

## LEADERSHIP STYLES AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF PUPILS IN SELECTED PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A CASE OF SELECTED SCHOOLS IN JINJA, UGANDA

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### Abstract

In a bid to address poor academic performance among students in Jinja City primary schools, this study looked into how students' academic performance was affected by school leadership styles within the theoretical framework of the Path-Goal theory of leadership. The goals of the study were to: 1) comprehend how the laissez-faire leadership style affects academic performance; 2) examine the authoritarian leadership style; and 3) ascertain how the democratic leadership style affects students' academic performance. Data collection and analysis were done using a cross-sectional survey design that combined quantitative and qualitative research methods. Using simple random and purposeful sampling techniques, 100 participants were chosen from a target population of 300. Through the use of questionnaires and interview guides, data was gathered. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the quantitative data, and descriptive analysis was used to find patterns and trends in the qualitative data. The findings revealed that the laissez-faire leadership style significantly affected students' academic performance by 83%. The authoritarian leadership style accounted for 66.7% of the variation in academic performance, while the democratic leadership style contributed 74.1%. The research emphasized the importance of upholding existing school rules, regulations, and goals to enhance students' academic performance. Recommendations include adopting flexible leadership approaches by school heads, emphasizing school rules and regulations, and recognizing the significance of authority in leadership to boost and sustain academic performance. The research also highlighted the value of open communication, guidance, equitable treatment, and equal opportunities for all stakeholders involved in promoting desired academic outcomes in primary schools. The theoretical implication of this study lies in the demonstration that adaptation of different leadership styles can be applicable to educational settings to achieve desired goals.

**Keywords:** Leadership Styles; Academic Performance; Path-Goal theory; Educational Outcomes; School Management; Students

### INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in shaping the future of societies and nations. At the core of quality education lies effective leadership within the school environment. School principals' adopted leadership styles profoundly influence various dimensions of the educational setting, particularly students' academic performance. This research centers on three primary leadership styles: laissez-faire, authoritarian, and democratic. While laissez-faire entails minimal intervention by principals in decision-making, the authoritarian style involves strong leadership with strict directives. On the other hand, democratic leadership encourages the participation of students and staff in decision-making processes.<sup>1</sup>

Leadership involves both authority and responsibility, encompassing the task of making decisions for the path forward and being accountable for achieving predetermined objectives.<sup>2</sup> The success or failure of managers can be evaluated based on their leadership qualities. In an ever-evolving social, economic, and technological landscape, leadership has become even more pivotal for effective management than in the past. In the context of the 21st century, educational leadership is expected to prioritize Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Vision 2040, particularly in countries like Uganda. Leadership enhances management efficiency, ensuring sustainable performance and optimal utilization of resources.<sup>3</sup> This study explores the intricate interplay between leadership styles and their effects, particularly with respect to laissez-faire, authoritarian, and democratic paradigms. Central to this exploration is the Path-Goal theory of leadership, which operates as a guiding framework, underscoring the pivotal role of motivation and behavior in leadership dynamics. The theory posits that individuals are more inclined to be driven when they perceive their endeavors as conduits to outcomes that hold significant personal value.<sup>4</sup>

In Uganda, the government underscores the significance of School Leaders' leadership styles as integral to the school's direction and as a guiding force in achieving educational goals.<sup>5</sup> School Leaders' leadership style strongly influences students' academic achievements.<sup>6</sup> Adopting an appropriate leadership style results in effective performance within educational institutions, with improving students' achievement recognized as the primary objective of school leadership.<sup>7</sup> Many scholars have acknowledged that School Leaders leadership is pivotal in enhancing overall school performance and students' accomplishments.<sup>8</sup>

The Path-Goal theory of leadership was developed by Robert House.<sup>9</sup> According to this theory, it emphasizes. This theory highlights that individuals are more likely to be motivated if they believe that their efforts lead to outcomes highly valued by them.<sup>10</sup>

The theory identifies three leadership behaviors: laissez-faire, authoritarian, and democratic. These behaviors are contingent upon environmental factors and the characteristics of followers. This theory finds applicability in contemporary educational settings, such as schools aiming to achieve strong academic performance among students in national examinations like P.L.E. Given that teaching holds significant value in our society, the Path-Goal theory's principles can be adopted to enhance pupil performance.

In educational institutions, School Leaders should employ Democratic leadership behavior to establish performance targets and instill confidence in the teaching staff that they possess the necessary potential to achieve high standards.<sup>11</sup> This approach is intended to elevate the academic performance standards of pupils across all subjects.<sup>12</sup> In conclusion, the Path-Goal theory underscores that effective leadership results from the dynamic interplay between leaders and environmental factors.<sup>13</sup>

Academic performance in primary schools has remained very poor. Most pupils who sat for Primary Leaving Examinations between 2014 and 2020 scored failures, especially in mathematics and English. This could be attributed to the School Leaders' leadership styles. Apart from high-performing schools like Victoria Nile Primary School and Mwiri Primary School, most schools have consistently performed poorly in recent years in P.L.E. It has been observed that School Leaders' leadership styles

do not align with the academic performance of pupils in selected primary schools in Jinja City. The poor leadership styles of the School Leaders could have led to poor performance, incomplete syllabuses, high dropout rates, and a negative attitude of pupils towards education, among other factors. This situation has motivated the researcher to investigate the influence of School Leaders' leadership styles on pupils' academic performance in Jinja City.

According to a workshop conducted by STIR Education (School and Teacher Innovation for Results) at Victoria Nile Primary School on 1st March 2021, the Centre Coordinator Tutor (CCT) reported a correlation between poor academic performance in schools and the leadership styles of School Leaders. This assertion was echoed during the release of PLE results in 2020 by the Executive Secretary, Dan Nathan Odong, who attributed some pupils' poor performance to the leadership styles of school leaders. Similarly, in a publication by The Monitor on 18th January 2021, where the president closed a workshop for secondary School Leaders in Masaka, it was highlighted that inadequate academic performance is linked to the leadership styles of school leaders. Likewise, despite having leaders in place, the performance of public primary schools in Jinja City has declined over the past five years. The Education Office Report for 2019 revealed that over 60% of pupils failed to meet their performance targets, as evidenced by the primary leaving examinations in 2019, due to delayed feedback from school leaders. Consequently, this study investigated the relationship between leadership styles and the academic performance of pupils in selected public primary schools in Jinja City.

The current study examines the relationship between students' academic performance and leadership styles in a few chosen public elementary schools in Jinja City. This study takes a cross-sectional approach to explore the relationship between leadership styles and students' academic success using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Surveys, interviews, and analysis using descriptive methods and statistical tools are all part of data collection. The novelty of this study lies in the specific context of public primary schools in Jinja City while examining how different leadership styles impact academic performance. It also highlights the potential consequences of poor leadership styles on various aspects of education.

The main objective is to prove a causal relationship between leadership behaviors and students' academic achievement in public primary schools. Three distinct goals are outlined in the study: It first seeks to comprehend how these schools' laissez-faire leadership practices affect the academic performance of their students. It also examines how the authoritarian leadership style affects students' academic success. The study also looks into how students' academic performance is impacted by democratic leadership.

The findings of the study have implications for Jinja City's management, governance, and administration of public primary schools. The study improves school administrators' knowledge of various leadership philosophies that might boost academic achievement. It provides guidance for school leaders on how to recognize the effects of leadership styles and adopt practical strategies to enhance educational outcomes. The results also offer insightful information to school leaders in various public primary schools who might otherwise undervalue the importance of leadership styles. This may spur leaders to review and harmonize their leadership philosophies.

Additionally, the knowledge can help stakeholders and school administrators manage staff and students more efficiently, achieving goals and improving performance while fostering a positive learning environment. The research question central to this study is: How do different leadership styles (laissez-faire, authoritarian, and democratic) within selected public primary schools in Jinja City influence students' academic performance?

The study can be instrumental to school leaders' self-appraisal, allowing them to gauge the influence of their chosen leadership styles on educational outcomes, leading to a more informed and proactive leadership approach. This study has the potential to positively impact education by providing clear guidance to school leaders and stakeholders to enhance performance and achieve educational objectives.

## **Literature Review**

Harris (2015) emphasizes that effective school leadership has led to higher student achievement and overall success.<sup>14</sup> In Uganda, examination performance holds significant importance within the education system, offering opportunities for further education and better job prospects. A head teacher is a key link between the school and the larger community, responsible for all activities within and around the school building.<sup>15</sup> Effective leaders should be capable of motivating subordinates toward achieving organizational objectives.<sup>16</sup>

Dess and Picken<sup>17</sup> and Majluf and Abarca<sup>18</sup> underscore leadership as a vital asset in 21st-century organizations. A study conducted in Ghana revealed that educational reforms lacked a focus on leadership, with an emphasis on the role of headteachers in effective schools and student achievement. Makgato and Mudzanani<sup>19</sup> note the profound impact of leadership quality on student achievement, indicating a strong correlation between effective leadership styles and student performance and identify the democratic leadership style as the most effective in Ugandan schools, promoting ownership and participation.

Schmid<sup>20</sup> defines leadership styles as defining characteristics of organizational leaders, asserting that these styles significantly influence organizational culture. Kabuchi and Gitau<sup>21</sup> found a significant relationship between leadership styles and pupils' academic performance in public primary schools. Their study revealed that the democratic leadership style was the most widely practiced, followed by laissez-faire and authoritarian styles. Despite these findings, existing studies on the impact of leadership styles on students' academic performance lack comprehensiveness.

The theory guiding this study is the path-goal theory of leadership.<sup>22</sup> This theory emphasizes how leaders can enhance task performance by demonstrating how achievements produce desired rewards. The theory identifies four leader behaviors—achievement-oriented, directive, participative, and supportive—that interact with environmental factors and follower characteristics.

The path-goal theory is highly relevant in the educational context, offering insights into how school leaders can improve pupils' academic performance, such as in national examinations like P.L.E. The theory suggests that achievement-oriented leadership behavior can elevate academic standards by setting performance targets and instilling confidence in teaching staff.<sup>23</sup>

The essence of the path-goal theory lies in recognizing that effective leadership takes shape through the interplay of leader behaviors, the dynamics among subordinates, and the prevailing environmental factors. Within the realm of schools, this theory not only underscores but also prompts school leaders to foster indicators of excellence. This encompasses the facilitation of task performance, active engagement in classroom supervision, and the enhancement of both motivation and performance among pupils, with a notable focus on their Primary Leaving Examination outcomes.

#### **The Influence of Laissez-Faire Leadership Styles on the Academic Performance of Pupils**

The laissez-faire leadership style is characterized by minimal intervention and decision-making from leaders. This approach grants employees autonomy and authority over their actions within established boundaries.<sup>24</sup> Laissez-faire leadership suits highly motivated and skilled individuals who have produced positive results.<sup>25</sup> Okumbe identifies advantages of this style, such as easily accepted decisions and employees providing motivation.<sup>26</sup> However, disadvantages include unhealthy competition and chaos due to unguided freedom.

Laissez-faire leaders are often characterized by establishing rapport with staff but not significantly enhancing performance or learning efficiency.<sup>27</sup> Uncontrolled freedom in this style can lead to conflicts and hinder academic performance, especially in examination outcomes. The laissez-faire leadership style involves minimal intervention, granting autonomy and authority to employees within boundaries. It suits skilled individuals but risks chaos and conflicts, potentially hindering academic performance indicators.

#### **The Role of Authoritarian Leadership Style on the Academic Performance of Pupils**

The authoritarian leadership style expects strict compliance and centralizes decision-making with the leader. This style aligns with scientific management principles and theory X, where people are coerced to work.<sup>28</sup> Okumbe defines authoritarian leaders as task-oriented, treating workers as machines for productivity.<sup>29</sup> Iqbal found that authoritarian styles were more influential in school effectiveness than democratic styles in Punjab's public schools.<sup>30</sup> Kanja, Student and Ueda notes that authoritarian style involves detailed instructions and close supervision, often imposing sanctions for underperformance.<sup>31</sup>

Authoritarian leadership can lead to negative performance outcomes, complex leader-follower relationships, and a high intention among followers to leave.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, specific conditions may render authoritarian leadership styles effective, particularly in traditional workgroups.<sup>33</sup> Authoritarian leadership demands strict compliance, centralizing decisions based on scientific management principles. It treats workers as productive units. While effective in traditional settings, it can cause negative performance, and strained relationships.

#### **The Role of Democratic Leadership Style on the Academic Performance of Pupils\*\***

Democratic leadership entails involving all workers in decision-making, promoting participation and shared decision-making.<sup>34</sup> Peretomode, Tookes, Aly and Avant, Lunenburg and Ornstein, asserts a positive relationship between democratic leadership and learners' academic performance.<sup>35</sup> This leadership style encourages participation and consultation, fostering a climate where stakeholders can express themselves freely.<sup>36</sup>

Democratic leadership's advantages include promoting high morale, providing autonomy, and enhancing flexibility.<sup>37</sup> Participative decision-making improves communication and shared values, promoting a conducive environment for employee performance in primary schools. Bell (2010) highlights the significance of democratic leadership in sharing workplace influence among individuals, enhancing co-determination of working conditions, and addressing performance issues. This style's participative nature encourages active engagement between managers and employees, positively affecting performance in primary schools. It involves inclusive decision-making, fostering participation, and communication. It positively relates to learners' academic performance. It promotes autonomy, flexibility, and shared values, enhancing employee performance in primary schools. Active engagement between managers and employees drives positive outcomes.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

To generate answers to research problems, Babey<sup>38</sup> and Harris<sup>39</sup> define research design as the scheme or plan employed to generate answers to research problems. This study chose a cross-sectional survey design, simultaneously capturing data from various population strata. Questionnaires were administered to parents, teachers, deputy headteachers, and school leaders. These standardized instruments allowed for uniform responses and suitable data collection. Quantitative and qualitative research approaches were utilized to analyze numerical and written data, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of leadership styles' impact on academic performance in selected primary schools.

The target population included 100 academic and administrative staff from five public primary schools: Spire Road, Narambhai, Walukuba East, Uganda Railways, and Walukuba West primary schools. This comprised 5 headteachers, 5 deputy headteachers, 5 senior education assistants, and 85 teachers, all chosen due to their direct involvement in and influence by the practiced leadership styles. A sample of 100 respondents was selected using simple random and purposive sampling techniques, ensuring representation of the population's interests.<sup>40</sup>

Primary data was obtained from parents, teachers, deputy headteachers, and school leaders of the selected primary schools in Jinja City. Secondary data was collected from documents, including annual reports, journals, dissertations, and educational reports from the Ministry of Education and Sports. Questionnaires and interview guides were the primary research instruments. Questionnaires with closed-ended questions were administered to all respondents, facilitating standardized and uniform responses. Interviews provided in-depth data and multiple perspectives.<sup>41</sup>

The study assured participants of confidentiality and the academic nature of the research. An introductory letter from the School of Graduate Studies and Research validated the study's purpose. Caution was exercised during questionnaire distribution not to pressure respondents, and their identities were kept confidential.

The collected data was cleaned and organized ensuring accuracy and consistency. Responses were coded for quantitative data and qualitative interview data was transcribed setting the foundation for analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and understand the quantitative data from questionnaire responses which provided an overview of participants' perceptions and opinions.

The instruments' validity and reliability were ensured through content validity and measurement of consistency. The Content Validity Index (CVI) was employed to establish validity, while reliability was assessed through consistency and stability of the instruments the instruments measured the construct consistently. The instruments will be valid and relevant when the computed content validity index is 0.7 or above.<sup>42</sup>

$$CV = \frac{\text{Items rated relevant}}{\text{Total number of items}} \times 100 \quad (1)$$

Following permission from the School of Graduate Studies and Research, the researcher visited selected primary schools for familiarization and distributed questionnaires. Interviews were conducted with teachers and school leaders. Questionnaires were collected after a week for data analysis. Quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for descriptive statistics. Qualitative data was analyzed descriptively to identify patterns and trends to extract meaningful narratives from the qualitative data. Content analysis was employed for data collected from focused group discussions.

Key themes and findings were summarized from the qualitative data analysis by describing the patterns, trends, and nuances present in participants' in-depth responses. The quantitative and qualitative findings were compared and contrasted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic, identify any consistencies, discrepancies, or relationships between the two types of data. The content of discussions to uncover insights and patterns that emerged during group interactions were analyzed, categorized and interpreted to extract meaningful information. The findings from the various data sources were combined to triangulate results for interpretation of the combined findings, and arriving at comprehensive conclusions regarding the impact of leadership styles on primary schools.

Several limitations were recognized in the study. Personal bias may have been introduced due to the researcher's background as a senior teacher. Honest responses were assumed, and the study's findings were based on a limited number of participants. Additionally, the study's scope was confined to Jinja City.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### ***Objective One: Influence of Laissez-Faire Leadership Style on Academic Performance***

The study's first objective was to establish how the Laissez-Faire leadership style influences the academic performance of pupils in selected public primary schools in Jinja City. The participants were asked to rate their agreement with statements related to the leadership style using a scale of 1 to 5 (1 - Strongly Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - Not Sure, 4 - Agree, 5 - Strongly Agree). The findings are summarized in Table 3 and Table 4 below.

**Table 1. School Leaders Leave School Duties to Teachers in Laissez-Faire Leadership Style**

| Responses         | Frequency   |    |              |    | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------|----|--------------|----|-------|------------|
|                   | 20 – 40 Yrs |    | 41 and above |    |       |            |
|                   | M           | F  | M            | F  |       |            |
| Strongly agree    | 0           | 1  | 2            | 2  | 5     | 5          |
| Agree             | 5           | 0  | 2            | 3  | 10    | 10         |
| Not Sure          | 0           | 0  | 3            | 2  | 5     | 5          |
| Disagree          | 22          | 45 | 1            | 2  | 70    | 70         |
| Strongly Disagree | 3           | 5  | 1            | 1  | 10    | 10         |
| Total             | 30          | 51 | 9            | 10 | 100   | 100.0      |

Source: Field Data (2022)

From the findings, it is evident that 70% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that school leaders leave school duties to teachers only in the Laissez-Faire leadership style. Similarly, 10% strongly disagreed, indicating that most respondents did not perceive a complete delegation of school duties to teachers under this leadership style.

**Table 2. School Leaders Look On When Staff Perform Their Duties**

| Responses         | Frequency   |    |              |    | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------|----|--------------|----|-------|------------|
|                   | 20 – 40 Yrs |    | 41 and above |    |       |            |
|                   | M           | F  | M            | F  |       |            |
| Strongly agree    | 0           | 1  | 3            | 3  | 7     | 7          |
| Agree             | 5           | 0  | 1            | 0  | 6     | 6          |
| Not Sure          | 0           | 0  | 0            | 2  | 2     | 2          |
| Disagree          | 16          | 45 | 1            | 3  | 65    | 65         |
| Strongly Disagree | 9           | 5  | 4            | 2  | 20    | 20         |
| Total             | 30          | 51 | 9            | 10 | 100   | 100        |

Source: Field Data (2022)

The data in Table 4 indicates that 65% of the respondents disagreed with the idea that school leaders closely supervise staff while they perform their duties, while 20% strongly disagreed. This implies that teachers receive minimal supervision from their supervisors under the Laissez-Faire leadership style.

Qualitative data from interviews revealed that the Laissez-Faire style involves delegating decision-making power to teachers, allowing them freedom in their activities related to teaching tasks. However, this freedom might lead to chaos and confusion, hindering achieving the school's goals and objectives.<sup>43</sup> The findings suggest that the Laissez-Faire leadership style does not fully entail leaving school duties solely to teachers and that teachers receive limited supervision from school leaders.

### **Objective Two: Role of Authoritarian Leadership Style on Pupils' Academic Performance**

The study's second objective aimed to analyze the role of the Authoritarian Leadership style on pupils' academic performance in selected public primary schools in Jinja City. Similar to the previous objective, respondents were asked to rate their agreement with statements related to the leadership style using a scale of 1 to 5. The results are summarized in Table 5, Table 6, and Table 7.



**Table 3. School Head Having Full Authority in School Matters for Effective Pupils' Academic Performance**

| Responses         | Frequency   |    |              |    | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------|----|--------------|----|-------|------------|
|                   | 20 – 40 Yrs |    | 41 and above |    |       |            |
|                   | M           | F  | M            | F  |       |            |
| Strongly agree    | 1           | 4  | 2            | 3  | 10    | 10         |
| Agree             | 1           | 2  | 0            | 2  | 5     | 5          |
| Not Sure          | 0           | 2  | 1            | 1  | 4     | 4          |
| Disagree          | 20          | 40 | 6            | 4  | 70    | 70         |
| Strongly Disagree | 8           | 3  | 0            | 0  | 11    | 11         |
| Total             | 30          | 51 | 9            | 10 | 100   | 100.0      |

Source: Field Data (2022)

Table 5 shows that 70% of the respondents disagreed with the idea that school heads have full authority and control over school matters for effective pupils' academic performance. Additionally, 11% strongly disagreed with this notion, indicating that most participants believed school heads do not have full authority in this context.

**Table 4. School Heads Do Not Listen to Staff Issues for Effective Pupils' Academic Performance**

| Responses         | Frequency   |    |              |    | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------|----|--------------|----|-------|------------|
|                   | 20 – 40 Yrs |    | 41 and above |    |       |            |
|                   | M           | F  | M            | F  |       |            |
| Strongly agree    | 14          | 45 | 6            | 5  | 70    | 70         |
| Agree             | 10          | 3  | 1            | 1  | 15    | 15         |
| Not Sure          | 0           | 0  | 0            | 0  | 0     | 0          |
| Disagree          | 3           | 2  | 2            | 3  | 10    | 10         |
| Strongly Disagree | 3           | 1  | 0            | 1  | 5     | 5          |
| Total             | 30          | 51 | 9            | 10 | 100   | 100.0      |

Source: Field Data (2022)

In Table 6, 70% of the respondents strongly agreed that school heads do not listen to staff issues for effective pupils' academic performance. This suggests a lack of effective communication and engagement between school heads and staff regarding pupils' academic performance.

**Table 5. School Heads Strictly Supervise School Activities to Enhance Pupils' Academic Performance**

| Responses         | Frequency   |    |              |    | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------|----|--------------|----|-------|------------|
|                   | 20 – 40 Yrs |    | 41 and above |    |       |            |
|                   | M           | F  | M            | F  |       |            |
| Strongly agree    | 25          | 43 | 6            | 6  | 80    | 80         |
| Agree             | 3           | 3  | 2            | 2  | 10    | 10         |
| Not Sure          | 0           | 1  | 0            | 0  | 1     | 1          |
| Disagree          | 1           | 1  | 0            | 0  | 2     | 2          |
| Strongly Disagree | 1           | 3  | 1            | 2  | 7     | 7          |
| Total             | 30          | 51 | 9            | 10 | 100   | 100.0      |

Source: Field Data (2022)

In Table 7, it is evident that 80% of the respondents strongly agreed that school heads strictly supervise school activities to enhance pupils' academic performance. This indicates that most participants believed that an authoritarian approach to supervision is present in the schools.

Qualitative data collected from interviews revealed that while the Authoritarian leadership style might involve exercising authority and control, it can also suppress staff input and ideas, leading to poor work and limited opportunities for decision-making. The data underscores the prevailing presence the Authoritarian leadership style in the studied schools despite its less desirable attributes.

**Objective Three: Role of Democratic Leadership Style on Academic Performance**

The third objective of the study aimed to determine the role of the Democratic Leadership style on the academic performance of pupils in selected public primary schools in Jinja City. The respondents' responses to different items related to the Democratic Leadership style were collected and summarized in the tables below, using a scale of 1 to 5 (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Not Sure, Agree, and Strongly Agree).

**Table 6. School Heads Delegate Staff in Doing School Duties for Effective Pupils' Academic Performance**

| Responses         | Frequency   |    |              |    | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------|----|--------------|----|-------|------------|
|                   | 20 – 40 Yrs |    | 41 and above |    |       |            |
|                   | M           | F  | M            | F  |       |            |
| Strongly agree    | 10          | 35 | 3            | 2  | 50    | 50         |
| Agree             | 16          | 14 | 5            | 5  | 40    | 40         |
| Not Sure          | 0           | 0  | 1            | 1  | 2     | 2          |
| Disagree          | 3           | 1  | 0            | 2  | 6     | 6          |
| Strongly Disagree | 1           | 1  | 0            | 0  | 2     | 2          |
| Total             | 30          | 51 | 9            | 10 | 100   | 100.0      |

Source: Field Data (2022)

Table 8 shows that 50% of the respondents strongly agreed that school heads delegate staff to do school duties for effective pupils' academic performance. Additionally, 40% agreed with this notion, indicating that most participants believed staff delegation is a school practice.

**Table 7. Open Criticisms Is Allowed Regarding Pupils' Academic Performance**

| Responses         | Frequency   |    |              |    | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------|----|--------------|----|-------|------------|
|                   | 20 – 40 Yrs |    | 41 and above |    |       |            |
|                   | M           | F  | M            | F  |       |            |
| Strongly agree    | 5           | 20 | 5            | 5  | 35    | 35         |
| Agree             | 23          | 24 | 4            | 4  | 55    | 55         |
| Not Sure          | 0           | 4  | 0            | 1  | 5     | 5          |
| Disagree          | 2           | 3  | 0            | 0  | 5     | 5          |
| Strongly Disagree | 0           | 0  | 0            | 0  | 00    | 0.00       |
| Total             | 30          | 51 | 9            | 10 | 100   | 100.0      |

Source: Field Data (2022)

Table 9 indicates that 55% of respondents agreed that open criticisms regarding pupils' academic performance are allowed. This suggests a culture of constructive criticism in the schools, promoting accountability and improvement.

**Table 8. Guidance Rather Than Control Is Done for the Sake of Pupils' Academic Performance**

| Responses         | Frequency   |    |              |    | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------|----|--------------|----|-------|------------|
|                   | 20 – 40 Yrs |    | 41 and above |    |       |            |
|                   | M           | F  | M            | F  |       |            |
| Strongly agree    | 15          | 29 | 1            | 4  | 49    | 49         |
| Agree             | 6           | 15 | 2            | 5  | 28    | 28         |
| Not Sure          | 2           | 5  | 3            | 0  | 10    | 10         |
| Disagree          | 6           | 0  | 2            | 0  | 8     | 8          |
| Strongly Disagree | 1           | 2  | 1            | 1  | 5     | 5          |
| Total             | 30          | 51 | 9            | 10 | 100   | 100.0      |

Source: Field Data (2022)

Table 10 reveals that 49% of the respondents strongly agreed that guidance rather than control is done for pupils' academic performance. This suggests that there is an emphasis on providing guidance and support to pupils, fostering a positive learning environment.

**Table 9. There Is Equal Treatment for All Members as Far as Pupils' Academic Performance Is Concerned**

| Responses         | Frequency   |    |              |    | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------|----|--------------|----|-------|------------|
|                   | 20 – 40 Yrs |    | 41 and above |    |       |            |
|                   | M           | F  | M            | F  |       |            |
| Strongly agree    | 10          | 17 | 0            | 5  | 32    | 32         |
| Agree             | 12          | 20 | 2            | 2  | 36    | 36         |
| Not Sure          | 3           | 8  | 0            | 0  | 11    | 11         |
| Disagree          | 5           | 6  | 0            | 1  | 12    | 12         |
| Strongly Disagree | 0           | 0  | 7            | 2  | 9     | 9          |
| Total             | 30          | 51 | 9            | 10 | 100   | 100.0      |

Source: Field Data (2022)

In Table 11, 36% of the respondents agreed that all members receive equal treatment regarding pupils' academic performance. This suggests that participants perceived a fair and inclusive approach to academic matters in the schools.

The qualitative data collected from interviews revealed that the Democratic leadership style involves participative decision-making, allowing pupils to engage in significant aspects of their academic tasks. This promotes a sense of belonging and self-esteem among pupils, fostering responsibility for their future. Additionally, decentralized decision-making facilitates effective monitoring of academic programs and encourages individuals to express their viewpoints on pupils' academic performance. The Democratic leadership promotes open communication, constructive criticism, guidance, and equal treatment for all members.

Overall, the results suggest that the Democratic Leadership style plays a role in creating a positive learning environment and fostering pupils' academic performance through its participatory and inclusive approach.

#### **Academic Performance**

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1994) defines academic performance as the quality and quantity of knowledge, skills, techniques, positive attitudes, behavior, and philosophy that learners achieve or acquire. This ability is typically assessed through the marks and grades pupils attain in tests

or examinations conducted at the end of a topic, school term, year, or education cycle. The scores and grades obtained by each pupil serve as a measure of their level of achievement. The quality of these grades and the number of candidates who pass in various grades collectively determine the level of academic performance within a specific class or institution during a particular examination period, whether internal or public.

Data on the academic performance of the primary schools under investigation were collected over recent years. A documentary analysis of the data from 2014 to 2017 reveals that only 34 Division 1 scores were achieved across all the primary schools in the study. Notably, certain years, such as 2015 and 2016, saw some schools without Division 1 scores. During these same years, there was a significant decrease in the number of pupils who sat for the Primary Leaving Examination (PLE). Conversely, the number of pupils obtaining Division 2 scores was slightly higher, while the number of pupils in the subsequent grade divisions was notably higher, which raises concerns.

The declining trend in Division 1 scores and the higher numbers of pupils falling into lower grade divisions highlight potential challenges in the academic performance of the primary schools under scrutiny. These findings raise questions about the factors influencing these trends and whether leadership styles correlate with the observed patterns. Further exploration of the relationship between leadership styles and academic performance is warranted to understand the dynamics at play better.

The documented data underscores the significance of investigating the potential influence of leadership styles on academic performance, as this information can provide insights into the strategies needed to address any observed academic challenges.

## **Discussion**

### ***Objective One: Influence of Laissez-Faire Leadership Style on Academic Performance***

The study's first objective was to explore how the laissez-faire leadership style influences pupils' academic performance in selected primary schools in Jinja City. The findings suggest that school heads who adopt the laissez-faire leadership style provide the necessary support, fostering a conducive learning environment that promotes pupils' academic performance. This is consistent with observation of Okumbe<sup>44</sup>, that laissez-faire leaders allow individuals to function independently, although it might lead to chaos if not managed effectively.

The study also revealed that this leadership style enhances pupils' academic performance (63.6%). This aligns with concept of laissez-faire leadership, which involves motivating followers by raising their awareness of organizational goals and inspiring them to go beyond self-interest for the organization's benefit.<sup>45</sup> The leader's focus on individual differences among followers, helping them develop strengths and listening to their concerns, creates a positive environment.

Moreover, the study findings indicate that goals initiated and directed by leaders under the laissez-faire style boost pupils' academic performance (64.4%). This resonates with Spinelli (2010), who proposed that charismatic and inspirational components of laissez-faire leadership involve communicating high expectations, using symbols to focus effort, and articulating a compelling vision for the future. This approach encourages followers to envision attractive future states, promoting individual and team spirit.

***Objective Two: Role of Authoritarian Leadership Style on Pupils' Academic Performance***

The second objective aimed to analyze the role of authoritarian leadership style on pupils' academic performance. The study found that authority in leadership is not deemed necessary for effective pupils' academic performance (41.5%). This finding contradicts the idea that authoritarian leaders impose detailed instructions and close supervision, as Kanja, Student and Ueda (2001) noted. It appears that the study's participants believe that authority does not necessarily lead to better academic outcomes.

Interestingly, the study revealed that school heads listen to staff issues, contradicting the typical characteristics of authoritarian leadership. This result suggests that some aspects of the authoritarian style might be blended with more participative elements, aligning with contemporary views that leadership styles can be adaptive and situation-dependent. This finding contrasts some perceptions of authoritarian leadership, often highlighting intimidation and fear-based control. It's important to note that leadership styles can be complex and multifaceted, incorporating different elements based on the specific context.

The study also demonstrated that school heads strictly supervise and control activities for effective pupils' academic performance (90%). These findings align with (Northouse, 2021), who asserts that the Authoritarian leadership style involves dictating and controlling activities without significant subordinate participation. This style can impact employee rights and school performance. Overall, the results suggest that the Authoritarian Leadership style does play a role in pupils' academic performance, with some positive and negative aspects.

***Objective Three: Role of Democratic Leadership Style on Academic Performance***

The third objective aimed to investigate the impact of democratic leadership style on pupils' academic performance. The study found that school heads delegate staff in doing school duties for effective pupils' academic performance (90%). This aligns with the participative nature of democratic leadership, where employees are involved in decision-making processes. This inclusivity will likely lead to greater ownership of tasks and improved performance.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that open criticism is allowed regarding pupils' academic performance (90%). This contradicts the notion that democratic leadership is always positively received by employees. However, the study indicates that in this context, democratic leadership allows for open communication and critique, which can contribute to improved performance.

The study also demonstrated that guidance, rather than strict control, is employed for pupils' academic performance (77%). This finding aligns with the consultative nature of democratic leadership, where employees' input is valued and integrated into decision-making. This involvement can foster shared values between the organization and its employees, promoting higher performance.

Lastly, the study revealed equal treatment for all members concerning pupils' academic performance (68%). This result reflects the inclusive and participative nature of democratic leadership, which seeks to create a climate where all stakeholders can freely express themselves and be part of decision-making processes.

With academic performance perceived in terms of assessment scores, the quality of these grades and the number of candidates who pass in various grades collectively determine the level of academic performance within a specific class or institution during a particular examination period, whether internal or public.<sup>46</sup>

The study highlights the intricate relationship between leadership styles and academic performance. The results indicate that leadership styles are not fixed but can encompass a range of behaviors and attitudes, which may be situation-dependent and influenced by various contextual factors.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study's findings shed light on the impact of different leadership styles on pupils' academic performance in selected primary schools in Jinja City. The research shed light on the potential benefits and drawbacks of each style, offering insights into their impacts on pupils, staff, and overall school effectiveness. The Path-Goal theory provided a valuable framework, emphasizing the interplay between motivation, behavior, and leadership. Ultimately, the findings underscore the significance of tailoring leadership approaches to the unique needs of schools, encouraging flexible and adaptive strategies to enhance educational outcomes. Concerning the laissez-faire leadership style, it was evident that simply leaving school duties to teachers without active involvement from school heads does not contribute to enhanced pupils' academic performance. The study emphasizes the importance of upholding and sustaining existing rules, regulations, and school goals to improve academic outcomes. Regarding the authoritarian leadership style, the study concluded that strict authority and top-down control are unnecessary for effective pupils' academic performance. Instead, mechanisms encouraging participation, decision-making opportunities, and a positive teacher working environment should be prioritized. Regarding the impact of the democratic leadership style, the study found that delegation, open communication, guidance, and equal treatment positively affect pupils' academic performance. The study emphasizes the importance of fostering a climate where all stakeholders can freely express their viewpoints, provide feedback, and actively contribute to decision-making processes. For the effect of a laissez-faire leadership style on pupils' academic performance, it's recommended that headteachers exhibit flexibility in their leadership approaches to align with the need for improved academic outcomes. Emphasizing and reinforcing rules, regulations, and school goals is crucial to enhancing pupils' academic performance. Regarding the role of authoritarian leadership style, the study recommends that while authority is important, a more decentralized approach should be adopted. Creating opportunities for members to participate in decision-making, encouraging teachers, and fostering a balanced work environment are vital considerations for boosting and sustaining academic performance. Lastly, in terms of the impact of democratic leadership style, the study suggests that government, policymakers, and relevant authorities should promote an environment that allows for free expression of viewpoints, open criticism, guidance, control, and fair treatment for all stakeholders involved in fostering desirable pupils' academic performance.

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