (50.0%)	4.23	0.98
The administration respects teachers' opinions during planning.	2 (2.5%)	3 (3.8%)	4 (5.0%)	32 (40.0%)	39 (48.8%)	4.29	0.93
Teachers willingly assist each other in academic responsibilities.	1 (1.3%)	2 (2.5%)	3 (3.8%)	34 (42.5%)	40 (50.0%)	4.36	0.89
There is effective communication among teachers and administrators.	2 (2.5%)	3 (3.8%)	4 (5.0%)	31 (38.8%)	40 (50.0%)	4.29	0.91
Staff meetings encourage team spirit and problem-solving.	2 (2.5%)	3 (3.8%)	4 (5.0%)	29 (36.3%)	42 (52.5%)	4.33	0.88
I feel valued and supported by my colleagues and school leaders.	2 (2.5%)	3 (3.8%)	5 (6.3%)	28 (35.0%)	42 (52.5%)	4.26	0.94
Joint planning among teachers improves curriculum implementation.	2 (2.5%)	3 (3.8%)	4 (5.0%)	30 (37.5%)	41 (51.3%)	4.29	0.92
Average						4.28	0.93

Source: Field Data (2025)

Findings from the teachers more agreement and consistency of teacher response were elicited in the scenario of administrators' involvement. The teachers strongly agreed that; school leadership promotes teamwork and collaboration (M=4.23, Std. Dev= 0.95), teachers are given the opportunity to be involved in school decisions (M=4.23, Std. Dev= 0.98), teachers' opinions are taken into consideration when planning (M=4.29, Std. Dev= 0.93), teachers assist each other in academic activities (M=4.36, Std. Dev= 0.89), there is effective communication between teachers and school leaders (M=4.29, Std. Dev= 0.91), staff meetings promoting team spirit (M=4.33, Std. Dev= 0.88), teachers felt valued and supported by leadership and colleagues (M=4.26, Std. Dev= 0.94), and collaborative planning improves curriculum implementation (M=4.29, Std. Dev= 0.92). The mean of all eight items was a strong 4.28, with low standard deviation (0.93), indicating strong and stable perceptions of administrator support and collaboration on the part of the teachers. A contrast between the teachers and students is evident. While teachers' responses indicate an exceedingly positive and cooperative relationship with school administrators, students describe more mixed experiences. Teachers feel that they are respected, involved in decision-making, and supported in their academic role, as indicated by the high mean scores and low variability. On the other hand, moderate mean scores and high standard deviations for the students indicate variation in administrative involvement as perceived by the students. As much as some students value administrative support, a fair number of them do not necessarily feel engaged, heard, or encouraged. The implication of these findings is that while school leaders are accomplishing professional collaboration and positive teacher climate, the same engagement and trust levels have not been fully extended to students. In support of the results, Schnitzler, Holzberger, and Seidel's (2021) highlight the significance of encouraging comprehensive student engagement to improve educational outcomes by indicating a significant correlation between higher levels of engagement and improved academic self-concept and accomplishment.

Table 3: Qualitative Results from Principals on Democratic leadership and its influence on Students Academic Performance

Theme	Sub-theme	Description
Inclusive and Respectful Communication	Clear Communication	Using official languages (English, Kiswahili) to ensure understanding among students and teachers (Principals 1, 6).
	Respectful Conflict Resolution	Employing polite, harassment-free communication to resolve issues, fostering a supportive environment
	Feedback-Driven Communication	Following up to confirm understanding and emphasizing feedback through formal and informal channels
Stakeholder Participation in Decision-Making	Collaborative Decision-Making	Involving all stakeholders (students, teachers, parents) in approving decisions, enhancing inclusivity
	Student Involvement in Governance	Encouraging students to contribute to school rules and well-being programs, promoting ownership
	Academic Rewards	Providing tangible incentives (e.g., gifts, trips) to motivate high-performing students
Incentives and Recognition	Public Recognition	Acknowledging academic growth in assemblies or staff meetings to inspire students
	Motivational Engagement	Organizing motivational speakers to boost student aspiration and academic effort
	Co-Curricular Activities	Offering school outings, debates, sports, music, and drama to support talent development and study balance
Holistic Engagement through Extracurricular Activities	Interactive Learning	Incorporating interactive academic activities to enhance engagement and learning outcomes
Student Empowerment and Leadership Development	Leadership Opportunities	Providing students with roles to develop leadership skills, fostering confidence
	Contribution to School Programs	Encouraging student input in school policies (e.g., well-being programs), enhancing responsibility

Source: Field Data (2025)

The findings revealed that principals promoted student engagement through communication, respect, and motivation, and provided a friendly learning environment. Principals prioritized recognition of progress, rewards, and co-curricular activities such as trips, retreats, and sports debates to encourage participation. Experiential learning and leadership opportunities were also promoted by administrators, and students were motivated to take an active part in the life of the school. Student engagement was shaped in general through a synthesis of academic care, recognition, and holistic development activities. The findings stated that principals considered effective communication as the foundation of leadership. Communication was also termed inclusive, responsive, and grounded on feedback to ensure accuracy and collective responsibility in decision-making. Principals reiterated student participation through academic and extracurricular activities. These approaches highlighted that activity beyond academics not only motivates students but also promotes all-round development, contrasting study with talent development and health. In concurrence, Muma and Odhiambo (2022) indicates that learning outcomes are improved when principals connect with their stakeholders through planned meetings and take their expertise into account when assigning tasks.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings indicated that no single leadership style is universally effective; rather, positive impacts on academic performance are often linked to democratic and transformational styles, while instructional can have mixed or negative effects. Successful leaders create a positive and collaborative learning environment through clear communication, support, and the provision of necessary resources, ultimately promoting higher levels of motivation and achievement among students. Leaders need to enforce clear rules, provide adequate teaching materials, and facilitate teacher development workshops. A leader's democratic style significantly shapes the school's atmosphere, and styles that promote a positive and collaborative environment lead to better results.

The study recommends that school principals promote student involvement through the institutionalization of means of participating in administrative decision-making and leadership. This would promote inclusivity, foster ownership of the learning process by the students, and narrow the gap between the perceptions of the teachers and the students regarding administrative support. Another essential recommendation is developing the communication systems at schools. Administrators should put up open, responsive, and feedback-oriented communication networks that will foster trust and enable students as well as teachers to be heard and supported in schoolwork as well as extracurricular activities. The research recommends that administrators adopt transformational and participatory leadership styles as compared to instructional leadership. Through collaboration, trust, and partnership among stakeholders, school leaders are able to create a unified learning environment that enhances academic performance and sustainable school improvement.

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