
The Extent to which Principals' use of Autocratic Leadership Style Influences Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Kenya

¹Peter Ndunda Mwove, ²Gideon Mutuku Kasivu, ³Jonathan Muema Mwanja

^{1,2}*Department of Educational Administration and Planning, South Eastern Kenya University, Kenya*

³*Department of Educational Psychology, South Eastern Kenya University, Kenya*

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which principals' use of autocratic leadership style influences students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Mwala sub-county, Machakos County. This study used descriptive survey research design. It targeted 72 schools, 72 principals and 505 teachers in Mwala Sub-county. The study employed stratified random sampling technique to select 36 principals and simple random sampling technique to include 216 teachers. The instruments were validated through piloting and by research experts to ascertain content validity while reliability was achieved through piloting using test-retest method. Data was coded and entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0 for analysis. Descriptive statistics which included frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were employed to analyse data. Inferential statistics which basically involved running correlation analysis at 0.05 level of significance were employed to test the nature and strength of relationships between variables. The study employed tables to present the analysed results. The results revealed that there was a weak negative correlation between autocratic leadership style and students' academic performance which was not statistically significant ($R = -.259, p=.160$). The study recommends to: Kenya Institute of Educational Management (KEMI) and the Teachers' Service Commission (TSC) to regularly in-service teachers on leadership styles; principals to discourage practices associated with autocratic leadership practices since they improve academic performance.

KEYWORDS: Leadership style, Autocratic Leadership Style, Academic Performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Leadership is one of the concepts that are studied a lot and there is still no clear agreement on its definition. On this note, Ucar, Eren and Erzengin (2012) claim that several definitions of leadership were made according to the ability, personality, efficiency in relationships, cognitive and emotional approaches of a leader and the focus on an individual or a group or according to a person's directing the other persons, organizational structure, ability to establish or facilitate relationships in a group or organization.

Leadership is the most effective when leaders choose more effective styles. Oluremi (2013) describes leadership style as the manner and approach of providing direction, implementing plans and motivating people. There are several leadership styles which exert varying influence on students' academic achievement such as transformational, instructional, transactional, democratic, laissez faire and autocratic among others. While some leadership styles when adopted make the leader effective; others make the leader weak and ineffective and thus lead to poor results. From a theoretical standpoint, House (1971) in his Path-Goal theory cited in Cote (2017) advanced that a particular leadership style should be used to complement what is missing from the work situation in order to enhance follower motivation, satisfaction and performance. This theory asserts that leaders' behavior is motivational when it eliminates factors that hinder goal accomplishment; provides guidance and support to the employees, and grants meaningful rewards in return for success. In agreement with this proposition, Quin, Deris, Bischoff and Johnson (2015) allude that effective school principals make positive changes which result in increased student achievement.

There is evidence which suggests that an effective school principal can be made through professional development program (Greatbatch & Tate, 2019). For instance, In Singapore, only those who successfully

complete a six-month, full-time Leaders in Education Programme (LEP) offered by National Institute of Education (NIP) can be appointed as principals (Retna, 2015). In addition, there are in – service training for serving principals. A study done by Deng and Gopinathan (2016) in Singapore reported that school leadership was instructional with school leaders being able to provide teachers with guidance and support in curriculum and instruction. As a result, the country emerged the best globally in 2015 Programme for International Students' Assessment (PISA) examination. When people receive some training, they employ effective leadership styles (Njagi & Mwanja, 2017) and high emotional intelligence (Mwanja, Khama & Nyamboga, 2022). However, instructional leadership style is not of any interest to this study but the evidence provided demonstrates that principals can be trained to employ more effective styles.

The autocratic leadership style can be defined as a type of leadership behaviour where the leader rules by issuing commands and directives on how tasks are to be performed by the subordinates who have no power to have their voice heard by the leader (Wangai, 2015). An autocratic leader is a control freak who reigns by giving orders and does not take any input from the subordinates (Maru, 2013). Moreover, Chikoyo (2023) alleges that this leadership style involves issuing detailed instructions and close supervision of subordinates in workstations. Furthermore, Mutuku (2014) alludes that communication is one-way and top-down in an autocratically led institution. As a result, Kitavi (2014) opines that authoritarian principals create an environment that negatively affects teachers' commitment to their job and satisfaction thus leading to poor student outcomes. Thus, a principal who adopts this style may be resented by teachers and as a consequence, indirectly demotivate academic performance.

Farooq, Dilshad and Qadir (2022) in a study done in Pakistan to investigate the influence of leadership styles on teacher performance established that autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire were commonly employed by principals. The study noted that autocratic and democratic leadership styles had a significant positive impact on teacher performance. While literature presents autocratic leadership as an undesirable style that contributes to dissatisfaction among teachers. The KEMI Diploma Module 2, Transforming Education Management, highlights five leadership styles which include democratic; autocratic; laissez faire, transactional styles and transformational styles (KEMI, 2014b). A cursory examination of the module reveals that the course material is shallow and inadequate to equip trainees with adequate content on effective leadership styles. To further this argument, a study done by Oyugi and Gogo (2019) in Awendo Sub-county, Kenya showed that autocratic, democratic and laissez faire styles are commonly practiced leading to poor academic performance. Use of weak leadership styles could suggest that the training could be inadequate. This investigation aimed at establishing whether principals in Mwala public secondary schools employ this style and how it is correlated with academic performance

Theoretical Framework

This study was based on Path-Goal Theory developed by Robert House, revised in 1974 by House and Mitchell, and revised again in 1996 by House (as cited in Cote, 2017). House believed that a leader's behaviour is contingent to employee motivation and employee performance. Path-Goal theory states that a good leader provides clear direction, sets high goals, gets involved in goal achievement and supports his employees. In the initial version of Path-Goal Theory, House (1971) explained that the leaders' behavior is motivational when it eliminates factors that hinder goal accomplishment; provides guidance and support to the employees, and grants meaningful rewards in return for success. House and Mitchell (1974) expanded the initial theory to include four well defined leader's behaviors: directive leadership; supportive leadership; participative leadership; and achievement-oriented leadership.

This theory proposes that a particular leadership behavior should be used to complement or to fill what is missing from the work situation in order to enhance follower motivation, satisfaction and performance. In school, the effect of principal leadership on academic performance is indirect and therefore the principal need to adopt a leadership behavior that will motivate teachers. In order to determine required leadership behaviors, a leader needs to analyze two factors. The first is attributes to the work environment. These include the task, the formal authority system and the primary work group.

The second is attributes of each individual subordinate. These include ability, experience, personal goals, needs and locus of control. Subordinates with an external locus feel little control over their lives. The theory provides various leadership behaviors which principals can employ on different individuals (teachers) in various task characteristics. Therefore, this theory formed the basis of this study because it identifies autocratic leadership style and provides situations (environment and tasks) that the school principal can apply to improve academic performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Boampong, Denteh, Issaka and Mensah (2016) define the autocratic leadership style as a form of directive or coercive leadership where a leader tells the subordinate what to do and how to do it. Abid, Saghir, Misbah, and Ayesha (2017) maintain that an autocratic leader has the final say and implements what he/she thinks is necessary to have tasks accomplished. Boampong, Denteh, Issaka and Mensah (2016) elaborate that such a principal wields immense power over members of staff and sometimes uses threats and sanctions to instil fear. The authors further contend that an autocratic principal does not delegate duties nor does s/he consult anybody on any decisions. Consequently, teachers may develop a sense of being disrespected as competent professionals and bullied into submission. Nevertheless, Bakare and Oredein (2022) contend that this leadership style may be appropriate in situations where decisions have to be made urgently and where staff are new. This study aimed at establishing how autocratic leadership impacts students' academic performance.

Although the highlighted literature paints autocratic leadership as undesirable, some authors like Oyetunji (2011) have identified situations where it may be appropriate. For instance, the author has pointed out that this style may be effective for a leader dealing with new and inexperienced staff who may require to be strictly guided on how to perform their duties. This leadership is also said to marry with McGregor's theory X presumption that some staff lack the motivation to perform their duties and thus require strict monitoring. For instance, Bett et al (2016) state that this leadership is required in military settings where precision in discharging duties and royalty is required. Kitavi (2014) warns that principals who use this style may often lead to poor performance for the same reasons identified by the literature. Thus, and for those reasons, it was thus compelling to undertake this investigation.

Maryam, Ejaz and Tatlal (2022) in their study done in Pakistan investigated the relationship between leadership styles and students' academic achievement. The study results established a positive moderate correlation between autocratic leadership style and students' academic performance. Therefore, the results suggested that autocratic leadership was effective in fostering students' academic outcomes in the country. To implement this study, the study adopted a quantitative research design and included a sample of 30 principals and 1,428 students. Data were gathered through the use of questionnaires. This study adopted a quantitative research design, unlike the present study which employed a descriptive research design. Furthermore, it was implemented in Pakistan while the current study was done in Kenya.

Similarly, Igwe, Ndidiamaka, and Chidi (2017) in their study conducted in the Enugu Metropolis of Nigeria established that autocratic leadership had a strong positive association with academic performance. The results thus indicated that autocratic leadership was effective in improving students' academic performance. The study employed ex post facto research design and employed questionnaires and interview guides to collect data. This study sampled 285 participants including principals, teachers, and support staff. Participants were selected through a simple random sampling technique. Notable gaps are: the study adopted an ex-post-factor research design while the current study employed a descriptive survey research design; the study was done in Nigeria while the present study was implemented in Kenya; and the reviewed study involved principals, teachers and support staff while the current study included only principals and teachers.

Tedla Redda and Gaikar (2021) utilized a descriptive survey research design to investigate how leadership styles impacted school performance in Eritrea. Through using non-probability sampling techniques which involved purposive sampling and convenience sampling techniques, the researchers drew a sample of 30 principals, 250 teachers, 50 students and 45 parents. Instruments used to collect data were interview guides, observation checklists, and questionnaires. The study results reported a strong negative and statistically significant relationship

between autocratic leadership and school performance. The results implied that an increase in this leadership style would directly decrease school performance. Thus, the study results suggested that the autocratic leadership style was not effective in improving school performance. This study was conducted in Eritrea while the present study was done in Kenya. Whereas this study used a non-probability approach such as purposive sampling, the current study used probability techniques which included stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques to select participants. However, in terms of the scope of data collection and respondents, the reviewed study used more instruments to collect data and included various classes of respondents such as school heads, teachers, students and parents. On the contrary, the present study included only 36 principals and 216 teachers and used only questionnaires to collect data.

Using a correlational survey research design and through involving 262 participants drawn from 8 schools, Tilahun (2014) designed and implemented a study in Ethiopia to determine how autocratic leadership was related to academic performance. The study results determined that autocratic leadership had a negative influence on academic performance. Thus, the results suggest that the autocratic leadership style was ineffective in enhancing academic performance. Data were collected through administering questionnaires, conducting interviews and focus group discussions. This study was implemented in Ethiopia in a relatively smaller sample of 8 schools while the current study was done in Kenya in 36 schools. Furthermore, this study adopted a correlational research design while the current study adopted a descriptive survey research design.

Bett, Wambugu and Flora (2016) conducted a study in Tinderet Sub-county to explore how school heads' styles of leadership influenced performances at the primary school level in Kenya. The study employed a descriptive survey research design and used a combination of stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques to select a sample of 40 head teachers and 280 teachers. The study utilized questionnaires to collect data. The results of the study reported a negative association between autocratic leadership style and academic performance. The results implied that an increase in the practice of this style would lead to a decrease in academic performance. Thus, the results suggest that autocratic leadership was ineffective in fostering students' academic performance. This study was implemented in a primary school setting and was done in Tinderet Sub-county while the present study was done at the secondary school level and was conducted in Mwala Sub-county.

Inconsistent with Bett, Wambugu and Flora's (2016) study, a study done in Narok South, Narok County by Kosgei, Tanui, and Rono (2018) revealed that autocratic leadership had a positive association with academic performance. This survey involved 13 principals and 130 teachers who were randomly selected. However, this study differs from the current study in that it employed a smaller sample of schools and respondents as compared to 36 schools and 252 respondents who were surveyed in the present study.

Another study done in Bungoma County North Sub-county by Okwaro, Kathambi, and Sitati (2020) which assessed the impact of principals' leadership styles on school academic performance reported a moderate association between autocratic leadership style and school performance which was not statistically significant. Hence, the results of the study indicated that autocratic leadership style was not effective in enhancing students' academic performance. The study employed a descriptive survey research design and involved a sample of 15 principals and 75 teachers. Primary data were collected through questionnaires while document analysis was used to gather secondary data. The survey was done in Bungoma County while the current study was implemented in Mwala Sub-county. This study involved a smaller sample of 15 principals and 75 teachers while the current study involved a larger sample of 36 principals and 216 teachers.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed descriptive survey research design. Descriptive research survey design involves collecting data in order to answer questions on current status of subjects of the study. This design allows the researcher to use descriptive and inferential statistics in data analysis. Thus, the choice of a research design is informed by a number of considerations key among them being data analysis techniques.

Participants

According to the Mwala Sub-County Education Office (2020), there are 72 public secondary schools with a population of 72 school heads and 505 teachers. The study targeted all (72) school heads and all (486) teachers in the sub-county making a total target population of 577 respondents. Stratified random sampling technique was used to stratify the schools into their respective zones

Out of the 72 schools, the study intended to include a sample of 36 (50.0%) schools which according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) were appropriate. The 72 public secondary schools were stratified into 5 zones which include: Mwala (14); Masii (15); Muthetheni (16); Yathui (12); and Mbiuni (15). After stratification, the study employed simple random sampling technique 50% of schools in each zone. The procedure involved writing names of all the schools on pieces of paper and folding them. The folded pieces of papers were put in a cup and shuffled. Then, half of the folded pieces of paper were drawn from the cup that when unfolded gave the actual names of the schools which were visited. All the principals of the participating schools were purposively included in the study. To determine teachers' sample, Yamene (1967) formula was employed as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where **n** is the sample size, **N** is the population size and **e** is the sample error at 95% confidence level

$$n = \frac{486}{1 + 505(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{486}{1 + 13.125}$$

$$n = 216 \text{ teachers.}$$

Therefore, a total of 216 teachers were included in the study. Using equal allocation of the number of sample schools 216/36, the study included 6 teachers per school. At the school level, simple random sampling technique was employed to select the actual 6 teachers who were included in each school. All the names of teachers in the school excluding the principal were written on pieces of papers that were then folded and put in a cup and shuffled. Then, 6 pieces of the folded papers were drawn and unfolded to give the actual names of teachers who were to participate in the study. In total, the study included 36 principals and 216 teachers making a total sample 252 respondents. Table 1 gives information on sample size.

Table1: Sample Size Table

Zone	Schools	Sample (50.0%)	Teachers	Sample Size
Mwala	14	7	42	49
Masii	15	7	42	49
Muthetheni	16	8	48	56
Yathui	12	6	36	42
Mbiuni	15	8	48	56
Total sample	72	36	216	252

Measures

Questionnaires were the main instruments of collecting data used in this study. Two sets of questionnaires, a questionnaire for school heads and another one for teachers were used to collect quantitative data. Statements were adapted from Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 6S variant which is a self-rating tool for the principals. The instruments had a 5-point Likert scale representing the frequency of each behavior, examples are 0 = not at all, 1 = once in a while, 2 = sometimes, 3 = fairly often, 4 = frequently, if not always. The MLQ has 12 items which measure the four aspects of autocratic leadership in four factors: Idealized influence (items 1, 8,

and 15), Factor 1; Inspirational motivation (items 2, 9, and 16), Factor 2; Intellectual stimulation (items 3, 10, and 17), Factor 3; and Individual consideration (items 4, 11, and 18), Factor 4.

Data Analysis

This study was purely quantitative and thus collected quantitative data. The Quantitative data was coded and captured through Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) computer program (version 23.0) for analysis. Data analysis involved two stages, that is, descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics included frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. This data was analysed mainly through frequencies, percentages and standard deviations. For instance, data relating to gender was coded as follows; 1 = male, 2 = female. Means of schools were entered into the SPSS version 23.0 and analysed through means and standard deviations. Further, academic performance data was transformed to create a new variable, A, which was used for correlation analysis.

Ethical Considerations

To address legal ethical concerns, a research license was applied from National Commission of Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) website. The researcher was authorized to conduct research by NACOSTI vide license number NACOSTI/P/21/10456. Cognizant of the fact that teachers' right to privacy, dignity and confidentiality overrode their need to participate in the study, the researcher undertook the following measures: respondents' consent was first sought and they were made aware that their participation or non-participation was not going to affect them in any way; as a general practice in surveys, respondents were asked not to indicate their name or the name of their school to ensure they participated anonymously; questionnaires were filled in the staffroom, departmental offices or in the open fields where teachers felt comfortable; filled up questionnaires were collected promptly from respondents and mixed with other questionnaires from other schools in the presence of participants; and that no questionnaire was collected by members of the administration or any other teacher. To protect self and the study participants from contracting Covid-19, the researcher observed all the Ministry of Health Protocols and reminded participants to observe the same during their interactions.

4. RESULTS

The objective of the study sought to determine the extent to which principals' use of autocratic leadership style influences students' academic performance in public secondary schools in the Mwala sub-county. Analyzed data for this objective is presented in the sections below

Principals' Views on their Practice of Autocratic Leadership Style

The principals were presented with 13 statements to rate their autocratic leadership practices using a 5 – item Likert scale described in calibrated as follows: 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Occasionally, 4 = Often, 5 = Always. Data were entered into the SPSS version 23.0. The analysis involved computation of frequencies, percentages and standard deviations. The means were interpreted as follows: below 1.4 = Never; 1.5-2.4 = Rarely; 2.5-3.4 = Occasionally; 3.5-4.4 = Often; and above 4.5 = Always. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Principals' on their Use of Autocratic Leadership Style

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	M	S.D
I keep the staff working up to capacity.	(F) 3 (%) 9.7	4 12.9	10 32.3	8 25.8	6 19.4	31 100	3.32 1.222
I make accurate decisions.	(F) 1 (%) 3.2	5 16.1	10 32.3	9 29.0	6 19.4	31 100	3.44 1.091
I overcome attempts made to challenge my leadership.	(F) 3 (%) 9.7	4 12.9	8 25.8	9 29.0	7 22.6	31 100	3.42 1.259
I take full charge when emergencies arise.	(F) 1 (%) 3.2	5 16.1	10 32.3	9 29.0	6 19.4	31 100	3.43 1.091
I become anxious when I cannot find out what is coming next.	(F) 5 (%) 16.1	7 22.6	7 22.6	3 9.7	9 29.0	31 100	3.13 1.477
I encourage the use of uniform procedures.	(F) 4 (%) 12.9	3 9.7	10 32.3	9 29.0	5 16.1	31 100	3.26 1.237
I push for increased production.	(F) 1 (%) 3.2	5 16.1	8 25.8	9 29.0	8 25.8	31 100	3.58 1.148
Things usually turn out as I predict.	(F) 6 (%) 19.4	8 25.8	10 32.3	4 12.9	3 9.7	31 100	2.68 1.222
I encourage overtime work.	(F) 1 (%) 3.2	5 16.1	10 32.3	9 29.0	6 19.4	31 100	3.45 1.091
I worry about the outcome of any new procedure.	(F) 3 (%) 9.7	4 12.9	11 35.5	7 22.6	6 19.4	31 100	3.29 1.216

Principals' Use of Autocratic Leadership Style as Rated by Teachers

Teachers were given 6 statements that related to principals' use of autocratic leadership practices to rate using a 5-point Likert scale calibrated as follows: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. Data were coded and entered into SPSS version 23.0 for analysis that mainly involved computation of frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. The means were interpreted as: below 1.4 = Strongly Disagree; 1.5-2.4 = Disagree; 2.5-3.4 = Neutral; 3.5-4.4 = Agree; and above 4.5 = Strongly Agree. The analysis of the responses is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Teachers' Views on Principals' Use of Democratic Leadership Style

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std Dev
The principal directs teachers to teach	(F) 27 (%) 14.4	33 17.6	24 12.8	69 36.9	34 18.2	187 100	3.27 1.337
The principal takes precaution when dealing with teachers	(F) 15 (%) 8.0	10 5.3	26 13.9	103 55.1	33 17.6	187 100	3.69 1.078
The principal checks record of work covered by teachers	(F) 11 (%) 5.9	24 12.8	13 7.0	91 48.7	48 27.7	187 100	3.75 1.147
The principal insist teachers follow stipulated policies	(F) 4 (%) 2.1	5 2.7	21 11.2	85 45.5	72 38.5	187 100	4.16 0.881
The principal reprimands teachers who fail to teach	(F) 15 (%) 8.0	18 9.6	24 12.8	83 44.4	47 25.1	187 100	3.69 1.182
Decisions regarding the progress of the school are solely made by the principal	(F) 39 (%) 20.9	37 19.8	23 12.3	56 29.9	32 17.1	187 100	3.03 1.425

Results in table 3 indicate that these practices are dictatorial and involve use of force and sanctions.

Finally, the study sought teachers' views to establish whether decisions were unilaterally made by the principals. A significant number of the teachers confirmed, as affirmed by 29.9% who agreed and 17.1% who strongly agreed, that decisions regarding the progress of the school were solely made by the principal. On the other hand, a sizeable majority represented by 20.9% who disagreed and a further 19.8% who strongly disagreed denied that decisions were solely made by the principals. About 12.3% indicated that they were undecided. A moderate mean of 3.03 confirms that this practice was moderate while the standard deviation (1.425) indicates that the opinion expressed about this statement was highly divided. The results validate principal's views in Table 4.27 where they revealed that they assessed themselves as moderately making accurate decisions.

Hypotheses Testing

The objective of the study sought to determine the extent to which principals' use of autocratic leadership style influences students' academic performance in public secondary schools in the Mwala sub-county. A null hypothesis was formulated which stated:

H₀₄: There is no statistically significant relationship between principals' use of autocratic leadership style and students' academic performance.

In order to test this hypothesis, data was first prepared for inferential analysis. The principals' data relating to autocratic leadership practices was transformed using the SPSS version 23.0 software to create a new variable. The software was used to test whether the variable was parametric or non-parametric by generating a normality test table. Shapiro-Wilk level of significance was used to test normality. A spearman's rank-order correlation between transformed autocratic leadership variable and transformed academic performance variable was run at a 0.05 level of significance to test the hypothesis. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlation between Autocratic Leadership and Academic Performance.

			Autocratic Leadership	Academic Performance
Spearman's rho	Autocratic Leadership	Coefficient	1.000	-.259*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.160
		N	31	31
	Academic Performance	Coefficient	-.259*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.160	.
		N	31	31

Results reported in Table 4 indicate that there was weak negative correlation between autocratic leadership style and students' academic performance ($r = -.259$). The results further reveal that the relationship between autocratic leadership style and students' academic performance was not statistically significant ($p = .160 > 0.05$). Based on the findings, the null hypothesis which stated that "there is no statistically significant relationship between principals' use of autocratic leadership style and students' academic performance" was upheld. Thus, it can be inferred from the results that autocratic leadership style is a poor predictor of students' academic performance.

5. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The results implied that an increase in autocratic leadership practices would lead to a decrease in academic performance. Because the relationship was not statistically significant, the results further implied that the autocratic leadership style could not predict academic performance. Thus, the study results demonstrate that autocratic leadership was not effective in fostering good academic performance. The results of the study are inconsistent with Maryam, Ejaz and Tatlah's (2022) study done in Pakistan which established a positive moderate correlation between autocratic leadership style and students' academic performance and thus suggested that the style was effective in fostering students' academic outcomes in the country. Contrary to the current study which employed a descriptive survey research design, this study adopted a quantitative research design. Moreover, it was implemented in Pakistan which is mainly a Muslim nation while the current study was done in Kenya, a predominantly Christian country.

Regionally, the study disagrees with Igwe, Ndidiamaka, and Chidi's (2017) study conducted in Nigeria which established that autocratic leadership had a positive association with academic performance. Unlike the present study, the results suggested that autocratic leadership was effective in improving students' academic performance. The results resonate well with Tedla Redda and Gaikar's (2021) study done in Eritrea which showed that autocratic leadership style had a strong negative and statistically significant relationship with school performance. Similar to the present study, this study indicated that the autocratic leadership style was not effective in improving school performance. The study results are further supported by Tilahun's (2014) study done in Ethiopia which indicated that autocratic leadership had a negative influence on academic performance. In line with the present study, the results thus suggested that the autocratic leadership style was ineffective in enhancing academic performance.

Locally, the study findings are consistent with Bett, Wambugu and Flora (2016) conducted in Tinderet Sub-county which reported a negative association between autocratic leadership style and academic performance and thus suggested that autocratic leadership was ineffective in fostering students' academic performance. The study is also supported by Okwaro, Kathambi, and Sitati's (2020) study done in Bungoma County which established that the relationship between autocratic leadership style and academic performance was not statistically significant. Like the present study, this study suggested that the autocratic leadership style was not effective in predicting students' academic performance.

The results are however inconsistent with Kosgei, Tanui, and Rono's (2018) study done in Narok County which revealed that autocratic leadership had a positive association with academic performance. Thus, the results indicated that the autocratic style was indeed effective in facilitating good academic performance. The results therefore contradict the present study which determined that autocratic leadership was ineffective in improving academic performance. On why the two studies give contradicting results, this study was done in Narok County where contextual factors might have been different from Mwala Sub-county, Machakos County. Furthermore, the study involved a smaller sample of 13 schools, 13 principals, and 130 teachers while the present study involved 36 schools, 36 principals, and 216 teachers. Hence, the validity of the results could have been affected by the smaller sample.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI) and TSC regularly in-service principals on exceptional circumstances on when they can use this leadership style to enhance students' academic performance in conjunction with other leadership styles. The study further recommends to principals to minimally and exceptionally use this leadership style in extraordinary circumstances when this style may be extremely necessary.

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