

Donnish Journal of Educational Research and Reviews
Vol 2(3) pp. 039-047 April, 2015.
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Original Research Article

School Heads' Leadership Traits and Learners' Academic Attainment in Uganda's High Schools

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Accepted 18th February, 2015.

This paper analyses the correlation between School heads' leadership traits and learners' attainment in Uganda, with a sample of 12 secondary schools in Kampala Metropolitan City. The study findings were as such: High-performing schools register high student grades ($\mu=68.47$) compared to Moderately-performing schools ($\mu=58.2$) and Low-performing schools ($\mu=37.41$). Secondly, the situational leader is the most appropriate trait to account for improved academic attainment ($F=18.41$), followed by the democratic trait ($F=17.06$), the laissez faire management trait accounting for an F statistic of 10.39, and the autocratic school head ($F=10.01$). Third, the higher the situational leadership trait is used, the higher the learners' academic attainment ($\beta_1=0.653$; $p\leq 0.05$). Fourth, democratic trait school heads reasonably influence learners' academic attainment ($\beta_2=-0.481$; $p\leq 0.05$). Learners' academic attainment is incompatible with autocratic trait school headships ($\beta_3=-0.651$; $p\leq 0.05$), just as it is similar with laissez faire trait school heads ($\beta_4=-0.292$; $p\leq 0.05$). Finally the study recommends that situational school headship is more appropriate for academic attainment because of being more adaptable to the current demands of the teaching service.

Keywords: Leadership styles, Head teachers' leadership, Academic achievement, Uganda's education

INTRODUCTION

For the past two decades, substantial research on education in underdeveloped countries has indicated that skilling a country's population is important in social development (Aikaman & Unterhalter, 2005). Even the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have earmarked mass education as the engine driving the modernization paradigm in Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). The Ugandan government has responded by improving educational growth and development through implementing mass education. For example, free basic education in Uganda that started in 1997 led to a steady increase in primary school enrolment leading to the subsequent introduction of the Universal Secondary Education (USE) programme in 2007 to absorb the primary

school graduates (Nsubuga, 2003). However, the quality of this mass educational access has unacceptably remained poor (Namirembe, 2005; Ssekasanvu, 2010). Primary school classes are unacceptably large posing threats to the delivery systems and the quality of outputs. Even secondary school academic performance, especially in science disciplines, has continuously deteriorated (Table 1) between 2010 and 2014, despite steady increases in students from 147,585 in 2004 to 169,098 candidates in 2006, which is 63.8% growth.

The researchers reason that ensuring quality and maintaining mass education at secondary school level may require reforms in leadership so as to enhance student academic achievement (Nsubuga, 2003). Effective school

Table 1: Comparison in performance in science subjects in UCE from 2010-2014

Subject/Discipline	Percentage of Distinctions and Credits		
	2004	2005	2006
Mathematics	27.2%	23.7%	30.9%
Physics	51.1%	42.9%	34.3%
Chemistry	27.3%	24.0%	20.1%
Biology	25.6%	29.5%	19.9%
Agriculture	56.8%	42.9%	55.9%

Source: Uganda National Examination Board, MoES

leadership is a key factor in upholding excellence in school performance (Passi, 2006:54). Leithwood and Riehl (2003) observe that educational leaders must guide their schools through the challenges posed by an increasingly complex environment. Principals must respond to increasing diversity in learner characteristics, including cultural backgrounds, income disparities, physical and mental disabilities, and variations in learning capacities. Sergiovanni (2006) also argues that proper school leadership demands for the use of the forces available to principals, supervisors and educators in order to influence the events of schooling. From the above background information, it is inappropriate that leadership, which is an important factor in advancing quality education outcomes and performance (Armstrong, 2001), is still kept on the periphery in most schools.

The primary purpose of the research was to examine the correlation between school heads' leadership traits and learners' academic attainment in High-performing, Moderately-performing and Low-performing schools of Kampala district, Uganda. The specific objectives were to:

1. Establish whether there are significant differences between High, Moderate, and Low-performing schools with regard to learners' academic attainment and in the dimensions of school heads' management traits.
2. Establish whether there is a relationship between school heads' autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire and situational traits and learners' academic attainment.
3. Establish the extent to which the autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire and situational management traits of school heads predict variations in learners' academic attainment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dimensions of leadership

Educational practitioners and scholars have recognized leadership as important for the survival of educational institutions because enhancing the quality of education requires improved school performance fostered by strong leadership (Armstrong, 2001). However, different scholars have interpreted the meaning of leadership in varying ways. Cole (2002) defines leadership as a practice in which organisational staffs are responsible to a head, who, determines their activities and influences accomplishment through collective institutional responsibility and collegiality to add value to institutional performance. Similarly, Maicibi (2005) elaborates that leadership is the springboard to institutional

success. Therefore, it must be effective, timely, and results-oriented.

Leadership is also placed within varied contexts. The organisational context creates circumstances in which leaders tend to adopt leadership practices relevant to a particular context. However, the changing nature of the organisation explains variations in leadership traits because such traits emerge depending on the contextual environment of the organisation (Oyetunyi, 2006). The school head enlists a leadership trait that is compatible to a certain organisational environment in order to achieve compliance with ease. For example, Leithwood et al. (2004) say that top-down leadership traits may be adoptable to a situation different from the one in which bottom-up traits may be conducive. In similar ways, school heads in some secondary schools might use direct instructional methods and find it appropriate to learners' passing, while in other schools, setting the indirect instructional methods might be more desirable. It is the history and culture of an institution that commands the alteration of the school's leadership trait.

In addition, theoretical and seminal thinking in education management indicate that school leadership must be understood from a human relations perspective, which contracts a situational approach (Maicibi, 2005; Oyetunyi, 2006; & Dunklee, 2004). Leadership capabilities of people are varied. Therefore, they are contextualized differently (Mullins, 2002).

Leadership theory

Management scholars have deduced leadership theories which also explain the pattern of school heads' traits (Hoy & Miskel, 2001). Some of these theories assert that leadership depends on a leader's behaviour, attributes, influence and power, and it is also environmentally driven. Some leaders are yet charismatic, transformative and transactional (Halpin, 1966; Blake & Mouton, 1985; Fielder, 1971). In this way, the actions or doings of a leader or behaviour determines the sort of influence exerted on the subjects.

Similarly, leadership is dependent on the psychological attribution of leaders; the power structure in their possession (Oyetunyi, 2006; Blanchard, 1988). This is why some leaders become more dictatorial than others. On the other extreme, leaders may decide to act passively, derogatory, domineering, harsh or even brutal with a mission to change the behaviours of subjects to a level demanded by the leader. This is so because leaders have the courage to influence subjects to their own appeals in order to ensure organisational effectiveness.

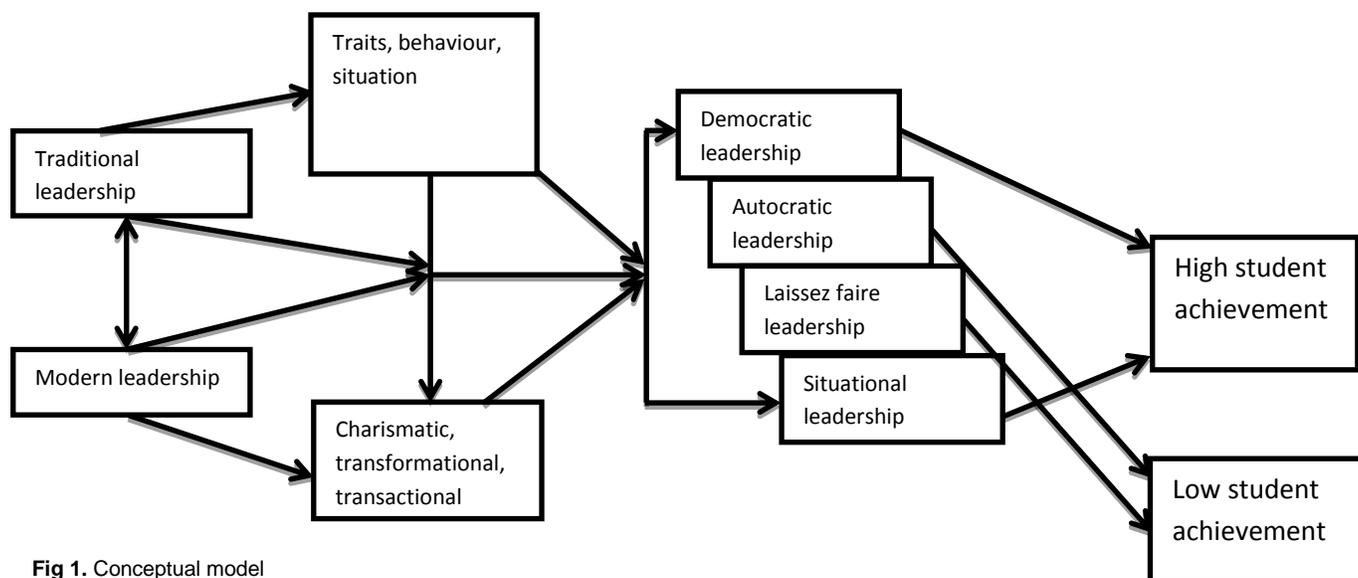


Fig 1. Conceptual model

The Concept of school attainment

Studies on school attainment provide a set of concrete measures and dimensions. De Cenzo and Robbins (1998) analyse institutional attainment as the achievement of institutional objectives as well as the attainment of quality. In a school, according to the Uganda Teaching Service Regulations (1996), institutional achievement could be noticed in the positive remarks the community has on the school, good grades, quality educators and increased enrolment of learners against all odds.

THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model tested in this study. The model is rooted in a combination of (1) the trait, behavioural and situational leadership traits under the traditional leadership theory, and the charismatic, transformational and transactional leadership theory under the modern leadership theory (Halpin, 1996; Blake & Mouton, 1985; Fielder, 1971).

These represent leadership theory, (2) Likert's management model on leadership styles (Goleman, Boyatzis & Mckee, 2002), and (2) Literature on school performance (Genck, 1983; Harris & Bennett, 2001). Leadership theory represents background variables in the model, leadership styles (democratic, laissez faire, autocratic and situational) represent antecedents (independent variables) represent independent variables, while some parts of literature on school performance represent student academic achievement (Dependent variable). Modern leadership traits (charismatic, transformational and transactional) were treated as extraneous variables, controlled by removing them from the leadership traits constructs (items) using repeated confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Therefore, four hypotheses from the model arise:

- 1) High learner attainment in academics is a correlate to the democratic leadership trait of the school head (H₁).

- 2) High learner attainment in academics is a correlate to the situational leadership trait of the school head (H₂).
- 3) High learner attainment in academics is a correlate to the Laissez faire leadership trait of the school head (H₃)
- 4) High learner attainment in academics is a correlate to the autocratic leadership trait of the school head (H₄).

These hypotheses are based on previous studies such as that of Oyetungi (2006), who positively correlated school climate to leadership styles in Botswana secondary schools. Nconco (2006) related leadership to student achievement in higher institutions of learning. He found out that high student achievement is dependent on good leadership traits. We also tested these same variables in Uganda to determine the extent to which they are compatible.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses the mixed research approach and a correlation survey design (Creswell, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2000). A sample comprised of 12 secondary schools was picked from Kampala district because it is where the best student academic achievement is registered in Uganda. Academic achievement was rated using High-performing schools (Those whose performance on national examinations is high), Moderate-performing (Those whose performance on national examinations is average over the years) and Low-performing schools (Those whose performance on national examinations is low over the years), based on secondary data of the annual student performance scores from the Ugandan National Examinations Board (UNEB) which is the highest official national examining body. Use of the UNEB rating builds on a previous study by MacNeil, Prater and Busch (2009), which used the Texas Assessment of Academic skills (TAAS) criterion to assign accountability ratings for American schools as Exemplary, Acceptable and Low-performing.

These ratings are based on test results from students (Texas Educational Agency, 2000). The Ministry of Education and Sports has lists of secondary schools in each category

(First-World, Second-World, and Third-World) and where they are located nationally. So it was easy for us to use these lists to randomly select 3 categories of schools in Uganda. In each of the 3 categories of schools, we selected 2 rural and 2 urban schools for equal representation of differing socio-economic backgrounds.

The study participants were teachers and head teachers. These were a convenient sample of 180 teachers and a purposive sample of 12 head teachers. Out of 180 teachers selected for the study, 102 (56.7%) of them teach in lower secondary (Senior/Grade I-IV) and 78 (43.3%) teachers teach at advanced level (Senior/Grade V-VI). More than half of the teachers (68%) lay in the age bracket of 31 and 40 years, 12% were between the ages of 41 and 51 years. However, the majority of the head teachers (58%) were above 50 years of age. Half of the participants were from rural schools and half from urban schools. About 30% of the participants came from High-performing schools, 34% from moderate-performing schools, and 36% from Low-performing schools.

Then 60% of the teachers were employed in public schools, while 40% were from private schools. Close to 51% of the participants had their bachelor's degrees, 10% had masters' degrees and 39% had diplomas. Before the study was conducted, appropriate ethical measures were observed as an attempt to protect and respect the individual participants' rights and dignity (Babbie, 1990). Negotiations were made with the head teachers of the schools selected for the study. Consent was obtained from the gatekeepers to access the schools and from teachers who were the participants.

Measurement of variables and instrumentation

The survey was implemented in August 2012. The survey instrument was a questionnaire which had three parts. In the first part of the questionnaire, participants were asked to provide demographic information and the authors assessed which category of school each participant belonged to in terms of High-performing, Moderate-performing and Low-performing based schools on the listings from UNEB and MoES. In the second part of the questionnaire, the participants gave their perceptions regarding the 8 items of leadership styles/dimensions on a 5-Likert scale. The leadership styles were defined as follows from the description of the instrumentation process:

- a) Autocratic, where the leader is strict, forceful, task-oriented and works with authority, focusing subordinates towards the task (Muijis & Harris, 2002; Mullins, 2002) and the sample items used for autocratic leadership style/dimension are: Power and decisions centrally generated from the school head, and strict and coercive school leaders/head teacher.
- b) Democratic, where the leader and teachers jointly take responsibility for course of action made and decisions come from bottom-up (Ogweng, 1995) and the sample items used for this leadership style/dimension are: The head teacher loves collective decision making, and academic decisions are generated from bottom i.e. lower staff to the top.
- c) Laissez faire, where the leader feels things should take their own course; no strictness and there is giving away of power to subordinates (Cole, 2002) and the sample items used for this the laissez faire leadership style/dimension are: head teacher fond of giving away power to subordinates, and there is no close supervision of task implementation. Finally,

- d) situational, where the leader chooses a style depending on a particular context. The leader uses flexible management styles (Balunywa, 2000; Armstrong, 2002) and the sample items used for the situational leadership style/dimension are: Head teacher adopts leadership skills appropriate to a particular situation, and a flexible leader.

Primary data was collected on teachers and head teachers' perceptions regarding the 8-item criterion for leadership styles/dimensions. For reliability of the 8 items of the instrument (independent variable), Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was computed. The instrument was pilot tested in another district, Wakiso, on 20 teachers and 2 head teachers. The results were then tested for internal consistency. As a measure of internal consistency, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient was used with the data from the study. The reliability coefficient was $\alpha \geq 0.738$ indicating that the 8-item criterion was reliable.

Dependent variable

For this analysis, student academic achievement was measured using performance in national examinations administered by UNEB, similar to the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), a criterion-referenced test for Exemplary, Acceptable and Low-performing schools depending on academic performance.

Independent variable

We failed to get already constructed instruments measuring leadership styles. However, we developed measures from literature and repeatedly used confirmatory factor analysis to select a minimum of two best aspects/items for each leadership style. We were interested in giving coefficients for all the 8-items measuring the 4 different leadership styles/dimensions. This would indicate the confirmatory factor analysis for each of the leadership styles and their level of internal consistency. Items that loaded on more than two factors (leadership styles) did not meet our criteria and therefore were removed. Mazzarella et al.'s (1989) 5-item measure of aspects of a democratic leader was translated and adjusted ($\alpha=0.72$). Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson's (1996) operationalization of an autocratic leader was translated and adjusted ($\alpha=0.82$). Furthermore, we developed a construct for the laissez faire leader based on aspects from Quinn's study (2000) ($\alpha=0.78$).

Finally, the constructs of a situational leader were based on Fiedler's (1971) contingency model of situational variables ($\alpha=0.93$). The instrumentation for the aspects on leadership styles (independent variable) consisted of 8-items measuring the 4 dimensions or leadership styles: i) democratic leader (collective participation in decision making, bottom-up management), ii) Laissez faire leader (fond of giving away of power, no follow-up on progress), iii) Autocratic leader (centralization of power, strict and coercive), and iv) Situational leader (adopting a leadership style appropriate to a particular context, flexible management style). The research depended on democratic, autocratic, laissez faire and situational leadership styles because these four types are widely used by school heads in Ugandan schools. Modern leadership styles such as charismatic and transactional leaders are recommended for future research.

Analysis

Quantitative analysis consisted of: 1) First, repeated confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) used to identify the best aspects for the different constructs of leadership styles. Based on the CFA, items that were double and multiple loading were removed because they did not meet our criteria. Two items for each construct were used to put the latent variable (head teachers' leadership styles) into operation. For descriptive statistical analysis, we compared the three categories of schools (High-performing,

Moderate-performing, Low-performing) (dependent variables) across the 8-item instrument measuring aspects of School heads' leadership traits (developed and validated by CFA), in order to establish variations or even similarities in performance between High, Moderate and Low-performing schools on the 8-dimensions of leadership styles. When warranted, post-hoc comparisons using Turkey's Honestly Significant Differences (HSD) were made. 2) Second, inferential statistical analysis of the Pearson Correlation Coefficient used to analyze whether there is a significant relationship between head teachers' leadership traits (X) and learners' academic attainment (Y). Again, a multiple logistic regression model was used to predict how school heads' leadership traits vary learners' academic attainment levels denoted by a coefficient of determination (β). The model is as follows: $Y = \mu(X_i)$ where (Y) is the dependent variable (student academic achievement) X_i denotes various independent variables for school heads' leadership traits.

Hence the regression model is modified as $Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \Sigma \epsilon$ for the democratic leadership trait (X_1), laissez faire leadership trait (X_2), autocratic leadership trait (X_3) and situational leadership trait (X_4). Modern leadership traits such as charismatic, transformational and transactional leaders denoted by ($\Sigma \epsilon$) were treated as extraneous variables and were controlled by removing them from the leadership styles constructs (items) using repeated confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). We used SPSS (version 16) as an analytical tool. The sample consisted of 180 teachers and 12 head teachers after excluding 8 teachers with missing values. Generating qualitative analysis consisted of transcripts of tape recorded data from interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) from which suitable texts to support qualitative analysis were extracted and narrations made to help in explaining what was happening with regard to the status quo of using leadership in boosting academic achievement in the selected secondary schools.

Again, transcripts were initially studied and analysed using open coding, relationships between codes also extracted using axial coding in order to get higher-order categories (themes). Finally selective coding was used to extract core categories and themes to describe the entire qualitative data that was reported. Presentation of qualitative data was based on these themes developed through the coding system (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The choice of collecting data using a combination of instrumentation was based on the idea of triangulation to create a wider, richer and deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study as well as increasing the validity of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first study objective aimed at ascertaining significant differences between High, Moderate and Low-performing schools as far as learners' academic attainment is concerned using descriptive statistics. MANOVA reported the means and

standard deviations of the 8 dimensions. The results of the MANOVA yielded a significant main effect ($F=9.53$; $df=2, 14$; $p \leq 0.05$) using Wilks' Lambda (λ) test and post-hoc comparisons using Turkey's HSD. With a statistical significance at $p \leq 0$, high performing schools ($\mu=68.47$; $SD=13.58$) register high student grades, followed by Moderate-performing schools ($\mu=58.2$; $SD=17.2$). Low-performing schools ($\mu=37.41$; $SD=18.09$) remained with poor performance. The results mean that the description of high-performance must portray the nature of the school. It means that the purpose and intent of high-performing schools is to keep quality standards constant so as to win public concern.

For example, many old boys and girls from high-performing schools would like to associate themselves with such schools long after leaving them because of the prestige they derive from the school's mission. One teacher had this to say:

"I am proud to have studied in one of the top schools in this country. As an old boy, I feel I should participate whole heartedly in seeing that the school maintains good leadership so that good academic performance can be sustained".

Again, it could be deduced from the above that use of the leadership styles in the different categories of schools differs with First-World schools employing more of these different leadership styles in student academic achievement than Second and Third-World schools. As Evryind, Knut and Turmo (2013) say, school success is not a one way traffic but a combination of possibilities for effective leadership. It takes many alternative leadership forces to get quality supervision in every institution. Therefore a mixture of all the leadership styles is relevant to harnessing high performance because different leadership forces could be relevant in different scenarios. It can also be noted from the results that the performance between High and Moderate-performing schools was mildly different (exhibited through mixed superscripts, *ab*). Higher student academic attainment consistently exhibited the school heads' ability to adopt each of the 8 leadership dimensions.

However, the F statistic for the various leadership dimensions indicate that the situational leader is the most appropriate style to account for improved academic attainment ($F=18.41$), followed by the democratic style ($F=17.06$), the laissez faire leadership style accounting for n F statistic of 10.39, and the autocratic head teacher ($F=10.01$). This implies that the situational head teacher emerges as the best leadership style required in improving school attainment. This is why high-performing schools tend to employ more situational leaders than the rest. Taking specific F-statistics, "adopting a leadership style appropriate to a particular situation" (13.87), and "collective decision making for the democratic leader (12.30)" are F-statistics larger than the rest. Again, this is why "collective decision making" and "adopting a leadership style appropriate to a particular situation", among the Moderate-performing schools, carry a superscript for high performing schools (note they have superscript a other than b). The dimensions of collective decision making and adopting a leadership style appropriate for a given condition describes leadership traits that are crucial to the academic success of students.

For inferential statistics, Correlation coefficients were used to analyze whether there is a significant correlation between school heads' leadership traits (X) and learners' academic attainment (Y). Again, a multiple logistic regression model was

Table 3. Differences between First-World, Second-World and Third-World-schools on the 8 dimensions of head teachers leadership styles

Variable	First-World		Second-World		Third-World		F
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1. Democratic head teacher							
Loves collective decision making	74.13	9.67 ^a	61.19	15.76 ^a	38.12	16.43 ^b	12.30 ^c
Decisions generated from bottom	68.45	12.45 ^a	54.78	24.89 ^{ab}	45.76	18.23 ^b	4.76 ^d
2. Laissez faire head teacher							
Fond of giving away power	72.87	13.45 ^a	58.91	22.15 ^{ab}	39.10	16.77 ^b	6.38 ^c
No close supervision of tasks implementation	65.34	16.56 ^a	49.87	19.36 ^{ab}	35.77	22.83 ^b	4.01 ^c
3. Autocratic head teacher							
Power and decisions are centrally generated	64.13	14.84 ^a	51.35	15.93 ^{ab}	43.25	17.55 ^b	4.40 ^d
Strict and coercive leader	72.28	16.28 ^a	60.96	13.67 ^{ab}	42.40	20.34 ^b	5.61 ^c
4. Situational head teacher							
Adopt leadership skill appropriate to a particular situation	64.13	13.97 ^a	60.93	14.80 ^a	23.99	16.89 ^b	13.87 ^d
Flexible management	66.45	11.49 ^a	67.61	11.09 ^{ab}	30.90	15.71 ^b	4.54 ^c
Grand Mean	68.47	13.58	58.2	17.20	37.41	18.09	

^{a,b}Means and Standard deviations (SD) sharing a common superscript are not significantly different by Tukey HSD comparison. ^cp≤0.0; ^dp≤0.001

Table 4. Relationship between respondents' perceptions of head teachers' leadership styles and student academic achievement across First, Second and Third-World schools

Variables	Betas	Correlation Spearman's Order)	(beta-Rank	F	Sig.
Autocratic style	beta 3	-0.651		7.143	0.010
Democratic style	beta 2	0.481		5.130	0.002
Laissez faire style	beta 4	-0.292		0.108	0.000
Situational style	beta 1	0.653		9.213	0.009
R ² (Leadership styles)		0.512			

**Correlation is significant at the level 0.05; Source: Field data

used to predict variations in learners' attainment dependent on school heads' leadership traits and results shown in Table 4.

The situational style

In this section, the hypothesis tested was, High academic attainment is dependent on situational

School heads (See table 5). The situational style is perceived to have a strong influence towards learners' academic attainment because it calls for flexible management and employment of a leadership style appropriate to a particular situation. This is supplemented by the comments of one of the head teachers that:

"It is proper for an experienced head teacher to use various leadership styles interchangeably depending on the prevailing situation in a school.[0] In some instances, when head teachers and their deputies are transferred from one school to another they tend to adopt new leadership styles because the new environment dictates differently. This choice has seen them manage to

put things right" (High-performing school, head teacher).

The democratic style

The hypothesis was, "High student academic performance is influenced by democratic head teachers". The results indicated that democratic trait school heads reasonably influence learners' academic attainment (β2=-0.481; p≤0.05). However, the democratic style needs to be complemented by other leadership traits to avoid over delegation of duties. However the fact that the democratic style is used in Ugandan schools this implies that, in today's schools, both teachers and students have a strong capacity to advise management on crucial matters of school success like academics (Nsubuga, 2008).

This is part of the reason why school managers tend to rely heavily on participatory and collective decision making mechanisms that promote democratic leadership (Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003). With the democratic leadership style in active use, decisions are made democratically by the group,

encouraged and assisted by the leader. A teacher was interviewed:

"The use of the democratic leadership style in schools reflects invitational leadership. Usually in invitational leadership leaders invite others to participate in decision-making. We strongly use democratic leadership style to ensure that consultations are made and teachers are involved in making useful decisions in order to promote harmony. In this case committees like the disciplinary or academic committees are formulated. These come up with proposals on how we can solve problems especially the discipline and academic problems. Consultation is a critical matter if the school is to succeed academically" (Moderate-performing school, teacher).

Autocratic style

In this section, the hypothesis tested was, Low student academic performance is influenced by autocratic head teachers" (see table 5). Learners' academic attainment is incompatible with autocratic trait school headships ($\beta_3 = -0.651$; $p \leq 0.05$) because of the negative relationship because of the harsh treatment these leaders pose on the school fabric. The more the autocratic traits are used, the poorer the school academic attainment. In a focus group discussion with students it was further indicated by the teachers that:

"Students hate harsh administrators who make their academic performance record decline tremendously. Likewise, teachers do not want commanding authority. Such authority makes them lose morale and they neglect their duty or even think of part timing in other schools which increases the labour turnover" (Moderate-performing school, teachers).

The laissez faire leader

It was found out that laissez-faire school heads tend to stagnate academic attainment because they over-delegate with the assumption that learners and educators cannot be policed. But at times, these subjects or subordinates need close supervision in order to deliver results. In an FGD of twelve teachers, one teacher had this to say:

"Much as teachers have to make decisions regarding academic program in their departments, the head teacher has to monitor and approve the decisions because he is the head of the school. Whatever wrong goes on in school, he is accountable" (Teacher from Low-performing school).

Multiple regression results indicated that the empirically tested leadership styles (democratic, autocratic, laissez faire and situational) contribute 51.2% to variations in student achievement ($R^2 = 0.512$). Leadership styles need to be complemented by other school factors in order to boost student achievement. In their study on "the effects of school culture and climate on student achievement", MacNeil, Prater and Busch (2009) found out that goal focus and adaptation account for the greatest influence towards student achievement. Muijis and Harris (2002) also argue that one of the most important actions that a head teacher initiates within a school to drive leadership is the promotion of a strong leadership. When the head teacher supports clear goals for the school and are accepted and supported by the teachers, then organizational

health score will be higher, reflecting his/her leadership influence on the climate.

CONCLUSIONS

In describing the situational School head, the strength and power of their attributes is derived from being more flexible and adaptable to whatever school environment. Even if the environment does not permit learning, such leaders tend to orient their management styles to conditions that will rejuvenate learners from a poor learning condition. For most schools in Uganda, this trait of a leader seems to be desirable, and it also exhibits a high degree of experience and expertise among school heads.

The situational leadership style can be useful, in assessing the maturity, zeal and capability of subordinates by the head teacher/leader. In case subordinates are knowledgeable, highly inspired, intelligent, movers and shakers, high performers, and good decision makers; the head teacher/manager will shift to using collegial and consultative leadership. When the school head finds that subordinates are naïve, lazy, incompetent/not professional, then he employs task oriented leadership styles. High performance is achieved where workers are given tasks to accomplish and have to report results periodically. There is strict and close supervision to ensure enhanced school attainment.

On the contrary, as school heads exhibit more autocratic leadership tendencies, school attainment tends to decline. Dubrin (1998) describes autocratic school heads to be bullies in management. Their style tends to kill morale other than boosting it. The above scenario was experienced in circumstances where many students, especially in Low-performing day schools, tended to dodge school where too much administration of the wooden paddle and use of corporal punishment was rampant. As a result, students who frequently dodged school because of the harsh disciplinary measures did eventually perform poorest academically. But as leaders become more democratic, more performance is realised. A teacher commented as such:

"The major point of focus by democratic leaders is sharing. The manager shares decision-making with the subordinates... Even though he/she invites contributions from the subordinates before making a decision, he/she retains the final authority to make decisions (consultative). The manager may also seek discussion and agreement with teachers over an issue before a decision is taken (consensus). He/she may allow the subordinates to take a vote on an issue before a decision is taken (democratic). He/she coaches subordinates and negotiates their demands."

From the findings, however, the laissez faire style was rejected because of its weak negative relationship towards learners' academic attainment. The laissez-faire head teacher tries to give away his powers and does not follow up on progress of task accomplishment. In most cases, laissez-faire head teachers do not prompt good academic performance because they are too liberal and flexible (Odubuker, 2007).

This is why their overall performance is often poor. More study is needed to address the relationship between the modern leadership approaches (transformational, charismatic, transactional, collegial and instructional leaders) on student achievement. Leithwood and Jantzi (2007) schools need leaders who are transformational and charismatic in order to drive progress in the positive direction. The laissez-faire style

was generally inappropriate in academic environments where students need to be closely monitored at all times and even guided to accomplish their academic goals. Schools are supposed to be an epi-centres of academic and career excellence which tasks require continued and close supervision.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

This study is limited in that the sample focused on teachers and head teachers' views only. Students, parents and the community were not involved in the study yet they are stakeholders with equally important views that could improve leadership. In addition, the sample was composed on secondary schools. Primary schools were not observed yet the problem of the study focuses on both USE and UPE schools as a whole.

Another study focusing on primary schools may be vital to comprehensively understand the problem at hand. It should also be emphasized that relatively little qualitative research has been carried out in this study. There is a need to include data from outside the school system in order to study what kinds of external factors influence leadership styles for improved student achievement.

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