

Teachers' Perception of Selected Leadership Qualities of their Head Teachers: Meru District, Tanzania

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine how teachers evaluate selected leadership characteristics of the head teachers of private schools in Tanzanian, Meru District. In order to establish the patterns of instructional leadership, leadership styles, communication systems and decision making procedures of the head teachers' in private secondary schools in Meru District, a descriptive research design was used to obtain information for this study. The study also utilized a comparative approach to explore differences between or among groups on selected leadership variables. Descriptive data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire and from past records of students' marks as kept in Arusha Education Region Archives. Data was collected from teachers in nine schools. The groups of participants comprised 97 teachers. The findings revealed that teachers perceived that their head teachers practice instructional leadership, appropriate communication systems and decision making procedures, democratic leadership, autocratic leadership and some degree of laissez-faire leadership.

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Introduction

Evaluation of head teachers in private secondary schools is of great concern in relation to students' performance. The quality of leadership of the head teacher can affect students learning and achievement. As it has been discussed by Sergiovanni, (2009), the head teacher is an instructional leader. He/she is seen by most people as the most important, influential individual and powerful person in the school. Northouse (2007) posits that the way the head teacher manages the school directly affects the implementation of key processes within their work structure, which indirectly influences the school climate and organization at hierarchy, and ultimately affects student's performance.

Laughridge and Tarantino (2005) argue that effective schools are the results of the activities of effective head teachers, who demonstrate strong instructional leadership, create positive school climate conducive to learning and know how to manage time and people efficiently and effectively. Sergiovanni (2009) argues that facilitating change, helping teachers work together, assessing and furthering school improvement are instructional leadership responsibilities of the head teacher, which, if done effectively, result into good academic performance. In connection to this, Webster (1994) suggests that head teachers must know what effective instruction is prior to attempting to help teachers with improvement of their individual approaches. The context of teaching and managing school has changed and promises to change even more in this millennium. The democratic society is transforming rapidly towards an information society and global economy. These changes are happening faster than the school can accommodate, hence parents and educational officers impress on the head teachers leadership qualities to develop awareness and democratic mastery of basic skills for excellent performance (Smyth, 1989). The impact of good leadership can be readily seen in a school where it exists. It can be identified through different characteristics like commitment to accomplish school goals, high level of performance, high level of quality, effective, efficient use of resources, mutual support and team work (Goetsch & Davis, 2010).

Lewis as cited by Lunenburg & Ornstein (2008) maintained that the head teacher can greatly benefit from effective communication systems. He advises that the head teacher should get out of his/her office and talk to teachers. This enables him/her to become aware of the needs of the teachers. Some of the positive communication behaviors that account for a successful leader include being verbally involved, being informed, seeking others' opinions, initiating new ideas, and being firm but not rigid, (Northouse, 2007). St. John cited by Lunenburg and Ornstein

(2008) holds that the school's effective communication has the following essential components which the head teacher has to ensure:

- i. Promoting the communication climate: By building a feeling of mutual trust among fellow workers and between management and teachers.
- ii. Opening communication channels: By establishing upward, downward, horizontal and informal communications.
- iii. Planning communication timing: By carefully planning and coordinating timing of important messages both from school administration to teachers and from teachers to school administration.
- iv. Executing feedback to communication: By ensuring that the teachers receive feedback to the messages conveyed to the school administration.

Decision making is the process of selecting one course of action from among two or more alternatives which is a critical task in a total quality setting (Goetsch & Davis, 2010). In regard to decision making strategies, Towel, cited by Lunenburg and Ornstein (2008) argues that involving teachers in decision making really improves school functioning. When the head teacher works together with teachers to identify and resolve teaching-related problems, it guides and assists them in setting the school standard and goals. This will also help teachers to set some challenging goals for themselves by channeling and molding their own motivation. It also helps to mediate conflict by interpreting rules rationally, explaining their usefulness and logical consequences of violating them.

Methodology

Descriptive research design was employed in this study. The study also utilized a comparative approach to explore differences between or among groups on selected leadership variables. Descriptive data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire and from past records

of students' marks kept in Arusha Education Region Archives. The groupings for the comparative approach were mainly determined by demographic variables. However, another salient grouping consisted of categorized schools according to the levels of academic performance of their students and national examination for Form IV students.

The unit of analysis in this study was the teacher. The population of the study comprised 257 teachers in the 16 private secondary schools located in Tanzania, Meru District of Tanzania. Out of a possible 16 schools, nine participated in this study. The nine schools were purposefully chosen because they had presented Form IV candidates for graduation for the school years 2006, 2007 and 2008. Their current head teachers had also administered those schools during the same school years. In addition, only teachers who had taught in the respective schools for the stated period were eligible for the study as respondents. Questionnaires were distributed to 162 teachers and 97 completed the questionnaires representing approximately 60% return.

Statistical Treatment of Data

One way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and t-test were used to address and respond to hypothesis raised. The level of significance for hypothesis testing was set at 0.05. The study aimed to test if there was significant difference in instructional leadership, leadership styles, communication systems, and decision making procedures of head teachers as perceived by teachers in their schools, categorized according to the level of their students' academic performance.

Table 1 shows the mean scores for teachers' perceptions by schools level of students' academic performance on all selected leadership variables. The table also presents the test F of one-way ANOVA among groups of levels of student academic performance on all the selected leadership qualities. To get a better picture of how the teachers evaluated their head teachers in each of the leadership variables, a comparison was done not only on the means but also on the items included in the evaluation questionnaire.

Table 1: Comparisons of Means of Teachers' Perceptions on Selected Leadership Qualities of Students by Academic Performance (n=97)

	Level of students academic performance	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Instructional leadership	High performing	33	2.9439	.65655	8.136	.001*
	Average performing	36	3.3528	.64364		
	Low performing	28	3.5482	.46815		
Autocratic leadership	High performing	33	2.8333	.67508	1.827	.166
	Average performing	36	3.1250	.63104		
	Low performing	28	3.0804	.71380		
Democratic leadership	High performing	33	2.9461	.66442	3.267	.042*
	Average performing	36	3.1944	.88347		
	Low performing	28	3.4365	.64216		
Laissez-faire leadership	High performing	33	2.5212	.57866	.764	.469
	Average performing	36	2.7389	.84559		
	Low performing	28	2.6429	.73304		
Communication systems	High performing	33	2.9909	.72902	4.476	.014*
	Average performing	36	3.3167	.73310		
	Low performing	28	3.5000	.52423		
Decision making procedures	High performing	33	2.9152	.67274	5.067	.008*
	Average performing	36	3.2639	.78637		
	Low performing	28	3.4571	.51814		

* The mean difference is Significant at the 0.05 level

Instructional Leadership

High performing schools' mean score on instructional leadership was the lowest ($\mu = 2.9439$) followed by the mean score of average performing schools ($\mu = 3.3528$). The mean score of lower performing schools was highest ($\mu = 3.5482$). A one-way ANOVA test applied to the groups yielded a p-value of .001 significantly less than the cut-off point of $\alpha = 0.05$. Therefore the null sub hypothesis that there was no significant difference in instructional leadership of head teachers as perceived by teachers from schools categorized according to different levels of student academic performance was rejected. According to the results, the low performing schools understood much about the instructional leadership of their head teachers than the average and high performing schools. Low performing school teachers had a high positive attitude towards instructional leadership of their head teachers as compared to average and higher performing schools.

In order to determine which groups were significantly different, a post hoc test for multiple comparisons was affected, (see Table 2). The test indicated that the mean score of high performing schools ($\mu = 2.9439$) differed significantly from both the mean score of average performing schools ($\mu = 3.3529$) and that of low performing schools ($\mu = 3.5482$). However, perceptions of teachers in low and average performing schools on instructional leadership of their head teachers were similar.

Table 2: Multiple Comparisons for Instructional Leadership by Academic Performance

(I) Performance Category	(J) Performance Category	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std Error	Sig.	95% confidence Interval	
					Lower bound	Upper Bound
High performing	Average performance	-.40884*	.14539	.006	-.6975	-.1202
Average performing	Low performing	-.60427*	.15501	.000	-.9120	-.2965
	High performing	.40884*	.14539	.006	.1202	.6975
Low performing	Low performing	-.19544	.15201	.202	-.4973	.1064
	High performing	.60427*	.15501	.000	.2965	.9120
	Average per	.19544	.15201	.202	-.1064	.4973

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

The findings can be in line with the ideas of Brewer (2001) suggested that instructional leaders require focusing on instruction, building a community of learners, sharing decision making, sustaining the basics, leveraging time, and supporting ongoing professional development for all staff members. Instructional leaders should redirect resources to support a multifaceted school plan, and create a climate of integrity, inquiry, and continuous improvement of school.

Autocratic Leadership Style

High performing schools mean score on autocratic leadership was the lowest

($\mu = 2.8333$) followed by the mean score of lower performing schools ($\mu = 3.0804$).

The mean score of average performing schools was highest ($\mu = 3.1250$). A one-way ANOVA test applied to the groups yielded a p-value of .166 greater than the cut-off point of $\alpha = 0.05$.

Therefore, the null sub hypothesis that there was no significant difference in autocratic leadership of head teachers as perceived by teachers in schools with different levels of student academic performance was not rejected. This portrayed that the average performing school teachers had a positive attitude to their head teachers' autocratic leadership than low and high performing schools. They understood well their head teachers' autocratic leadership styles than the other two groups. The three groups however, held similar perceptions regarding their head teachers' autocratic leadership style and moderately upheld their head teachers' behavior as autocratic leaders in their schools.

Democratic Leadership Style

High performing schools mean score on democratic leadership was the lowest ($\mu = 2.9461$) followed by the mean score of average performing schools ($\mu = 3.1944$). The mean score of lower performing schools was highest ($\mu = 3.4365$). A One-way ANOVA test applied to the groups yielded a p-value of .042 significantly less than the cut-off point of $\alpha = 0.05$. Therefore the null sub hypothesis that there was no significant difference in democratic leadership of head teachers as perceived by teachers in schools with different levels of student academic performance was rejected. The results portrayed that teachers from low performing schools understood well their head teachers democratic leadership style than average and high performing schools. They had a positive attitude to their head teachers.

In order to determine which groups differed significantly, a different post hoc test for multiple comparisons was affected, (see Table 3). The test indicated that the mean scores of high performing schools ($\mu = 2.9461$) differed significantly from both the mean score of average performing schools ($\mu = 3.1944$) and that of low performing schools

($\mu = 3.4365$). However, perceptions of teachers in low performing and average performing schools about the democratic leadership of their head teachers were similar. This finding can concur with the idea of Bush (2002) who argued that the greatest task of a leader is to get the people from the place they are, to a new and advanced one, where they have not been, by invoking attainment of their great vision.

Table 3: Multiple Comparisons for Democratic Leadership by Education Qualification

(I) Performance Category	(J) Performance category	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std Error	Sig	95% confidence Interval	
					Lower bound	Upper Bound
High performing	Average perform	-.24832	.18024	.172	-.6062	.1096
	Low performing	-.49038*	.19216	.012	-.8719	-.1088
Average performing	High performing	.24832	.18024	.172	.1096	.6062
	Low performing	-.24206	.18845	.202	-.6162	.1321
Low performing	Average per	.49038*	.19216	.012	.1088	.8719
	High performing	.24206	.18845	.202	-.1321	.6162

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

Laissez-faire Leadership

High performing schools mean score on laissez-faire leadership was the lowest

($\mu = 2.5212$) followed by the mean score of lower performing schools ($\mu = 2.6429$). The mean score of average performing schools was highest ($\mu = 2.7389$).

A one-way ANOVA test applied to the groups yielded a p-value of .469 greater than the cut-off point of $\alpha = 0.05$. Therefore, the null sub hypothesis that there was no significant difference in laissez-faire leadership of head teachers as perceived by teachers in schools with different levels of student academic performance was not rejected. Thus, high performing, average performing and low performing schools held similar perceptions regarding their head teachers' laissez-faire

leadership style and moderately upheld their head teachers' behavior as laissez-faire leaders in their schools.

Communication Systems

High performing schools mean score on communication systems was the lowest ($\mu = 2.9909$) followed by the mean score of average performing schools ($\mu = 3.3167$). The mean score of lower performing schools was highest ($\mu = 3.5000$).

A one-way ANOVA test applied to the groups yielded a p-value of .014 significantly less than the cut-off point of $\alpha = 0.05$. Therefore the null sub hypothesis that there was no significant difference in communication systems of head teachers as perceived by teachers in schools with different levels of student academic performance was rejected.

In order to determine which groups were significantly different a post hoc test for multiple comparisons was affected, (see Table 4). The test indicated that the mean score of high performing schools ($\mu = 2.9909$) differed significantly from both the mean score of average performing schools ($\mu = 3.3167$) and that of low performing schools ($\mu = 3.5000$). However, perceptions of teachers in low performing and average performing schools about the communication systems of their head teachers were similar.

Table 4: Multiple Comparisons for Communication directions by Education Qualification

(I) Performance Category	(J) Performance category	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std Error	Sig.	95% confidence Interval	
					Lower bound	Upper Bound
High performing	Average perform	-.32576*	.16345	.049	-.6503	-.0012
	Low performing	-.50909*	.17426	.004	-.8551	-.1631
Average performing	High performing	.32576*	.16345	.049	.0012	.6503
	Low performing	-.18333	.17089	.286	-.5226	.1560
Low performing	Average per	.50909*	.17426	.004	.1631	.8551
	High performing	.18333	.17089	.286	-.1560	.5226

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

Decision Making Procedures

High performing schools mean score on decision making procedure was the lowest ($\mu = 2.9152$) followed by the mean score of average performing schools ($\mu = 3.2639$). The mean scores of lower performing schools was the highest ($\mu = 3.4571$).

A one-way ANOVA test applied to the groups yielded a p-value of .008 significantly less than the cut-off point of $\alpha = 0.05$. Therefore, the null sub hypothesis that there was no significant difference in decision making procedures of head teachers as perceived by teachers in schools with different levels of student academic performance was rejected. In order to determine which groups were significantly different a post hoc test for multiple comparisons was effected, (see Table 5).

Table 5: Multiple Comparisons for Decision making strategies by Education Qualification

(I) Performance Category	(J) Performance category	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std Error	Sig	95% confidence Interval	
					Lower bound	Upper Bound
High performing	Average perform	-.34874*	.16371	.036	-.6738	-.0237
	Low performing	-.54199*	.17453	.003	-.8885	-.1955
Average performing	High performing	.34874*	.16371	.036	.0237	.6738
	Low performing	-.19325	.17116	.262	-.5331	.1466
Low performing	High performing	.54199*	.17453	.003	.1955	.8885
	Average per	.19325	.17116	.262	-.1466	.5331

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

The test indicated that the mean score of high performing schools ($\mu = 2.9152$) differed significantly from both the mean score of average performing schools ($\mu = 3.2639$) and that of low performing schools ($\mu = 3.4571$). Nevertheless, perceptions of teachers in low performing and average performing schools about the decision making procedures of their head teachers

were similar. These findings can be related to the idea of Lunenburg and Ornstein (2008) who pointed out that involving teachers in decision making really improves school functioning.

Discussion and Conclusion

The salient findings from this study were that the low performing schools understood much about the instructional leadership of their head teachers than the average and high performing schools. Low performing school teachers had a high positive attitude towards instructional leadership of their head teachers as compared to average and high performing schools. The average performing school teachers had a positive attitude to their head teachers' autocratic leadership than low and high performing schools. They understood their head teachers' autocratic style than the other two groups. The three groups however, held similar perceptions regarding their head teachers' autocratic leaders in their schools.

The results also portray that teachers from low performing schools understood well their head teachers democratic leadership style than average and high performing schools. This group had a positive attitude to their head teachers. High performing, average performing and low performing schools held similar perceptions regarding their head teachers' laissez-faire leadership style and moderately upheld their head teachers' behavior as laissez-faire leaders in their schools. The perception of teachers in low performing and average performing schools about the communication systems of their head teachers were similar.

This study generates findings to the effect that school heads should make self-evaluation of their leadership qualities as a way of strengthening their skills. There is also need for head teachers to conduct continuous training for improvement in their leadership qualities. Such training could

include quality school management. Further studies could be carried out with participants drawn from primary and tertiary education institutions. Other variables such as school size and educational facilities could be considered on how they affect performance in schools.

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