EXPLORING LEADERSHIP STYLES AND THEIR EFFECT ON TEACHER AND STUDENTS PERFOMANCE

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ABSTRACT :

One of the significant factors for success in educational institutions is successful management which is fulfilled by school heads who are entrusted with the role of supervising teachers and other staff in educational facilities. According to Ampofo et al. (2019), leadership practices such as supervision, either internal or external, should be considered a significant attempt intended to improve teachers' outcomes.

The main aim of this study is to explore the leadership styles adopted by school heads in two selected schools in Blantyre Rural and their impact on teacher and student performance. 20 teachers from the schools were selected by simple random sampling . Two instruments - the "Principals' Self Percieved Leadership Style Questionnaire" and the "Teachers' Questionnaire", were employed for the collection of data. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to analyse collected data. Key informant interviews were also conducted to explore the leadership styles adopted by Heads in the selected secondary schools. The results revealed that transformational leadership style and transactional leadership style was adopted by the private school while transformational and democratic leadership styles was adopted by the public school.

Keywords: leadership, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, instructional leadership, school principal, teachers, student academic performance

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is more important than it has ever been for management in today's constantly changing social, economic, and technical environment (Aunga & Masare, 2017). While management is concerned with accumulating resources, coming up with plans, and organizing and supervising operations to achieve agreed-upon goals, leadership fulfills the management job. Effective leadership increases management's effectiveness and competency, which in turn boosts long-term performance and resource management. An excellent leadership style aids in efficient performance in educational institutions, claims Maccabi (2005). The success or failure of an organization is determined by the strength and weakness of its administration because most organizational decisions have its implementation and execution by the kind of leadership style adopted by its manager or administrator. This research will explore the leadership styles adopted by School Heads in two selected schools in Blantyre Rural and their impact on teacher and student performance to form a basis of recommendations on leadership styles in schools

LITERATURE REVIEW

In an educational setting, a school head's leadership ability is demonstrated through the ability to maximize the resources to facilitate the achievement of goals. Lian (2020) also reinstates that a principal is a crucial player in the success of an institution because of their influential feature in developing quality education processes and outcomes. Further, school heads are also entrusted with influencing, guiding, encouraging, and moving teachers, staff, and other stakeholders who work together for the success of a school.

Kartini et al. (2020) conceptualize that the school heads' ability to lead results in creating an effective environment for learning and also promotes the performance of teachers. In this study, the findings reveal that the role of a school head is prominent, and their contribution to an institution is central, specifically regarding policies in coming up with decisions.

In educational facilities, school heads use different types of leadership styles. In the following sections, the specific leadership styles and how they are utilized in a school setting will be discussed alongside their implications on teachers' performance.

Autocratic Leadership

Autocratic management style which is a top-down style of management where decisions flow from the top leader with little input from others below them. This highly centralized and bureaucratic form of leadership where authority is concentrated at the top and decisions are imposed on the rest of the organization with little consultation or debate has been the dominant form of managing schools across the region for decades.

Autocratic leadership does not pay attention to the needs of its members, does not emphasize collective decision-making, and most leaders adhere to a mandatory system where decisions come firmly from the authority at the highest hierarchy level in an institution (Wahidin, Basri, Wibowo, et al., 2020). Sarwar et al. (2022) indicated that autocratic leaders come up with their own decisions without involving others. Leaders who make decisions without involving others result in dissatisfaction or resistance from other staff.

Mboya et al. (2018) investigated the implications of autocratic leadership styles used in schools by school heads. The results showcased that authoritarian leaders contribute to poor relationships. Thus, collaborations between school heads and teachers are minimized. In such cases, performance is decreased because significant information is withheld, which should be used to transform learning experiences.

Democratic Leadership

According to Wahidin, Basri, Wibowo, et al. (2020), democratic leadership involves all members in the decision-making process, consulting with them, listening to and valuing their ideas and suggestions before making decisions. Leaders with a commitment to participation involve their members actively in activities, provide competencies to their members with the courage to make decisions, and develop policies, systems, and implementation procedures. Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy (2014) suggest that under democratic leadership, members experience collaborative work and a sense of inclusivity, emphasizing equality, collective decision-making, and harmony

In the study by Sarwar et al. (2022), the democratic leadership style is described as a situation whereby leaders and followers have similar rights when it comes to decision-making. Democratic leadership also involves promoting the interest of followers through practicing social equity. Further, Sarwar et al. (2022) research also conceptualized that when principals use a democratic leadership style, teachers' performance increases.

Laissez-faire leadership

Laissez-Faire leadership is when leaders are hands-off and allow group members to make the decisions. With this style, freedoms are fully determined by group goals, techniques, and working methods. Leaders rarely intervene. Laissez-faire style is described by Hackman and Johnson (2009) as the most effective style, especially where followers are mature and highly motivated.

Laissez-faire leadership style allows complete freedom to group decision without the leader's participation. Thus, subordinates are free to do what they like. The role of the leader is just to supply materials. The leader does not interfere with or participate in the course of events determined by the group (Talbert and Milbrey, 1994). The leader in this case acts as the contact person with the group's external environment, very little power is used. (Weihrich, 2007)

Chances of anarchy and chaos are high since the leadership does not guide people's activities (Muzaasi, 1982). The manager delegates almost all authority and control to subordinates. There is no person of authority in the organization. The manager leads the organization indirectly, he/she does not make decisions; rather he/she abides by popular decisions. There is no setting of goals and objectives by the manager. Tasks are done the way the manager thinks it should be done, but he/she gets involved on request and this may lead to the digression from broad organizational policy. Thus, this style of leadership may be effective with well-motivated and experienced employees (Dubrin, 1998:111), but could lead to failure when subordinates are deceptive, unreliable and untrustworthy.

According to Nguyeni and Glover's (2017) study on laissez-faire leadership practises in Vietnam's public sector, these practises have a negative effect on the psychological safety climate of organisations and encourage bullying at work. Furthermore, they found that laissez-faire leadership is positively correlated with employees' psychological well-being, which was adversely correlated with bullying at work. Bullying results from a lack of an efficient mechanism for monitoring norms limiting teachers' behaviour as well as the traits of bullies and victims.

transformational leadership

Bush (2003) links three leadership models to his 'collegial' management model. The first of these is 'transformational leadership'. This form of leadership assumes that the central focus of leadership ought to be the commitments and capacities of organisational members. Higher levels of personal commitment to organisational goals and greater capacities for accomplishing those goals are assumed to result in extra effort and greater productivity (Leithwood et al., 1999:9). Caldwell and Spinks (1992:49-50) argue that transformational leadership is essential for autonomous schools: Transformational leaders succeed in gaining the commitment of followers to such a degree that higher levels of accomplishment become virtually a moral imperative.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Leadership in education significantly influences the overall effectiveness of schools, particularly regarding teacher motivation, instructional delivery, and student academic outcomes.

In Malawi, secondary schools face several challenges, including low teacher morale, high absenteeism, limited instructional support, and declining student performance in national examinations.

Anectodoctol evidence suggests that leadership style may be a key determinant of school climate, teacher performance, and learner achievement.

However, there is a lack of systematic empirical evidence on how different leadership styles adopted by school heads (such as autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, transformational, and transactional) affect both teachers' professional engagement and students' academic success.

This gap undermines efforts to improve school management practices and educational outcomes in Malawian secondary schools. Thus, there is a critical need to explore the relationship between leadership styles and teacher and student performance to inform policy and school leadership development programs.

This study will therefore seek to explore the leadership styles adopted by School Heads in selected schools in Blantyre Rural and their effect on teacher and student's performance.

METHODOLOGY

Population of the study

For this study, the population constituted of 20 secondary school teachers from two secondary schools.

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used to ensure effective data collection from highly perfoming schools.

Data analysis method

This study adopted a mixed research method .Data collected from the close ended likert scale questionnaires were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics like median, mode, correlation analyses and percentages were used to analyze the data.

With the qualitative data analysis interviews were conducted with two headteachers. A thematic analysis was used to analysed the opnions of groups using Insight 7

RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS
Gender Distribution of the respondents in the two schools
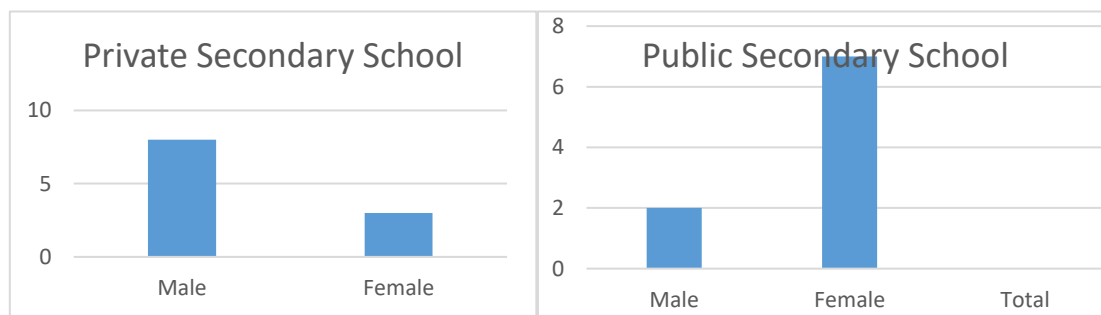
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	8	73%
Female	3	27%
Total	11	100%

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	2	22%
Female	7	78%
Total	9	100%

From the table, there were more males at the school than females at the private secondary school and more females than males at the public secondary school
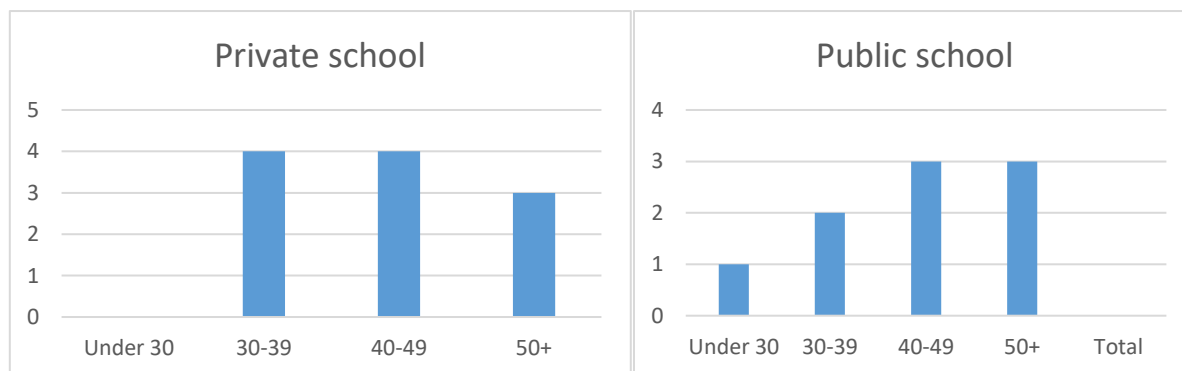
Work Experience

Years of experience	Frequency	Percentage
0-5	0	0%

| 6 to 10 years | 6 | 55% |
| 11 to 20 years | 2 | 18% |
| 20+ years | 3 | 27% |

The majority of the respondents both in public and private school was 6 to 10 years.

AGE

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The study found that the private school adopted transformational and transactional leadership styles. leadership styles were adopted by both secondary schools. However, interviews revealed that the school sometimes adopts autocratic styles. The public school adopted Democratic and transactional leadership styles. Transformational leadership was commonly adopted by both schools
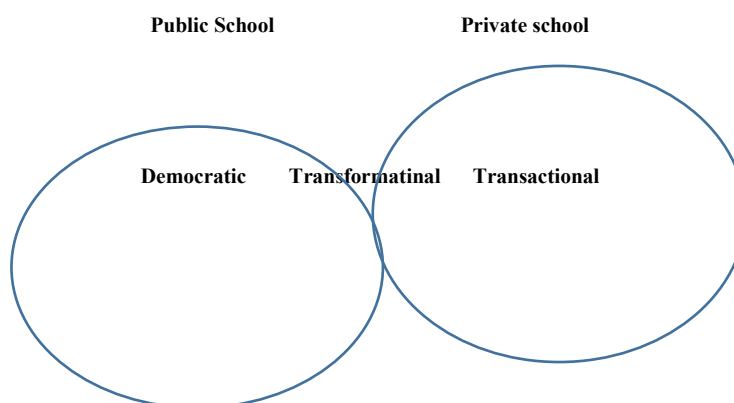
These had a positive impact on teacher and students perfomance as shown in the table below.

Perceptions on leadership styles on teacher perfomance

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am motivated to perform my teaching duties to the best of my ability	3	0	5	0	3
	27%	0%	45%	0%	27%
I feel my work is valued by school management	1	1	0	4	5
	9%	9%	0%	36%	45%
I consistently deliver well planned and effective lessons	0	0	0	5	6
	0%	0%	0%	45%	55%
My job satisfaction has been affected by the leadership style of my school head	2	2	0	6	1
	18%	18%	0%	55%	9%
I feel stressed at work due to the leadership style of my head	2	5	1	0	3
	18%	45%	9%	0%	27%
There is high level of collaboration of teachers at this school	1	0	1	3	5
	9%	0%	9%	27%	45%
The current leadership style encourages me to be more innovative in my	2	0	1	5	3

teaching methods					
	18%	0%	9%	45%	27%

From the table, 36% and 45% of the respondents agree and strongly agree that they feel that their work is valued by management, 45% and 55% agree and strongly agree respectively that they consistently deliver well planned and effective lessons, 18% and 45% strongly disagreed that they feel stressed at work due to the leadership style of their head, 27 and 45 % agreed that there is high collabolaration of teachers at the school.

Perceptions of leadership styles on students perfomance(Tansformational and transactional)

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students at this school are highly motivated to learn	0	0	1	5	5
	0%	0%	9%	45%	45%
Students absenteeism is a significant problem in this school	1%	6	0	2	2
	55%	55%	0%	18%	18%
I have observed a positive change in students academic perfomance since this leadership style was adopted	1	0	1	8	1
	9%	0%	9%	73%	9%
The leadership style of my head has a positive influence on students academic perfomance	1	2	0	2	3
	9%	18%	0%	18%	27%

From the results, 45% of the respondents and another 45%agree and strongly agree respectively that students at the school are highly motivated to learn. 55% and another 55% disagree and strongly disagree respectively that absentiism is a significant problem in the school and 73% of the participants agree that they have observed a positive change since the current leadership style was adopted and 27%strongly agree that the leadership style of their headteacher has a positive influence on the students

From the public secondary school, it was found that the headteacher adopted democratic and transformational leadership. These have a positive impact on teacher and students perfomance as shown in the table below

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am motivated to perform my teaching duties to the best of my ability(Frequency)	0	0	0	4	5
	0%	0%	0%	44%	56%
I feel my work is valued by school management	0	0	1	3	4
	0%	0%	11%	33%	44%
I consistently deliver well planned and effective lessons	0	0	0	0	5
	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
My job satisfaction has been affected by the leadership style of my school head	2	3	0	3	0
	22%	33%	0%	33%	0%
I feel stressed at work due to the leadership style of my head	2	3	2	2	0
	22%	33%	22%	22%	0%
There is high level of collaboration of teachers at this school	0	0	0	2	7
	0%	0%	0%	22%	78%
The current leadership style encourages me to be more innovative in my teaching methods	0	0	0	9	0
	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%

The study reveals that democratic leadership in combination with transactional leadership Motivates teachers to do their work effectively with 44% and 56% of the participants agreeing and strongly agreeing respectively, 100% of them delivering lesson plans effectively, feeling valued by administration and 100% of them being encouraged to be more innovative in their teaching methods.

Perceptions on student Perfomance in the public school

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students at this school are highly motivated to learn	0	1	2	4	2
	0%	9%	18%	36%	18%
Students absenteeism is a significant problem in this school	2%	2	0	3	0
	18%	18%	0%	27%	0%
I have observed a positive change in students academic perfomance since this	1	0	1	1	6

leadership style was adopted					
	9%	0%	9%	9%	55%
The leadership style of my head has a positive influence on students academic perfomance	0	1	0	7	1
	0%	9%	0%	64%	9%

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership styles adopted by selected school headteachers in Blantyre rural and their influence on student and teacher perfomance.

From the research findings researcher would like to make the following conclusion. For a school to perform well in academics effective leadership is needed. Transformational, transactional and democratic as revealed in this study result in increased teacher motivation, job satisfaction, lesson delivery, development of effective instructional materials for students, teacher innovation and high level of collaboration amongst teachers

A combination of democratic and transformational leadership has proved to be more effective and leads to higher student and teacher perfomance as compared to the combination of transactional and transformational leadership. The inclusion of autocratic styles in some cases has led to a decrease in teacher motivation. This study concluded that no single leadership style was better than the other in a crises period but teachers could adjust their leadership style concerning the situation. A student's academic performance depends on the teacher's leadership style. From the results, it is evident that autocratic, laisse faire and coaching leadership styles all played a great role in students' academic performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There should be in-service training for teachers on leadership. This will help them to be updated and be provided with new knowledge and leadership skills concerning changing contexts and management models. Students and teachers who have done well should be given rewards.

School rules and regulations should be reconstructed in such a way that it will also consider the broken and stressed minds of the learners. This will give them a sense of belongingness which will comfort them and cause them to love the school environment more, thus, engaging more in their bookwork. This will eventually influence performance in a positive manner. Teacher and headteacher relationship is to be improved by headteachers

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