

Effects of Head of School Leadership on Students' Academic Performance of Form Four National Examinations in Public Secondary Schools in Unguja, Zanzibar, Tanzania

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of head of school leadership on students' academic performance of Form Four National Examinations in public secondary schools in Unguja, Zanzibar, Tanzania. The study employed a convergent research design under mixed method approach whereby both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed simultaneously. The target population consisted of 3,558 respondents, from which a sample size of 266 respondents was selected. The sample included six heads of schools, who were chosen using a total population sampling technique, 24 teachers were selected through stratified sampling technique, 218 students through stratified sampling technique, and 18 parents through convenience sampling technique. Data was gathered using questionnaires and interview guide. The quantitative data was analyzed descriptively using frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, which were presented in a table. The qualitative data was analyzed through techniques such as paraphrasing, quoting, and narration. Findings revealed that head of school leadership has effects on students' academic performance in public secondary schools. The researcher recommended that heads of schools should participate in training, seminars, and workshops on school leadership. This will enable them to acquire knowledge and skills for effective school leadership, leading to high students' academic performance.

Keywords: Head of school leadership, Academic performance, Form Four National Examinations and Public secondary schools

1. Introduction

Students' academic performance is a crucial measure of the quality of teaching and learning within secondary schools (Johnson et al., 2019). Students' academic performance serves as an indicator of a school's effectiveness, with high academic performance signaling a good school and also, when students get low academic performance make a school to be considered as a bad school.

As leaders of schools, heads of schools play a pivotal role in overseeing and managing the daily activities of teaching and learning. They are the driving forces behind the functioning of various factors within the school learning environment, all working towards the goal of improving students' academic performance (Lonyian & Kuranchie, 2018). Consequently, their effectiveness is often evaluated before considering other contributing factors.

In Unguja, Zanzibar, there has been a persistent issue of low academic performance among students in public secondary schools from 2010 to 2022. Records from the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA) reveal that, more than 60% of students have consistently achieved low academic performance, categorized as Division IV and 0, while less than 40% have obtained high academic performance, categorized as Division I, II, and III (URT, 2010 & URT, 2022). In response to this concerning situation, education stakeholders naturally begin assessing the effects of the school learning environment on students' academic performance. Among the components scrutinized within the school learning environment, the leadership provided by the heads of schools is often evaluated. If academic performance is low, the head of school leadership is often criticized for not being sufficiently proactive in affecting students' academic performance. To shed light on this matter, the researcher conducted a study to investigate the effects of head of school leadership on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Unguja, Zanzibar.

2. Statement of the Problem

The issue of low academic performance among students in Form Four National Examinations is a prevailing concern in Unguja, Zanzibar. Official data from the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA) reveals that only a small percentage of students in public secondary schools in Zanzibar achieve higher academic performance, categorized as Division I, II, and III,

while the majority attain lower academic performance, categorized as Division IV and 0 (URT, 2010 & URT, 2022). Despite the government's efforts to address this issue and enhance students' academic performance, the problem persists and proves to be highly resistant.

The cause of this low academic performance among students in public secondary schools in Unguja, Zanzibar could be attributed to various factors, one of which might be poor head of school leadership. To ascertain the truth behind this situation, the researcher of the present study conducted an investigation on the effects of head of school leadership on students' academic performance in Form Four National Examinations in public secondary schools in Unguja, Zanzibar.

3. Research Question

This study was guided by the following research question;

What are the effects of head of school leadership on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Unguja, Zanzibar?

4. Significance of the Study

This study provides significant and valuable insights that are relevant to policy makers, educational planners, heads of schools, teachers, and other education stakeholders regarding the importance of head of school leadership and its effects on students' academic performance. The information obtained from this study sheds light on key issues related to head of school leadership, which can be utilized by policy makers in the planning process aimed at improving students' academic performance in public secondary schools.

Moreover, this study holds value for researchers in the field of education who are interested in exploring the effects of head of school leadership on students' academic performance in secondary schools. It serves as a foundational source of information for their own studies. Additionally, the findings of this study demonstrate the efficacy of the transformational leadership theory, which serves as the guiding framework, in understanding the relationship between head of school leadership and students' academic performance.

5. Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study is grounded in the transformational leadership theory, which was developed by James Burn in 1978. The theory posits that effective leadership influences followers and leads to high

performance (Collins et al., 2002). The theory emphasizes the impact of leaders on their followers, precisely what this study seeks to examine the influence of heads of schools as leaders on students' academic performance.

This theory aligns well with the current study, which aims to investigate the effects of head of school leadership on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Zanzibar. This theory informs the current study about the need for leadership skills among heads of schools, which can influence teachers' motivation and commitment and enhance students' academic engagement. By improving the teaching and learning process, the study aims to contribute to better academic performance in secondary schools. The transformational leadership theory aligns with the study's objective of investigating the effects of head of school leadership on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Unguja, Zanzibar, as it examines the leaders' effects on the followers, in this case, the students.

6. Literature Review and Knowledge Gap

This section highlights several studies examining the effects of head of school leadership on students' academic performance in public secondary schools. It discusses the methodologies employed, the findings obtained, and identifies knowledge gaps.

Yanyan (2018) conducted a research study in the Chinese context to investigate the influence of head of school leadership on students' academic performance. The study included 26 high schools, 26 principals, and 4,288 students in Shenyang. Hierarchical linear models were used to test the hypotheses. The findings indicated that head of school leadership has a significant impact on students' academic achievement. However, the study was limited to the Chinese context, suggesting the need for similar research in a different setting, such as Unguja, Zanzibar.

Tseer (2021) conducted a study on the effects of school leadership on students' academic performance in secondary schools in Northern Ghana. The study employed a cross-sectional design involving 384 teachers to gather both qualitative and quantitative data using questionnaires and interview guides. Descriptive analysis was done to determine the mean and standard deviation of the data. Inferential analysis was also done using ordinary square regression levels. The findings of the study revealed that, school leadership has effects on students' academic performance in secondary schools. However, the study only collected data from teachers, neglecting the information of other stakeholders, such as heads of schools,

students, and parents which could help to enhance the validity of the findings. So, the researcher of the current study conducted a similar study by involving heads of schools, teachers, students and parents in order to enhance the validity of findings.

Etecha and Shireye (2021) conducted a study in the Guraghe Zone of Ethiopia to explore the effectiveness of school leadership on students' academic performance. The study used a correlational research design and quantitative methods. The sample consisted of 225 secondary school teachers, heads of schools, heads of departments, and 2,298 grade ten students' national examination results from 10 public secondary schools. The findings revealed a positive and significant relationship between leadership effectiveness and students' academic achievement. However, the study's context differed from that of Unguja, Zanzibar, highlighting the need for a similar study in the latter environment.

Mtuku (2018) conducted a study to examine the effects of head of school leadership practices on students' academic performance in secondary schools in Machakos County in Kenya. The researcher of this study applied a survey research design under quantitative research approach. A total of 58 school heads and 345 students from among high and low performing secondary schools participated in the study. The data was collected, analyzed and presented descriptively. The findings of the study revealed that, school head practices were associated with academic performance of the students. However, the study solely relied on a qualitative research approach. The researcher of the current study conducted a similar study by employing convergent research design in order to capture all the important contextual information for underpinning the phenomena which was being studied.

Upendo and Mkulu (2020) conducted a study in Morogoro region, Tanzania, to explore the effect of school head leadership styles on students' academic performance. The study employed a mixed methods research approach, using simple random, stratified, and purposive sampling techniques were employed giving the total sample size of 111 individuals. The convergent parallel research design was utilized, combining quantitative and qualitative data, which were analyzed independently and interpreted together. The study revealed the influence of school head leadership styles on students' academic performance, while questioning the effectiveness of laissez-faire leadership style. However, since head of school leadership encompasses multiple

practices and factors, there was a need of conducting another study on effects of head of school leadership on students' academic performance.

Despite with the positive findings from the reviewed studies, several gaps were identified. First, some studies collected data from a single group of respondents which lead to limited information and conclusions. Second, some studies examined school leadership in general, the specific focus on head of school leadership was lacking. So, in order to address these gaps, the current study was conducted in Unguja, Zanzibar, examining the effects of head of school leadership on students' academic performance. A convergent research design was employed, involving heads of schools, teachers, students, and parents. Questionnaires and interview guides were used as data collection instruments to ensure more valid findings for the research conclusion.

7. Methodology and Design

The study utilized a convergent research design under mixed-method approach in collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously (Cresswell&Cresswell, 2018). The target population consisted of 3,558 respondents from 32 secondary schools in Unguja, Zanzibar, which had been established for over 30 years. In order ensure clear research findings, the sample size for the study was determined based on the recommendation by Kothari and Garg (2019), who suggested that the sample size should be between 10 percent and 30 percent of the target population. Thus, the researcher selected a sample size of 266 respondents, which accounted for more than 10 percent of the target population. Probability and non-probability sampling techniques were employed to select participants from six secondary schools. The sample included six heads of schools selected through total population sampling, 24 teachers selected through stratified sampling, 218 students selected through stratified sampling, and 18 parents selected through convenience sampling. The data collection instruments consisted of questionnaires for heads of schools, teachers, and students, as well as an interview guide.

In order to ensure the validity of the quantitative data instruments, the researcher sought validation from research experts at Mwenge Catholic University. For the qualitative data instruments, the researcher employed peer debriefing validation by sharing the instruments with experts at Mwenge Catholic University. The reliability of the quantitative data instruments was assessed by calculating the Cronbach Alpha values using the Statistical Package for Social

Sciences (SPSS). The calculated values were 0.711 for heads of schools, 0.739 for teachers, and 0.702 for students, indicating that the instruments were reliable for collecting data. The reliability of the qualitative data instruments was ensured through triangulation, involving multiple data sources in a single investigation, and peer debriefing, where the findings were shared with experts at Mwenge Catholic University. The collected quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, presenting frequencies, percentages, and mean scores in a table. The qualitative data, on the other hand, was analyzed through paraphrasing, including quotes, and narration.

Ethical considerations were carefully followed throughout the research process. The researcher obtained all necessary permissions to conduct the study and presented the consent forms, which required all participants to sign before their participation. The purpose of the study and the identities of the participants were disclosed to ensure voluntary participation. The findings were presented in their original form as obtained from the field.

8. Findings and Discussion

This research question aimed to investigate the effects of head of school leadership on students' academic performance. In order to collect data, questionnaires were distributed to heads of schools, teachers, and students. The participants were asked to rate the items on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "no effects" to "major effects." The responses received from heads of schools, teachers, and students were analyzed and presented in descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. The collected data are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Responses of heads of schools(n=6), teachers (n=24) and students(n=212) on the effects of head of school leadership on students' academic performance

Items	RS	NOE		MIE		NEE		MOE		MAE		M.S
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
1. Effects of head of school's way of delegating power to other members of school on students' academic performance	HS	00	00	00	00	04	67	00	00	02	33	3.67
	TC	01	04	07	29	03	13	07	29	06	25	3.42
	ST	10	05	23	11	75	35	72	34	32	15	3.44
2. Effects of head of school's way of communicating to	HS	00	00	00	00	01	17	05	83	00	00	3.83
	TC	04	17	04	17	04	17	06	25	06	25	2.92

members of school on students' academic performance	ST	08	04	24	11	63	30	79	37	38	18	3.54
3. Effects of head of school's way of cooperating with teachers in different activities on students' academic performance	HS	00	00	00	00	02	33	04	67	00	00	3.67
	TC	06	25	02	08	06	25	06	25	04	17	3.00
	ST	05	02	22	10	77	36	71	34	37	18	3.53
4. Effects of head of school role of coordinating teachers and parents on students' academic performance	HS	00	00	00	00	02	33	01	17	03	50	4.17
	TC	01	04	04	17	11	46	06	25	02	08	3.17
	ST	02	01	25	12	62	29	81	38	42	20	3.64
5. Effects of head of school's role of class supervision on students' academic performance	HS	00	00	00	00	02	33	03	50	01	17	3.83
	TC	02	08	05	21	07	29	06	25	04	17	3.21
	ST	07	03	33	16	66	31	73	34	33	16	3.43
6. Effects of head of school's way of making school learning environment conducive on students' academic performance	HS	00	00	00	00	00	00	03	50	03	50	4.50
	TC	03	13	05	21	07	29	06	25	06	25	3.29
	ST	08	04	34	16	64	30	71	34	35	17	3.43

Source: Field data (2023)

Key: No Effect = NOE, Minor Effect=MIE, Neutral Effect= NEE, Moderate Effect= MOE, Major Effect= MAE, HS=Heads of Schools, TC=Teachers, ST= Students and RS=Respondents

The data presented in Table 1 reveal that 67% of heads of schools and 35% of students, with mean scores of 3.67 and 3.44 respectively, perceived neutral effects on students' academic performance from the way heads of schools, delegate power to other school members. Additionally, 29% of teachers, with a mean score of 3.42, perceived major effects on students' academic performance resulting from power delegation by heads of schools. This implies that, heads of schools do delegate power to others, their approach to delegation look to be not wholehearted. Many heads of schools seem to be unaware of the benefits of power delegation, such as the development of subordinate skills and confidence, quick problem-solving abilities among subordinates, improved decision-making even in the absence of the head of school, closer

relationships between heads of schools and fellow teachers, and increased commitment to teaching tasks.

According to Lonyian and Kuranchie (2018), successful heads of schools empower others, particularly teachers, by distributing leadership responsibilities through delegation across the entire school. This promotes a culture of trust, support, collaboration, and a shared vision. Delegating power in this manner simplifies the overall leadership workload, while still maintaining the ultimate leadership role of the heads of schools. However, during an interview, a parent whose child attends School B expressed concern about heads of schools' delegation when said that:

One of the hindrances present within secondary schools is the situation where a head of school tries to do everything alone without sharing with others or delegating power to others and if he/she shares in some moments then he/she shares with friends only regardless of their ability in performance (Personal communication, 28 November, 2022).

The interview data also revealed that a majority of heads of schools tend to withhold power from others due to fear of challenges or a fear of losing their leadership position. It is important for heads of schools to recognize that their role is not to work alone but to lead students, teachers, and other school members towards a common goal. Power sharing and delegation are essential for achieving this common goal. Hallinger et al. (2018) further emphasize that highly successful heads of schools encourage collaborative decision-making that involves a wide range of key stakeholders. Therefore, to succeed in their leadership roles, heads of schools need to learn how to foster a strong shared sense of school leadership by fostering a high spirit of commitment within the school community.

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that 83% of heads of schools and 37% of students, with mean scores of 3.83 and 3.54 respectively, perceived moderate effects on students' academic performance based on the ways heads of schools deliver communication on important issues in secondary schools. On the other hand, 25% of teachers, with a mean score of 2.92, perceived major effects on students' academic performance resulting from communication by heads of schools. This implies that, many heads of schools recognize the importance of communication as

a crucial tool for managing secondary schools. Through effective communication, heads of schools have made it easier for school members to provide feedback, maintain healthy relationships with staff, and enable the efficient completion of duties by other members of the school.

Additionally, heads of schools have successfully developed good relationships with other members of the school through communication, creating a friendly school environment. This environment fosters comfort, enthusiasm, and teamwork among students, teachers, and parents, ultimately contributing to the achievement of desired academic goals. However, during an interview, a parent whose child attends School E expressed concern about some heads of schools who fail to communicate important issues within the school, leading to a sense of detachment among school members when said that:

Normally the aspect of communication makes us members of a school as one and every one becomes aware of whatever is taking place within the school. Sometimes due to some heads of schools' character of not communicating important issues within the schools, makes other members behave as if are not part of the school. (Personal communication 2 December 2022)

The interview data further revealed that heads of schools sometimes fail to provide clear communication to other members of the school when necessary. Communication is a core aspect of a head of school's leadership role. A head of school who cannot effectively communicate with their followers will struggle to achieve the desired outcomes within the school. Conversely, a head of school who communicates transparently about all matters pertaining to the school receives cooperation from teachers and builds strong bonds with other members of the school. Dean (2020) emphasizes that communication skills are vital for heads of schools as they interact with multiple people simultaneously. Good communication by a head of school is imperative for effective presentation, motivation, enthusiasm, and conflict resolution in all school matters. Berkovich and Eyal (2018) also assert that communication is an essential tool for achieving intended goals, and clear communication is necessary for teachers with high performance expectations.

Therefore, heads of schools should always prioritize clear communication to achieve their goals alongside their followers. Tyler (2019) states that maintaining communication between heads of

schools, teachers, and students is essential for creating a favorable school climate conducive to teaching and learning activities. Effective leadership by heads of schools and clear communication are indispensable factors in school management.

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that 67% of heads of schools, 25% of teachers, and 36% of students, with their respective mean scores of 3.67, 3.00, and 3.41, perceived moderate effects on students' academic performance based on the ways heads of schools cooperate with school members in different activities in secondary schools. This implies that, although there is some level of cooperation in secondary schools, the majority of the collaboration appears to be between heads of schools and teachers, rather than involving other members such as students and other school staff. Many heads do not fully grasp the benefits of cooperating with all members of the school, which can foster harmony, skill-sharing, and positive relationships.

Jeznik et al. (2018) affirm that cooperation between heads of schools and other members of the school encourages mutual learning, enhances motivation for work, and provides opportunities for professional growth. However, during an interview, a parent whose child attends School B expressed concern that:

Most of our heads of schools cooperate only with few individual teachers whom they are very close to. So heads of schools should cooperate with all members of the school particularly teachers and not only those whom they relate with (Personal communication 3 December 2022).

The interview data further reveal that heads of schools do engage in cooperation with various members of the school, albeit not with all of them. A school is a complex organization that requires the collective efforts of multiple individuals. In order to effectively carry out all school activities, heads of schools need the support and cooperation of others. Heads of schools should not fear cooperation with other school members, as avoiding collaboration can be detrimental to their leadership. Lesar (2018) recommends that leadership should be viewed as a shared phenomenon, where heads of schools lead together with other members of the school, rather than attempting to lead alone. Fostering cooperation with all members of the school, particularly teachers, is crucial for heads of schools. By embracing collaboration, heads of schools can tap into the support, knowledge, and expertise of others, leading to a more effective and harmonious school environment.

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that 50% of heads of schools and 34% of students, with mean scores of 3.83 and 3.43 respectively, perceive moderate effects on students' academic performance resulting from the role of class supervision by heads of schools in secondary schools. On the other hand, 29% of teachers, with a mean score of 3.21, perceive neutral effects on students' academic performance. This implies that, class supervision is conducted by many heads of schools in secondary schools, though it is not taken seriously enough to yield visible outcomes. If class supervision were given more attention, teachers could become more committed to their teaching, and students could become more engaged in attending classes. During an interview, a retired teacher who is also a parent of a child attending School C commented that:

Heads of schools do conduct class supervision in many secondary schools, although not consistently. In a semester of five months, heads of schools only appear three times for class supervision. During these sessions, heads of schools typically review scheme of works, lesson plans, class notes, and also observe teachers while they are teaching (Personal communication, 28 November 2022).

As heads of schools hold positions of authority within schools, they are responsible for ensuring that teaching and learning activities adhere to the rules, regulations, and proper procedures set forth by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST). This aligns with the findings of Jeremi (2017), who emphasizes that class supervision is an essential tool for improving the quality of teachers' instruction. To enhance the quality of instruction, heads of schools need to consistently conduct class supervision to determine the effectiveness of the teaching and learning provided to students.

Similarly, another parent whose child attends School E expressed dissatisfaction during the interview that: *Heads of schools do not make class supervision and if they were doing so then they could have become aware of what our children write in their exercise books. Unfortunately, what they write is terrible* (Personal communication, 28 November 2022). The interview data reveal that not all heads of schools consistently conduct class supervision. Even those who do, only do so sporadically, often citing their heavy workload in their offices as a reason for not conducting regular supervision. For class supervision to be productive for students, it must be carried out consistently, creating an environment where teachers feel compelled to prepare and

teach students diligently due to the awareness that someone of higher authority is observing their work. When supervision is sporadic, both teachers and students tend to approach lessons lackadaisically, resulting in less active teaching and learning. Heads of schools should prioritize consistent supervision to ensure the quality of teachers' instruction and student engagement. By conducting regular and effective supervision, schools can create a conducive environment for meaningful teaching and learning experiences.

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that 50% of heads of schools and 34% of students, with mean scores of 4.50 and 3.43 respectively, perceive moderate effects on students' academic performance resulting from the way heads of schools create a conducive school learning environment in secondary schools. Conversely, 29% of teachers, with a mean score of 3.29, perceive neutral effects on students' academic performance. This implies that, heads of schools generally make an effort to establish a conducive school learning environment. The majority of heads of schools recognize that creating such an environment leads to effective teaching, active student engagement, positive teacher-student relationships, parental cooperation, and the availability of necessary learning facilities, all of which contribute to students' academic success. This aligns with the statement by Najike et al. (2019) that the quality of the school learning environment plays a crucial role in students' academic achievement, making it a determining factor for their success or failure.

In line with these findings, a parent whose child attends School C mentioned during the interview that: *They are accustomed to seeing the head of the school making efforts to ensure the presence of teachers and the availability of school learning facilities, although acknowledging that task is not an easy one (Personal communication, 28 November 2022).* The interview data reveal that heads of schools consistently strive to create a conducive school learning environment despite facing numerous challenges. They recognize that the school learning environment encompasses natural conditions, circumstances, influences, and socio-cultural contexts that impact students' academic performance. As Nwizu (2019) asserts, a conducive school learning environment can only be achieved when teamwork is fostered, diversity is embraced, and individuals care for, trust, and respect one another, thereby ensuring that students can learn comfortably and achieve academic success.

The collected data emphasize the importance of establishing a conducive school learning environment in secondary schools. Heads of schools play a vital role in creating such an environment, which positively impacts teaching and learning outcomes. Their efforts are aimed at providing an environment where students can thrive academically. Despite the challenges they face, heads of schools strive to ensure the presence of qualified teachers, adequate learning facilities, and a supportive atmosphere. By fostering teamwork, embracing diversity, and promoting care, trust, and respect, schools can create an environment where students can learn effectively and achieve academic success.

9. Conclusion

The study reveals that head of school leadership has effects on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Unguja, Zanzibar. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of providing to heads of schools enhanced knowledge and skills in school leadership. By equipping them with these competencies, they can effectively lead their secondary schools and significantly impact students' academic performance in public secondary schools.

10. Recommendations

In order to enhance effective head of school leadership, the study recommends that, heads of schools should engage in various school leadership training programs, seminars, and workshops which can empower them with essential skills and knowledge in school leadership. They should also, seek opportunities to interact with heads of schools who have demonstrated success in their leadership roles. By exposing themselves to these accomplished leaders, they can gain valuable insights and experiences related to school leadership.

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