

The influence of Principal's leadership style on Students' performance in selected secondary schools in Centre Region of Cameroon

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of principal's leadership styles on students' performance in some selected secondary schools in Mefou Afamba Division, Centre region of Cameroon. The study had as focus to gain insight into the kinds of leadership styles presently used, and the leadership preference of principals in the region. Data was collected using questionnaires from forty five teachers. Using regression analysis method, the study provided evidence that democratic leadership and laissez-faire leadership statistically do not influence the performance of students. However, autocratic leadership style practiced by principals was seen to have significant influence on effectiveness of teachers and performance of students. These results draw us to the understanding that leaders adopt different styles to manage their personnel depending on the situation.

Keywords: Leadership style, autocratic leadership, democratic leadership, laissez-faire leadership

1. Introduction

The success and quality of achievement recorded by an institution partly relies on its leadership. Schools therefore must pay considerable attention to the type of leader they place at the helm of the school. Every leader faces a variety of issues on a daily basis and has a personal educational leadership philosophy.

(Armstrong, 2004) Defines leadership as influence, power and the legitimate authority acquired by a leader to be able to effectively transform the organization through the direction of the human resources that are the most important organizational asset, leading to the achievement of desired purpose. Moreover, (Cole, 2002) defines leadership as inspiring people to perform. Even, if an institution has all the financial resources to excel, it may fail woefully or dismally if the leader does not motivate others to accomplish their tasks effectively. Sashkin (2003) maintains that leadership matters because leaders help to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty in organizations or society. Leaders take constructive acts to achieve long-term goals and provide clear positive reasons for their actions, goals and accomplishments. Leadership style is therefore a key factor to improve the condition of any department and also the same in school aspects. (Maicibi, 2005), asserts that, without a proper leadership style, effective performance cannot be realized in schools. (Namirembe, 2005), further argues that, many secondary schools still lack the necessary performance requirement, not because of inadequate funds or even poor facilities but as a result of poor leadership styles have direct effect on the overall effectiveness of both teachers and student's performance under the leadership of school principal.

Mbua (2003) sees the leadership of the principal as the head or executive of a secondary or high school who manages the school administration and influence teachers and students towards the achievement of school objectives. Fielder (1967), quoted in Mbua (2003), sees leadership style as the fundamental need for the

leader to the motivation of behavior in various interpersonal situations. In order to enhance high academic excellence in educational achievement, it is important to deal with effective leadership styles performed by principals as they indeed play the most important role in determining students' performance.

Statement of the problem

The primary aim of secondary school education encompasses the acquisition of knowledge skill and attitude, producing graduate who are prepared for higher education to become valuable citizens, competent intellectuals, who will go a long way to help and assist in the growth and development of their nations in all ramification in order to meet with the competitive global standards. With this laudable aim of education, the phenomenon of students' performance in schools in Cameroon has been a great concern to all the stake holders of education. This led us to the question; could these low performances be influenced by the principals' leadership styles? The rate at which classroom teachers are transformed into principals with minimal administrative training and the lack of leadership training for current principals in schools in Cameroon is a call for concern in school leadership and managerial competencies. Principals in government institutions obtain appointments through ministerial decrees, while those in private institutions and mission schools are appointed by the proprietor or board of directors respectively. These appointments regroup together experience and inexperience individuals which makes the situation complex. Principals must often do not receive any formal training for the position which indicates the lack of tacit knowledge and technical know-how for the administrative tasks that await them. These concerns and many others keep the effectiveness of school principal leadership questionable, leading the reason why this study was designed.

Research Objectives

The main objective seeks to find out the influence of principal's leadership style on students' performance. This is followed by specific objectives as follows:

- To examine the influence of principal's autocratic leadership style on students' performance.
- To determine the influence of principal's democratic leadership style on students' performance
- To identify the extent to which principal's laissez-faire leadership style influence students' performance.

Research Questions

The main research question seeks to find out whether there is any relationship between principal's leadership style and students' performance? This is followed by specific questions which state that:

- How does the principal's autocratic leadership style influence students' performance?
- To what extend does principal's democratic leadership style influence students' performance?
- Does the principal's laissez-faire leadership style have any influence on students' performance?

2. Literature Review

Leadership has been discussed by several authors but more and more studies keep appearing on this subject in the literature. In many instances, the success or failure of an organization, nations and other social structures was largely attributable to their leadership style (Oladipo, Jamila, Abudul, & Daud, 2013). Leadership style has an influential relationship with institutional and employee performance, and different leadership styles may have a positive correlation with organizational performance (Wang, Chich-Jen, Mei-Ling, 2010). In another remark, McGrath & Macmillan (200) note that the style of leadership and organizational output are strongly related. Effective leadership style is seen as a powerful source of sustained competitive advantage and development management Khajeh, A. (2018). Different leadership styles influence the performance of an institution. The following sections examines three types of leadership styles practice by managers of schools and school principals in most communities.

The authoritarian or autocratic leadership style

The authoritarian or autocratic leadership style is often exercised by a leader (principal or teacher) who has a very high level of influence over his subordinates. Usually, autocratic leaders make choice based on their beliefs and judgment and seldom consider follower's advice which requires a group's absolute and

authoritarian control (Cherry, 2019). These types of leaders want their subordinates to function as they command (Al Khajeh, 2018). Autocratic leadership may be useful in emergency situations where there is a homogeneous workforce, where the leader is wise, fair and has a good understanding of the followers (Armstrong, 2004). Also, Adeyemi & Bolarinwa (2013) brought into focus a dimension of leadership style that is associated with the autocratic/democratic continuum. This is the task orientation-versus relationship-oriented style of leadership with the task orientation being similar to the autocratic method and the relationship oriented style being similar to the democratic method. It is a kind of leadership style where a principal lacks confidence and never trusts subordinates (Gyasi, Owusu-Ampomah, 2016). Psychologists believe that autocratic leadership style stems from fear or insecurity (Afful-Broni & Nanyele (2012). Teacher as a leader thus, aim at providing guidance, implementing plans and motivating students for achieving the desired behavioral objectives. Teachers use cooperative, constructive, transactional and autocratic leadership styles in the teaching-learning process as well as at all managerial levels (Hallinger, 2004; Houser and Frymier, 2009 & Plas and Kearney, 2010). Autocratic leaders take note that decision making procedures are carried out in due time and rigidly (Robinson & Otengir, 2008). Authoritative instructional leadership, in certain instances such as low-income communities, is believed to play a crucial role in establishing order and instill discipline (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2004).

Democratic leadership style

The democratic leadership style is that which recognizes the dignity and worth of students in the classroom and the school in general. In this type, power and authority are either passed- on or derived from the governed (students) as they are given the right or freedom to make choices, take appropriate decisions and are responsible for whatever out-comes these may come with. The leader here is very permissive and considerate of his group members feeling and thus passing in for a “democratic leader” operating upon democratic principles. This type of leader spread responsibility to all the members of the group ensuring their maximum involvement and of their active participation. Democratic leadership, also known as participatory or collective leadership, is a kind of style where members of the group are more active in the process of making decision (Cherry, 2019). In a democratic system, decision making is not centralized and the quality is appreciated and rewarded by the work team (Belias, D. & Koustelios, 2014). Contrarily, it is suggested that, depending on the contribution made by the employees or subordinates, there is potential for poor decisions to be made by subordinates (Nwokocha, & Iheriohanma, 2015).

The democratic leadership style recognizes the dignity and worth in the educational process. In this type, power and authority are either passed- on or derived from the governed (students) as they are given the right or freedom to make choices, take appropriate decisions and are responsible for whatever out-comes these may come with. Meaningful change and improvement in schools are accomplished by the contribution of all members since this will enhance the sense of ownership of the improvements processes. In a collaborative school culture, teachers pursue a clear, shared purpose, engage in collaborative activity, and accept a collective responsibility for student learning. Parent involvement is also fundamental in students’ academic achievement, attendance, and student attitude towards education (Delgado, 2014). In all educational set-up headed by a democratic principal and teacher for the case of a classroom etc., they will usually share planning of educational activities or programs and decision making with the group of teachers and students for both cases respectively. In a study by Akudo (2020) secondary school principals in public secondary schools in Nnewi education zone adopted democratic leadership styles; the style so adopted has positive and significant influence on the good academic achievements of majority of the students in English language in secondary schools in Nnewi education zone. Other research studies (Chapman, W.D. 2011; Goldstein, J. & Noguera, P. 2006) state that this style provides guidance, develop consensus and adoption to the prevailing condition. It increases the morale and performance of community members. Studies on the effect of leadership style performance of students in KCSE (Okoth, 2000 & Kimacia, 2007) found out that head teachers rated as being democratic had high mean performance index than autocratic head teachers.

The laissez-faire leadership style

This type of leader is exceptionally tolerant to his subordinates and then presents him only as a mere “symbolic” leader or head. For the case of a school principal, unguided freedom is not dished-out to his teachers, students etc., and no rules nor is apparent group of teachers’ goals and little or no help given to these teachers. Teachers just like students come to school at will, does what they like, teaches what they like thus working in an atmosphere that seems not to have any authority at all. The laissez-faire leadership style could lead to apathy or anarchy Gyasi & Owusu-Ampomah (2016). Laissez faire leaders rarely or never guide the team members and give the decisions for the team members. Although this style may be effective when the team members are excellent in their fields or expertise, it often leads to unclear roles and lack of motivation (Blais & Koustelios, 2014). Their morals are often low and when they work, they produce poor and untidy work. They are irritable, hostile and at times aggressive. Those practicing “more of laissez -faire styles” are but only destructive elements to educational set-up. At least there should be some restriction on the style. When a wrong person is put in charge, he or she refuses to take action in order not to offend the followers, thus producing disastrous consequences (Afful-Broni, 2004).

3. Methodology

The research design for this study is descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey enable the researcher to collect data from different sources, organize, analyze, present and make interpretations. Data was collected from 10 secondary schools (2 public, 7 lay private and 1 religious school) in Mefou Afamba Division. Forty five (45) staff participated in the study. Selection of the staff members was done through volunteer sampling technique. Analysis of the data was done using regression analysis.

Presentation of Results and Discussion

The study was conducted in ten different secondary schools in Mefou Afamba Division (Centre Region of Cameroon). The questionnaire was distributed to 45 respondents. Based on the respondent’s answers to the questions related to the variables on leadership style: autocratic, democratic and laissez – faire, the relationship between principal’s leadership style and student’s performance was analyzed and discuss below.

Influence of Autocratic leadership on students’ performance

The study sought to investigate autocratic leadership styles on student’s performance. Regression analysis was done with students’ performance as the dependent factor and autocratic leadership as tested predictor factor. Data from 45 respondents were tested. The results are illustrated below.

Table 1. Relationship between autocratic leadership style and Students’ Performance

| Performance | Coefficient | Std. Error | T |
|-----------------------|-------------|------------|--------|
| Autocratic Leadership | 3.092 | .224 | 13.794 |
| Constant | .215 | .060 | 3.564 |

$F = 12.701$, $P < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.251$, $R^2\text{-Adjusted} = 0.231$. The value of variance $R^2 = 0.251$, shows that 25.1% of the students’ performance is explained by autocratic leadership style. The values of $F = 12.701$, $P < 0.05$, shows that autocratic leadership style statistically and significantly predicts the student’s performance (i.e., the regression model is a good fit of the data) and that autocratic leadership significantly influence student performance of the Mefou Afamba Division in Yaoundé Cameroon. The data is statistically significant ($t=13.794$, $p<.05$). The regression model explaining the results in Table 1 is given by: $\text{performance} = 3.092 + 0.215 \times \text{AL}$

The model shows that autocratic leadership positively affects the students’ performance, i.e. an increase in mean index of autocratic leadership increases the performance of the students by a positive unit mean index value of 0.215. The study sought to establish the effect of autocratic leadership as a function of students’ performance in Mefou Afamba Division in Yaoundé Cameroon. Numerous studies have posited that well managed autocratic leadership lead to improvement of the performance of students (Thernstrom &

Thernstrom, 2004; Armstrong, 2004; Houser and Frymier, 2009 & Plas and Kearney, 2010). The autocratic leader only commands or dictates orders to his subordinates and requires no assistance, expects obedience and adherence to his decisions etc. goes on to dominate staff meetings which he turns into a forum of announcing decisions which he alone had made and even goes ahead to suspend or expel student's offenders before his staff knows about it.

Influence of democratic leadership on students' performance

The study sought to investigate the relationship between democratic leadership style and student performance. The findings are presented and discussed below.

Table 2. The Relationship between democratic leadership and students' performance.

| Performance | | Coefficient | Std Error | T |
|-----------------------|--|-------------|-----------|-------|
| Democratic Leadership | | .126 | .170 | .738 |
| Constant | | 3.308 | .729 | 4.537 |

$F = .544, P > 0.05, R^2 = 0.014, R^2\text{-Adjusted} = -0.012$

The value of variance $R^2 = 0.014$, shows that 1.4% of the students' performance is explained by democratic leadership. The values of $F = .544, P > 0.05$, shows that democratic leadership does not statistically and significantly predicts the students' performance (i.e., the regression model is a bad fit of the data) and that democratic leadership does not significantly influence the performance of students in the study area. The value of democratic leadership is statistically significant ($t = .738, p > 0.05$). The regression model explaining the results is given by: $\text{Performance} = 3.308 + .126 \times \text{DL}$

Results of regression analysis indicate that there is no significant relationship between democratic leadership style and student's performance; $p > 0.05$ ($P = .465$). The results show that democratic leadership statistically and significant does not predict the students' performance (i.e., the regression model is not a good fit of the data) and democratic leadership does not significantly influence the performance of students in some selected schools in Yaoundé Cameroon. The findings of this study present contrarily views to those of (Akudo, 2020; Chapman, W.D. 2011; Goldstein, J. & Noguera, P. 2006). However, Nwokocha & Iheriohanma, E. (2015) agree with this study that depending on the contribution made by the employees or subordinates, there is potential for poor decisions to be made by subordinates.

Influence of Laissez-faire leadership style on students' performance

The study sought to investigate the relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and students' performance. The following sections presents and discuss the finding of this variable.

Table 3. Relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and student performance

| Performance | | Coefficient | Std. Error | T |
|--------------------------------|--|-------------|------------|-------|
| Laissez-faire Leadership style | | .000 | .161 | |
| Constant | | 3.840 | .633 | .003 |
| | | | | 6.063 |

$F = .000, P > 0.05, R^2 = 0.000, R^2\text{-Adjusted} = -0.026$

The value of variance $R^2 = 0.000$, shows that 0% of the students' performance is explained by laissez-faire leadership style. The values of $F = 0.000, P = 0.998$, shows that laissez-faire leadership style does not statistically and significantly predicts the students' performance (i.e., the regression model is not a good fit of the data) and laissez-faire leadership style does not significantly influence the performance of students in Mfoundi Divison, Yaoundé. The regression model explaining the results is given by: $\text{Performance} = 3.840 + 0.00 \times \text{LL}$ $\text{Performance} = 3.840$.

The model shows that laissez-faire leadership style does not affect the students' performance. Results of regression analysis show that laissez-faire leadership style does not statistically significantly influence the performance of students, $p > 0.05$ ($P = 0.998$) with an explanatory power of 0% percent.

4. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- Principals should involve all their staff in the decision making process of the school;
- Principals should avoid the laissez-faire leadership style considering that the latter always leads to poor management and could lead to poor performances in the school.
- The principal should not rely on one leadership style. Depending on the situation, they should be flexible their leadership style.
- Teachers should collaborate with their leaders and be ready to accept collective success and failure.

5. Conclusion

This research work is focused on the influence of principal's leadership styles on students' performance in some selected secondary schools in Mefou Afamba Division in the Centre Region of Cameroon. Three types of leadership styles were examined in the study and the results established that two principal leadership styles insignificantly influenced students' performance. That is democratic leadership and laissez - faire leadership styles. Leadership style is not static. On the other hand, autocratic leadership style is said to have an influence on students' academic performance. Principals of schools and other managing positions should consider making their leadership style dynamic. Judging from the situation before acting is an important factor which principals should cultivate to create a good school culture.

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