

School Leadership and Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in the North Rift of Kenya

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ABSTRACT

School leadership is seen as being crucial for students' academic performance. Among all school factors that work towards improved performance, the importance of school leadership is said to be only second after teacher's instruction in the classroom. This study sought to examine the influence of school leadership on student's performance in selected secondary schools in the North Rift region of Kenya. Cross sectional survey design was used while the effects of school type, school climate and class size were controlled. The specific objective was to establish the effect of school leadership on students' academic performance in selected secondary schools in Kenya. Data was collected using a close-ended self-administered questionnaire. Multistage, stratified and simple random procedures were utilized to get 358 teachers in selected public secondary schools in Uasin Gishu, Elgeyo Marakwet and Nandi counties of Kenya. Multiple regression using PROCESS macro was used to analyze the data and test the hypothesis. The findings were that school leadership ($\beta = .350$ $p < .001$) is a predictor of students' achievement and that principals are highly visible in school and supportive of teacher's efforts. The study concludes that school leadership plays a significant role in students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Kenya. The study recommendations are that school leadership abilities should be reinforced in order to boost learners' success and stimulate overall educational outcomes. The study findings are important for policy and practice and showcase the necessity of aiming at interventions that develop and strengthen school leadership capability in secondary schools.

Keywords: school leadership, secondary education in Kenya, students' academic performance,

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I. INTRODUCTION

School leadership has been understood as a key predictor of student performance (Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe, 2008; World Bank, 2018) whose effect is thought to next in position after teacher instruction in the classroom in contrast to other school related determinants that influence enhanced levels of outcomes (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom, 2004; World Bank, 2018). The manner in which school leadership influences student outcomes is however indirect by overseeing the quality of teaching and safeguarding the effective use of teaching and learning materials (World Bank, 2018).

An exceptional school principal is the most important contributor to improved learning (Xu, 2018; Day and Sammons, 2016; Nettles and Herrington, 2009). School leadership is where the head teacher steers the school community made up of teachers, learners, and parents to achieve the set goals and objectives by persuasion and participation until the targets become a reality (Northouse, 2019).

The school leadership is said to be the mediator between the classroom, the school, and the national education system and effective leadership has the potential to enhance learning by creating a kind of setting and environment where the best instruction can occur. Outside school, they can make associations and acclimatize the school to fit the ever-changing external context, thus being a tie that links the procedures for growth and development within the school and the exterior source of change itself. They influence the stimulation, abilities, and operational environment of teachers who on their part mould classroom practice and learners' education (Pont *et al*, 2008).

The school leaders should therefore have close collaboration with the school board to maintain academic standards in the school, embrace teamwork through collaboration with the staff in school, serve as the accounting officer of the institution and as secretary and technical advisor to the Board of Management (Robinson *et al*, 2008; Waters, Marzano and McNulty, 2013).

1.1 Statement of the problem

In Kenya, the school leader is responsible for overseeing the day to day operations of the school so that the learning and all other school objectives are met. Despite having frameworks and policies in place, concerns persistent regarding the consistently low scores in national exams exhibited in public secondary schools in Kenya.

1.2 Research objective

The study was guided by the following objective:

To establish the effect of the school leadership on students' academic performance in selected secondary schools in Kenya.

1.3 Research hypothesis

The following hypothesis were tested while controlling for class size, school type, and school climate covariates.

H₀1 There is statistically no significant effect of the school leadership on students' academic performance.

II. Literature Review

2.1. Concept of school leadership

School leadership is the “intentional influence” Yukl (2002) as cited by Pont *et al* (2008) exercised by head teachers of directing the teachers, parents and learners towards the laid down targets or achievements by use of persuasion and participation till the goals are attained (Northouse, 2019). School leaders mediate between the classroom, the school, and the national-wide education system (Pont *et al*, 2008). The more effective leader enhances learning by creating the setting and atmosphere where the best instruction can occur. They inspire teachers' capabilities and operational environment of teachers who on their part mould classroom practice and learners' education (Pont *et al*, 2008). Effective school leadership is crucial for improving standards, enhancing teacher quality, and responsible accounting for results (NEA, 2008). Undoubtedly, an exceptional school leader is the most important contributor to improved learning (Xu, 2018; Day and Sammons, 2016; Nettles and Herrington, 2009).

According to Hou, Cui and Zhang (2019), school leaders that demonstrate high-level instructional leadership are those whose focus is on the academic aspects of school. These are school leader tend to focus on such activities as setting targets, evaluating the effectiveness teachers' instructional practice, and arranging for opportunities to improve learner's instruction. They argue that when lower levels of instructional leadership is observed in principals, their activities will be "narrow" that directly influence academics.

"Leadership practices" according to Hitt and Tucker (2016) cited by Tan, Dimmock, and Walker (2021) is "what leaders do to improve teaching and learning in schools." They include responsibilities such as; the organization instruction, teacher professional development, administrative duties, and stakeholder involvement.

Robinson *et al* (2008) point out that when the focus of principal leadership's influence is on teaching and learning as well as on improving relations with teachers, there will be a marked improvement in learner outcomes. The principal's role is therefore to mastermind not only the capabilities of the learners but also to create conducive working conditions where teachers are empowered to carry out effective teaching of learners (Pont *et al*, 2008). Effective principal leadership is crucial for improving standards, enhancing teacher quality, and responsible accounting for results (NEA, 2008).

Principals are overburdened with heavy workloads (NEA, 2008; Pont *et al* 2008). On any single day, they supervise teaching and learning, ensure a safe school environment, oversee learner's interests among many other duties. Although school leaders are expected to be “educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations/communications experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special programs administrators, as well as guardians of various legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives, ” the school leader should not allow mundane duties to interfere with the leadership role of teaching and learning in order for the school to progress, (Berlin, B., J. Kavanagh, and K. Jensen, 1988 as cited by the NEA, 2008).

2.2 Empirical literature review

The effect of school leadership on students' performance is a subject of interest in current debate from the volume of meta-analysis and systematic studies as well as individual studies (Waters *et al*, 2013). The empirical studies reviewed consist of meta-analysis and systematic reviews as well as individual studies. The meta-analysis and systematic reviews include: Ozdemir *et al* (2022) undertook a systematic review of empirical studies that related school leadership and student academic outcomes. Out of 5509 retrieved, they chose 144 articles for descriptive and content analysis. The findings were first, quantitative research is the most frequently

employed approach for such studies, only a few used qualitative or mixed methods research. Second, most of the studies were cross-sectional rather than longitudinal, hence could not explain causal relationship between school leadership and academic achievement. Thirdly, the study established that most studies were of the direct-effects model and where the indirect model was used, the most common mediators were school factors such as classroom instruction and disciplinary climate. The study also found that instructional leadership was the most liked model of school leadership research studies.

Grissom *et al* (2021) undertook a systematic review of principal effects studies done in the US since 2000. The studies were drawn from quantitative studies in elementary and middle schools done at state and district levels. The results indicated that in learning institutions where the school principal is more effective, more significant learning took place in both math and reading. They also show as quantified by standardized assessments that school leaders affect learners far beyond learning outcomes. The other benefits include school attendance and discipline and are crucial not just for learners' future success but also for teacher outcomes such as attitudes and remaining in the institution longer. On the requisite skills principals ought to possess, studies identified three broad categories: skills on abilities and competencies to enhance teaching and learning such as teacher supervision and motivation and monitoring curriculum implementation, skills to manage and improve staff including the ability to communicate effectively and to show concern for teacher's interests and skills that deal with coordinating the school whose impact is felt far beyond the school.

Studies on direct effects of different aspects of principal or school leadership include: instructional leadership and academic performance in high school (Johnson, 2006); leadership characteristics, school climate and employee engagement in high performing, high needs schools (Hahn, 2017); effects of leadership behavior of principals on students' academic achievement (Tatlah *et al*, 2014); role of school leadership on improvement on students academics in China (Tedla and Kilango, 2022); influence of head teachers' leadership styles on students' academic performance in Ghana (Ofori *et al* 2018); principal's instructional leadership practices on students' academic achievement (Gautama *et al* (2023); principals' leadership styles and secondary students' performance (2020); instructional leadership behaviours on students' academic performance (Muasya, 2018) and principals' instructional leadership practices on learners' performance in secondary school (Irungu, 2020).

Tan, Dimmock, and Walker (2021) did a systematic study to assess the relationship between wide-ranging school leadership practices and student achievements in varying school backgrounds. The three-level meta-analysis consisted of 493 separate effects from 108 studies circulated from the year 2000. The findings indicate the significance of various categories of leadership activities associated with instructional management such as improving teachers' capabilities and involving stakeholders to enhance learners' performance were highlighted and those practices considerably related to student's academic performance.

Wu (2020) undertook a multivariate meta-analysis of 42 empirical studies done in the US in the last 20 years in a bid to understand whether and how a principal's leadership influences student achievement. Some of the research findings were that there is consistent and overwhelming evidence of the relationship between principal leadership effects and student achievement, most of the dimensions studied were statistically related to student achievement as reflected in direct effect without control and/or moderation and indirect effect and that effects of principal leadership were almost always present despite varied conceptual and analytic methodologies employed by researchers.

Robinson *et al* (2008) carried out a meta-analysis to study the effect of various school leadership types on the academic and non-academic outcomes of students from studies from all over the world. The meta-analysis was done in two phases. In the first phase, 22 studies were analyzed to compare the effects of instructional and transformational models of school leadership on student achievement. The second phase consisted of twelve studies used to compare the effect of five selected leadership behaviors on learner performance. The findings from the first phase indicated that the impact of instructional leadership on learner performance was on average three to four times more than that of transformational leadership. Principal leadership behaviours were assessed using five leadership dimensions namely: forming and anticipating goals, strategic resourcing, planning, monitoring and evaluating learning, professional development of teachers, and creating an organized environment that supports learning. In the second phase, it was uncovered that the leadership elements that consisted of including and taking part in teacher learning had averagely solid effects on student performance while the elements that dealt with target setting and preparation, organizing, and appraising learning had modest effects on student performance.

Johnson (2006) carried out a study to establish whether differences exist in instructional leadership behaviors between principals of high-achieving, high-performing, low-achieving, and low-performing schools. Her study involved 251 high school principals from Tennessee whose perception was sought on how they utilized instructional leadership in school. The study found no statistical differences in the instructional leadership behavior between principals of high and low-achieving schools and no statistical difference in the instructional leadership behavior of principals of high-performing and low-performing schools. However, it found statistical significance when achievement and performance data were added up in four areas: in

instructional leadership, in coining of school goals, guarding time allocated for instruction, upholding high visibility, and spearheading continuous professional development

Hahn (2017) did an inquiry on the principal of a high-performing school to determine the specific characteristics that had the most positive sway on school climate and employee engagement. The choice school was identified by the Department of Education of Georgia. The study adopted a qualitative research approach. The research identified six main leadership characteristics that influenced school climate and employee engagement: the principal was dedicated to: students, building relationships, harnessing an environment of collaboration, clear communication, staff development, and thinking on practice.

Tatlah, Iqbal, Amin, and Qurashi (2014) carried out a study to examine the effect of principal leader behavior on student academic achievement at the secondary school level by comparing the perceptions of school leaders and teachers in Punjab, Pakistan. Results from the study registered an effect of principal leadership behavior on learner's academic performance. However, there was a considerable disparity in the viewpoints of the school principals and the senior secondary school teachers on the effect of school leadership activities and learners' outcomes with the principals indicating an effect of their leadership on learners' outcomes while teachers did not indicate any effect.

Tedla and Kilango (2022) carried out a study to discover the function of school leadership in improving student achievement in secondary schools in Changchun, China by regarding principal's leadership practices and behavior. The study employed a mixed methods approach where questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data from principals and teachers. Results indicated that classroom supervision, organizing, goal setting, working together for the common good keeping scrutiny on learners' development, and steering teacher independence were the principal behaviors that enhance greater performance in school.

Ofori, Tordzro, and Ametefee (2018) assessed the influence of heads' leadership styles on students' academic performance at senior high school in East Akim Municipal, Ghana. They used a concurrent triangulation mixed method design with a sample size of 460 respondents. Data was collected by use of questionnaires and face-face interviews. The findings were that the democratic leadership style had a positive influence on learners' academic performance, that involving teachers and learners in decision-making while working together with the support staff and providing necessary instructional resources were the top factors that led to increased academic performance of students in senior high schools in East Akim Municipal, Ghana.

Gautama, Otieno, and Waweru (2023) undertook a study on principals' instructional leadership practices and their influence on student's academic performance in public secondary schools in Nyeri and Nyandarua Counties. They sought the perceptions of principals, heads of departments, and teachers using a mixed-methods research methodology. The results indicated that there was a positive and substantial correlation between all five dimensions of instructional leadership and students' academic performance. The dimensions with the most effect was strategic facilitation of teaching and learning resources and enhancing teacher capability and incentives. The main finding was that school principals must attend and list all the dimensions of instructional leadership to effectively have an impact on student academic performance.

Okwaro *et al* (2020) investigated the effects of principal's leadership style on secondary school performance in Tongaren Division in Bungoma County. They used McGregor's Theories X and Y of 1960 and descriptive survey design and mixed methods. The research findings were that there was a negative relationship between autocratic leadership style and school performance. The leadership style brought about resentment from colleagues. Democratic leadership style had a positive moderate relationship with student performance while laissez-faire leadership style elicited a negative relationship with school performance.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Research Methodology

The study adopted the cross-sectional survey design. Convenient sampling was used to select the three counties of Nandi, Elgeyo Marakwet, and Uasin Gishu. A sample size of 364 teachers was used as recommended by Krejcie & Morgan (1970) out of a target population of 6,678. Proportionate stratified sampling technique was used to get the number of teachers from each sub-county. Finally, random sampling was used to identify select the specific teachers from each sub-county. School teachers were chosen as they are first hand recipients of school leadership decisions and are one of the most knowledgeable stakeholders the school principals' operations in school and potentially offer a realistic scenario of their schools.

Table 3.1 Target population and sample size

County	Sub County	Target Population	Sample size
Elgeyo Marakwet	Marakwet East	221	12
	Marakwet West	514	28
	Keiyo North	632	34
	Keiyo South	622	34
	TOTAL	1,989	108
Uasin Gishu	Moiben	299	16
	Ainabkoi	323	18
	Soy	392	21
	Turbo	373	20
	Wareng	495	28
	TOTAL	1,882	103
Nandi	Nandi North	561	31
	Nandi South	517	28
	Chesumei	560	31
	Tindiret	400	22
	Nandi East	326	18
	Nandi Central	443	24
	TOTAL	2,807	154
Grand Total		6,678	364

Source: Author's own work

3.2 Data collection instruments

Data was collected by use of a close-ended self-administered questionnaire for its capacity to solicit data from a large sample size and the results can be generalized for a whole population. The data was obtained from a 5-point Likert scale and presented in tables.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic information

Demographic Factor		N	% of N
Teacher's Gender	Male	184	50.4
	Female	174	47.7
	Total	358	100
Highest academic Qualification	Diploma	19	5.2
	Degree	305	83.6
	Postgraduate Diploma	7	1.9
	Masters	27	7.4
	Total	358	100
Teaching experience	less than 5	151	41.4
	10-Jun	95	26
	15-Nov	58	15.9
	above 16	54	14.8
	Total	358	100

Source: Author's own work

4.2 Descriptive Statistics of Respondent's Demographic Characteristics

The following is a breakdown of the demographic information of the respondents in the study area. This information is useful for further analysis of the specific research objectives. It sheds light on the nature and caliber of the respondents from which an interpretation can be made. An examination of the questionnaire responses for each of the 358 responses based on the teacher's age range, gender, academic qualification, years of experience, school type, school population, school gender, average class size, average KCSE mean, and school climate are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Demographic Composition of Respondents (N=358)

Demographic Factor		N	% of N
Teacher's Gender	Male	184	50.4
	Female	174	47.7
	Total	358	100
Highest academic Qualification	Diploma	19	5.2
	Degree	305	83.6
	Postgraduate Diploma	7	1.9
	Masters	27	7.4
	Total	358	100
Teaching experience	less than 5	151	41.4
	6 - 10	95	26
	11 - 15	58	15.9
	above 16	54	14.8
	Total	358	100

Source: Author's own work

The respondent's gender shows a marginal majority of 50.4% comprises male teachers, while 47.7% are female. This gender distribution brings to light balance in gender representation within the study. This result implies that although the males are slightly more than the females, gender parity is near achievement in the teaching profession.

The academic qualifications is a noteworthy part of the demographic profile, with a prominent 83.6% (n=305) of respondents indicating a degree as their highest academic qualification. Meanwhile, 7.4% (n=27) of teachers possess a master's degree, 5.2% (n=19) hold a diploma, and a modest 1.9% (n=7) hold a postgraduate diploma. This concentration of educators with degrees underscores the academic ability of the sample which has the potential to influence the study outcomes and perspectives shared by participants.

Teaching experience which is an important aspect in the understanding of professional backgrounds, shows a balanced distribution. A massive 41.4% (n=151) of respondents have less than 5 years of teaching experience, 26% (n=95) fall within the 6-10 years category, 15.9% (n=58) have 11-15 years of experience, and 14.8% (n=54) have more than 16 years in the profession. The results show that teachers of all age groups are represented in the study to enlighten on principal leadership.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics for Principal Leadership

Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics for Principal Leadership

Principal Leadership	N	M	SD
There's a harmonious working relationship between the Principal and the BOM	358	4.65	0.676
Our Principal is inspirational in steering the school to strive for greater heights	358	4.57	0.732
Our Principal is highly visible, is involved in daily school activities	358	4.58	0.735
The focus of the Principal's leadership is mainly on teaching and learning in school	358	4.55	0.741
The Principal supports teachers' efforts in enhancing academic performance in my school	358	4.55	0.778
The Principal promotes parental participation in student's learning activities so as to improve their performance	358	4.51	0.773
The Principal supports the disciplinary committee which has directly impacted on academic performance in school	358	4.58	0.708

The Principal is very passionate about preparing learners for national examinations	358	4.65	0.692
Grand Mean		4.58	0.729

Source: Author's own work

Results in Table 4.2 provide a detailed overview of respondents' perspectives on the leadership in their schools. The data encompasses various dimensions of the principal's leadership role, shedding light on their perceived effectiveness and impact on school dynamics. A notable finding is the overwhelmingly positive perception regarding the relationship between the Principal and the Board of Management (BOM). The high mean value of 4.65 and a low standard deviation of 0.676 suggests a consensus among respondents. This indicates a favorable view of a collaborative and harmonious working relationship between the Principal and the BOM, fostering a cohesive leadership structure.

Finding from a study by Hess (2002) also revealed that according to the respondents, one of the most crucial determinants of a principal's performance is the board-principal relationship, which reflects the value a well-functional leadership team is for effective governance and management of a school. Conversely study by Plough (2014) also found that board members repeatedly emphasized the importance they place on their relationship with the superintendent saying that they make the effort to spend quality time developing this relationship.

Furthermore, respondents express a strong belief in the Principal's inspirational leadership with a resulting mean value of 4.57 and a relatively low standard deviation of 0.732 that indicate a shared positive sentiment. This underscores the perceived impact of the school leadership in motivating and guiding the school community toward greater achievements.

The data also highlights the leader's high visibility and active involvement in daily school activities. The mean value of 4.58 and a standard deviation of 0.735 suggest a consistent positive perception of the Principal's hands-on approach to school affairs. A study by McColum (2010) also established that highly effective principals are typically highly visible role-models for learners as they usually walk around greeting students and teachers informally checking for likely problems. The study found that the presence of the principal in hallways and in extra curricula activities is a source of security that someone is in charge and that there is someone to consult when facing a difficulty.

Respondents acknowledge the Principal's focus on teaching and learning. The mean value of 4.55, along with a standard deviation of 0.741, indicates a predominantly positive view, suggesting that the Principal's leadership aligns closely with the academic aspects of the school. According to Jackson (2018) principals' leadership should support improved teaching and learner achievement by creating the climate that learning takes place.

Additionally, there is a general agreement that the Principal supports teachers' efforts in enhancing academic performance. The mean value of 4.55, albeit with a standard deviation of 0.778, suggests a positive perception, though with a slightly wider range of opinions.

The Principal's promotion of parental participation in students' learning activities is acknowledged by the majority. With a mean value of 4.51 and a standard deviation of 0.773, the data indicates a positive perception, emphasizing the school leader's role in fostering a collaborative educational environment involving parents. The findings support findings by Mleczko and Kington (2013) that the principal's role is vital in initiating programmes where parents are involved in solving problems in the learning environment.

Furthermore, respondents believe that the Principal's support for the disciplinary committee has a direct impact on academic performance. The mean value of 4.58, with a standard deviation of 0.708, suggests a positive consensus, highlighting the perceived connection between effective disciplinary measures and academic outcomes. The findings corroborate with findings by McColum (2010) whose study found that principals supported the disciplinary decisions of the deputy principal and the teachers.

The majority recognize the Principal's passion for preparing learners for national examinations as indicated by the high mean value of 4.65 and low standard deviation of 0.692 show a strong positive perception, emphasizing school leaders' commitment to academic excellence.

Overall, the descriptive statistics underscore a predominantly positive perception of the school leadership qualities. The findings highlight key strengths, such as collaborative engagement with the BOM, inspirational leadership, active involvement in daily activities, and a focus on teaching and learning. These positive perceptions collectively contribute to the Grand Mean of 4.58, reflecting a commendable assessment of the school leadership impact within the selected Kenyan secondary schools.

In summary, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of School Leadership. The positive perceptions among respondents regarding various aspects of school leadership align with the overarching goal of enhancing academic performance in Kenyan secondary schools. The interplay between leadership practices,

collaborative efforts, and the dynamic relationship with the BOM exemplifies the complex yet crucial nature of school leadership in shaping educational outcomes.

4.4 Descriptive Statistics for Student Academic Performance

Table 4.3 Descriptive Statistics for Student Academic Performance

Student's Academic Performance	N	M	SD
When teachers and learners are involved in setting academic targets by the BOM, it affects the academic performance	358	4.335	0.904
When the BOM monitor teaching and learning, students' academic performance improves	358	4.316	0.787
If the school environment is quiet, safe and orderly, the academic performance goes up	358	4.648	0.612
A school leadership that is supportive of teachers' efforts enhances students' academic performance	358	4.662	0.626
Exposing teachers to regular trainings/workshops/seminars has an effect on learner's academic performance	358	4.643	0.691
Motivating highly performing teacher and learners influences academic performance	358	4.682	0.698
Grand Mean		4.548	0.720

Source: Author's own work

Table 4.3 presents descriptive statistics providing valuable insights into the perceived impact of various factors on student academic performance. Firstly, when examining the involvement of teachers and learners in setting academic targets, a majority of respondents expressed a positive sentiment. The mean score of 4.335, coupled with a standard deviation of 0.904, indicates a relatively high level of agreement among the participants. This suggests that collaborative goal-setting involving teachers and learners is perceived as influential in affecting academic performance.

Similarly, the BOM's role in monitoring teaching and learning shows a positive correlation with students' academic performance. A significant proportion of respondents believe that when the BOM actively monitors teaching and learning, it positively impacts academic performance. The mean score of 4.316, along with a standard deviation of 0.787, underscores a consensus among participants regarding the constructive role of BOM monitoring.

Furthermore, the study explored the association between the school environment and academic performance. A substantial majority perceive that a quiet, safe, and orderly school environment contributes to an improvement in academic performance. The high mean score of 4.648 and a low standard deviation of 0.612 signify a strong agreement and a relatively consistent viewpoint among respondents. This suggests that investing in discipline measures and maintaining a safe and orderly environment directly contributes to the overall improvement in academic performance.

Supportive school leadership is also identified as a crucial factor influencing academic performance. The majority of respondents believe that leadership supportive of teachers' efforts enhances students' academic performance. The mean score of 4.662 and the standard deviation of 0.626 suggest a high level of consensus on the positive impact of supportive leadership.

Moreover, the exposure of teachers to regular training, workshops, and seminars is perceived as beneficial for learners' academic performance. A significant proportion agree with this notion as indicated by the mean score of 4.643 and standard deviation of 0.691 to show the level of consensus on the positive impact of professional development opportunities on academic outcomes.

Lastly, respondents strongly affirm that motivating highly performing teachers and learners influences academic performance. A substantial majority acknowledge the importance of motivation in academic outcomes. The mean score of 4.682 and a standard deviation of 0.698 underscore a strong consensus on the positive influence of motivation.

Overall, the above findings reveal that teachers highly agreed with the indicators of student academic performance; a quiet, safe, and orderly school environment enhances academic performance, school leadership that is supportive of teachers' efforts enhances students' academic performance, exposing teachers to regular trainings/workshops/seminars has an effect on learner's academic performance and motivating highly performing teachers and learners influences academic performance. Hence collectively reveals a positive perception among respondents regarding the factors influencing student academic performance. The high grand mean of 4.548 indicates an overall agreement on the significant role these factors play in fostering a conducive environment for enhanced academic outcomes.

4.5 Hypothesis Testing

Effect of Principal Leadership on Student's Academic Performance

Hierarchical regression was employed to find out the ability of the predictor principal leadership (PL) to predict student academic performance after controlling for class size, school climate, and school type. Class size, school climate, and school type were entered as step 1 and explained for 3% of the variance in student academic performance. After the addition of principal leadership (PL) at step 2, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 12% $F(4,353) = 11.8$ $p < .001$. The predictor PL further explained an additional 11.8% of the variance in student academic performance R^2 change = .118, F change 1, 353 = 47.31, $p < .001$. Further, the predictor variable PL was statistically significant recording a beta value of .350 $p < .001$. Therefore, based on the findings, the hypothesis is rejected.

The findings from this study support similar findings from several studies that found principal leadership has a positive effect on learners' performance (Xu, 2018; Waters *et al* 2013; Ozdemir *et al* 2022; Grissom *et al*, 2021, Gatama *et al*, 2023; Irungu, 2020). Irungu (2020) in her study on the influence of instructional leader practices on students' academic performance found that the leader's characteristics - communication of set school targets, teacher supervision, and the advancement of collaborative networks correlated positively with students' academic performance. The study by Muasya (2018) that sought to find out the effect instructional leader behavior had on students' academic performance also found similar results to the practices of outlining of school mission, overseeing teaching and learning in school, pioneering a conducive learning culture and championing for teachers' welfare had a positive correlation with students' performance.

Ofori, Tordzro, and Ametefee (2018) assessed the influence of heads' leadership styles on students' academic performance at senior high school in East Akim Municipal, Ghana. The findings were that that involving teachers and learners in decision-making while working together with the support staff and providing necessary instructional resources were the top factors that led to increased academic performance of students in senior high schools in East Akim Municipal, Ghana.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study findings established that principal's leadership has a positive statistically significant influence on student performance in selected secondary schools in Kenya. The study therefore concludes that principals should endeavor to consistently practice those behaviors that improve students' performance because the findings from the study infer that this will have a positive statistically significant effect students' academic performance.

The study therefore recommends that principals should be trained so that they can demonstrate leadership that improves student academic performance. The stakeholders should each play their roles and cooperate with the principal so that academic performance in schools is improved.

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