

# Assessment of Principals' Leadership Styles on Student Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Nakuru County, Kenya

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## Abstract

Student discipline in learning institutions has received high attention, not only in Kenya but all over the world. Indiscipline among students results into undesired outcomes such as destruction of school property, poor academic achievement among others. Education stakeholders have formulated policies and strategies to prevent and stop student indiscipline, but these efforts have not yielded fruits. This study assessed the effect of principals' leadership styles on student discipline in public secondary schools in Nakuru County. More specifically, the study assessed the effect of Transformational Leadership Style, Transactional Leadership Style, Democratic Leadership Style and Autocratic Leadership Style on student discipline in public secondary schools in Nakuru County. The study adopted descriptive research design with a target population of 12,091 respondents. Stratified sampling, simple random sampling, and purposive sampling techniques were used to select a sample of 119 respondents to inform the study. This study obtained quantitative data from closed-ended questionnaires. The study data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. The study found out that there is significant relationship between principals' transformational style of leadership ( $r=0.868$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), principals' transactional style of leadership ( $r=0.602$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), principals' democratic style of leadership ( $r=0.782$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), principals' autocratic style of leadership ( $r=-0.467$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Nakuru County. A multiple linear regression model;  $Y = 0.436 + 0.845 X_1 + 0.304X_2 + 0.678X_3 - 0.586X_4 + 0.13472$ , Where;  $Y$ = Student Discipline,  $X_1$  = Transformational Leadership Style,  $X_2$  = Transactional Leadership Style,  $X_3$  = Democratic Leadership Style and  $X_4$  = Autocratic Leadership Style with a  $R^2$  value of 0.731 and F-statistic of  $F(4, 105) = 38.992$ ,  $p < 0.05$  was obtained. This study concluded that Transformational Principal Leadership Style, Transactional Principal Leadership Style, Democratic Principal Leadership Style and Autocratic Principal Leadership Style affect student discipline in secondary schools in Nakuru County. This study recommended secondary school principals to use transformational leadership style complemented by transactional and democratic leadership styles. The study also recommended Teachers Service Commission to monitor leadership styles used by secondary school principals.

**Keywords:** Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Democratic Leadership, Autocratic Leadership, Students' Discipline

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Leadership that does not bring all members on board is day by day being rejected and participatory leadership adopted. According to Hammer and Whisman (2014), school leadership should be able to motivate students, teachers and other staff members towards a common goal. School principals determine to a large extent how other stakeholders in the school will behave (McIntyre & Morrison, 2003). Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) asserts that school principals should ensure smooth running of the school as well maintaining high standards of student discipline. It is the role of the school principals to establish a connection with the immediate community for better coexistence. The school principals must aim also to channel well discipline students to the society. School leadership should encourage and motivate all stakeholders to participate in school activities with a aim of sharing ideas and avoiding conflicts as a results of decision taken by the school (Day, 2000). Schools must come up with strategies to prevent and stop student indiscipline acts such as drug abuse, use of acceptable language in school, theft, pornography, and radicalization among others. Leadership styles adopted by school principals significantly determine the student discipline in the school.

Discipline is essential part of any leading institution and is evident when a school becomes a peace and safe place for learners and all other stakeholders. School has a role to live harmoniously with the surrounding community (Sushila, 2004). Kindiki (2012) asserts that discipline is a role of administration and therefore the school principals should offer good management skills in order to have students with acceptable behaviour. Principal leadership is very essential in maintaining student discipline as well as motivating students to work harder to produce good academic results (Cole, 2002). A school that has good discipline in the one that whose students adhere to the rules and regulations of the school. In such a school few or not indiscipline cases are reported and students are motivated to do what is right even with little or no teacher supervision (Ali, Dada, Isiaka & Salmon, 2014). In Kenyan context, the school principal is expected to be effective in maintaining proper discipline in the school compound and in classroom. It is the role of a school principal to motivate

students towards set goals and also spur them to be responsible members of the society. Principals who are not qualified may be the source of management related problems whose effects extends to classroom performance (Ndiku, 2004).

Okumbe (2003) summarized the following leadership styles as used in Kenyan schools; transformational leadership, transactional leadership, democratic leadership, autocratic leadership, laissez-faire leadership and bureaucratic leadership. The leadership styles used in secondary schools are aimed at providing way forward for students, supporting staff and communicating to parents. Good leadership style brings about flexibility of duties and tasks as well provide a quick way to respond to school problems and challenges. It provides also a channel through which education stakeholders can raise their concerns and various roles are coordinated through the same channel. This study focused on four commonly used leadership styles, namely; transformational leadership, transactional leadership, democratic leadership and autocratic leadership (Okumbe, 2001). It is therefore on this background that the study critically assessed principals' leadership styles on student discipline in public secondary schools in Nakuru North Sub-County, Nakuru County

### 1.2 Statement of Problem

Acts of student indiscipline is alarming and posing a challenge to education policy makers, teachers, students, parents and society at large (Njoroge & Nyabuto, 2014). Student demonstrations and violence in schools are increasing day by day possibly because of poor parenting (Kute, 2014). Media reports indicates that students demonstrate against the school authorities in order their concerns to be addressed (Standard Newspaper, 2016). In Kenya indiscipline cases such as sexual assault, arson, rape, sneaking out of school, theft, fighting, vandalism, absenteeism, drug abuse, lateness, bullying, truancy among others are common in secondary schools (Kiongo & Thinguri, 2015). In 2016, there was a wave of strikes linked to students' indiscipline in Nakuru County that left several schools counting losses from destroyed property and others closed addressed (Standard Newspaper, 2016). Lack of discipline in students has been portrayed through theft, drug abuse, lateness, possession of pornographic materials, abusive language, violence, dirtiness among others (Ali, Dada, Isiaka & Salmon, 2014).

These acts of student indiscipline also affected schools within Nakuru County to a great extent. Many education stakeholders raised the question whether the school principals were linked to the skirmishes that occurred in their respective schools (Standard Newspaper, 2016). Studies previously done in Kenya on student discipline have shown different outcomes. For example Gakure, Kithae and Mukuria (2013) did a research in secondary schools from Gatanga district and whereby they established that 70% of students had at least one case of indiscipline such as sexual harassment, sneaking out of school, theft, bullying and fighting, vandalism, absenteeism, drug abuse, lateness to school among others. Kabuka, Odoyo and Odwar (2016) in their study among public secondary schools in Muhoroni Sub-County found out that indiscipline acts were dominant in secondary schools but at different levels. Of these studies, no link has been established between principals' leadership styles and student discipline which opens the gap for this study. The current study seeks to bridge this existing gap and therefore sought to scrutinize and shed more light on the effects of principals' styles of leadership on student discipline and identify gaps which may need to be addressed.

### 1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the effect of principals' leadership styles on the discipline of students in public secondary schools in Nakuru County.

### 1.4 Objectives of the study

1. To evaluate the effect of transformation leadership style on student discipline in public secondary schools in Nakuru County.
2. To determine how transactional style of leadership influence student discipline in public secondary schools in Nakuru County.
3. To assess the effect of democratic style of leadership on student discipline in public secondary schools in Nakuru County.
4. To examine how autocratic leadership style influence student discipline in public secondary schools in Nakuru County.

### 1.5 Research Hypotheses

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between principals' transformation style of leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between principals' transactional style of leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between principals' democratic style of leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools.

**H<sub>04</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between principals' autocratic style of leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Principal Leadership Styles

This section reviews all the relevant literature on four principal leadership styles; transformational, transactional, democratic and autocratic. Transformational leadership style was first conceptualized by Duckworth and Seligman (2006) as the one that inspires and encourages participants to willingly perform various tasks without being forced. In this leadership style, the leaders and followers encourage each other to grow together to higher heights and accomplish more. Due to the motivation of employees, any change a leader brings to the organization is highly welcomed. Sergiovanni (2000) indicates that this kind of leaders do not always blame employees for the failure experienced in the organization but motivates them to making essential changes in their performance in order to avoid future failures. These leaders promote are very instrumental in achieving smooth transition in an organization. Anderson, Leithwood, Louis & Wahlstrom (2014) indicates that if a school wants to restructure its operation, transformation leadership styles is the most appropriate.

Studies by many researchers such as Anderson, Leithwood, Louis, and Wahlstrom (2014) are in support of transformational leadership styles. These researchers attribute school initiatives to changes in the learning environment, increase in student discipline score and students' academic achievement to transformational leadership styles. Transformational leadership goes beyond academic achievement of students to influence the staff and the community at large. A study was undertaken by Eyal and Roth, (2011) involving Israel teachers confirmed that transformational leadership encouraged followers to perform beyond their expectations and was negatively linked to burnout. They recommended for this type of leadership to be used in learning institutions for it has the ability to cope with day to day challenges that may face students and other staff members in the school. Due to advancement to technology which is happening each day, schools may need to promote teachers to various roles and constantly urge them to be loyal but with transformational leadership, all these changes may not be necessary since loyalty is nurtured and all stakeholders are involved in running the various roles in the school.

According to Salim (2002), transformational leadership differs from transactional leadership in that transactional leadership requires the leaders to make negotiations and agreement with the followers. In schools, this is applied when principals involve student councils in decision making on student discipline. Unlike transformational leadership whereby the leader is able to motivate and encourage his or her followers all through by being actively involved in the tasks being performed by the organization, a transactional leader caters for short term need of his or her followers as long as the task being done lasts. Transactional leadership is concerned on what you can accomplish as an individual (Salim, 2002). Careful considerations need to be taken into account before choosing transactional leadership style of leadership in a learning institutions for it only fits only under specific situations. For instance, transactional leadership should be used in a school with a stable leadership that experiences few changes in their day to day running of the school. Again, this style of leadership should not be used for a long period of time.

Democratic leadership strives to gain consensus through collaboration. As discussed by Begley and Zaretsky (2004), democratic style of leadership comprises the nature in which the leadership in school is exercised as well as the social set up of the community surrounding the school. Democratic leadership in schools gives everyone a voice including the students. This leadership style may have significant effect on student discipline since the students are part of decision making regarding the same school discipline (John, 2002). This style of leadership is however not appropriate during crisis and when urgent action needs to be taken. Researchers have found that democratic leadership styles consumes a lot of time before a decision is made. Democratic leadership style dictates that all decisions to be made after consulting all stakeholders. The school principal tries to make every student feel essential part of the school by involving them before making any decision concerning them. In this, students can give their views to the principal and the principal responses to their views making it a two way communication channel (Clear, 2005). This type of leadership styles motivates all stakeholders since they are involved in all decision making (Mba, 2004).

Autocratic Principal Leadership Style is a type of leadership whereby only the leader has the power to make decisions. An autocratic principal directs students and staff on what to do and how to do it (Masitsa, 2008). This kind of principal does not engage in communication with the students or staff aimed at making any decision concerning the school. Autocratic school principals do not give his juniors any leadership roles and therefore he or she directs everything in the school (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2004). Autocratic principal leadership instills fear to students and staff and therefore the followers accomplish the tasks assigned to because of fear of disciplinary action. This style may achieve high degree of discipline by students but it does not build trust between the principal and the students. However other literature show that the fear instilled by this leadership style may lead to student indiscipline as a mechanism to overcome the fear or evade any disciplinary action from the school principals.

## 2.2 Student Discipline

The importance of a student having good discipline is reflected on their academic achievement as shown by several studies done in Kenya, in Africa and some studies in Europe, America and Asia. In America, indiscipline acts include; insubordination, inadequate or lack of support for and from teachers, fighting, lack of respect, and disobedience to the school authority. A study in the USA showed that 29.6 percent of students at grade 3 to 11 level had an indiscipline act reported (Hammer & Whisman, 2014). To the extreme, schools are not safe because students carry deadly firearms, swords and knives to school (Donnelly, 2000). Khatete, and Matanda (2014) reported that cases of students stubbing fellow students and teachers are common as well as burning of school premises and property. Other cases of student indiscipline may include strikes and boycotts as cited by (Ehiane, 2014). In Africa, several cases of serious indiscipline behaviors have been reported from different countries by different researchers. For example, Umezina and Elendu (2012), for example, found out that indiscipline among Nigerian students was high and occurred even at elementary level of education.

In Kenya, Njoroge and Nyabuto, (2014) found that teachers experienced many problems in containing student discipline and come up with strategies on how to effectively control student discipline among schools in Ruiru, Kenya. KNEC (2010) reported that between 90-100 percent of teachers had to struggle with large number of indiscipline cases from students. Gakure, Kithae and Mukuria (2013) in their study in Gatanga District, found that 70 percent of teachers encountered indiscipline cases from their pupils. Indiscipline cases cited included stealing, truancy, noise making in class, disobedience, late coming to school, cheating in exams, not doing class assignments, fighting with other students, having pornography materials, bullying, using unacceptable language, abuse of drugs, sneaking, sexual assault and drug trafficking according to research work by Ouma, Simatwa and Serem (2013) in Kisumu Municipality.

## 3. Methodology

The study adopted descriptive research design with a target population of 12,091 respondents. The target population of this study comprised of 34 principals, 300 teachers (175 males and 125 females), and 11,757 students (5896 boys and 5861 girls) in public secondary schools in Nakuru North Sub-County, Kenya. In this study, a sample of 34 class teachers (20 males and 14 females since the ratio of males to females is 7:5) was used using stratified sampling, simple random sampling, and purposive sampling techniques. A sample of 119 respondents was used to inform the study. The study used three sets of closed-ended questionnaires; a questionnaire for the teachers, for principals and for students. The validity of the research instruments was ascertained by the study supervisor. Test and re-test method was used to measure the reliability of research questionnaires based on a pilot study. The study data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. Frequencies, mean and standard deviation were used for descriptive statistics while Pearson correlation and regression analysis were done for inferential statistics. All the data analysis of the study was reported in form of tables.

## 4. Results and Discussions

### 4.1 Relationship between Transformational Principal Leadership Style and Student Discipline

The first hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between principals' transformation style of leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools. This hypothesis was tested by use of Pearson correlation as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Correlations between Transformational Leadership Style and Student Discipline**

Variable		Student discipline
Transformational Leadership Style	Pearson Correlation	0.868**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

\*\*Significant at the 0.01

The study found out that transformational leadership style used by school principals was strongly and positively related to student discipline ( $r=0.868$ ) and was statistically significant at 0.01 significance level ( $p<0.01$ ). The first null hypothesis of the study was therefore rejected. This implied that there was a significant relationship between principals' transformational style of leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Nakuru County.

### 4.2 Relationship between Transactional Principal Leadership Style and Student Discipline

The second hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between principals' transactional style of leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools. This hypothesis was tested by use of Pearson correlation as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Correlations between Transformational Leadership Style and Student Discipline**

Variable		Student discipline
Transactional Leadership Style	Pearson Correlation	0.602**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

\*\*Significant at the 0.01

The study found out that transactional leadership style used by school principals was moderately and positively related to student discipline ( $r=0.602$ ) and was statistically significant at 0.01 significance level ( $p<0.01$ ). The second null hypothesis of the study was therefore rejected. This implied that there was a significant relationship between principals' transactional style of leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Nakuru County.

#### 4.3 Relationship between Democratic Principal Leadership Style and Student Discipline

The third hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between principals' democratic style of leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools. This hypothesis was tested by use of Pearson correlation as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Correlations between Democratic Leadership Style and Student Discipline**

Variable		Student discipline
Democratic Leadership Style	Pearson Correlation	0.782**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

\*\*Significant at the 0.01

The study found out that democratic leadership style used by school principals was strongly and positively related to student discipline ( $r=0.782$ ) and was statistically significant at 0.01 significance level ( $p<0.01$ ). The third null hypothesis of the study was therefore rejected. This implied that there was a significant relationship between principals' democratic style of leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Nakuru County.

#### 4.4 Relationship between Autocratic Principal Leadership Style and Student Discipline

The third hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between principals' autocratic style of leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools. This hypothesis was tested by use of Pearson correlation as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: Correlations between Autocratic Leadership Style and Student Discipline**

Variable		Student discipline
Autocratic Leadership Style	Pearson Correlation	-0.467*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

\*\*Significant at the 0.05

The study found out that autocratic leadership style used by school principals was moderately and negatively related to student discipline ( $r=-0.467$ ) and was statistically significant at 0.01 significance level ( $p<0.01$ ). The fourth null hypothesis of the study was therefore rejected. This implied that there was a significant relationship between principals' autocratic style of leadership and students' discipline in public secondary schools in Nakuru County.

#### 4.5 Regression Analysis

A multiple linear regression was performed to establish how well principals' leadership styles predict student discipline in public secondary schools in Nakuru County. Table 5 shows the model summary.

**Table 5: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.855 <sup>a</sup>	0.731	0.717	0.13472

a. Predictors: (Constant), Transformational Leadership Style, Transactional Leadership Style, Democratic Leadership Style, Autocratic Leadership Style

From the model summary, the study established that 73.1% of the variability in student discipline was explained by transformational, transactional, democratic and autocratic leadership styles by school principals. This was due to an R-Square value of 0.731. Table 6 shows the significance of the regression model.

**Table 6: ANOVA**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	11.526	4	2.881	38.992	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	4.138	105	.075		
Total	15.664	109			

a. Dependent Variable: Student Discipline

b. Predictors: (Constant), Transformational Leadership Style, Transactional Leadership Style, Democratic Leadership Style, Autocratic Leadership Style

The study established that the regression model provides a better fit to the data and had statistically significant predictive capability ( $F(4, 105) = 38.992$ ) at 5% significance level. Table 7 shows the significance of each principal leadership style in predicting student discipline.

**Table 7: Model Coefficients**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
	$\beta$	Std. Error			
(Constant)	0.436	0.309		1.348	0.139
Transformational Leadership Style	0.848	0.158	0.787	5.073	0.000
Transactional Leadership Style	0.304	0.075	0.342	4.598	0.000
Democratic Leadership Style	0.678	0.156	0.669	4.263	0.000
Autocratic Leadership Style	-0.586	0.173	-0.561	-3.349	0.001

a. Dependent Variable: Student Discipline

The study established that transformational leadership had the greatest influence on student discipline ( $\beta=0.848$ ), followed by democratic and transactional leadership ( $\beta=0.678$ ), then autocratic leadership style ( $\beta=-0.586$ ) and lastly transactional leadership style ( $\beta=0.304$ ). It was noted that autocratic leadership had a negative influence to student discipline. This implied that for every one-unit increase in Transformational Leadership Style, student discipline increases by 0.845 units provided that other factors are held constant. Similarly, for every one-unit increase in Transactional Leadership Style, student discipline increases by 0.304 units provided that other factors are held constant. For every one-unit increase in Democratic Leadership Style, student discipline increases by 0.678 units provided that other factors are held constant. It was however noted that one-unit increase in autocratic leadership style, student discipline decreases by 0.586 units provided that other factors are held constant. This resulted to the following multiple linear regression model;

$$Y = 0.436 + 0.845 X_1 + 0.304 X_2 + 0.678 X_3 - 0.586 X_4 + 0.13472$$

Where; Y= Student Discipline, X1 = Transformational Leadership Style, X2 = Transactional Leadership Style, X3 = Democratic Leadership Style and X4 = Autocratic Leadership Style.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that Transformational Principal Leadership Style, Transactional Principal Leadership Style, Democratic Principal Leadership Style and Autocratic Principal Leadership Style are significantly related to student discipline in secondary schools in Nakuru County. The study further concludes that transformation, transactional, democratic and autocratic leadership styles by school principals significantly influence the discipline of students in public secondary schools in Nakuru County.

This study recommends principals to use transformational leadership for it has the greatest positive influence on student discipline. The study further recommends the use of transactional and democratic leadership styles to complement the transformational leadership style in secondary schools. This study also recommends Teachers Service Commission (TSC) and Ministry of Education to monitor leadership styles used by secondary school principals in making sure that there is no use of autocratic leadership and that transformational leadership is used most of the time.

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