

# **Influence of Headteachers' Leadership Styles on Pupils' Performance in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education Examination in Dagoreti District, Kenya**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to find out the extent to which headteacher leadership skill influence pupils academic performance in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) in primary schools in Dagoreti District, Nairobi County, Kenya. The study had three fold objectives; namely (i) to determine the extent leadership styles influence pupils academic performance , (ii) establish the extent headteachers involve teachers in decision making; and (iii), determine the types of leadership styles that affect curriculum delivery. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. A combination of purposive and random sampling strategies was employed to select a sample of 126 respondents comprising 104 teachers and 22 head teachers to participate in the study. The major findings were that headteachers applied various leadership styles with the most frequently used being democratic and laissez fair styles. A majority of teachers from top performing schools reported frequent use of democratic leadership styles, and were more frequently involved in decision making process by their headteachers. It is recommended that training in modern transformational leadership styles should be intensified for headteachers to enhance schools academic performance (182 words).

**Key words:** Headteachers leadership, Pupils' academic performance, Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) Examinations, Primary schools, Dagoreti District, Kenya.

## **I INTRODUCTION**

### **Background Information**

In recent times, education stakeholders have expressed their concerned over the poor performance of students in the school certificate examination (Oluremi, 2013; Odhiambo, 2012; Osangie & Okafor, 2013; Orodho, 2014). Part of the blame for the poor performance has been directed towards school administrators (principals) and the teachers while some portion of the blame has been put squarely on the shoulders of the students themselves and the parents (Sawamuran& Sifuna, 2008; Oluremi, 2012; Osangie& Okafor, 2013; Orodho, 2013).

Student academic achievement is very crucial at every level; from a perspective of an individual, a family, an organization (like a school) and the nation as a whole. For a school to perform well both in academics and in co-curricular activities, effective leadership is needed (Cole, 2004). Leadership at work in educational institutions is thus a dynamic process where an individual is not only responsible for the group's tasks but also actively seeks the collaboration and commitment of all the group members in achieving group goals in a particular context (Cole, 2004; Richlin & Cox, 2004).

The leadership style of the headteacher is of utmost importance in the school performance. The school headteacher has the role of providing direction and exerting influence on persons and other things in order to achieve the school's goals (Leithwood, 2003). This shows the importance of the school principal's role in improving student performances and achievement. It is against this background that this study sought to examine the possible influence of leadership styles on students academic performance at the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) in primary schools in Dagoretti District, Kenya.

### **Literature Review**

Leadership style is the manner and approach of providing direction, implementing plans and motivating people. Lewin led a group of researchers to identify different styles of leadership. This early study has been very influential and established three major leadership styles. The three major styles of leadership are Autocratic or Authoritarian, Democratic (participative) and Laissez faire. A good leader uses all three styles, with one of them normally dominant while bad leaders tend to stick with one style (Oluremi, 2013) .

Lewin found out from his research that it was more difficult to move from an authoritarian style to democratic style than vice versa. Abuse of authoritarian style is viewed as controlling, bossy and dictatorial. Levin's study found out that Democratic leadership was generally the most effective. In his study, children in this group were less productive than the members of the autocratic group, but their contributions were of much higher quality. Children under the Laissez-faire leadership were the least productive of all the three groups.

Waters, Marzano, and Mcnulty (2003) described that the caliber of leadership in a school could have a dramatic effect on student achievement. Furthermore, there was a strong relationship between effective leadership style and student achievement. Iqba (2005) found out that authoritative leadership style had a significant effect on school effectiveness (an indicator of student achievement) as compared to democratic style in public schools in Punjab. Haymon (1990) found a positive relationship between leadership styles and student performance in the elementary schools. Valesky (1992) found that a democratic style produced higher test scores than an authoritarian or Laissez-faire leadership style did in high schools in Memphis, Tennessee. Nsubuga (2009) revealed that the democratic or consultative form of leadership was the best in Ugandan schools.

It was also found that most headteachers in Uganda used this kind of leadership in order to create ownership. The findings of the study also showed that no one kind of leadership style was used in schools. Although the democratic style was the most preferred, it was found that depending on situations in schools, leaders tended to use the different leadership styles and at times used other styles of leadership. It was established that where the democratic style of leadership was practiced, the school was likely to achieve good overall school performance.

Ngugi (2006) observed that headteachers who used democratic leadership style posted high exam results. No significant relationship was found between the autocratic leadership style and academic performance in public secondary schools in Maragua district, Kenya. Onyango (2008) stated that good academic performance in K.C.S.E was exhibited by schools whose headteachers were having a mixture of autocratic (Task-oriented behaviour) and democratic leaders (relationship-oriented behavior). From the following studies, it was still not clear whether a particular leadership style resulted in the most effective form of organizational behaviour.

The Kenyan education system is examination oriented and so performance of a student in national examinations is very important. The exam results of K.C.P.E determine the type of secondary school the student is admitted to. The numbers of secondary schools are few compared to the number of students. This means that the students with low marks end up missing admission in secondary schools. When a school does well in K.C.P.E. it is, the headteacher who is praised and when it performs poorly, it is the headteacher who is blamed. Nairobi County has eight districts. Out of the eight districts, Dagoreti had been posting the worst results for the last six years as shown in Appendix F. All the eight districts in Nairobi County receive free primary education funds and the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) has posted trained teachers in all the schools in the county. It is with this concern that the study sought to investigate if headteachers leadership style influenced students' KCPE performance in public primary schools in Dagoretti district.

The reviewed literature gave a working definition for the purpose of the study as the process in which one person successfully exerts influence over others to reach the desired objectives in an organization. Leadership style was defined as a particular behaviour applied by a leader to motivate his or her subordinates to achieve the objectives of the organization. The literature reviewed discussed three leadership styles namely, the autocratic style, democratic style and laissez-faire. In the autocratic leadership style, the leader held all the authority and responsibility. There was little or no group participation in decision making and there was close supervision.

In the democratic leadership style the workers were involved in decision making and this promoted high morale among the workers. In the laissez-faire leadership style, the leader waived responsibility and allowed workers to work as they chose with minimum interference. The advantages and disadvantages of each leadership style were also discussed. Several empirical studies on influence of headteachers leadership styles on students' performance were reviewed. This study indicated different findings. For some studies there were relationships while in others, there were no relationships between leadership styles and students performance in national examinations. There was no consistency in the findings related to the variables.

This study therefore intended to carry out further investigation on the influence of democratic, authoritarian and laissez-faire leadership styles on pupils KCPE performance in public primary schools in Dagoretti District. Studies done concentrated on the influence of leadership styles on KCSE performance. No study had been done

on the influence of leadership styles on KCPE performance. This study therefore aimed at investigating the influence of headteachers leadership styles on pupils KCPE performance in Dagoretti District.

### **Statement of the problem**

Despite the fact that school administration has been touted as being a critical determinant of students academic performance, the problem is that it is a difficult and complicated process and not easy to directly associate with the performance. It is also evident that unless the principal is keen, the goals of the school cannot be realized. A school principal plays a pivotal role in activating other school organs to function. It is the principal's administrative tasks and duties that the researcher would want to investigate. Yet, measuring the administrative roles has not been a direct one-shot process but a complicated one that requires inquiry into the effective administrative roles being performed by these principals.

The foregoing problems notwithstanding, the current research investigated the effectiveness of principals in administering secondary schools in Dagoretti District, Kenya. This was so because it has been observed that the general performance of the schools in the study locale of Dagoretti District has deteriorated over time and caused public outrage

### **Purpose and Objectives of the study**

The study investigated the influence of headteachers' leadership styles on pupil's KCPE performance in public primary schools in Dagoretti district, Nairobi. The following objectives guided the study:

- i) Determine the performance profile of schools in the district for the last five years.
- ii) Examine the extent to which leadership styles have any influence on pupils KCPE performance.
- iii) Determine the extent in which the leadership styles affect curriculum delivery.
- iv) Find out the extent of teacher involvement in decision making process in the study locale.

## **II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted using descriptive survey design. The target population was public primary schools in Dagoretti District, Nairobi. The district has 22 public primary schools with 22 headteachers and 1034 teachers. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 104 teachers in the district. This was 10 percent of the total number of teachers in the district. All the 22 headteachers participated in the study. The study employed questionnaires as tools to collect the data. Two sets of questionnaires were used to collect the data, one for the headteachers and the other for the teachers. To test the reliability of the Instrument, split half method of reliability was used. The Pearson's correlation co-efficient was obtained as 0.88 for headteachers, and 0.83 for teacher indicating a high degree of stability (Mugenda, 2003; Orodho, 2013) confirming that the instruments were reliable.

## **III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **School Performance in Dagoretti District**

The first objective was to examine the performance profile of primary schools in the study locale of Dagoretti District. Dagoretti District has twenty two public primary schools. Table 1 carries information which indicates that Dagoretti District had been posting the worst results in Nairobi County for the last six under review.

Between 2007 and 2009, most primary schools in Dagoretti District have posted dismal results. During the period under review, only 3 schools, constituting 13.7 percent recorded in steady increase in performance. On the contrary, 19 schools, constituting 86.3 percent exhibited downward trend in performance. During the 2009 to 2011, almost the same schools recorded an upward trend with over 80 percent of the schools recording a downward trend during the period under review. Some schools such as Kagiria primary school dropped sharply in the mean score from 184.99 in 2009 to a dismal 149.5, against the district mean score which similarly dropped from 218 in 2009 to 216.60. On the overall, most of the schools in Dagoretti District featured very poorly in the national examinations between 2007 and 2011.

Most of the schools in Dagoretti district had been posting mean scores of less than 250 marks apart from a few schools like Kabiria, Dagoretti special and Jamhuri. The best mean score in the district was 281.41 from Kabiria Primary school in 2011 while the worst was 149.45 from Kagira Primary School in 2011.

**Table 1: 2007-2011 Dagoretti District Schools of K.C.P.E. Performance**

School	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Kabiria	255.54	229.34	279.58	272.79	281.41
Kinyanjui rd	235.34	232.10	254.83	244.29	243.91
Dagoretti special	280.57	218.55	252.14	215.48	229.40
Riruta satellite	252.54	250.16	237.07	240.04	242.91
Jamhuri	231.55	235.66	236.57	257.81	233.63
Ruthimitu	272.82	224.73	235.58	216.78	228.38
Mbagathi rd	233.74	219.52	230.98	230.31	225.95
Ndurama	240.96	222.35	230.78	234.56	230.53
Toi primary	224.84	201.24	228.76	249.69	241.54
Gtiba	214.65	213.98	225.63	211.46	216.30
Mukarara	217.37	212.30	225.45	205.53	208.58
Shadrack Kimalel	241.33	224.34	217.65	218.84	224.58
Joseph Kangethe	209.62	220.31	213.90	216.07	197.56
Riruta H.G.M.	227.95	234.34	210.97	218.23	234.11
Muthini	220.26	223.70	208.09	201.87	217.41
Nembu	213.59	189.87	203.56	205.36	197.71
Kirigu	198.83	196.16	199.59	216.65	200.43
Dagoretti Muslim	204.02	195.08	196.58	191.94	189.70
Gatina	182.15	194.80	189.23	183.15	232.46
Kagira	202.17	196.62	184.99	182.2	149.45
Dr. Muthiora	192.14	190.12	174.59	183.62	169.22
Kawangware	188.12	172.44	174.44	188.59	209.74
Dagoretti App	-	-	-	169.63	177.00
	<b>224.55</b>	<b>213.53</b>	<b>218.68</b>	<b>215.43</b>	<b>216.60</b>

#### Summary of Dagoretti District order of Merit (2006-2011)

Table 2 carries data on the summary order of merit of Dagoretti District for the period between 2006 and 2011. An examination of the data reveals that In Dagoretti Districts' order of merit had been in eighth position out of eight districts for the last six years i.e. from 2006 to 2011. The mean score of Dagoretti district was below half. The lowest mean score was in 2008 when it posted a mean score of 213.53. While the top district, Wetlands had a mean score of 286.04 in the same year. The highest mean score for Dagoretti was 226.88 in 2006, while the top district, Westland's had a 271.74 as shown in (Table 1.) In Dagoretti District, there are twenty –two schools. An average of six schools in the district had been posting mean scores of less than 200 marks.

**Table 2 : 2006-2011 K.C.P.E Summary of District order of Merit (Nairobi County)**

Division	2006 mean	2007 mean	2008 mean	2009 mean	2010 mean	2011mean
Westlands	271.74	265.68	286.04	262.50	266.07	254.62
Langata	269.36	263.58	266.61	259.03	254.52	250.61
Makandara	261.44	251.48	266.78	244.88	243.49	242.46
Embakasi	254.12	249.35	285.57	242.03	257.37	254.30
Kamukunji	250.54	242.97	255.18	239.07	235.0	234.47
Starehe	241.81	238.68	248.98	231.83	224.32	224.81
Kasarani	235.55	227.72	266.76	229.96	229.8	224.63
Dagoretti	226.88	224.55	213.53	212.68	215.43	216.60

Source: City Council of Nairobi – Education Department

From the review of the results posted for the last 5 years, it was clear that most schools in Dagoretti District performed poorly and were below average. It is on this basis that the study sought to investigate if the head teacher's leadership style had any influence on student's performance in K.C.P.E. From studies done, there was no leadership style that had exclusively contributed to performance. This study therefore sought to find out which leadership styles headteachers used in schools, which in turn translated to good or bad performance in K.C.P.E.

#### Leadership Style and Performance

The second objective was to establish the headteachers' leadership styles in Dagoretti District and thereby determine whether the leadership styles have any influence on pupils KCPE performance. The study found out that 60 percent of the headteachers applied the democratic leadership style, 20 percent applied authoritarian while another 20 applied laissez fairer leadership styles, as exhibited in Table3.

**Table3: Leadership styles used by Headteachers in Primary schools in Dagoretti District**

Attribute	Number of schools	Percent
Authoritarian	3	20
Democratic	9	60
Laissez Faire	3	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

It was observed that democratic leader ship posted the best results in KCPE while Laissez-Faire posted the worst in KCPE. It was also noted that most of the primary schools where democratic leadership styles were used tended to perform better than those that used authoritarian and/or laissez fair leadership approaches. A very weak relationship between the leadership styles and KCPE performance was observed concluding that other factors were responsible for the KCPE performance other than headteachers' leadership styles in the district.

#### Extent of Involvement of Teachers in Decision making Process

The third objective was to establish the extent to which headteachers involved teachers in decision making. The results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Headteachers' dominance of staff meetings**

Attribute	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	2	3
Agree	9	11
Disagree	52	64
Strongly Disagree	14	17
Did not respond	4	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100</b>

The study found out that headteachers did not dominate the assemblies, neither did they dominate the staff meetings, nor dominated the procurement of books. Rather the headteachers shared the assembly platforms with the other teachers and especially the teacher on duty; they gave teachers turns to discuss and air their opinions on issues at hand during staff meetings and consulted teachers whenever the issue of procurement of books arose. The study also found out that majority of the headteachers in the district discussed motivational rewards within

the school with their respective teachers thus reducing cases of conflicts and disagreements. However the headteachers held the final word on the issue of admission of new pupils in their respective schools.

#### **Influence of selected Management Practices on curriculum Delivery**

The fourth objective was to establish whether leadership styles had an influence on curriculum delivery in the district. The results are carried in Table 5.

**Table 5: Frequency of the headteachers' demand of scheme of work**

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Before school opens	9	11
Within first week of the term	55	68
Within first month of opening	11	14
Did not respond	5	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100</b>

The results in table 5 indicate that majority of headteachers, constituting 68 percent of the total demanded to assess the schemes of work from teachers within the first week. Another good proportion of headteacher, constituting 11 percent observed the schemes of work before school opens, with about 14 percent demanding to see the schemes of work within the first month of opening. It was, however, disappointing to note that about 8 percent did not respond, implying that they hardly saw the benefit of observing schemes of work. On the overall, it was encouraging to note that majority of headteachers, constituting 79 percent, demanded to see the schemes of work at least within the first week of opening schools.

The study found no relationship between leadership styles and curriculum delivery since most of the teachers in the district handed in their lesson plans and scheme of work within the first two weeks of the term. Diverse teaching methods were also employed across the district where teaching aids, peer tutoring, co-teaching and lecture methods were used. The teacher-pupil ratio in most of the schools was more than 1:40 suggesting that most of the classes were overcrowded probably as a result of the free primary education program initiated by the government in the year 2002. The study also found out that athletics, football, volleyball music festivals, drama festival, compound cleaning, boy scouts and girl guides were the most common co-curricular activities in the district as they were found in all the schools while table tennis, swimming, debate clubs, quiz clubs, and poetry clubs which were only found in selected schools in the district.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study found out that the headteachers in the district applied various leadership styles where majority applied democratic, while a few applied authoritarian and laissez faire leadership styles. However, a weak relationship was established between KCPE performance and the headteachers' leadership styles. It was observed that democratic leadership posted the best results in KCPE while Laissez-Faire posted the worst in KCPE.

The study found out that the headteachers shared the assembly platforms with the teachers on duty and gave teachers turns to discuss their opinions during staff meetings. They also consulted teachers whenever the issue of procurement of books arose and discussed motivational rewards with their teachers. However the headteachers held the final word on the admission of new pupils in their schools.

The study confirmed that half of the teachers in the district were never involved on procurement of textbooks, stationery, desks and chairs suggesting that these issues were regulated from the Ministry of Education in which case the headteachers were not in full control. In the process, the study found no relationship between leadership styles and resource allocation and utilization.

There was a weak relationship between leadership styles and curriculum delivery since most of the teachers in the district handed in their lesson plans, and scheme within set deadlines. Diverse teaching methods were also employed across the district.

Based on the results, the study made four recommendations, namely:

1. The Ministry of Education should identify the reasons behind the perennial poor performance of schools in KCPE in Dagoretti District since this study ruled out the leadership styles as the plausible cause of the poor performance.

2. The Ministry of Education should identify the level of pupils' preparedness for KCPE. It is most likely that dimension can help to find out the extent to which pupils are ready and well prepared for KCPE.
3. The Ministry of Education should organize motivational talks to the candidates before they sit for KCPE. It is envisaged that this strategy can probably help to prepare them psychologically and boost their morale.

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