

The implementation of the transformational leadership style in primary schools for enhancing the pupils' academic performance in Tanzania

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Abstract. In this study, we investigated the implementation of transformational leadership style (TLS) in primary schools to enhance pupils' academic performance in Tanzania. A mixed-methods approach and convergent parallel research design were employed. Data was gathered through questionnaires and interviews. The study involved 382 participants, comprising 356 primary school teachers, 14 head teachers, and 12 ward education officers (WEOs). The results were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. Results reveal that the TLS was integrated into school management practices as head teachers inspired and empowered teachers to work hard to improve pupils' academic performance. The results also indicate that head teachers frequently motivate and foster respect and a collaborative culture. However, the results indicate poor parental and community members' involvement in school development plans. The key argument in this study is that for effective engagement of parents and community members in school development plans, capacity building is needed to orient them on the necessity of supporting the schools. The head teachers, parents, and community members need training for this to be a reality.

Keywords: transformational leadership, pupils' academic performance, community collaboration, primary school

1. Introduction

Leadership plays a pivotal role in the management of organisations, and significantly influences the overall effectiveness and pupils' academic performance [2, 5]. Recent global educational reforms also underscore the necessity of effective leadership to enhance the teaching and learning standards [1, 10, 11]. In the context of educational institutions, strong leadership is vital not only for achieving academic objectives but also for fostering a conducive learning environment [8, 9]. Transformational leadership style (TLS) has been consistently acknowledged to help improve the quality of education and shape the outcomes [29]. TLS focuses on inspiring and motivating both teachers and pupils, thus cultivating an atmosphere that promotes pupils' learning [12, 24].

Western countries such as Australia, Canada, and the United States of America (USA) heavily invest in human capital through the capacity building of the school leaders [1, 18]. African countries have also seen the necessity of training educational leaders by advocating the TLS, which is perceived to enhance the teachers' productivity for improving pupils' learning [2, 3, 5]. It is argued that if teachers are adequately supported by a transformational leader, pupils' academic performance improves significantly [13, 22].

Many scholars have indeed researched TLS [2, 3, 5, 9, 11, 12, 22, 24]. However,

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*Educational
Dimension*



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most of these studies have been conducted in foreign countries such as Australia, Dubai, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Indonesia, Turkey, and Uganda. The study by Aunga and Masare [3] in Tanzania was concerned with the effects of leadership styles, and it dealt with teachers' performance, unlike pupils' academic performance. However, it was about leadership styles in general and did not focus on the TLS in specific terms. The implementation of TLS and its role towards enhancing the pupils' academic performance has not been well documented in the Tanzanian context, and the literature in this area is still scant. It was necessary, therefore, to investigate the implementation of the TLS to enhance the pupils' academic performance in primary schools in Tanzania. The key research question was: How was TLS implemented to enhance the pupils' academic performance in primary schools?

1.1. What is TLS?

Defining a concept is sometimes very difficult, as it differs from one person to another. For example, Abdallah and Alkhrabsheh [1, p. 94] defines TLS as “a process of influencing in which leaders change their followers' awareness of what is important and move them to see themselves, the opportunities, and challenges of their environment in a new way”. Uthman, Bn Don and Kasim [27, p. 100], on the other hand, TLS can mean “a leadership style that inspires and motivates followers to demonstrate commitment to a shared vision”. In this study, TLS can be conceptualised as a process of influencing followers or teachers and inspiring them to view themselves as important individuals in solving challenges in their school environment by utilising the available opportunities for better pupil academic performance.

1.2. Academic performance

Academic performance can be termed as “the evaluation of test results which are corresponding to pupils' Intelligence Quotient (IQ), and leaving aside other personal characteristics” [16, p. 1106]. According to Kumar, Agarwal and Agarwal [14, p. 3093], academic performance is “the process of gaining knowledge, acquiring skills, competencies, securing high grades, securing a progressive career, and persistence towards education”. In this study, academic performance can be conceptualised as evaluating pupils' IQ based on knowledge and skills acquired and grades achieved after examinations and tests.

2. TLS in Tanzania

In Tanzania, recent policy initiatives have emphasised the vital role of effective leadership in addressing educational shortcomings [28]. While these policies aim to create a conducive learning environment and improve educational outcomes, a significant challenge lies in translating them into practice [9]. However, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) has recognised the need for more investment in leadership training and resources, although limited funding for professional development hinders progress [23]. This disparity between policy intentions and practical implementation raises important questions regarding the effectiveness of current leadership frameworks in improving primary school academic performance.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research approach and design

This study employed a mixed-methods research approach and a convergent research design. Adhering to the recommendations of McMillan and Schumacher [19], the mixed-methods research approach bolsters data accuracy by facilitating the simultaneous collection and analysis of diverse data sets. This methodology also enhances the reliability of field data and is particularly adept at addressing complex research

issues, such as those related to educational leadership [7]. The study also utilised a convergent parallel research design, as it enables the integration of qualitative and quantitative data at the same time. This design again served as an effective method for synthesising various research methodologies [15]. Convergent design facilitates a nuanced exploration of TLS, ultimately enhancing the validity of results through triangulation and utilising the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. However, the mixed-methods research approach is time-consuming, and sometimes it is challenging to balance qualitative and quantitative data during data collection and analysis. It was important, therefore, to ensure that both data were collected and analysed.

3.2. Location of the study

This study was carried out in the Lindi Region, Tanzania. This area was selected to be a study area because, in recent years, there has been an improvement in primary school pupils' academic performance. For example, in 2022 the average performance was 87.78%, in 2023 it was 97.28%, and in 2024 it was 97.42% [21]. Indeed, this region has shown an impressive pupils' academic performance in the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE). However, this region is characterised by limited resources, and is usually termed as a poor region within the country as it faces inadequate funding, a lack of teaching and learning materials, and insufficient infrastructure, which hinder the effective implementation of educational policies and practices [6]. The diverse socio-cultural backgrounds of the community also create varying educational priorities and expectations that further complicate the learning environment [25]. This study intends to investigate how TLS has played a role in improving pupils' academic performance amid these challenges.

3.3. Sampling procedures and sample size

This study employed both purposive and simple random techniques. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the head teachers and ward education officers (WEOs) because of their leadership roles, to see whether they employed the TLS in schools. Simple random sampling was used to select the teachers to ensure each participant had an equal chance of selection for minimising bias. This was done by writing numbers on paper; those who selected the even numbers were involved in the study. The simple random sampling technique guaranteed that both male and female teachers were equally likely to be included in the study. The study involved 382 participants, consisting of 356 primary school teachers, 14 head teachers, and 12 WEOs. The distribution of the study participants is as indicated in table 1.

Table 1

Study participants by gender.

Participants	Males	Females	Total
Teachers	166	190	356
Head teachers	9	5	14
WEOs	8	4	12
Total	183	199	382

3.4. Data collection methods

Data were collected using questionnaires and interviews.

3.4.1. Questionnaires

Questionnaires were employed in this study to collect data from primary school teachers. Questionnaires are acknowledged to help collect huge amounts of informa-

tion within a short time. However, they have the weakness of yielding a low response rate. To offset this problem, it was necessary to administer them in person.

3.4.2. Interviews

Interviews were also employed to collect the data from head teachers and 12 WEOs. Interviews are used to gain a deeper understanding of the problem and experiences of individuals in an issue under investigation. Through this method, it was easy to get the head teachers' and WEOs' views on how they employed the TLS in their schools to inspire the teachers to work hard to improve pupils' academic performance. Interviews took 30-45 minutes per individual and were conducted in a place free from interference. Interviews have been highly criticised for being time-consuming, as interviewees sometimes tend to stray from the issue under investigation. It was important, therefore, to rephrase the questions where possible to ensure that interviewees remained focused on the relevant questions during the interview session.

3.4.3. Data analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data was analysed thematically based on Braun and Clarke [4] six steps for qualitative data. The qualitative analysis begins with familiarising the collected data, such as interview transcripts and relevant documents, to understand TLS comprehensively. This process involved thoroughly reading transcripts, highlighting significant phrases, and condensing the information while retaining its core meaning. It also involved coding to identify the pertinent themes and generation, and clearly defined and named to ensure that the data presented reflected the research objectives. The last procedure was to write a report.

3.5. Ethical concerns

It was important to seek a research permit and ethical clearance letters from the University and route them to the Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS), District Administrative Secretary (DAS), and the District Executive Directors (DEDs). Participants were involved after their informed consent. They were also assured about the confidentiality of the information they would provide. Plagiarism of ideas was avoided by writing the direct quotations, i.e., providing page numbers, writing the sources of information, and giving the reference list. For anonymity purposes, head teachers and WEOs were labelled by numbers.

4. Results

This section presents the results focusing on the use of TLS to inspire and motivate teachers, work for the school's interest, achieve school objectives, create new ideas, lead with examples, provide a framework, and use technology in school management, assessment organisation, and parent and community involvement.

4.1. Utilisation of TLS for inspiring and motivating teachers and working for the school's interest

The results indicated that about 21% of teachers strongly agreed that head teachers utilised the TLS to inspire and motivate them, and about 57% agreed, while only a few disagreed and some were neutral (table 2). If strongly agree and agree are combined, then about 78% of teachers agreed that headteachers did so, and only about eight (8%) disagreed. Again, about 23% of teachers strongly agreed and more than 49% agreed that head teachers encouraged them to work for the school's common goal. If combined, then about 72% of teachers agreed on the matter, and only a few disagreed.

The head teachers also stated that they tried to employ the TLS in their schools. However, they demanded training to be effective. One of the head teachers stated

Table 2

Utilisation of TLS for inspiring and motivating teachers to work for the school's interest.

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Head teacher focuses on inspiring and motivating teachers	22 (6.18%)	7 (1.97%)	50 (14.04%)	202 (56.74%)	75 (21.07%)
Head teacher encourages teachers to work for school interest	21 (5.91%)	20 (5.62%)	57 (16.01%)	176 (49.44%)	82 (23.03%)

during the interview:

I try to use TLS at my school. However, the leadership styles used in our primary schools are not very effective because of a lack of training for capacity building for leaders to be effective when managing their schools. This makes even the pupils' academic performance unstable. (Head teacher 2 on 3rd Feb 2025)

Another head teacher also commented on the same issue related to capacity building for them to be effective in school management. He stated during the interview:

There is a need for the provision of capacity building programme to help the headteachers use appropriate leadership styles in managing the educational institutions instead of leaving every headteacher to think of his or her ways of leading the school. (Head teacher 4 on 5th Feb 2025)

The WEOs again confirmed that head teachers who employed TLS demonstrated improvement in pupils' academic performance in their schools. One of the WEOs stated during the interview:

From an inspection standpoint, I can affirm that schools that practice TLS demonstrate remarkable improvements in the academic performance of pupils. Such leaders prioritise teacher development and support, enabling them to implement effective teaching strategies. This approach fosters teachers' hardworking spirit and creates an environment conducive for pupils to thrive academically, as they receive consistent encouragement and support from teachers. (WEO 2 on 19th Feb 2025)

The results indicated that head teachers employed the TLS in school management, which helped improve the pupils' academic performance. However, head teachers require capacity-building training programmes for effective school leadership.

4.2. Achieving school vision, creation of new ideas, and leading by example

The results indicated that about 18% of teachers strongly agreed that schools achieved their objectives, and about 58% agreed, and only a few disagreed and were neutral (table 3). If these percentages are combined, then about 76% of teachers agreed on the matter. The exact percentage was for creating new ideas and perspectives for the teachers to meet the vision. The head teachers leading by example also received high rates, where about 23% of teachers strongly agreed and about 52% agreed. When these responses are combined, about 75% of teachers agreed that head teachers set good examples for their subordinates. During the interview, one of the WEOs commented:

Table 3

Achieving school vision, creating new ideas, and leading by example.

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Head teacher creates new ideas for the teachers to meet the vision	19 (5.34%)	11 (3.09%)	54 (15.17%)	185 (51.97%)	87 (24.44%)
Head teacher is frequently leading by doing	41 (11.52%)	6 (1.69%)	42 (11.8%)	185 (51.97%)	82 (23.03%)
Teacher achieve objectives through higher ideals and moral values	13 (3.65%)	9 (2.53%)	63 (17.7%)	208 (58.43%)	63 (17.7%)

I feel that a situational leadership style can be beneficial as it adapts to the needs of the school and its staff by focusing on goals set by the respective school. Our head teachers assess the dynamics of our team and the challenges we face. They try to adjust their leadership approach accordingly. This flexibility allows teachers to respond to different academic challenges effectively. When the leader helps teachers with their needs, we can better support our pupils, leading to improved academic outcomes. (WEO 7 on 28th Feb 2025)

However, it was commented that all leadership styles are required to ensure teachers improve pupils' academic performance. Another WEO had this to say during the interview:

I think, in my views, all types of leadership styles are good and need to be practiced in schools. However, many school leaders use a democratic leadership style that involves a decision-making process. Therefore, the leadership style favourable for enhancing pupils' academic performance is democratic. It should be used in our primary schools. (WEO 1 on 19th Feb 2025)

The results indicate that head teachers employed TLS and used situational and democratic leadership styles to involve teachers in decision-making and improve pupils' academic outcomes.

4.3. The provision of a framework and the use of technology in school management

The results revealed that head teachers are proactive in implementing strategies that align with TLS, such as introducing frameworks for achievement and employing technology in school management. In this study, about 21% of teachers strongly agreed and 54% agreed that head teachers provided the framework for achieving the intended objectives (table 4). If these rates are combined, then almost 75% of teachers agreed on that aspect. Again, about 17% of teachers strongly agreed that the head teachers employed technologies in school management, while about 52% agreed. When these rates are combined, then almost 69% of teachers agreed that their head teachers did so.

Table 4

The provision of framework and the use of technology in school management.

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Head teacher employs technology in managing school	25 (7.02%)	21 (5.9%)	66 (18.54%)	185 (51.97%)	59 (16.57%)
Head teacher introduces framework of achievement to the subordinates	19 (5.34%)	11 (3.09%)	61 (17.13%)	192 (53.93%)	73 (20.51%)

Head teachers said they used the technology when communicating through emails and text messages (SMS), reminding teachers to fulfil their obligations. One of the head teachers stated during the interview:

I usually send emails and sometimes text messages to teachers to remind them to ensure that they attend classes and follow the school timetable. As you know, our government has provided tablets to teachers, and communication with teachers is easy. I can just send the SMS to teachers even when I am away from the school. (Head teacher 2 on 20th Feb 2025)

Another head teacher commented that they provided the framework for what teachers need to do to improve pupils' academic performance.

As a leader, I need to show the direction to teachers about what we need to do. I usually explain to them the strategies they need to follow to improve the pupils' academic performance. They need to follow the schemes of work and planning for every lesson they teach. They also need to offer enough exercises to pupils and mark them. Every teacher has to understand what specific competence skills pupils need to acquire. Teachers always need to provide the performance indicators by which they will be assessed, whether they have achieved as planned or not. (Head teacher 4 on 20th Feb 2025)

The results indicate that the head teachers employed technology in school management, such as the use of emails and SMS. They also provided teachers with a framework on how to improve the pupils' academic performance by specifying what competence skills pupils need and ensuring that teachers follow the schemes of work and prepare their lessons daily.

4.4. Organisation of assessment and involvement of parents and community members

The results indicated that about 37% of teachers strongly agreed that head teachers involved the parents, and about 49% agreed on the same matter, and only a few teachers disagreed and were neutral (table 5). If these are combined, then about 86% agreed that head teachers did so. Again, about 22% of teachers strongly agreed that the head teachers organised frequent assessments to ensure pupils learn what they need to learn, and about 59% agreed. When these rates are combined, then about 81% of teachers acknowledged that such exercise has been conducted in their schools.

The results also indicated that head teachers organised assessments for pupils and tried to involve parents and community members in the school development plans. Although again, the response from community members and parents was low. One of the WEOs commented during the interview:

Table 5

Organisation of assessment and involvement of parents and community members.

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Head teacher organise for frequency assessment	14 (3.93%)	15 (4.21%)	39 (10.96%)	210 (58.99%)	78 (21.91%)
Head teacher involves parents and the community in academic initiatives	15 (4.21%)	10 (2.81%)	24 (6.74%)	174 (48.88%)	133 (37.36%)

Head teachers involve parents and community members in school development plans, and they create channels for feedback from parents and community members to ensure a continuous improvement of pupils' learning. However, we observe that parents and community members are not supportive enough, and their response to support the schools for the improvement of pupils' academic performance is always low. In most cases, we see that parents do not care about the education of their children and do not support the schools. As a result, pupils lack school requirements. If they could be involved in the school development plans, it could help improve the environment in which education is provided to our children. (WEO 3 on 24th Feb 2025)

These results illustrate the transformative impact of effective leadership practices on assessments of what pupils need to learn. However, it seemed that the parental and community members' involvement in the school development plans for the pupils' academic performance was low.

5. Discussion

The results indicated that the head teacher employed the TLS in primary school management, which helped improve the pupils' academic performance. This highlighted the significant role that head teachers play in fostering a collaborative and motivating environment for teachers. These results align with the study by Smith and Bell [24], who argued that TLS can enhance teacher commitment and performance by creating an inclusive environment where educators feel valued. They also support what Rizkie, Suriansyah and Sulistiyana [22] in Indonesia, and Karakose et al. [11] in Turkey found in their studies that TLS positively influenced the teachers' performance through enhanced job satisfaction and organisational commitment. TLS is especially important in developing countries like Tanzania, where limited resources can affect teacher morale and performance, suggesting that effective leadership can reinforce teachers' commitment to overcome such challenges.

The results also indicated that head teachers used the TLS, situational, and democratic leadership styles by involving the teachers in the decision-making to improve pupils' academic performance. These results agree with the study results by Aunga and Masare [3] in Tanzania, who advocated for the collaborative efforts for educational improvement in schools. Eluk, Nsisi and Okello [9] found in Uganda that democratic leadership styles positively impacted the pupils' academic performance as they fostered a collaborative environment and promoted the teachers' involvement in school affairs. This observation is also echoed by Ibrahim and Al-Taneiji [10] in Dubai, who

found that there was a positive correlation between leadership style and principal effectiveness, although they noted that there was no direct correlation with school performance. Dabesa and Cheramlak [8] found the same results in Ethiopia: a positive and significant relationship between leadership effectiveness and pupils' academic achievement.

The results again indicated that head teachers employed the technology, i.e., emails and SMS, in school management to simplify the communication with teachers. They also provided the framework and performance indicators from which teachers could be assessed to improve pupils' academic performance. These results support the views of Adangabe and Boateng [2] study in Ghana, who emphasised the importance of goal-setting in enhancing academic performance.

The results further indicated that parents' and community members' involvement in the school development plans for the pupils' academic performance was low. These results confirm what Matete [17] study found in Tanzania, that parental and community members' involvement in the school development plans for their children's education was problematic. These results, however, contradict the recommendations made by UNESCO [26] regarding inclusive educational practices. To UNESCO [26], community engagement is crucial as it enhances educational outcomes and fosters a sense of shared responsibility for pupils' success. For parents and community members to effectively support their children's education, they need training.

It was, however, found that head teachers, as was the case for parents and community members, were not trained to understand the best way of leading their schools. However, again, they confirmed the use of situational and democratic leadership styles. As teachers in this study admitted that they were not trained on leadership styles, the results support what Bwambale, Mulegi and Bulhan [5] found in Uganda that head teachers demanded training on leadership styles for them to be effective in their schools and improve pupils' academic performance. However, they contradict Mphale [20] study in Tanzania, which emphasised the need for ongoing professional development initiatives for teachers that enhance their leadership effectiveness in challenging educational contexts. However, limited resources may hinder the arrangement of these training programmes, as argued by Karakose et al. [11] in their study in Turkey.

Conversely, the socio-cultural diversity could enrich leadership practices by bringing varied perspectives and approaches to problem-solving, but it may also pose challenges in communication and cohesion. Understanding these dynamics allows for a comprehensive analysis of how leaders navigate these complexities, adapting their TLS practices to meet the unique demands of their environment. This deeper exploration could illuminate the specific mechanisms through which contextual factors influence leadership effectiveness, ultimately contributing to more tailored and effective leadership strategies that resonate with the local realities. As noted by UNESCO [26], effective education systems require inclusive approaches that leverage local knowledge and resources available.

6. Conclusion and implications

This study dealt with implementing TLS in primary schools to enhance pupils' academic performance in Tanzania. Results revealed that head teachers employed TLS in school management practices by inspiring the teachers to work hard and improve pupils' academic performance. However, again, head teachers confirmed that they were ineffective because they were untrained. This suggests that for head teachers to be effective in school leadership, they need training.

The results also indicated that head teachers employed TLS, situational and democratic leadership styles and involved the teachers in the decision-making to improve

pupils' academic performance. It was good to note this as leadership style is situational and environment-specific. The results also indicated that head teachers frequently motivated teachers, and fostered and cultivated a respect and collaborative culture. This indicates that involving teachers in decision-making fosters collaborative efforts to improve academic performance. However, the results indicate a poor parental and community members' involvement in school development plans. The results again indicated that head teachers employed technology, i.e., emails and SMS, in school management to simplify communication with teachers. They also provided the framework and performance indicators from which teachers can be assessed to improve pupils' academic performance. The results indicated that parental and community members' involvement in the school development plans to improve the pupils' academic performance was low. This indicates a necessity for training of community members and parents to involve themselves in school development plans.

The educational authorities need to prioritise developing and implementing a comprehensive professional development programme aimed at enhancing head teachers' capacities on the TLS practices. These programmes should include training on effective community engagement strategies and parental involvement techniques, enabling school leaders to create strong partnerships with local stakeholders that bolster academic success. Furthermore, policymakers should establish clear guidelines and incentives that promote active community participation in school governance, fostering an inclusive environment that recognises education as a collective responsibility. In addition, increasing access to resources and training in innovative teaching techniques will empower head teachers to inspire and motivate their staff more effectively, ultimately leading to improved teacher morale and student performance. Educational authorities should also invest in creating structured frameworks that facilitate regular assessments of leadership practices, allowing for the identification of best practices and areas for improvement.

7. Limitations of the study and area for further research

In this study, we concentrated on TLS at the primary school level, leaving other levels of education, such as secondary schools, colleges, and universities. We did not consider other leadership styles that could be a focus for further research.

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