



Laissez-Faire Leadership and Students' Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Teso North Sub-County, Kenya

Domtillah Atitwa

Kibabii University, Kenya

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between the laissez-faire leadership style and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Teso North Sub-County. This study was modeled on the path-goal theory which is based on specifying a leader's style or behavior that best fits the employee and work environment in order to achieve a goal. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The target population consisted of 31 deputy principals (administration) and 216 teachers from the 31 public secondary schools in Teso North Sub-County. Stratified random sampling technique was used for the schools. Purposive sampling technique was employed for the deputy principals (administration) while simple random sampling was used to select the teachers. The total sample size was 139 respondents comprising 16 deputy principals (administration) and 123 teachers. The data was collected using interview schedules for deputy principals (administration) and questionnaires for the class teachers. These were administered by assistant researchers. The instruments were validated by the supervisors. Reliability of the instruments was determined via a pilot study of three schools in Teso South Sub-County. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (measures of central tendencies) and inferential statistics (t-test) and presented in frequency counts, means and percentages. Qualitative data was transcribed and coded in thematic clusters. The study indicated that hardly do principals in public secondary schools in Teso North sub-County employ the laissez-faire leadership style. The study concluded that the exercise of laissez-faire leadership style by the principals has a less effect on student discipline.

Keywords: Discipline, Laissez-faire, Leadership, Students

1.0. INTRODUCTION

Delegated leadership style is another name for laissez-faire leadership. The phrase "Let them do what they wish" comes from French. There are no absolute laws that grant organization employees total freedom or autonomy. When the wrong person is put in command, they refrain from acting so as not to anger the following, which has fatal results (Afful-Broni, 2004). However, this technique may be appropriate in situations where the subordinates are knowledgeable in the many fields. Despite the aforementioned, Afful-Broni notes that laissez-faire leadership might result in worker disinterest and anarchy.

Laissez-faire leaders offer their team members a great deal of latitude in how they carry out their duties, establish their aims and objectives, and set deadlines. In addition to offering assistance, resources, and guidance when necessary, leaders in this style refrain from getting involved in group activities. Although high job satisfaction may result from this autonomy, it typically results in lower productivity if team members do not properly manage their time or if they lack the abilities, expertise, or self-motivation to complete their work. Additionally, when supervisors lack control over their job and team, this style may emerge spontaneously. In a laissez-faire leadership style, the leader typically shuns authority and power (Botha, 2005). When a principal uses this method of management, they tend to step back and let the subordinate take the initiative. When a principal uses this approach, their job is more advising than evaluative. In this manner, the group members communicate horizontally with each other, and the principal respects the subordinates as equals. The kids' behavior in such a school is less monitored, which eventually affects the efficient operation of the school programs or, worse yet, leads to strikes and other anti-social activities. The principal relies only on the "hands-off" model.

Kimurua (2010) investigated the role of principals' leadership philosophies in creating a positive learning environment in Malindi District secondary schools. 15 schools in the Malindi district were randomly selected by the researcher using a cross-sectional survey approach. During the first part of June 2013, a head teacher and six regular teachers from each school were questioned using a structured questionnaire. The study found that some principals never anticipated instructors to set their own goals and achieve them on their own. This was due to their laissez-faire leadership style. Kamurua concentrated on the role that principals' leadership philosophies played in creating a positive learning environment in Malindi District secondary schools. However, the current study concentrated on the leadership styles of the principals and the behavior of the pupils.

In Siaya, Kisumu, and Kajiado Counties in Kenya, Obonyo (2019) investigated principals' leadership styles and their relationship with teachers' job satisfaction. The correlation research design was used in the study. All of the 397 principals, 389 deputy principals, 1,190 department heads, and 2,208 teachers working in public secondary schools in the counties of Siaya, Kisumu, and Kajiado who had spent at least two years at the same institution made

up the target population. A total of 352 respondents, including 39 secondary school principals, 35 deputy principals, 97 department heads, and 181 secondary school instructors, were sampled using proportional stratified and simple random sampling. The study found a substantial inverse relationship between teachers' work satisfaction and a laissez-faire leadership style. The study came to the conclusion that a principal's leadership style has a big impact on how happy teachers are at work.

The impact of Laissez-leadership Faire's style on academic performance was examined by Muturi (2021). A review of the relevant literature. The paper employed a desk study review methodology, reviewing pertinent empirical literature to find key themes and isolate knowledge gaps. According to the study, servant leaders had a little impact on performance since schools with head teachers who exhibited a laissez-faire leadership style performed horribly because no one was held accountable.

2.0. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

The research design for the study was a descriptive survey. This study method was deemed suitable since it enables the researcher to get data through conducting interviews as well as distributing questionnaires and forms for the respondents to complete. This is carried out independently of the dependent variable, which in this study is the leadership styles of the principals (Orodho, 2012). The descriptive survey research design also enables reliable generalization of findings from a small sample.

2.2 Target Population

The overall population of participants or the entire environment of interest to the researcher is the definition of target population given by Oso and Onen (2005). The target audience was made up of 216 instructors and 31 deputy principals (administrative) from the 31 public secondary schools in Teso North Sub County, Kenya. 139 people made up the overall sample, including 123 teachers and 16 deputy principals (administration). The deputy principals in charge of administration and the instructors from the sampled schools were surveyed for information on the leadership philosophies of principals and their effects on students' behavior. This Sub-County was chosen because it has all types of educational institutions, which results in principals with a range of leadership philosophies and pupils with diverse behavioral patterns.

2.3 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

Table 1. Sample size

Respondents	Target Population	Sample	%	Sampling Technique
Deputy principals (administration)	31	16	51.6	Purposive
Teachers	216	123	57.1	Simple random
TOTAL	247	139	56.28	

Source: Author (2021)

2.4. Instruments of Data Collection

A questionnaire was employed by the researcher to get information from the teachers. Both closed-ended and open-ended questions were included in the surveys. The use of questionnaires is useful since it allows for the collection of data from a large number of respondents while maintaining the respondents' anonymity, allowing for more honest responses. Additionally, surveys have standardized formats and are simpler to complete (Orodho, 2009).

An interview was used to obtain data from deputy Principals pertaining the leadership practices in the school and teacher job satisfaction.

3.0. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Determine the relationship between the existence of laissez-faire leadership and students' discipline

The objective for the study was to determine the relationship between the existence of laissez-faire leadership and students' discipline. The study set to verify a null hypothesis stating:

H₀ There is no statistically significant relationship between the existence of laissez-faire leadership style and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Teso North Sub County

Hence the study set to analyze the data collected from the questionnaires administered to teachers in order to determine the existence of Laissez faire leadership style among Principals in the schools sampled for study. The teachers were required to rate their opinions against five statements on a five point likert scale, where;

1-Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3-Undecided, 4- Agree and 5- Strongly Agree.

The findings of their opinions were presented in table 2

Table 2: Teacher Responses on Laissez faire Leadership by Principals

Statement	SD	D	UD	A	SA			
The principal is Hands off	12	13	12	26	52	115	252	2.19
Leaves decisions to students & Staff	24	21	18	33	19	115	343	2.98
Principal fails to take action	4	15	16	26	54	115	234	2.03
Hardly controls staff and students	6	14	5	35	55	115	226	1.97
Hardly monitors activities of the school	4	11	6	44	50	115	220	1.91

Source: Field data, 2022

When the teachers were required to rate opinion on whether the principal is Hands off, majority represented by 78(67.8%) disagreed with the statement while only 25(21.7%) agreed. A total of 12(10.4%) were not sure with the statement which brought the weighted mean to 2.19 which is very low and hence imply there was very few principals could be understood as being hands off.

On whether the principal leaves decision making to students and staff, 52(45.2%) disagreed with the statement while 45(39.1%) agreed and only 18(15.7%) indicated being neutral. The weighted mean for the ratings on the statement was 2.98 implying that generally, most principals do not abandon decision making to students and staff.

When asked whether principal fails to take action over issues in the school, a large proportion of 80(69.6%) agreed while only 19(16.5%) agreed with the statement and 16(13.9%) were not sure about the statement. Hence the rating for the statement had a weighted mean of 2.03 which generally imply most principals usually take prompt action whenever issues crop up which means there is limited Laissez-faire leadership.

The teachers were also required to rate opinion as to whether the principal hardly controls staff and students, a very large proportion of the respondents represented by 90(78.3%) disagreed while a very small proportion of 20(17.4%) agreed. Only 5(4.3%) were neutral over the statement, giving a very low mean rating of 1.97 implying that very few principals fail to controls staff and students.

The respondents were also required to rate their opinion on the statement that the principal hardly monitors activities of the school, a very large proportion represented by 94(81.7%) indicated that they disagreed with the statement while a very minimal proportion of 15(13.0%) agreed. And 6(5.2%) were not sure about the statement. Hence the statement had the lowest mean rating of 1.91 implying there were nearly no principals who conformed to the attribute of failing to monitors activities of the school.

3.2. Aggregation of Variables for Responses on Principal's Laissez faire Leadership Style

The ratings in table 3 were aggregated to compute indices that could measure the levels of Laissez faire leadership by principals in the sampled schools which would help the researcher to draw inferences in relation to levels of discipline. The index had values ranging from 5 to 25. An aggregate of Values above 15 indicate relatively high levels of Laissez faire leadership by principals while values below 15, imply low levels. The descriptive statistics for the index were presented in table 4 below

Table 4: Principals' Laissez faire Leadership Index

School Discipline Category	N	Mean	Min	Max	Std. Deviation
High Level	67	10.7463	5.00	23.00	4.12804
Low Level	48	11.5625	5.00	24.00	4.81976
Total	115	11.0870	5.00	24.00	4.42791

Source: Field, 2022.

Table 4 illustrates that generally, there was very limited Laissez faire kind of leadership practices in the sampled schools) which was a value below the mean value of 15. However, the high level discipline schools had lower mean ratings for laissez faire leadership styles by principals) as compared to ratings in low level discipline schools) Hence, the findings could indicate that low levels of discipline can be attributed to existence of elements of Laissez faire leadership by principals

3.3. Hypothesis testing on influence of principals' Laissez faire leadership on student discipline

In order to achieve the objective of determining the relationship between the existence of laissez- faire leadership and students' discipline in the area under study. The study sought to verify H_0 stating:

H_0 There is no statistically significant relationship between the existence of laissez-faire leadership style and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Teso North Sub County

The study computed the inferential statistical technique of Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient in order to verify the hypothesis. The study compared the values of the discipline level index with the Laissez faire Leadership Index were presented in table 5.

Table 5: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient comparing Laissez faire with Levels of discipline

		Discipline Levels Index	Laissez Faire Leadership Index
Discipline Levels Index	Pearson Correlation	1	-.070
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.456
	N	115	115
Laissez Faire Leadership Index	Pearson Correlation	-.070	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.456	
	N	115	115

Source: Field data, 2022

From the table 5 the computed r -value was not significant. Hence the null hypothesis stating that there is no statistically significant relationship between the existence of laissez-faire leadership style and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Teso North Sub County, was accepted. A Pearson Correlation Coefficient was computed to assess a linear relationship between Laissez faire Leadership and levels of discipline in public secondary schools in Teso North Sub County, no significant correlation was determined .

These findings in table 5 were supported by interview data from interviews held with the deputy principals in schools. When asked to give opinion on the principal's use of laissez-faire leadership style and student discipline, D7, D10, D12 & D15 remarked that:

School Principal's hardly embrace laissez-faire leadership style as a management practice, this is because of the nature and characteristics of a learner today.

D1 remarked that:

No way...have I never witnessed a school Principal who practices laissez-faire leadership, the situation can't allow.

The result suggests that Teso North Sub County public secondary school principals rarely employ a laissez-faire leadership style in dealing with pupil behavior. As a result, the employment of laissez-faire leadership styles by school principals is less responsible for the discipline of the students.

As a result, Table 5 of the current study's findings indicated that the principals of some of the schools under examination had a laissez-faire leadership style, which is why there were variances in the levels of student discipline.

The results in Table 5 conflict with those of a comparable study by Boke, Nyakundi, and Namoki (2017), who found that a laissez-faire leadership style may lead to student discipline problems as a result of a school's failure to enforce rules and regulations. The School Principals in the current study, however, were found to only sometimes use a laissez-faire leadership style.

CONCLUSION

As a result, the study draws the conclusion that the discipline of students is not much affected by the principals' use of the laissez-faire leadership style.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the study findings and conclusion, the study recommends that school administrators should refrain from employing a laissez-faire management approach in order to foster healthy student behaviour.

REFERENCES

Abid .H.C *et al* (2017) *Principals' Leadership Styles and Teachers' Job Satisfaction: A Correlation Study at Secondary Level in Lahore*. Bulletin of education and research, December 2017, vol.39, pp. 44-47.

- Botha, R.J. (2005). *Excellence in Leadership: Demands on the Professional School Principal*. University of South Africa: College of Human Science, School of Education.
- Kendi, K.J (2018) *Influence of Principals' Leadership Styles on Students' Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Igembe Sub County, Kenya*, published research project, university of Nairobi.
- Kimarua, E. N. (2010). *Influence of Secondary Schools Principals' Leadership Styles on Students' Unrest in Kigumo District, Kenya* (Research project). Retrieved from <http://cees.uonbi.ac.ke>.
- Obonyo .P. M (2019) *Principals' Leadership Styles and their Relationship with Teachers' Job Satisfaction in Siaya, Kisumu and Kajiado Counties in Kenya*, Unpublished thesis, Kenyatta university.
- Okumbe, J. A. (1998). *Educational Management: Theory and Practice*. Nairobi: Nairobi university press.
- Oluwatayo, J. (2012). *Validity and Reliability Issues in Educational Research*. *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 2, 391-400.
- Orodho J.A. (2009) *Elements of Education and Social Science Research*. Maseno, Kanezi Publishers.
- Wakachala, K. M (2021) *Principles' leadership styles and students' unrest in Bungoma County*, Unpublished Thesis, Kibabii University, Kenya.