

## Influence of Principals' Democratic Leadership Style on Curriculum Design Coverage in Public Senior Schools in Kapseret Sub-County, Kenya.

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## ABSTRACT

Timely coverage of the prescribed curriculum depends heavily on how school principals lead teachers. This paper reports the first objective of a wider study: to determine the influence of principals' democratic leadership style on curriculum design coverage in public senior schools in Kapseret Sub-County, Kenya. The study was anchored on Leadership Behavior Theory and adopted a convergent mixed-methods design. From a target population of 243 teachers, 22 principals, 66 student representatives and one Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (QASO), 75 teachers were selected through stratified random sampling and seven principals, 21 student representatives and the QASO were selected purposively. Teachers completed a structured Likert-scale questionnaire (69 of 75 returned; 92.0%), while the other participants took part in in-depth interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression, and qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Teachers agreed that their principals practised democratic leadership ( $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ), with 73.9% to 81.2% agreeing with each consultation, participation, delegation, teamwork and communication item. Democratic leadership had a positive and statistically significant influence on curriculum design coverage ( $B = 0.241$ ,  $\beta = .268$ ,  $t = 3.394$ ,  $p = .001$ ), and the null hypothesis was rejected. It was the second strongest predictor in a model that explained 70.9% of the variance in coverage ( $R^2 = .709$ ). Interview data confirmed that consultation, teamwork and open communication build teacher ownership of the syllabus. The paper recommends continuous professional development of principals in participatory leadership.

**Keywords:** *democratic leadership, participative leadership, curriculum design coverage, principals, senior schools, Kenya*

## 1. Introduction

Effective school leadership is widely accepted as a condition for good teaching and learning. Leadership shapes the learning conditions in a school, encourages teachers and helps the school to meet its educational objectives (OECD, 2019). Principals in particular are expected to define school goals, guide the curriculum and motivate teachers, and together these roles determine learning results (Bush, 2020). Democratic, autocratic and laissez-faire styles are

regarded as important influences on organizational effectiveness and on individual performance in schools (DanDan & Alias, 2024). The way a principal consults, guides, motivates and supports teachers therefore affects how teachers plan lessons, keep to schemes of work and complete the prescribed content within the academic period.

Evidence from Africa points in the same direction. In South Ethiopia, principals' instructional leadership was found to be positively related to teachers' efficacy, which in turn was strongly associated with student performance (Gechere et al., 2025). In Kenya, principals' roles are consistently linked to teacher performance and learner outcomes, yet studies report that supervision of syllabus coverage is uneven and that some teachers do not complete the curriculum on time (Kiilu et al., 2023; Obama et al., 2015). Most Kenyan studies have, however, used academic achievement or general teacher performance as the outcome variable. Timely curriculum design coverage, meaning the extent to which teachers complete the recommended content within the year, follow schemes of work and the teaching timetable, and deliver instruction that prepares learners for examinations, has received far less direct attention.

Democratic leadership is a particularly relevant style to examine. It is characterized by consultation with teachers, participation in decision-making, delegation of responsibilities, teamwork and open communication. Its logic is that teachers who help to shape academic decisions feel greater ownership of them and are therefore more likely to implement them on time. The reviewed literature nonetheless shows that this claim has mostly been tested against teacher morale, collaboration and performance in general, rather than against curriculum coverage itself. Kapseret Sub-County adds a contextual reason for the study. Its public senior schools vary in category (C2, C3 and C4) and in the leadership and supervision practised by principals, and coverage of the curriculum is reportedly quicker in some schools than in others.

This paper reports the first objective of a study on the influence of principals' leadership styles on curriculum design coverage. The objective was to determine the influence of principals' democratic leadership style on curriculum design coverage in public senior schools in Kapseret Sub-County, Kenya. The research question was: What is the influence of principals' democratic leadership style on curriculum design coverage in public senior schools in Kapseret Sub-County? The corresponding null hypothesis was  $H_{01}$ : Principals' democratic leadership style has no

statistically significant influence on curriculum design coverage in public senior schools in Kapseret Sub-County, Kenya.

## **2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Leadership Behavior Theory**

The study was guided by Leadership Behavior Theory, which shifts attention from the personal traits of leaders to the behaviors they display. Two broad dimensions are usually identified: initiating structure, which is task oriented, and consideration, which is people oriented (Northouse, 2019; Yukl, 2013). Later applications extended the theory to styles such as directive or autocratic, participative or democratic, supportive, transactional, transformational and laissez-faire leadership. For the present objective, the theory suggests that a principal who behaves participatively, by consulting teachers, sharing responsibility and communicating openly, builds collaboration, commitment and motivation among teachers, and that these attitudes translate into more timely coverage of the curriculum. A strength of the theory is that it deals with observable behavior, which makes it easy to measure through teachers' perceptions and suitable for school settings (Northouse, 2019).

### **2.2 Democratic leadership in schools**

Democratic or participative leadership is described in the educational management literature as a style in which authority is shared and decisions are reached through consultation and group involvement (Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Bush, 2020). It is closely related to distributed leadership, which holds that leadership functions are spread across many people in a school rather than concentrated in the principal (Spillane, 2006). In the classroom-related tasks that determine curriculum coverage, such as preparing schemes of work, coordinating departments and agreeing on assessment calendars, this sharing of responsibility is expected to improve coordination and accountability.

### **2.3 Empirical studies**

Sarwar et al. (2022) examined the effect of principals' leadership styles on teachers' performance at college level in Pakistan and reported that a participative approach had a

significant positive influence on teachers' performance. DanDan and Alias (2024) similarly reviewed principal leadership styles and their impact on teachers' performance and concluded that leadership style is an important determinant of what teachers do in the classroom. Glickman et al. (2018) argue that instructional leadership is most effective when principals work with teachers developmentally and collaboratively rather than through directives alone. Robinson et al. (2008) reached a related conclusion in a synthesis of research on leadership and student outcomes: the leadership practices that matter most are those that engage the principal directly with teachers in planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum.

In Kenya, Chepkwony et al. (2025) studied principals' administrative styles in relation to students' academic performance in Keiyo South Sub-County, and Kiilu et al. (2023) considered strategies for strengthening instructional supervision in Makueni County. Obama et al. (2015) compared principals' leadership styles and academic performance in Homa-Bay County. These studies confirm that principals' behavior matters for what happens in Kenyan classrooms. They also show the pattern noted above: the dependent variable is usually teacher performance, job satisfaction or examination results. None of them measures curriculum design coverage directly, and none isolates the democratic style from the other four styles within a single model in a Kapseret-type setting.

Two gaps therefore emerge. The first is a conceptual gap: participative leadership is known to raise teacher engagement and collaboration, but its effect on the completion of the curriculum has rarely been tested. The second is a contextual gap: little context-specific evidence exists for public senior schools in Kapseret Sub-County. This study responds to both by measuring the perceived democratic practices of principals and relating them to curriculum design coverage using a combination of regression analysis and interview evidence.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research design**

A convergent mixed-methods design was used, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately and then merged for triangulation and comparison (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). A cross-sectional survey provided the quantitative

strand, and a phenomenological approach guided the qualitative strand by exploring how principals, students and the QASO experience leadership and syllabus completion (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The design was chosen because leadership behavior and curriculum coverage are shaped by institutional and contextual factors that numbers alone cannot capture.

### **3.2 Study area, population and sampling**

The study was carried out in Kapseret Sub-County, Uasin Gishu County, which is made up of urban, peri-urban and rural areas. The target population consisted of 22 principals, 243 teachers, 66 student representatives (three per school) and one QASO from the 22 public senior schools. Seven schools were selected through stratified purposive sampling based on school category (C2, C3 and C4) and performance. All seven principals were included through a census. From the 243 teachers, 75 (30.9%) were selected through proportionate stratified random sampling across the seven schools. Twenty-one class representatives (three per school) were selected purposively, as was the QASO, who monitors curriculum coverage and instructional quality in the sub-county.

### **3.3 Instruments, validity and reliability**

Teachers completed a structured questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Section B measured democratic leadership through five items on consultation, participation in decisions, delegation, teamwork and open communication. Principals, the QASO and student representatives were interviewed using in-depth interview guides. Face, content and construct validity were established through review by university supervisors and specialists in educational administration and planning, and by aligning items with the study variables and the theoretical framework. The instruments were piloted in two public senior schools that were not part of the main sample, and reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a coefficient of 0.70 or above considered acceptable. Trustworthiness of the qualitative data was addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **3.4 Data collection and analysis**

Research authorization was obtained from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), the Ministry of Education and the participating schools. Participants gave written consent, and no personal identifiers were recorded. Quantitative data were analyzed with SPSS version 27 using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, followed by multiple linear regression to establish how far the five leadership styles predicted curriculum design coverage (Field, 2018). The significance level was set at  $\alpha = 0.05$ , and assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity and independence of errors were checked before the inferential analysis. Interview data were transcribed, coded and analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke (2006), and the emerging themes were triangulated with the questionnaire results (Patton, 2015).

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Response rate and respondent profile**

Of the 75 questionnaires administered, 69 were completed and returned, giving a response rate of 92.0%, which is adequate for analysis. Humanities teachers formed 39.1% of respondents, sciences 34.8%, technical and applied studies 17.4% and languages 8.7%. Most respondents (84.1%) were permanently employed, 11.6% were on contract and 4.3% were temporary. By school category, 56.5% of respondents were from C4 schools, 31.9% from C3 and 11.6% from C2 schools. This spread across subjects, employment terms and school categories gave a broad base of experiences of principals' leadership.

### **4.2 Descriptive findings on democratic leadership**

Teachers rated five statements on their principals' democratic practices. Results are shown in Table 1. The overall mean of 3.90 ( $SD = 0.99$ ) indicates that respondents agreed that their principals practised democratic leadership to a considerable extent. Agreement (agree plus strongly agree) ranged from 73.9% to 81.2% across the items, while disagreement never exceeded 15.9%.

**Table 1**

*Teachers' Responses on Principals' Democratic Leadership Style (N = 69)*

| Statement (abbreviated)                                         | Disagree (%) | Neutral (%) | Agree (%) | Mean        | SD          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| Principal consults teachers before important academic decisions | 14.5         | 11.6        | 73.9      | 3.86        | 1.07        |
| Teachers participate in decisions on curriculum implementation  | 15.9         | 10.1        | 73.9      | 3.83        | 1.01        |
| Principal delegates academic responsibilities to teachers       | 13.0         | 8.7         | 78.3      | 3.91        | 0.94        |
| Principal promotes teamwork among teachers                      | 8.7          | 10.1        | 81.2      | 4.04        | 0.91        |
| Principal maintains open communication with teachers            | 13.0         | 11.6        | 75.4      | 3.88        | 1.02        |
| <b>Overall democratic leadership</b>                            |              |             |           | <b>3.90</b> | <b>0.99</b> |

*Note.* Disagree combines strongly disagree and disagree; Agree combines agree and strongly agree. Source: Field data (2026).

Teamwork received the highest rating ( $M = 4.04$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ), with 46.4% agreeing and 34.8% strongly agreeing that the principal promotes teamwork that improves coordination and timely coverage. Delegation of academic responsibilities followed ( $M = 3.91$ ), with 78.3% of teachers in agreement. Consultation before important academic decisions ( $M = 3.86$ ) and involvement in curriculum implementation decisions ( $M = 3.83$ ) each attracted 73.9% agreement, and open communication ( $M = 3.88$ ) attracted 75.4%. Consultation and participation in decisions recorded the highest levels of disagreement (14.5% and 15.9%), which suggests that a minority of teachers still experience decision-making as closed.

### **4.3 Qualitative findings**

Three themes emerged from the interviews with principals, the QASO and student representatives: participation in decision-making, teamwork and cooperation, and openness of communication. Principals reported that they regularly sought teachers' advice when making academic decisions, drawing up the school academic calendar and reviewing progress in syllabus coverage, and that teachers' views were valuable in resolving instructional problems. The QASO observed that schools whose principals involve teachers in decisions tend to cover the curriculum better because teachers feel responsible for meeting academic goals. Student representatives noted that where teachers and the administration cooperated, there were fewer disruptions to learning. One principal summed up the view: "When teachers participate in academic decisions, they own the implementation process and work together to ensure that the syllabus is completed on time" (Principal 3, personal communication, 2026).

### **4.4 Regression analysis and hypothesis testing**

Multiple linear regression was used to test the influence of democratic leadership while controlling for the other four styles. The model was statistically significant,  $F(5, 63) = 42.183$ ,  $p < .001$ , with a multiple correlation of  $R = .842$ . The five styles together explained 70.9% of the variance in curriculum design coverage ( $R^2 = .709$ ; adjusted  $R^2 = .686$ ), leaving 29.1% to factors outside the model. The coefficients are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Regression Coefficients for Leadership Styles Predicting Curriculum Design Coverage*

| Predictor                   | B      | SE    | $\beta$ | t      | p     |
|-----------------------------|--------|-------|---------|--------|-------|
| (Constant)                  | 0.714  | 0.352 |         | 2.028  | .047  |
| Democratic leadership       | 0.241  | 0.071 | .268    | 3.394  | .001  |
| Laissez-faire leadership    | -0.164 | 0.060 | -.198   | -2.733 | .008  |
| Autocratic leadership       | 0.097  | 0.046 | .133    | 2.109  | .039  |
| Transformational leadership | 0.358  | 0.079 | .391    | 4.532  | <.001 |
| Transactional leadership    | 0.203  | 0.067 | .227    | 3.030  | .004  |

Note. Dependent variable: curriculum design coverage.  $R^2 = .709$ ;  $F(5, 63) = 42.183$ ,  $p < .001$ . Source: Field data (2026).

Democratic leadership had a positive and statistically significant influence on curriculum design coverage ( $B = 0.241$ ,  $SE = 0.071$ ,  $\beta = .268$ ,  $t = 3.394$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Holding the other styles constant, a one-unit increase in democratic leadership was associated with a 0.241-unit increase in curriculum design coverage. Judged by standardized coefficients, democratic leadership was the second strongest predictor in the model after transformational leadership ( $\beta = .391$ ), and ahead of transactional ( $\beta = .227$ ), laissez-faire ( $\beta = -.198$ ) and autocratic leadership ( $\beta = .133$ ). The fitted equation was  $Y = 0.714 + 0.241X_1 - 0.164X_2 + 0.097X_3 + 0.358X_4 + 0.203X_5$ , where  $X_1$  is democratic leadership.

The null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ) stated that principals' democratic leadership style has no statistically significant influence on curriculum design coverage. Because the  $p$ -value (.001) was less than the 0.05 significance level,  $H_{01}$  was rejected. It was concluded that democratic leadership has a significant positive influence on curriculum design coverage in public senior schools in Kapseret Sub-County.

## 5. Discussion

The results show that democratic leadership is common in the sampled schools and that it is associated with better curriculum design coverage. The finding is consistent with Leadership Behavior Theory, which predicts that people-oriented behaviors such as consideration, consultation and support raise commitment and, through commitment, performance (Northouse, 2019; Yukl, 2013). The quantitative and qualitative strands converged: the regression coefficient showed a significant positive effect, and principals, the QASO and students independently described participation, teamwork and communication as the mechanisms through which teachers took responsibility for finishing the syllabus.

The result also agrees with earlier work showing that participative and collaborative leadership improves teachers' performance (Sarwar et al., 2022; DanDan & Alias, 2024) and with the argument that leadership that engages directly with teachers in planning and coordinating the curriculum has the strongest effect on outcomes (Robinson et al., 2008; Glickman et al., 2018). The present study extends this literature in one important respect. Whereas these studies measured teacher performance or student outcomes, the outcome here is curriculum design coverage itself, and the influence of democratic leadership on it remained significant when the other four leadership styles were held constant. Shared decision-making and delegation appear to matter not only for morale but for the practical, time-bound task of finishing the prescribed content.

Teamwork and delegation were the most strongly endorsed practices, which is consistent with the view that distributed leadership works through shared responsibility (Spillane, 2006). In curriculum terms, coordinated departments and delegated academic duties spread the load of planning, monitoring and remedial work, so delays in one classroom are less likely to go unnoticed. The relatively higher disagreement on consultation and participation in decisions (14.5% and 15.9%) suggests that in some schools consultation is more symbolic than real, and that the benefits of democratic leadership are not yet fully realized.

It is notable that democratic leadership ranked second, behind transformational leadership and ahead of transactional and autocratic leadership. The standardized coefficient of .268 is moderate rather than dominant, which means that participation alone does not guarantee timely

coverage. This aligns with the observation that effective principals combine participative approaches with monitoring and accountability (Bush, 2020). The study has limitations. The sample was small (69 teachers from seven schools) and the leadership scores were based on teachers' perceptions, so shared-source bias cannot be ruled out. The design was cross-sectional, so the findings show association and predictive influence rather than proof of causation. Finally, curriculum design coverage was assessed largely through perceptions and interviews, and future studies should add direct measures such as the proportion of the syllabus covered.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that principals' democratic leadership style has a positive and statistically significant influence on curriculum design coverage in public senior schools in Kapseret Sub-County. Consultation with teachers, involvement in decisions, delegation of responsibilities, teamwork and open communication increase teachers' commitment and shared accountability for completing the curriculum on time. Democratic leadership was the second strongest of the five leadership styles studied in predicting coverage.

Three recommendations follow. First, principals should strengthen democratic practices by involving teachers in academic decisions, delegating responsibilities with clear follow-up, promoting departmental teamwork and keeping communication channels open. Second, the Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission should provide continuous professional development that builds principals' participatory leadership skills, and the Quality Assurance and Standards Directorate should include participative practices in its supervision of schools. Third, because democratic leadership was only one of five styles that jointly explained coverage, principals should pair democratic practices with regular monitoring of syllabus coverage and timely feedback. Further research should use larger and more varied samples, compare public and private and urban and rural schools, and use direct records such as schemes of work and lesson plans to measure coverage.

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