

School Leadership and Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in West Budama, Tororo District, Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of school leadership on academic performance in secondary schools using a cross-sectional design and quantitative approach. Data was collected from 92 teachers out of a sample of 96, with Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression employed for analysis. The results showed that performance-based incentives ($B = 3.015, p = .003$) had the strongest positive influence on academic performance, followed by professional development ($B = 2.524, p = .017$) and clear expectations ($B = 2.026, p = .018$), suggesting these factors enhance teaching effectiveness and student outcomes. Individualized consideration ($B = 1.055, p = .043$) and idealized influence ($B = .946, p = .048$) also positively impacted academic success. However, factors like gender ($p = .315$), curriculum delivery ($p = .278$), and age ($p = .845$) had no significant effect on performance. The study recommends focusing on performance-based incentives, professional development, and clear goal-setting to improve academic outcomes.

Key words: Leadership, Instructional, Transactional, Transformational, Academic performance

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INTRODUCTION

Effective school leadership is widely recognized as one of the key factors influencing student academic performance. Globally, research indicates that leadership quality plays a critical role in creating environments that foster learning, teacher motivation, and student achievement (Karatas et al., 2024). Educational leadership is crucial for the development of schools, particularly in contexts where resources are limited, as it helps in directing efforts towards achieving educational goals, managing challenges, and improving student outcomes.

In Africa, the importance of leadership in enhancing educational outcomes has been increasingly acknowledged. According to the African Union (2024), quality education in Africa is often hindered by several factors, including inadequate leadership, insufficient teacher training, and inadequate learning materials. The African Union has emphasized the need for strong school leadership to support educational reforms and enhance the quality of education across the continent. The situation in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) presents a more critical challenge, with countries facing high dropout rates, poor educational outcomes, and low rates of literacy and numeracy. UNESCO (2022) reports that more than 33 million children of primary school age in Sub-Saharan Africa are out of school, with secondary school enrollment rates still below global targets.

In East Africa, the challenges related to educational leadership are similarly evident. A report by UNESCO (2024) indicated that East African countries, including Uganda, face significant gaps in educational performance. While there have been efforts to improve access to education, disparities remain in the quality of education offered. Poor leadership practices in schools have been highlighted as a contributing factor to the overall educational challenges in the region.

In Uganda, the education sector has made considerable progress with increased enrollment rates, but the quality of education, especially in secondary schools, continues to lag. According to the Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB, 2023), the pass rates for the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education

(UACE) examinations highlight a significant gap, with 26.3% of candidates failing to meet the minimum criteria of two Principal passes required for university degree admission.

Specifically, in Tororo District, the quality of education has been influenced by several factors, with school leadership identified as a critical determinant of academic performance (Auma, 2019). According to the Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development [MoFPED] (2020), schools in the West Budama region of Tororo District face challenges such as limited infrastructure, inadequate teaching materials, and a high teacher turnover rate. Moreover, the leadership in these schools often struggles with managing these challenges effectively, which affects student performance. Despite these challenges, school leadership has the potential to mediate many of these issues by fostering a culture of high expectations, providing necessary resources, and ensuring that teaching practices align with curriculum standards.

In this context, this study aims to investigate the role of school leadership in shaping academic performance in secondary schools in West Budama, Tororo District. By examining the leadership styles, strategies, and practices within the schools, the study seeks to understand how leadership influences student outcomes in this particular region.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

School leadership is a crucial factor influencing academic performance in secondary schools. School leaders, particularly principals, are responsible for guiding educational processes, motivating staff, and setting the tone for academic achievement (Dabesa & Cheramlak, 2021). The leadership styles employed by school leaders play a significant role in shaping the learning environment, which directly impacts student outcomes. This essay explores the relationship between school leadership styles and academic performance, with a particular focus on transformational, transactional, and instructional leadership in secondary schools in West Budama, Tororo District, Uganda.

School leadership styles refer to the approaches that school leaders adopt in managing their schools and interacting with teachers, students, and other stakeholders. According to Akparep et al. (2019), leadership styles can significantly influence organizational outcomes, including student performance. Transformational leadership is characterized by leaders who inspire and motivate their followers to achieve more than what is expected, thereby fostering a positive school culture and higher student performance. Transformational leaders engage in behaviors such as inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence, which aim to empower teachers and students to exceed their own expectations (Metaferia et al., 2023). On the other hand, transactional leadership focuses on performance-based incentives, clear expectations, and corrective actions for maintaining school order and ensuring compliance (Reid et al., 2018). Transactional leadership often focuses on routine tasks, rewards, and punishments. Instructional leadership, which focuses on improving teaching and learning, is another leadership style widely recognized for its direct impact on academic outcomes. Instructional leaders focus on curriculum delivery, providing professional development opportunities for teachers, and monitoring classroom practices to ensure that teaching meets established standards (Reid et al., 2018).

Academic performance, often quantified by metrics such as grades or test scores, refers to the measurable outcomes of student learning. In this study, academic performance was conceptualized using end-of-term average scores, a commonly used indicator of student achievement in Ugandan schools. Research has shown that academic performance is influenced by various factors, including leadership behaviors, teaching quality, and the overall school climate (Auma, 2019). As such, school leadership, by shaping the educational environment, is believed to have a direct effect on student performance.

Globally, researchers have highlighted the importance of leadership styles in influencing academic performance. A study by Karatas et al. (2024), found that transformational leadership had a significant positive effect on student outcomes, as it encouraged a collaborative school culture, teacher engagement, and the continuous development of effective teaching practices. In particular, transformational leadership motivates teachers to perform at higher levels, resulting in improved student learning. Additionally, instructional leadership was found to have a strong link to improved academic performance, as it involves a direct focus on teaching practices and curriculum implementation (Reid et al., 2018). On the other hand, transactional leadership, while effective in maintaining order and ensuring routine tasks are accomplished, has been found to have limited impact on long-term academic outcomes due to its reliance on extrinsic motivation and its focus on compliance rather than innovation (Dabesa & Cheramlak, 2021).

In Africa, leadership plays a critical role in shaping academic outcomes in schools. A study by Dabesa and Cheramlak (2021), found that transformational leadership practices, particularly in the form of motivating teachers and creating a supportive school environment, positively impacted student academic performance in several African countries. However, the study also highlighted that many schools in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in rural areas, faced challenges in implementing transformational leadership

due to limited resources and systemic issues. In contrast, transactional leadership, with its focus on rewards and punishments, was more commonly practiced in these regions, with mixed effects on academic outcomes. Transactional leadership may work in contexts where structure and routine are essential, but its impact on fostering long-term academic achievement is limited.

In East Africa, including Uganda, several studies have explored the relationship between leadership and academic performance. Nizeyimana and Martha (2024), found that instructional leadership, which focuses on teachers' professional development and monitoring of classroom practices, directly improved student performance in Rwandan schools. Similarly, a study by Turyahikayo et al. (2024), in Uganda revealed that schools led by principals with a strong instructional leadership focus tended to have higher academic results. These leaders were able to align teaching strategies with the curriculum, provide teachers with ongoing professional support, and ensure that classroom practices met educational standards. Furthermore, transformational leadership, particularly in Ugandan secondary schools, has been found to foster a school culture of collaboration and motivation, resulting in improved student outcomes (Sengendo, 2023).

In Uganda, school leadership is particularly influential in determining academic performance, especially in secondary schools. According to Sengendo (2023), transformational leadership has shown a positive relationship with academic performance in Ugandan secondary schools, especially when school leaders focus on creating a vision of academic excellence, motivating teachers, and promoting collaboration. Similarly, instructional leadership has been associated with better academic outcomes in Ugandan schools because it focuses on improving teaching and learning processes. Principals who are actively engaged in monitoring classroom practices, supporting teachers' professional development, and ensuring effective curriculum delivery are more likely to see improved academic performance (Sengendo, 2023). However, the prevalence of transactional leadership in Ugandan schools, particularly in urban areas, where performance-based rewards are common, suggests that while transactional practices may offer short-term improvements in performance, they do not foster the intrinsic motivation necessary for sustained academic success (Nabunya, 2020).

While previous research in Uganda, such as studies by Turyahikayo et al. (2024) and Sengendo (2023), highlights the importance of leadership styles in determining educational outcomes, there remains limited knowledge on how school leadership styles affect academic performance in secondary schools in Tororo district. Therefore, the focus of this study is on the relationship between school leadership styles and academic performance in secondary schools in West Budama, Tororo District, Uganda.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In Uganda, academic performance at the secondary school level remains a significant concern, with many students failing to meet the required standards for progression to higher education. According to the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports (MoE, 2023), 26.3% of candidates nationwide failed to obtain the minimum two Principal passes necessary for university admission in the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE) examinations. Alarming, the situation in Tororo District is even more dire, where over 35% of students fell below this threshold, exceeding the national failure rate and raising concerns about the factors contributing to this poor performance. Researchers such as Dabesa and Cheramlak (2021) and Sengendo (2023), have identified school leadership as a critical determinant of academic performance. Leadership styles influence key factors such as teacher motivation, resource allocation, and the learning environment, all of which directly impact student outcomes. However, very little is known about how these leadership styles affect academic performance within Uganda's secondary schools. Even less is understood about this relationship in Tororo District, where persistent underperformance suggests unique challenges that require further investigation. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the role of leadership styles in influencing academic performance in secondary schools in Tororo District.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

The study was guided by the Full-Range Leadership Theory (FRLT), developed by Bass and Avolio (1991). Building upon Burns' (1978) work on transformational and transactional leadership, FRLT introduces a continuum of leadership styles, ranging from transformational leadership, which emphasizes vision and motivation, to transactional leadership, focused on structured exchanges and performance-based rewards, and laissez-faire leadership, characterized by non-involvement. The theory assumes that leadership behaviors directly influence organizational or group performance. Transformational leadership inspires individuals by fostering a shared vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, while transactional leadership clarifies roles and provides rewards or corrective feedback based on performance.

The first objective, which examined the relationship between transformational leadership and academic performance, aligns with the FRLT assumption that leaders who inspire a shared vision and consider individual needs can drive positive outcomes. Studies such as Metaferia et al. (2023) have demonstrated that transformational leadership enhances school performance by creating an environment of trust and motivation among staff and students. The study's focus on transformational leadership components—such as inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence—further reflects this assumption, emphasizing how these elements can foster academic success.

The second objective, focused on transactional leadership, aligns with FRLT's premise that structured interactions and performance-based incentives improve outcomes. Research by Reid et al. (2018) supports this, showing that transactional leadership provides clarity and immediate reinforcement, making it effective in achieving short-term performance goals. The study's analysis of clear expectations, performance-based incentives, and corrective actions corresponds with this theoretical foundation, highlighting how transactional behaviors contribute to academic performance through structure and accountability.

Instructional leadership, addressed in the third objective, can be linked to the theory's emphasis on structured practices and performance monitoring. Instructional leadership, often focused on curriculum delivery, teacher development, and classroom monitoring, reflects the structured approach advocated by the FRLT theory. (Nizeyimana & Martha (2024) emphasize that instructional leadership significantly impacts student outcomes by aligning educational practices with institutional goals.

While FRLT provides a comprehensive framework, it has faced criticism for overemphasizing the superiority of transformational leadership over transactional styles, which may be equally effective depending on the context (Yukl, 1999). The theory has also been challenged for its limited cultural sensitivity, as leadership effectiveness often varies across cultural and organizational settings (House et al., 2004). Furthermore, its limited focus on instructional leadership necessitates adaptations when applied in educational contexts. Despite these critiques, FRLT remains a relevant and robust framework for studying leadership and performance. Its integration of transformational and transactional styles offers a versatile lens through which leadership's impact on academic performance can be understood, reaffirming its utility in educational research.

Transformational Leadership and Academic Performance

Transformational leadership has garnered considerable attention in educational research due to its potential to positively influence academic performance. In the context of school leadership, transformational leadership refers to the ability of leaders to inspire, motivate, and support teachers and students to achieve beyond their expectations, thus fostering a positive school culture and enhancing educational outcomes (Zickafoose et al., 2024). The key components of transformational leadership include inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence. These components work in tandem to create a supportive and motivating school environment, ultimately influencing the academic performance of students.

Inspirational motivation is a central component of transformational leadership, where leaders communicate a clear, compelling vision and inspire followers to achieve that vision (Turyahikayo et al., 2024). School leaders who exhibit inspirational motivation motivate teachers by setting high expectations and articulating a clear direction for the school's academic goals. This leadership behavior can influence academic performance by fostering a sense of shared purpose among teachers and students. According to a study by Sengendo (2023), schools led by transformational leaders who emphasized inspirational motivation saw improvements in both teacher engagement and student outcomes. The study found that when teachers were inspired by the school leader's vision, they were more likely to implement innovative teaching practices and maintain high levels of student engagement, ultimately improving student academic performance.

Research also shows that inspirational motivation fosters a positive school culture, which enhances learning outcomes. Akparep et al. (2019) found that when school leaders effectively communicated a shared vision and encouraged collective effort, students showed higher academic achievement. This finding underscores the importance of leaders' ability to motivate their teams, as a motivated teaching staff is more likely to implement effective instructional strategies that contribute to improved student performance.

Transformational leaders who demonstrate individualized consideration offer support, mentorship, and professional development opportunities, which can directly impact teacher efficacy and, consequently, student performance (Turyahikayo et al., 2024). Research by Metaferia et al. (2023) indicates that individualized consideration enhances teacher motivation and performance. Teachers who feel that their leader is concerned with their professional development are more likely to be committed to their work and adopt innovative teaching methods, which positively influence student academic performance.

Individualized consideration also has a direct impact on students. A study by Dabesa and Cheramlak (2021), revealed that transformational leaders who exhibited individualized consideration helped improve student self-esteem and engagement, leading to higher academic performance. This finding supports the idea that when leaders recognize and cater to the unique needs of both teachers and students, it enhances overall educational outcomes.

Studies have shown that idealized influence can enhance school climate, which in turn positively affects student achievement. A study by Wilson et al. (2023), found that school leaders who embodied idealized influence promoted a school culture of respect, collaboration, and high expectations, which contributed to improved academic performance. Teachers and students in such environments were more likely to engage in productive behaviors that align with academic success. Moreover, leaders who embody idealized influence serve as examples of commitment and discipline, setting a standard for teachers and students to follow, thereby directly impacting the overall academic performance of students.

Transactional Leadership and Academic Performance

Transactional leadership, unlike transformational leadership, is centered around a more structured approach to management, emphasizing rewards and penalties based on performance (Reid et al., 2018). In the context of educational leadership, transactional leadership involves clear expectations, performance-based incentives, and corrective actions, where leaders reward teachers and students for meeting specific academic targets and take corrective measures when those targets are not met (Dabesa & Cheramlak, 2021). This leadership style is often described as being more focused on maintaining the status quo and ensuring that the educational system runs efficiently through strict adherence to rules and performance metrics.

Performance-based incentives are a central component of transactional leadership, as they tie rewards to the achievement of specific academic or professional goals. Several studies have explored the effect of performance-based incentives such as salary bonuses, promotions, or other forms of recognition for teachers, on academic performance. A study by Karatas et al. (2024) found that when school leaders implemented incentive programs tied to student performance, teachers were more motivated to engage in effective teaching practices, leading to improved student outcomes. The study showed that students in schools with performance-based incentives for teachers performed better in standardized tests due to the enhanced focus and motivation among teachers to improve their teaching practices.

Transactional leadership emphasizes setting clear expectations for both teachers and students. Research shows that clear expectations in schools are associated with better academic performance. In a study by Akparep et al. (2019), school leaders who set clear academic and behavioral expectations saw improvements in both teacher performance and student outcomes. The study found that when teachers were provided with specific academic targets and performance guidelines, they were better able to plan and implement effective teaching strategies, which directly influenced student academic achievement. Similarly, in a study by Reid et al. (2018), it was found that leaders who articulated clear academic goals for students and communicated them effectively helped improve students' focus and performance, as the students were motivated to meet these clearly defined expectations.

Research has shown that punishment and corrective action can have both positive and negative effects on academic performance, depending on how they are implemented. On one hand, corrective actions can help maintain discipline and ensure that students and teachers are held accountable for their actions, leading to improvements in performance (Mugizi et al., 2019). A study by Mugizi et al. (2019), found that when school leaders implemented corrective measures in response to underperformance, it encouraged teachers to take their responsibilities seriously, leading to improvements in teaching quality and student achievement. The study suggested that a fair and consistent application of corrective actions could motivate both teachers and students to adhere to performance expectations, resulting in higher academic performance. However, Bergmark and Ager (2020) noted that while corrective action can motivate some teachers and students to improve, it can also create a negative school climate if used too frequently or harshly.

Instructional Leadership and Academic Performance

Instructional leadership is a leadership style that focuses on improving teaching and learning within a school. This approach emphasizes the active role of school leaders in guiding and supporting teachers to enhance classroom practices, ensuring effective curriculum delivery, and fostering professional development opportunities for educators (Noor & Nawab, 2022).

Curriculum delivery is a key aspect of instructional leadership, as school leaders are responsible for ensuring that the curriculum is delivered effectively and consistently across classrooms. Instructional leaders support teachers in ensuring that the curriculum is adapted to meet the needs of diverse students and delivered in ways that engage students and promote learning. When school leaders prioritize

curriculum delivery and ensure its effective implementation, students are more likely to achieve better academic results (Noor & Nawab, 2022).

Several studies have demonstrated the impact of effective curriculum delivery on academic performance. A study by Nizeyimana and Martha (2024), found that instructional leadership practices, particularly in terms of monitoring and supporting curriculum delivery, had a direct and positive impact on student academic performance. In their study, schools where leaders were actively involved in the planning and implementation of curriculum delivery showed higher student achievement. Similarly, a study by Dabesa and Cheramlak (2021) explored the relationship between instructional leadership and academic performance in Canadian schools. They found that principals who were involved in ensuring that the curriculum was implemented effectively and aligned with learning goals saw improvements in students' test scores.

Another critical element of instructional leadership is providing teachers with professional development opportunities. Professional development ensures that teachers continuously improve their instructional practices, stay updated with the latest pedagogical strategies, and meet the evolving needs of students. A study by Metaferia et al. (2023) demonstrated that teachers who engage in ongoing professional development are better equipped to implement effective teaching strategies, which leads to improved student outcomes.

Monitoring classroom practices is another key responsibility of instructional leaders. This involves observing classroom teaching, providing feedback to teachers, and ensuring that teaching methods align with the school's educational goals. Instructional leaders use classroom observations to assess the quality of teaching, identify areas for improvement, and provide targeted support to teachers (Dabesa & Cheramlak, 2021). In a study by Robinson (2019), it was found that schools where principals actively monitored classroom teaching and provided constructive feedback saw higher student achievement. In a study conducted by Wanzare (2021) in Kenya, it was found that schools with strong instructional leadership practices that included regular monitoring of classroom practices had better academic performance. The study noted that when school leaders provided feedback on teaching methods, it helped teachers improve their instructional techniques, which in turn enhanced student learning experiences and academic success.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional design with a quantitative approach to gather data at a single point in time. A cross-sectional survey was chosen due to its efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and ease of implementation, which are ideal for investigating the relationships between school leadership styles and academic performance. The target population consisted of 92 secondary school teachers in West Budama, Tororo District, Uganda. Using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling table, a sample size of 96 teachers was selected, and random sampling was employed to ensure each teacher had an equal chance of being included, minimizing selection bias and enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

Data was collected using structured questionnaires, which included 5-point Likert scale items designed to capture teachers' perceptions of their principals' leadership styles and their views on academic performance. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: demographic information, school leadership styles, and academic performance. Leadership styles assessed included transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and instructional leadership, while academic performance was measured based on teachers' perceptions of students' end-of-term average scores. The reliability and validity of the instrument were ensured through a pre-test conducted in a neighboring district.

The collected data was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, means, and percentages, were used to summarize demographic data and key variables. Pearson's correlation was employed to assess the relationships between school leadership styles and academic performance, while regression analysis was used to control for potential confounding variables. The study adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring participant confidentiality and voluntary participation. The results provided valuable insights into how different leadership styles impact academic performance, with recommendations for improving school leadership practices in the region.

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of school leadership on academic performance in secondary schools. Data was collected from 92 teachers out of a sample of 96, yielding a response rate of approximately 95.8%, and the results are presented as below:

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The results of the demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in table 1 below:

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents

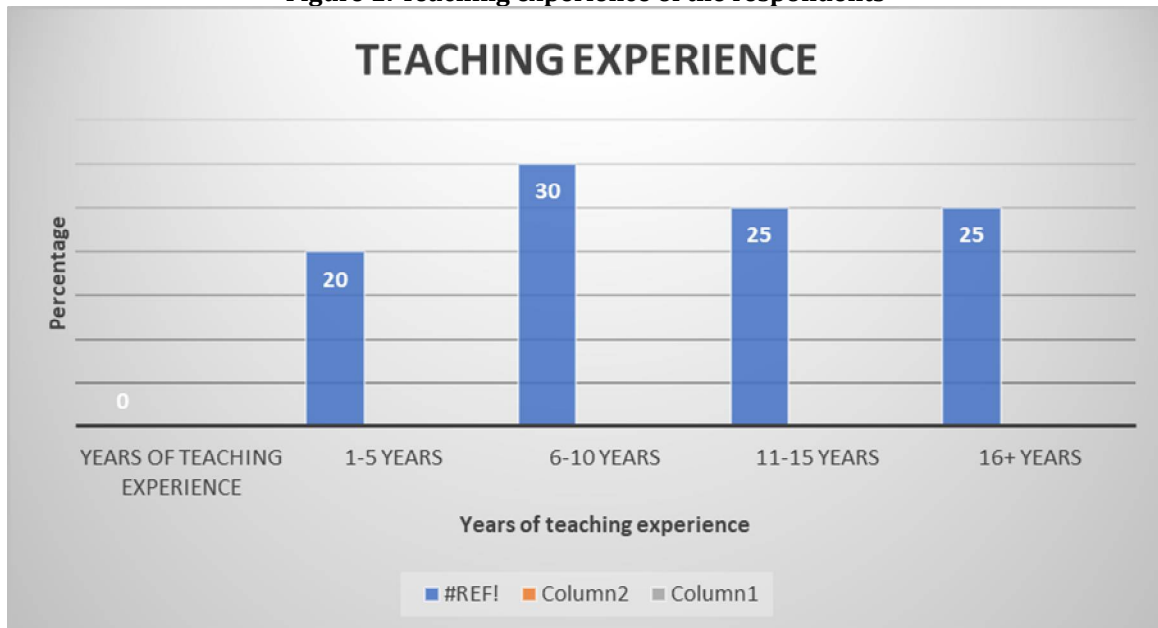
Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	37	40%
Female	55	60%
Age Group		
20-30 years	14	15%
31-40 years	32	35%
41-50 years	23	25%
51+ years	23	25%
Highest Level of Education		
Certificate	14	15%
Diploma	23	25%
Bachelor's Degree	46	50%
Master's Degree	9	10%

The demographic profile of the respondents, as presented in Table 1, showed that Females constituted the majority (60%), suggesting a higher participation or representation of women in the study.

Most of the respondents (35%) were aged 31–40 years, highlighting this group as the predominant age bracket actively engaged in teaching. Respondents aged 41–50 years and 51+ years each comprised 25%, while those aged 20–30 years formed the smallest group at 15%. This distribution reflects a mature and experienced teaching workforce.

In terms of educational qualifications, the findings indicate that the majority held a bachelor's degree (50%), followed by diploma holders (25%), underscoring a significant presence of formally trained educators with varying levels of advanced training. The largest segment (30%) reported 6–10 years of service, closely followed by those with 11–15 years and 16+ years (both at 25%) as per figure 1 below;

Figure 1: Teaching experience of the respondents



School leadership and academic performance

Pearson correlation tests were run to determine the relationship between transformational leadership, transactional, and instructional leadership styles and academic performance and the results are presented in the following subsections.

Transformational leadership and academic performance

The first objective of the study was to assess the relationship between transformational leadership and academic performance. Transformational leadership was conceptualized using three components: inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence. The Pearson correlation results, which demonstrate the strength and direction of the relationship between these components and academic performance, are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Relationship between Transformational leadership and academic performance

Transformational leadership components	R statistic	P_value
Inspirational motivation	0.923	0.000
Individualized consideration	0.775	0.000
Idealized influence.	0.721	0.002

As seen above, it was established that both inspirational motivation ($P = 0.000$), individualized consideration ($P = 0.000$), and idealized influence ($P = 0.002$) had a significant effect on academic performance at the 95% level of confidence, since all the significance values were less than the threshold value of 0.05. These findings provide strong empirical evidence that transformational leadership critically influences academic performance. Specifically, inspirational motivation likely fosters a shared vision and enthusiasm that enhances both teacher and student commitment, while individualized consideration promotes tailored support and mentorship that addresses diverse needs. Similarly, idealized influence appears to set a standard of excellence and integrity, which motivates stakeholders to strive for higher achievement. The strength of these relationships underscores the indispensable role of transformational leadership in driving academic success within the educational context.

Transactional leadership and academic performance

The second objective of the study was to examine the relationship between transactional leadership and academic performance. Transactional leadership was conceptualized using three components: clear expectations, performance-based incentives, and punishment and corrective actions. The Pearson correlation results are presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Relationship between Transactional leadership and academic performance

Transactional leadership components	R statistic	P_value
Clear expectations	0.944	0.000
Performance-based incentives	0.928	0.001
Punishment and corrective actions	0.627	0.036

As seen above, it was established that both clear expectations ($P = 0.000$), performance-based incentives ($P = 0.001$), and punishment and corrective actions ($P = 0.036$) had a significant effect on academic performance at the 95% level of confidence, since all the significance values were less than the threshold value of 0.05. Specifically, clear expectations likely provide students with a structured and goal-oriented learning environment, enhancing focus and motivation. Performance-based incentives appear to act as a catalyst, rewarding achievements and encouraging sustained effort. Meanwhile, punishment and corrective actions, though less intuitively aligned with positive outcomes, might serve as a regulatory mechanism to discourage undesirable behaviors and maintain discipline.

Instructional leadership and academic performance

The third objective of the study was to analyze the relationship between instructional leadership and academic performance. Instructional leadership was conceptualized through three key components: curriculum delivery, professional development opportunities, and monitoring classroom practices. The Pearson correlation results are presented in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Relationship between Instructional leadership and academic performance

Instructional leadership components	R statistic	P_value
Curriculum delivery	0.779	0.023
Professional development opportunities	0.928	0.000
Monitoring classroom practices	0.824	0.012

As seen above, it was found out that curriculum delivery ($P = 0.023$), professional development opportunities ($P = 0.000$), and monitoring classroom practices ($P = 0.012$) had a significant effect on academic performance at the 95% level of confidence, since all the significance values were less than the threshold value of 0.05.

Regression analysis

To determine the individual contribution of each of the components of school leadership on academic performance, the researcher conducted a linear regression with academic performance as the dependent variable and the different constructs of transformational leadership, transactional leadership and instructional leadership, that were significantly related with academic performance at the bivariate stage, as the independent variables and the results are presented below;

Table 5: Regression Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.650	.329		8.060	.000
	respondent gender	.347	.047	.152	1.015	.315
	Inspirational motivation	1.459	.010	.076	.966	.059
	Individualized consideration	1.055	.018	.326	3.070	.043
	Idealized influence	.946	.014	.055	.837	.048
	Performance-based incentives	3.015	.032	.077	.473	.003
	Clear expectations	2.026	.020	.188	1.330	.018
	Punishments and corrective action	.085	.025	.370	3.006	.724
	Curriculum delivery	.048	.048	.257	1.095	.278
	Professional development	2.524	0.256	.786	.446	.017
	Monitoring classroom practices	1.020	0.387	.502	.827	.074
	Respondent's Age	-1.132	.012	-.013	-.196	.845
	Teaching Experience	1.019	.010	.117	1.796	.078
	Education Level	0.206	.012	.030	.466	.643

($R^2 = 0.935$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.932$, sig. = 0.000)

As seen above, the linear regression analysis yielded an R^2 value of 0.935, indicating that approximately 93.5% of the variance in academic performance could be explained by the independent variables included in the model. The significance of the overall model was confirmed with a p-value of 0.000, indicating that the predictors significantly contributed to explaining variations in academic performance.

It was established that performance-based incentives ($B = 3.015$, $p = .003$) had the strongest positive influence on academic performance, indicating that rewarding performance significantly enhances academic outcomes. Similarly, professional development ($B = 2.524$, $p = .017$) and clear expectations ($B = 2.026$, $p = .018$) were significant, suggesting that teacher growth and well-defined goals positively influence academic performance. Also, individualized consideration ($B = 1.055$, $p = .043$) and idealized influence ($B = .946$, $p = .048$), also showed significant associations, emphasizing the role of effective leadership in fostering academic success.

On the other hand, respondent gender ($p = .315$), curriculum delivery ($p = .278$), and respondent's age ($p = .845$), had no significant relationship with academic performance, implying limited or no influence on student outcomes. Additionally, punishments and corrective actions ($p = .724$), teaching experience ($p = .078$), education level ($p = .643$), and monitoring classroom practices ($p = .074$) were not significant, indicating they may not substantially impact academic performance in this context.

DISCUSSION

The study found that performance-based incentives had the strongest positive influence on academic performance, followed by professional development, clear expectations, individualized consideration, and idealized influence. Conversely, respondent gender, curriculum delivery, and respondent age showed no significant association with academic performance. Punishments and corrective actions, teaching experience, education level, and monitoring classroom practices were also not significantly related to academic performance.

The observed positive influence of performance-based incentives on academic performance aligns with the findings by Turyahikayo et al. (2024), who reported that performance-linked incentives enhanced teaching effectiveness and, consequently, improved student outcomes. Similarly, Sengendo (2023) found that monetary rewards and other performance-based incentives for teachers were associated with improvements in student achievement, underscoring the importance of incentivizing teaching performance. Professional development as a significant predictor is supported by Metaferia et al. (2023), who noted that continuous professional growth for teachers improves both teaching strategies and student achievement.

The significance of clear expectations aligns with Karatas et al. (2024), who found that setting clear, measurable goals contributed to higher teacher performance and better student outcomes. Additionally, individualized consideration and idealized influence reflect findings by Akparep et al. (2019) and Dabesa & Cheramlak (2021), highlighting the importance of supportive leadership and role modeling in fostering an environment conducive to learning. Leaders who demonstrate individualized consideration tend to create a positive school culture that boosts teacher morale, which in turn enhances student engagement and academic performance (Turyahikayo et al., 2024).

Variables such as respondent gender, curriculum delivery, and respondent age had no significant association with academic performance. These findings resonate with Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2019), who noted that demographic factors like gender often have limited direct impact on student outcomes, especially when contextual factors such as school leadership play a more significant role. Similarly, curriculum delivery, despite its centrality to instructional leadership, may not significantly influence performance in contexts where it lacks alignment with practical implementation strategies (Noor & Nawab, 2022). In this study, curriculum delivery did not significantly influence academic performance, possibly due to its mismatch with local educational needs or insufficient teacher support for its implementation.

Monitoring classroom practices, while widely recognized as critical in leadership (Robinson, 2019), was insignificant in this study, possibly due to inconsistent or superficial feedback mechanisms. This supports the findings of Sengendo (2023), who argued that monitoring without effective follow-up and professional support often yields limited results. Studies contrary to these findings include Wanzare (2021), who identified a significant role of classroom monitoring in improving academic outcomes. The contradiction may stem from contextual differences, such as leadership training or resource availability, which might influence the effectiveness of these practices.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that performance-based incentives, professional development, clear expectations, individualized consideration, and idealized influence had a significant positive impact on academic performance. Among these, performance-based incentives showed the strongest effect. In contrast, factors such as gender, age, curriculum delivery, teaching experience, education level, and monitoring classroom practices were found to have no significant impact on academic performance in this context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that schools implement performance-based incentives to motivate teachers and improve academic outcomes. Additionally, continuous professional development should be prioritized to enhance teaching strategies, while setting clear and measurable expectations for both teachers and students can foster accountability and drive high performance. Supportive leadership, characterized by individualized consideration and role modeling, is also essential for creating a positive learning environment that enhances academic outcomes.

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