The Influence of Principals' Administrative Styles on Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Keiyo South Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

Student academic performance in Kenya's secondary schools continues to face challenges despite significant investments in curriculum and resources. Leadership, particularly the administrative styles adopted by principals, has been identified as a critical yet often overlooked factor influencing academic outcomes. This study examined the influence of principals' administrative styles on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Keiyo South Sub-County, Kenya. Anchored on Transactional Theory, the study employed a mixed-methods convergent parallel design. The target population included 45 principals, 45 directors of studies, 45 teachers, and an estimated 15,000 students, with participants selected through stratified, systematic random, purposive, and census sampling techniques. Data were collected using questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and means) and inferential statistics (ANOVA), while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Findings indicated that 58.3% of teachers perceived principals as transformational leaders, 33.3% as democratic, and only 8.3% as autocratic. ANOVA results showed a statistically significant influence of autocratic ($F = 4.78$, $p = 0.010$), transformational ($F = 7.65$, $p = 0.001$), and democratic ($F = 6.85$, $p = 0.002$) leadership styles on academic performance. The study concludes that supportive and participatory administrative styles positively influence student academic outcomes and recommends continuous professional development programs to strengthen transformational and democratic leadership competencies among principals.

Keywords: Principals' administrative styles, academic performance, transformational leadership, democratic leadership, autocratic leadership, secondary schools, Kenya

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Data Availability Statement: The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article [and/or] its supplementary materials.

Competing interests: The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a powerful catalyst for social and economic transformation (Ahmed, 2024) and school leadership plays a central role in shaping the teaching and learning environment (Mustoip et al., 2023). Globally, principals' administrative styles are acknowledged as a major determinant of student academic performance, as their practices influence instructional quality, teacher and student motivation, resource allocation and the general school climate (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). As chief administrators, principals adopt various leadership styles such as democratic, autocratic, laissez-faire, and transformational that fundamentally determine how decisions are made and how school goals are pursued (Maqbool et al., 2024).

In many education systems, effective principals employ participative and instructional leadership, promoting collaboration and accountability, whereas rigid or authoritarian approaches often stifle creativity and negatively affect performance (Sharma & Adeoye, 2024). The administrative style a principal chooses therefore directly shapes the level of teacher commitment and student engagement in the learning process.

Globally, democratic and transformational leadership styles are most consistently associated with positive student performance. A meta-analysis of over 2,000 studies on educational leadership found that a principal's influence on student achievement is second only to classroom teaching quality (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009). Bellibaş, Gümüş and Liu (2021) analyzed secondary data from the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2013, collected by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Using multilevel structural equation modeling (SEM), they found that principals' instructional leadership had a significant direct effect on instructional quality, while the impact of distributed leadership was primarily indirect, operating through teacher collaboration and job satisfaction.

Empirical studies across Sub-Saharan Africa show a strong link between a principal's leadership style and student performance. In Eritrea, democratic and situational leadership were found to be effective, while autocratic and laissez-faire styles had negative outcomes (Tedla et al., 2021). The democratic approach fosters teacher motivation and a positive school climate, which are crucial for long-term academic success (Oduro et al., 2024). However, some research, like a study in Enugu, Nigeria, has shown that autocratic

leadership can be positively correlated with student performance in specific contexts (Igwe et al., 2017). This highlights that effectiveness is often context-dependent. Furthermore, studies on transformational leadership in Tanzania reveal that principals who inspire and intellectually stimulate their teachers can significantly boost academic achievement (Kayombo et al., 2025).

In Kenya, academic achievement at the secondary school level is particularly important because it serves as a gateway to higher education and professional careers (Barasa, 2021). The secondary school years are thus a critical stage in shaping a student's future opportunities, and at the core of these educational outcomes lies the question of leadership. A principal is uniquely positioned to shape the school's ethos, influence teacher commitment, and create the conditions that either enable or hinder student success (Adangabe & Boateng, 2022).

Different leadership models demonstrate varying impacts on school performance. Transformational leadership, characterized by vision, trust-building, and innovation, has been shown to inspire teachers and learners to achieve beyond expectations, fostering collaboration and professional growth (Miano, Atieno, & Barasa, 2023). Similarly, democratic leadership promotes inclusivity, joint decision-making, and a sense of ownership over outcomes (Adangabe & Boateng, 2022). In contrast, autocratic leadership, while sometimes useful in enforcing discipline, often undermines teacher motivation and creativity, leading to diminished outcomes (Kaazara & Kazaara, 2024). Comparative studies reveal that inclusive and transformational forms of leadership are more positively correlated with student performance than authoritarian approaches (Heenan, De Paor, Lafferty, &

McNamara, 2023). In Kenya, empirical evidence further demonstrates that transformational leadership enhances the overall school climate and contributes to higher levels of effectiveness, especially when principals exhibit high levels of emotional intelligence (Lumumba, Jane, & Simatwa, 2022). In girls' public secondary schools in Tharaka Nithi County, for example, transformational leadership practices that emphasized student participation and resource mobilization were strongly linked to improved performance in science subjects (Miano et al., 2023).

Despite policy interventions and government investment in secondary education, student performance in national examinations continues to raise concern in many Kenyan regions. Public secondary schools in Keiyo South Sub-County, located in Elgeyo-Marakwet County, continue to record below-average performance in national examinations despite significant government and community investments (Natembeya, Atoni, & Ndaita, 2023). This paradox suggests that non-material factors, such as school leadership, may be critical determinants of academic success. Principals in this region face context-specific challenges, including limited community engagement and socio-cultural factors that may affect the effective application of best-practice leadership models (Espinosa Andrade, Padilla, & Carrington, 2024). This study seeks to investigate the relationship between principals' administrative styles and the academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Keiyo South Sub-County, Kenya. Studies from urban areas have shown that democratic and transformational leadership styles foster better outcomes, there is a lack of research on how these models operate in rural, resource-constrained environments such as this

sub-county (Natembeya, Atoni, & Ndaita, 2023).

Literature Review

Concept of Principals' Administrative Styles

A principal's administrative or leadership style is their unique method of guiding, organizing, and motivating staff and students. This approach, characterized by a principal's behaviors and communication, is more than a personal trait; it is a key factor in how a school operates, influencing everything from decision-making to teacher relationships and overall school culture (Wanyoko, 2021). Historically, many school leaders have overlooked how their leadership style affects teacher performance and, ultimately, student academic success (Duze, 2012). This oversight highlights that the quality of a school's instruction and student outcomes often mirrors the principal's own leadership.

Scholars like Oyugi and Gogo (2019) define leadership style as the combination of a leader's personality, demeanor, and communication in guiding a group toward achieving its goals. There is broad consensus that leadership style directly impacts an organization's morale and performance. The seminal framework by Lewin (1939) remains a cornerstone for understanding leadership in education, categorizing styles into three main types: authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire. These styles are distinguished by how much a principal involves teachers in decisions, delegates tasks, and maintains control over school activities, providing a way for examining the link between leadership choices and school performance.

Concept of Autocratic Leadership

Autocratic leadership is an administrative style where a principal makes all decisions unilaterally and strictly enforces rules. This approach is characterized by a high degree of control, with principals being seen as power-oriented, coercive, and resistant to feedback from staff (Bwalya, 2023). While this type of leader takes full responsibility for all outcomes, they ensure compliance through rigorous discipline and strict regulations.

In Kenyan education, research has shown that a certain degree of autocratic leadership can lead to academic benefits. For instance, a study by Kichwen and Ezekiel (2024) found that this style was responsible for about 43.8% of the variation in student performance on the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exams. Local observations support this, suggesting that this approach helps maintain discipline, ensures efficient time management, and fosters respect for authority, which can all contribute to better exam results (Salsabila, 2022).

However, the effectiveness of this style comes with significant limitations. An overly authoritarian approach can severely damage teacher morale and student motivation over time. Teachers in Awendo, for example, described extreme autocratic practices as leaving them feeling powerless and demotivated, effectively reducing them "to a fiddle" (Salsabila, 2022). These findings highlight the critical need for a principal to balance firm authority with supportive engagement to maintain a disciplined and positive learning environment.

Concept of Democratic Leadership

Democratic or participative leadership emphasizes collaboration, consultation, and shared decision-making between principals, teachers, and occasionally students. In this approach, principals provide guidance while actively soliciting input, fostering an environment of mutual respect and collective

responsibility (Syofia et al., 2022). Studies conducted in Kenya demonstrate that schools employing democratic leadership strategies, including joint planning and inclusive decision-making, generally achieve higher academic performance compared to institutions relying solely on top-down control (Nunayon, 2022).

Studies show that schools using democratic strategies, such as joint planning and inclusive decision-making, generally achieve higher academic performance than those with a top-down approach (Nunayon, 2022). Democratic leadership thus cultivates an environment in which teachers feel valued, motivated, and capable of innovating, which in turn enhances the overall quality of instruction.

Concept of Transformational Leadership

Beyond the classical styles proposed by Lewin, transformational leadership has emerged as a significant paradigm in contemporary educational research. Transformational principals articulate a compelling vision, inspire teachers, and attend to individual needs, effectively translating personal motivation into collective effort (Jose & Escote, 2024). Such leaders leverage emotional intelligence to transform teacher frustration into positive energy, fostering an environment of creativity, commitment, and professional growth. Studies show that when principals demonstrate individualized consideration, provide recognition, and inspire confidence, both teacher morale and student learning outcomes improve markedly (Sari, 2021). Transformational leadership is therefore recognized as a powerful conduit through which principals indirectly influence classroom practice, stimulating innovation and sustained commitment among educators.

Empirical Review

International research consistently affirms the profound impact of school leadership on student academic outcomes. Meta-analyses show that while not the sole factor, effective leadership is critical for school improvement and learning gains (Yani, Arafat, & Puspita, 2021). Principals influence student success indirectly by shaping the instructional climate, motivating teachers, and managing resources effectively (Susanti, 2024). According to Agustin, Suriansyah, and Hadi (2023), a school's quality is a direct reflection of its leader, who sets the vision and ensures resources are used to enhance achievement. Systematic reviews also confirm that practices like goal setting and curriculum supervision key aspects of instructional leadership are strongly linked to higher student achievement (Hadi, 2025). Furthermore, distributed leadership, which involves collective responsibility, has been shown to significantly improve school performance.

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, a strong link exists between a principal's leadership style and school performance. In Eritrea, studies found that democratic and situational leadership positively impacted schools, while autocratic and laissez-faire styles had negative outcomes (Tedla, Redda & Gaikar, 2021). In South Africa, the democratic approach, which involves teachers in decision-making, has been consistently linked to higher teacher motivation and a more positive school climate (Oduro, Parker & Mensah, 2024). However, not all findings are uniform. In Nigeria, autocratic leadership was positively correlated with student performance in some contexts, suggesting that effectiveness can be context-dependent (Igwe, Ozofor & Alinno, 2017). Beyond the classic styles, transformational and instructional leadership are also seen as powerful drivers of achievement. A

study in Tanzania, for example, showed that principals who inspire and intellectually stimulate their teachers can significantly boost student outcomes (Kayombo, Matete & Suru, 2025).

In Kenya, research has explored the relationship between principals' leadership and school performance. A study in Awendo sub-county found that autocratic leadership accounted for 43.8% of the variance in student KCSE performance, while democratic leadership accounted for 37.4%, suggesting a blend of strict discipline and engagement may yield optimal results (Oyugi & Gogo, 2019). Other studies confirm that schools using participative strategies consistently outperform those with a top-down approach (Gelisa, Handayani, & Rosni, 2023).

Kenyan scholars highlight that a principal's key role is to enhance student learning by effectively leveraging resources (Rohana, 2023; Karya, 2021). In practice, principals manage significant administrative tasks alongside instructional duties. Schools with strong leadership are characterized by effective planning and clear goals, while those with weak leadership often have low KCSE results (Othieno, Bakashaba, & Ssendagi, 2024; Berhanu, 2025). This evidence underscores the critical influence of principals' administrative styles on student achievement in Kenya.

Elgeyo Marakwet County, which includes Keiyo South Sub-County, faces unique socio-economic and institutional challenges that impact education. Research shows a strong link between teacher-related factors, such as qualifications and class size, and student performance (Natembeya, Atoni, & Ndaita, 2023). The region also contends with social issues like parental alcoholism, which can negatively affect student discipline and behavior. These challenges demand that principals in Keiyo South adopt leadership strategies that address both academic and social dimensions to effectively manage their schools.

Though the influence of leadership styles on academic performance has been studied in other parts of Kenya, such as Nyanza (Oyugi & Gogo, 2019) and Western Kenya (Lumumba et al., 2022), Keiyo South Sub-County remains an unstudied context. Existing reports on underperformance in the region are largely anecdotal, with no systematic research directly linking principals' administrative styles to student academic outcomes. Consequently, it remains unknown how specific leadership behaviors whether authoritative or collaborative influence student results on the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) in this area. This study aims to fill this critical gap by providing a rigorous, context-specific analysis of the relationship between principals' administrative styles and academic performance in Keiyo South, contributing original, evidence-based insights to both local and national discussions on educational leadership.

Methodology

The study used a mixed-methods approach with a convergent parallel design to investigate how principals' administrative styles affect student academic performance in public secondary schools in Keiyo South, Kenya. This design allowed for the simultaneous collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

The target population comprised all public secondary schools in Keiyo South Sub-County, consisting of 45 principals, 45 directors of studies, 45 teachers and approximately 1,500 students. To determine an appropriate sample, Mugenda and Mugenda (2003)

recommend that when the study population is less than 10,000, a sample size of 10–30% is adequate for social science research. Guided by this principle, the study adopted 10% of the accessible student population. Thus, 10% of 1500 students yielded a sample of 150 students, which was considered sufficient to provide reliable and representative data for quantitative analysis.

For quantitative data, stratified and systematic random sampling were applied to select schools and students, ensuring representation across different categories, streams, and grade levels. Principals, directors of studies, and teachers were chosen purposively for the qualitative component, given their direct roles in school leadership and instruction. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and interview guides. The questionnaires, administered to students, generated quantitative data on perceptions of principals' leadership behaviours, levels of engagement, and academic performance indicators. The interview guides facilitated in-depth discussions with principals, directors of studies, and teachers, yielding qualitative accounts of leadership practices and their influence on learning environments. Ethical protocols, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly observed throughout the research process.

The quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics via SPSS version 26. The qualitative data from the interviews were organized thematically, with direct quotes from participants used to support and enrich the statistical findings.

Results and Discussion
Principals' Leadership Styles
Teachers hold a key position in evaluating school leadership, as their views on a principal's administrative style provide vital information into its effect on the teaching and learning environment. This study asked teachers to identify their principal's primary leadership style, with the results summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Principal's leadership style

Leadership Style	F	%
Authoritarian	3	8.3
Democratic	12	33.3
Transformational	21	58.3

Source: Research Data, 2025

Only 8.3% of the teachers described the principal's leadership style as authoritarian, suggesting that a small fraction perceive the school's leadership as rigid and top-down, with limited teacher autonomy or voice in decisions. A larger proportion, 33.3%, identified the leadership as democratic, indicating recognition of participatory practices where consultation and shared responsibility are evident. However, the clear proportion of 58.3% classified the leadership as transformational, meaning that most teachers perceive the principal as visionary, inspirational, and focused on fostering motivation, innovation, and capacity-building among staff. This reflects a leadership climate that promotes collaboration and professional growth while aligning teacher efforts with broader school goals. Such a style is critical in driving academic achievement, as it cultivates ownership, commitment, and continuous improvement in instructional practices. This is in line with recent research by Jose and Escote (2024)), who found that transformational leadership among principals strongly correlates with improved academic performance in public secondary schools due to its emphasis on vision, motivation, and empowerment.

Students' Perceptions of Principals' Influence

Students' views are vital for understanding how a principal's administrative style directly impacts their academic life, motivation, and performance. In this study, students were asked to rate the influence of their principals' leadership practices on various aspects of their schooling. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Students' responses on the influence of principals' administrative styles on academic performance

Statement	No extent at all		Small extent		I do not know		Large extent		Very large extent	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
My principal's leadership helps me feel motivated to study.	2	2.4	4	4.8	6	7.1	35	41.7	37	44.0
The way my principal communicates helps me understand what is expected academically.	1	1.2	6	7.1	4	4.8	38	45.2	35	41.7
My principal creates a supportive atmosphere for learning.	3	3.6	5	6.0	7	8.3	36	42.9	33	39.3
My principal encourages teamwork among students, which helps my performance.	2	2.4	3	3.6	5	6.0	39	46.4	35	41.7
The principal's involvement in academics does not positively affect my success.	45	53.6	18	21.4	6	7.1	9	10.7	6	7.1
My principal does not address issues that affect my academic progress.	48	57.1	16	19.0	5	6.0	9	10.7	6	7.1
The principal's support for extracurricular activities such as drama and sports has improved my overall experience.	1	1.2	5	6.0	6	7.1	40	47.6	32	38.1
I feel that my principal's way of managing helps me do well in school.	2	2.4	4	4.8	4	4.8	36	42.9	38	45.2

Source: Research Data, 2025

A significant 44.0% of students indicated that their principal's leadership motivated them to study to a very large extent, highlighting the motivational power of effective leadership. Leadership behaviors that model discipline, articulate clear expectations, and instill purpose create a sense of academic agency among students, thereby enhancing engagement and commitment (Miano, Atieno, & Barasa, 2023; Lumumba, Jane, & Simatwa, 2022). The minimal 2.4% reporting no motivation suggests isolated instances where students may have been disconnected due to personal, social, or contextual factors, emphasizing the generally pervasive influence of leadership in promoting intrinsic motivation.

Communication emerged as another critical dimension, with 45.2% of students acknowledging that the principal's communication helped them understand academic expectations to a

large extent. This demonstrates that structured, transparent, and consistent communication is essential in aligning learner effort with institutional goals. Effective communication likely included the provision of clear academic targets, timely feedback, and clarification of school regulations—all contributing to coherent learning pathways (Adangabe & Boateng, 2022; Oyugi & Gogo, 2019). The minority (1.2%) who reported no benefit could reflect occasional gaps in communication or limited opportunities for interaction, highlighting the need for sustained and inclusive dialogue.

The creation of a supportive learning environment was affirmed by 42.9% of respondents to a large extent, underscoring the principal's influence in establishing psychological safety and a climate conducive to learning. Supportive leadership encompasses accessibility, recognition of effort, and targeted interventions to address academic challenges. Such environments promote engagement, resilience, and a sense of belonging, all of which are critical determinants of academic performance (Lumumba, Jane, & Simatwa, 2022; Ahmed, 2024). Conversely, the 3.6% indicating no support highlights minor gaps, possibly linked to uneven interactions or perceived favoritism.

Collaboration and teamwork among students were reported as strongly encouraged, with 46.4% of learners acknowledging a large extent of principal support in fostering teamwork. Collaborative leadership practices cultivate peer learning, cooperative problem-solving, and shared responsibility, enhancing academic outcomes through mutual reinforcement (Louis-Omiyi & Igenegbai, 2021; Rinaldi, Suhaimi, & Dalle, 2021). A small minority (2.4%) felt unsupported, suggesting that leadership efforts may not uniformly translate across all student groups.

Principal involvement in academic processes was perceived positively by 53.6% of students, indicating that active engagement in monitoring, mentoring, and instructional oversight is both visible and impactful. A further 7.1% reporting a very large positive effect reflects instances of personalized attention, where targeted engagement may have produced exceptional academic outcomes (Heenan et al., 2023; Syofia et al., 2022). These findings illustrate the importance of participatory leadership, where principal involvement extends beyond administrative duties to directly influence student learning trajectories.

In contrast, 57.1% of students reported that principals did not address issues affecting academic progress, revealing potential leadership gaps in responsiveness to learner-specific needs. Unaddressed academic challenges can hinder performance, reduce motivation, and create disengagement (Natembeya, Atoni, & Ndaita, 2023; Berhanu, 2025). Despite this, the majority still recognized positive aspects of leadership, suggesting that while leadership is effective in general, there remain opportunities to enhance responsiveness.

Extracurricular support was recognized by 47.6% of students to a large extent, highlighting principals' role in promoting holistic development. Participation in drama, sports, and clubs not only complements academic learning but also enhances self-esteem, resilience, and social skills (Ahmed, 2024; Mutuku & Kiplagat, 2022). Only 1.2% reported no benefit, suggesting near-universal access and positive reception of such programs.

Finally, 45.2% of students affirmed that their principal's management style facilitated academic success to a very large extent, reflecting the centrality of effective administration in educational outcomes. Strategic planning, motivational oversight, and

clear organizational structures were likely contributors to these perceptions (Jose & Escote, 2024; Oyugi & Gogo, 2019). The small proportion (2.4%) indicating no benefit emphasazing that leadership impact, while overwhelmingly positive, is not uniformly experienced by all learners due to individual or contextual variations.

Directors of Studies' Views on Academic Performance

Directors of Studies gave important insights into their schools' academic performance, reflecting not just student achievement but also how principals' administrative practices affect academic outcomes. Their findings are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Directors of studies response on academic performance of students

Item	Response Option	F	%
How would you rate the overall academic performance of students in your school?	Excellent	6	16.7
	Good	20	55.6
	Average	8	22.2
	Poor	2	5.6
What percentage of students typically achieve passing grades?	90–100%	4	11.1
	70–89%	21	58.3
	50–69%	9	25.0
	Below 50%	2	5.6
How often do students participate in extracurricular academic activities?	Very often	8	22.2
	Often	20	55.6
	Rarely	6	16.7
	Never	2	5.6
How would you describe the motivation level of students towards their studies?	Very high	5	13.9
	High	21	58.3
	Low	8	22.2
	Very low	2	5.6
How do you perceive parental involvement on student performance?	Very positive	7	19.4
	Positive	20	55.6
	Negative	7	19.4
	Very negative	2	5.6

Source: Research Data, 2025

Teachers (55.6%) reported that students in most public secondary schools in Keiyo South Sub-County consistently achieve commendable academic outcomes, reflecting a moderately effective learning environment. This observation suggests that principals in these schools employ administrative styles characterized by structured planning, regular supervision, and proactive support for instructional delivery. Effective school leaders often establish clear academic goals, ensure resource availability, and monitor curriculum implementation to maintain high standards of teaching and learning. In contrast, only 5.6% of teachers rated academic performance as "Poor," highlighting that a minority of schools may be experiencing leadership inefficiencies such as lax oversight, inadequate teacher support, or poorly coordinated academic activities. These findings underscore the significant influence of principal leadership on student outcomes. Supporting this observation, Adangabe and Boateng (2022) emphasize that effective leadership practices foster

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accountability, optimize instructional quality, and enhance teacher morale, all of which translate into improved student academic achievement. When 58.3% of teachers report that 70–89% of students pass their examinations, it indicates that a substantial proportion of schools in Keiyo South Sub-County attain relatively high academic performance. Such outcomes are typically associated with principals who prioritize instructional quality, implement rigorous assessment mechanisms, and engage in consistent performance tracking.

Schools led by principals employing participatory and instructional leadership strategies often cultivate a results-oriented culture, encourage teacher collaboration, and ensure timely intervention for underperforming students. Conversely, 5.6% of teachers indicated that fewer than 50% of students pass, suggesting potential administrative deficiencies such as weak instructional supervision, low academic expectations, or insufficient follow-up on student progress. These contrasting outcomes reinforce the pivotal role of school leadership in fostering academic discipline and success. Miano, Atieno, and Barasa (2023) contend that transformational leadership practices, including mentoring, performance monitoring, and structured evaluation, significantly enhance student outcomes in secondary schools by providing a framework for continuous academic improvement.

The finding that 55.6% of teachers report frequent student participation in extracurricular academic activities demonstrates that most schools actively integrate co-curricular engagement into their academic culture. This suggests that principals allocate resources, time, and encouragement for students to participate in debates, science fairs, academic clubs, and other intellectually enriching platforms. Engagement in such activities complements classroom learning by developing critical thinking, communication skills, and personal confidence. Conversely, 5.6% of teachers reported no student participation, which likely reflects administrative apathy, poor time management, or a school culture that undervalues non-classroom learning. Principals who neglect the academic value of co-curricular activities may inadvertently restrict students' holistic development and limit opportunities for enhanced engagement. This observation aligns with the findings of Ahmed (2024), who asserts that proactive leadership practices deliberately incorporating non-formal academic platforms into school programs foster comprehensive student growth and academic excellence.

Furthermore, a report from 58.3% of teachers indicating high student motivation points to a robust presence of academic inspiration and goal orientation in most schools within the sub-county. Such motivation often stems from leadership practices emphasizing rewards, mentoring, academic support, and goal-setting. Principals who adopt transformational or supportive administrative styles cultivate an environment where students feel acknowledged, challenged, and empowered to achieve their full potential. Conversely, 5.6% of teachers observed very low student motivation, signaling possible leadership failures in inspiring enthusiasm, providing structured guidance, or promoting a sense of academic purpose. In such contexts, inconsistent feedback, inadequate teacher support, or minimal leadership visibility may hinder student engagement. Lumumba, Jane, and Simatwa (2022) highlight that leadership strategies emphasizing goal-setting, positive reinforcement, and active student involvement significantly enhance

learners' motivation, academic focus, and overall performance.

The positive perception of parental involvement, as indicated by 55.6% of teachers, suggests that principals in most public secondary schools in Keiyo South Sub-County actively promote collaborative relationships between schools and families. Such engagement reinforces academic achievement through shared responsibility, consistent communication, and mutual accountability. Principals often facilitate parental involvement through structured meetings, regular progress updates, and participation in decision-making processes affecting students' academic experiences. Conversely, 5.6% of teachers perceived parental involvement as very low, implying leadership shortcomings in mobilizing parent support, fostering

home-school partnerships, or addressing socio-cultural barriers. Failure to engage parents effectively can limit the reinforcement and monitoring essential for sustaining student focus and academic progress. This perspective is supported by Barasa (2021), who emphasizes that principals who prioritize collaborative leadership and family engagement positively influence student outcomes by creating a cohesive support system across home and school environments.

Comparative Academic Performance Across Schools

To assess differences in student outcomes across schools, standardized continuous assessment mean scores were analyzed. The findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Standardized continuous assessment 2025 mean scores

School Code	Form 2 Mean	Form 3 Mean	Form 4 Mean	Overall Mean
School A	4.2	4.5	4.8	4.5
School B	6.0	6.3	6.5	6.3
School C	3.5	3.8	4.1	3.8
School D	5.0	5.4	5.6	5.3
School E	7.2	7.5	7.8	7.5
School F	4.7	5.0	5.3	5.0
School G	6.5	6.8	7.0	6.8
School H	3.8	4.1	4.4	4.1
School I	5.3	5.7	6.0	5.7
School J	7.5	7.8	8.0	7.8
School K	4.0	4.3	4.6	4.3
School L	6.2	6.5	6.9	6.5

Source: Research Data, 2025

The analysis reveals significant disparities in academic performance across the public secondary schools in Keiyo South Sub-County, with mean scores ranging from 3.8 to 7.8, suggesting that differences in leadership practices may be a determining factor in these outcomes. Notably, School J, which attained the highest mean score of 7.8, and School E, with 7.5, are reported to be under principals who predominantly

employ transformational and democratic leadership styles. These leadership approaches are distinguished by collaborative decision-making, active teacher motivation, meaningful student involvement, and the strategic setting of academic goals. Such practices foster an inclusive school culture where all stakeholders feel valued and supported, thereby committing to sustained academic excellence. The upward

progression of student scores across the forms in these institutions indicates a consistent and supportive learning environment that nurtures academic growth. Research by Miano, Atieno, and Barasa (2023) and Lumumba, Jane, and Simatwa (2022) emphasizes that transformational and democratic leadership in educational settings cultivates trust, shared purpose, and teacher empowerment, which collectively enhance instructional effectiveness and student engagement. In such environments, students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning, while teachers are empowered to innovate and adapt pedagogical strategies, ultimately facilitating long-term academic resilience and sustained improvement across grade levels.

In contrast, schools with the lowest performance, School C (3.8) and School H (4.1) were associated with autocratic leadership, characterized by rigid command structures, minimal delegation, limited teacher input, and passive student engagement. The data indicate that such leadership correlates with stagnated or marginal improvement across the forms, as reflected in the modest increases in mean scores from lower to higher grades. This pattern suggests that autocratic practices may suppress creativity, stifle innovation, and discourage learner engagement. Teachers and students operating under strict hierarchical systems are often motivated by compliance rather than intrinsic interest, which can diminish morale and reduce collaboration (Kaazara & Kazaara, 2024; Bwalya, 2023). Consequently, the rigidity inherent in autocratic leadership constrains adaptability to individual learner needs, thereby impeding the potential for sustained academic growth. These findings align with the studies of Duze (2012) and Kichwen and Ezekiel (2024), which highlight the detrimental impact of top-down leadership on instructional quality and student achievement.

Middle-performing schools, such as School D (mean score 5.3) and School I (5.7), reflect moderate academic outcomes and are reportedly led by principals employing a hybrid of transactional and democratic styles. These leaders implement performance-based incentives, structured feedback mechanisms, and compliance monitoring, while simultaneously offering limited opportunities for teacher participation in decision-making. While such approaches enhance accountability and stability, they may not fully foster the deep motivation, innovation, and sustained engagement required for higher academic achievement. The relatively steady progression of scores across forms in these schools suggests that without a deliberate and sustained emphasis on transformational practices, such as inspirational leadership, collaborative goal-setting, and teacher empowerment, the potential for exceptional academic performance remains underutilized (Adangabe & Boateng, 2022; Heenan, De Paor, Lafferty, & McNamara, 2023).

During interviews, the Directors of Studies provided insights into recent academic trends and strategies for enhancing student achievement. One participant observed:

> *"Over the past three years, we have observed steady improvement in students' academic performance, reflected in both internal and national examinations. In 2022, our mean score was 5.8, which rose to 6.3 in 2023 and slightly improved to 6.5 in 2024. The improvement is largely attributed to better monitoring, targeted academic clinics, and the principal's consistent emphasis on teacher*

accountability and learner discipline. Despite challenges such as absenteeism and limited teaching resources, the academic environment has become more focused and competitive." [DOS 6]

The Director's reflections underscore the critical role of structured leadership in creating conducive learning environments. The upward trend in scores, from 5.8 in 2022 to 6.5 in 2024, illustrates how results-oriented leadership, characterized by meticulous monitoring, targeted academic interventions, and reinforced teacher accountability, can cultivate an academically competitive school culture. These observations resonate with the findings of Ahmed (2024) and Barasa (2021), who argue that effective leadership strengthens instructional quality, motivates staff, and aligns teaching practices with performance targets, thereby significantly improving student outcomes.

Principals also provided valuable insights into the mechanisms through which their administrative practices influence academic performance. One principal stated:

> *"Our administrative practices, especially regular lesson supervision and prompt feedback, have a direct impact on academic outcomes. We ensure teachers prepare adequately, and we follow up on syllabus coverage closely. This consistency creates an environment where students receive structured and timely instruction, which leads to improved performance in assessments."* [Principal 4]

This account highlights how active instructional leadership, manifested through lesson supervision, syllabus tracking, and timely feedback, directly enhances both teaching quality and learner engagement. Structured oversight fosters accountability, reduces instructional gaps, and ensures that students consistently receive high-quality content, translating into improved examination results and long-term academic growth (Susanti, 2024; Syofia et al., 2022).

Another principal emphasized the importance of collaborative planning and data-driven decision-making:

> *"We emphasize collaborative planning and data-driven decision-making. For example, we analyze exam results and use them to design remedial programs. By involving teachers in academic target-setting and providing them with clear expectations, we create a shared responsibility for student achievement. This approach has steadily improved both motivation and performance among learners."* [Principal 7]

These insights demonstrate that inclusive and data-informed leadership fosters a culture of shared accountability, promotes continuous reflective practice, and ensures responsiveness to student needs. The strategic use of assessment data to guide interventions enhances learner motivation and academic outcomes, confirming that participatory leadership is a powerful driver of school effectiveness (Adangabe & Boateng, 2022; Miano, Atieno, & Barasa, 2023; Rinaldi, Suhaimi, & Dalle, 2021).

Inferential Statistics

The study employed the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) technique through SPSS software to determine the significance of relationships and differences across various data sets (Ahmed, 2024; Adangabe & Boateng, 2022).

The study tested three hypotheses to examine the influence of administrative style on students' academic performance. To test differences in students' academic performance under different principals' leadership styles, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. The independent variable was leadership style (Autocratic, Democratic, Transformational), and the dependent variable was students' academic performance (mean scores).

Table 5: Anova results for leadership styles and academic performance

Leadership Style	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p-value)
Autocratic	Between Groups	31.08	2	15.54	4.78	0.010
	Within Groups	380.25	117	3.25		
	Total	411.33	119			
Transformational	Between Groups	502.80	2	251.40	7.65	0.001
	Within Groups	3840.20	117	32.82		
	Total	4343.00	119			
Democratic	Between Groups	462.30	2	231.15	6.85	0.002
	Within Groups	3945.70	117	33.72		
	Total	4408.00	119			

Source: Research Data, 2025

For the first hypothesis (H_{01}), which stated that there is no significant influence of autocratic administrative style on students' academic performance, the ANOVA results showed an F-value of 4.78 with a p-value of 0.010. Since the p-value is below 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that autocratic leadership significantly influences student performance. Though this style may enhance discipline and compliance, the findings suggest that its rigid nature limits creativity and intrinsic motivation, which can suppress academic excellence. These results are consistent with the findings of Kaazara and Kazaara (2024) and Bwalya (2023), who argue that autocratic leadership, although effective in maintaining discipline, often undermines teacher morale and student engagement, ultimately restricting the potential for academic excellence.

The second hypothesis (H_{02}) proposed that transformational administrative style has no significant influence on students' academic performance. The ANOVA results yielded an F-value of 7.65 with a p-value of 0.001. Given that the p-value is below 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This confirms that transformational leadership significantly improves students' academic performance. Transformational principals, through vision sharing, empowerment, and motivational practices, create a conducive learning environment that promotes student engagement, innovation, and resilience, leading to improved outcomes. The findings reinforce the assertion that schools guided by transformational leaders consistently achieve higher levels of student engagement, resilience, and measurable academic gains (Miano, Atieno, & Barasa, 2023; Lumumba, Jane, & Simatwa, 2022).

For the third hypothesis (H_{03}), which tested the effect of democratic administrative style on students' academic performance, the ANOVA analysis produced an F-value of 6.85 and a p-value of 0.002. Since the p-value is below the 0.05 threshold, the null hypothesis was rejected. These results

indicate that democratic leadership significantly influences academic performance. Democratic leadership fosters inclusivity, transparency, and participatory decision-making, creating an environment where students and teachers feel valued and responsible for collective academic success. enhancing communication, mutual respect, and accountability, democratic principals encourage a collaborative culture that improves learner motivation and discipline, which in turn elevates academic performance (Adangabe & Boateng, 2022; Syofia et al., 2022; Barasa, 2021). Schools adopting democratic practices consistently demonstrate higher mean scores due to the shared sense of responsibility, stakeholder engagement, and commitment to academic excellence.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Principals' administrative styles significantly influence student academic performance in Keiyo South Sub-County. Transformational and democratic leadership foster collaborative, inclusive, and motivational environments that enhance teacher effectiveness and student engagement, while autocratic leadership, though enforcing discipline, limits creativity and long-term academic growth. The study recommends that Ministry of Education should invest in training programs that develop transformational and democratic leadership competencies among principals, promoting participatory decision-making, instructional supervision, and student-centered strategies to achieve sustained academic excellence.

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