**Head Teachers’ Democratic Leadership Style and Discipline of Students in Secondary Schools in Buhweju District, Uganda**

**Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to establish the influence of Headteachers’ Democratic leadership styles on discipline of students in secondary schools in Buhweju District-Uganda. In all education settings, the impact of head teachers leadership styles has been key in fostering disincline among students, as these have employed a number of strategies mainly aimed implement to improve discipline with in secondary schools. In the effort to understand how principals can generate democratic spaces and school success, it was asserted that head teachers leadership styles are involved in setting directions, building a vision for the students to achieve the required levels of discipline, as well as setting standards and expectations for their students, families, and teachers. In this regard, Some headteachers in secondary schools in Buhweju adopted Democratic leadership style. The study adopted descriptive research design. This study made use of the quantitative methods within a single study, to provide a more-full understanding of the research subject. The participants were selected from the selected secondary schools, which included Head teachers, (08), teachers, (169) and students (1928). Total population was 2105 participants The findings indicated that head teachers help to influence motivate, and direct their followers, which determines how head teachers as leaders implement plans and strategies to accomplish given objectives while accounting for stakeholder expectations and the wellbeing and soundness of their teaching and non-teaching teams. In recommendations, Head teachers should investigate how participative decision making fosters a sense of self esteem among students, potentially leading to credited behavior and discipline.

**Key words:** Head teacher, Democratic, Leadership, Leadership Styles, Students' Discipline

**Introduction**

“Discipline is essential part of any leading institution and is evident when a school becomes a peace and safe place for learners and all other stakeholders” (Padayachee, 2021)[1]. “Indicators of the status of students’ discipline include: students obeying school rules and regulations, dressing code (wearing school uniform), better results in internal and external examinations, respect for authorities, and good behavior. In the school context, head teachers play critical roles to instill the discipline of students in schools to achieve their expected goals”.

Ouma, Simatwa and Serem (2013) )[2].  “conducted research in Kisumu Municipality and reported indiscipline cases such as stealing, truancy, noise making in class, disobedience, late coming to school, cheating in exams, not doing class assignments, fighting with other students, having pornography materials, bullying, using unacceptable language, abuse of drugs, sneaking, sexual assault and drug trafficking”. Murava (2018) )[3].  “conducted study in Rwanda on guidance and counseling practice and students’ discipline in secondary schools in Rwanda: A case study of Kamonyi District. Fielder argued that the theory of desirable leadership depends on the contingencies of the situation, demanding the style of the task and how secure they are. He believed that the effectiveness in leading depends on controlling the situation and the style of Leadership. According to Fiedler, some traits of leadership help in a certain crisis and so leadership would have to change given the new circumstances” [7-9].

“Discipline refers to the action by management to enforce organizational standards” (Wahyuni, Ramli, and Mawardi, 2023). Wulandari, and Darwis, (2023) )[1]. , defines discipline as a means to bring control, train to obedience and order or drill. Burden, (2020) describes “discipline as a system of guiding the student or the staff to make reasonable decisions and the ability to control class to achieve the desired behavior. Hence good discipline should lead to obedience, self-control, cooperation and being accountable for one’s behavior”.

Porter, (2020) )[2]. , defines “school discipline as a form of discipline appropriate to the regulation of children and the maintenance of order in the school. However, in this study, discipline will be conceptualized as the observance of school rules and regulations, time management and the administration of punishments. Discipline more so is a set of consequences determined by the schools to remedy actions taken by a student that are deemed inappropriate. Discipline is typically thought to have a positive or negative influence on both the individual as well as the classroom environment. Utilizing disciplinary actions can be an opportunity for the class to reflect and learn about consequences, instill collective values, and encourage behavior that is acceptable for the classroom”.

This contextual evidence shows that there is poor students discipline across the secondary schools in the district where evidence reveal that there are bad groups of students, strikes are rampant, drug abuse on the increase and others fail to attend to classes and this study seeks to examine the impact democratic leadership style exhibits on students discipline by the head-teachers whereby there is need to see students loving the school, attending to their classes, abandoning peer group influences by exhibiting positivity in reporting to school in time, and developing team work spirit [10-12].

**Statement of the Problem**

“Effective leadership is key to the success of an educational institution because it provides guidance, purpose and helps others to understand the goals of education. The core function of the school is to provide quality teaching and learning. These services are provided by the teaching force comprising of multi-talented individuals with the right skills and experience to assist learners to attain good results” (Muammar, and Maker, 2022) )[1]. . “The responsibility of the school head is to foster an atmosphere of creativity in the school, provide flexible environment for employees and motivate staff and students. This will improve efficiency leading to achievement of excellence and producing dependable citizens of the country” (MOES, 2022) )[2]. . “However, there has been public concern about the way heads teacher of secondary schools manage their institutions in Buhweju District” (Buhweju District Inspection Annual Report, 2022). “Deterioration of students' discipline is on the increase and has been a debate in many forums. Indiscipline among students results into undesired outcomes such as destruction of school property, poor academic achievement among others. Despite formulation of relevant educational policies aimed at the control of discipline, still exists indiscipline cases among students” (Buhweju District Inspection Annual Report, 2022)[3]. ; Mbarara District Education Commission Report, October 2023). Lack of discipline is manifested through theft, drug abuse, lateness, possession of pornographic materials, abusive language, violence, and dirtiness among others in learning institutions (Mbane, 2020) )[4]. . The issues of concern are whether head teachers’ leadership styles such as democratic, autocratic and situational, have influence on discipline of students in secondary schools which this study seeks to establish. If the situation remain unaddressed there will be rampant indiscipline cases among students leading into destruction of school properties and eventually low academic performance. This made it difficult for the country to achieve National Development Plan (NDP3) )[5]. Therefore, there was need toexamine the influence of Head teachers’ leadership styles on Discipline of Students in Secondary Schools in Buhweju District.

**objective of the Study**

1. To examine the influence of head teachers’ democratic leadership style on students’ discipline in secondary schools in Buhweju District.

***Significance of study***

The implications of this study are significant for educational policy makers and school administrators aiming to improve student outcomes through effective leadership practices.

***Literature review***

**2.2.1 Influence of Head Teachers' Democratic Leadership Style on Students’ Discipline**

“Democratic leadership in many institutions, is practiced by involving staff in decision making, which is done through regular meetings and decisions made implemented. It is also exercised by delegation of duties, holding regular meetings as a way of allowing the majority staff to participate in the affairs of the institution. It is as well applied through communicating important information to rightful people at the right time. Thus, democratic leadership is the most popular leadership styles which most institutions of learning want to be associated with because it generates family spirit in the work place and aids in building of respect among members’ contribution” (Isundwa, 2015; Nyambura, 2019); Odebode, 2019).

Smith (2016) conducted “a study on The Role of Leadership Style in Creating a Great School: Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit (SELU) and pointed out that a good democratic leader delegates wisely without losing sight of the fact that he or she bears the crucial responsibility of leadership. By implication, this means that though the leader delegates and allows members to take part in decision making, such a leader holds the final say in all the undertakings of the organisation. Whenever conflicts occur, a democratic leader settles the conflicts objectively and amicably by addressing the causative factors and not based on personalities. In this way, a fair conflict resolution strategy is employed, which does not leave any of the two parties hurt permanently. The research found that for leaders to lead change in the 21st century the 4Cs (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication) have taken centre-stage and school curricula has had to adapt in order to prepare learners for a world where the ability to adapt expertise and engage with lifelong learning as an imperative can no longer be ignored”.

According to Arikan, (2020) in the study “An overview on leadership styles for organizations. This study aimed to provide an overview of the major leadership styles that organizations may find useful for their specific needs. By providing such an overview, it is hoped that researchers and practitioners alike benefit from these perspectives and have a chance to shed light on their current problems and future objectives”. The study found that, democratic leadership is admired by leaders because they want follower to participate in the leadership of their organizations where collective execution of leadership functions are shared between members of the group.

Similarly, Velma Jack, and Bernard, (2022) in their study, ‘Effect of Principals’ Leadership Styles on School Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Vihiga Sub-County, Kenya” aimed at investigating the effects of transactional leadership styles on school discipline in public secondary schools. The study targeted population of 27 Principals, 321 teachers, and 3083 form three students from 27 public secondary schools. The study concluded that Principals’ transactional leadership style was critical in instilling school discipline in Vihiga Sub-County. The study would assist the policy makers in the Ministry of Education to formulate viable policies on handling of school discipline. The study is useful to teachers, students, parents, and guardians in secondary schools. A study on effects of Principals’ transactional leadership style on school discipline in private secondary schools in Vihiga Sub-County-Kenya would expound the understanding of the current problem. Further, Arikan, (2020) defined “democratic leadership as the type of leadership characterized by the distribution of power and authority between subordinates and managers to proffer subordinate involvement in decision making”.

Crook, and Manor, (2018) in “their research Democratic decentralization. In Making Development Work established that in democratic leadership, authority is decentralized and it gives people the freedom to participate freely in decision making, determining of policies and implementation of systems and procedures of the institution through delegation of duties by the leader. In their study they further found that this will help us to clarify where decentralizations are falling short, where they are moving forward to produce positive outcomes, and how they can leverage productive change. This research focused on seemingly technical matters. For example, better subsidiarity principles are needed to guide the choice of powers, to identify which should remain public, which can serve society best when privatized, and to indicate which belong at each level of the political-administrative hierarchy. Such research could then feed into the public dialogues mentioned above. Institutional choices also require guidelines”.

In a study conducted by Owiti, (2016) who investigated on “the influence of principals’ leadership styles on students’ discipline in public secondary schools in Kikuyu Sub County, Kenya. The study aimed to establish the influence of democratic leadership style, transactional leadership, authoritarian leadership style and transformational leadership style on students’ discipline in public secondary schools in Kikuyu Sub-County, Kenya. The research applied descriptive research design employing stratified random sampling technique. The study sampled 230 teachers and 28 principals. Questionnaires were used for data collection due to the ability to collect information from a large population within a short period of time with relative ease. Reliability was determined through test-retest method and calculated using Pearson’s correlation coefficient resulting in coefficient value of 0.8 for teachers’ questionnaire and 0.9 for principals’ questionnaire. Validity was ensured through discussion with the experts (supervisors) and using questions framed in less ambiguous way. The findings showed the existence of a positive relationship between the principal’s leadership style and students’ discipline. The study also found out that authoritarian style of leadership is practiced and this has both positive and negative influence on discipline. Democratic style of leadership is partially practiced where most principals chose when to and when not to involve members in decision making. The use of democratic leadership had a positive impact on students’ discipline, hence needs to be strengthened. Various aspects of transformational leadership style such as charisma, idealized influence, inspirational motivation and individual consideration were being practiced, and these had a positive bearing on the discipline of the students, especially the application of guidance and counseling”.

Owiti’s (2016) study also found out that “the headteachers applied transactional leadership styles in the schools where punishments and rewards were being used to reinforce discipline. This style was also found to influence the discipline of students positively especially where the students were encouraged to follow and adhere to school rules and regulations. He further recommended that: Board of Govrnors of schools should hold regular meetings with students to listen to their discipline challenges; Ministry of Education should organize seminars and workshops to make teachers aware to about transformational leadership style that stresses guidance and counseling of students; train principals on the need to emphasize transactional leadership that stresses observance of school rules and regulations; Sub County Directors of Education should organize workshops for teachers that emphasize the need for school managers to act on the needs and aspirations of the students to avert irresponsible behavior; and teacher training institutions and management training institutions should modify their curriculum to include leadership aspects that nurture desirable behavior but shun those that glorify undesirable behavior. The researcher suggests a further study to be done on: the influence of leadership styles on the academic performance and the influence of leadership style on the school culture and climate; school-based factors that may influence students’ discipline other than principal’s leadership styles. Thus, this type of leadership did not solve much of indiscipline cases in public secondary schools in this county”.

In another study of Bundi, (2020) who studied on the factors that “contribute to student indiscipline in Public Secondary Schools in North Imenti Constituency Meru County Kenya.

The purpose of the study was to find some of the factors contributing to indiscipline among student and the study was guided by establishing if peer pressure contributes to student indiscipline, to establish if mass media contribute to student indiscipline, to establish if drug abuse contributed to student discipline. The study employed social learning theory and Kournin theory of classroom management. The study employed a survey method and some of the data collection instruments were questionnaires, oral interviews to gather necessary information from 70 respondents in 5 selected schools. The researcher randomly selected respondent through a simple random sampling technique. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented in tables and figures. The data analyzed indicated that most student disciplinary problems experienced were due to influence of peer pressure from other teens. In addition also the study revealed that mass media also contribute to student indiscipline mainly T.Vs and mobile phones another factor that the study revealed was influence of drug abuse highly contribute to indiscipline and some consumed drugs by student were bhang, hat that disrupted their behavior”.

Similarly, Bundi’s (2020) study revealed that “home factors contributed a lot to indiscipline cases. The home factors consisted of lack of attention and guidance on student’s behavior, poor relationship between parents and their children, the influence of the media at home, parents not providing desired school resources for students/children and parental ways of managing misbehavior. Further, findings showed that there was lack of professionism from teachers and poor management of indiscipline cases. The study recommend that school administration should enforce rules and regulations that should be strictly adhered the research further provides a reliable data on indiscipline in schools and recommend possible solution to curb indiscipline”.

A study by Riang’a, (2013) who conducted “a study on Principals’ strategies influencing students’ discipline in public secondary schools in Kisii Central District, Kenya. The study investigated on school strategies influencing students’ discipline in public secondary schools in Kenya and was guided by four objectives which included: To establish how the principals’ use of democratic leadership influences students’ discipline in public secondary schools, to determine the extent to which the principals’ means of communication influence students’ discipline in public secondary schools, to examine how the involvement of the prefects’ body in the decision making process affects students’ discipline in public secondary schools and to establish the extent to which the guidance and counseling department influences students’ discipline in public secondary schools. The study based on the collegial theory which attempts to explain all those theories that emphasized that power and decision making should be shared among some members of the organization. The researcher applied descriptive survey research design. The target population consisted of all 52 public secondary schools in Kisii Central District, 52 principals and 1,560 teachers in the administration of the school affairs. Simple random sampling was used in selecting teachers at school level from the 16 principals and 30 teachers per school who participated. Data was gathered by use of questionnaires and analyzed using the quantitative method in frequency distribution tables, percentages and bar graphs. The validity of the questionnaires was checked by my supervisors, pilot testing in two schools and checked against the research objectives. Reliability was established through computation of Cronbach’s alpha coefficient formula. The research process was carried out jointly by both headteachers and teachers. The study revealed that 50.0% of the principals used a democratic leadership style as one of the strategies influencing students’ discipline by encouraging an open-door policy where students are free to see the head of the school to explain their problems. This implies that democratic leadership styles were preferred by most principals in public secondary schools by encouraging students to meet with their head teachers when they have problems. The head teachers also allowed students to participate in decision-making by using democratic leadership”. Riang’a, (2013) findings signify that “there was effective communication between the head teachers and students in schools because the prefects' bodies were involved in decision-making and counted as part of the management team for the smooth running of the school”.

According to literature reviewed, democratic leadership seems to be preferred in the management of the schools, however, the influence is on the contrary. Owiti, (2016) in his study found that indiscipline cases are still high in public secondary schools where democratic leadership has been adopted. Also, the study of Bundi, (2020) focused on factors responsible in causing indiscipline is schools and failed to identify leadership style adopted. Therefore, this study will address this gap

***METHODOLOGY***

 **Research Design**

The study adopted descriptive research design. The major purpose of descriptive research is description of the state of affairs as it exists, and then the researchers report the findings (Colorafi, and Evans, 2016) )[1]. . A descriptive research design is a method of gathering information to respond to inquiries about the current situation of the study's subjects. It entails obtaining information about occurrences, organizing, tabulating, depicting, and describing the information. The researcher collected information in narrative form using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Participants were offered opportunity to share their opinions on the influence of Headteachers’ leadership styles on discipline of students in secondary schools. The design helped in the choice of data collection instrument, classification, analysis and interpretation of results. The research ensured that questions are constructed well to solicit the desired information (Colorafi, and Evans, 2016) )[2]. .

**Study Population**

The participants will be selected from the selected secondary schools, which included Head teachers, (08), teachers, (169) and students (1928). Total population was 2105 participants.

**Sample size**

The sample size consisted of 299 students from the 8 public secondary schools, 29 teachers, and 8 head teachers. The sample sizes for each type of respondents from each of the eight schools are displayed as 366 respondents

**Sampling Technique**

The study utilized both simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques to select the respondents who answered the questionnaires. Purposive sampling was ideal for selecting head teachers while simple random sampling were applied in selecting teachers and students.

**Research Instruments**

The study instruments to be employed to collect information were comprised of questionnaires and interview guide.

**Questionnaire**

A questionnaire is a set of questions or items used to gather data from respondents about their attitudes, experiences, or opinions. Questionnaires can be used to collect quantitative information. Both open-ended and closed-ended questions were created since they were simple to respond to, save time, and maintain respondents' attention on the topic. Therefore, questionnaires was the primary method of data collection (Sarantakos, 1998) )[3]. .

**Interview guide**

An interview is used to collect qualitative data on attitudes, opinions and also behavior (Mugenda, 2012). The interview guide was used while administering the instrument whereby conversation was face- to- face at their convenience)[4]  (Amin 2005; De Vos, 2001)

***Results and discussion***

**Table 1: The influence of head teachers’ democratic leadership style on students’ discipline in secondary schools’ results (N=300)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Questionnaire statements**  | **SA**  | **A**  | **U**  | **D**  | **SD**  | **Mean**  |
| Head teachers who involve teachers in decision-making processes positively impact students’ discipline | 0%  | 33.3%  | 10%  | 56.7%  | 0 | 1.70  |
| Students are more disciplined when head teachers show a willingness to listen to their concerns and suggestions. | 0%  | 33.3%  | 1.7%  | 46.7%  | 18.3  | 2.00  |
| A democratic leadership style of head teachers encourages a positive school environment, which improves student behavior. | 1.9%  | 8.3%  | 11.7%  | 75%  | 5 | 2.00  |
| Head teachers who delegate responsibilities effectively contribute to better student discipline. | 0%  | 0%  | 3.3%  | 83.3%  | 13.3  | 2.15  |
| Teachers feel more motivated and are better able to enforce discipline in students when they have a say in school policies | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 66.7%  | 33.3 | 3.6  |
| Students respond better to disciplinary actions when they are involved in the development of the school's rules and regulations | 2.8%  | 0%  | 0%  | 66.7%  | 31.3 | 3.6  |
| A head teacher’s openness to feedback from teachers leads to more effective disciplinary measures in the school. | 33.3%  | 33.5%  | 3.1%  | 30%  | 0 | 3.56  |
| The democratic leadership style of head teachers fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among students, leading to improved discipline. | 6.7%  | 26.7%  | 8.3%  | 58.3%  | 0 | 3.80  |
| Head teachers who share leadership roles with teachers help to create a more disciplined student body. | 0%  | 43.3%  | 8.3%  | 56.7%  | 0 | 4.15  |
| Students' respect for school rules increases when head teachers practice transparency in their leadership. | 1.9%  | 8.3%  | 11.7%  | 75%  | 5 | 2.00  |
|  Decision making is made jointly | 0%  | 0%  | 3.3%  | 83.3%  | 13.3  | 2.15  |
| School management is involved in selection of student leaders | 0%  | 0%  | 0%  | 66.7%  | 33.3  | 3.6  |
| Regular meetings are held to discuss discipline issues | 2.8%  | 0%  | 0%  | 66.7%  | 31.3  | 3.6  |
| PTA is involved in making rules and regulations | 33.3%  | 33.5%  | 3.1%  | 30%  | 0 | 3.56  |
| Disciplinary committee is involved before student is punished | 6.7%  | 26.7%  | 8.3%  | 58.3%  | 0 | 3.80  |

**Source:** Primary data, (2025)

The above questions were asked to head teachers, deputies and the teachers, the responses to the statement “Head teachers who involve teachers in democratic decision-making processes positively impact students’ discipline” had the majority disagreeing with the statement (34, 56.7%) rated that they don’t agree with it. This corresponds to “Disagree” rating. However (20, 33.3%) of the respondents agree to the statement and (6,10%) were not decided on the statement. In a school setting many democratic Head teachers involved teachers in decision-making processes. These responses concurred with statements “students are more disciplined when head teachers show a willingness to listen to their concerns and suggestions”, and “a democratic leadership style of head teachers encourages a positive school democratic environment, which improves student behavior.” (33.3% ) agree to them while (46.7 and 18.3%) disagree to the statement having the rating of “Agree” and “Disagree” respectively .This is confirmed by the statistical mean scores on all the indicators with the highest of 4.1500 and the lowest of 1.70.

**Conclusions**

**The influence of head teachers’ democratic leadership style on students’ discipline in secondary schools in Buhweju District**

The researcher recognized from literature and experience from interviews and observations of head teachers’ democratic leadership style on students’ discipline in secondary schools in Buhweju District that were adopted one or more of the leadership styles discussed in the literature review. However, the researcher noted that most of them practiced the democratic leadership style of leadership without knowing it.

***Recommendations***

The following were the recommendations made from the research:

Head teachers should investigate how participative decision making fosters a sense of ownership among students, potentially leading to improved behavior and discipline in addition, Head teachers should assess the role of communication and collaboration in creating a positive school climate that encourages adherence to rules.

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1.

2.

3.

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